Center for Strategic Solutions

Cambridgeport School Equity Audit

The Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Cambridge Public Schools (CPS) contracted the New York University Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools (NYU Metro Center) to conduct a review of the efforts to promote equity at the Cambridgeport Elementary School (CPort). NYU Metro Center's mission is the following:

> **We advance equity and excellence in education, connecting to legacies of justice work through critical inquiry and research, professional development and technical assistance, community action and collaboration.**

Within the NYU Metro Center there are a number of different units that work with schools, districts, and organizations in varied ways. Metro Center's Center for Strategic Solutions (CSS) has developed national expertise in supporting educators and individuals who have contact and influence in education, to consider the impact of race, power, and privilege on the lives of students and their learning trajectories. CSS was founded on the belief that an equitable and just society loves and invites its members to be their authentic selves and openly reflects how disparities and historical inequities in education contradict the principles of racial justice.

PART 1

The Process

THE EQUITY AUDIT PROCESS

CSS designed a tailored equity audit model to meet the needs of CPS and CPort, given a number of previous consulting partnerships that had already been in place and will presumably continue in the future. Assessing a school's ability to provide equitable educational opportunity to all students depends on understanding which policies and practices require improvement. Conducting an equity audit helps to:

❏ **Define the students, by category, who are not receiving an equitable education;**

❏ **Identify the key functions that produce inequitable educational opportunities and disparate student outcomes;**

❏ **Incorporate the voices and lived experiences of parents/guardians/community members,**

❏ **Analyze how the implementation of those core functions produce inequitable opportunities and outcomes, and**

❏ **Propose strategies and interventions to improve how a school implements its core functions so that all students receive an equitable education.**

A school-level equity audit is a process designed to identify and assess disparities in educational opportunities and resulting student outcomes. Many disparate opportunities and inequitable outcomes are structured into the DNA of key school functions. Others result from internalized and interpersonal racism, sexism, homophobia and xenophobia, as well as other biases and prejudices held by individual school community members who exercise decision-making power over how educational opportunities are provided. An equity audit can identify the school policies and practices associated with those disparities and, depending on the scale of individual bias and prejudicial decision-making, can identify those patterns as well.

CSS Director, Natalie McCabe Zwerger, conducted preliminary conversations with district leaders, spoke with leadership at CPort, met with the members of the Equity Leadership Team (ELT), and a subset of less than two dozen CPort parents who attended "drop-in hours." Additionally, she spoke with Gene Thompson-Grove and Charline Alexandre, outside facilitators of a series of community conversations at CPort. The CSS team also reviewed the ELT's racial equity statement, school website, notes and agendas from Community Conversations and the School Council, and the results of the Panorama Survey. CSS reviewed the *Building Equity Bridges* principles which CPS designed in partnership with the Nellie Mae Foundation; these principles are cited throughout this report (BEB Core Principles, 2019). CSS was prepared to review disaggregated discipline data to assess

where disproportionalities exist, but CPort leadership reported there is no formal process for collecting discipline referral or outcome data. There is a discussion of the recommended processes below in recommendation #5.

PART 2

The Recommendations

TOP RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations below will include a number of ways to leverage information from both qualitative and quantitative data to assess progress toward promoting equity at CPort. Ultimately, the reflections of CPort's efforts will be best assessed by reported shifts in the lived experiences of the most marginalized and under-represented members of the community. Operationalizing equity and racial justice through more inclusive and affirming policies and practices will manifest a more positive and welcoming culture and climate. Based on the data CSS reviewed, several recommendations emerged for the continued work of promoting equity at CPort. When executed, these recommendations have the potential to propel forward the work of operationalizing equity and racial justice at the school.

The recommendations are in the following areas: School culture and climate, Community Conversations and the School Council, the Equity Leadership Team (ELT), professional development, and data systems. Though these recommendations are listed separately, they are deeply related and interconnected. In fact, in many ways, their success and effectiveness will heavily depend on each other. Further, the embedded assumption here is that the more equity is woven into the fabric of CPort, the harder it becomes to dissent, overlook, or deprioritize. This structural intersectionality is imperative to the work being recommended. Further, these recommendations should be responsive and will evolve once there are growing opportunities for cross-stakeholder dialogue between the ELT, school leaders, and the community.

Currently, CPort is infusing a language of equity, as can be noted on the school website and in community-wide resources; however, using the language and operationalizing it are two separate processes and CPort needs to examine how individuals are confirming or confronting inequity in the school.

Recommendation #1: *With the support of CPS leadership, methodically work to repair harms perpetuated, even unintentionally, to rebuild a positive culture and climate between leadership and staff, amongst staff, between leadership and the community, and between staff and the community.*

Recommendation #2: *Continue Community Conversations in a way that results in tangible shifts and commitments. Consider whether the School Council is a representative body as required by state regulations.*

Recommendation #3: *Strengthen the Equity Leadership Team by defining a clear purpose.*

Recommendation #4: *Embed professional development opportunities for all staff to develop an equity lens that they employ daily to identify and address the impact of race and bias at CPort.*

Recommendation #5: *Strategically ensure that data systems are used to illuminate disparities in order to define goals for addressing the narratives behind the data.*

RECOMMENDATION #1

With the support of CPS leadership, methodically work to repair harms perpetuated, even unintentionally, to rebuild a positive culture and climate between leadership and staff, amongst staff, between leadership and the community, and between staff and the community.

