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# Reimagining School Board Leadership:
# Actions for Equity

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**DIRE**
AN nsba INITIATIVE

**nsba Center for Safe Schools**

A publication by NSBA's DIRE (Dismantling Institutional Racism in Education) Initiative
and the Center for Safe Schools

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# Foreword

In response to grave public health concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts across the country closed campuses and made a sudden pivot to remote learning in the spring of 2020. At the same time, school districts found themselves serving as first responders during a public health crisis, connecting students and families to basic needs, essential services, and support. As summer began, millions of Americans took to the streets to protest police brutality and systemic racism in the wake of the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and others. Both COVID-19 and the movement to uproot systemic racism have continued into the 2020-21 school year. For many school districts, distance learning remains the sole delivery path for learning, while other districts have opened campuses with new protocols for physical distancing, hygiene, and the mandatory wearing of masks.

The Brookings Institution estimates that, on average, students will have suffered a 30 to 40 percent learning loss due to the disruption in face-to-face learning caused by COVID-19. This assessment is alarming for any student but is even more troubling when one considers the persistent performance trends for students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are English learners. A 40 percent learning loss for the most vulnerable students coupled with meager achievement in a normal school year will turn the achievement gap into a chasm.

Yet, the challenges of the present circumstances present a unique opportunity for long-needed change. We are collectively experiencing a watershed moment where many sacrosanct aspects of society—from law enforcement to the structure of work—are being scrutinized and reimagined. As the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement endure, it has become increasingly clear that it will not be possible to return to the way things used to be. The only way out is through a different and better way of living. For school districts, this means a different and better way of schooling.

Since the 1983 publication of *A Nation At Risk*, student performance data has exposed the uncomfortable truth that "schooling as usual" is a system that produces and perpetuates intolerable inequities. But after almost 20 years of reports, accountability measures, and reform movements, U.S. schooling has largely failed to move far from "one model fits all" approaches. In large part, the opportunity gaps that lead to disparities in student achievement have come to be expected and accepted.

If we understand that a system generates the outcomes it was designed to produce, then the silver lining of these current crises is that school districts and the school boards that lead them have an opportunity to reimagine and redesign systems for learning.

If school boards rise to the challenge in this moment, public education across the U.S. can be transformed so that its highest promise is fulfilled—equitable access to a world-class education, so that every student is prepared to succeed in life.

## What Do We Mean by "Equity"?

The promise of public education is that every child succeeds in school and life. To realize this promise, children must be provided resources, supports, and interventions based on their needs. The nation's school boards are uniquely positioned to fulfill this promise to all students, which is why NSBA is committed to educational equity for all children in public schools.

If all students are to be educated in a manner that prepares them for success in school and in life, school board members must lead with an equity lens. Because the notion of educational equity means different things to different people, it is important to clearly define what educational equity is and is not.

NSBA's Center for Public Education defines educational equity as being achieved when *all students receive the resources they need so they graduate prepared for success after high school.*

Educational equity is sometimes confused with educational equality, but they are not the same. Educational equality is when all students are treated the same and have access to similar resources. Educational equity considers the needs of students as a precursor to and a determining factor for things such as setting policy, the allocation of resources, and the design of educational programs. On the other hand, educational equality is solely concerned with whether all students get the same resources, even if the resources provided do not adequately prepare students for success after high school.

While conversations about equity can sometimes become politically charged, educational equity is not a partisan issue. Educational equity is first and foremost about ensuring that school districts fulfill their core mission: successfully educating all students so that they are prepared to be productive and engaged citizens. Creating educational equity is of upmost importance because public schools serve an increasingly diverse student population with a broad range of needs. The face of America's typical public school student has changed and will continue to change.

In 1960, 85 percent of the country was white. African Americans were the largest non-white racial group and comprised 11 percent of the total population. Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans represented less than 5 percent of the total population combined. Today, approximately 63 percent of the total population is white.

If current trends hold, by 2025, the U.S. is likely to have the following demographic profile: African Americans: 13.4 percent, Asians: 9 percent, Latinos: 29 percent, and whites: 47 percent. (Pew Research Center, 2008)

By 2050, almost one in five Americans (19 percent) will be foreign-born. This is an increase of 7 percent from 2005 and will surpass the historic peak for immigrants as a share of the U.S. population of 14.8 percent established in 1890. (Pew Research Center, 2008)

Childhood poverty is pervasive. A 2016 study by the National Center for Education Statistics found that Black and Latino children were more likely to belong to families living in poverty (31 and 26 percent, respectively). The same study found that 10 percent each of white and Asian children belong to families living in poverty. According to the Children's Defense Fund, 29.1 percent of Native American children and 23.7 percent of Latino children live below the poverty line.

