

# Defusing the Political Land Mines

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# 13

*Transcending personal and institutional norms that contribute to inequitable educational outcomes requires crafting, participating in, and sustaining a new political and social order.*

**P**ursuing equity transformation at a personal and organizational level in schools includes dealing with tenacious overt and covert resistance, some of which is based on conscious or unconscious fears. The resistance to both levels of change may come from various individual stakeholders who deny they are biased or racist, but passively participate in the ideology of White dominance as discussed in Chapter 1. They may also defend some treasured organizational norms and policies that are identified by equity proponents as a primary cause of inequitable educational outcomes, such as how students may be assigned to classes, commonly called tracking and discussed in Chapter 5. Confronting racially biased individual and school organizational practices must be a very strategic undertaking.

In several schools, I have been told by individual teachers or support staff in private interviews about specific policies or norms that were biased and discriminatory. Upon further investigation of other sources, I found merit in many of these allegations. However, there has often been little willingness to go public with such characterizations by those who blew the whistle, so to speak, or discuss questionable practices in staff meetings.

When it comes to confronting racism, ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, or biases related to primary language, disability, and so on, even when corroborating evidence is provided, there is often little willingness to “open up Pandora’s box.” Fear of retaliation or strong discomfort is ever-present in some school environments when such topics are put on the table. Persons advocating a need for changes in some attitudes, beliefs, practices, and identities (i.e., equity transformation) are viewed by some as “troublemakers” who only have a self-serving agenda.

To complicate matters, those attempting to make positive changes on behalf of students may demonstrate attitudes and behaviors toward their detractors, which are manipulated to negatively reflect on their cause. Just because one is an ardent advocate of equity doesn't mean she doesn't have her own biases, and her demonstration of them can be counterproductive to achieving her social justice goals. In other words, ardent equity advocates can unwittingly cause political land mines as well as have responsibility for defusing those caused by opponents.

Sometimes those on the front lines trying to achieve equity express themselves very passionately and may make sweeping generalizations. Opponents of the changes being advocated may try to increase opposition by attacking the "messenger." The bottom line is that culturally courageous leaders must be collectively willing and able to effectively defuse land mines, whatever their source or characteristics.

### **KWL EXERCISE**

1. What are some of your personal rules for how to address the politics associated with trying to implement any equity initiative?
2. What would be helpful to know in order to improve how you personally navigate the politics of equity transformation in your district or school?
3. What are three or more ideas from the "5 A's" and the leadership profiles that you will add to your arsenal when providing leadership to equity initiatives?



### **WHAT IS MEANT BY THE "POLITICS" OF EQUITY TRANSFORMATION?**

In the discourse on how to achieve equity transformation in 21st century U.S. schools, there are very different educational philosophies. Those engaged in this effort often demonstrate a missionary zeal and experience a lot of political resistance.

Different school community stakeholders vie for shaping decisions about what changes should occur in who is taught, what is taught, how it is taught, and the relationships between students, parents, and teachers. This battle for power and authority may be based on very different visions about the purpose, process, and desired outcomes of education in the United States for the historically underserved. The strategies decided upon to influence the actions of others must be very carefully considered by those attempting to engineer improvements in social justice. The word "politics" has multiple meanings, as illustrated by the following definitions.

### **Definitions of Politics**

- a. Social relations involving intrigue to gain authority or power (WordNet, 2010).
- b. A process by which groups of people make collective decisions . . . generally applied to the art or science of running governmental or state affairs. . . . It also refers to behavior within civil governments, but politics has been observed in other group interactions, including corporate, academic, and religious institutions. It consists of "social relations involving authority or power and refers to the regulation of public affairs within a political unit, and to the methods and tactics used to formulate and apply policy (TheFreeDictionary.com, 2011; Wikipedia, 2012).
- c. Politics is the process and method of decision making for groups of human beings. Although it is generally applied to governments, politics is also observed in all human group interactions including corporate, academic, and religious (WordIQ.com, 2012).
- d. Competition between competing interest groups or individuals for power and leadership (Merriam-Webster, 2012).



### **HOW DEFINITIONS APPLY TO THE TERM "POLITICS OF IMPLEMENTATION"**

When trying to implement equity transformation, the skills, needs, perspectives, strengths, feelings, and concerns of those most directly affected should be considered. The relationships among the various school stakeholders will be impacted by whatever is done and how it is done. In school after school, all low performing and populated by families of low socioeconomic status, I have witnessed the prevalence of ethnic rivalries and perceived, as well as real, slights. The lack of trust and respect within and across racial and cultural boundaries still abounds in the 21st century. Such cultural dynamics and politics are counterproductive to the achievement of equitable educational outcomes and require leadership from all stakeholder groups that reflects a willingness to rise above the forces that help perpetuate deep-seated dissonance. Administrators and teachers must model such behavior.

For example, when board policies create program support for English language learners, or African Americans are selected for administrative positions in predominately Latino/a schools, or vice versa, such decisions must be implemented in ways that are a win-win for all constituencies in the school community, rather than in a way

that exacerbates resentment. The decisions on any policy changes or personnel selections may impact how equity efforts are undertaken, if at all. Any equity initiative requires new working relationships and norms to be initiated, such as those between parents and teachers, teachers and administrators, teachers and teachers, students and students. University faculty in teacher and administrator preparation programs need to be involved, because they are preparing future teachers and administrators who must have the skills necessary to help schools be successful with all students.

With or without the involvement and preparation of all involved, efforts may be made to sabotage whatever directions are taken to achieve genuine equity. Some of the relationships needed that will enable the changes to work may not be willingly undertaken, if at all. Therefore, the *politics* of implementing equity transformation must be carefully navigated, but not at the expense of those for whom equity is sought.

The competition for power between various interest groups influences what decisions and how decisions are made. Without an effort to influence the psychological climate in which decisions occur, it is unlikely that equity efforts have a chance of succeeding. Such efforts must also be collectively undertaken by all stakeholder groups in the school community. This means those who experience inequitable outcomes must be involved, as well as those who would experience a change in some of their privileges and entitlements.

For example, if a proposal was being considered to stop sorting students into several academic levels, such as advanced placement, honors, general, and so on, students who are scheduled into various “tracks” should be involved in a discussion about the proposed change as well as their parents and other community representatives. A transformation is required in personal identities, such as how people view themselves in comparison with others on the socioeconomic and academic status continuum, and in use of available resources, such as how government funds are used. All those impacted in one way or another by the culture and structure of the school system and community in which schools reside should have chances to be involved in the change process used to foster equity transformation. Making such attempts requires a lot of political savvy by a core group of various stakeholders.



## POLITICAL SAVVY

Political savvy includes having intuitive instincts and diagnostic skills when assessing people and situations to determine the course of action needed at a given time. This includes the ability to effectively motivate persons with very diverse cultural identities and agendas. They must work together rather than at cross-purposes. Effective cross-cultural communication involves using one’s intimate knowledge about the organizational culture and organizational factors that most influence the identities of those within the organization.

