

ized teachers and families and undermined their efforts to create community.

Integrating Coherently

Advancing equity requires sustainability. District leaders sustain their work by aligning policies, systems and structures to values explicit in the equity vision and supporting school leaders to do the same.

Aligning is action when it sews together systems and structures. In our new book *Equity Warriors*, we describe 69 moves district and school leaders can take to advance equity depending on their context.

Experience has taught us that alignment is an important step on the way to building coherence. Coherence across systems and structures comes from integrating new ideas into the culture. In other words, if we are clear about our purpose and we are clear that policies, systems and structures are closely linked to our purpose, more often than not we are successful in advancing and sustaining equity.

Ultimately, advancing and sustaining equity requires school leaders — those closest to students — to take action that brings alignment and coherence. Here is one example.

The professional journey of a principal of a middle school in a large Midwestern district — whom we will refer to as Ron Brown — was unpredictable. He was a highly regarded senior district administrator. With just a few years before retirement, he volunteered to become principal of the middle school, which served a neighborhood overwhelmed by poverty, violence and high rates of cancer due to environmental conditions. Despite a decade of attention and resources focused on improving instruction, the middle school remained one of the lowest performing in the state.

Brown breathed life into the school. He tightened operations to provide a safe learning environment. He pushed teachers with his charismatic style and decisive comments, letting teachers know he expected more from them than they had shown. When a teacher had compassion and worked for the kids, Brown found resources for that teacher, but he made life difficult for those who did not respect and believe in students.

Brown knew the transition would take time and that inexperienced teachers who were fill-

ing vacancies might be intimidated or feel unsafe when realities from the neighborhood spilled into the building. After explaining his vision and expectations, he asked new hires to promise to stay for three years to provide continuity for students. Teachers said remembering that promise carried them through discouraging moments.

Brown's expectations came with social and emotional supports for adults. He initiated incentive awards, student recognition events and programs that recognized teachers and caretakers of students. Students wrote about adults they admired and read their stories at celebration events. Brown sent a daily newsletter containing announcements, recognitions and resources. He visited classrooms, observed teaching and talked with students. He expected teachers to use the professional learning resources. He reorganized counselors so they could know students better.

When he retired after three years, alignment had taken place. Student performance on state testing had increased significantly. It marked an important beginning in changing the school's culture.

Staff and students trusted him. They knew what Brown valued by what he expected and inspected. He was certain about the values and the culture he was trying to build and less rigid about the steps to be taken. The middle school was on the road to coherence by forming a culture that valued learning from doing, focusing on progress and accepting mistakes made along the way.

Acting Consistently

District and school leaders advance and sustain their equity agenda by redirecting their organization's culture. Leading with vision and shared values enables others to find their place in the work and to take responsibility. Assessing readiness and preparing to act consistent with the values builds confidence and efficacy.

Aligning and bringing coherence to systems and structures over time binds a community in common purpose. It can be done. It is being done every day. We have seen it. ■

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