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English learners make up approximately 10 percent of the national student population. One in 4 children in the U.S. is either an immigrant or the child of immigrants. (Children's Defense Fund, 2020)

NSBA recognizes that based on factors including but not limited to disability, race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status, students are deprived of equitable educational opportunities. Fortunately for our students, demographics are not destiny. Operating with an equity lens empowers school board members to intentionally allocate resources, instruction, and opportunities according to need, requiring that discriminatory practices, prejudices, and beliefs be identified and eradicated. School board members have the positioning and power to employ the key levers to create more equitable outcomes:

- Ensuring equity in school funding.
- Ensuring access to high-quality and high-level curriculum.
- Ensuring access to effective teachers.
- Ensuring safe and supportive school climates.
- Fostering meaningful community engagement.

This guide will explore how school board members can set the tone and create policy to influence operations in each of these areas so that all students receive the resources they need to graduate prepared for success after high school.

## The Culturally Responsive Board

Designing a school system to create equitable outcomes is not easy or simple. It is precisely because the work is so difficult and complex that school boards must fully commit to guaranteeing every student their civil right: a quality education that prepares them for life in a global economy.

The economic and social benefits of a well-educated population are many. When school boards take up

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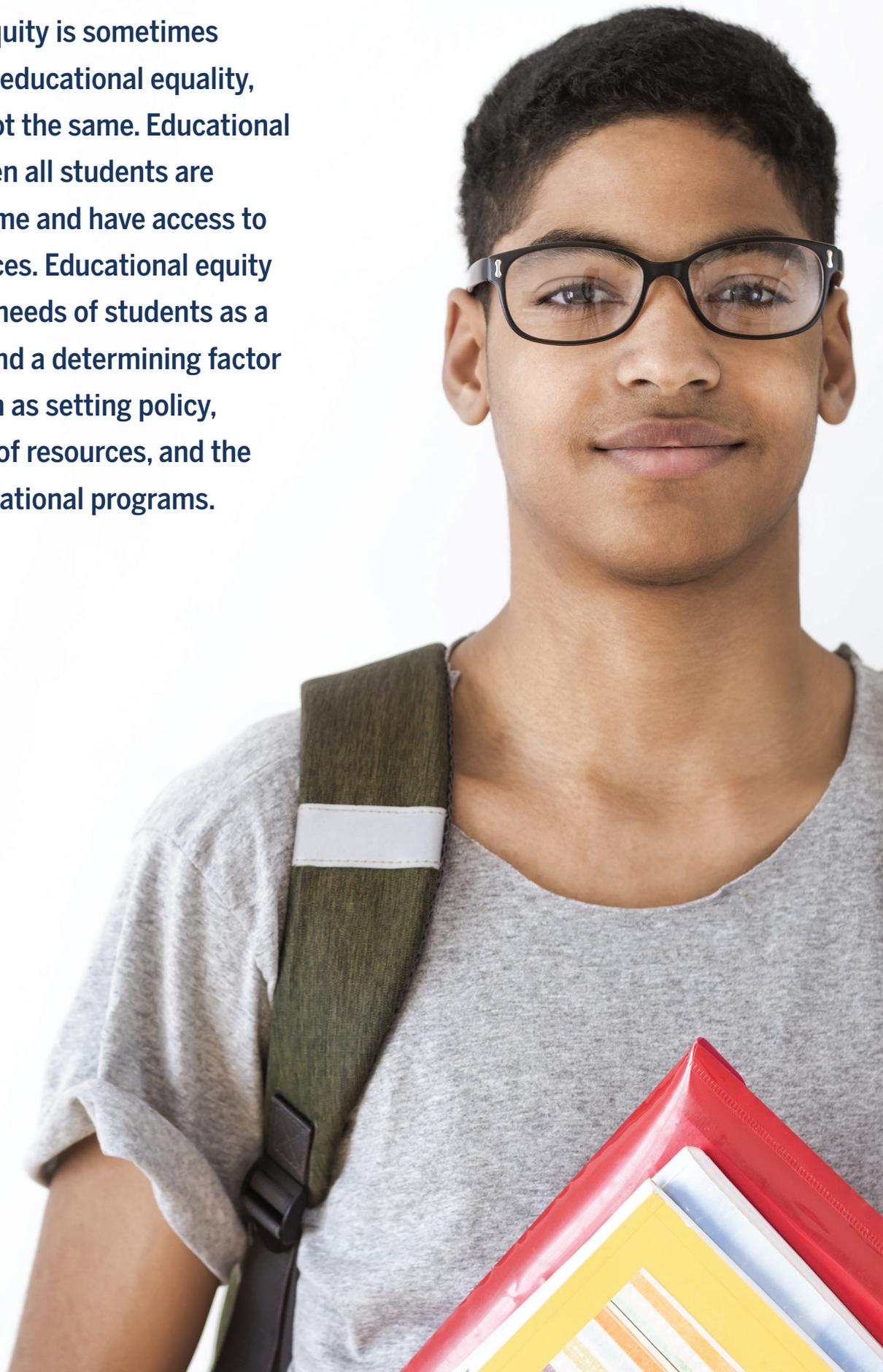
this work, they will immediately benefit the children in their schools. They also are investing in the larger community by producing future residents that are more likely to contribute productively to their cities, counties, and states.