It is important for administrator and teacher equity leaders to appropriately leverage their personal or formal power as a way of influencing others' motivation and behavior. Personal power is based on interpersonal relationships, referent power (e.g., degree of likability due to personal traits), and connection power (e.g., the "connections" a leader has with influential others). Formal power can be based on legitimate, expert, reward, or information power. Legitimate power is based on the position held by the leader. Expert power is based on the leader's possession of expertise to facilitate the work of others. Reward power is based on the leader's ability to provide rewards for people who comply, such as recognition. Information power is based on the leader's possession of or access to information considered valuable by others (Stimson, 2011). All of these forms of power must be utilized with respect for those one is trying to influence, which further induces receptivity. Everyone must see the equity transformation as something that will serve their personal self-interest as well as contribute to the common good.

One reason political savvy is imperative is that the job of improving the educational experience and outcomes of those who have been underserved involves helping nonbelievers (e.g., nonbelievers include those who do not believe most Black and Brown students can achieve at high levels) become believers, and helping everyone of all colors, ethnicities, language backgrounds, social, and economic status positively change their ways of interacting and working with each other.



## **EQUITY TRANSFORMATION VS. EQUITY REFORM**

Qualitatively different degrees of political savvy are needed based on whether equity transformation or equity reform is being attempted. Equity reforms are more like appendages to the existing institutional structure and culture whereas equity transformation efforts are aimed at changing the entire school community, meaning changing the school culture and structure. Changes in individual ways of being are required in equity transformation and not usually in equity reform. When equity reforms are undertaken, persons can continue to believe what they have always privately believed and make only minor modifications in the behaviors they have practiced as teachers, administrators, support staff, and so on. However, in most cases, new identities, roles, attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviors are required when pursuing equity transformation.

Vignette 13–1 describes an initiative that is in the very early stages of attempts to achieve equity transformation, where the intentions were good but the political actions taken were counterproductive. Vignette 13–2 describes how a districtwide equity reform effort was being implemented in a particular school. Both vignettes emphasize the major impact that the politics and equity leadership can have on the success of any equity initiative.

**MAKE IT PERSONAL**

1. What is your opinion about the extent to which there continues to be a major lack of trust and respect across racial and cultural boundaries in the United States, and in your life?
2. How would you characterize your own level of political savvy when it comes to working with diverse constituencies with different, sometimes conflicting, agendas related to achieving equitable educational outcomes?

**VIGNETTE 13-1: AN ATTEMPT AT EQUITY  
TRANSFORMATION—THE MOUNT VERNON SCHOOL DISTRICT**

*In the Mount Vernon school district, the equity transformation effort was a proposal by a community-based group to the Board of Education for a policy change that would grant all students, regardless of prior academic performance, greater access to college preparatory courses at the high school level. Students would also have greater access to "highly qualified" teachers, as redefined in the proposal. The impact of this policy would primarily affect students of African and Latino/a descent. This effort began when Latino/a and Black community organization leaders jointly invited a few district and school site administrators, teachers, parents, and students to join an ad hoc community group they were creating that would conduct a series of meetings. The purpose of the group was to discuss some potential solutions to the growing gap in educational outcomes being experienced by students of color at the high school level.*

*After those who accepted the invitation to join the group met on several occasions and heard presentations by various educational "experts" invited to the meetings, the group proposed two major policy changes to the board of education. The first proposal was for change in the policy determining criteria for student access to college preparatory courses, whose successful completion is a requirement for application to the state university system. The second proposal was for change in district policy determining teacher work assignments, that is, the school site where teachers work and the courses/academic levels they teach. These changes were based on the strong belief that students of color with the weakest academic backgrounds need equitable access to being taught at high academic levels and to the most experienced and accomplished teachers.*

*Equitable access was defined by the ad hoc group to mean that if 60% of White or Asian students have access to college preparatory courses and to the teachers with the most experience, then students of African and Latino/a descent should have comparable access. There were several complexities associated with this proposal that were acknowledged by the ad hoc group. For example, in Mount Vernon, providing equitable access to college preparation courses taught at high levels would require a major increase in the*

number of such courses in high school schedules as well as changes in the teacher's contract. Many teachers would not voluntarily agree to these changes in work assignment and could not be required to do so because of their seniority. In previous contract negotiations, the teachers union had expressed its very strong opposition to such changes. Another complexity is that the ad hoc group proposed ongoing training on culturally responsive pedagogy for existing teachers of college preparatory courses and any additional teachers given such assignments. Their rationale was that all teachers assigned to such classes should be prepared to effectively teach the curriculum to more culturally diverse students in the district.

These proposals definitely have implications for the teacher contract and the district budget. In addition, the ad hoc group is aware that many qualified students of color have previously opted to not take such classes. Despite acknowledging these complexities, those who voluntarily came together in this ad hoc community group are adamant in their resolve to strongly lobby for a positive board response. They know they are challenging well established norms and policies in the district. They argue that a sense of urgency is needed, since the U.S. Department of Education has designated the entire district as low performing. To further complicate things, there has been a lot of community reaction to the proposals, both pro and con.

The creation of this group and their proposed changes have spurred a lot of debate among those on different sides of the issue, increased racial tension in the community, and legal threats by the teacher's bargaining unit. The conflicts have led to a broader discussion of relevant issues, such as the quality of teaching experienced by historically underserved students in general, the quality of instructional support provided by the district to all teachers, and the nature of the curriculum in college preparatory classes compared with all other classes.

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To the Reader: Before continuing to read the rest of this vignette, think about what you would do if you were an administrator, teacher, or parent in the ad hoc group before a vote was taken by the Board of Education on these proposals.

After very contentious debates in the media on the recommendations, the assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, in consultation with her superintendent, created a district task force composed of teacher, parent, community, and student representatives. The charge to the task force was to investigate what the potential effects would be of making such changes, and listing the pros and cons of taking such action based on evidence they had collected. The district task force was also asked to develop a list of recommendations for what if any immediate courses of action should be taken in response to the proposals.

Several proponents and opponents of what was being proposed are incensed by the creation of this district task force, and want the Board of Education to get directly involved, including the possibility of initiating their own investigation, and hiring their own experts. There are rumors spread by the teachers union that the superintendent

*privately encouraged the community ad hoc group to meet on their own and develop such proposals for presentation to the Board of Education. The district administration has refused to comment on the rumors.*

*One board member, a retired teacher, who was heavily supported by the teacher's union in his last campaign for a seat on the board, is furious over this entire series of events. He has publicly stated that he thinks there were ill-advised political decisions made by district and school site administrators to become involved with this community group. He claims this was a premeditated effort by the superintendent to put public pressure on the teacher's bargaining unit to change their opposition to contract language on teacher assignments.*



## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE POLITICS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EQUITY TRANSFORMATION EFFORT**

The attitudes and actions described in vignette 13–1 include some very controversial political decisions made by the ad hoc group. These decisions underscore the political dimensions of culturally courageous leadership discussed in Chapter 9. The vignette also illustrates how important it is to be politically savvy when trying to change any inequities. It is essential to identify and navigate any “political land mines.” Attention to three dimensions of POI might have lessened the negative reaction to the ad hoc group proposal.

