Confronting Inequity and Removing Barriers to Ensure All Children Achieve and Succeed

A Report on the Spring 2017 ASCD Whole Child Symposium
About ASCD

ASCD is the global leader in developing and delivering innovative programs, products, and services that empower educators to support the success of each learner. Comprising 115,000 members—superintendents, principals, teachers, professors, and advocates from more than 128 countries—the ASCD community also includes 51 affiliate organizations. The nonprofit’s diverse, nonpartisan membership is its greatest strength, projecting a powerful, unified voice to decision makers around the world. Learn more about how ASCD supports educators as they learn, teach, and lead at www.ascd.org.

ASCD Whole Child Approach

Launched in 2007, ASCD’s Whole Child approach is an effort to transition from a focus on narrowly defined academic achievement to one that promotes the long-term development and success of all children. We help educators, families, community members, and policymakers move from a vision about educating the whole child to sustainable, collaborative action. Join us, and together we’ll change the face of education policy and practice.

Learn more at www.ascd.org/wholechild.
Introduction

In 2012, a business professor who was seeking to explain equity did so by creating a simple graphic image of three children of differing heights trying to watch a baseball game over a fence.

The meme, which has since been shared or adapted by millions, is split into two frames, the first of which shows the children standing on three identical crates. But the view of the shorter of the two children is still partially or completely obscured. In the second frame, the tallest child is standing on the ground, while the shorter two children are standing on different-sized boxes that better meet their specific needs. Equitable viewing of the game is thus achieved for all three.

If only addressing the various forms of education inequity could so easily be identified and remedied.

Inequity in education has been a topic of national conversation for decades. President Lyndon Johnson’s declaration of “war” on poverty during his 1964 State of the Union address certainly helped place the problem more in the minds of average Americans. And Johnson’s Elementary and Secondary Education Act backed up his words with resources by directing federal education dollars to school districts serving high numbers of children in poverty. Title I of that legislation continues to offer support to local public schools more than 50 years later.

But economic poverty is just one of the many inequities that confront today’s students and hinder their ability to achieve and succeed. Students’ ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and even their immigration status can negatively affect their ability to receive an equitable education.

On May 10, 2017, ASCD tackled the expansive topic of inequity in education during its fifth Whole Child Symposium. The organization convened a diverse group of professional educators to lead a nationwide conversation on the various types of inequity that persist in our public schools. These educators offered thought-provoking insights and relevant suggestions for ensuring education equity for all children.

This symposium—as previous ones have—approached the topic of inequity from a whole child perspective, ensuring that our schools address students’ social, emotional, mental, physical, and cognitive development. ASCD’s Whole Child approach sits at the core of ASCD’s mission.
These symposia are designed to highlight the expertise of professional educators working on the front lines of issues such as inequity and to showcase their successes, share their challenges, and outline the action steps that each person can take, regardless of their role, to “make education better for each child across systems, processes, and/or outcomes,” says Sean Slade, ASCD’s senior director of global outreach.

This report highlights the relevant conversations and key takeaways from the May 10 symposium, and it offers ASCD’s policy recommendations and provides readers with additional resources.

Above: Panelists Montserrat Garibay, Paul Gorski, and Linda Cliatt-Wayman; Right: Moderator Sean Slade
Why This Topic?

The Finnish education system is consistently ranked as one of the best on the globe. But its education system didn’t always perform so well. The Finnish success story that the world has come to know in 2017 was built over the past few decades, and it was achieved because equity was placed front and center of the reform efforts, according to Krista Kiuru, the country’s minister of education, in a 2014 interview with The Atlantic. “Regardless of a person’s gender, background, or social welfare status, everyone should have an equal chance to make the most of their skills,” she said (Gross-Loh, 2014).

This same focus has been echoed by Pasi Sahlberg, another Finnish educator, author, and scholar. Sahlberg wrote in an ASCD Inservice blog post, “Finland’s education system consistently ranks among the top in the world in learning achievement, equity of outcomes, and system efficiency. Many people ask: Why? Our solution has been to focus systematically on equity, not competition, and to ensure that all schools are excellent, well resourced, and focus on the whole child. If all schools are good, there is no need to have publicly available ranking systems and your school of choice is your neighborhood school” (Sahlberg, 2013).

