Culture Shift: Four Traps that Undermine Action Steps Toward an Equitable Learning Environment for All Students

Office of Improvement Planning, Exceptional Student Services Unit and

Office of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education

2023

ALL
MEANS
ALL

Culture Shift: Four Traps that Undermine Action Steps Toward an Equitable Learning Environment for All Students

Pathway Toward an Equitable Learning Environment for All Students

The pathway to equity moves through various phases of personal growth, and problem analysis resulting in a commitment to change barrier-producing practices. Each step on the pathway requires personnel to persist in deeper levels of exploration and reflective discussions to identify systemic gaps for historically underserved students and implement strategies to mitigate those challenges.

Exploration

The Exploration Stage is a critical starting place that requires personnel to engage in their own learning, self-reflection, and increased understanding of key concepts related to equity. This includes taking the time to explore what is required to implement an equitable system, identify what needs to be changed, how to make change, who will do it, and how to improve the likelihood that change is meaningful and sustainable. The overall goal of this stage is to create clarity regarding personal areas of growth, the equity needs of the school/district community, and initial actions taken.

Root Cause Analysis

In this phase, a broad base of community perspectives is needed to fully examine all student groups and needs. To bridge the mismatch between our words and actions we must collectively gather and examine information to understand existing gaps and potential underlying cause(s). These causes occur across a spectrum of areas and may be rooted in systems, ideologies, practices, and personal biases of individuals. Having a broad base of perspectives will increase the likelihood these root causes are unearthed, exposed, and addressed. Root causes are statements that describe the deepest underlying cause, or causes, of performance challenges and they become the focus of major improvement strategies.

The effective use of data to engage in root-cause analysis is foundational to gaining a clear picture of the presence of systemic equity gaps. Data analysis begins with collecting different types of data and information to identify trends and explore gaps across a variety of performance indicators.   Accessing a broad base of information does not always equate to addressing every existing gap but provides opportunities to identify discrete focus areas for additional examination. Once areas of need are unearthed, a more focused analysis may occur to gain a clearer picture of the existing challenges. In general, the process for determining root causes can be thought of as a funnel, starting with the broadest thinking possible about causes related to each prioritized performance challenge and systematically narrowing and deepening the collective understanding until the team arrives at a root cause. Root cause analysis may involve multiple layers of analysis; more information helps to illustrate a clearer picture of each equity-based priority performance challenge. To access resources and learn more go to Root Cause-Overview/CDE (state.co.us).

Equity Gaps Identified

It is not enough to acknowledge the existing barriers and inequities faced by our students. The actual impact on the lives of marginalized populations has life-long impacts on our youth regardless of our good intentions. Therefore, the importance of acting as soon as possible to alleviate the barriers facing historically impacted groups of students cannot be overemphasized. A comprehensive root cause analysis promotes the capacity of leaders to create action-plans designed to timely address equity gaps. Becoming agents of change requires a commitment to join with others to take positive steps to remove barriers and promote equitable practices within each educational institution.

This resource is designed to guide leaders in identifying persistent and destructive traps that will undermine action steps to address the identified equity gaps.

Understanding Four Traps that Undermine Action Steps Toward an Equitable Learning Environment for All Students

The concept of equity traps reveals the conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors that trap teachers, administrators, and others, preventing them from creating systems that are equitable for all students. These thinking patterns and behaviors deter educators from believing all students can be successful learners. The traps are both individual and collective, often reinforced among administrators and teachers through formal and informal communication, assumptions, and beliefs (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004, p.603). Understanding each trap supports moving forward, avoiding each trap in the future, and supports a plan to eliminate disparities that persist in accessing a high-quality education for all students. The four traps identified below can hinder efforts toward an equitable learning environment. An equitable learning environment is the responsibility of schools and districts to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education. All students, regardless of race, gender, color, national origin, or zip code, learning needs; deserve a high- quality education that includes resources such as academic and extra-curricular programs, strong teaching, technology, and instructional materials and safe school facilities.

- **Seeing Only Deficits:** The deficit-thinking model is an endogenous (internal) theory-a theory that posits and deems the student who fails in school does so principally because of internal deficits or deficiencies. Such deficiencies manifest, it is alleged, in limited intellectual abilities, linguistic shortcomings, lack of motivation to learn, and immoral behaviors (Valencia, 2010).
- **Rationalizing Bad Behavior and Unsuccessful Practices:**   These address two issues including the inequitable treatment of students and maintaining practices that are unsuccessful and limit student learning. Educators maintain their bad thinking and practices because they excuse their behavior or practices and frame the problem as residing outside themselves. The problem is not the way these adults just think about or treat students; the problem is seen as the students. This rationalizing of behavior practices, this making of excuses, prevents reflection and the changing of beliefs and practices.