School board members have clear spheres of influence by which to effect necessary change:

**Leadership:** School boards set the tone for how the business of teaching and learning is carried out in their district. School boards lead by defining the mission, vision, and core values for the school district. Do the mission, vision, and core values of your district communicate a commitment to educational equity?

School boards also lead by setting policy that clearly defines what they see as the priorities for daily management and implementation by the superintendent and staff. When policies are grounded in the needs of students and responsive to the local context of the district, equitable outcomes for students are more likely.

Perhaps most importantly, school boards ensure that the values and priorities they have defined are reflected in the annual budget before approval. This guide will include explicit discussions about critical budget considerations.

**Accountability:** The board is responsible for ensuring that the superintendent and leadership team can execute on the vision and priorities that the board has established. Strong governance processes that facilitate healthy collaboration between the board and superintendent are vital. Transparent mechanisms for oversight are essential. As COVID-19 has undeniably demonstrated, delivering a world-class education to children in challenging circumstances requires flexibility and accountability. For school boards committed to equity, adaptive governance will continue to be the norm.

**Community engagement and advocacy:** School board members are a community's steward of its most precious resource—the future. Leading with an equity lens will create substantial change for the entire community, so boards should create avenues for listening and responding to community input. School districts can benefit when boards engage local entities, including service providers and industry as partners to help meet students' needs. As board members engage the community, it is important to reflect on your board's current makeup. Be aware of the ways your board does and does not reflect your community.

## Designing Your Portfolio of Schools for Excellence, Equity, and Integration

The landmark case *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled segregation in public schools unconstitutional. Despite that ruling, U.S. Supreme Court decisions in the 1990s resulted in the discontinuation of desegregation orders and plans across the country. (Orfield, Frankenberg, Ee, Ayscue, 2019)

Due to shifting student demographics and pervasive child poverty, students increasingly find themselves in doubly segregated schools by race and by socioeconomic levels. The persistent problem of segregation in American schools needs a set of novel solutions for the 21st century. Schools should be integrated, excellent, and produce equitable outcomes.

To achieve this, board members have two powerful devices for change—the ability to draw district

boundaries that determine assignments to neighborhood schools and the power to set policy that defines the makeup of your district's portfolio of schools.

Drawing district attendance boundaries is often a contentious process. For this reason, redrawing boundaries frequently is avoided unless factors like overcrowding due to a growing student population require immediate attention. But school districts would be well served by examining district boundaries with an equity lens. Do district boundaries expose students to segregation by race or socioeconomic level? Are students doubly segregated by both factors?

School boards should consider if redistricting can be used as a tool to ensure that district boundaries can positively disrupt segregation patterns commonly found in residential neighborhoods. When district lines are being redrawn, care should be taken to balance competing priorities of diversifying schools: reducing overcrowding and maintaining manageable travel times for students. School boards also should be prepared to resist pressure to redraw boundaries to maintain segregation during demographic shifts in the student population.

A district's school portfolio can be thought of much like an investment portfolio. The allocation of investments—or in this case the types of schools—will look quite different, depending on the needs and goals of the beneficiary.

When school boards reimagine their school districts as equitable systems, they will ensure that the portfolio of schools responds to what students need, instead of simply maintaining what has always been done. Data about what students need and how existing schools are performing should drive decisions about portfolio management. To match students with schools that are right for them, your district may begin to use a mixed model to pair students with schools (district boundaries and choice). Depending on student needs, your portfolio may include schools that specialize in:

- Integration of students with special needs.
- Second language learning.
- Providing social services (community schools).
- Special talents or interests (magnet schools).
- Career and technical education.
- Advanced Placement and IB.

*The guiding question is no longer, "How do we ensure every school receives the same amount of funding?" but rather, "How do we ensure that every school is properly resourced to meet the learning needs of their student body?"*

- Dual enrollment (early college models).
- Nontraditional students (virtual, flexible scheduling, credit recovery).

Effective management of a portfolio of schools will typically result in regular changes to the schools in a district, including but not limited to:

- Existing schools revising or augmenting their educational model.
- New schooling models introduced to the mix.
- Some schools being phased out.

**Budget consideration:** It is important to keep in mind that allocating money and other resources across an innovative school portfolio will mean that each school is likely to receive a different level of funding. Certain models will be more expensive than others, and particular elements of some models may be funded by special sources or contributed in-kind by partners.