And the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development reports that the evidence is conclusive: “Equity in education pays off. The highest-performing education systems across OECD countries are those that combine high quality and equity” (OECD, 2012).

Above: Panelists Eliza Byard and Montserrat Garibay
Right: Panelist José Vilson
Equity should be a driver for education improvement in America—both nationally and at the state and local levels. The longer we ignore inequity or deny its effect on students, the longer we maintain its negative prevalence and influence.

Students who face inequity on a daily basis (in the classroom, in their schools, or both) do not feel healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. It is up to each of us—educators, parents, and members of society—to confront inequity, whether at an individual level or a systemic level. Education is about more than numbers and letters. It is about more than how much we know. It is also about raising each child’s potential and ability to succeed, and as educators we must purposefully break down barriers that stop any child achieving.

“Courageous are those who can stand in the conversation with a spirit of collaboration and understanding. It’s important for us to critique, but just as important to find solutions. We can’t solve the problems by ignoring them; we’ll simply continue to promote them. I believe we can do it so much better together.”

—José Vilson, 2014
The Panelists

ASCD invited the following panelists to share their expertise on inequity—across race, poverty, sexual orientation and immigration status—during the spring 2017 symposium.

**Eliza Byard** is the executive director of GLSEN—the Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network. She is recognized worldwide as a pioneer in the education, youth development, and civil rights sectors, fighting to end anti-LGBTQ bias and discrimination in K–12 schools. She leads GLSEN’s public education and advocacy efforts, student organizing and leadership development, professional training for educators, research, and in-school programming.

**Linda Cliatt-Wayman** is a passionate educator with an unwavering belief in the potential of all children. She spent 20 years as a special education teacher before becoming principal of FitzSimons High School (Philadelphia, Pa.), in 2003. At FitzSimons, she led a turnaround effort and transformed the school from one known for low levels of academic achievement and high levels of violence to a safe space focused on learning. In 2005, she opened the Young Women’s Leadership School at Rhodes High School, also in Philadelphia, and then spent two years as assistant superintendent of high schools for the School District of Philadelphia. When the district decided to merge her former schools, FitzSimons and Rhodes, Cliatt-Wayman knew she had to step in to lead the merged school as principal. Her leadership as a high school principal in North Philadelphia has been featured by TED, *World News Tonight*, and *Nightline*.

**Montserrat Garibay** is a National Board–certified teacher and the vice president of Certified Employees with Education Austin, the union representing more than 3,000 employees in the Austin Independent School District (AISD). She taught bilingual prekindergarten for eight years in the AISD. Garibay came to the United States as an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, and, after 20 years, she became a U.S. citizen in 2012. She attended public schools in Texas and received her bachelor’s degree and a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction at the University of Texas at Austin. Today, Garibay remains a fierce advocate for children and families on issues of access and equity in public education. She is
also a tireless advocate with a proven track record of fighting for and working on a broad cross section of human and civil rights—including race, women's rights, immigration, voter participation, and labor.

Paul Gorski is the founder of EdChange and an associate professor of social justice and human rights at George Mason University. He has more than 15 years of experience cultivating equity literacy and structural change in schools and school districts across the United States. His books include Reaching and Teaching Students in Poverty: Strategies for Erasing the Opportunity Gap and Case Studies on Diversity and Social Justice Education (with Seema Pothini). He has written articles for Rethinking Schools, Teaching Tolerance, Phi Delta Kappan, Equity & Excellence in Education, Urban Review, and Teaching and Teacher Education.

José Vilson is a math educator, blogger, speaker, and activist in New York City. He is the author of This Is Not a Test: A New Narrative on Race, Class, and Education and has spoken and written about education, math, and race for a number of organizations and publications, including the New York Times, Education Week, the Guardian, Al Jazeera America, Huffington Post, GOOD magazine, El Diario Nueva York, and Edutopia. He is the founder of EduColor, a Math for America fellow, and a National Board–certified teacher.

