Applying Equity Frameworks to Advance Systemic Change in Education

Spring 2021 Colorado Department of Education Schools of Choice Unit Equity Convening

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Organizations

Colorado Department of Education: Schools of Choice Unit
Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS)
Colorado Association of Charter School Authorizers (CACSA)

Advisory Panel

Parker Baxter, University of Colorado Denver
Toby King, Outcomes 4 All, LLC
Dr. Amy McCart, SWIFT Education Center
Tom McMillen, Jeffco Schools
Amelia Meunir, Aurora Public Schools
Cecilia Soto, Denver Public Schools
Brittney Stroh, Atlas Preparatory Schools
Clare Vickland, Colorado Charter School Institute
Nicole Wetzel, Global Village Academy Northglenn
Carlitha Wilson, STRIVE Prep

Presenters and Panelists

Dr. Manya Whitaker, Colorado College.
Stephen Menendian, The Othering & Belonging Institute at the University of California at Berkeley.
Terri Bissonette, American Indian Academy of Denver
Valerie Siow, Native American Community School (NACA) Inspired Schools Network
Sherrell Lang, Kwiyagot Community School, Ute Nation
Nicolas Martinez, Transform Education Now
Daniella Morella, STRIVE Preparatory Charter Schools, Denver, CO
Willyn Web, Vision Charter Academy, Delta, CO
Casey Simpson, Southwest Open School, Durango, CO
Brittney Stroh, Atlas Preparatory School, Colorado Springs, CO
Dr. Natalie Lewis, Denver School of Science and Technology
Angele Davenport, Resilient Futures, Denver, CO
Dr. Aaron Griffen, Prosperity Educators, LLC, Denver, CO
Dr. Karega Rausch, National Association of Charter School Authorizers

Charles Duke, Wend Collective, Denver, CO
Megan Brennan, Resilient Futures, Denver, CO

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Abstract

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Schools of Choice (SOC) Unit, in collaboration with the Colorado League of Charter Schools (CLCS), hosted the *Applying Equity Frameworks to Advance Systemic Change in Education* Virtual Equity Convening in June 2021. Educators, community organizers, and scholars from Colorado and across the nation assembled to share their research and practice on using a clearly articulated framework in their approach to creating high-quality and equitable school experiences that result in belonging, well-being, and high achievement for all students including those that identify as Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asain, and Middle Eastern. At a state level, Colorado charter schools serve a higher percentage of students of color than non-charter schools. Beyond enrollment, Colorado charter schools aim to retain students of color; retention is heavily reliant on the school's parent and student satisfaction, student achievement, and discipline practices. Academic performance of disaggregated ethnic and racial groups tends to be higher in charter schools than non-charter schools in Colorado; however, the disproportionality in measurable outcomes between most ethnic subgroups and White students is present in traditional and charter schools alike. The same is true for discipline disproportionality; charter school disproportionality is highest for Black and Hispanic/LatinX males referred for expulsion. Furthermore, the COVID19 pandemic widened existing inequities by disproportionately impacting already impacted communities and students. The 2021 CDE Equity Convening converged academic research, presentations from practitioners in the field, and various case studies on three prominent equity-based frameworks:

- Culturally Relevant-Sustaining Pedagogy (CR-S)
- Culturally Relevant Trauma-Informed Care (CRTIC)
- Targeted Universalism (TU)

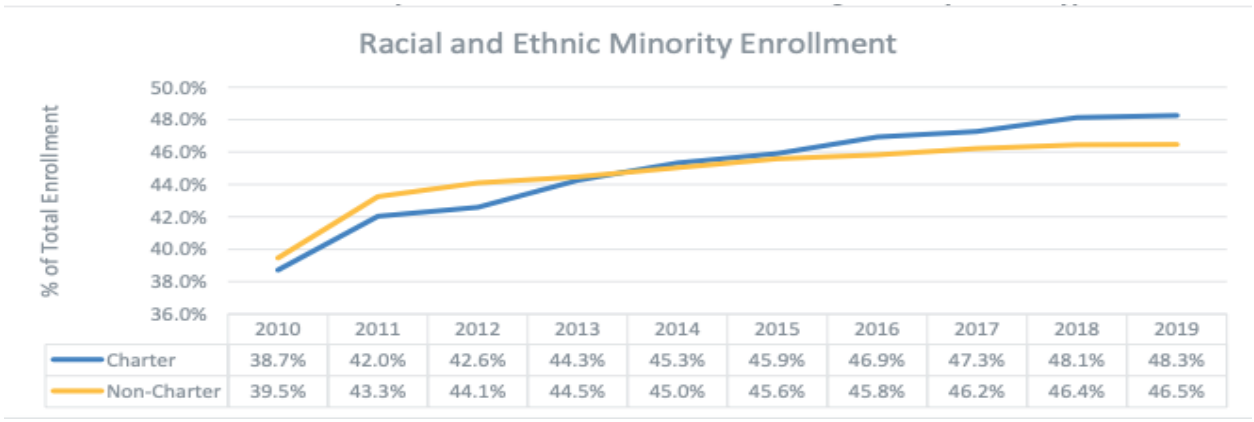
These frameworks serve as guides for districts and schools advancing racial equity priorities in their school designs, re-designs, pandemic reentry structures, and continuous improvement plans. The body of evidence resulting from the 2021 CDE Equity Convening revealed four key implications for Colorado charter schools; these implications are paired with specific recommendations and implementation tools at the end of the white paper:

- Implication 1: Root equity efforts in shared understanding, beliefs, and values
- Implication 2: Center the community and parents in the model
- Implication 3: Focus on culture, identity, and belonging
- Implication 4: Remove challenges and barriers

Problem Statement: Equity in Colorado Charter Schools

According to the CDE SOC “2019 State of Charter Schools Triennial Report” (2020), enrollment in charter schools remains steady and significant, and that overall “charter schools serve higher percentages of minority and English Language Learner (ELL) students than schools statewide but serve lower percentages of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunches (FRL) and students with disabilities'' (pg. 4). Figure 1 displays that enrollment of Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern students in charter schools has outpaced non-charters across the state. The same is true for English Language Learners (ELLs) as demonstrated in Figure 2.