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## Ensuring World-Class Teaching and Learning
### Who's teaching?
A significant body of research has demonstrated the positive correlation between a diverse teaching force and improvements in student achievement, especially for students of color. Teachers of color tend to have higher expectations for students of color. This is important because we know that a teacher's expectations can have a significant impact on student performance. Teachers of color also tend to have more positive perceptions of students of color. For example, African American teachers are less likely than white teachers to perceive African American
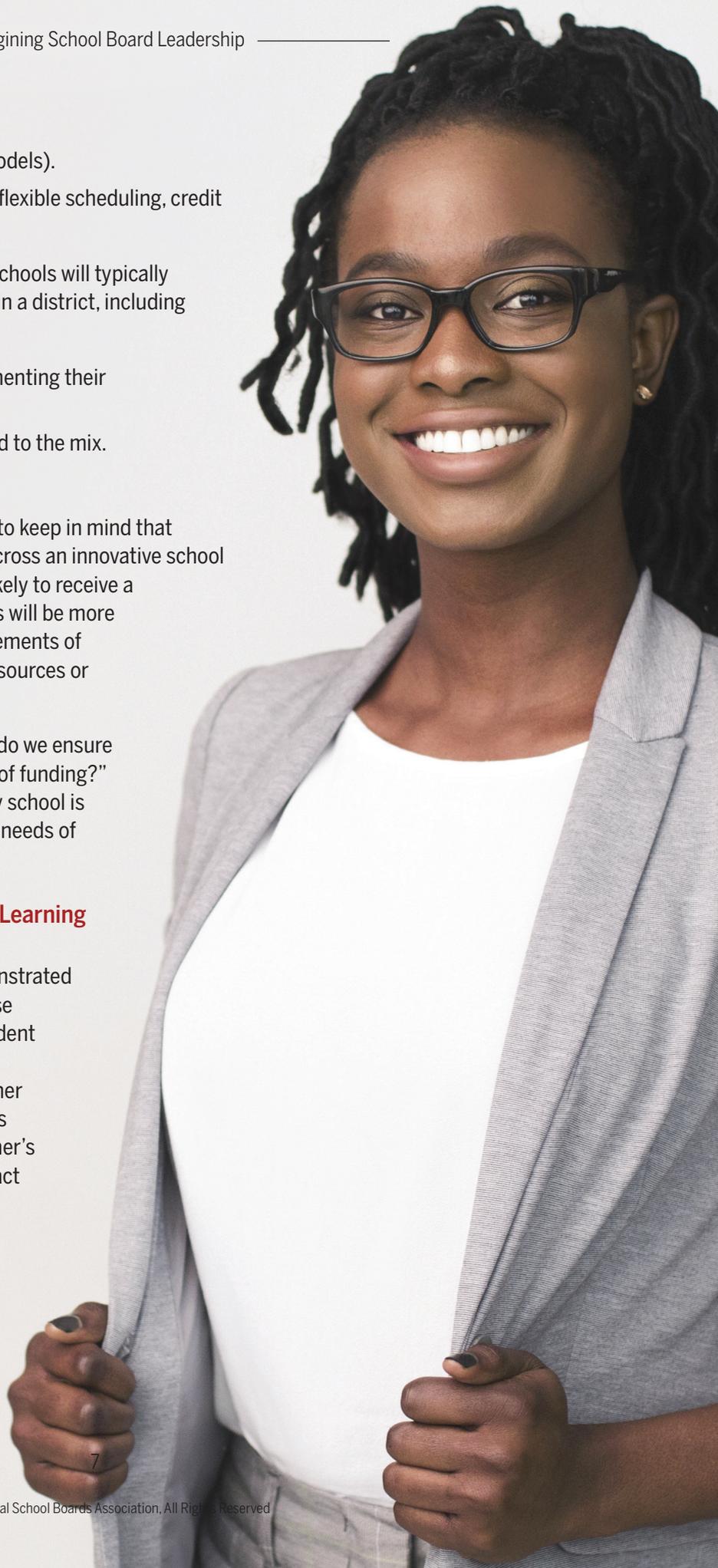
*The evidence is clear: Students need teachers who look like them. Because educational equity requires systems to respond to students' needs, school board members should ask the question: How is my district ensuring that the teaching force in my district is diverse so that students are taught frequently by teachers of color?*

students' behavior as disruptive. Further, teachers of color serve as more relatable role models and can often bridge cultural divides between home and school for students of color and their families. (Center for American Progress)

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In addition to ensuring the teaching force is diverse, teachers also need to be qualified and effective. If students have even one highly effective teacher, they are more likely to go to college. If students are taught by effective teachers for every year of their elementary school years, their education experience can offset the negative impacts of poverty.

All teachers, no matter their racial background, should be skilled in culturally relevant teaching—ways of engaging students in learning that leverages the diverse knowledge and experiences of all students to make learning more relevant and impactful. To do this, teachers need regular opportunities to identify and uproot ways that unconscious bias may affect their practice. Implicit or unconscious bias is something that every individual must grapple with—the human tendency to process information based on unconscious associations and feelings, even when these are contrary to one's conscious or declared beliefs. Regular examination of implicit bias is essential to culturally relevant practice for every educator. Culturally relevant teaching is not only important for students of color, but it also helps educators to effectively address the needs of students with special learning needs and those who are differently abled.

Creating and maintaining a diverse and highly effective teaching force are challenging tasks. Some school districts have successfully implemented "homegrown" teacher pipeline models to encourage local students to study education and return to teach in the district. Other districts have found success by partnering with schools of education or using other targeted recruitment and retainment strategies.

