



# **IN PURSUIT OF RACIAL EQUITY** **A PATHWAY FOR ACTION AND** **TRANSFORMATION IN EDUCATION**

**BY**

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## ABOUT EDUDREAM

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Established in 2016 and based in Chicago, EduDream is a Latina-owned education consulting firm that partners with foundations, education agencies, and nonprofits working to ensure educational equity for racially and economically diverse students. We advance our mission by providing research and program evaluation, data analytics and insights, and strategic planning.

EduDream is committed to empowering communities and making research and data accessible.

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Monica brings 15+ years of applied research experience working with education organizations to turn data into actionable information that directs strategic, programming and policy decisions. She has substantial experience providing robust but realistic technical assistance to education leaders to guide continuous learning and improvement decisions. A daughter of immigrants, Monica experienced the power of education in transforming her future. She is passionate about improving access to educational opportunities so all children learn, grow, and achieve their dreams. Monica holds an MPA from New York University's Wagner School of Public Service, and a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy from the University of Chicago.

### **MICHELLE OLIVA, CO-FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR**

Michelle V. Oliva forges lived experiences and equity lens with 15+ years of applied research, evaluation, policy analysis and strategic planning. Michelle helps education organizations understand perception data and unpack contextual factors that may explain community and student experiences, values, assets, and challenges as well as systemic barriers. She has substantial experience facilitating focus groups, leading interviews, conducting landscape scans, facilitating retreats, and building capacity. As a daughter of immigrants, raised in a multi-generational, low-income household impacted by the prison pipeline, alcoholism, drug abuse and failing public school system, Michelle is committed to advancing educational equity for racially and economically diverse students and communities. Michelle holds a Master of Arts in Social Sciences from the University of Chicago, and a Bachelor of Arts in Public Policy.



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# KEY DEFINITIONS

## Diversity

The presence of different types of people from a wide range of different identities and with different perspectives, experiences, etc.

**Source:** Merriam-Webster

## Inclusion

Putting diversity into action by creating an environment of involvement, respect, and connection – where the richness of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives create value.

**Source:** Diversity Journal

## Equity

The process of removing the predictability of success or failure that correlates with any social or cultural factor (such as race), examining biases, and creating inclusive environments.

**Adapted from:** The National Equity Project

**EDUCATION EQUITY.** The moral and civil rights obligation to ensure that students receive the supports and resources they need to succeed, regardless of background, race, color, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, religion, place of origin, native language, socioeconomic status, or any other discriminating factor. Success hinges on access to a school environment equipped for safe and stimulating learning opportunities. Resources for social and emotional growth and excellent educators who can keep students on track to graduate from high school ready for college or careers are also necessary.

**Adapted from:** U.S. Department of Education

**EQUITY LENS.** An equity lens creates a different context to see diverse learners, to value and embrace their similarities and differences, and to find ways of appropriately responding to and optimizing on those various characteristics to support, nurture, learn with, guide, and help move them to success as a part of their experience in public schools, college, and life.

**RACIAL AND ETHNIC EQUITY.** Racial or ethnic identity no longer predicts life outcomes.

## OTHER TERMS

**EXPLICIT BIAS.** Biases that people are aware of and that operate consciously. These beliefs are expressed directly.

**IMPLICIT BIAS.** Biases that people are usually unaware of, and that operate at the subconscious level. These beliefs are generally expressed indirectly.

**INSTITUTIONAL RACISM.** Policies, practices, and procedures that work better for White people than people of color, often unintentionally.

**PRIVILEGE.** Having access to an unearned set of possessions, conditions, rights, or immunities of value, enjoyed by some while others do not have access due to an aspect of identity.

**STRUCTURAL RACISM.** A history and current reality of institutional racism across all institutions, combining to create a system that negatively impacts communities of color.

**STUDENTS OF COLOR.** Generally defined as non-White students who may identify as Black, African-American, Asian, South Asian, Middle Eastern, Pacific Islander, Latinx, Native Indigenous, and multiracial.







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# INTRODUCTION

**Access to quality education and learning opportunities should not be predetermined by personal and social identifiers like race, ethnicity, gender, income, birthplace, neighborhood, language, religion, or disability.**

Yet, institutional and structural racism in education perpetuate racial disparities. Although students of color are the new majority in the United States, lack of opportunity for an even start and a strong finish persists for far too many.

Addressing systemic inequities in our education system, made worse by COVID-19 school closures, requires centering on racial equity solutions. For too long, education leaders have tip-toed around racial equity, afraid to upset stakeholders, especially those with power and privilege.

**We can no longer accept the status quo.** We are living through a racial reckoning in the United States. Now is the time to address inequities directly, engage in courageous conversations, and move toward racial healing.

Outwardly, corporations, agencies, and organizations across the country are acknowledging institutional racism and the need to do better by and for people of color. However, we must challenge ourselves and do the hard work to dismantle racism.