Sean Slade, symposium moderator, has more than 25 years of experience in education in a career that encompasses four continents and five countries. Slade is the senior director of global outreach at ASCD, focusing on promoting and expanding ASCD's Whole Child approach across the United States and globally. He coauthored the 2014 ASCD Arias publication School Climate Change: How Do I Build a Positive Environment for Learning?
Tackling Persistent Racial Inequality

In high-poverty, high-needs schools where students of color make up the majority population, inequity can immediately show up upon entering the front door.

Linda Cliatt-Wayman attended a low-performing school in the same Philadelphia neighborhood where she was asked to lead another as a principal. She recalled how incredibly dark the school was inside:

“I remember saying to myself, ‘How can I educate kids that I cannot see? Where are the lights? No wonder so many fights. I can’t see anything.’ Instantly I thought about segregation and I thought about how it was supposed to have ended in 1958—I felt trapped, that we were stuck there. And then what in the world was I going to do to make sure that this also was a school for students who had nowhere else to go. And I felt how it was degrading that anybody’s child would have to go to a school like this.”
José Vilson’s thinking about racial inequity was shaped by his own education experiences as a child. He attended ethnically diverse elementary and middle schools, but his high school was made up primarily of white students. His experiences there as a student of color often made him feel as though he had missed a “secret” orientation meeting.

“I went through school thinking, ‘Wow, all these people know the secret codes, such as how to get better grades, how to skip detention, how to, like, become [or] make friends.’ I’m thinking about it now and thinking I must have missed something that very first year because everybody’s totally in line with the messaging that’s going on in front of me and [I’m] wondering, How do I get to be part of that?”
A common pitfall that students of color who attend primarily white schools make, Vilson said, is to think that they have to assimilate. “That’s a dehumanization process because it tells us we’re not good enough to be in that space. Those are forms of inequity that we have yet to really tackle.”

Inequity for students of color manifests in many different ways inside America’s schools, such as in the lack of school and classroom resources, staffing majority-minority or high-poverty schools with greater numbers of new or inexperienced teachers, a narrowing of the curriculum, and fewer advanced placement courses, just to name a few.

What are the consequences of this persistent inequity for students of color?

“The hopelessness is what is destroying the kids the most, and actually it’s really pouring over into society. That’s what I see the most. Years ago, we always believed, we always dreamed, we always hoped, we always cared, all the time that I’ve been alive,” said Cliatt-Wayman.

“We have to spend all day caring, and the only way we are going to get them to care is to just to say, ‘We care’. And now that we care, we need you to start caring, and we have to chip away a little bit at a time because their hopelessness is what destroying our community.”

Countless studies and reports document the consequences of systemic inequity on students. Ignorance of the problem is no longer an acceptable excuse—if, indeed, it ever was. Education inequity needs to be confronted, addressed, and remedied. The latest Civil Rights data collection report (released by the White House on June 7, 2016) outlined many of the inequities experienced by youth in the United States. This included
black preschool children being 3.6 times as likely to be suspended as are white preschool students; in kindergarten through 12th grade, black students are nearly four times as likely to be suspended as are white students. Black students also are nearly twice as likely to be expelled—removed from school with no services—as are white students. And it’s not just racial inequity. Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely as students without disabilities to be suspended in K–12 settings; and students with disabilities also represent two-thirds of students who are secluded from their classmates or restrained to prevent them from moving—even though they make up only 12 percent of the overall student population.

In a press release announcing the report’s release, former U.S. Secretary of Education John King said, “The CRDC (Civil Rights Data Collection) data are more than numbers and charts—they illustrate in powerful and troubling ways disparities in opportunities and experiences that different groups of students have in our schools…The stories the CRDC data tell us create the imperative for a continued call to action to do better and close achievement and opportunity gaps” (2016).

Former U.S. Department of Education assistant secretary for civil rights Catherine E. Lhamon added, “The CRDC data shines a spotlight on the educational opportunities proffered, and denied, to our nation’s sons and daughters in schools every day. We urge educators, researchers and the public to join us in using this data to its full potential to support students in realizing theirs” (2016).

Microaggressions

A much larger conversation about institutional oppression, racist assumptions, and the daily indignities of microaggressions is long overdue and needs to be had across the entire U.S. education system.