In order to repair harm and rebuild a positive school culture and climate, a focus is needed on *relational trust*, or the connective tissue of the school (Bryk, et al., 2010). All of the interviews conducted with CPort community members touched upon issues of trust, or the lack thereof, and the results of the Panorama survey reinforced what was shared. A review of the CPort website referred to the school's history as "built upon the idea that teachers and families can work together as a community toward assuring success for every child." Revisiting this history and foundation is necessary now and also in alignment with the CPS **Building Equity Bridges** principle to "proactively cultivate trust-- especially among people from marginalized communities-- so that students, educators, and families are willing to share their authentic and lived experiences within an inequitable system" (BEB Core Principles, 2019). In reviewing efforts to date, it is unclear if their has yet been proactive intentionality to build and foster trust as opposed to reactive responses when distrust has become apparent.

Less than two dozen parents attended drop-in hours with CSS. Findings from these conversations are limited given the sample size, but are strengthened by their alignment with the reported content of the Community Conversations as shared by district leaders, school leaders, staff, and parents who were in attendance. Parents interviewed offered both personal and observed feelings about the school climate. During drop-in hours, 64% of the parents who attended were white, 36% parents of color. Positive and negative impressions of school climate did not fall cleanly on racial lines. A few findings from this sample of parents are below:

- All interviewed parents reported negative impressions of school climate based on either personal experiences or observing the experiences of others. These included:

    a. Lack of communication and transparency regarding specific incidents of staff bias against students, namely Black children, including, but not limited to, one specific incident,

    b. Disproportionate discipline and targeting of children of color in behavioral consequences,

c. An overwhelming lack of representation and diversity in curriculum,

d. Concern for teacher and staff preparedness in navigating issues across race and culture,

e. Perceptions of a racial divide amongst leadership, teachers and staff, that has, or could result, in undermining the work of leadership, teachers, and staff of color, and

f. Perceptions of a racial divide amongst parents, with views ranging from "these issues are just because of one family wanting the Principal to be fired" to "there is a deep divide that intersects race and socioeconomic privilege in the CPort community."

● Half of the parents, even some who reported negative impressions of school climate described above, expressed support for the CPort Principal or some level of empathy with the situation she was in, navigating current community dynamics.

● The majority of parents reported they did not believe the district was supportive enough of CPort leadership, teachers, or staff.

● The vast majority of parents reported incidents specific to Muslim parents not being fully included in the community, mostly offering examples of parent to parent discrimination and bias.

● The vast majority of parents had questions about the mechanisms for reporting an incident of bias or discrimination that they themselves or their child experience. They asked for clear reporting channels and an understanding of how school and district leadership evaluate and approach a complaint when it comes in.

● Parents expressed varying challenges with attending the School Council and the Community Conversations, given scheduling concerns. Some were reporting what they had heard happened in each of these forums as they were not personally in attendance.

● More than half of the parents expressed a feeling that the CPort Principal is more focused on equity and inclusivity for the LGBTQ+ community than for students and families of color.

The totality of these parent interviews and the overlap of impressions from leadership and the ELT member interviews suggest that attention must be paid to continuing forums that welcome and invite more parent feedback and, in turn, offer transparency about CPort's ongoing efforts at promoting equity. There will inevitably be families who feel equity efforts are not moving fast enough and then others who feel they are moving too fast. There were at least a few parents who expressed hesitation with ongoing conversations about race which they found divisive. Once parent went so far as to say they did not want to appear to be "anti-anti-racist" but that they had concerns about what the approach would be for training teachers and staff. Another parent suggested that the school does more when there is a student who has lice than it does when there is an incident of bias or

discrimination. "When a child has lice, they send letters home, calls are made, teachers speak to parents, and a chain of events is set into motion methodically." This parent questioned why something similar could not happen when there has been bias and discrimination in the CPort community. CPort leadership should be in conversation with district leaders about the best strategies for equitable communication *and* communication about equity. For example, the CPort Principal might want to outline for the community what steps are taken when a child calls another child a slur, or when a parent or student feels a teacher is biased, or what mechanisms are in place to support staff members in navigating questions that come up when teaching units on slavery and colonization. One parent suggested a flow chart similar to that for a fire drill that would outline the roadmap of what happens when a member of the community is harmed. A forward-facing, proactive approach affords the community some understanding of how things work under the inevitability of inequity.

