Integrating Equity and Networked Improvement

Each network in the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation's Network for School Improvement (NSI) initiative seeks to improve student outcomes focused on expanding learning and post-secondary success for traditionally underserved students. While focusing the work to specifically improve outcomes for marginalized students is one aspect of centering attention to equity in educational systems, the ways in which NSI engage in improvement work must also be infused with equitable mindsets and practices. Hub leaders do this in a variety of ways. The work of building equitable networks begins by intentionally selecting network members to represent and honor diverse perspectives—most importantly voices that reflect the youth and communities in which

Network hubs then work to engage a broad array of stakeholders to identify problems or systemic improvement opportunities and understand the system that creates inequitable learning opportunities for students. By inviting a wide array of stakeholders into decision making processes and data collection efforts, hub leaders can begin to center equity in the continuous improvement tools and methods used. In these ways, they seek to build an equitable culture within their improvement network.

Spotlighting Networks for School Improvement

Based on 2022 Network Health Survey data, four NSI were achieving in equity-related network processes and three NSI had statistically significant growth in this area.[*] In this brief, we summarize some of the practices these networks use to integrate equity and continuous improvement work. Some patterns emerge as leaders describe:

- Intentionally recruiting diverse membership
- Integrating student voice into the work
- Expanding data collection and decision-making rights

New York City Department of Education City-Wide Networked Improvement Community for Multilingual Learners

Each year begins with discussions to define and norm on racial and linguistic equity; biases and systems of oppression; and language and power. Coaches use these tools to build relationships and support teams to develop a shared vision for racial equity. Every school team member also **gathers the perspective of students** through *journey maps* as a crucial part of understanding the problem. These foundational pieces set teams up to use our **data equity protocol to ensure they are reviewing multiple types of data with a careful understanding of what the data does and does not offer**. All these pieces ensure an equity-centered engagement with the subsequent fishbone diagram, driver diagram, and Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles.

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[*] ***Note on methodology:*** NSI were considered "achieving" in an area on the 2022 Network Health Survey if they were in top 25% relative to all 2021 NSI. They were considered "significantly improving" if members' perspectives in 2022 were significantly more positive than their perspectives in 2021 (based on a standardized t-statistic).

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California Education Partners: 8th Grade

Student success is always at the center of our work. Within the On Track NSI we used student data and system investigation to surface areas in each district where specific groups of students were being underserved. Rather than use data to blame or shame participants, **we continually used data as a tool to measure progress in each district for the students at the center of this work.** The overwhelming majority of our districts serve high numbers of socio-economically disadvantaged Latinx students. Using common historical data (D and F grades) allowed the network to internalize the moral imperative that this work is about closing gaps and opening doors for students who had historically been left behind.

Team Leads are supporting school teams to move to inclusive language (e.g., Discourse II language) in their team meetings.
-CORE

CORE

One of the ways the CORE Team has been **integrating our equity imperative is through the use and revisions of data protocols and data displays.** One simple tweak we have tried is having **student group data displays for off-track as the prominent display**, which can help to identify disparities in performance.

We also **modified our data protocol** so that teams reflect on the changes that they have tried, what students have been the focus of those changes, and what were the results. By giving teams this frame to discuss, many have made adaptations to their programs by considering how they reach the students who are least well-served.

We provided training to Team Leads with strategies for **supporting school teams to move to inclusive language (e.g., Discourse II language) in their team meetings.**

The Dallas Independent School District/Institute for Learning Network for School Improvement

The Dallas ISD/IFL Network for School Improvement has used a multi-tiered approach to engaging an equity lens throughout our work with Dallas ISD administrators, teachers, and students. We began our root cause analysis work by inviting teachers to **examine their own beliefs and cultural backgrounds**. Additionally, we worked to **give voice to the experiences of teachers and students** through a series of empathy interviews. These interviews focused on inviting teachers and students to tell the stories of their experiences with literacy instruction. **These stories then informed the development of our instructional tests of change.**

Our instructional framework was co-developed with teachers to center relevant and engaging texts, and engage every student in cognitively demanding literacy instruction using student-centered practices. Through a series of bright spots and empathy interviews, we were able to highlight the changes in teaching and learning happening at network schools and what those changes have done for students. Through a partnership with Community Design Partners, we have brought teachers and students into a **student-driven collaborative instructional development process**, where they were able to use our student-centered routines to explore social, cultural, racial, and self-identity development.

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Teach Plus

The Teach Plus NSI is structured around supporting school-based teams to implement continuous improvement cycles in their middle schools. By coaching teacher leaders on CI and teacher leadership best practices and administrators on CI and distributed leadership best practices, Teach Plus is growing capacity at the individual school level to implement teacher-led continuous improvement, driven by middle school grade level teams. We have integrated equity into our work with schools in the following ways:

- We base our coaching and professional development on our internally created Teacher Leadership Attribute Continuum, which contains five domains: Skillful Facilitator of Adult Learning, Evidence-Based Decision Maker, Purpose-Driven Instructional Leader, Change Agent, and Equity Advocate. **The Equity Advocate strand focuses on identifying/challenging inequities in one's self, colleagues, and systems; identifying/challenging barriers to equity, and identifying/creating systems and structures to promote equity. These components are woven into our cohort meetings and convenings as part of teacher and school leaders' professional development.**
- When we talk about the impact/effort matrix of evaluating change ideas, we have also **created an equity lens through which to analyze potential change ideas**.
- We started formally using the **PERTS** Elevate survey this year, and their **equity dashboard** has been useful in terms of analyzing data through different equity lenses (race, gender, ELL status, etc.).
- **Centering the voices of our most important stakeholders, students**, through both the PERTS Elevate survey, which regularly gathers their opinions and feedback on the learning conditions they experience, and through supporting school teams to engage students in empathy interviews as part of their initial root cause analysis process.

Baltimore City Public Schools: Baltimore Secondary Literacy Improvement Community (BSLIC)

Attending to equity in the improvement process, BSLIC elevated teacher and student voices in their structures and routines. A foundational tenet of the BSLIC Teacher Fellowship is to **disrupt the normal one-way flow of information from the central office to classroom teachers by implementing structures and routines that allow district staff and leaders to learn directly from teachers' experiences with their students.** BSLIC has created teams solely composed of teachers instead of more heterogeneous "school teams" to better leverage their expertise and lived experiences for improvement.

In the early stages of BSLIC's Teacher Improvement Fellowship, teachers were given access to research and experts in secondary literacy practices to co-design change ideas; as these ideas were tested, the Fellowship narrowed its focus to the most successful practices, and teachers generated and shared learning about how they could best implement these ideas. Teacher Fellows report that **this process empowers them in a way that standard professional development doesn't because they are given the space and the tools to demonstrate, with data, what is possible in their own varied classroom contexts**.

Additionally, **teachers found insight in the voices of their students.** BSLIC improvement coaches trained teachers to regularly apply qualitative tools, like empathy interviews and surveys, to deeply understand their students' experiences with tested change ideas. This has empowered teachers to pair insights from collected qualitative data with the quantitative student progress data they were gathering, which increased their desire to include **students as partners in the improvement process.**

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