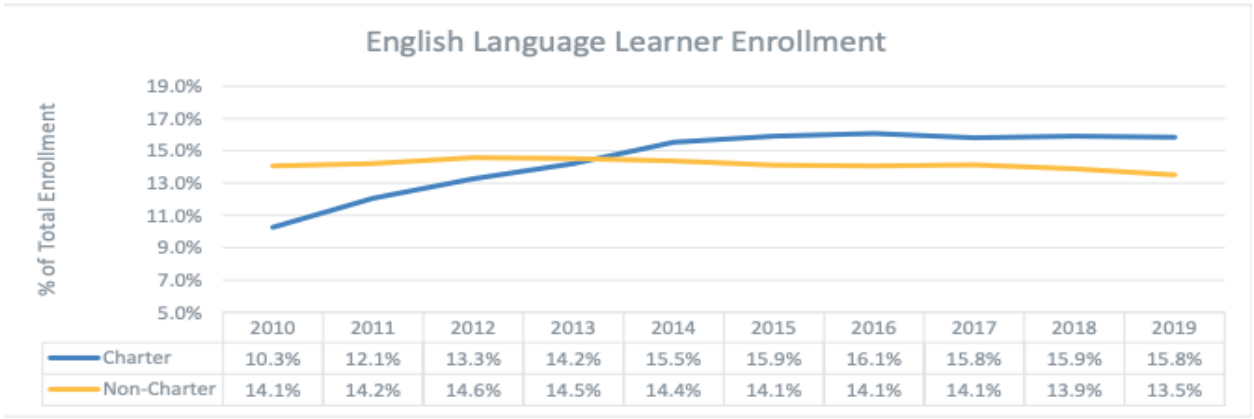
Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Minority Student Enrollment from 2010 through 2019 by School Type



	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Charter	38.7%	42.0%	42.6%	44.3%	45.3%	45.9%	46.9%	47.3%	48.1%	48.3%
Non-Charter	39.5%	43.3%	44.1%	44.5%	45.0%	45.6%	45.8%	46.2%	46.4%	46.5%

From Colorado Department of Education, Schools of Choice Unit. (2020). *2019 State of charter schools triennial report*. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/2019charterschoolsreport.

Figure 2. English Language Learners Enrollment from 2010 through 2019 by School Type



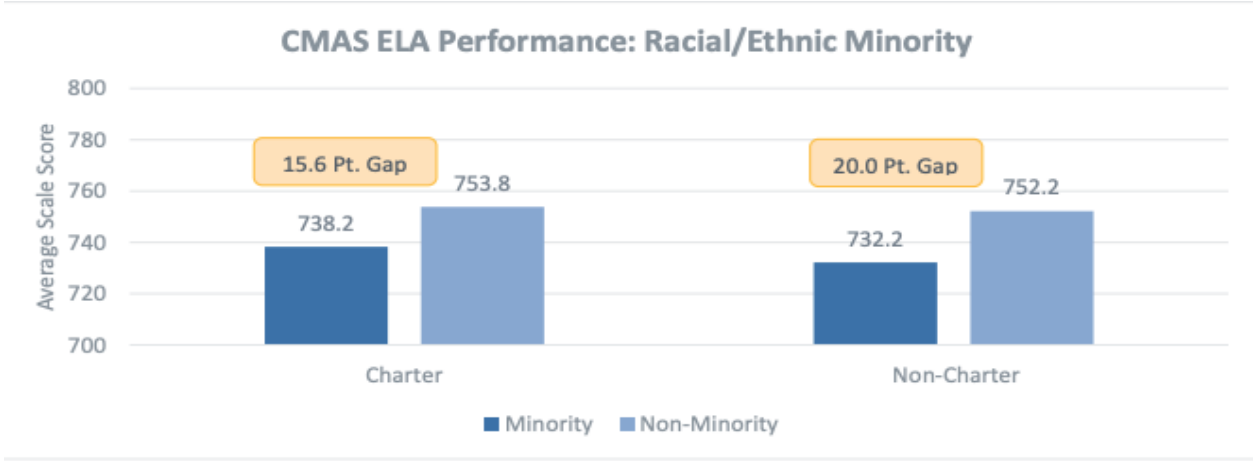
	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Charter	10.3%	12.1%	13.3%	14.2%	15.5%	15.9%	16.1%	15.8%	15.9%	15.8%
Non-Charter	14.1%	14.2%	14.6%	14.5%	14.4%	14.1%	14.1%	14.1%	13.9%	13.5%

From Colorado Department of Education, Schools of Choice Unit. (2020). *2019 State of charter schools triennial report*. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/2019charterschoolsreport.

This dataset provided a broad overview of the state charter sector; however, enrollment data for charter schools was not disaggregated by ethnicity type or geographical area. Enrollment and ultimately retention of diverse student populations in charter schools rely heavily on community engagement and satisfaction, academic outcomes, and discipline procedures.

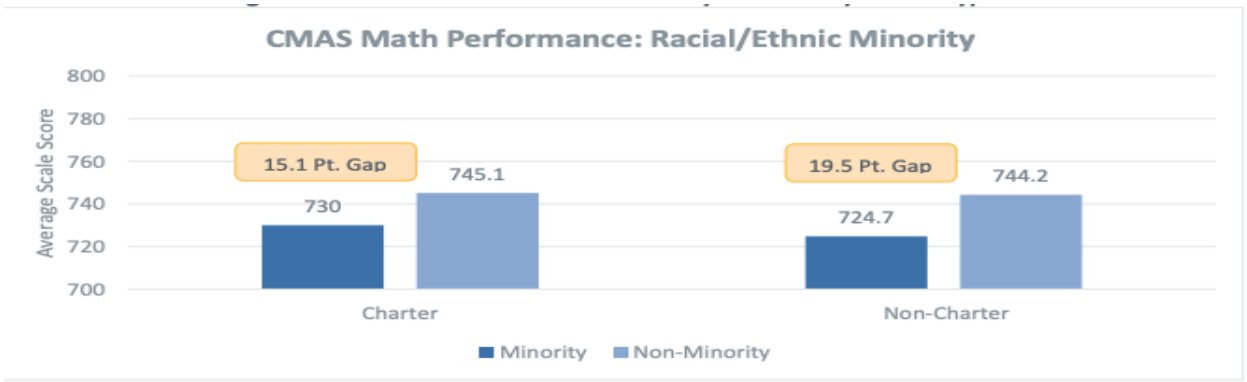
The "State of Charter Schools Triennial Report" (2020) also indicated that the academic performance of students of color tends to be higher in charter schools than non-charter schools in Colorado; however, outcomes between these students and their White counterparts are inequitable as displayed in Figures 3 and 4.

Figure 3. 2018 Average CMAS ELA Performance for Racial/Ethnic Minority Students by School Type



From Colorado Department of Education, Schools of Choice Unit. (2020). *2019 State of charter schools triennial report*. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/2019charterschoolsreport.

Figure 4. 2018 Average CMAS Math Performance for Minority Students by School Type



Figures 4 and 5 from Colorado Department of Education, Schools of Choice Unit. (2020). *2019 State of charter schools triennial report*. https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/2019charterschoolsreport.

Again, the presented dataset is limited because it does not disaggregate performance and identify achievement gaps in charter schools by ethnicity type and geographical area.

The “State of Charter Schools Triennial Report'' (2020) does not provide a discussion on discipline practices in charter schools. Colorado schools, charter and non-charter, have disproportionate discipline rates for Black, Indigenous, and LatinX students and particularly those with identified disabilities. State Senator Janet Buckner and Representative Leslie Herod partnered to introduce the SB21-182 School Discipline bill to the 2021 Colorado state legislature; the bill aims to improve district reporting of discipline practices, minimize racial disproportionality, and minimize student criminalization and run-ins with the police. SB21-182 reported that over 4,000 Colorado students were ticketed or arrested for a nonviolent misdemeanor at Colorado schools in the 2017-2018 school year, and that “Black students in Colorado were 3.2 times more likely to be suspended than were white students, and Hispanic students were 1.7 times more likely to be suspended than white students.” (Gonzales, 2021, para. 7).