This means we acknowledge our own biases that deny access and opportunity for students of color, identify and address oppression and privilege, and remove existing barriers to equitable opportunities.

Recognizing the need for tools and approaches to address equity that are explicitly designed for the education context, EduDream developed the [EduDream Equity Toolkit](#) (EET™). Our toolkit helps facilitate difficult yet necessary conversations about racial inequities. With guided action planning, the EET sparks discussions among education leaders and provides insights into addressing inequities within their local school buildings and the broader school district.

This report highlights the current state of educational inequities and national efforts to address them through policy, resources, tools, and technical assistance. Based on our review of over sixty equity-centered resources, we find that few toolkits are explicitly designed for K-12 schools and districts. We make a case for practical tools and resources, such as the EET™, to support education leaders in their equity work. Finally, based on our analysis of federal efforts to advance equity and a new administration that is prioritizing racial justice, we outline immediate action steps the Biden-Harris administration can take on this matter.

## A SNAPSHOT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS

American public education is the great equalizer in our democratic society. Access to quality public education opens doors to opportunities. It paves the path to success as individuals and productive citizens.

**Today, individuals with higher education levels are more likely to be employed, earn higher wages, be more civically engaged, and move up the socioeconomic ladder.<sup>1</sup>**

Yet, the challenge of ensuring all students in America have an even start and a strong finish—regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status—persists.

Recent data demonstrate that over 50 percent of all students in U.S. public schools are students of color. Projections also show that the percentage is likely to increase.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ma, J., Pender, M & Welch, M. (2016). [Education pays: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society](#). Washington, D.C.: The College Board.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary and Secondary Education," 2000–01 and 2015–16; and National Elementary and Secondary Enrollment Projection Model, 1972 through 2027. See Digest of Education Statistics 2017, table 203.50.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education, National Assessment of Educational Progress, 2019.

Yet, students of color continue to underperform on several measures of academic performance. Since 2003, student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) has slowly increased but racial achievement gaps persist in 4th grade Reading and 8th grade Math.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, low-income White students have higher educational outcomes than higher-income Black and Latinx students. This suggests structural racism underpins racial disparities.

### A NOTE ON THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The achievement gap is a measure based on standardized test scores, which in many ways simplifies the problem and solutions to improving academic performance. The achievement gap is a narrow measure of what students know and can do. At the same time, we can use it to advocate for more resources and supports for schools. Unfortunately, it also impacts our perception of Black and Latinx student intelligence levels. It can incorrectly imply that non-White students are less capable of achievement.

The achievement gap tends to mask the **education debt** – the cumulative impact of fewer opportunities and resources held back from students of color over decades.<sup>4</sup> This debt is not only financial but also historical, sociopolitical, and moral. If we focus instead on addressing the education debt by creating equality of opportunity, we're closer to forging a better educational future for young people.

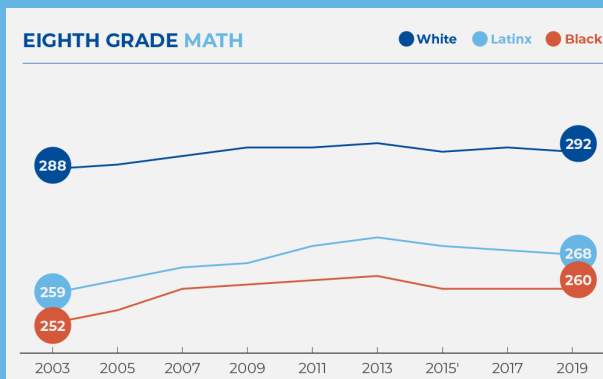
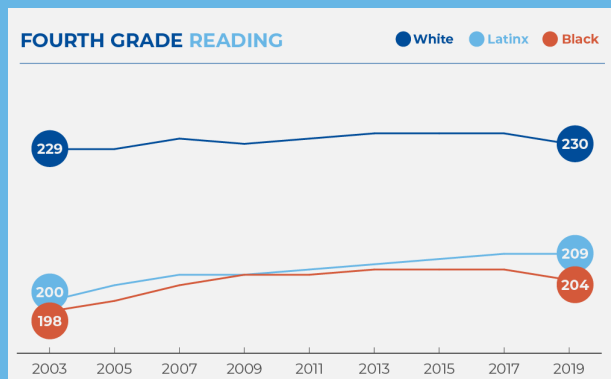
<sup>4</sup> Ladson-Billings, G. (2006). [From the Achievement Gap to the Education Debt: Understanding Achievement in U.S. Schools](#). Educational Researcher, 35(7), 3–12.



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## DEMONSTRATING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP



**SOURCE:** U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Statistics, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)

Educational inequities are evident beyond elementary schools. Students of color, especially those living in poverty, experience the high school and college admissions process differently. For example, they have less access to advanced high school coursework, college-credit bearing classes, and college preparation resources.