Interviews with leadership, staff, and parents suggest significant concerns with the health of the school climate. These concerns were reinforced in the Panorama survey data. Relationships are fractured, and staff report they do not have the support they need to actualize culturally responsive-sustaining classroom environments. No school can expect to see culturally responsive-sustaining education (CR-SE) practices manifest in classrooms if they aren't intentionally fostered in staff meetings, in teacher evaluation and supervisory relationships, in coaching relationships, and amongst colleagues. In order for these things to happen, CPS should continue to offer ongoing capacity-building, coaching, and support for the CPort Principal. CPS should have an active presence in, and engagement with, the CPort community. There are apparent fractures in the relationships amongst CPort leadership and some staff members that have to be addressed. This will require outside support given the depth of these breaks. A fractured school community must acknowledge the complexity of addressing harm. Harm must be defined by the person or persons who experience or perceive it. Harm, therefore, is the impact defined by the impacted. Often though, when harm is acknowledged, the person who has caused it or was witness to it, denies it, minimizes it, and/or disavows their role because they didn't consciously intend it. This is particularly problematic when the person harmed is from a marginalized and underrepresented group and the person causing the harm is from a privileged group. Concretely, what this means is that white teachers, even when they don't intend it, can harm Black and Brown children. Addressing the harm requires that teachers leave open the possibility that despite their good intentions and even the enormous efforts they exert to serve children, they may be harming kids. This might be because of biases they hold, perspectives they weren't even aware of, history they haven't yet grappled with, and the simple reality of never having walked in someone else's shoes. A racially equitable school requires that privileged white teachers consciously focus on their impact, not their intent. CPort leadership and staff must wrestle with their active role, and/or complicity in, perpetuating harm.

In a school with an expressed commitment to racial equity, a white Principal must be conscious of the racial privilege they exert on a daily basis, from their microdecisions to their modeling of the

positive relationships they hope to see fostered by and amongst staff. Owning gatekeeping responsibilities and decision-making authority requires a rigorous and consistent self-awareness of bias, even in the most subtle of ways like deprioritizing difficult conversations, blocking scheduling time for equity-related work, or undermining/usurping the power of leaders of color. This self-awareness must be actualized for any and all privileged identities of the Principal that both align and intersect with the community they serve. Relatedly, the depth of the Principal's willingness to be humble, reflective, and vulnerable in the process, will loudly communicate expectations to staff.

There were descriptions by the CPort Principal, reiterated by staff and parents, in which the Principal's defensiveness presented in varying degrees in response to conversations, complaints, and the lived experiences of community members of color. For example, community members said they did not feel that their Black History Month display was supported by the CPort principal, or felt the support was lackluster or not robust, inviting, or reflective of a school committed to racial equity. Moving forward, the CPort Principal and CPS leadership will not only need to be consciously aware of, but able to move beyond, individual white fragility when their actions, decisions, and even microdecisions are harmful to community members. According to Robin DiAngelo (2018), white fragility is "discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice." When an instance of expressed white fragility occurs, the moment requires someone in a leadership position who holds leverageable power in spaces committed to racial equity to call out the fragility without centering it. A leader should ask a series of questions whenever an individual statement or action regarding equity is challenged: *How is my identity and any related bias informing this moment? What are my privileges in this moment? Is what I am feeling informed by those privileges? How does my positionality impact this relationship and my decisions?* Only then can a leader mitigate the impact of privilege and bias in interactions to acknowledge, address and/or redress harm.

A final note about the community-wide approach to this work of racial equity is to become a community of individuals who refuse to question, pathologize, or deny the harm reported by others. During at least a third of the parent interviews, statements were made like, "well, I'm not sure that's racism" or "that doesn't really rise to the level I would call racist, I mean, we always had positive interactions with that teacher." Similarly, during interviews with ELT members, a number of them reported that some staff see this work as divisive and therefore unproductive. There are persistent narratives about children of color that some staff do not believe or will explain away such as, "Black boys are having more emotional outbursts than other students, but that's not because they are Black." The CPort community needs a space where members learn to focus more on the impact of their actions than their intent. This is imperative for the privileged white parents who may not see racism because they have never experienced it or even paid much attention to its possibilities in a system built on a history of racism that has only served them well. It is imperative for parents and staff to see beyond their own experiences with a teacher and accept the possibility that although they have a

positive relationship, it is possible that the same teacher is harming or has harmed other students and families. It is imperative for white school leaders and staff to accept that although they might not intentionally mean to discriminate, they are micro-aggressing colleagues of color. Focusing on impact versus intent challenges folx to acknowledge that despite being well-intentioned and expressing commitments to equity, they can still be perpetuating harm, and when there is harm, there must be repair. The question then becomes what role they will take in being actively involved in that repair.

A suggested coaching framework to support school leadership would be grounded in how they are promoting racial equity within each of the relationships within their sphere of influence. . In keeping with the CPS **Building Equity Bridges** principle to "document and elevate the voices and expertise of students, educators, and families" (BEB Core Principles, 2019), this framework must push CPort beyond documenting community voices, and focus on how to intentionally elevate them while honoring their expertise. This will be discussed throughout the report. Working with a coach, the CPort leadership could identify actionable ways they are leading for equity within each of these spheres of influence:

- Promoting racial equity in working with *students* by: elevating the voices of the most marginalized and under-represented students, assessing whether students feel they belong and are included, serving as an instructional leader committed to building children's understandings of fairness and justice.