- **Norming the Negative:** This addresses the normalizing negative beliefs, behaviors, and practices. This means exerting group pressure on people within a school/district so that negativity becomes the normal situation for all aspects of schooling. This collective trap can mislead an entire school/district community. Norming the negative is done regarding opinions about students and their families; it is done in response to new teaching initiatives and efforts to involve the community, and anything that would disrupt the status quo.
- **Cultural Blindness:** Racial or culture erasure, which is often referred to as color-blindness, as "the sentimental idea…that racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and just see each other as human beings who are the same" (Hooks, 1992). One must ask why individuals would want to see each other as the same when it is our differences that add texture and make life more interesting. This question aside, though, the idea that we can forget about race and just see each other as human beings seems to say that race is a bad thing, that one would have to overlook or get beyond someone's race to see them as human beings-to see them as "the same" not "the other."

If the cycle of equity traps is to be broken, school leadership must first be able to understand what equity traps are and then be able to recognize or identify these traps in themselves, others and within the school/district system. The purpose of this resource is to develop an understanding of the four equity traps and gain awareness of barriers and the ways they are deployed in the lived reality of schools (McKenzie, Scheurich 2004). An exploration of school/district policies, practices, and culture through the lens of each trap will lead towards deeper conversations and ongoing reflection about specific practices. Each trap is defined, illustrated with examples in the following contexts: classroom, school, district, informal environment, and community. This resource may be used by a variety of stakeholders, including school and district administrators, teachers, paraprofessionals, and families. Each trap includes questions that are meant to generate discussions and reflect on those conscious and unconscious thinking patterns and behaviors found within the system that prevent meaningful and sustainable change. Questions within this resource correspond to each trap and can be seen more than once to demonstrate the overlapping complexity of this work.

Seeing Only Deficits

Deficit thinking is an endogenous perspective theory that "blames the victim" (Valencia, 2010, chapter 1). This theoretical perspective posits that students who experience academic achievement problems do so because they, their cultures, and their families have deficits or deficiencies. Such deficits manifest, allegedly in students' limited intellectual abilities and lack of motivation to achieve, dysfunctional cultures, and in families in which parents do not value education or raise their children to succeed in school.

Examples of Seeing Only Deficits

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
Classroom	Grouping by achievement level "My low group"	Students effectively become "tracked" or stuck in the initial group assignment. Student confidence and personal belief in capacity becomes negatively affected.	Consider where students are at a given point in time, create structures where students can move between groups, create opportunity for acceleration.	Students have an opportunity to accelerate through groups, engage in responsive instruction that meets their needs more promptly.
			Grouping is based on collaborative learning opportunities to create a trusting learning environment for students to facilitate their learning.	

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
School	"Of course, they are low performing." - students with disabilities.	Students are presumed to not be capable due to being identified as a student with a disability. Students may not have access to the same opportunities as their peers. Reinforces negative statements within the building when statements are not addressed.	Identify opportunities for students to demonstrate learning/mastery. Address adult mindsets through counterexamples and culturally responsive strategies.	Evidence of students meeting their potential creates a narrative that counters prevailing deficit orientations. Allows for an IEP to play a more meaningful role in actively driving instruction for student learning.
District	The discipline "frequent flyers"- they do not know how to act appropriately. These "kids aren't motivated to learn."	Students who may not have been explicitly taught the expectations, are not capable of change, are on the receiving end of punitive action. Those who do not conform are pushed out and are not able to benefit from education.	Engage in reflection on why motivation or behavior is a challenge, such as: What are the ultimate goals of the system? Is it about supporting students in school to learn? What are the specific behavior violations? Do the consequences contribute to "push out"? What are the behaviors indicating about students need? Investigate what behaviors might indicate about students' social-emotional needs. In school	Clarifying behavior expectations to ensure they reinforce student learning (not adult convenience). Provide an opportunity to visit behavior and instructional frameworks to ensure they are meeting student relevance, belonging and efficacy as a learner.

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
			suspension or restorative practices may bring greater alignment.	
Informal Environment (e.g., before/after school, lunch, recess)	Lunch lines for paid/school lunch program participation (e.g. X, note, announcing or writing on hands of kids) with unpaid lunch debt, or other dietary needs.	Grouping of students based on participation in free/reduced lunch program, singles-out students based on family financial circumstances or other needs.	Identify structures and training can be put in place in responding in a more inclusive and student-centered approach. Ensure students feel safe in all the school environments.	Students feel a sense of safety and belonging. Develop mutual respect between classified staff and students. Create positive non-instructional environments for students and staff.
Community/ Messaging (web, news, etc.)	"It's their culture." culture of apathy.	Assumes a denial of values that support education. Students and families are perceived as different. Allows for abdication of responsibility for connecting with students and families.	Recognize and engage with multiple avenues and multiple languages for students and families of which school is part of a larger community. Identify opportunities to develop relationships that can be built upon.	Students feel a sense of safety and belonging. Develop mutual respect between classified staff and students. Create positive non-instructional environments for students and staff.