### **Engage in Problem Definition and Analysis (the process for defining problems)**

From the information provided in the above vignette, it appears the “problem” has been identified as one of unequal access to being taught at high levels (i.e., access to academically rigorous instruction) and to what are considered “highly qualified” teachers, as redefined by the community leaders in the vignette. A major assumption is that college preparatory courses are taught at high levels, and that the most experienced teachers are the most “qualified” or competent. Other issues or problems related to the problem of limited access are not addressed in the proposal, such as student academic readiness level for participation in such courses, and the right of students, under current board policy, to not choose such courses. In other words, there is no default curriculum in the school district that requires all students to enroll in and pass college preparatory classes in order to graduate from high school.

Another problem not addressed in the proposal is the low pass rate of historically underserved students who are enrolled in such courses. In the proposal, there is no acknowledgement of the relationship between all of these associated problems or the assumptions undergirding these additional problems. The issue of there being a low pass rate by students of color in college preparatory courses is indirectly addressed



by acknowledgement of the need to provide teacher training on culturally responsive pedagogy. However, when little attention is given to problem definition and problem analysis during the development of proposals for equity transformation, the likelihood of their success is greatly compromised.

**Be Sensitive to the Psychology of Equity Transformation  
(the climate cultivated when actions are undertaken)**

Equity transformation is usually not attempted in school districts, and even then, it is not often pursued in an open, direct, linear fashion, and may be the result of civic unrest, public protests, lawsuits, or court decisions. Equity transformation may also be initially undertaken because of elections that result in a new board of education majority that has the power to take a school district in a new direction. In vignette 13–1, it is unclear what motivated some community leaders to initiate a series of meetings about the condition of underachievement being experienced by students of color. The politics in the community and on the school board might have motivated the superintendent to encourage such actions by community leaders, especially given the district is designated a low-performing district by the federal department of education.

In addition, it is unlikely administrators in the school district would have agreed to participate if they didn't think such actions were approved by the superintendent. It is also unlikely these community organizations in the Black and Latino/a community would have taken the initiative to work together to form such an ad hoc group, since they have no history of having taken any joint actions before. This initiative suggests they received encouragement to do so from the superintendent or new board of education president, who happens to be of Latino/a descent. Rather than go directly to the Board of Education with their concerns or ideas, the community leaders chose to invite a group of individuals in the school district community to deliberate with them on what should be done about the situation.

Out of all the changes they could have advocated, they chose to identify two that are extremely contentious and difficult to achieve. Why? No doubt, they were making some assumptions based on their collective beliefs about what should have highest priority in order to turn around low student achievement. What were the opinions of students in the group? Did teachers in the group share some insider information about their colleagues that influenced the choices made? The administrators, parents, and community persons might have had their assumptions confirmed by what they heard from the teachers and students, who are at the heart of the teaching and learning process.

At some point in the deliberations of the ad hoc group, they seem to have reached consensus on what they needed to do. When that happened, there was a psychological break-through because persons with very different perspectives and in very different roles came to the position of having one mind about what they would

propose. They might originally have had very diverse reasons for deciding to accept the invitation to be part of the group and different ideas of what the group should propose, if anything. The ad hoc group appears to have individually and collectively transcended their personal doubts or agendas to decide on direct confrontation and strong public advocacy. They do not seem to have any fears about what their actions could trigger or what the personal consequences might be. Their proposal stimulated a different kind of discourse in the school district community that may lead to an entirely new dynamic of communication between persons in diverse groups as well as potentially plant some seeds for new forms of collaboration among school community stakeholders. The psychology of this budding initiative is stimulating more openness and authenticity among different players in the school district community, whether that was intended or not. The psychology of equity transformation includes the degree of willingness to air strongly held feelings and values of all the players for and against such transformation as well as what people are open to accepting, respecting, or rejecting.

*An Essential Strategy: Awareness, Team, and Trust Building*

The equity proposal for greater access was developed by district administrators and community leaders without much dissemination of information in the school community about the conditions and circumstances that they thought necessitated such action. The results of having inadequate information may be pushback now being experienced from some teachers and others who resent, resist, or fear such equity initiatives. Building greater awareness of the need for certain changes is of paramount importance if there is an interest in building greater support within school communities for such efforts.

In addition to increased awareness building, there is a great need for team and trust building, all of which can be undertaken simultaneously. Persons from all stakeholder groups must be engaged in activities that improve the climate in which equity transformation is attempted, such as an increase in the communication between, and problem solving by, school community stakeholders in order to increase their cohesion, morale, and goal focus. Such activities can concurrently improve their willingness to trust each other and trust in the potential benefits of equity transformation. Increasing the acquisition by historically underserved students of 21st century skills cannot likely be achieved without simultaneous attention to improving relationships in school communities and relevance in classroom instruction (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011).

How do you substantially improve rigor, relationships, and relevance? As stated throughout Section II of the guide, there must be the political will and political savvy among all adult stakeholder groups. A good starting point is to have a much more candid dialogue within school communities about how race, class, and culture

impact educational environments and outcomes. There is usually a strong reticence within most stakeholder groups to engage in such dialogue. There is even more discomfort with trying to make the personal and organizational changes needed in the entire school community to achieve positive relationships, academic rigor, and curriculum relevance. The school is the major part, but not the only part of the school community that requires transformation. A major value often articulated by “privileged” parents and the community at large, and thus echoed by teachers and administrators in the dominant cultural group, is that *all* students must benefit from whatever is done for low-income historically underserved students of color. This is a constant refrain, or mantra, and reflects the willingness of those with power and authority to only consider improvements in equity for the underserved when those with privilege receive even greater benefits.

The reticence to avoid discussing the notion that “all students must benefit” cannot be allowed to inhibit such discussions from ever taking place. The psychology of equity transformation that culturally courageous leaders help to craft must include opportunities for ongoing dialogue and problem solving that is undertaken by all school community stakeholders within an environment where respect and trust are nurtured among the various players. Dialogue and problem-solving activities must include students, parents, other community members, and university faculty in teacher/administrator preparation programs who have helped prepare educators who work in the school community. These stakeholders are every bit as important as teachers, instructional support staff, and administrators. Without simultaneous attention to trust building, it is highly unlikely equity transformation will ever take place, much less that equitable outcomes will result.