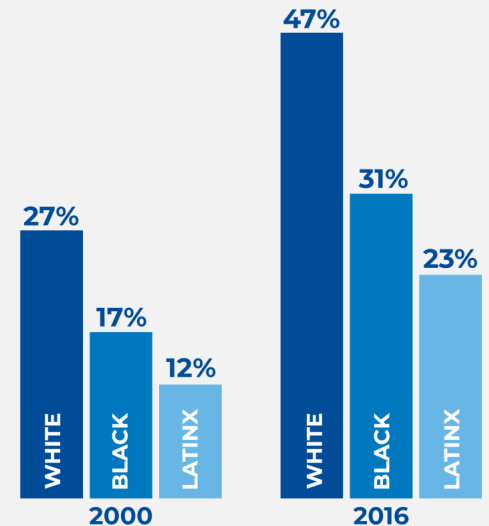
Students of color continue to face barriers to entering and completing college. In fact, growth in degree attainment among White adults has outpaced Black and Latinx adults nationwide. For example, in 2000, 16.8 percent of Black adults and 11.5 percent of Latinx adults had earned some form of a 2-year college degree or higher, compared to 27.1 percent of White adults.

By 2016, degree attainment for White adults jumped to 47.1 percent. During that same time, degree attainment among Black adults grew to only 30.8 percent and 22.6 percent for Latinx adults.<sup>5</sup>

For students of color who complete college, higher education provides an opportunity for economic mobility. Unfortunately, our current education system isn't transforming the lives of those who need it most.


**The opportunity gap prevails due to persistent institutional and structural racism in our education systems. The EET is a resource for education leaders to address these inequities holistically.**

#### COMPARING DEGREE ATTAINMENT IN THE U.S.



SOURCE: The Education Trust, *The State of Higher Education Equity*

<sup>5</sup> The Education Trust, [The State of Higher Education Equity](#)



# **A REVIEW OF RACIAL EQUITY TOOLS & APPROACHES**

## FEDERALLY SUPPORTED EFFORTS TO ADVANCE EQUITY

**For the last 50 years, the federal government's role has been to protect “the education of disadvantaged children,” as articulated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965.**

ESEA authorized additional funds to schools serving large percentages of low-income students, English Learners, and students with disabilities. Since then, presidential administrations have updated or evolved the scope of ESEA.

In more recent history, the federal government's role and corresponding funding have significantly decreased since 2016, with implications for state and district leaders.

Without guidance and support from the federal government, local education leaders must redefine educational policies, identify priority areas, and implement targeted strategies to address inequities.

One of the significant challenges facing public education leaders today is addressing the unique needs of students from diverse racial, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.

In this section, we highlight federal efforts to support educational equity. If adequately funded, these policies could further advance local education leaders' equity work. We also present state and district approaches to address educational inequities.



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# A 50-YEAR HISTORY OF FEDERAL EDUCATION POLICY BY DECADE

## 1960s

**1965.** President Johnson's administration passes the **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** as part of its "War on Poverty." The Act provided federal funds to help low-income students, resulting in the initiation of Title I and other bilingual education programs.

## 1970s

**1975.** The **Education for All Handicapped Children Act** requires public schools to provide free, appropriate education to students with disabilities.

## 1980s

**1983.** Although the Reagan administration briefly rolled back many ESEA provisions, the release of ***A Nation at Risk*** pushed for the restoration of previous requirements and added new recommendations. This landmark report pointed out persistent inequalities in the education system and called for equitable opportunities for all students.

## 1990s

**1994.** President Clinton reauthorizes ESEA as **Improving America's Schools Act**, which connected Title I funding to efforts that help students achieve rigorous statewide academic standards. It also mandated that states test at least once in elementary, middle, and high school.

## 2000s

**2001.** President George W. Bush reauthorizes ESEA as the **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act**, requiring an annual test in grades 3-8 and once in high school. States had to demonstrate "adequate yearly progress," and report student achievement data by subgroups including race, ethnicity, and learning ability. The lowest-performing schools faced funding cuts or closure. Despite its intention to ensure equitable outcomes for all students, NCLB caused some schools to narrow their curriculum and lower their academic standards, especially those serving disadvantaged students.

**2009.** The **American Reinvestment and Recovery Act** earmarked more than \$90 billion for education, including the *Race to the Top* initiative, aimed at spurring K-12 education reform.

## 2010s

**2011.** The Obama administration attempts to ease strict NCLB accountability measures through waivers, which allowed states to design their own methods to support low-performing schools. The waivers came under fire by civil rights organizations because they did not include equity measures to ensure access and opportunity for all students.<sup>6</sup>

**2013.** The Obama administration creates a nonpartisan **Commission on Equity and Excellence in Education** within the ED. The Commission's first report<sup>7</sup> highlights imbalances in funding, early education, teacher quality, and resources for teachers and students. The Commission called for policies and evidence-based proposals that support educational equity.