Guiding Questions

1. Describe the ideal parent and school/district partnership.
2. What goals have been identified for improving parent engagement and empowerment?
   a. What steps have been taken towards those goals?
   b. How are goals being monitored for results? By whom?
3. What steps have schools taken to create a welcoming environment for all students?
4. What neighborhood events do staff attend? When are home visits conducted?
5. What steps have been taken to understand the history of the community? Neighborhood walks?
6. What steps are in place to support students and families with income, housing and health needs that may present a challenge?
   a. What external organizations are supporting this effort?
7. How are families supported with student learning expectations throughout the school year?
8. What barriers have been identified for all students to access grade level academic expectations?
9. What are the strategies, abilities, practices, and ideas that students bring to school from their homes and communities (assets)?
10. How are the identified student assets leveraged in the educational process?
11. What steps are in place to learn more about families and communities on a personal level?
12. What language support (translation services) are in place for school/district communication in languages that are reflective of students served?
13. How are parents involved with the decision-making process throughout the year?
14. What is the attendance rate for parent-teacher conferences?
    a. If not meeting attendance goal, what steps are identified for improvement?
15. How do students, parents and teachers have a voice during parent-teacher conferences?
16. Describe professional development to support staff with anti-deficit thinking and/or social justice.
    a. How do you know if professional development is enough to get results?
17. Describe professional development to support staff with implicit bias.
    a. How do you know if professional development is enough to understand their own implicit biases and how those shape teacher expectations for all students?
18. Describe professional development to understand poverty and the impact poverty can have on all students.
    a. How do you know if professional development is enough to understand poverty and how that can impact students?
19. Describe professional development to support staff in understanding multicultural education theory, methodology, strategies, and implementation.

    a. How do you know if professional development is enough to implement multicultural educational strategies in the classroom consistently and successfully?

20. Describe professional development to support staff with culturally responsive pedagogy.
    a. How do you know if professional development is enough to create and/or enhance a culturally responsive environment?

21. Describe support for new teachers regarding 11-15 above.
    a. How do you know if the new teacher induction program is enough to support a new teacher?
    b. Describe support for classroom management strategies and curriculum development.

22. Describe strategies to gauge teacher time management, resources, materials, and knowledge for student success.

23. Describe how teachers are supported with behavioral expectations for all students in the classroom.

24. Describe a teacher's schedule with enough time to collaborate and discuss students in depth with colleagues.

25. What supports are in place for students that are not attending school on a regular basis?

26. What is your understanding of "why" students are chronically absent?

27. What steps are taken for all students to have access to all activities, support, and events provided by the school/district?

28. How do you know all students have access to technology for classroom work?

29. How do you know all students have a clear understanding of behavioral expectations?

30. How do you know teachers have a clear understanding of laws that address the civil rights of students and student needs?

31. What steps are in place for all educators to prioritize building strong relationships with all students?

32. Describe the school/district's beliefs, values, and behaviors toward all students.

33. What steps are taken to recruit teachers that reflect the student demographics in the school?

34. What steps are taken to recruit and retain high quality educators?
    a. Do you have articulation agreements with local colleges/universities?
    b. What does your data show about teacher characteristics (teacher turnover, teacher experience, qualifications, attendance)?

35. What does your data reveal about students who have been historically underserved?

36. How are Title and general funds used to support all students who are identified as academically underperforming in the school/district?

37. What evidence do you have that Title and general funds are supporting results with academically underperforming students?

38. How are teachers held accountable for student learning?

39. How do teacher observations provide a clear understanding of how instruction is differentiated for all students in every classroom?

40. How much time is allocated for reading instruction in every classroom? Is that enough to get results?

41. Describe the multiple pathways for student success.

Rationalizing Bad Behavior and Unsuccessful Practices

Rationalizing bad behavior and unsuccessful practices: This trap includes the inequitable treatment of students and the use of practices that are unsuccessful and limit student learning.   An example of the first issue would be the educator who contends students must be dealt with harshly and punitively because it is the only behavior students understand or it is the only way to control students. An example of the second issue would be the educator that does not allow any practices that require the teacher to relinquish strict teacher control. In both examples, educators maintain their bad thinking and practices because they excuse their behavior or practices and frame the problem as residing outside themselves. The notion here is that the only arrangements that can work for some students are ones in which there are high levels of control. The problem is seen as the students and not the way these adults think about or treat students. Therefore, this rationalizing of behavior and practices, this making of excuses, prevents reflection and the changing of beliefs and practices.

Examples of Rationalizing Bad Behavior and Unsuccessful Practices

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
Classroom	Teacher interprets behavior as "disrespectful." Teacher exhibits frustration and displays reactive behavior towards students. For example, when managing the classroom, teacher yells at a student, "…Rude! Detention!"	An adult whose behavior is contingent on the behaviors of students is more likely to foster a chaotic learning environment. Ineffective classroom management can interfere with a student's ability to engage, succeed, and learn, preventing an	Clarify expectations for classroom interaction for the school. Follow-up with individual teachers as needed. Equipping teachers with support, resources, and tools for building relationships and effectively addressing	Using a school-wide system of positive expectations and support, the school has created a safe and inviting learning environment. A positive climate and culture exist where teachers know, respect, and value each student. Each student is treated with civility and honored for their unique