It might be necessary to initially bring together ethnic-specific subgroups of various stakeholder groups, so that African, Latino/a, Asian and/or White students, teachers, administrators, parents, and so on, can first discuss their questions and concerns with each other. Such ethnic-specific activities can help improve the communication, problem-solving, and team/trust building within subgroups before trying to do it in cross-cultural groups. This decision should be based on an analysis of the context in specific locales.

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. Describe the feelings, values, motivation, and openness of all parties when you were personally involved in an equity initiative.
2. How would you characterize the level of trust and team effort during the initiative you described?

### **Focus on Standards Categories Receiving Low Priority (expand the accountability criteria)**

The history of the standards-based movement in K–12 schools within the United States since the early 1990s reflects a focus almost exclusively on content and performance standards: what students should know and/or be able to do, to what extent, and how the expected degree of mastery should be ascertained. However, during the early years of the standards movement in some school districts, greater attention was also given to opportunity to learn (OTL) standards, which primarily meant whether students of all backgrounds had sufficient opportunity to learn the designated content standards (AERA, 1993; Elmore & Fuhrman, 1995).

Opportunity was defined initially as whether there were equitable financial resources provided to ensure all students had equal access to the requisite instructional resources for achieving the standards as well as sufficient time provided to teachers and students for mastery of the standards. The push for inclusion of OTL standards in national education legislation, that is, the federal elementary and secondary education act, was dropped due to opposition from both the left and right wings of the political spectrum. There was considerable concern over what this would cost and who would pay for it as well as the resistance in congress to the federal government having too much influence over education. This was and still is considered by many to primarily be the prerogative of individual states.

Since that time, in the last 15 to 20 years, the federal government has assumed a much larger footprint by requiring measurement of performance outcomes on high stakes tests, as specified in the No Child Left Behind legislation enacted into law in 2001. During the 1990s, the original concept of opportunity to learn standards was expanded as well as the creation of delivery standards that stood alone from OTL standards.

Finally, professional development standards, influenced by the National Staff Development Council, were also conceptualized to spell out all of the perceived requirements for significantly improving teacher and administrator professional development that would then impact the quality of education offered and learning outcomes experienced by all student subgroups. Examples of each category of standards are identified in Chapter 5 of this guide.

Despite the identification and development of five categories of standards, content and performance standards became the default standards to which all schools were held accountable, initially by some school districts, and finally by almost all state governments and the federal government. In my work with several school districts with high numbers of underachieving historically underserved students, there was less attention, if any at all, to delivery, OTL, and professional development standards by school boards and district-level executive administrators. Without more fidelity to the latter three categories of standards, it is not likely that educational

opportunities and learning environments will be equitable for all racial, cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic groups, much less equitable educational outcomes. There was a landmark superior court decision (California Department of Education, 2004) in the last decade that requires California to provide more financial resources to identified schools that did not provide student access to adequate facilities, instructional materials, and qualified teachers. These areas encompass some of the opportunity to learn standards as defined in this guide. However, that court decision is the exception and not the rule in educational policy throughout the United States.

Culturally courageous leadership, as stated above, includes confronting and changing organizational practices that help perpetuate inequitable educational outcomes of historically underserved students of color. The plaintiffs and their supporters in the Williams court decision mentioned above exemplified a degree of culturally courageous leadership (CCL), in their dedication to seeking implementation of some opportunity to learn standards in low-income schools, so there would be a better chance to achieve equitable educational outcomes.

In vignette 13–1, it appears the group of diverse stakeholders who were convened by community leaders came to the same conclusion. It is likely that they concluded underperforming students of color were definitely not experiencing fidelity to what is defined in this guide as opportunity to learn, delivery, and professional development standards.

Lawsuits that result in favorable court decisions are one way that state governments can be required to give higher priority to the implementation of some delivery and opportunity-to-learn standards. In addition, school boards can require district and school site administrators to give higher priority to establishing multiple benchmarks that the district and school sites must collaboratively achieve in the implementation of such standards. One benchmark could be greater access to courses taught at high levels.

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

1. What would happen if your school board received a similar community-based proposal about improving student access?
2. Describe how you would attempt to use the above dimensions of POI as part of your implementation plan for achieving equitable educational outcomes in your work setting.
3. Based upon discussion of the difference between equity reform and equity transformation in Chapter 4 and in this chapter, describe equity “reforms” that have been attempted in your school district compared with equity “transformation,” and what the results were.

### **VIGNETTE 13-2: AN ATTEMPT AT EQUITY REFORM— PIERSON ACADEMY FOR LEADERSHIP (PAL)**

*The equity reform (as opposed to equity transformation) attempted in the Pierson Academy for Leadership (PAL) was voluntary metropolitan busing. This would ostensibly increase desegregation and the quality of education provided to low-income underachieving students of color who were voluntarily bused from a much larger adjacent school district. PAL is the most culturally and socioeconomically diverse school in a suburban upscale small community adjacent to a large city. The suburb is composed primarily of homes occupied by middle- and upper-middle-class White families. However, there is a growing number of large apartment complexes, populated by culturally, linguistically, and socioeconomically diverse persons who live in the residential boundaries of PAL, which is the oldest K-8 school in the district but has the newest school facility.*

*The school district is part of a metropolitan voluntary busing program that brings native-born and immigrant students of color to PAL from the adjacent city school district, starting in the third grade. The bused students constitute about 10% of all students at PAL, and the total school population is 75% White and 25% students of color. Resident students of color are another 15% of the student population at PAL. There are two Black teachers and no Latino/a teachers out of 27 teachers on staff, most of whom are below the age of 40. There is a large achievement gap between most White students and most students of color, resident and bused, that hasn't substantially changed in the last 5 years. This is the case because even though the achievement by students of color on statewide tests has improved, the achievement of White students has improved much more.*

*One indicator of the school climate at PAL is the attitude of most teachers that the students of color, both resident students and those bused, are lucky to be attending such an innovative and accepting school as PAL, where the teachers say they really "care" about the students. The teachers are quick to point out they have been very receptive to the district's state-funded multicultural education program, even though they have resisted integrating most of the program's concepts into the district core curriculum. They also proudly proclaim they voted overwhelmingly for Pierson to participate in the metropolitan busing program. Based on these espoused forms of support for diversity, these teachers feel the students should appreciate being at PAL by practicing good citizenship, including making their best efforts to do well in school, as demonstrated by consistently completing homework and being on task during classroom instruction.*

*When students of color don't exhibit such appreciation and effort in the opinion of their teachers, some of the teachers get very frustrated with them and also with their parents when they don't respond to teachers' request for their help. Conversely, many of the parents of color, especially those whose children are bused from the adjacent city, complain about the attitude of several teachers, whom they accuse of pretending to respect and welcome them to the school but only on their terms.*

*Teachers at PAL have great discretion in instructional decisions, with the principal playing a low profile when it comes to observation of classroom instruction. He is receptive to*

teachers who seek his counsel or guidance, but usually only intervenes to influence classroom functioning for two reasons. Those reasons are when there are curriculum directives from the district office or when long-time resident White parents with political clout think teachers are spending inordinate time with the more academically needy students at the expense of their children's needs.