**Budget considerations:** What resources can be allocated to teacher pipeline development, including

recruitment? What resources can be allocated to support and retain teachers of color? How does the district ensure that teachers have ongoing professional development?

## What's being taught?

What students are taught, commonly referred to as curriculum, is as important as having diverse and effective teachers. Students that have access to high-level, culturally relevant curriculum perform better in school and have better long-term outcomes including college acceptance, college completion, and future earnings.

Curriculum is a combination of the learning materials and learning experiences that students are exposed to over the course of their educational journey. Typically, curriculum is organized into "units of study" or "courses." Curriculum is related to but distinctly different from standards and assessments.

Standards are statements that establish what students should know and be able to do, while curriculum contains the materials and experiences by which students gain the desired knowledge and skills. Assessments measure the degree to which students can demonstrate the knowledge and skills expressed in the standards and taught through the curriculum.

School districts need to be intentional about creating pathways so that all students experience rigorous or high-level curriculum. Students can only master educational content to which they are exposed. Disturbingly, non-Asian students of color are half as likely as white students to take Advanced Placement courses or even have them offered at their schools. (U.S. Department of Education) Unequal access for Black and Latino students to high-level curriculum perpetuates inequities by denying students of color the opportunity to learn advanced content.

In addition to ensuring that all students have access to rigorous curriculum, educators must ensure that curriculum is culturally responsive. Curriculum should be inclusive of multiple populations (such as diverse racial groups, linguistically diverse people, differently abled people, etc.) and multiple perspectives. Inclusive curriculum provides points of relevance and cultural access for all students, instead of just students belonging to the dominant cultural group.

Reimagining schooling to create educational equity will require that districts provide equitable access to rigorous, culturally relevant curriculum so that all students have the knowledge and skills to succeed as contributing members of a rapidly changing, global society, regardless of factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnic background, English proficiency, immigration status, socioeconomic status, or disability.

**Budget considerations:** Before approving budget allocations for curriculum, be sure that the materials are aligned to your state's learning standards and meet criteria for high-quality curriculum, including criteria for cultural inclusion. School boards should take a student-based approach and anticipate that the budget will need to be allocated for regular curriculum updates, curriculum supplements, or curriculum revisions.

## Who's leading?

In the same way that teachers of color provide support to students of color, administrators of color are an asset to systems of education intentionally working toward educational equity. When people of color are in leadership positions, negative unconscious bias decreases. Leaders of color are often more positively

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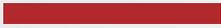
received by communities of their same racial background, and they often bring fresh insights to the design of academic programs for underserved students.

As is the case with teachers, there is a disparity between the diversity of the student population and diversity among school leaders. While approximately half of public school students are white, about 75 percent of administrators are white. (Brookings Institution)

The dearth of diversity in school leadership is directly related to the lack of diversity among teachers. The school leadership pipeline lacks diversity. The scarcity of school leaders of color underscores the need for school districts to diversify their teaching force and to create transparent and supportive career ladders so that educators of color can advance to positions of school and district leadership.

## Taking a Whole Child Approach to Safety and Well-being

Whole child health refers to the physical, mental, and social and emotional well-being essential for students to achieve positive outcomes in their academic, professional, and personal lives. The experiences that students have, especially in their very early years, shape their readiness to learn, including but not limited to language development, social development, and executive functioning that is related to self-control and good decision-making.

Research from the CDC Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study indicates that almost two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, such as trauma, stress, hunger, environmental conditions, etc. More than one in five reported three or more ACEs. These experiences can have lasting effects and present barriers to the well-being of children and impact their performance at school.

School districts that operate with an equity lens accurately identify and support an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and overall well-being for success in academics, life, and career.

### Mental health

In 2019, more than 12 percent of youth reported suffering from at least one major depressive episode, and approximately 30 percent of adolescents reported suffering from anxiety. Sixty percent of youth reporting mental health challenges did not have access to care. According to a recent study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (April-June 2020) there has been a significant increase in adverse mental health conditions among youth due to the pandemic. Based on this study, over 40 percent of youth reported at least one adverse mental health condition. The prevalence of depression and anxiety reported was significantly higher among youth of color. Optimal learning cannot occur if schools fail to provide for the mental wellness of their students. School boards should set policy that:

    a)   Requires staffing models that ensure student access to support staff.

    b)   Directs staff to maintain healthy school climates, including bullying prevention.

    c)   Integrates social-emotional learning into student-adult interaction across the district.

    d)   Requires district staff to learn and implement trauma-informed practice.

    e)   Encourages partnership and programs that meet students' basic needs.

### Social-emotional learning (SEL)

Social-emotional learning (SEL) involves the process through which students and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make reasonable decisions. (Durlack, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011) SEL capacities are widely recognized by mental health professionals, higher education professionals, and industry as being important to success in college, career, and life. (American Institutes for Research)

The development of SEL capacities is important for every learner and benefits all students. There are several resources to support schools in this work, including:

- The National Center on Safe and Supportive Learning Environments
- The Yale Center for Emotional Intelligence
- The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning

These organizations offer frameworks, toolkits, resources, and training on SEL and ways to integrate the practice into the work of teaching and learning. It is important to note that SEL is not only for students. As learning theorist Albert Bandura posits, students will mimic the behavior and norms demonstrated by the adults around them. For this reason, it is paramount that SEL be practiced and reflected at every level and facet of the district—from the boardroom to the classroom and to the lunchroom.