**2015.** President Obama reauthorizes ESEA as the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**, with a new focus on assessing student achievement by multiple measures.

<sup>6</sup> Forte 2018, **Under ESSA, Achieving Equity in Education Is Still Challenging**

<sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Education, **For Each and Every Child—A Strategy for Education Equity and Excellence**, Washington, D.C., 2013.

The 2014 *Excellent Educators for All* initiative and the 2015 reauthorization of ESEA, as amended by the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* required that low-income and students of color have access to experienced and qualified teachers. ESSA also required districts to submit plans to their state education agencies (SEAs), explaining how they will ensure equitable access to effective teachers.

Before 2017, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) outlined a national expectation for equitable student outcomes and allocated resources to ensure states and districts could effectively implement their equity plans. **One key element in these federal efforts was the creation of state equity labs.**

In addition to equity labs, the ED also supported states' efforts to advance educational equity through regional technical assistance centers, such as the *Equitable Access Support Network (EASN)* and *Equity Assistance Center (EAC)*.

**Unfortunately, the EASN is no longer in use, and funding for regional EACs has significantly decreased. As of 2016, only four EACs — meant to serve all 50 states — are funded by the ED, down from 10 centers in 2008.**

This shift in the federal government's role in supporting state efforts has crucial implications. Specifically, states shoulder the responsibility to redefine educational policies, create a clear and shared vision of equity and excellence, and identify priority areas. This work is taxing because it requires playing the long game. It demands enormous time and effort to engage families, community members, educators and policymakers to address inequities. Without support from the federal government, this work will be piecemeal and under-resourced across the nation.

## A SNAPSHOT OF FEDERAL EFFORTS

**Equitable Access Support Network (EASN).** In partnership with the Office of State Support (OSS) of the ED, the EASN provides technical assistance to states increasing access to excellent educators for all students. The EASN also builds partnerships with other technical assistance partners, including the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), regional educational laboratories (REL), and equity assistance centers (EAC). The EASN developed several tools that can be used by states and districts, including a readiness self-assessment for states, stakeholder engagement guides, and root-cause analysis workbooks.

**Equity Labs.** In an equity lab, district representatives and other key stakeholders gather to develop and implement plans to improve access to excellent teachers for low-income students and students of color. Districts have an opportunity to examine in greater depth the state's educator equity plan and determine how to align the identified strategies to a local context. Equity labs spark conversations about how districts, state education agencies, and other partners can join forces. Together, they can overcome racial and socioeconomic injustices that may have limited student access to the teachers and education they deserve.

**Equity Assistance Centers (EACs).** Funded by the ED, EACs provide comprehensive technical assistance and training to help districts build capacity to transform school systems. EACs are the nation's oldest technical assistance centers and hold a unique position, focusing on civil rights and public education implications. They provide equity toolkits and guidance for engaging in equity-oriented policy analysis.

## STRENGTHS

The EASN offered **multiple ways for states and districts to engage in equity work**, including a website to share information and connect with other states, technical assistance, communities of practice focused on data use and analysis, and access to additional useful toolkits.

*The Equitable Access Toolkit*, developed by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders for the EASN, supports states establishing their teacher equity plans. It includes **rich resources and materials to guide leaders** through critical aspects of developing strategies — stakeholder engagement, root-cause analysis, and data review.

*The Equity Lab Toolkit* was **grounded in research** using surveys, interviews, and document reviews to guide leaders in creating a state equity lab.

EACs provide individualized technical assistance to **help districts build capacity** to ensure educational equity.

## LIMITATIONS

While the EASN continues to be a technical assistance provider, **its core work is no longer funded or in use**.

Federal funding for EACs has significantly decreased since 2016, while the need for targeted technical assistance continues to increase.

Federal funding for equity labs has decreased, leaving a shortage of organizations and technical assistance providers to deliver much-needed support to states and districts.

Now that equity plans focused on high-quality teachers have been submitted to the ED, it isn't clear how states and districts will use the Equitable Access Toolkit. This is particularly true in the areas of data analysis and continuous monitoring.

The Equitable Access Toolkit focuses on improving access to effective educators. Additional priority areas could include evidence-based interventions and supports for school improvement, social and emotional learning, and specific subgroups (i.e., English Learners, students with disabilities).

## STATE AND DISTRICT APPROACHES TO ADVANCE EQUITY

**Despite recent rollbacks from the federal government, many state and district leaders continue monitoring, promoting and working toward educational equity.**

Historically, states have played a role in driving education policy. ESSA provides states the flexibility necessary to create strategies and initiatives that resonate with local needs.

District and school initiatives range from re-examining teacher recruitment processes and revamping the curriculum to harnessing **culturally responsive teaching**. However, the process of examining educational equity can be daunting, raising questions about what steps to take to uncover racial inequities and identify student assets as opposed to engaging in a deficit-based approach.