Existing racial inequities in all schools have been exacerbated by the landmark COVID19 crisis that widened student and family access to educational opportunities; however, the moment provides the charter sector an opportunity to respond urgently and advance equity. The root causes of inequitable racial outcomes in enrollment, achievement, and discipline are systemic and multifaceted, and therefore, require a systemic and multifaceted solution.

Problem Solution: Using Equity Frameworks to Advance Systemic Change

The practice of using equity-based frameworks from policy creation to classroom discussion has been popularized as a best practice for addressing racial inequities in enrollment, student and staff retention, academic achievement, and community satisfaction. This approach aims at transforming and dismantling systemic challenges and barriers faced by Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asain, and Middle Eastern students within school policy, practice, and culture. A framework is a conceptual structure intended to guide an organization’s collective thinking, culture, and way of being; a framework is inherently a mental model. When applied effectively, frameworks are well articulated, and they drive the development of tools and protocols that influence and lead systemic thinking and change management within schools that are committed to achieving equitable outcomes for all students. A review of relevant research and praxis from the field revealed three prominent equity frameworks:

- Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Pedagogy (CR-S)
- Targeted Universalism (TU)
- Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Care (CRTIC)

These frameworks are all aimed at equity while embodying unique perspectives and approaches. All frameworks share the essential components of the community, family, and student partnership. Furthermore, the use of equity frameworks has been popularized by schools in response to the COVID19 pandemic, targeting resources and designing specialized practices to provide access to the most impacted students. This includes providing devices, internet hot spots, unique special education services, and now, the heightened implementation of social and emotional programming as students return to school. The 2021 CDE SOC Equity Convening gathered education and other public sector experts and participants from across the nation to focus on these promising equity-based frameworks. Workshops, panels, and presentations during the 2021 CDE Equity Convening attended to community-centered charter school authorizing, centering parents in our models, building cultural humility in CRTIC, using CR-S practices to improve outcomes in Indigenous communities, and The Other & Belonging Institute's approach to TU in schools.

Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Pedagogy (CR-S)

CR-S pedagogy is built on the 25-year foundation of culturally relevant and responsive teaching (Nieto 1992, Ladson-Billings 1995, Carol Lee 1995, Geneva Gay 2002, Moll and Gutierrez 2005, etc.). The original call for culturally relevant teaching focused on cultural competence, academic rigor, and sociopolitical consciousness. In 2012, Paris argued that being solely relevant and responsive without centering diverse cultures may serve to only maintain the status quo (*i.e.*, inequitable outcomes). By adding the additional sustaining component to culturally responsive pedagogy, he called for school systems to achieve true cultural pluralism and cultural equality. Key elements across all CR-S-inspired frameworks are creating an affirming environment that nurtures belonging, engaging staff in ongoing professional development, providing an inclusive curriculum and school culture, maintaining high expectations, and partnering with families and communities. Hammond (2018) combined neuroscience and CR-S by focusing on the cognitive factors of Black, Indigenous, LatinX, and other racially diverse learners. Students' cultural and personal experiences program their thinking and schema, and this ultimately lays the foundation for their learning. She proposed a *Ready for Rigor* framework that is rooted in brain-based teaching and CR-S; this framework compels schools to explicitly build these learner operating systems: awareness, information processing, a community of learners, and learning

partnerships. She is clear that this framework is not a how-to guide or prescriptive outline, but more of a mental model to integrate into existing practices.

Several states such as New York and Massachusetts have adopted a CR-S approach as their equity framework for advancing systemic change. The Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Schools (2018) conceptualizes school practice on a continuum of cultural destructiveness to culturally sustaining. A culturally destructive approach is when all levels and parts of the system from policy to pedagogy are informed by a patriarchal, Judeo-Christian White, English monolingual perspective. New York's Culturally Responsive Sustaining (CR-S) (2019) framework recognizes diversity in identity as an asset for teaching and learning. This framework has the following domains: establishing a welcoming and affirming environment, promoting high expectations and rigorous instruction, providing inclusive curriculum and assessment, and building adult capacity through ongoing professional learning. It guides educators to create student-centered learning environments that "affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning; develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices and empower students as agents of social change" (p.10).

A successful example of CR-S implementation is the Native American Community Academy (NACA) and NACA Inspired Schools Network (NISN). NISN leaders and fellows presented at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening and shared how they have used the CR-S framework to improve experiences and outcomes for American Indian children at NACA and other NISN schools. These presenters included Valerie Siow from NISN, Sherrell Lang from Kwiyagot Community School in Tawaoc, Ute Nation, and Terri Bissett from the American Indian Academy of Denver. The CR-S driven practices utilized at NISN have been organized into these key findings:

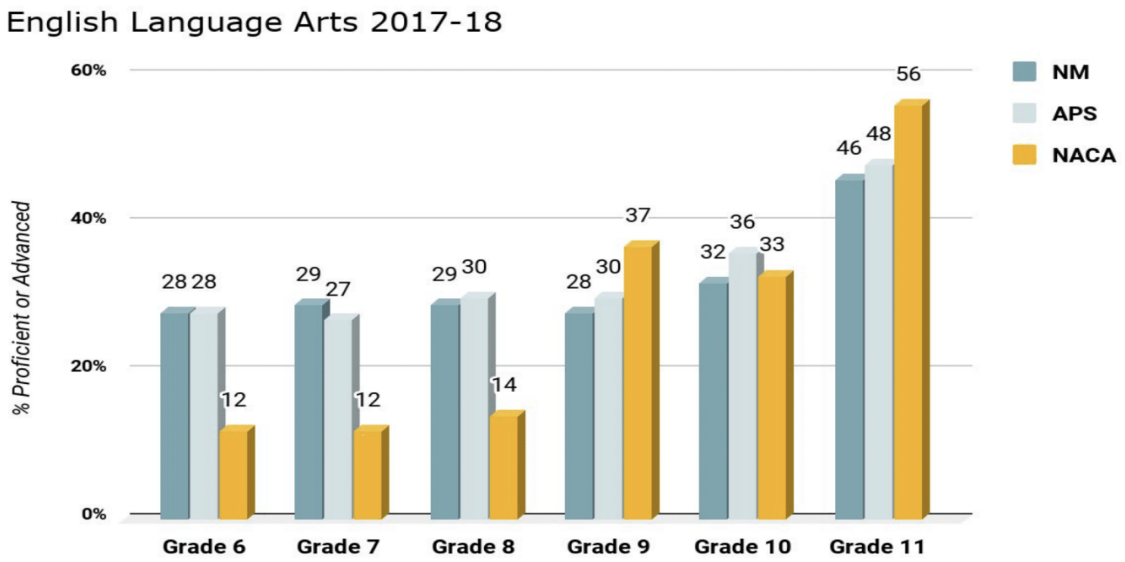
- NISN schools are co-created, attended, led, and governed by the Indigenous communities they serve.
- The preservation of Indigenous culture and community at NISN schools allows students to develop secure and confident identities.
- NISN provides a holistic education that is centered on Indigenous well-being.