- Promoting racial equity in working with *other school leaders* by: consciously uplifting and empowering leadership of color, acknowledging one's own positionality as a supervisor, and avoiding questioning or doubting expressed harm by leaders of color.

- Promoting racial equity in working with *district leaders* by: seeking support and guidance from supervisors to build one's own capacity, providing feedback to district leaders about the racial equity work in the school, continuously evaluating if the school community's needs are being met, sharing points of tension, areas of discomfort, and areas where the answer is unknown.

- Promoting racial equity in working with *parents, guardians, families and community members* by: evaluating how one receives and processes feedback from parents of color about the harms they have experienced, calling out coded language and microaggressions, educating privileged white families and families of higher socioeconomic status, understanding and advocating for

community-based issues, and creating structures that attend to the lives of all parents, guardians, families, and community members.

- Promoting racial equity in working with *staff by: e*valuating how one receives and processes feedback from staff of color about the harms they have experienced, consciously uplifting and empowering teachers of color, calling out coded language and microaggressions, providing and/or encouraging opportunities for teachers to build their CR-SE skill set and understanding of racial equity, guiding teachers in having courageous conversations where they interrogate their assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the classroom, and recognizing and challenging common patterns of inequities that lead to the disenfranchisement of students of color.

- Promoting racial equity by continuing to build one's *own capacity* by*:* examining whose work one studies, identifying personal areas of growth and strength, continually interrogatIng personal assumptions about race and culture and their impact on the school community, and defining personal success in leading a racially just school.

RECOMMENDATION #2

Continue Community Conversations in a way that results in tangible shifts and commitments. Consider whether the School Council is a representative body as required by state regulations.

In order to enhance communication methods and communicate effectively about equity, CPort leadership needs to strive for transparency, clarity, and responsiveness in all communications with stakeholders. While using the right language, such as "culturally responsive and sustaining education," is a starting point, all members in the community need to understand what this means in practice. Concerns of inequity have been voiced by both parents and staff in the CPort community, yet frustration has resulted as stakeholder groups have different ideas about how to address these concerns. When Community Conversations are held, follow-up communication must be both flexible and responsive to community members and transparent about the efforts at promoting equity.

Strong relationships between school, family, and community result in significant gains in student learning, better family-child relations, and lower drop-out rates (Usher & Kober, 2012). Yet, schools often rush quickly to the business of "action" without spending enough time building stakeholder understanding and buy-in to issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Time must be spent in ensuring that the school community members share definitions and understandings around these issues (Childress et al., 2009; Leithwood et al., 2008; Smith & Brazer, 2016).

During interviews with parents, a number of ideas on improving racial equity at CPort arose, many of which were outlined in a document prepared by a subset of parents who defined their demands which included:

1. A racial equity audit that examines the practices deployed by CPort leadership, including a review of previous instances where race played a major component.

2. Development of an explicit code of conduct for teachers that is affirming to students and colleagues from marginalized backgrounds.

3. A defined series of trainings for all educators (teachers, staff and administrators) to be completed within their first year of employment on racial justice and equity. Consistent opportunities for current educators to better understand and dismantle white supremacy culture.

4. Establish mechanisms and policies to ensure that racial justice and equity plans are discussed with a representative body of community members, including children.

5. Create a reporting method for families to elevate concerns around racism.

6. An action plan for how race and equity issues, particularly anti-racist culture, will be integrated into the curriculum and addressed across the school.

7. Opportunities for staff and families to engage in facilitated conversations about race and equity at CPort.

8. A group for parents of children of color to meet regularly and create goals and provide feedback on issues related to climate at the school.

9. Implementation of Restorative Justice practices for teachers, students and families.

10. More information from the district about what is happening to support the CPort Principal and hold them accountable to the equity vision.

11. Creating a baseline for teachers staff and administrators that must always be maintained for training and action items.

There is clear alignment with the recommendations of this equity audit and those offered by parents and families, which is a strong indication that parents should have a seat at the table of a culturally responsive-sustaining school. Leveraging parents as partners and acknowledging the level of repair and rebuilding of relationships necessary given the immediate history of harm at CPort, the opportunity to work together cannot be overlooked.

Additionally, the School Council, which had a pivotal role in defining the space for Community Conversations, should continue to serve as a forum for leveraging parent and family knowledge in influencing school policy and practice as it relates to racial equity. In many of the parent and ELT member interviews, community members spoke favorably about the Council's power in defining the goals and agendas for the Community Conversations. There was frustration around one of the conversations where some folx felt that although there was a defined agenda from the School Council, the CPort Principal and CPS leadership took over the session without acknowledging the plans that had been laid by the Council. Moving forward, if the School Council is given ownership over a space, it is important to honor that, barring something unexpected or an emergency.