### Trauma-informed practice

The National Child Traumatic Stress Network defines childhood trauma as a frightening, dangerous, or violent incident that poses a threat to a child's life or bodily integrity or to the life or bodily integrity of a child's loved one. Children who are repeatedly exposed to traumatic events can develop chronic traumatic stress that can produce reactions that interfere with academic learning and positive social development.

*Schools can be redesigned to support students who have experienced trauma. To accomplish this, educators and other district staff must be trained to understand the impact of trauma on human development and behavior, how to respond to trauma, and how to avoid causing additional trauma. All district staff should learn when and how to refer students to external professionals.*

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District staff should understand that trauma-informed practices benefit all students. While designed specifically with the needs of students who have experienced chronic, episodic, or occasional, its practices have been shown to support the development of all students.

### Meeting students' basic needs

For many students, adverse childhood experiences are directly related to the lack of basic needs like food, shelter, utilities, and health care. With the notable exceptions of the National School Lunch Program, National School Breakfast Program, and the Summer Food Program, school districts are typically not funded, equipped, or organized to provide basic needs assistance to students and their families. However, we know that when students' basic needs are not met, their education is compromised.

Because school boards are positioned to engage community organizations and forge partnerships, they can consider how strategic partners might help ensure that students in need can be easily connected to sources of support. School boards should consider how they can better prepare and organize to meet the needs of their most vulnerable learners.

One type of school that successfully addresses the needs of students is the Community Schools Model. Community Schools are designed to be both academic and social centers that connect students and their families to the resources, opportunities, and supports that make academic success possible while also fostering stronger family and community ties. Community Schools embody what schooling for equity looks like and are designed with:

- Integrated student supports.
- Expanded and enriched learning time and opportunities.
- Active family and community engagement.
- Collaborative leadership and practices.

You can learn more about community schools at https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org.

**Budget considerations:** The notion that educators are responsible for maintaining learning environments that are trauma-informed and support the social and emotional development of students is relatively new. This means that most educators are not well-versed in the foundational theories nor the most current practices in SEL and trauma-informed practice for educators. School districts should be prepared to make a significant investment to develop district capacity, including teacher and staff professional development, to meet the needs of students in these areas.

## Providing Safe Spaces for Learning

### School discipline

Like mental health and emotional safety, physical safety of students at school is crucial. Most school districts understand that maintaining order and safety for students is critical. However, widely used

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school safety policies and practices often contain bias against students of color and students with behavioral disorders. Even as schools focus on physical security, the principles of whole child health discussed above should be foundational principles of school safety policies and practices.

If not structured with equity in mind, the roles of school resource and school safety officers can often lead to greater discrimination in discipline for students of color. No-tolerance policies and severe suspension and expulsion practices deprive students of educational time and attainment. Overreliance on school safety officers can exacerbate negative feelings towards law enforcement that often exist in low-income communities and communities of color.

Fortunately, new models for maintaining school safety are proving to be successful. These models take a whole child approach to school discipline and focus on ensuring students remain part of a strong and healthy school community. This means that student removal through suspensions and expulsions is not the primary or desired action for maintaining positive student behavior. While undesirable student behavior can be expected, schools can prepare to respond to this behavior in ways that ensure students continue to function as full members of their school's learning community. Restorative justice is a system of criminal justice that focuses on the rehabilitation of offenders through reconciliation with victims and the school community. A growing body of research, including studies by the Rand Corporation, indicate that restorative justice practices in schools have many benefits, including:

- Reducing suspension rates.
- Reducing suspension rates of African American students and of those from low-income families, shrinking the disparities in suspension rates between African American and white students and between low- and higher-income students.
- Improving overall school climates.

Schools can reimagine consequences. Instead of at-home suspensions, consider community service or other appropriate forms of restitution. Keep in mind that equity in school discipline provides a path for the student to be successful in school and in life. School boards should consider if their discipline policies and staffing models for safety personnel work toward that end for all students.

School boards should regularly review their discipline polices as well as disaggregated data about students who are most impacted by these policies to determine if policies are disproportionately affecting certain groups of students. School boards should review staffing models to assess whether schools have the appropriate balance of support staff, whose work can prevent safety issues, as well as respond to safety issues after they have occurred. Having adequate support staff in place can create the win-win of a safe school environment where all students remain integrated and engaged in the learning community.

### Safe spaces for learning

The importance of high-quality physical learning spaces has been understood for quite some time. The prevalence of remote and hybrid learning due to COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of high-quality virtual learning spaces. In our new world, there are several factors that school boards should consider when they are assessing the quality of their learning spaces:

When we consider the whole child, it is of critical importance that we recognize that before children are students, they are part of a family. Children's family and larger community play a large part in shaping the set of experiences and readiness for learning that they bring to school.