Targeted strategies to address educational inequities must respond to the unique needs and context of local communities. They must be informed by those directly impacted, including teachers, students, families, and community leaders.

Further, strategies and approaches must be intentional—requiring tools and processes to guide education leaders in this vital work. On the following pages, we highlight existing practices that state and district leaders are taking on their path to educational equity. From our review of equity-centered resources, three categories of state and district equity efforts emerged:

1. **Developing a clearly articulated racial equity plan**
2. **Using equity tools and processes to upend inequities**
3. **Building partnerships to provide districts with targeted supports**

**Culturally Responsive Teaching.** A method of instruction in which teachers include and build on students' cultural backgrounds and assets in all aspects of teaching and learning.



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## 1. DEVELOPING A CLEARLY ARTICULATED RACIAL EQUITY PLAN

While most states are committed to educational equity, each state makes its own path toward that vision. Many states have adopted racial equity goals and developed an equity plan to operationalize them.

These plans emphasize building partnerships with communities often overlooked in the process of education reform. ESSA required all states to submit equity plans, and some, such as Massachusetts, show an expanded equity focus.

**The Massachusetts Equity Plan** adopted in 2015 emphasized stakeholder engagement, data analyses, and research-based strategies. The previous equity plan had a narrow focus on the equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers. The revised approach focuses on students' learning experiences and equitable access to learning opportunities.<sup>8</sup>

As part of its Equity & Excellence Project (EEP), the National Urban League reviewed ESSA Consolidated State Plans. It assessed the plans against twelve equity indicators. Of the 37 states included in the analysis, nine states were rated excellent, 20 states were rated sufficient, and eight states were rated poor.<sup>9</sup>

The Illinois plan was rated excellent across four indicators of a high-quality curriculum. The Ohio plan was rated excellent on two of the four indicators of reporting and accountability.

- **The Illinois State Plan** demonstrated exemplary focus on equity through its extensive stakeholder engagement, out-of-school-time learning, and equitable access to high-quality curricula. The plan includes benchmarks for career and technical education, dual enrollment, science, and social and emotional learning (SEL). The state offers SEL professional development and encourages districts to use SEL as a measure in their accountability systems.
- **The Ohio State Plan** emphasized equitable access to early childhood education and learning, equitable implementation of college and career standards, and transparent data systems. The state set a long-term goal of 80 percent proficiency in Reading and Math by 2025-26 and includes all subgroups in this performance index score. Ohio is developing an "Online Evidence-Based Clearinghouse" to support school and district planning.

<sup>8</sup> Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Massachusetts State Equity Plan 2015-2019

<sup>9</sup> National Urban League. (2019). [Standards of equity and excellence: A lens on ESSA state plans](#). New York, NY: Author.

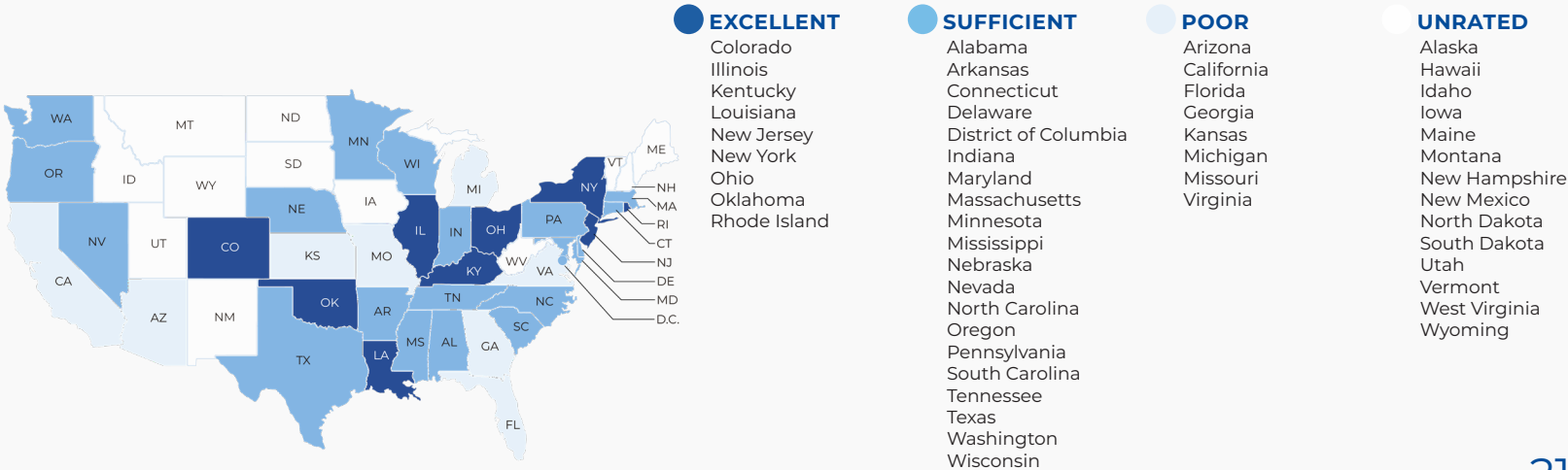
Local school districts are also spearheading efforts to devise equity plans.

