LEADING WITH AN
EQUITY LENS

Keeping Equity in Focus

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PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA
Creating a Culture, Planning with Data, Improving Instruction, Engaging Communities, Closing the Gap
According to Riggio (2006), Transformational Leadership includes four significant tenets: idealized influence, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation. I cannot think of a better way to model an equity lens in my daily work as a principal when it comes to conversations about race and equity. With this approach, leaders strengthen their perception of situations by applying these four areas. To use the four tenets of transformational leadership effectively with my equity lens, I must truly know my staff.

In addition to transformational leadership, Singleton and Linton (2006) offer the strongest protocol and approach in their The Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations. This is key because it offers a self-regulating protocol in place for the challenging interactions with staff. The agreements also have four tenets: stay engaged, experience discomfort, speak your truth and expect and accept non-closure.

**WHAT IS AN EQUITY LENS?**

As a principal, bringing an equity lens to my daily work is key. Simply put, an equity lens allows us to seek and understand the disparities and disadvantages of segments of our population by diving deep into the data that matters. According to Reykdal (2017), every decision made at OSPI must have an equity lens to it.”

An equity and empowerment lens leads us to think about issues in a new way; it can bring an idea into focus, or alternately, expand it outward and upward. In this case, this lens does both. It allows us to focus on how equity and racial justice relate to a given issue and teaches us issues don’t live in isolation. In fact, issues exist and are related to a much larger system of factors.

Clearly, this equity lens is one that is always in place. The commitment to racial equity is not something to check off a to-do list. Rather, it is a point of view that must be integrated with a mindful commitment to serve your school community. The commitment to racial equity is not something to check off a to-do list. Rather, it is a point of view that must be integrated with a mindful commitment to serve your school community.”

**HOW DO YOU KEEP THE EQUITY LENS IN FOCUS?**

Transformational Leadership and Four Agreements for Courageous Conversations.

Our daily work as principals needs to be viewed continually through the equity lens. However, this cannot be a lens we pick and choose to wear, like a favorite pair of shades. Rather, the equity lens is the frame we hold up to the light every day to check ourselves and the effectiveness of our commitment to the students we serve.

As I think about applying this lens in my work, it is key to remember that for the equity lens to be sharp—and for me to demonstrate fidelity to its purpose—I must intentionally exercise the equity lens in all settings. Research on transformational leadership and courageous conversations give leaders two approaches to implement.

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SHARPEN YOUR LENS: KNOW YOUR RESOURCES
You can never have enough effective resources when keeping the lens sharp. It’s not enough to watch an occasional webinar on race relations, attend a session on equity at a national conference, or even participate in a book study. Instead, you must be prepared to access and use resources at any given moment, and continually add to your toolbox.

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Remember, your first resource is your ability to self-reflect and ask tough questions about your own biases, fears, and assumptions of others, as well as questions about how to impact change. My personal questions include (and this is only a handful):

• How are my assumptions about a particular group keeping me from understanding this person’s experience?
• Which conversations do I personally find uncomfortable, and how to I own that or do I avoid the conversation altogether?
• How can I help others (all stakeholders) apply an equity lens to our daily interactions and experiences as a learning community?
• How do I take conversations that matter beyond the monthly staff meeting, school assembly, or quick chat in the staff lounge?

In addition to asking questions, it is critical to find resources to support your understanding of equity and offer suggestions for ways to create change. Taking time to seek support is critical. Resources are often a simple click away. Here are a few strong publications:

• teachingtolerance.org (also comes with a publication)
• www.edchange.org/multicultural/sites/journals.html
• http://www.nea.org/tools/30402.htm

Be sure to check out AWSP’s own diversity and equity resources at www.awsp.org/diversityresources.

KEEPING AN EQUITY LENS IN CHECK: BE PART OF THE SOLUTION
Regardless of your familiarity with an equity lens approach, our students, staff and all stakeholders deserve for their leaders to embrace this lens. We must keep this lens in continual check. Put your equity lens on and see the world with hope. Remember, using an equity lens is not wearing rose-colored glasses. Rather, it means looking at the underbelly of some of our daily exchanges and the disparity and marginal nature of our students’ experiences, and owning our role and responsibility in changing these experiences for them.

Brene Brown, author of several best sellers, including Daring Greatly, tweets it best when she shares, “The fight for justice requires honest conversations about race & class privilege. Start owning it. Start healing it.”

As a teacher, conversations that mattered were at the heart of my daily instruction. As a principal, these conversations are part of my soul’s work. The equity lens must be a permanent fixture in our routines, and wearing this lens a continual part of our professional and personal identity.