NACA was established in 2006 in Albuquerque, New Mexico; it manifested from community demand and mobilization to improve the wellness and educational outcomes of the growing urban American Indian student population. Essentially, the school is co-created with, designed for, and

governed by the community. NACA serves approximately 500 students in grades K-12 that represent over 60 Indigenous communities. NISN is a charter network of schools across several states including two new Colorado charter schools: The American Indian Academy of Denver (AISD) and Kwiyagat Community School (KSC).

The National Charter School Resource Center (2018) reports that "students who attend the Native American Community Academy (NACA) demonstrate academic achievement, proficiency, retention, graduation, and college attendance rates that outpace their Native American peers at the district, state, and national levels" (para. 1). According to the NACA 2019 Tribal Education Status Report (2020), Indigenous elementary students at NACA perform comparable to their Indigenous counterparts in Albuquerque Public School (APS) and across New Mexico and then out-perform them over time in middle and high school (pg. 11). When comparing all students at NACA to all students in APS and New Mexico, performance varies. For example, Figure 5 displays achievement disproportionality between all NACA students and all APS/New Mexico students in English Language Arts (ELA) on the 2018 PARCC exam; however, the achievement becomes more comparable in high school. Ten percent of 11th-grade students at NACA were more proficient in ELA than APS/New Mexico students on the 2018 PARCC exam.

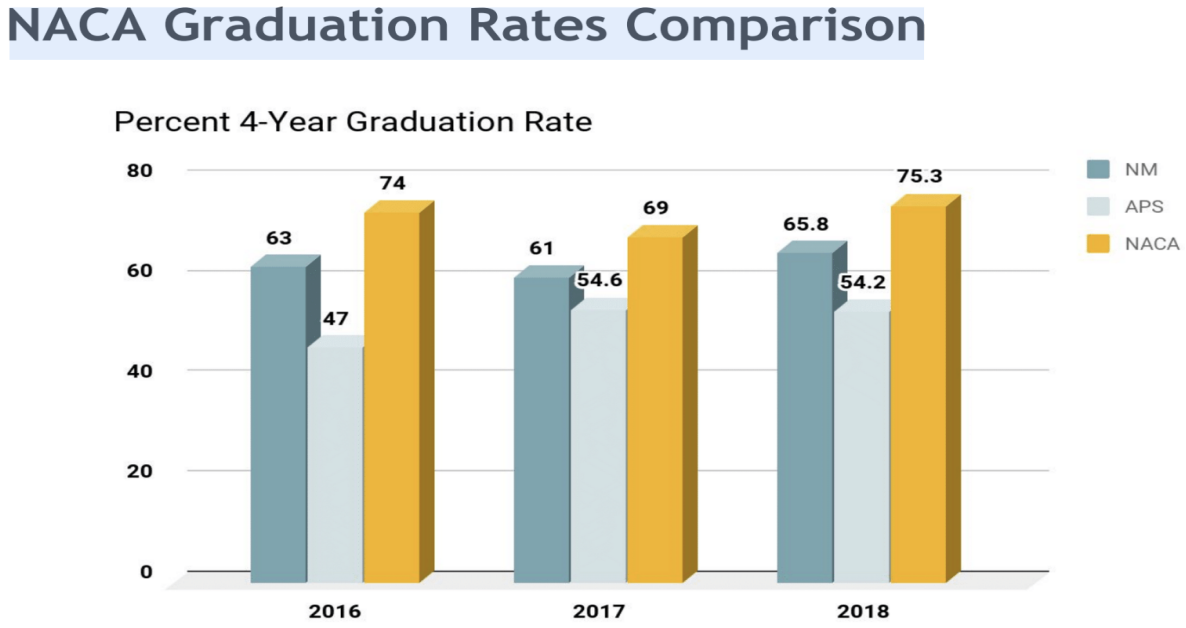
Figure 5: NACA 2018 ELA Data



From NACA Inspired Schools Network. (2021). *Uplifting the Genius of Our Communities: Why Community Led Schools Matter*. 2021 Colorado Department of Education Equity Convening. https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3weidzk2feqzj70/AAD84vKcGIV3yGtOStyhW2wna/Culturally%20Sustaining-Responsive?dl=0&preview=NISN+Equity+Convening+Presentation6.18.21_updated.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1

Figures presented at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening also displayed achievement disproportionately between NACA and APS/NEW Mexico in math for all grades except 10th grade. Last, Figure 6 displays that graduation rates for students at NACA have remained significantly better than the graduation rates for APS and New Mexico from 2016-2018. The data presented indicate that the longer NACA students stay in the community, the stronger they become academically and that they may be up to 20% more likely to graduate from high school.

Figure 6. NACA Graduation Rates from 2016-2018



From NACA Inspired Schools Network. (2021). *Uplifting the Genius of Our Communities: Why Community Led Schools Matter*. 2021 Colorado Department of Education Equity Convening. https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3weidzk2feqzj70/AAD84vKcGIV3yGtOStyhW2wna/Culturally%20Sustaining-Responsive?dl=0&preview=NISN+Equity+Convening+Presentation6.18.21_updated.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1

NISN schools are co-designed, attended, led, and governed by the Indigenous community they serve. NISN leaders describe how these values drive everything they do from creating policy to approving curriculum. Specifically, they highlighted how the Indigenous value of community is used in the NACA school design. For example, the organizational chart is circular as opposed to a hierarchy. Conceptually, leadership is at the center of the organization and not on top of it. The saying “none of us are more important than all of us” adorns the chart. Also, NISN leaders noted that it is essential for the staff to be a reflection of the community, stating that approximately 70% of teachers are Indigenous and

are from the communities they serve. The school and network leaders and board members reflect the community as well. Furthermore, the curriculum is co-designed with and rigorously reviewed by the community including students to ensure alignment to the mission and core values. The curriculum is built on sovereignty, identity, self-determination, and centered on justice, empowerment, and equity while integrating state content and college readiness standards.

The preservation of Indigenous culture and community at NISN schools allows students to develop secure and confident identities. The organization's culture, curriculum, and instruction are centered on Indigenous identity and specifically building confidence and pride in their identities and academic abilities. This results in a strong sense of self-efficacy and self-determination. They center Native literature, teach world history through the relevant Indigenous perspective of the location, include Indigenous arts and sciences, and offer several languages. Specifically, NACA has developed a land-based curriculum inspired by the relationships Indigenous peoples have with the land. Indigenous culture and identity thus drive the teaching and learning cycle along with state standards. Additionally, NISN integrates cultural rituals, practices, and events throughout and beyond the school day which further establishes belonging and strengthens identity.

Two NISN connected schools recently opened in Colorado Indigenous communities: one urban and one rural. The American Indian Academy of Denver and Kiwayagot Community School on the Ute Nation are currently in their second and first year of operations and are authorized by Denver Public Schools and the Colorado Charter School Institute respectively. Both school leaders are NISN leadership fellows. The schools have visions and missions similar to NACA and are rooted in Indigenous values, community, culture, and identity. While implementation is very early and has occurred through the landmark COVID19 crisis, many of the NACA-inspired practices have already been successful in these Colorado communities: the engagement and mobilization of the community, getting the charter authorized, meeting enrollment benchmarks to open, etc.