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
	When talking to a fellow teacher, teacher states, "These kids need to follow the rules and have respect for their teacher!"	inclusive and safe learning environment. Because the child is not treated with dignity, the student may "shut down or act out" in response to teacher reaction and student learning does not occur.	challenging student behaviors. Clarify assumptions, potential triggers and meaning of student behaviors. Educators model behaviors consistent with school and classroom expectations. Training is provided in positive school-wide practices and classroom management techniques (i.e., PBIS, Restorative Justice/Practices, etc.).	characteristics. The teacher's role is to teach and model appropriate behaviors and continually reinforce student's positive behaviors. When behavioral errors are made, teachers correct and re-teach expected behaviors. The learning environment is inclusive and safe.
School Conversations occur for the purpose of confirming or debriefing.	Categorically labelling students as, "...the bad kid," or "those parents are the reason for…" is detrimental to the student's self–image as well as to how educators view the student and their families.	Unaware of the impact that the practice of student labeling can have on a student's self–image. As well as how educators view the students and their families.	Data analysis to reframe adult mindsets on the practice of student labeling. Adult and student mindsets are shifted so that all students regardless of race, social-	Develop a commitment from all adults in the school to ensure a safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environment for all.

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
			economic status, disability etc., respond to rigorous and appropriately challenging expectations and instruction. The understanding of student needs will mitigate or prevent learning gaps from occurring. When learning gaps are present an agile and responsive learning environment with appropriate scaffolds must be available to support the learning of every child.	Leadership has established a collaborative approach to systemic change and advocates who support equity and rigor for diverse populations of students. All staff in the school agreed to teach, monitor, correct and reteach school-wide expectations to ensure a positive and productive school culture. Student voice is invited, valued and evident in all adult-student interactions. Students observe and reflect adult practices resulting in a positive

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
				and inclusive environment.
District	"It is not possible for all our schools to perform at a high level given the FRL percentages. We have lots of students from generational poverty in these schools."	Educational leaders and teachers accept communication of low expectations when making statements such as, "That school is low performing because they have a high number of poor students." The community has acceptance of low performance and self-fulfilling prophecy.	Professional development focuses on high expectations of students, definition of rigor and examples of high-quality teaching. Coaching and accountability are in place to ensure sustainability and recognizing each individual student brings diverse assets to the classroom.	Using master teachers or instructional coaches to promote or demonstrate success by modelling how teachers need to support students. Consistent data is used in multiple areas (i.e., truancy, suspension/expulsion, achievement, etc.) to identify disaggregated groups of students who are performing at a level different from their peers.
Informal Environment (e.g., before/after school)	Students are expected to maintain behaviors consistent with the expectations written in the student's discipline handbook. Adult convenience and/or fear	No one is supervising students during transitions, unstructured times, sporting events, extra-curricular, in non-classroom settings (i.e., assemblies, playground,	Quantitative and qualitative data is used to identify areas of high-risk incidents. Always engaging in active supervision of all non-	Teachers teach, monitor/scan, reinforce and correct school-wide expectations for all settings. Identify, teach, and communicate expected behaviors for all

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
	becomes more important than supervision of school community.	lunchroom, bussing, hallways, etc.). Student safety is jeopardized.	classroom events and settings by all staff. Use the three-part process for supervision: 1. Scan- move your eyes back and forth across the whole area of supervision, to see as many students as possible. 2. Move- in a pattern that is not predictable but gives you a view of all. 3. Interact with all students.	non-classroom behaviors including Hallways, lunchroom, bathrooms, buses, playground, assemblies/sports events, etc.
Community/Messaging (web, news, etc.)	School personnel are experts in education. "Stay in your lane and I will stay in mine. If anyone wants to know what I am doing, I am glad to tell them. Teachers are accountable to the principal, and the principal is accountable to the superintendent. The superintendent is accountable	Creating effective partnerships with parents, schools and communities is a key to improved student achievement. The adage "out of sight, out of mind," is not conducive to forming effective school, parent, and community	Inclusive decision-making practices are representative of the whole community. School and district-initiated, specific family participation in programs such as: shared reading, homework checking, and teamed two-way	Education is vital to the social, economic, and quality of life indices for individuals and families in local communities. Family members, business and political leaders want to know that their local schools provide engaging, culturally responsive, and safe learning

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action to Address the Trap	Opportunity for Success
	to the School Board. The School Board is accountable to the community. Our results speak for themselves."	partnerships. It is not conducive to a well-informed approach to decision making, minimizing all perspectives within the workplace. Education personnel and community members silo themselves and limits perspectives to support students.	communication are significantly and positively related to academic achievement for students of all levels (Jeynes, 2012)	environments for every student in the community. A coherent and transparent vision of goals and areas for growth can be communicated by school leaders using a variety of methods and media.