Pursuant to Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 71, Section 59C, schools must form a School Council as a "representative, school building-based committee composed of the principal, parents, teachers, community members" that "enhance site-based decision making because they expand the participation of the school community in its schools' decision making," providing "the school with different and mutually complementary perspectives on its improvement goals and plans." "The membership of school councils "should be broadly representative of the racial and ethnic diversity of the school building and community."' The law allows for some leeway in approaching this representative make-up and offers a number of ways to think about participation, election, nomination, and engagement processes. Namely, the membership establishment and meetings themselves must be "open and inclusive" affording accessibility to the most under-represented school community members.

CPort must consider if the School Council in its current makeup is reflective of the community, open, inclusive, and accessible. This analysis should be informed by the timing of meetings,

expectations for participating regularly, translation of materials and outreach, descriptions of the opportunity, access to interpretation services at meetings, and welcoming of parents who many not automatically feel a sense of belonging in the community. Practices like holding elections for seats on a school council seriously complicate the potential engagement of marginalized, under-represented parents who do not feel included in a school community. In an effort to "share power so that stakeholders who are most impacted have agency to steer this work" (BEB Core Principles, 2019), targeted outreach, nomination, and encouragement that leverages existing positive relationships is essential.

In terms of the responsibilities for the School Council, the regulation suggests: School councils are to assist principals in:

1. Adopting educational goals for the school that are consistent with local educational policies and statewide student performance standards;

2. Identifying the educational needs of students attending the school;

3. Reviewing the annual school building budget; and

4. Formulating a school improvement plan (SIP).

Assuming the School Council has had an opportunity to vet the racial equity statement, a next step would be aligning the School Improvement Plan goals to this mission for racial equity. [If the School Council has not yet spent time unpacking the racial equity statement, it is recommended that members of the ELT attend the next School Council meeting and support their unpacking of the racial equity statement, including discussing its intersections and alignments with the work they have engaged in thus far.] The reason for alignment with SIP goals is that this racial equity statement now needs to be actionable and measurable in the context of the existing goals for improving the school.

When reviewing the SIP and its policy and practices, as Portland Public Schools (2016) recommends, the School Council should consider the following 5 questions:

1. Who are the under-represented groups (federal subgroups) affected by this policy, program, practice or decision? And what are the potential impacts on these groups?
2. Does this policy, program, practice or decision worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences?
3. How have you intentionally involved stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by this policy, program, practice or decision? Can you validate your assessments in (1) and (2)?
4. What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes? (e.g. mandated, political, emotional, financial, programmatic or managerial)
5. How will you (a) mitigate the negative impacts and (b) address the barriers identified above?

RECOMMENDATION #3

Strengthen the Equity Leadership Team by defining a clear purpose.

The CPort Equity Leadership Team (ELT) needs to ask itself: how is the work of this Equity Leadership Team actually leading the change to promote a more equitable CPort community? Research suggests the most leverageable power in either promoting or hindering equity is in fact driven by leadership (Blankstein et al., 2015; Childress et al., 2009; Milner & Howard, 2015; Strand et al, 2011; Smith & Brazer, 2016). As designated leaders in equity, the CPort ELT must communicate openly with stakeholders about their equity efforts after they themselves have identified their clear purpose. ELT members should feel comfortable with how to express the depth of the work, what their role is, and what the expectations will be of the community (Childress et al., 2009; Smith & Brazer, 2016).

The ELT must see its role as being hyper-vigilant in identifying areas where racial disparities (and disparities by other student identities) have become normalized, if not expected (Milner, 2015). For example, in a school where the students discuss with familiarity the fact that the kids who always are singled out for behavioral issues and/or sent to the office are Black boys, there is a gap in leadership identifying the normalized stereotyping and investigating the root causes of the disparity. At CPort, this very perception of Black boys was shared by interviewed parents who said it was relayed to them by their children. For this reason, the ELT should consider having students and parents as team members to ensure these stakeholder voices are heard. The ELT defined their goal and drafted the following equity statement:

> **Our goal:** to build a common vision for Cambridgeport that is grounded in equity, by working together to unpack the Equity statement and determining how to make it a reality. We seek to make our common vision a living part of our school's identity.

> **Equity statement**: Racial equity actively corrects the inequities that have resulted and continue to result from centuries of racist societal systems and structures in order to provide infrastructure for each member of the Cambridgeport School community to achieve excellence intellectually, socially, and emotionally.

Interviewed members of the ELT reported that they had begun unpacking the Equity Statement with staff. In making this statement actionable, time will need to be spent to clarifying what "achieving excellence" means, particularly when referring to social and emotional well-being. The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) defines it as "the process through which children and adults understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions" (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, 2019). A goal of achieving excellence in

measurable ways would need to be tied to specific, actionable steps that support the well-being of children. This must be done in the context of a racial equity lens.

Dr. Gloria Ladson-Billings, scholar of culturally relevant pedagogy, recently shared in an interview that her theory is misinterpreted so often and really comes down to two things: teachers must understand racism exists and they play a part in it (Fay, 2019). Assuming that the CPort ELT members and the larger CPort staff all understand racism exists, their focus now needs to shift to questioning their individual and collective roles in perpetuating it. The question becomes how can CPort staff tailor their efforts to be more supportive of the most marginalized students in the community in furtherance of their social and emotional well-being? This will require open and honest dialogue about the way we talk about children, their communication styles, and behaviors in a way that honors racial and cultural difference, and does not revert to white supremacist norms and expectations. It is unlikely there are members of the CPort community who are intentionally harming Black and Brown community members, but it is happening nonetheless.

