

## Who we are and why we do the work we do.

The Center for Innovation in Education advances the development of systems that seek greater equity in how children develop the identity, community, agency, and competency that will pave the way for greater equity in our society.

We act on this aspiration by forming learning communities of leaders who are committed to striving for the kind of extraordinary leadership that builds, sustains and repairs relationships across traditional lines of difference. We believe that this kind of inclusive leadership builds power that can reshape systems so that they are, by design, always seeking greater equity.

This declaration articulates our beliefs about how our leadership and our systems must transform in order to shape a more perfect future for our nation. We believe in the power of shared learning to advance shared purpose and we hope that a public statement of intent will form a foundation for building common understanding across the many partners who must collaborate in equity-seeking work.

We recognize that each of us is an individual and a leader of a community, and that each of us and our respective communities is at a different place on this journey of learning and action. It is our shared aim to support each other with this challenging work, wherever we may begin.

To seek greater equity, we believe the community must share an understanding of our field, honestly reflect on what has been tried and make sense of why efforts to date have failed to reach the lofty aims they sought to attain. From this shared understanding, the community can organize collective work and enact the commitment to learn, act and grow together.

### Our nation:

- From its founding, our nation established a social order based on race that primarily benefited white males everywhere, regardless of the demographics, then or now, of their individual states.
- This social order has shaped our nation's development from its earliest days by concentrating wealth, property and privilege in the hands of the white majority.
- Over time, and in different local contexts, who has been included in and excluded from privilege varies. But what is unchanged and unarguable is that legal, economic, civic, social and educational systems across our nation were designed and shaped by those with privilege and power to uphold this asymmetrical concentration of resources and influence.
- Each of these systems evolved a resilient and complex network of policies, beliefs, behaviors and practices that continue to create and maintain inequity.

### Our system:

- Those with privilege designed the educational system based on principles of social Darwinism to sort out a small number of elites and consign the remainder to an industrial system of learning, and then life.

- A complex set of policies, beliefs, behaviors and practices maintain the system of social asymmetry by limiting the access that some students have to deeply enriching learning experiences that are common to others, both in and out of school.
- The political costs of change mean that we regularly trade stability for perpetuating a system that preserves historical patterns of inequity based on race, class and gender.

#### Our leadership:

- We often engage one aspect of these complex privilege-maintaining systems without engaging adequately with other parts that make the system as a whole resilient. For example, we all likely have the experience of addressing policy without attending to instructional practices or focusing on instruction without accounting for the habitual behaviors that run counter to changes in practice.
- Even when we have played the “perfect game of chess” and won, we are often dismayed to realize that the system we just partially re-formed is nested within yet another set of policies, beliefs, behaviors and practices that are resilient to our limited wins.
- And when we pass on from the seat of leadership, the resilient system tends to rebound - whether at the local, state or federal level.

#### Our identities:

- As leaders, we recognize that the intersectionality of any individual’s many identities contributes to the complexity of a person’s experience.
- We also acknowledge that poverty, especially generational poverty, is sometimes entangled with race and identity in different ways in different parts of the country.
- This intersection of identity and class brings a different set of contexts and must be addressed differently in rural and urban settings.
- But we acknowledge that race remains the most salient identity in predicting a range of health, social and economic outcomes.

#### What have we tried?

- We rallied behind “A Nation at Risk” and “No Child Left Behind” to augment the legacy design of the educational system with renewed equity considerations.
- We made great strides in increasing our ability to identify and make visible inequities in certain types of learning outcomes.
- We responded to the newly measurable, but always felt, inequity with new standards, assessments and teacher evaluation systems that were meant to fuel a system of continuous improvement that would yield more equitable outcomes.
- More recent efforts around assuring quality instructional materials and practices have more sharply focused on the learning experience, but these efforts tend to be independent of broader systemic changes required to remake legacy designs.

We acknowledge that the systems we inhabit, and lead must be transformed to break the hold of a legacy design that protects racial inequity. We gladly take up our responsibility to be curious, to learn, and to teach so that we can challenge each other and get better together.

To fulfill this charge, we commit to a shared agenda based on:

Identity...

- Building knowledge about our legacy systems and how they preserve inequality
- Exploring our own intersectional identities and the way they impact our beliefs and actions

Leadership...

- Intentionally seeking and repairing relationships across historical lines of difference
- Leading in ways that build “power-with” communities versus “power over” communities

System...

- Building open systems: systems that co-create, learn from the field and distribute power
- Seeking equity through a commitment to constant reflection and renewed action
- Building systems that develop resilience to any movement away from equity.

Nation...

- Driving a national dialogue that a system of social stratification no longer serves our collective interest
- Elevating proof points that more equitable systems generate greater prosperity for all

When we commit to these ideas, we become a community that learns and leads to actively seek equity, a world where each child receives what he or she needs to develop the identity, agency, and competency that supports successful pursuit of the path of their choosing. Working towards equity involves:

- Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor
- Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children
- Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that every human possesses.
- Repairing broken relationships and establishing trust and community across lines of difference.

(adapted from [National Equity Project](#))