*An equity lens requires that school boards consider if the quality and makeup of facilities can prepare learners for the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) demands of the 21st century.*

- Are facilities designed and equipped for the physical safety, security, and hygiene of all students, including students with disabilities or other special needs?
- Are facilities designed to support the mental well-being of students?
- Are virtual learning spaces designed to protect the cybersecurity of students and families?
- Are virtual learning spaces designed to protect the mental well-being of students?

In addition to safety concerns, an equity lens requires that school boards consider if the quality and makeup of facilities can prepare learners for the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) demands of the 21st century. Do students have access to equipment that prepares them to pursue higher education in STEM fields or pursue career-focused experiential learning in Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs?

School boards should be sure that they are addressing the digital divide. Like textbooks, all students need to have access to digital devices as well as high-speed internet access at school and at home. But it is not enough to have devices and access. All students need to be technologically literate. They need to know how to operate their devices and navigate a range of online resources. Further, all students need to understand the rights and responsibilities of digital citizenship so that they can safely and productively engage in opportunities for virtual learning.

## Including Parents, Family, and Community

When we consider the whole child, it is of critical importance that we recognize that before children are students, they are part of a family. Children's family and larger community play a large part in shaping the set of experiences and readiness for learning that they bring to school. As school districts think of ways to engage families, begin with a clear understanding of who the families are instead of who we might imagine them to be. Because family engagement can impact student outcomes, carefully consider collaboration with parents and families, especially those of underserved students.

Like the students in public schools, their families are diverse. According to the Pew Research Center, 25 percent of parents living with a child are not married. This is a noteworthy change from 50 years ago, when about 7 percent of parents living with their children were unmarried. In addition to changes in marital status, families look different in other ways. Children may live in a home with same-sex parents or with a non-parent caregiver such as a grandparent or other relative. Some children live in multigenerational households.

The socioeconomic status and nature of work in families also varies greatly. This results in some parents or caregivers having more flexibility and availability to engage in traditional forms of engagement such as PTA and other school councils, volunteering during school hours, and attending parent-teacher conferences and school board meetings.

As is true with teaching and learning, one size does not fit all when thinking about engaging parents, family, and community. When considering family engagement strategies, it is important to keep in mind two groups in particular:

- Parents and guardians who have had their own adverse experiences with schooling.
- Parents and guardians who support their child's education but are likely to engage in nontraditional ways.

When the diversity of stakeholders is considered, the possibilities for engagement expand. Many school districts regularly produce written communication in multiple languages, but would a short video or animated content be easier to access and understand? Is the language used accessible to a wide audience? Are school board meetings scheduled to facilitate broad engagement? And for those who are not able to attend, how can school boards make sure that it is easy for community members to share their perspectives?

## Equity Cannot Wait

We are living in a time of rapid technological and social change. The world that our students will meet upon graduating will require that every learner possess the knowledge and competencies that enable them to live successfully in the 21st century. Schooling as usual will not produce the outcomes our students need. Our students need equity, and they need it now.

The questions for school boards are where and how to begin to walk the path to educational equity. School board members have the power, the position, and the ethical responsibility to reimagine education by:

- Ensuring equity in school funding.
- Ensuring access to high-quality and high-level curriculum.
- Ensuring access to effective teachers.
- Ensuring safe and supportive school climates.
- Fostering meaningful community engagement.

The future benefits for our students, their families, and our communities are too great to forfeit. School boards that seize this moment for systemic change can fulfill the promise of public education for all their students—an education that prepares every student for a successful life in the world they will inherit. As the saying goes: Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what your priorities are. As school boards take up the work to make certain that all students succeed, they need to begin by restructuring budgets to accommodate the learning environment and experiences that students require, while also providing for their physical and emotional well-being so that they are ready to learn. School board members have a moral obligation to leverage their position as policymakers and fiscal agents to ensure that education equity becomes and remains the norm in America's schools.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### NSBA Resources
NSBA Statement on Educational Equity: https://www.nsba.org/Advocacy/Equity

Educational Equity. What Does It Mean? How Will We Know When We Reach It?: https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-educational-equity-research-brief-january-2016.pdf?la=en&hash=A0F139B97D13C589CE00F186E594BEF1C3396F93

Whole Child Health: https://www.nsba4safeschools.org/css/topics/whole-child-health

NSBA Center for Public Education Report - Educational Equity: What Does It Mean? How Do We Know When We Reach It? CPE Report: https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-educational-equity-research-brief-january-2016.pdf?la=en&hash=A0F139B97D13C589CE00F186E594BEF1C3396F93

NSBA Center for Public Education Brief - Educational Equity Research Brief: https://www.nsba.org/-/media/NSBA/File/cpe-educational-equity-research-brief-january-2016.pdf?la=en&hash=A0F139B97D13C589CE00F186E594BEF1C3396F93

The Opportunity to Increase Equity: A Guide to ESSA, Title IV, Part A , Council of Urban Boards of Education (2019)