Some parents of color whose children have been frequently sent to the office for disciplinary reasons think the principal should be more visible in classrooms to monitor whether teachers are discriminating against their children. Their children tell them their teachers don't adequately explain what they are teaching and say that when they (the students) ask for help, the teacher moves on to something else or says they need to pay closer attention and stop engaging in off-task behavior. The same children complain that they don't get time on the computers in the classroom, only those students who finish their assignments early. Time on the computers is only used as a reward for finishing assignments before end of the designated time and having good citizenship grades (i.e., being compliant to all teacher directives).

The principal requires teachers to engage in some joint lesson planning but never attends these meetings nor does he initiate any problem-solving discussions about strained cross-cultural relations in the classroom. He also doesn't participate in quarterly staff reviews of progress by each student subgroup on school-wide formative assessments unless invited to do so.

Although Pierson teachers say they have a very cohesive staff, there is actually dissension among some of those with strong personality or educational philosophy differences. Most teachers see themselves as social liberals and will give the politically correct appearance of being very committed to changing any inequities. However, they will not engage in large- or small-group problem solving devoted to joint development of instructional strategies for "needy" students. This reticence by many staff to engage in such discussions is for diverse reasons, including the desire to avoid conflicts and maintain their autonomy over what instructional strategies to use, the differences among staff in their teaching styles and attitudes about the students, and their desire to avoid at all costs appearing to be biased. Furthermore, most of the teachers have strong doubts about the ability of bused-in students to perform at high levels, and they have some other negative attitudes about these students.

Several teachers want the principal to think they are courageously tackling major challenges experienced in their teaching of those they consider the "most needy." These same staff will sometimes take credit for student academic success more likely caused by after-school tutorial assistance provided by community volunteers and instructional support staff. A few teachers like to give the false impression they are working closely with one or more of their peers who are having great success in their classroom with very academically and culturally diverse students. However, their "collaboration" consists of "farming out" some of their students with whom they have difficulty to the room of the other teacher. They let their more successful teaching partner do most of the teaching with students of color they cannot handle.



## **FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE POLITICS ASSOCIATED WITH THE EQUITY REFORM EFFORT**

The attitudes and actions of some teachers and the school principal described in vignette 13–2 demonstrate the need for more attention to the political dimensions of equity transformation and reform discussed in Chapter 9 and elaborated upon in this chapter. The vignette also illustrates the potential negative consequences of distributed instructional leadership. When instructional leadership is shared by the principal with several teacher leaders, all persons providing such leadership need to have very clear rules of engagement to which all agree. For example, they need to have protocols for investigating any parent allegations of discriminatory treatment by teachers, in such areas as discipline, monitoring of student engagement, and building on student interests, strengths, and prior knowledge.

Being politically savvy when making equity efforts includes taking the actions needed to improve capacity building and cohesion of persons in multiple stakeholder groups, so they more effectively work together. Actions needed include taking the initiative to increase personal awareness of and responsiveness to the needs and concerns of those one is attempting to lead. As indicated earlier, an example of such awareness and responsiveness may result in convening ethnic/race-specific groups for problem definition and problem-solving discussions before bringing them together for the same kind of discussion in culturally diverse groups. For example, in some schools there are community members, parents, teachers, students, and administrators who work at cross purposes with others in their cultural group or job category as well as across cultural or stakeholder groups. They even conspire against and/or malign each other to the detriment of success by all students. At PAL, there are some major philosophical, pedagogic, and personality differences between some teachers, even though it is kept under wraps. Skilled facilitation by the principal is needed to expose and resolve dysfunctional attitudes and behaviors between staff, but that is not happening at PAL.

Vignette 13–2 does not illustrate political savvy and instead illustrates the need for the following political dimensions to be strongly considered when trying to initiate any equity reform.

### **Learn From Observations During Other Equity Initiatives (make more informed decisions based on what has happened during other equity initiatives)**

Most of the teachers at PAL are inclined to view some bused students and their parents as problematic, because they do not exhibit appropriate appreciation for being “allowed” to attend the school. The teachers didn’t seem to see these persons as resources whose feedback and suggestions could help them improve school achievement. If pushed, most of these same teachers might acknowledge their belief



that African and Latino/a American students cannot be taught at high academic levels if too much time is spent on multicultural education, especially if they are from low socioeconomic backgrounds. These attitudes of some teachers are never explicitly expressed to parents, but the parents intuit this attitude being prevalent among many staff, so they react accordingly.

Many districts and schools are implementing school choice programs or approving charter schools that result in a greater percentage of African and Latino/a American students in these educational settings. When they do so, they could benefit from acquiring information about the challenges experienced by choice or charter schools elsewhere with similar demographic profiles. In Chapter 4, I shared 10 major observations from my experience with equity initiatives and as an external evaluator in low-performing schools. I have already discussed how poor school climate contaminates and compromises efforts to achieve the goals of any equity “reform” or “transformation.” Two examples of my observations relevant in vignette 13–2 are as follows:

1. “There is cultural dissonance within each stakeholder group, as well as within and between stakeholder groups, that contributes to the failure of some equity initiatives.”
2. “There is little if any nurturing and utilization of students and parents, especially those of color, as resources in helping to develop, implement, and monitor equity plans.”

In the above vignette, Pierson school has a lot of cultural dissonance, despite efforts by some to give the impression they have a very harmonious school community. Some teachers say they have a very cohesive staff but in private will admit there are major personality differences and differences in educational philosophy that contribute to avoidance of situations where such differences might have to be discussed. In addition, the Black and Latino/a parents are almost evenly divided between those who are residents of the school community and those whose children are bused to the school from the adjacent city. The resident parents of color and parents of bused students rarely have the opportunity to talk to each other, and some of them have incorrect assumptions about each other, based on hearsay. Cultural dissonance isn’t always displayed, but that doesn’t mean it doesn’t exist. The tension in some settings can be a reflection of such dissonance between many diverse stakeholders.

Parents and teachers from what may seem to be very different backgrounds can often find they have a lot in common when they are helped to reach out to each other. In PAL, the culturally diverse parents and students of color in the busing program do not feel welcome at the school. This could be due to a variety of factors. From their perspective, the concerns they have shared with the principal fall on deaf ears. It is incumbent on principals to take the initiative to see that parents and

teachers come together. Likewise, principals need to meet directly with students to elicit their thoughts, feelings, and any grievances they have about the school. This kind of relationship building is of critical importance. It is ironic that the Pierson school is named the Pierson Academy for Leadership, but there are no programmatic efforts to build student leadership across all cultural groups. There are also no cross-cultural teacher initiatives that reflect the acronym of the school that is PAL, so that those students bused to the school feel they have “pals” who warmly embrace them at Pierson and appreciate what they have to offer.

