



JUNE 25, 2020

WEBINAR 10 SUMMARY: NOT JUST VISION, BUT ACTION

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Discovery Education *Equity Talks* is a live webinar series featuring our nation's top educational leaders with a focus on cultivating equity and excellence. Moderated by Dr. Luvelle Brown – superintendent of Ithaca City School District – these 45-minute segments are designed to provide guidance and support to educators across the country and internationally who are struggling with issues of equity that, while always a topic of concern, have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, nationwide civil unrest, and the need to rely on remote and hybrid learning.

Summary

This webinar heavily focused on action: changing policies and changing mindsets. In Topeka, the governor established a commission on racial equity and justice, and their first task is to examine policing and create recommendations for new legislation. In a district in Pennsylvania, the board of directors proposed an antiracism and equity policy involving procedures that will lead to culturally responsive resolutions. The goal is to create sustainable action that aligns with the surrounding community and the needs of students. One panelist made a call for more substantial policy conversations regarding standardized tests and resources (e.g., laptops, internet). Another panelist asserted

that policy must influence funding because gaps in funding can involve tens of thousands of dollars per pupil, and inequities are often found with students of color. In Pennsylvania, one governor enacted a fair funding formula that accounts for students in high-poverty areas or who may need additional assistance with language services or special services. No matter the location, there is a consistent issue with underfunding.

During the discussion about inequities due to funding, panelists called for creativity in the face of underfunding. One example was examining hiring practices. Regardless of funding, we can test teachers and ensure that they are qualified to teach our students. For teachers who make

education their life-long careers, the initial investment in excellence is worth the effort. Panelists noted that all teachers, regardless of identity, must display cultural competence. There might also be community connections that can be leveraged. For example, one community utilized connections to provide homes for homeless students and their families. We need to partner with our communities to create a vision for a “new normal.”

The panelists recognized that “systemic oppression stands on the legs of bias.” A large part of creating sustainable change is addressing implicit bias and mindsets. Without addressing bias and mindsets, systems can be blamed, but students will still be subjected to racist practices. There are ways to reduce bias and change mindsets as a part of hiring practices. For example, one superintendent brings new leaders to the local prison to critically examine the school-to-prison pipeline, reminding them that change starts from the top-down and the bottom-up. In a New York district, the superintendent asserts that “you cannot change anything you cannot name.” We need to name the problem in order to create practical changes that address inequitable attendance policies, grading practices, and educator recruitment.

The panelists reminded us how much data exists and what there is to be learned from it. Stakeholders can look at data locally or nationally and there and note evidence of inequity. The problem is not identifying the problem; the problem is whether we are ready to do something about it. We need to use the anger and frustration about inequities to change policy, practices, and mindsets. One interesting solution posed was to link data to action. The suggestion was to send school system leaders on a “day in the life of” mission where they shadow students and live the inequities. This allows for leaders to experience those trends that data show firsthand and to provide an opportunity to get students involved in addressing their needs. In addition, leaders who have experienced

inequities should be courageous in telling their own stories. Telling one’s story with authenticity creates “buy in” and allows us to “start somewhere” when we may have trouble identifying the best place to start. Sharing experience creates the opportunity for hope in a courageous system that involves advocacy, action, and empathy.

Pertinent Quotes

- Systemic oppression stands on the legs of bias.”
- “We now have the license and also the responsibility to really have students buy into hope.”
- “Justice will not be served until those who are unaffected are as outraged as those who are.”

Additional Questions/Commentary

- What are schools’ roles in protests? Should districts take a stand and march? Should they participate in mobilizing or organization?
- What are the best recruiting practices to promote cultural responsiveness?
- What alternatives are there to traditional discipline in schools?
- Are there resources (e.g., equity questions) for critically examining school systems, policies, practices, decision making, etc.?

Resources for Consideration

- Reading School District. (n.d.). *Equity and Anti-Racism Resolution*. <https://www.readingsd.org/Page/2501>
- Anderson, T. (2020, June 24). When the marches end, will you stay awake? *The St. Louis American*. http://www.stlamerican.com/news/columnists/guest_columnists/when-the-marches-end-will-you-remain-awake/article_aece461c-b628-11ea-8812-db652cf62f24.html

- Topeka Public Schools. (2016, September 29). *Section I: Definition, Purpose, Belief Statements and Yearly Strategic Goals of Topeka Public Schools Equity Council*. https://drive.google.com/file/d/13jaaDzvE0_Y4B8rDcfaEaxYT3CAtojol/view
- Vedantam, S., Schmidt, J., Shah, P., Cohen, R., Boyle, T., & Penman, M. (2018, March 9). Radio Replay: The Mind Of The Village [Audio podcast episode]. In *Hidden Brain*. NPR News. https://www.npr.org/2018/03/09/591895426/the-mind-of-the-village-understanding-our-implicit-biases?fbclid=IwAR2g1s3ai_