Targeted Universalism (TU)

Targeted Universalism (TU) is an equity framework used to design policy and practice across public sectors such as health care and education. Fundamental to the framework is the acknowledgment that Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern people experience personal, structural, and systemic racism within society and its public sectors. Dr. Manya Whittaker, Associate Professor and Chair of Education at Colorado College, defined equity in her opening keynote speech: "equity is the distribution of opportunity and the resources to take advantage of those opportunities." She declared

that charter schools can create cultures of belonging and achieve equitable outcomes when the barriers and challenges that Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asain, and Middle Eastern families and students face are acknowledged and removed. TU intends to set universal goals and standards for all members of a community while targeting the community's most impacted populations with resources and removing any barriers along the way. This ideology is similar to popular equity imagery in which all people get what they need to arrive at the same place as demonstrated in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Equity Imagery in the Context of Targeted Universalism

From Powell, J. (2019). Targeted Universalism: A Primer. The Haas Institute and The Othering and Belonging Institute. https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9sm8b0q8

The TU framework also asserts that focusing on the growth and achievement of targeted populations results in improved outcomes and experiences for all community members.

Steven Menendian of the Othering and Belonging Institute @ University of California at Berkeley presented this five-step protocol for implementing a TU strategy at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening:

- Step 1: Establish a universal goal.
- Step 2: Assess performance relative to the goal.
- Step 3: Identify differences in performance between goal and select targeted populations.
- Step 4: Assess and understand how the structures in the school impact targeted populations.
- Step 5: Develop and implement targeted strategies for those furthest away from the goal.

Menendian stressed that schools should have the goal of reaching past the attainment of equitable

outcomes to the goal of attaining belonging for all students. Learning and achievement rely on belonging. Thus, the target group shapes the policy and culture of the organization; ultimately, this changes how they feel and think about the system and their place in it. Menendian also warned against focusing on "closing disparities" in universal goal setting because closing educational disparities does not automatically result in belonging. The pathway to equity and belonging is identifying and actively monitoring universal goals for all students while targeting resources and strategies towards those furthest away from the goal. Additionally, he offered a caveat for the navigation of consensus, if a consensus cannot be made on if a problem exists or warrants being solved, then a TU approach will not be effective. Menendian says, "TU can however forge a policy pathway forward where there is broad agreement that a problem exists and, furthermore, that the problem warrants a policy response, even if there is disagreement or uncertainty about what to do" (pg. 21). This displays the importance of arriving at a common mental model among all stakeholders.

Several school districts across the country are explicitly or implicitly using a TU approach in their racial equity frameworks including Portland, Seattle, and Oakland. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) (2018) also uses a framework that is built on TU; it is early in the implementation phase and its rollout has occurred during the COVID19 crisis. While outcomes are unknown, the curation process of the district's systemic plan holds implications for promising practices in the charter school sector. The CPS Equity Framework (2018) was created out of the Race & Equity Working Group of educators, policymakers, community members, students, and families that were tasked with the determination of responding to racial inequities across the district. The working group takes this stance:

> We acknowledge and account for past and current inequities, and we provide all people the infrastructure needed to thrive. We prioritize people of color and other groups in the decision-making process who have been historically marginalized or are negatively impacted by recent events related to racial injustice. We believe everyone benefits from a more just, equitable system (p.9).

The working group rooted their framework in a shared agreement on a problem and a commitment to urgently solving the problem.

The CPS framework identifies four major components: liberatory thinking, inclusive partnerships, resource equity, and fair policies and systems. The components all build on each other. All change is rooted in liberatory thinking and the goal of shifting mental models about marginalized people. The CPS Equity Framework (2018) defines liberatory thinking as pushing "people to interrogate their own multiple identities in relation to others and to think about the consequences of our actions, especially

for students of critical need. It explores how mindsets can impede or ignite progress in the classroom, school, and district" (pg. 28). Building on liberatory thinking, the framework compels schools to build inclusive relationships with families and communities through deep listening and engagement. The third component of the CPS equity framework is resourcing equity. The framework defines this as "consistently prioritizing and allocating people, time, and money to align with levels of need and opportunity" (pg. 32). The underlying philosophy is that if all student learning is funded equally while lived experiences remain drastically different, inequitable outcomes will persist. The final component of the framework calls on schools to design and implement fair policies and systems. When these policies and practices are found to be biased and have negative impacts on different identities, it is essential to transform them with equity in mind.

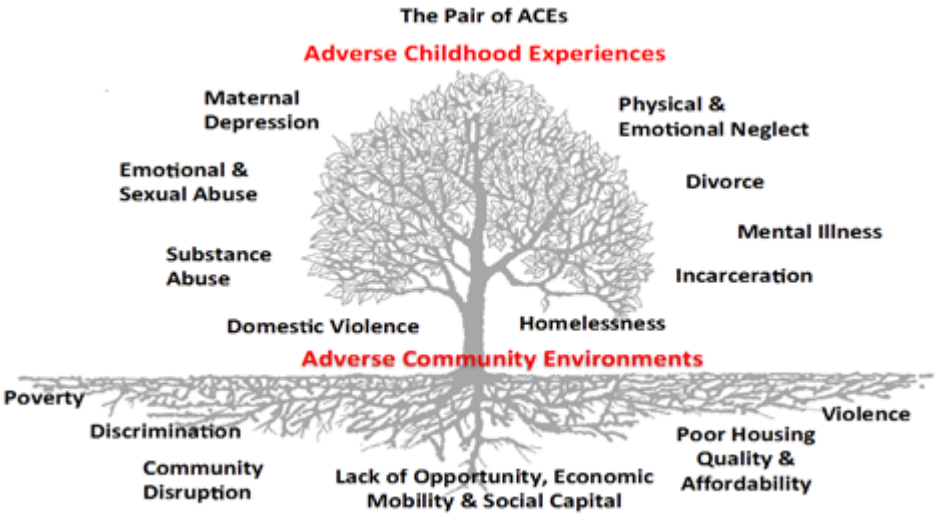
Brittany Stroh, school leader of Atlas Preparatory Charter School, spoke about the TU practices they use to address academic inequities specifically among English Language Learners on the "Applying equity frameworks for transforming policy and decision-making" panel at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening. Atlas Prep is hyperfocused on literacy, setting rigorous academic growth goals for all students and using multiple data points to identify groups of students that are the furthest away from meeting their literacy goals. The universal, best first instruction, as well as targeted and intensive interventions, are then provided to these students; resources are targeted to support these interventions including time, people, and money. Stroh reported that it took a shift in staff culture to get all stakeholders on board with the schoolwide literacy initiative which included engaging in deep listening and receiving feedback. The change management of the TU approach took small, incremental changes while keeping everyone invested along the way.

Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Care (CRTIC)

Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Care (CRTIC) aims to ameliorate the impact of personal and socio-political trauma on students and staff, and to resist further traumatizing them in the school community (Jones, Berg, and Osher, 2018). More than ever, the discourse on trauma and learning is being centered in research and teacher professional development; school communities are expecting higher rates of trauma in students after returning from COVID19 school closures. CRTIC practice is built on guiding principles that are rooted in multidisciplinary research on trauma, the brain, and learning. The acknowledgment and inclusion of race and racism regarding childhood trauma and chronics stress are becoming more prevalent. In addition to personal trauma, some students experience racial trauma which results from interpersonal and structural racism that occurs in society and the school system

(Brown-Griffin, Gray, and Elan, 2020). The CRTIC framework compels staff members to be knowledgeable about the impact of chronic traumatic stress on student development, learning, and behavior. Chronic stress can develop from adverse experiences that can be categorized as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Adverse Community Experiences (ACEs) as demonstrated in Figure 8.

Figure 8. The Two Types of ACEs



From Davenport, A. Resilient Futures. (2021). C*ultural humility: A step towards transformational change in education*. Colorado Department of Education Schools of Choice Unit 2021 CDE Equity Convening.https://www.dropbox.com/sh/3weidzk2feqzj70/AADRGRvgS-D7fAqWFAvEfRtSa/Culturally%20Responsive%2C%20Trauma%20Informed%20Care?dl=0&preview=CDECharterSchoolTrainingCH.vFinal.pdf&subfolder_nav_tracking=1

In a CRTIC framework, staff members are aware of the disproportionality of ACEs and chronic traumatic stress in Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern students, and they understand the underpinnings of systemic racism, classism, and other oppressions.

Culturally responsive trauma-informed care implies that trauma and the manifestation of that trauma are uniquely experienced by different identities and their intersectionalities. Organizations risk ineffective outcomes and further traumatization when implementing trauma-informed practices without a culturally responsive lens. Gorski (2019) referred to siloed support and services that are aimed at helping students cope as opposed to changing school systems and structures as “equity detours.” For the practice to be at the behest of equity, it has to move from treating students and families to transforming systems. Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) in trauma-informed schools typically focuses on building resilience and other protective factors that ameliorate ACEs and chronic stress. Students learn skills and

strategies to cope with their experiences with the ultimate goal of fostering student self-determination and agency. Adding the culturally responsive component to the framework, schools are compelled to transform practices that present challenges and barriers to students from marginalized communities (Brown-Griffin, Gray, & Elan, 2020). For example, discipline in culturally responsive trauma-informed schools is intent on reducing racial and other disproportionalities in school discipline. Typically, this means there is a paradigm shift from punishment to prevention (i.e., an unbiased classroom that promotes access and belonging) and culturally responsive practices.

Angele Davenport of Resilient Futures Colorado presented on CRTIC at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening and focused on what she and her organization, Resilient Futures, consider to be the first step in CRTIC: building cultural humility. Cultural humility is both a concept and a process that is rooted in the medical field and has been bridged to nonprofits, community organizations, and schools. In the medical field, "cultural humility can serve as a guiding concept for the practice of trauma-informed care in centering and empowering patients on their journey of healing, rather than making assumptions about the patient's experience or practicing an authoritative, power-over communication style" (Ranjbar et al., 2021, pg. 13). It is understood that it is mutually beneficial to partner. Davenport (2021) defines cultural humility as "a communal reflection to analyze the root causes of suffering, and create a broader, more inclusive view of the world" (pg. 4). She explained that cultural humility must begin with a strong commitment to learning and self-reflection. From a point of awakening and understanding, the school can recognize power imbalances, biases and discrimination, and then move to correct them through institutional accountability. This includes understanding ACEs and the predictable relationships between them and race. When educators inherently understand the underpinnings of history, discrimination, and trauma, they are essentially prepared to use the framework to create a safe and responsive school environment. Through the cultural humility process, trust is generated and leveraged so that schools and parents can truly partner. Furthermore, cultural competency is built and sustained through practicing cultural humility.

The Common Thread: Sharing Power and Centering Parents in Our Models

Deep engagement with parents and community was an omniscient theme in the research and discourse of the 2021 CDE Equity Convening. The goal of authentic and equitable family and community engagement is afforded choice, shared power, and co-creation. A recent nationwide poll revealed that parents believe there is a great opportunity to reform schooling after the COVID19 pandemic; 60% of all parents reported the need for post-pandemic shifts to education, and "among Black parents, 72% want

schools to reimagine education, with just 23% saying they want to go back to the way things were'' (National Parents Union, 2020). There is no better time than now to listen to and partner with Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asain, and Middle Eastern families to improve enrollment, retention, and academic outcomes in charter schools.

The Center for Reinventing Public Education (2020) published a report on four grassroots social advocacy groups that supported Black and LatinX parents in achieving meaningful engagement during the pandemic, proposing the question to schools and authorizers, “at a time when they are depending on parents to partner in their children’s education like never before, are they willing to give parents a real voice at the table?” (p.8). The advocacy groups are The Oakland REACH in Oakland, California; Parents Amplifying Voices in Education, or PAVE, in Washington D.C.; Kids First Chicago; and Parent Revolution in Los Angeles. The report provides implications for family-led policy that are useful to charter schools, authorizers, and other organizations: don’t wait for a crisis to develop relationships with families; help families navigate a complex system; create feedback loops with families; equip families with the skills and power to elevate their concerns and craft solutions (pg. 8).

RISE Colorado is a parent advocacy group that serves Aurora Public Schools and Cherry Creek School District in Colorado. According to their website, RISE Colorado “runs one holistic program with three unique phases to educate, engage, and empower families. We work with low-income families, families of color, and refugee and immigrant communities to put those most impacted by the opportunity gap at the forefront of the movement for educational equity” (para. 1). RISE published a post-pandemic assessment titled *Our Stories, Our Time* (2020) that included the voices of over 1,000 families, the majority of whom are immigrants and refugees. Their findings confirmed the disproportional impact of the COVID19 pandemic on impacted communities they serve and rapidly responded with direct services and supports including rental payment, food, and health care access. The needs assessment also revealed that “RISE Family and Student Leaders want to have active involvement in ongoing planning and decision making efforts. This will ensure their voices are heard and centered so their needs are met to ensure all students receive the excellent education they deserve” (pg. 12). Parent and family recommendations were synthesized into these findings: create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment for students and families of color, create a strong communications plan centering on family and student voice, and prepare teachers to support students experiencing trauma.