In identifying ways that racial inequity has become ingrained in policies and practices at CPort, there is ample data to draw from through the Community Conversations. The Community Conversations held space for the expressions of pain, testimonies of the harm, and the explicit (and subtle) damage done everyday to members of the community. Now the focus must be on identifying who is responsible and how the harm can be repaired. The facilitators of the Community Conversations asked questions like, "What does healing from racism look like?" Time must be spent to unpack what this ongoing and likely perpetual healing could be. Because racism is embedded in the fabric of CPort, CPS, and society, what is required "to undo racism is to consistently identify and describe it- and then dismantle it" (Kendi, 2019, p. 9). For the ELT and staff of CPort, the goal must be becoming antiracist, or as Dr. Ibram X. Kendi defines it, "one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea" (Kendi, 2019, p. 9). The community must determine what antiracist practices would look like at CPort. It is striking that the ELT, the body that crafted language about this very work of "actively correct[ing] the inequities that have resulted and continue to result from centuries of racist societal systems and structure" did not hold space to debrief, interrogate, learn from, and leverage the expressions of racism shared at the Community Conversations. There was a forum where CPort community members shared localized experiences, the very manifestation of what the ELT purports to intend to address, and they were not afforded the agency to do that very essential work. It is incumbent upon the CPort Principal to provide the space and agency for the ELT to engage at this level.

Moving forward, the ELT's role could be serving as the body that holds the CPort community accountable to its commitments defined in the Equity Statement, defining and providing professional development for staff through horizontal learning opportunities like book clubs, article studies, speaker series, professional learning communities, and lunch n learns, analyzing complex data points (both qualitative and quantitative) for disproportionality (*see recommendation #5*), auditing curriculum

materials using the NYU Metro Center Culturally Responsive Education Scorecard (NYU Metro Center, 2019) and action-planning how to address the findings.

A sample meeting agenda might be the following:

I. A community-building activity around the work of including intersectional identities;

II. A discussion of the impact of the current sociopolitical climate in Cambridge, in MA, and in the U.S. for example, considering what community engagement means with an inclusive lens for undocumented or immigrant families;

III. Analysis of one or two data points like disaggregated special education identification and classifications and achievement data on last year's state testing;

IV. Action-planning as a result of identified root causes of these inequities in the context of other disproportionalities discussed previously.

RECOMMENDATION #4

Embed professional development opportunities for all staff to develop an equity lens that they employ daily to identify and address the impact of race and bias at CPort.

Professional development must be ongoing and embedded within the existing contexts of instructional priorities, commitments, and the district mission (Bryk, et al., 2010; Childress et al., 2009; Milner, 2015; Strand et al., 2011; Smith & Brazer, 2016). There must be opportunities for follow-up coaching and spaces for collaboration so that staff see the equity work as deeply embedded and ongoing.

To promote equity and sustain culturally responsive academic and behavioral interventions, CPort must consider how responsive their intervention approaches are to students' cultures (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014). There should be training specific to this, and existing policies, practices, and protocols must be analyzed through a CR-S (culturally responsive and sustaining) lens. For example, using a CR-S child study protocol can transform the way we talk about kids and design academic and behavioral interventions.

Professional Development: Mindset Shifting

CPort staff must define the characteristics, practices, habits of mind, and behaviors of the CR-S educator in order to understand what is required of them and what they are striving for. For example, CPort staff must teach a history of enslavement (naming *enslaved people* as opposed to *slaves*, which is not an identity) that is not steeped in white supremacy. White supremacy "is a political, cultural, and economic system premised on the subjugation of people who are not white" with "that subjugation [taking] on an infinite number of forms" that are "enforced with varying degrees of physical violence, mental abuse, and robbery" (Solomon & Rankin, 2019, p. Vii). For elementary educators, this means that they must consider how teaching about a culture from the starting point at which people were enslaved, murdered, colonized, or forcibly removed from their homelands gives children inaccurate and ahistorical understandings steeped in white supremacist frames.

Part of this shift in mindset extending beyond curriculum must be the awareness of microaggressions and stereotyping in the school environment and beyond. Racial Microaggressions, in particular, are defined as "brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color" (Sue et al., 2007). Dr. Ibram X. Kendi actually refers to microaggressions as abuse, arguing they are not just *micro* or *aggressive* (Kendi, 2019, p. 47). Kendi suggests that abuse, and more specifically racial abuse in the case of racial microaggressions, "describes the action and its effect on people: distress, anger, worry, depression, anxiety, pain, fatigue,