1. How are effective pedagogical practices aligned and supported in your school and district?
2. In addition to having the right tools and procedures for effective teacher observations, how much time is spent on training educators to use them effectively?
3. What evidence do you use to provide accurate and meaningful feedback regarding instructional practices? How is that information uniformly used to improve instruction for all teachers?
4. What opportunities are teachers provided for observing (this may be done through videos), modeling and practicing change in ways that better promote student learning?
5. How much time are teachers provided to work collaboratively to forge a common understanding and strategies to meet challenging student goals, share resources, plan, and learn together?
6. How are teacher observations designed to promote growth for both teachers and observers?
7. When looking at students who consistently underperform academically, what barriers/challenges have you identified that prevent growth from happening? What steps are you taking to eliminate those specific barriers/challenges?
8. How often is teacher feedback provided? Do you think teachers receive feedback frequently enough to make any necessary changes in their pedagogy?
9. Which modes are considered when providing teacher feedback?
10. How are observers assessed to ensure quality improvement?
11. What opportunities do teachers have to provide feedback on the observation process? How often? Is this a two-way process?
12. What feedback do teachers receive from their students? How often? Is this a two-way process?
13. What is the student-teacher relationship for all students?
14. How frequently is discipline and attendance data disaggregated by the teacher?
15. What training do teachers receive regarding targeted strategies to meet specific student needs?
    a.   How might teacher training reflect barriers and challenges identified?
16. How is overall job satisfaction assessed for each teacher?
17. What are overall student perceptions of the learning environment?

18. What strategies are used to develop a culture in which every educator approaches instruction with the belief that every student can and will learn?
19. How do district/school leaders and teachers define rigor?
20. What effective systems are present for responding to student's needs: school-wide, targeted/at-risk groups, and specific individuals?
21. Are educators visible to students with strategies to make interpersonal connections and build relationships purposefully and meaningfully with students?
22. Are educators trained in alternative discipline approaches?
23. How do personnel access the skills of the school/district identified behavior team?
24. Who makes decisions about how gifted and talented identified students are served?
    a. Are they making an impact on student learning? How?
25. What are characteristics of a high-quality gifted and talented program?
26. What training do teachers receive to work with identified gifted and talented students?
27. Who makes decisions about the experiences of students with exceptional needs?
28. What are the diverse ways students with exceptional needs are served?
29. What are the characteristics of a high-quality special education program?
30. What training do teachers need to effectively work with students with exceptional needs?
31. How are all students encouraged to self-advocate and have leadership opportunities?
32. When students do not meet expectations (failing grade(s), missing assignments(s), late work, unacceptable behavior, etc.) what support is given to recover?
33. How are students who consistently underperform given positive successful experiences?
34. Do all educators model respect, acceptance, and compassion towards all? If not, how is it addressed?
35. For those students that have on-going behavioral issues, what is the nature of the relationship and communication with the parents?
36. For those students that have on-going behavioral issues, what is the nature of the relationship and communication with the parents?

37. How is the exploration of post-secondary educational options of students from historically marginalized communities supported?
38. What is the role of counselors at the elementary, middle school and high school levels?
39. How are students celebrated? Are these celebrations meaningful to all students? Are they making a difference? How?
40. What changes have been made to accommodate the various cultures represented in the school/district/classroom?
41. What changes must occur to develop culturally responsive classrooms?
42. What strategies are used to help parents develop a keen sense of community?
43. What strategies are used to ensure special education and gifted and talented groups of students in schools match the overall proportional representation of these same groups district-wide?
44. What are the characteristics of a high-quality English learner program?
45. What strategies are used to ensure teachers possess the expertise to work with all proficiency levels of an English learner?
46. What does student engagement in extracurricular activities look like for all student groups?
47. What are the expectations for all sports? What are the expectations for all after school activities?
48. How are funding decisions made to meet the needs of all students?
    a. Are the decisions made collaboratively? How is funding prioritized? Does funding align with student needs?

Norming the Negative

Norming the negative is subconscious action of accepting negative views, the status quo or just keeping silent and not pushing positive views. This equity trap can also refer to suppressing positive behavior and changes in creating a hostile, fearful, and negative climate. To avoid this equity trap districts and schools create transparency and a unified system. Creating transparency means creating a district and school that is thoroughly collaborative that all beliefs, behaviors, and practices are out in the open and are visible. When made visible, deficit beliefs, inappropriate behaviors and unsuccessful practices are understood, addressed, and transformed.

Examples of Norming the Negative Practices

Context	Example of Trap	Risk/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunities for Success
Classroom Level	Social studies teacher only teaches out of the textbook, refusing to teach multiple perspectives. She states, "This is the way I have always done it, and this is what my district adopted. This is the resource I must use."	Limiting students' opportunities in expressing their knowledge, values, and competencies. Higher level thinking and expressions are limited. Teaching from limited resources will not provide a rich opportunity for all students to engage and provide multiple perspectives.	Teacher works collaboratively with school leadership to evaluate expectations and current curriculum. Teacher receives professional development on culturally responsive teaching. Relationship building and inviting multiple perspectives into the classroom inclusive of students and community. Engaging with the community. Professional development in best, first instruction.	Learning environment where students have ownership and opportunity for their learning. Students feel safe and have a sense of belonging and feel they can go to the teacher around student issues and learning.