“We have a bigger conversation to have, because if we are part of a society that institutionally oppresses so many of our people, specifically our kids, then that means that all of us are susceptible and complicit in the ways that society works—even those of us trying to do the work, we also have to reflect and internalize because it's not enough to be ‘woke,’” said Vilson.

“It's about approaching things from a very conscious and thoughtful perspective and really trying to rehumanize all of our children, because the idea that our kids can't learn comes from this idea that our kids are actually inferior and they are not able to. And that's where I see a lot of these issues, that's like you don't even think they're human enough to grab that book, to go learn something and find something that's interesting to them and bring it back to their community, so they can be more self-determined, more engaged in their communities, and trying to build solutions. Those are things that I'm not seeing with respect to the national dialogue around education, and we need to have that conversation too.”

VIDEO CLIP
https://bcove.video/2vThdA9
Such ideas are reemphasized through comments, statements, and language used in and across our schools and into society. They may not be as direct as a racial slur, but these microaggressions can be just as harmful in the long term.

Students of color at Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School in Montgomery County, Md., produced and were featured in a video, “I Too, Am B-CC,” which was shown at the symposium and which documented the inequities they were subjected to just for being students of color at a majority-white, high-performing school:

“She only got in [to an academic team because she’s black]… I remember feeling so hurt … I was that ‘black girl’ who made the team because she was black, not because of merit.”

“It’s just so hard for black students because we feel that we have to go the extra step to prove that we are on the same level … that we can do it. I work so hard. I want other kids to see it’s something they can do.”

“I feel like, sometimes, that I am living two lives.”

These microaggressions, “those little, ostensibly innocent actions that highlight a person’s privilege or lack thereof” (Vilson, 2014) are far more common than outright or overt racism, but they too affect people and take their toll over time. They are called out in the Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School “I, Too, Am B-CC” video, as well as other “I, Too, Am…” videos produced since the first “I, Too, Am Harvard” video released on March 3, 2014.

These microaggressions are often hard to combat and confront, and they play out in very color-blind ways by deliberately not calling out color but rather another attribute. They demean or down grade someone as not belonging but refrain from overtly calling out color. They can be as subtle as “Oh, we just don’t think you’re a ‘good fit,’” or “Maybe you don’t belong in this space.”

VIDEO CLIP
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KpKEFEpHms
VIDEO CLIP
https://bcove.video/2wQGFN

Panelists Eliza Byard, Montserrat Garibay, and Paul Gorski

Leslie Grant and Montserrat Garibay

Moderator Sean Slade
Deficit versus Grit versus Structural Ideology

Inequity exists—but what should we do about it? Do we change the individual or change the system?

Developing grit may be a necessary skill in today’s world, but there is danger in teaching children grit in order to overcome a broken system. This approach places the burden on affected individuals to be motivated and knowledgeable in seeking the right supports and skilled enough to adjust to a problem not of their making. It allows the system’s brokenness to perpetuate and for inequities to become part of the norm.

Fixing the broken system is what’s needed. So why don’t we try to fix the system?

Paul Gorski, EdChange founder and associate professor of social justice and human rights at George Mason University, explained this idea by focusing on three different ideologies: deficit, grit, and structural.

- **Deficit ideology** is the view that people at the tip of hierarchy are there because they earned it, while people at the bottom deserve to be where they are because they “earned” that as well. According to Gorski, “This translates into the rationale that marginalized people are in need of fixing, versus fixing the problems that created the margination in the first place.”

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• **Grit ideology**, the “new” ideology on the block, recognizes the existence of inequity but moves to making marginalized people more resilient to inequality instead of working to eliminate the structures of inequality. Marginalized folks are “already the most resilient and gritty people,” Gorski said, because “they are facing all the inequity and they are showing up.”

• **Structural ideology** recognizes the dominant reasons why disparities exist and attempts to develop policies and practices to fix the inequality, rather than, fixing the people who are the targets of the inequality.

Grit cannot substitute much-needed structural changes. To understand inequity is to recognize the main reasons for why it exists and then change the ways it’s addressed at the classroom, school, or systems level.
Instead of blaming parents for not becoming more engaged in their child’s education, Gorski suggested as an example, schools should change their policies and processes about parent engagement to make them more responsive to the unique challenges faced by certain families.