- **Portland Public Schools** enacted its Racial Equity Plan into policy in 2011. The policy outlined six goals to achieve racial equity and identified four key areas that require significant investment to accomplish this. These areas include culturally responsive teaching and learning, along with family and community engagement.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Portland Public Schools, [Racial Equity Plan](#)

- **Evanston/Skokie School District 65** in Illinois conducted a 9-month equity audit in 2016. The district serves 8,000 PreK-8 students; 38 percent are low-income, and more than half are Black, Latinx, Asian, Native, and multiracial. The equity audit findings informed changes at the district level. Changes include developing a racial equity statement, proactively acknowledging cultural biases, and eliminating biased institutional structures that negatively impact student achievement. District 65's equity commitments, responsibilities, and progress are explicitly stated on their website.

## DIVING DEEPER INTO THE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE’S STATE EQUITY RATINGS



## 2. USING EQUITY TOOLS AND PROCESSES TO UPEND INEQUITIES

While developing an equity plan marks a milestone, states need tools and processes to bring those plans to life. With recent federal funding cuts to technical assistance that provided customized guidance and tools, some states, like Texas, began creating home-grown tools. Pennsylvania also created an equity toolkit in response to racially charged incidents in schools. Other states, such as Colorado, have led equity efforts for years.

- **The Texas Education Agency (TEA)** released a toolkit for districts to identify effective strategies that positively impact student learning for all in 2017. The *Texas Equity Toolkit* provides resources for district leaders to evaluate, monitor, and reflect on existing school practices that influence student experiences. While the tool is valuable, given Texas's highly decentralized education system, TEA has limited oversight and influence on each district's use of the toolkit.

- **The Pennsylvania Department of Education** released a detailed *Equity and Inclusion Toolkit*<sup>11</sup> in 2017 to identify and prevent discrimination and bias in school environments. In 2016, racially charged incidents occurred in some schools in the state. This tool emerged to combat bias and discrimination in schools. Emphasis was placed on pro-active prevention and response alongside recovery to ensure students of color feel safe, respected, and welcomed in schools.
- **The Colorado Department of Education (CDE)** created the *Equity Toolkit*<sup>12</sup> in 2010. The toolkit supports school and community leaders in addressing bias, harassment, prejudice, and discrimination in their school communities. It provides resources to help schools work through a crisis and create intervention plans for a more accepting culture. The toolkit includes assessments for administrators, teachers, and students, as well as training resources.

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<sup>11</sup> Pennsylvania Department of Education. (2017). [\*Pennsylvania Equity and Inclusion Toolkit\*](#).

<sup>12</sup> Colorado Department of Education. (2010). [\*Equity Toolkit for Administrators\*](#).

### 3. BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS TO PROVIDE DISTRICTS WITH TARGETED SUPPORTS

Some states sought partnerships with local organizations, research centers, and education leaders to provide districts with targeted supports to advance equity. State education leaders also leverage funding and incentives to help districts close achievement and opportunity gaps based on a local context.

- **The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE)** launched *IL-EMPOWER* with feedback from schools and community partners. This plan revises the state's approach to school improvement. The process starts with a needs assessment that includes an **Equity Analysis** focused on promoting positive student outcomes. This analysis creates a foundation for using data to address access and opportunity. ISBE partnered with more than 30 technical assistance providers to support schools with capacity development in priority areas.
- **The Minnesota Department of Education** created the *Equity Specialist* position, which works with classroom teachers to increase their capacity to work on equity. Equity Specialists engage with community members and support teachers in being responsive to local community needs. Further, the state is leveraging ESSA funding to create additional positions that increase school principals' capacity to work on equity.





## POLICY & PHILANTHROPIC APPROACHES TO ADVANCE EQUITY

**Over the last decade, several policy, research, and advocacy organizations have developed new approaches to dismantle institutional racism.**

Our environmental scan found ten organizations or initiatives that provide tools, frameworks, and resources to reduce, eliminate, and prevent racial inequities. While not exhaustive, we highlight several philanthropic, policy, and nonprofit efforts that help organizations advance racial equity.

*It is important to note that since this research was conducted in 2019, several new tools have emerged.*

### PHILANTHROPY

In 2006, the **Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF)** developed the original *Race Matters Toolkit*. The toolkit helps foundation program officers, advocates, and community-based nonprofit practitioners intentionally focus efforts to produce equitable opportunities.

It includes several resources like fact sheets, a step-by-step user guide, and an organizational self-assessment. In particular, the *Racial Equity Impact Analysis* and *System Reform Strategies* tools help determine if the proposed actions or reforms are likely to produce equitable results.