All of these practices were utilized in the RISE Colorado and East Village Community School partnership in Aurora, Colorado, a partnership aimed at improving post-pandemic student outcomes through parent engagement. Village East Community School (K-5) is the most culturally and linguistically

diverse school in the CCSD; it serves Aurora, Colorado which is a designated refugee resettlement community. Village East Community School and RISE Colorado designed and launched the RISE Together Recovery & Re-Entry Approach. To begin the work, staff collaborated to generate a survey for parents that mined feelings of connectedness, belonging, and being valued. Questions were scanned for bias and cultural context and revised several times and ultimately translated into several languages. Families were able to choose to answer questions via a written survey or 1:1 phone call. Second, a group of 5th-grade leaders worked with staff to generate a similar survey for students. This data collection was ultimately used in designing Village East Community School's back-to-school plan. Village East Community School and RISE launched the RISE Family Engagement Program and the Power, Privilege, and Intersectionality Learning Series as part of the reentry and recovery approach. The Family Engagement Program offered two types of engagement avenues: Parent Opportunity Gap Night((POG) and Family Learning Nights (FLN). POGs engage families in conversations about the opportunity gap in public schooling (i.e., the disparity in access to quality schools many students experience). FLNs offer families guidance in supporting their children as learners. The Chan & Zuckerberg Initiative (2021) reported that " Village East Community School staff recorded a significant increase in parent participation between their first POG Night and the subsequent FLN: while 145 families logged on for the POG Night, 201 families signed up for the FLN" (para. 12). This displays that when schools engage in honest and open conversations with families and communities about the challenges and barriers in education, trust is built and engagement can deepen. These practices built the cultural capital of staff while optimizing the assets and wisdom of the parent engagement team and RISE partnership. Overall, Village East Community School reported that parents surveyed felt more connected and felt like they had a stronger purpose at the school after the implementation of the 2020-2021 recovery plan (Chan & Zuckerberg Initiative, 2021). This is a phenomenal feat, for parents to feel more connected to their children's school after the disruption of the pandemic.

Dr. Aaron Griffin, Director of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the Denver School of Science and Technology (DSST), provided a workshop titled "Sharing power: Centering parents in our models" at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening. His presentation explored three skills: auditing for equity, elevating diverse voices, and promoting structures that disrupt dominant culture. In elevating diverse voices, Dr. Griffin compelled districts and schools to center the most marginalized families and voices in the feedback cycle. It is critical to be thoughtful about who you want to hear from and how you can create a meeting or feedback structure that is culturally relevant, safe, and convenient. Daniella Morella, Chief External Affairs Officer at STRIVE Preparatory Schools, stressed the importance of understanding the community

and families that you serve on the “Leveraging parents & community when applying equity frameworks” panel. She explained that this includes understanding how they access information and how they prefer to provide feedback. Data collected from parents should be galvanized with community partnerships to influence change. This includes engaging with community organizers and groups that families trust, developing collaborative groups for parents of multiple backgrounds, and providing affinity spaces for families to safely express themselves. Nicolas Martinez of Transform Education Now also stressed these practices on this panel, compelling schools to shift from the mental model of educators being the expert on a child to a parent being the expert on a child. He argued that this is the fundamental basis for trust, respect, and partnership with families.

Conclusion

Utilizing an explicit framework to address racial equity within schools assures a systemic and holistic approach. Frameworks are mental models that tether stakeholders to a shared perspective, In the case of CR-S, CRTIC, and TU, the shared perspective is that racial inequities are root causes of deficiencies within school systems and structures as opposed to students, families, and communities. Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern students, families, and communities must be liberated from challenges and barriers that hinder them from thriving in public schools. Staff and leaders must agree that there is a problem and that the problem is worthy of solving for this approach to be effective. In addition to wrapping everyone in this shared understanding, frameworks help schools conceptualize how to transform their systems and structures. CR-S, CRTIC, and TU center families and communities, culturally relevant teaching, building a culture of belonging, using data and assessment to set goals and target resources, and developing educator capacity for serving diverse students. When schools attempt racial equity work without a shared understanding and explicit framework in place, the results can range from ineffective to harmful. It takes a clear and systemic approach with vertical and horizontal alignment across the organization. The 2021 CDE Equity Convening resulted in four key implications for Colorado charter schools aiming to improve equitable enrollment and retention rates for Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern students:

- Implication 1: Root equity efforts in shared understanding, beliefs, and values.
- Implication 2: Center the community and parents in the model.
- Implication 3: Focus on culture, identity, and belonging.
- Implication 4: Remove challenges and barriers.

Implications and Recommendations for Colorado Charter Schools

The implications for practice derived from this body of work are present in all of the equity-based frameworks presented at the 2021 CDE Equity Convening; they have been paired with recommendations and implementation tools for Colorado schools and educators. Recommendations and tools are intended to be used by a diversity of stakeholders including teachers, administrators, BoD members, and authorizers.

Implication 1: Shared Understanding, Beliefs, and Values

All frameworks presented at the convening compel group values and beliefs, particularly concerning race and culture. The acknowledgment of a problem and its impact, and the agreement to solve it are the foundation for each framework. Schools must build what Brene Brown calls a “Safety Container '' around their efforts that hold community members tethered to clearly understood values and commitments that drive the work and keep the community and its members safe. Without this foundation, the outcomes of equity work can range from ineffective to harmful.

Recommendations	*Implementation Tools*
Co-create a list of agreements and norms that articulate the staff’s shared understanding of the equity work they are engaging in together; this list should define the problem and the organization’s commitments to solving the problem.	**Daring Classrooms Safety Container (Brene Brown)**
Explicitly build teacher capacity in understanding the challenges and barriers Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern students and families experience.	**Project Reimagining Equity and Access for Diverse Youth (READY) CR-S Training Module (the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill).**
Build liberatory thinking in educators, transforming their assumptions and beliefs about the capacity of themselves,	**Liberatory Thinking Tool (Chicago Public Schools)** **Culturally Responsive Continuum**

students, and families. This includes understanding where they currently fall on the cultural responsiveness continuum and where they want to land. Use tools that operationalize "liberatory thinking." It should be clear what biases, misconceptions, or ineffective practices the system is liberating itself from. Furthermore, schools are encouraged to use these tools for self-reflection and talent development.	**Reflection Tool (Massachusetts Department of Education)**
Use protocols when facilitating conversations about race and racial equity to assure that the discourse itself is equitable.	**Coffee Talk Equity Protocol (The School Reform Initiative)** **Designing for Equity Conversation Protocols (Next Generation Learning)**

Implication 2: Deep Family and Community Engagement

Parents and community members should play the role of co-creator in districts and schools; this includes all levels within and around the organization. Providing all parents explicit and relevant opportunities to engage, offer feedback, make decisions, lead, and govern is the Northstar of equity frameworks. The aim is to share power with students, families, and communities. This can also be extended to community-based authorizing practices. Additionally, the community must be reflected in the staff, operations, culture, and programming of the school. The cultural components of the school and the community mirror each other rather than oppose each other.