Context	Example of Trap	Risk/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunities for Success
School Level	The role of a school counselor has remained consistent in supporting academic needs (scheduling, applying for college and G.P.A) of students despite the increased social-emotional needs of students.	Not defining the role and responsibilities of the counselor to address emerging social-emotional learning of students can result in missed opportunities in support of students. School counselor lacks training in supporting students with social-emotional learning of students in a timely manner. Not defining the role responsibilities of the counselor to include social-emotional learning can contribute to the lack of safety, belonging and climate and culture of staff and students.	Reevaluating the role and responsibilities of the school counselor and all staff to directly address the social-emotional learning of students. Develop plan and processes in building capacity to support the social-emotional learning of students. The development of key community partnerships to support students and families.	Engagement of a social – emotional learning support team committed to data-based decision making, culturally responsive interventions, and embedding behavior change processes to better support student safety and learning. The evaluation of the counselor's role will lead to evaluation of the roles of all staff members with regards to social-emotional learning and will create a shared responsibility in creating a safe and inclusive environment for all students.

Context	Example of Trap	Risk/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunities for Success
District Level	Graduation rates for Native American students have been at the 60th percentile for the past 3 years.	Native American students feel devalued and fall into a routine of not meeting district expectations. Native American students become an invisible student group within the district. The district does not look at data on student groups with low N counts.	District evaluates local data for all disaggregated groups. The district is strategic in messaging and protecting student identities when analyzing and communicating data. Develop knowledge for meeting the specific needs of Native American students within the district. Develop meaningful relationships with families to create an inclusive and inviting learning environment.	Data highlights the need and circumstances of Native American students and all other disaggregated groups. Intentional focus on student needs can provide positive messaging and a shift in Native American student's mindset.
Informal Environment	"These young teachers think they know it all with their naive and idealistic ideas."	Veteran teachers miss the opportunities to learn new and current strategies for potential student successes. Veteran teachers discredit the enthusiasm of novice teachers and limit their own perspective for professional growth. These attitudes reinforce the institutional status quo which results in continuous	Establish formal structures to create asset-based thinking and learning with all staff. Identifying the existing competences that teachers bring to the learning environment. Building upon teacher induction programs and establish formal structures for professional teaching and learning,	All teachers feel valued and appreciated for their contributions to the learning environments. There is a breaking of barriers between novice and veteran teachers all benefiting from the collaboration of teaching and learning. All teachers benefit from multiple perspectives

Context	Example of Trap	Risk/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunities for Success
		norming the negative practices.	knowledge sharing and collaboration.	and pedagogies that result in personal and professional growth.
Community/ Messaging (web, news, etc.)	Communicating student dress code solely through the student handbook or written policy.

If the student cannot promptly obtain appropriate clothing on the first offense, the student shall be given a written or verbal warning and an administrator shall notify the student's parents/guardians. The student may be held out of class or classes at the discretion of the administrator. On the second offense, the student shall remain in the administrative areas of the school for the day to do schoolwork and a conference with parents/guardians should be held prior to the student's return to class or classes to clarify the district and school's expectations with respect to dress and appearance. | Communication of appropriate student dress code is limited and can lead to unintended messaging.

Communication based on policy results in a lack of flexibility for individual culture(s) and can lead to feelings of defiance or resentment.

Freedom of self-expression is limited without any conversation.

There is little to no understanding for the purpose of student dress code without conversation.

There is little to no understanding of the culture the school/district is trying to establish. | Explore other ways to communicate appropriate student dress code.

Allow students the opportunity to dialogue about student dress code, be open to input, and/or provide a way for students to have a voice in the development of student handbook policies.

Build a meaningful relationship with students to understand both sides of student dress code.

Educators need to model daily expectations for student dress code during any contact time with students | By developing a meaningful relationship with students and providing opportunity for conversation, students understand the school/district perspective.

By providing students an opportunity for input or policy development, students are more apt to invest in written policy.

When educators model expected student dress code an inclusive culture is developed, rather than a "do as I say" or "top down" approach. |

22

Context	Example of Trap	Risk/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunities for Success
	Missed classes due to a second dress code offense will be considered like a suspension regarding the student making up missed schoolwork. On the third offense, the student may be subject to suspension or other disciplinary action in accordance with Board policy concerning suspensions, expulsions, and other disciplinary interventions.			

Guiding Questions

1. How does the school/district take necessary steps to present data points over time for the effectiveness of programs, initiatives, and ideas?
2. What patterns of performance stand out to the school/district?
3. Which specific student groups continue to underperform over extended periods of time?
   a. What action has the school/district taken to address these needs?
4. How are multiple stakeholders involved in the interpretation of the school/district data trends?
   a. How is stakeholder feedback collected?
5. How is change facilitated when ineffective practices are brought to the district/school's attention?
6. How does the school/district collect ideas and feedback on initiatives?
7. What opportunities do teachers have to evaluate their beliefs and how these beliefs form their behavior and practices in the classroom?
8. How often do coaches, administrators and other teachers in classrooms support positive classroom practices and learning environments?
9. How does the school/district engage with teacher climate surveys?
   a. How are results addressed?
10. How does the school/district work with community partners and organizations committed to improving the outcomes of students?
    a. Describe modes of communication.
    b. Describe frequency of communication and engagement.
11. How does the school/district provide information to student's families regarding progress, instruction, interventions, academic goals, and how families can support student learning in the home?
12. How does the school/district maintain and communicate a culture of high expectations and promote a sense of shared accountability among staff, students, and community?
13. To what degree do all staff and students in the school/district feel safe?
14. To what degree do all staff and students in the school/district feel emotionally safe?