AECF later provided foundational resources to launch the **Race Matters Institute**. The institute supports organizations in achieving their missions by becoming intentional about advancing racial equity in their work.

More recently, AECF partnered with several racial equity leaders to create the *Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide*. The purpose of this guide is to demonstrate how foundations or other organizations that work directly with systems, technical assistance providers, and communities can adopt a racial equity lens.

**The W.K. Kellogg Foundation (WKKF)** has also actively pursued racial equity through its programming. In 2014, WKKF launched its online *Racial Equity Resource Guide*. It provides individuals and organizations with access to resources, tools, and data to achieve racial healing and equity in their communities. An organization can customize the guide based on their needs. It includes tools that focus on racial healing, media and communications, research for action, and organizational alliances.

## LOCAL AND REGIONAL POLICY

Local and regional governments can address racial equity by implementing policy changes at multiple levels.

**The Government Alliance on Race & Equity (GARE)** is a national network of local governments working to achieve racial equity and advance opportunities for all. GARE currently partners with over 170 local and regional governments across five regional hubs to help implement racial equity frameworks, build capacity, and develop and implement strategies. Working on racial equity at the local and regional level can bring about meaningful and sustainable change.

Perhaps the most well-known and widely used racial equity tool is the *Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Toolkit*, developed by **Race Forward** in 2009. REIA is a systematic examination of how different racial and ethnic groups will likely be affected by a proposed policy or decision. REIA is used to minimize unexpected consequences for various contexts, including suggested policies, institutional practices, programs, plans, and budgetary decisions.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Keleher, T. (2009). *Racial Equity Impact Assessment Guide*. Race Forward, The Center for Racial Justice Innovation.

## NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

Other organizations have developed their unique racial equity frameworks, tools, and processes to help communities address systemic inequities. While some organizations deliver racial equity training, others move beyond this to offer a systematic approach for racial equity work. For example:

- As a technical assistance provider for the New York State Department of Education's Technical Assistance Center on Disproportionality (TAC-D), the **Metro Center at New York University (NYU)** developed a manual geared towards district leaders. It outlines a process to identify the root causes of **disproportionality in special education** as an outcome of policies, practices, and beliefs. The overrepresentation of Black and Latinx students in special education is a considerable equity concern. For 15 years, the TAC-D at the Metro Center at NYU has partnered with 75 districts across the state of New York. Progress has been positive for districts and schools that have implemented the work with fidelity over four years.<sup>14</sup>
- **Just Lead Washington** is a nonprofit established to support and grow the network of legal and community leaders working toward equity and justice in Washington State. It launched the *Washington Race Equity & Justice Initiative (REJI)* to share resources and create a support infrastructure for racial equity and justice work. The *REJI Organizational Race Equity Toolkit* was developed in 2018 to help organizations, particularly justice-oriented legal organizations, understand and incorporate racial equity into their work. The toolkit provides an assessment to understand and advance practices, policies, and culture to operationalize racial equity work, including developing plans.

<sup>14</sup> *Innovations in Equity and Systemic Change*, New York University

- Interest among research organizations to support racial equity work is growing. *Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools (RIDES)* is a **Harvard Graduate School of Education** project launched in 2016. It fosters school diversity and disrupts educational inequities by providing schools, districts, and charter management organizations with tools to move from desegregation to integration. RIDES offers various resources that are grounded in practice, including a framework for action, coaching tools, and assessments. Since 2016, RIDES has curated over 150 methods and partnered with a dozen traditional and charter schools to develop new tools and processes.
- **Beloved Community** is a nonprofit consulting firm that partners with regional coalitions of individuals and organizations to build their capacity for moving from diversity to inclusion to equity. Beloved Community uses a core set of tools to deliver capacity-building programs through individual and personalized support and a **customized multi-phase partnership with schools**. These tools include an Equity Audit that sets baselines and benchmarks and an Equity Lens Map
- **The Advancement Project**, a civil rights law, policy, and communications “action tank,” developed an action kit to help community activists: 1) collect information and data about school discipline policies and practices, 2) analyze and organize the data, and 3) develop messaging and build a base of support to advocate for pushing students toward college and careers rather than prison. The action kit, released in 2009, was informed by a decade of work with community partners on the use and devastating effects of harsh school discipline policies and practices and the increased role of law enforcement in public schools.

Results from this landscape scan reveal many equity-centered tools and resources available for nonprofits, philanthropic organizations, and schools/districts. User-friendly toolkits and online guides, such as WKKF’s *Racial Equity Resource Guide*, are comprehensive with practical examples and flexible materials to address specific local contexts.