The issues described in vignette 13–2 are not uncommon and require a different kind of distributed leadership among the principal and teachers than what has been practiced. The teacher leaders probably need to be held to a higher level of accountability. There also seems to be a strong reticence of many staff to acknowledge school climate problems at Pierson. The conditions in schools described in Chapter 11 that have eliminated achievement gaps are examples that Pierson needs to follow. The distributed instructional leadership in those achieving schools is qualitatively different than that in Pierson. The prevailing tendency of PAL seems to be a proclivity to paper over any major problems with school climate, the work environment, and with equity reform efforts, and to give an impression to the Board of Education, district leadership, and general public that all is under control and being well managed.

PAL is in a school district that has a public image of being a beacon of educational innovation and quality education, albeit for mostly middle- to upper-middle-class White families. The desire to protect the school district’s reputation may have inappropriately influenced the approaches taken or not taken at PAL to adapt to their more diverse student population.

The district administration must hold the principal to a higher standard, and he must do the same for all PAL teachers, starting with teacher leaders, regarding their response to students of color and bused students in particular. Sometimes school staff must be held to higher expectations and help provided for them to meet expectations that they responsibly collaborate with all stakeholders to improve the school climate. This expectation should require confronting and changing some personal and organizational norms at Pierson, but this may be unlikely if some district office organizational norms related to support for equity are not subject to critical examination. There appears to be a need for some hands-on supervision and coaching from district office staff or others they designate, and the district office may not have the capacity or disposition to provide such support.

### *Is There Transparent and Institutional Racism at PAL?*

Does the learning environment at PAL reflect both transparent and institutional racism? There do seem to be covert and overt forms of resistance to initiatives for equity reform. Racism is when a given group of people, such as a racial/ethnic group, a religious group, or a group distinguished by other cultural characteristics,

such as primary language, are kept in a subordinate position by government entities, organizational culture, and/or policies in the public or private sector. This is the raw use of political and/or economic power, and those targeted are usually not able to change that subservient position (Miles & Brown, 2003).

Transparent racism is when racist beliefs or practices are very easily seen but may not appear to be obviously racist, such as low teacher expectations. Institutional racism is when there are policies or regulations that legitimize social injustice and indefinitely keep a group or groups in a subservient role based on their racial/cultural/linguistic identity. Institutional racism is usually more overt. In PAL, the students' rebellious behaviors could be interpreted as reactions to or misunderstandings of some teacher's expressed attitudes, resulting in teacher referrals to the office. When school policy is used to support disciplinary actions that keep students and parents in a subservient role, the policies can arguably be construed as racist when the point of view of those targeted is given no consideration.

However, the district and school site administration, as well as PAL teachers, appear to be unconsciously incompetent in their ability to discern either institutional or transparent racism. In other words, they do not seem to know what they don't know, or pretend to not know what they don't know, and would vehemently deny such a characterization.

An entire group doesn't have to experience such treatment or oppression for racism to be present. At PAL, there are no policies requiring a watered-down curriculum and lower teacher expectations for Black and Brown students, but that is nevertheless what occurs, reflecting a clear case of *de facto* transparent racism. This is all the more solidified via an almost total absence of any instructional supervision. The classroom supervision that occurs does not include the use of observation rubrics for characterizing what is being taught and how it is being taught to any students. Likewise, there is no ongoing monitoring of what if any schoolwide instructional support systems are in place for those students needing them. Arguably, one consequence is perpetuation of inequitable educational outcomes for students of color. The racism is easily seen or transparent, but because there are no policies requiring such omissions in educational practice, they are not likely viewed as racist.

Students claim some teachers don't provide extra help in the classroom, saying they need to move on and complaining students need to pay closer attention and be less distracted during instruction. The teachers' posture is a part of the transparent racism, because even though their practices don't reflect school policy, they do contribute to denying access of some students to the curriculum and keep some students in a state of underachievement. The teacher attitudes display a total dismissal of student and parent concerns about their teaching practices and the Eurocentric curriculum.

Institutional racism at PAL is reflected in formal rules, and transparent racism is reflected in norms that keep bused students of color in a subservient role. These policies and norms are key barriers to achievement at high levels.

**MAKE IT PERSONAL**

1. Describe an example, if possible, of institutional and/or transparent racism in your school and/or school district.
2. If you described an example, what do you think should be done about it?

**Reduce Some Key Barriers to Achievement at High Levels (work on major constraints that must be eliminated to remove gaps in educational outcomes)**

Three of the major barriers to high achievement that were discussed in Chapter 6 are weak instructional leadership, toxic school and school community climate, and limited accountability. The toxic school climate and weak instructional leadership at Pierson were discussed above. The actions of the principal and some teachers are also examples of limited accountability, another major barrier to achievement at high levels by students of color.

*Limited Accountability*

In vignette 13–2, weak instructional leadership has led to limited accountability for the educational outcomes experienced by students of color. The vignette describes teacher resistance to collective problem solving on how to improve instruction for students of color, so there is no goal focus or instructional plan adopted by the entire staff for serving this student population. I have found the same schooling conditions in several low-performing schools to be major barriers to high achievement. In this vignette, the district leadership seems complicit in this lack of responsibility and accountability. The principal hasn't been directed to do anything about such conditions as long as achievement goals are met for the overwhelming number of resident White students.

One could infer that teachers are not giving the students of color who need it more assistance during the school day, because their marching orders may be to make sure they are not perceived as taking time away from other students to serve the most needy. There is a very deep-seated antipathy in some low-performing districts to differentiated instructional interventions that may be resented by the families of higher achieving students who don't want limited or dwindling resources disproportionately allocated to help historically underserved students. Another factor that may influence resistance to changing current practices is the end-of-year test scores by students of color bused to Pierson. These test results are better than what their test scores were in their home schools, even though a very large achievement gap continues to exist between the bused students and the resident White students. The old cliché that a rising tide raises all boats masks the embedded racism in

such a rationalization for tolerating continuation of major gaps in educational outcomes, despite the espoused intent of the federal No Child Left Behind legislation.

*Conditions Contributing to Limited Accountability*

At Pierson Academy, there are several conditions that may be contributing to limited accountability, which are major barriers to all student groups achieving at high levels. The conditions fall into three broad categories, the first of which is an absence of the three R's: relationships, rigor, and relevance. Teacher relationships with some parents of color, relationships between some teachers, and relationships between the principal and some parents of color were characterized in the vignette as tense. The curriculum and instructional strategies for students of color were also described as less rigorous than for other students, and students of color probably do not find the Eurocentric curriculum relevant or the instruction motivating.