“Maybe [schools] should provide transportation … offer family engagement [opportunities] outside of the schools … train teachers so [that] they are not condescending to low-income parents, parents of color, [and] ELL parents when they do come into the school,” continued Gorski.
When Legality Undermines Humanity

The “otherizing” of immigrants is certainly not a new American phenomenon. Each new immigrant group has unfortunately faced various forms of discrimination upon entering this country. But anti-immigrant sentiment expressed during the 2016 election campaign cycle not only persists, but seems to have even worsened since then. Coupled with an increase in deportation activity by the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency, many immigrant students and their families are experiencing greater levels of anxiety and fear about their futures, regardless of whether they are documented or not, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center.

Montserrat Garibay understands these anxieties. She was an undocumented student when her parents brought her to the United States. She shared her thoughts on how to make schools safe places for immigrant families and their students and ensure that the students are receiving an equitable education.

“In order to have those safe spaces, you have to build relationships with the parents, with the students, and with your coworkers. I think we are living in a very critical moment where if we don’t step up to the game saying ‘We’ll welcome anybody, regardless of your religion, your sexual orientation,’ it doesn’t matter. It’s the thing I love about public schools—that they’re open for everyone. And that part, I think, we have to make sure that we embrace it and that we are doing that for any type of student,” said Garibay.
Schools that serve high numbers of immigrant students, regardless of their legal status, need to make their buildings safe, welcoming places, Garibay stressed. Given that public schools serve as the hub of the community, she recommended having resources, booklets, etc. on hand so that undocumented immigrant families know their rights. Creating a welcoming community inside the public school is essential to the success of the school system, she said.

Approximately one-third of Vilson’s students are recent immigrants from the Dominican Republic and locations in Central and South America. With the recent attention given to undocumented students and families, Vilson has made an effort to ensure his classroom is a safe learning environment. He told his students, “I am a human being just like you … we will work through this together.”

Garibay stressed the importance of addressing students’ social and emotional (SEL) learning needs.

“We need to address needs that our children are coming with, because as a teacher I can teach them how to read and write, but the reality is that if they’re worrying that their dad or mom is being deported, I can’t teach that child how to read and write. So I need to take care of that social-emotional [aspect].”
Teachers, she said, must have a moral and ethical code for responding to kids in crisis. “How do we help them feel safe and welcome in our schools? In our district, we were able to pass a resolution in support of undocumented students. And how that is helping is the community know that their superintendent, their school board, their teachers, their custodians, are welcoming students no matter their status” Garibay continued.
Separate Accommodations: Still Not Equitable

A transgender student's request to use the boys' bathroom at his local public school became an issue that quickly grew well beyond the borders of his Virginia school system. Gavin Grimm's case (G.G. v. Gloucester County School Board) has been debated since 2014 and was due to head to the Supreme Court for a final ruling in March 2017. But the recently rescinded U.S. Department of Education guidance on transgender students created under the previous administration and the April 2017 Supreme Court announcement that it was sending the Gavin Grimm case back to the Fourth Circuit Court of Appeals has recreated a climate of fear and uncertainty among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) youth. These same young people who in 2016 were being encouraged to come out and to have a voice are now seeing the very same institutions close the door.

Inequity is inequity, no matter the content or focus of discrimination. And although the conversations may be related to race or immigrant status or gender identity, there are undeniable similarities when discussing inequity—that resonate across the discussions. Panelist Eliza Byard, executive director of GLSEN, discussed the privilege of being part of a conversation where inequity is discussed across racial discrimination, poverty, and anti-immigrant sentiment—and not pigeonholed or downgraded to a single-topic issue.
For years, schools have had transgender students and have, in many cases, respected or at least accommodated their rights. Recently, however, we have seen more state legislatures considering or enacting what have been deemed as “bathroom bills,” such as H.B. 2 in North Carolina. These bills require that individuals in government buildings, including public schools, must use the bathrooms and locker rooms that corresponds to the sex identified on their birth certificate. These bills fail to consider—or deliberately ignore—the needs of individuals who identify as the opposite sex or are in the process of transitioning gender.
Note: HB2 was partially repealed on March 30, 2017.