and suicide" (Kendi, 2019, p. 47). CPort must explore the pervasiveness of Whiteness in its curriculum and staff climate, and examine questions such as: *What are some of the impacts of the deep historical entanglements of white supremacy? What is the sociopolitical context that shapes the experiences of marginalized groups and impacts their outcomes? How has Whiteness persisted as the norm to which we compare all other identities? How do we decenter Whiteness?* (Center for Strategic Solutions, 2016) In exploring these questions, it is often helpful to role-play addressing microaggressions and stereotyping that may or have already occurred in the community. This might manifest in practicing calling out a supervisor or colleague on a microaggression, discriminatory comment, or biased remark. In turn, practice is needed to receive a call out in ways that avoids defensiveness and gaslighting, shutting down an open dialogue. In the same way that educators must prepare to address when students use slurs (racial or in terms of gender, sexuality, religion, etc), eduators must be well-positioned to navigate particular types of bullying and discrimination. Often times this takes practice and even a script. Where CR-SE is enacted, leadership has intentionally held space to question how responsive-sustaining practices are fostered not just in classrooms, but at staff meetings, team meetings, in offices, and throughout the school building (New York State Education Department, 2019). Overall, a goal for CPort should be to make sure that talking about racial inequity is less of an event and more of an embedded, regular practice that occurs outside of professional development, ELT meetings, or consultation with outside facilitators (Benson & Fiarman, 2019, p.52).

Professional Development: Curriculum

Culturally responsive and sustaining curriculum must also be implemented. To do this CPort must first assess the viability of their current curriculum while engaging culturally responsive and relevant pedagogical tools/ideology (Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2014). During this process CPort must ensure the curriculum is vertically and horizontally aligned and that all students have access to advanced curriculum opportunities, regardless of their identity (Carter & Welner, 2013). In pursuit of this, leaders should convene teams of teachers to conduct curriculum audits where they are investigating areas of stereotyping and bias that could be marginalizing specific students based on who they are (*Educational Equity Audit for the School District of Palm Beach County: Final Report*, 2016).

On the CPort website, there are references to both the CPS commitment to "*Expand Joyful, Rigorous, Culturally Responsive Learning Experiences*" *and* a "culturally sustaining environment" at CPort with "culturally responsive learning." In conversations with members of the CPort ELT, CPort leadership, and CPort family members, there was evidence that these words on the website are not yet operationalized in practice. For example, the CPort principal reported she was unsure if she should celebrate Black History Month when honoring Black history everyday should be expected. While well-intentioned, given the dearth of children's books, curriculum, and resources that positively represent Black history, as well as reflections from staff and families that there is a lack of positive

representation of Black people and Black history at CPort, the intentionality of Black History Month is warranted (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2018).

The National Council for Social Studies found in 2017 "that generally only 1 to 2 lessons or 8–9 percent of total class time is devoted to Black history in U.S. history classrooms" (King, 2017). Efforts to specifically seek out representative materials from publishers like Lee and Low Books is as important as auditing existing materials and texts for bias, stereotyping, and misconception, even where there is representation. For example, there are plenty of elementary books that feature Black and Brown characters, but overwhelmingly tell stories of hardship and life challenges without celebrating the characters' joy and successes. A culturally responsive-sustaining educator is consciously assessing whose cultures and histories are misrepresented, while intentionally affording space for teaching about the collectivist cultures from which many of their most marginalized students come from (Hammond, 2015).

In order to authentically assess whether or not students feel they have a voice in curriculum, schools need to ask them. Given the expressed commitments of CPort, a series of questions like, "Do you find joy in school? Where and how? Do you feel heard? How do you know your voice is heard? Do you feel your teachers want to know your story? How do you know?" asked of students would afford teachers, staff, and leadership a window into how students feel about their presence in the learning. The same set of questions could be adjusted to ask teachers to share how they are fostering joy, what mechanisms they use to hear from their students, and how their are authentically holding space for students to share their stories. Similarly, these would be great reflection questions for parents and guardians. These data could inform curriculum mapping to specifically center young people in their own learning, one of the most essential CR-S practices. It would also be in service of efforts to "proactively engage students, educators and families from marginalized groups" (BEB Core Principles, 2019).

RECOMMENDATION #5

Strategically ensure that data systems are used to illuminate disparities in order to define goals for addressing the narratives behind the data.

To promote equity at CPort, it is imperative to approach the goal of strategically ensuring that data systems are used to illuminate disparities. While approaching defined goals for addressing the narratives behind the data, there are both structural and capacity issues that must be addressed. First and foremost, school leadership must require regular, streamlined data collection, reporting, and analysis. School leaders must weave this data analysis into the fabric of professional development and use data to drive instructional decisions, curriculum, and academic and behavioral interventions (Kramarczuk et al., 2017).