Recommendations	*Implementation Tools*
Use culturally and linguistically responsive methods of collecting data and feedback from parents, students, and the community; use these methods (multilingual surveys, focus groups, and 1:1 phone calls) as an opportunity to listen deeply to the community. Use this data to set universal goals and design responsive practices.	**Copilot-Elevate Student Survey (PERTS)** **Cultivate Staff Survey (University of Chicago)** **Youth Truth Student Survey** **Youth Liberty Squad Survey**

Co-create school systems and policies with the community, and be intentional about equitable representation in parent and community task forces and design teams. Articulate and train educators on successful inclusive partnerships.	The rubric of Inclusive Community and Family Partnerships (Chicago Public Schools)
Use families and community members to review curriculum and school culture systems for relevancy through a rigorous monitoring and feedback cycle.	CR-S Curriculum Score Cards (New York University)
Place high priority on recruiting and retaining Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern leaders and teachers.	Diversifying the Teaching Profession: How to Recruit and Retain Teachers of Color (Learning Policy Institute)
Directly center families and communities in school design and authorizing processes.	Communities at the Center: Guide for Charter School Authorizers (National Association of Charter School Authorizers)
Partner with community organizations dedicated to racial equity and family advocacy; they have the potential to guide the organization through culturally relevant communication strategies, outreach, professional development, etc.	RISE Colorado Transform Education Now

Implication 3: Focus on Culture and Identity

It is through identifying with one's ethnic and cultural group that students build confidence and a strong sense of self-efficacy. The vehicle to getting there is an inclusive program that harnesses belonging through its staffing, curriculum, and cultural routines and rituals. It entails focusing on the perspective from which history, science, literature, and other content is taught; it implies a more systemic approach than the inclusion of a unit on a particular culture or heritage in a traditional humanities textbook or a celebration during an assigned history month. The goal of creating a confident identity at school requires a sustaining and positive reflection of one's self.

Recommendations	*Implementation Tools*
Adopt and/or create clear criteria for cultural sustaining practice in the teaching and learning cycle; use this criterion in creating and reviewing curriculum, teacher evaluation systems, and school culture models.	**CR-S Curriculum Score Cards (New York University)** **Turnaround for Children Cultural Curriculum Audit Tool** **Equity Self Assessment Tool for Administrators and Teachers (Colorado Department of Education)**
Use a specific protocol for applying culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy to build a positive student identity alongside content knowledge and skills. Protocols provide educators with a step-by-step process for revising the existing standards-based curriculum for cultural pluralism and equality.	**Cultivating Genius: A Framework for Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy**
Center curriculum and instruction on what Black, Indigenous, LatinX, Asian, and Middle Eastern Students can relate to and feel positive about identifying with. This includes using an ample amount of literature, scholarship, science, and philosophy of diverse peoples across all content areas.	**CR-S Curriculum Toolkit (New York University)** **Anti-Defamation League (ADL) Anti-Biased Building Blocks Curriculum**
Incorporate neuroscience in your equity framework as Hammad (2018) does in her Ready for Rigor framework. Apply the interconnections of intellective capacity and culture to the classroom and organizational culture through intentionally attending to these skills: self and social awareness, learning partnerships, and information processing.	**Ready for Rigor: A Framework for Culturally Responsive Teaching**

Implication 4: Remove Challenges and Barriers through Transforming Systems

Inequitable racial outcomes are not the result of deficiencies within students, families, or communities but the result of mental models, systems, and practices that are implicitly and/or explicitly biased and discriminatory. Districts, schools, and other systems are compelled to audit their programs for inequitable practices and engage with the community to revise and replace programming. This takes

a systematic and holistic approach.

Recommendations	*Implementation Tools*
Take a step by step approach to identifying and responding to the challenges and barriers faced by students furthest away from the district or school's universal goals.	**Target Universalism 5 Step Approach (The Othering and Belonging Institute at the UC Berkeley)** **Targeted Universalism Action Map (Chicago Public Schools).**
Directly resource organizational goals and priorities aligned to equity; engage a diversity of stakeholders in the budgeting cycle and use financial policies to hold the organization accountable.	**Resource Equity Guidebooks (Alliance for Resource Equity)** **Direct Resourcing Equity Tool (Chicago Public Schools)**
Conduct an equity audit of fair policies and systems to revise and replace them if corrective action is needed.	**Racial Equity Impact Assessment (Chicago Public Schools)** **Equity Audit for Schools (Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.)**

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Appendix A: CDE's Schools of Choice 2021 Equity Convening Event Agenda

AGENDA

Welcome & Keynote

8:30 AM - 9:30 AM

Welcome
Bill Kottenstette, CDE Schools of Choice Office

Keynote

Dr. Manya Whitaker

Manya the founder of Blueprint Educational Strategies. Manya received her doctorate in developmental psychology from Vanderbilt University and my B.A. in educational psychology from Dartmouth College. She has worked as an educational consultant since 2009 and established Blueprint Educational Strategies in 2013. As an Associate Professor of Education at Colorado College, Manya teaches courses in Urban Education, Education Reform, Diversity and Equity in Education, and Educational Psychology. She has published numerous journal articles and book chapters about family engagement in children's schooling, urban charter school quality, and preparing teachers to more effectively work with diverse students.

Panel

9:30 AM - 10:30 AM

Applying Equity Frameworks for Transforming Policy and Decision-making
This panel brings together school, central office, and management personnel who engage one or more equity frameworks in their organization. This candid dialogue will share ways in which to embed these frameworks, the successes, pitfalls, and obstacles that present as they navigate the organizational "WILL" to engage in policy and decision-making.

Moderator: Dr. Aaron Griffen
Panelists: Brittney Stroh, Atlas Prep, Casey Simpson, Southwest Open School, Dr. Natalie Lewis, DSST

Break

10:30 AM - 10:40 AM

Moving from Theory to Practice Workshops

10:40 AM - 12:00 PM

During the Moving from Theory to Practice Workshops, participants will dig deeper into one of three equity frameworks: Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Care, Culturally Sustaining, and Targeted Universalism. Facilitators will provide an overview of the framework and highlight how they have moved from theory to practice. Sessions will conclude with time for participants to reflect on applying an equity framework to their work.

Workshop #1

Culturally Responsive Trauma-Informed Care

Presenter: Angele Davenport & Megan Brennan, Resilient Futures

Workshop #2

Culturally Responsive Sustaining Education

Presenters: Terri Bissonette, American Indian Academy of Denver; Valerie Siow, NACA; Sherrell Lang, Kwiyagat Community Academy

Workshop #3 Targeted UniversalismPresenter: Stephen Menendian, Othering, and Belonging Institute

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Reflection & Lunch

12:00 PM - 12:45 PM

Reflection Share Out

12:45 PM - 1:15 PM

Panel

1:15 PM - 2:15 PM

Leveraging parents & community when applying equity frameworks

Parents and community members are key stakeholders in our schools' development and continuous improvement. In this session, we will hear from a collection of school and state-level community and parent organizers about the ways that parents and community stakeholders could and should be included when applying equity frameworks for continuous improvement and policy review efforts as well as the potential implications of not including these critical stakeholders.

Moderator: Karega Rausch, NACSA

Panelists: Nic Martinez, TEN, Dani Morello, STRIVE Prep, Willyn Webb, Vision Charter Academy

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Break

2:15 PM - 2:25 PM

Workshops

2:25- 3:25

Sharing Power: Centering parents in our models
Description: In this workshop, participants will unpack the fears and hesitations about working to engage parents in Equity planning. We will address how to center the most impacted and marginalized families first to garner support and feedback before revealing a fully developed decision-making plan of action for all stakeholders.
Presenter: Dr. Aaron Griffen

Community Centered Authorizing

Presenter: Karega Rausch, NACSA, & Alex Medler, CACSA

Closing

3:25 PM - 3:45 PM

Application - Commitments and follow-up