According to Byard, the explosion of transgender bathroom bills and news stories needs to be viewed in the context of the current administration’s recent effort to “undermine the civil rights function of this federal agency and, in doing so, injecting an incredible policization into schools.”

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Allies for Equity

The fight for equity of disadvantaged groups tends to be successful when support is garnered from people and groups that have access to and influence over the spheres of power. And although LGBTQI students canvas all cultures and ethnicities, many students who have come out are white. The significance of this is that they come from families that have expectations of the system being fair (or at least expectations that their voice can be heard), access to power, and a cultural comfort with standing up for their rights.

“If we put ourselves in the right context, right company, and the right fight, that can be then an asset and a power that we can bring to those struggles overall,” said Byard.

Likeminded people need to consolidate their power when it comes to addressing all the ways that inequity manifests itself in education. Byard continued, “Student voice has such an important role and really can point a way forward if we listen to them.”
We can empower student voice by cultivating and creating daily opportunities for whole-class or whole-school conversations that extend well beyond the curriculum and work to cultivate a more positive school culture and climate by tackling bullying and discrimination in all its forms, including gender identity. Students who feel safe and supported are students who can achieve and succeed to much higher levels.

“We haven’t yet learned how to embrace students like that [who are transitioning] because a) we are afraid, b) we already have our hidden discrimination within us, and c) frankly we don’t have the protocols in our schools as a whole … In 2017, regardless of whoever is president, that is not acceptable,” said Vilson.
Byard expressed strong hope that LGBTQI students and their allies “understand the connection of all these other issues of inequity.”

Educators need to look no further than their own students for help in developing the protocols and creating the space for conversation about education inequities to occur. Today’s students trend as progressive, if not more so, than adults. By listening to their concerns, by hearing their perspectives, and by viewing students as unique individuals rather than a generic collective, we are providing opportunities for empowerment, ownership of their education, and a core role in determining solutions.
Educators as Change Agents

In a 2015 blog post, Jose Vilson discussed teachers’ role as change agents:

“Are teachers agents of change or agents of the state? The real status quo isn’t the antiquated schools with the rusty unions and curmudgeon teachers nor is it the hyperfocus on testing, standards, and charter schools as a winning formula. It’s the system that creates separate and unequal schooling for students all across the spectrum only exacerbated by the 1% influence upon them. Whenever we seek compliance for the sake of compliance or we use the words rigor to mean one thing (raising the bar) and not how it’s actually defined (hardship, torture), we subjugate. Whenever we embody the principles of the folks whose policies disproportionally affect our kids, we oppress.

“Does that include me, a person of color from the neighborhoods my students grew up? Sometimes. That’s consciousness.

“Much like anti-racist/sexist/homophobic work, if we aren’t engaged in shaking off the things that bind us down, we become complicit in it. The history of American education is bound together with the history of America, racism and all. It’s best we do this work discomforted, maladjusted, and riled up by social injustices” (2015).

How do educators reach beyond the traditional structures or confines in which they have been placed to understand their larger significance as change agents? Is it the duty of educators to singlehandedly rectify inequity when they see it occurring, especially when their professional training and development confirm what they already know to be true: that inaction is harming the students with whom they are entrusted?

These are the types of questions that most, if not all, educators have debated in their own minds, or with a select, trusted few, especially if they work in schools or systems that are resistant to change. How do you know what your role should or should not be?

Teaching to a specific standard or using an approved curriculum is a necessary part of the profession. But at what point do educators become complicit in preserving the inadequacies of a broken system by playing along, by not rocking the boat?

Schools frequently adjust how and what they teach; perhaps equal consideration should be made to adjusting why the educators in those schools teach. Is it to satisfy syllabus expectations or to address the inequities of the youth who sit right in front of us? And why should this fight or challenge be confronted only by teachers, when all of us play a role in determining what’s acceptable, reasonable, and expected in our society?
“I believe I’m a change agent, because I’m on the side of right, and I’m on the side of the children. And I’ll take on anybody… what’s right for kids is right for kids … I’m a change agent as the leader of the building. “ Cliatt-Wayman said.