Another relationship issue in PAL and the district at large is the intense competitiveness between adults, whether they are teachers, administrators, or parents. Most staff have a strong motivation to work in this district because of its reputation. There is a strong preoccupation with one's "status" in the school community at large and in their stakeholder group in particular. This proclivity leads to constant efforts to improve both one's position power and personal power within the district, and this same inclination is true to varying degrees in different schools. This dynamic is part of the back story helping to explain the principal's style and the teacher's relationships with each other and with students.

The second category of conditions is the absence of the three A's: accountability, assessment, and access. It is my view that school districts should vigilantly hold all stakeholders accountable, especially principals and teachers. As an assistant superintendent in charge of all instructional programs as well as the supervision and evaluation of all principals in a secondary school district, I used multiple assessments during the instructional supervision process to monitor the quality of leadership, teaching, and student educational outcomes. I also monitored the extent to which the district was able to give priority to opportunity to learn, delivery, and professional development standards. Vignette 13–2 describes supervision of the principal as limited and focuses primarily on whether achievement targets for the White student population are met. It should be no surprise that accountability, assessment, and access issues addressed by the principal mirrored the district's priority and went no further. Accountability, assessment, and access experienced by students of color, especially those bused in, did not receive the same level of scrutiny and urgency by the principal or instructional staff.

The third category of conditions contributing to limited accountability at Pierson is the absence of several communication behaviors: facilitation, mediation, and candor. The vignette provides no evidence of any attempts to facilitate better communication and team building among all staff. During such discussions, the

principal, teacher leaders, or university faculty engaged for that purpose could help surface any conflicts and attempt mediation between those with differing perspectives, at the same time that candor, that is, open honest dialogue, would be encouraged and supported. In PAL, the teachers avoid candid conversations about school problems, especially those involving race and culture, and the principal does not take the initiative to convene meetings for that purpose.

Who should be engaged in addressing the above conditions? District and site administrators, as well as teacher and community leaders, should all be working collaboratively to address the conditions described. For example, the principal should be helped if necessary to develop a work plan that calls for collaboration with “other stakeholders” and helped, if needed, to carry out the plan. “Other stakeholders” include parent and upper grade level student representatives whose perspectives on the causes and barriers to high achievement should be solicited and not discarded once received. In addition, principals need their own professional learning community where they can candidly share and receive feedback and suggestions from colleagues in a synergistic fashion.

I have found an effective strategy can be the creation of a network of schools within a district or a network of districts within a geographic region who focus primarily on increasing the expertise of principals to improve and expand instructional leadership and accountability for equitable educational outcomes. Such a network should engage as often as possible in electronic and live synergistic activities, where they learn from sharing personal challenges and build upon each other’s successes. I facilitated such face-to-face “synergy groups” of principals when I was director of leadership development in a county office of education. I found principals more comfortable in being open and candid when such groups were composed of people from different districts, because they felt a greater sense of confidentiality was possible.

### *The Role of Culturally Courageous Leaders in Reducing Barriers*

Improving the three R’s, the three A’s, and several communication behaviors in PAL requires CCL. For all of the above barriers to achievement at high levels to be reduced or eliminated, the appropriate district administrators, site administrator(s), and teachers must be willing to work collaboratively in addressing their day-to-day challenges.

Culturally courageous leaders are willing to critically examine and transcend personal influences that may significantly contribute to prejudicial beliefs, discriminatory actions, avoidance behavior, and cultural incompetence.

Culturally courageous leaders are more open and honest about human difference biases, their own and others, as well as biased organizational norms in their work setting. Through more critical self-reflection, cultural consciousness is raised, and also the comfort to openly and candidly discuss what has been happening compared with what needs to happen. As discussed in Chapters 7 through 12, culturally

courageous leaders consciously take the initiative to think and act in ways that help all students achieve at high levels. That is not happening at PAL.

The focus of problem solving must include collective strategizing on how to deal with *barriers* to creating culturally democratic learning environments, where all voices are legitimized and priority is given to the needs of all students. Culturally democratic learning environments are those where teachers are in a constant state of “learning,” enabling them to stay motivated to effectively teach culturally diverse students.

An example of a barrier to creating culturally democratic learning environments would be teachers not having the knowledge or comfort to integrate content about societal conditions negatively impacting cultural and ethnic minorities in the United States. Some of the political constraints to successfully implementing the three R’s, three A’s, and communication behaviors include the interpersonal and philosophical differences within and between ethnic-specific and stakeholder groups about whether students should learn about the negative dynamics between groups and individuals in their neighborhoods and larger communities. Some equity advocates would assert that if children live in environments where they experience such conflicts on a day-to-day basis, then schools should help them develop the capacity to make things better.

There is a lack of collaborative effort and trust within groups (e.g., teachers, parents, racial groups) as well as across groups. Some ethnic specific community-based organizations have their internal conflicts and trust issues as well as their difficulties in establishing trust and collaboration with other community-based organizations. Likewise, when it comes to equity reforms or equity transformation, school administrator and teacher organizations each have their conflicting priorities and trust issues within their groups and between their groups. Many parents from each cultural/ethnic group experience the same problem within their peer groups and across their groups. All of these conflicts among the stakeholder groups make it very difficult, but not impossible, to reduce the key barriers to achievement at high levels for historically underserved students of color.

The political priorities of culturally courageous leaders must be to improve social relations within and among all constituencies, expand collective decision making so that there is more investment and ownership in the decisions made and willingness to implement them, more equity in power and authority relationships, and less competition between stakeholder groups. These are overlapping priorities complementary to each other. It is not possible to improve power and authority relationships, personal investment, ownership, political will, and savvy unless social relations are dramatically changed across all boundaries. Elizabeth Martinez discusses the need for multiethnic coalitions to join forces in their struggle for social justice in her book *De Colores Means All of Us: Latina Views for a Multi-Colored Century* (1998).

**MAKE IT PERSONAL****FN13-1 (SEE FACILITATOR NOTES IN APPENDIX 1)**

1. Which of the above conditions, such as absence of the three R's, three A's, or communication behaviors, contribute the most to weak instructional leadership and limited accountability in your work setting?
2. What is one thing you would do if you were engaged in direct efforts to correct the absence of any conditions identified in response to the previous question?

**Prevent “Equity Hustlers” From Compromising Equity Efforts (be able to identify and eliminate any negative impact of those who want others to think of them as equity leaders even though they are not)**

Based on information provided in the vignette, there may be some equity hustlers at PAL, and the school district itself may be an equity hustler. Social relations within and between groups are exacerbated by wanksters, gangsters, and riders.