LifeReady Students, NSBA Resources

NSBA Center for Public Education Report — School Segregation Then & Now

NSBA Report — Increasing Equity and Achievement by Empowering Students

NSBA DIRE Homepage

### Resources to Support Challenging Conversations
Courageous Conversations: https://courageousconversation.com/about/

Disagreement doesn't have to be divisive: https://hbr.org/2020/11/disagreement-doesnt-have-to-be-divisive

3 steps to having difficult, but necessary conversations: https://ideas.ted.com/3-steps-to-having-difficult-but-necessary-conversations/

### Additional Resources
How much learning may be lost in the long run from COVID-19 and how can mitigation strategies help?: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/education-plus-development/2020/06/15/how-much-learning-may-be-lost-in-the-long-run-from-covid-19-and-how-can-mitigation-strategies-help/

U.S. Population Projections: 2005-2050: https://www.pewresearch.org/hispanic/2008/02/11/us-population-projections-2005-2050/

The State of America's Children, 2020: https://www.childrensdefense.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/The-State-Of-Americas-Children-2020.pdf

Community Schools Playbook: https://communityschools.futureforlearning.org/

Leadership in Dual Language Education: https://www.cal.org/ndlf/pdfs/publications/NDLF-White-Paper-October-2017.pdf

Harming Our Common Future: America's Segregated Schools 65 Years after Brown: https://www.civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/harming-our-common-future-americas-segregated-schools-65-years-after-brown

America Needs More Teachers of Color and a More Selective Teaching Profession: https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education-k-12/reports/2017/09/14/437667/america-needs-teachers-color-selective-teaching-profession/

School Leadership: An untapped opportunity to draw young people of color into teaching: https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brown-center-chalkboard/2018/11/26/school-leadership-an-untapped-opportunity-to-draw-young-people-of-color-into-teaching/

Teachers, Schools, and Academic Achievement: https://econ.ucsb.edu/~jon/Econ230C/HanushekRivkin.pdf

Erasing Inequities: https://www.ednc.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/EducationNC_Eraceing-Inequities.pdf

Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, and Dual-Enrollment Courses: Availability, Participation, and Related Outcomes for 2009 Ninth-Graders: 2013: https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2019/2019430.pdf

Understanding Culturally Responsive Teaching: https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/culturally-responsive-teaching/understanding-culturally-responsive-teaching/

Introducing the Culturally Responsive Curriculum Scorecard: A Tool to Evaluate Curriculum, 2019: https://steinhardt.nyu.edu/metrocenter/perspectives/introducing-culturally-responsive-curriculum-scorecard-tool-evaluate

National Institute of Mental Health Report on the Prevalence of Any Anxiety Disorder Among Adolescents: https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/any-anxiety-disorder.shtml#part_155096

Mental Health, Substance Use, and Suicidal Ideation During the COVID-19 Pandemic — United States, June 24–30, 2020: https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/69/wr/mm6932a1.htm?s_cid=mm6932a1_w

Can Restorative Practices Improve School Climate and Curb Suspensions? https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2840.html

Improving College and Career Readiness by Incorporating Social and Emotional Learning: https://ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/Improving%20College%20and%20Career%20Readiness%20by%20Incorporating%20Social%20and%20Emotional%20Learning_0.pdf

Creating Trauma Informed School Systems: https://www.nctsn.org/trauma-informed-care/trauma-informed-systems/schools/essential-elements

The impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A meta-analysis of school-based universal interventions: https://www.casel.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/PDF-3-Durlak-Weissberg-Dymnicki-Taylor-_-Schellinger-2011-Meta-analysis.pdf

Jon Valant, "The Banality of Racism in Education" Brookings Brown Center Chalkboard (June 4, 2020)

Kevin Welner and Prudence Carter, "Closing the Opportunity Gap: What America Must Do to Give Every Student a Chance" Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education

Heidi von Ravensberg, Achieving Equity in Discipline, NSBA Blog (Dec. 1, 2019)

Community Tool Box: Working Together for Racial Justice and Inclusion

Equity in the Center: AWAKE to WOKE to WORK: Building a Race Equity Culture

The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is the leading advocate for public education. For 80 years, we have been leading the effort to support and enhance public education. We are succeeding in creating the best possible environment in which students can realize their dreams.

NSBA is a federation of 49 state associations and the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands, representing their more than 90,000 school board officials. These local officials govern more than 13,600 local school districts serving more than 50 million public school students. Working with and through our state associations, and serving as their Washington, D.C., office, NSBA advocates for equity and excellence in public education through school board governance.

We believe public education is America's most vital institution. It is a civil right necessary to the dignity and freedom of the American people, and all children deserve equal access to an education that allows them to reach their potential.

In pursuit of these beliefs, NSBA and our members will continue to lead the national conversation about public education, advocate for public policies that ensure all students everywhere have access to a great public education where they live, create a better understanding of the importance of school boards and the benefits of local governance, and enhance the effectiveness of school boards.

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