Gorski added, “I always think there are multiple spheres of influence [that] create change. We can make change interpersonally with one student. My classroom can be a site of resistance. The school can be my sphere of influence, maybe the bigger education system… My responsibility is to find ways to expand my sphere of influence.”

“Education is the most, should be, the most child-centered. GLSEN is very proud that it was a founding member of the Whole Child initiative. If you put ‘whole child’ at the center, then you will be oriented towards thinking about the changes that need to happen to make that work,” continued Byard.
Panelists Eliza Byard, Montserrat Garibay, Paul Gorski, Linda Cliatt-Wayman, José Vilson, and moderator Sean Slade

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Conclusion

The word “Ferguson” has come to symbolize for so many the inequity that exists in our society. Following the August 2014 death of Michael Brown Jr., the governor of Missouri tasked a group of regional leaders to study what happened and to recommend a path toward change.

One of the Ferguson Commission’s signature recommendations was that the state of Missouri address systemic racial inequity by “supporting the whole child, ending hunger for children and families, reforming school discipline, and leveraging the influence of schools to improve childhood health” (Blad, 2015).

Imagine a whole child–centered framework being put in place at every school to ensure that students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged. This approach would greatly mitigate longstanding systemic deficiencies and inequities that students face. When educators, policymakers, and business and community leaders recognize each student’s humanity, when those who hold the decision-making power acknowledge the deficits that exist—that they either helped create or allow to persist—then we can clearly identify the ways we’ve disenfranchised students because of their class, race, gender, sexual orientation, and immigration status. And we can begin to put the right policies and practices in place to correct the course.
Policy Recommendations

The policy strategies for addressing inequities in our education system are as numerous and as varied as the factors that create such inequities in the first place. In many ways, ASCD’s comprehensive Whole Child approach to education is a multifaceted effort for an equitable education based on the priorities of local educators and the particular needs of their students. Working to ensure that each child, in each school, in each community is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged is sure to address issues of inequity along the entire continuum. Although the Whole Child approach provides a framework and organizing principle for equity, there are specific policies at the federal, state, and local levels for which educators can advocate to promote the approach systemically across all schools, districts, or states.

At the national level, the federal government can ensure that all students’ civil rights are protected and collaborate with states, districts, and communities to enhance efforts to safeguard all students. This means a robust Office of Civil Rights that promulgates equitable rules, vigorously investigates possible violations, and applies just enforcement.

Perhaps most fundamentally, the administration and Congress have a responsibility for a sufficient federal investment in education to help students meet high standards. First and foremost, this means fully funding the two preeminent federal K–12 education programs: Title I of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Title I's very purpose is to provide supplemental resources to districts and schools for the additional services and supports socio-economically disadvantaged students need for academic success. The No Child Left Behind Act set the targeted amount for Title I funding at $25 billion—for FY07. A decade later, the reality is that Congress appropriated only $15.5 billion for Title I in FY17, nearly $10 billion less than what was needed in 2007! Even if we do not take inflation into account, the higher standards students are being asked to meet combined with the dismaying rise in student poverty—more than half of all students in schools now come from low-income families—highlight the woefully inadequate funding for the federal government’s primary K–12 academic and equity program.

Similarly, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was created to help offset the expenses borne by districts and schools in educating students with disabilities, particularly after the federal and court-ordered mandates that students are to receive a free and appropriate public education. Although debate continues some 40 years later
about whether Congress “promised” a certain level of funding, it is clear that federal government identified a goal of providing 40 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure to states for special education costs; this goal has never come close to being met. Currently, federal IDEA funding to states is $12 billion ($1,177 per student), or approximately 16 percent of the average per-pupil expenditure—less than half of the 40 percent goal.

More locally, states can establish and enforce education policies and procedures that do not discriminate among educators and students, and they can adopt restorative justice discipline practices for schools. And much like their federal counterparts, states can provide the necessary structures and supports, both fiscal and programmatic, to help districts and schools ensure all students are healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged.

At the community level, school districts can ensure the equitable distribution of resources and services to best meet students’ needs, especially those living in poverty and those with disabilities. And district leaders can implement practices that ensure safe, supportive, and welcoming learning environments for all students and engage and inform families and communities in efforts to enhance these practices.
References