Wanksters can be identified based on the gap between what they say and do. They talk a good game but never follow through. Although they pretend to embrace the need to improve the achievement of bused students, thus “talking the talk,” they do not “walk the talk” of the equity reform undertaken in the school. Although they seem committed to nurturing relationships with their bused students or their parents, they do not defend the right of students and parents to feel the way they do about how they are treated. They say there is staff cohesion in the school when actually there are major philosophical and pedagogical differences among staff causing resistance to teacher collaboration on problem solving and joint lesson planning. There are many wanksters at PAL. However, as already mentioned, school districts as a whole can be “wanksters” when it comes to a commitment to equity transformation, and the district in which PAL is one school could be considered a wankster in some regards, unwittingly or consciously contributing to such attitudes and behaviors among the principal and staff at PAL.

Gangsters take credit without attribution for the work and accomplishments of others. They also take credit for what others do for them (i.e., taking credit for the academic successes and/or improved behavior of students one cannot handle by “farming” them out to other teachers who work better with the “farmed out” students). PAL has a few teachers who meet the definition of a gangster.

Riders need to be helped, mentored, or coached so they can over time become more self-secure and motivated to make efforts at the next level of functioning, instead of hiding behind the high visibility role of others committed to social justice. Riders may value culturally responsive teaching, but they don't have the psychological readiness



or skills to promote the implementation of culturally responsive teaching in the face of resistance. They prefer to stay in the background and let others provide all of the visible leadership, take all of the risks and do the heavy lifting when it comes to actually confronting biased attitudes, or trying to change biased school policies. They must ride other's coattails. There are also a few riders at PAL; a few of the teachers are very successful with their bused students, but don't assume an aggressive public role of advocacy within the school or district on behalf of their historically underserved students .

It is the duty of the principal to work with his expanded leadership team to raise everyone's consciousness about the phenomenon of "equity hustlers" that can be counterproductive to equity initiatives, followed by vigilant efforts to identify and correct any instances when there is evidence of such attitudes and behaviors, or even the appearance thereof. This should include the courage to self-identify and model the willingness to change, and will probably require a critical self-examination of whether the ideologies of White dominance and color-blindness discussed in Chapter 1 are embraced by the district and school.

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

#### FN13-2 (SEE FACILITATOR NOTES IN APPENDIX 1)

1. Identify either an equity transformation or equity reform initiative undertaken in your school district, school, or program in the recent past, and then describe the politics (i.e., the dynamics between people based on their competing interests, beliefs, values, and priorities) during roll out of the initiative.
2. Given the politics you have just described in response to #1 above, identify one of the six political strategies discussed after vignette 13-1 or 13-2 that was NOT used in your situation but should have been. Explain your reasoning.



### WHAT WAS HAPPENING IN THE VIGNETTES

In vignette 13-1, the community leaders who convened the meetings to discuss lack of student access were attempting to achieve *equity transformation* by getting leaders from all stakeholder groups to collectively identify causes of the achievement gap and develop a proposal for how to begin correcting the problem. The proposal was directed at transforming both the culture and structure at the school that perpetuated some school conditions contributing to low student achievement. Personal and organizational identities, beliefs, values, and norms would be transformed during the course of this equity initiative if it had been successful.

In vignette 13-2, however, the district was attempting to implement an *equity reform*, that is, metropolitan desegregation, that would ostensibly improve student

achievement of the target students, but there was no hint of leadership at the district level or at the receiving school level to transform personal and organizational identities, school norms, and policies that contributed to maintenance of the achievement gap. The parent complaints about the classroom actions of some teachers and the principal's lack of response to their concerns illustrate the inadequacy of the school's response at the end of the bus ride.

Given the above vignettes about equity initiatives and analysis of how the politics in each case was inadequately handled, it is important to remember some key points about what culturally courageous leaders do when undertaking such goals.



## **POLITICAL STRATEGY REMINDERS**

Culturally courageous leaders must do the following:

- Demonstrate the insight, will, and savvy to rise above personal cultural influences (that is, beliefs, values, priorities, norms) that are divisive, as they simultaneously work with other stakeholders to change individual behaviors, organizational priorities, and norms that work against equitable educational outcomes. They must be able to withstand and push back against prevailing winds, without succumbing to demonstrating disrespect or destructive behaviors.
- Forge broader and more in-depth coalitions to develop common agendas and goals, both within racial/cultural/stakeholder groups and across such groups. For example, there is a need for ongoing discourse between and joint strategic planning by several types of organizations. These include churches or other community-based organizations that primarily serve particular communities of color, ethnic studies departments and schools/colleges of education at a university, and educational organizations that focus on serving and advocating for particular ethnic communities. There is a critical need for joint efforts by these entities to advocate for and help achieve equitable outcomes for historically underserved students. There is not enough of this going on. These organizations tend to be very insular.
- Reach out to persons who seem indifferent or are diametrically opposed to what you want to achieve. For example, concerted efforts are needed to educate and increase understanding about cultural democracy and equitable outcomes by persons of European backgrounds. They may mistakenly consider issues of social justice, race, and culture as minority issues that have no relevance for them and cannot benefit them. There are White scholars, politicians, and community activists (as well as persons from other racial/ethnic/cultural backgrounds) who have a very strong commitment to cultural democracy and social justice, but in any particular school or school district, there may be no connection between such persons and those of the same racial background who steadfastly oppose such initiatives.

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- Have an unswerving commitment to assist the disenfranchised and alienated who may strongly resist and distrust the motives, sincerity, and expertise of those trying to help.
- Exhibit patience, and they might initially need to work on establishing two-way communication, building relationships and establishing trust with a small number of people in one stakeholder group. This may be necessary before trying to work with multiple stakeholder groups to tackle the major causes of social injustice and inequitable educational outcomes.
- Not attempt equity transformation initiatives on a predetermined timeline. In many cases, the initiatives must be allowed to evolve with the initial work focusing on developing new norms of communication, collaboration, and commitment within particular cultural, ethnic, and stakeholder groups. One of the ultimate goals should be for each group to develop greater capacity to work effectively across stakeholder groups on common interests.

### MAKE IT PERSONAL

#### FN13-3 (SEE FACILITATOR NOTES IN APPENDIX 1)

1. Which of the political strategy reminders would you find most difficult to do? Explain your reasoning.
2. What is your experience that confirms or contradicts the statement about how equity transformation initiatives cannot always be attempted on a predetermined timeline?

### REVIEW OF CHAPTER 13

- The term “politics” is defined and personalized in terms of how it relates to the phenomenon of attempting “equity transformation” and “equity reform.”
- The differences between equity transformation and equity reform are discussed.
- Two vignettes are provided, one describing the politics of implementation (POI) during an attempt at equity transformation and the other the POI during an equity reform effort.
- Each vignette is followed by an analysis of how using three POI dimensions could have minimized the political land mines associated with each equity initiative, and political strategy reminders are provided to emphasize the importance of practicing CCL.