15. What do the turnover and mobility rates of the school/district indicate?
16. How are successes celebrated for both staff and students?
17. What opportunities are available for staff to grow and develop professionally?
18. How does the school/district prioritize equity in the hiring process?
19. How is conflict resolved? How are decisions made when there is disagreement?
20. If a staff member has a specific need, what is the process to meet the need?
21. How knowledgeable are staff on school laws pertaining to students?
    a. How does the school/district receive appropriate support beyond compliance-driven mandates for all student groups?
22. How does the school/district ensure equitable access to grade level content is provided to every student?
23. How is disaggregated student data shared district-wide?
24. Is there an overrepresentation of student groups in certain academic areas of concern?
    a. What are those procedures to support inexperienced staff with disaggregated data concerns?

Cultural Blindness

Cultural Blindness is any policy, practice, or behavior that ignores existing cultural differences or that considers such differences inconsequential. This could include people acting as if the cultural differences they see do not matter or not recognizing that significant differences exist between and between cultures. Cultural Blindness is paradoxical for some people. It is the belief that color, and culture make no difference and that all people are the same. For some educators, the goal of a diversity program is uniformity. The values and behaviors of the dominant culture are presumed to be universally applicable and beneficial. The intention of the culturally blind educator is to avoid discriminating – that is, to avoid making an issue of the differences manifested among the students.

Examples of Culturally Blind Practices

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunity for Success
Classroom Level	Blanket discipline policies e.g. "Why not just suspend?" Enforcement of zero tolerance policies.	A one-size-fits all approach to discipline may result in missed opportunities to connect with the student, correct the behavior and foster a positive perception of the student's learning environment. Adult attitudes and conveniences are given priority when addressing student behavior that can result in pressure for administration to act on zero tolerance policies. Contributes to the "school to prison" pipeline.	Leadership establishes expectations and preventative processes for all staff to engage in positive student interactions. Create a toolkit of effective and successful discipline practices. Use the incident as a teaching opportunity and it will reduce repeated incidents. This can also enhance the belief that every student can and will learn.	Students learn and are taught behaviors on how their decisions can impact themselves and others in a safe, nurturing environment that supports engagement. Fostering positive student perceptions and improving relationships through a proactive student-centered discipline approach versus a reactive discipline process.

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunity for Success
School Level	"Why am I in this training?"	Professional development that is not content focused and/or supports the teacher in developing knowledge to improve student learning can result in poor use of time, minimal to no participation or engagement (during or after training), and a missed opportunity to develop expert teachers.	Work collaboratively with teachers to gain an understanding for professional learning needed to better support students. Clearly define purpose and expected outcomes of professional development. Professional development must be flexible and specific to teacher needs. Leaders regularly examine data to determine student and teacher needs.	Teachers have the most interaction with students, determine what is taught, and are responsible for the environment in which students learn. A knowledgeable and skilled teacher can elevate a student's ability and close achievement gaps between economically disadvantaged students and their peers. Research has proven that a knowledgeable and skilled teacher makes a direct impact on student learning and achievement.
District Level	Developing a plan without being inclusive of all student groups will limit the diversity of each represented voice in the district.	Key perspectives not represented in the development process may lack commitment for the implementation of the plan. Can be interpreted as a top-down approach.	Ensure opportunity and consideration for perspectives of all relevant stakeholder groups to be engaged in the process, in a safe context. Ensure	A plan that makes an inclusive statement, on agreed upon actions, and defines purpose for each department or stakeholder group impacted, resulting in a collaborative implementation

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunity for Success
		Assumptions made on stakeholder perspectives can weaken relationships and deter true inequities.	transparency and communication about inclusion of ideas/perspectives.	process with increased support for implementation.
Informal Environment	"I didn't know that about my student or their family." "I didn't think to ask." "I was so caught up in just the academics."	The inability to connect with students can result in disconnecting staff from students, their learning environment, and engagement in daily activity. This disconnect can create a feeling of not belonging and isolation.	Develop knowledge on culturally responsive practices. Prioritize relationship building with students and families. Develop meaningful relationships with students, families, and community so students are invested in their school/district and the individuals they work with daily. Learn and appreciate school/district community and attend community events to engage with students and families. Consider embedding community identity and interests within school/district	"No significant learning occurs without significant relationships." (James Comer) Students are seen and respected as individuals in the school environment. Staff values the differences of a student and understands the various components of their identity.

Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Actions to Address	Opportunity for Success
			events and daily learning activity and shifting mindsets.	
Community/Messaging (web, news, et.)	"Why do we have Safe to Tell?" Little or no differentiated communication on Safe 2 Tell across different constituencies. "I don't understand what Safe 2 Tell is." "There is an app for safety. That is so weird, that does not exist in my home country."	Students from other countries may not fully understand the safety concerns and culture within a U.S. school environment. Students may not act on reporting information and concerns that can compromise the safety of the school and other students.	Ensure Safe 2 Tell information is communicated in a language all students understand. Safe 2 Tell is differentiated to ensure that every student comprehends its purpose and access. Develop knowledge about the student's previous school environment and the supports needed for the student to understand the safety and social-emotional concerns that U.S. students are currently facing.	Safe 2 Tell supports an improved culture and climate for all students. Students are empowered through intentional conversations. School develops a partnership with Safe 2 Tell to build a preventive framework to support student safety. Schools and districts understand the diversity within their community and use that understanding to leverage Safe 2 Tell.

Guiding Questions

1. What are the various student groups/cultures represented?
2. What are the various community groups/cultures represented?
3. How have student demographics changed in the past 5 to 10 years?
4. What changes have been made to meet the changing demographics?
5. How do different schools within the same district vary regarding the student populations served?
6. What are the student cultures/groups represented in all extracurricular activities?
   a. What student cultures/groups are underrepresented?
   b. What has been done to support increased participation in extracurricular activities?
7. What does student engagement look like for all students?
8. What do students need to be engaged in learning?
9. What do teachers know about their students that will lay the foundation for authentic engagement?
10. What are the steps taken by teachers to develop meaningful relationships with students?
11. What training(s) have teachers received on culturally responsive strategies and equity at the elementary, middle school and high school grades?
12. What steps are taken to support varying transportation needs?
13. How are all parents/guardians included in communication and student's overall education?
14. How is the school/district creating a welcoming environment for all families?
15. What steps are taken to include all families in school/district events?
    a. Are these steps enough to communicate to families their participation is important?
16. How does the school/district ensure all students feel they are in a supported, inclusive, and safe learning environment?
17. What are the hiring practices to ensure educators have the belief all students can learn?
18. To what degree do students view teachers as being fair?
    a. What evidence do you have to support this?
19. What evidence do you have to show all students have access to a quality, robust, relevant core instructional program?
20. What evidence do you have to show all students feel educators are invested in their success and hole them to high expectations?
21. What student driven factors are taken into consideration when scheduling a student's instructional program?
22. What activities required of students are of high cognitive demand at the elementary, middle school and high school grades?
23. Which instructional methods, currently in use, are optimal for learning for all students?

24. How are instructional practices adapted to mee the needs of all individual students?
25. How are services delivered to underperforming students (during the day, before and after school, through pull-out sessions, etc.)?
    a. Does this service model have a positive impact on students as you assess multiple data points?
    b. What is the evidence?
26. What are those skills required for a general education teacher (not a specialist) to meet the students' accelerated needs?
27. What evidence is gathered to understand a teachers' abilities to accelerate learning?
28. Has the school/district conceptualized the acceleration needs of students as central or peripheral to the overall work of the school/district?
    a. What is the evidence for the assertion?

Check for Understanding.

Provide one example for each trap.

Trap Name	Context	Example of Trap	Risks/Unintended Consequences	Action(s) to Address	Opportunity for Success
Seeing only deficits					
Rationalizing Bad Behavior and Unsuccessful Practices					
Norming The Negative					
Cultural Blindness					

Resources:

The following articles provide additional examples of Colorado educators advancing and implementing successful equitable practices.

Colorado Springs School District 11
[Trailblazing Leader Was Hired to Fix Colorado Springs Schools](#)

St. Vrain School District
[Equity in St. Vrain Valley Schools](#)

Thompson School District
[Equity Diversity and Inclusion](#)

Cherry Creek School District
[Equity, Culture and Community Engagement](#)

References

McKenzie, Kathryn Bell; Scheurich, James Joseph, *Equity Traps: A Useful Construct for Preparing Principals to Lead Schools That Are Successful with Racially Diverse Students* (SAGE Publications. 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, CA 91320, 2004).

Valencia, Richard R., *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice* (Routledge Taylor & Francis Group. 270 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016, 2010).

Contacts

Georgina Owen

Office of Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education

Owen_g@cde.state.co.us

Michael Ramirez, Ed.D.

Exceptional Student Services Unit

Ramirez_m@cde.state.co.us

Erin Loften

Office of School Improvement and Planning

Loften_e@cde.state.co.us

Acknowledgements

The Colorado Department of Education would like to express appreciation and gratitude to the following educators for their time and valuable suggestions on the development of this resource.

Lourdes "Lulu" Buck, Student Services Coordinator of Educational Equity & Community Engagement, St. Vrain Valley Schools

Noemi Aguilar, Supervisor, Office of Migrant Education, Colorado Department of Education

Melissa Patterson, Director of Human Resources, Fountain School District 8

Pikes Peak Regional English Language Development Directors

Poudre School District, Ft. Collins, Colorado