Currently CPort does not track discipline referral or outcome data, which is key in understanding inequity and disproportionality. Additionally, CPort must look at data across groups, including categories of race and (dis)ability to understand the intersections of inequity. Although formal exclusions from school like suspensions and expulsions are seemingly not occurring, during interviews with community members, a number of informal exclusionary tactics came up like taking a timeout, visiting a buddy classroom, taking a walk down the hall, etc. Each of these tactics results in what Dr. Pedro Noguera terms humiliation and exclusion (Noguera, 2008). Humiliation occurs when the student is called out in front of their peers and may potentially fall prey to a stereotype like a reputation for misbehaving (Noguera, 2008; Steele, 2011). Exclusion occurs because even when, for a brief amount of time, the student is both removed from their classroom community and losing out on valuable instructional time (Noguera, 2008). Furthermore, during the interviews with ELT members, there were varied approaches as to what would be done before resorting to those informal exclusionary tactics and how the child's behavior itself is analyzed. If teachers are not clear about the event(s) prior to a student misbehaving they may be addressing a symptom and not a cause. In schools that are not formally collecting data about even these informal disciplinary tactics, disproportionalities fester unchecked. There is a missed opportunity for staff to interrogate how their own cultural norms about behavior are influencing their disparate discipline of young children. Behavior, communication style, and engagement in learning all intersect with school climate. Where a student does not feel they belong, they will certainly not be in a position to thrive or experience joy in learning. Understanding and analyzing data, such as how many positive and negative interactions teachers typically have with students everyday, can afford a lens into how inclusivity must be better promoted in a classroom. A point of data to consider is also student voice. As scholar Pamela Perry explains (2008), teachers must stay open to feedback from their students, particularly students who hold marginalized identities, in order to learn when teacher behaviors or interactions make them feel afraid, unwelcomed, or ignored.

It is important that teachers recognize that students of color may be particularly vulnerable in white-dominated spaces to experiencing student and teacher behaviors as exclusionary or stigmatizing (Perry, 2008). Valuing and capturing student voice is thus another entry point for promoting and sustaining equity in the classroom.

The most predictable challenges that can be anticipated when collecting and analyzing data are the perceptions that data analysis is burdensome and that there is a negative impact of reporting data that elucidates disparities by race, gender, socioeconomic status, or (dis)ability status. However, the streamlining of data analysis and reporting will strategically inform work with students and communication with parents about academic and behavioral interventions and becomes routine with emphasis over time (Kramarczuk et al., 2017). Mechanisms for reporting and identifying disparities will elucidate unconscious ways that policies and practices can perpetuate negative outcomes for students of color. Data will support how to disrupt these cycles of inequity.

As CPort moves forward in its work of striving for equity, a theory of action can be a guide for the actionable steps CPort will make. Scholars Jane Flood and Chris Brown (2018) explain that theories of action can aid teachers in developing research-informed teaching practices. The theory of action provides a "journey guide" for impact and helps teachers understand why an intervention works by spotlighting which aspects of it drive change (Flood & Brown, 2018). For example, a theory of action for CPort will aid the school in understanding how the work of streamlining discipline processes furthers a more racially equitable environment. By streamlining discipline processes, CPort will be better prepared to recognize the policies and practices that negatively impact students of color and provide a path to disrupt the inequity.

A theory of action that calls for this type of research-informed practice can substantially impact teacher knowledge, curriculum, and student outcomes (Flood & Brown, 2018). In their study, Flood and Brown found that educators who used a theory of action were able to state what their intervention was, the logic underpinning its design, how it was intended that the intervention be realized and what changes should be seen. If interventions were not delivering the desired impact, reworking or refinement could be done by re-examining the logic of the approach and whether all parts and players were being implemented or supported effectively.

At CPort, a number of school community members expressed a desire for a code of conduct with clear behavioral expectations, a ladder of referral inclusive of the expectations for interventions a teacher will use before seeking outside help or using informal exclusionary tactics, defined conflict resolution and de-escalation techniques that are expected throughout the school, and an outline of potential consequences. ELT members discussed the need for norming expectations for behavior. In conjunction with those suggestions from the community, the Center for Strategic Solutions recommends that particular attention be paid to subjective descriptors for behavior like disrespectful, defiant, disruptive, or insubordinate is a great place for staff to start interrogating how *who they are*

informs *how they teach, relate, and engage* with young people differently. In this case, CPort would want to define their theory of action for this inquiry process: *Norming expectations for student behavior is in furtherance of promoting racial equity because attention to the impact of teacher bias in interpreting behavior and disciplining students will elucidate where some students are treated disparately.*

Beyond discipline data, CPort must consider similar analyses for special education identification and classification, attendance, academic achievement, and more. These quantitative data, paired with the in-depth examples of qualitative data described above, illuminate the narrative of lived experiences of CPort young people and families and must inform commitments to racial equity as well as the monitoring of progress in all efforts.

PART 3

The Conclusions

CONCLUSION

A brief note about these findings: likely nothing in these findings will be surprising or unexpected to a community that has been navigating the journey of defining and committing to approaching racial equity for some time. What has to be the charge now for the community as a whole but most specifically for the CPort Principal, leadership including members of the ELT, the School Council, and supporting CPS leaders, is spending 2019-2020 focused on operationalizing commitment to racial equity. In a community where harm runs deep, where communication and transparency have been questioned, and where there is a level of skepticism about ongoing efforts to this work, action must be intentional, thoughtful, responsive, and vigilant in order to foster the culturally responsive-sustaining environment to which CPort students, especially those from the most marginalized and underrepresented identities, are entitled.

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