However, toolkits are often stand-alone materials and would benefit from guidance and facilitation. There are many examples geared towards city agencies, philanthropic organizations, or colleges. **However, few toolkits are explicitly for K-12 schools and districts. Further, equity toolkits and partnerships are used less often in K-12 schools.**

# CONCLUSION

**At the core of inequitable educational access and opportunity are policies and practices—informed by racial and cultural biases—that uphold institutional barriers.**

Meeting the needs of students with different cultures, languages, and economic backgrounds necessitates an inclusive and equitable education system. Research shows that students in diverse and inclusive schools reap civic and social-emotional benefits such as cross-cultural dialogue, increased tolerance, and enhanced confidence.<sup>15</sup>

However, diversifying schools is not a silver bullet solution to addressing educational disparities. Historical efforts to integrate schools have resulted in an exodus of white students and further depletion of resources needed to maintain and strengthen school quality. Some parents, particularly white parents, use race as a proxy for school quality.<sup>16</sup> Thus, long-term and equitable investment in communities of color can do more to help districts and schools address disparities.

To forge a path toward an inclusive and equitable education system, it is incumbent on education leaders to:

1. **Be aware of their racial identity, biases (implicit or explicit), privilege, and cultural and counter-cultural experiences; and**
2. **Identify existing policies and practices that undermine equity.**

Our review of equity tools and resources found a limited availability of tools and approaches designed specifically with schools and educators in mind. To help education leaders in their equity efforts, we created the [EduDream Equity Toolkit](#), a comprehensive toolkit and system to support successful planning, implementation, and evaluation of equity-focused plans.

Advancing educational equity requires a comprehensive approach that includes a role for federal government, philanthropy, communities of color, and allies. Today, the United States is politically and racially fractured.

Further, the current economic and public health crises will likely exacerbate educational disparities. Yet, as we usher in the Biden-Harris Administration—which has prioritized racial justice and equity—there is an opportunity to take practical steps to advance educational equity.

<sup>15</sup> R. Bigler, & L. S. Liben, "A Developmental Intergroup Theory of Social Stereotypes and Prejudices," *Advances in Child Development and Behavior*, 34 (2006), 39-89. T. F. Pettigrew, and L. R. Tropp, "A Meta-Analytic Test of Intergroup Contact Theory," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 90, no. 5 (2006), 751-83. See also J. Bojsjoly, G. J. Duncan, M. Kremer, D. M. Levy, & J. Eccles, "Empathy or Antipathy? The Impact of Diversity," *American Economic Review*, 96, no. 5 (2006), 1890-1905;

<sup>16</sup> Johnson, Heather Beth and Thomas M Shapiro. 2003. *Good neighborhoods, good schools: Race and the 'Good Choices' of White Families*. In *White out: The continuing significance of racism*, ed. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva and Woody Doane. Routledge pp. 173-187

## KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are a few immediate steps the Biden-Harris Administration can take:

- **Reinvest in federal technical assistance centers, such as the Equity Assistance Centers (EACs) and Equitable Access Support Network (EASN), which were defunded under the former administration.** As mentioned in this White Paper, the EACs and EASN were providing districts and states with invaluable resources and supports to address equity. Reinvestment in EACs could mean expanding the capacity and reach of existing centers or adding more centers to ensure adequate and equitable support to districts across the United States.
- **Prioritize BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) researchers, data scientists, facilitators, and consultants to lead and advise on state and federal policy development, equity assessments, resource allocation, and community engagement efforts.** Developing targeted solutions to advance educational equity should include the voices and perspectives of historically marginalized groups. Too often, decisions are made in the absence of BIPOC experts.

- **Ensure equity is an integral component of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).** An equity analysis of state approved ESSA plans found that just four state plans adopt an equity-centered approach (e.g., provide equitable access to educational resources—including funding and effective educators). Less than half of the state plans attend to equity in outcomes.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, many states are not including student groups such as English learners or students with disabilities in calculating school ratings. These ratings are used to identify schools needing additional supports for improvement. Greater transparency is necessary to direct more resources to support schools and students, particularly those who have been disproportionately impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because educational inequity is a root cause of many other injustices faced by people of color, **we must dismantle systemic racism in the U.S. education system.** On a national level, the economic benefits of eliminating educational disparities are tremendous. Addressing educational disparities between Black and Latinx children and their White counterparts would create an estimated \$2.3 trillion increase to the U.S. economy by 2050.<sup>18</sup>

The nationwide uprisings against police brutality have led to a significant shift in conversations and attitudes about racial inequalities in America. This is a momentous time to commit to engaging in racial equity work.

<sup>17</sup>Chu, Y. (2019). What are they talking about when they talk about equity? A content analysis of equity principles and provisions in state Every Student Succeeds Act plans. Education Policy Analysis Archives, 27(158). <https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.27.4558>

<sup>18</sup>Lynch, R & Oakford, P. The Economic Benefits of Closing Educational Achievement Gaps. (2014). Center for American Progress.

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# RESOURCE LIST

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- <sup>1</sup> Ma, J., Pender, M & Welch, M. (2016). **Education pays: The benefits of higher education for individuals and society**. Washington, D.C.: The College Board.
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