



Central Carolina Regional Educational Service Alliance

Serving School Districts in the Heart of North Carolina

TO: Brie Butler, Kelvin Bullock, Freda Clifton, Jill McKenna, Karen Harrington, Leondus Farrow, Maurice Barnes, Rodney Trice, Sheldon Lanier, Sherita Cobb, Todd Wirt, Patricia Hilliard

FROM: Neil Pedersen
Executive Director

SUBJ: Meeting Summary and Direction for Equity Advisory Committee

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We had an engaging discussion today around the definition of equity in each of our represented districts and the role that the Central Carolina RESA might play in supporting equity initiatives in our region. It's clear that school districts and communities are in very different places in terms of discussions around race and equity. That said, those districts with full-time equity officers admitted that progress was slow and much work remained. Other districts thought that they needed to have more discussions around equity with a racial lens but recognized that there is an understandable hesitancy to engage their communities in these discussions due to the potential negative repercussions they may have. In some districts, the reality is that if the public schools are perceived as advocating for more an equitable distribution of resources and more access to advanced academic programs for students of color, it might result in more white flight to private, charter, or home schools, resulting in less support for the traditional public schools.

Although the districts' definitions of equity tended to be broad and inclusive in terms of what populations of students they applied to, in most cases the primary focus was on racial groups. Race tends to be correlated with economic status and even exceptional education status. Consequently, it was agreed that the focus of our future programming should be centered around issues related to race.

The Council also seemed to agree that the focus of our work should not be narrow. For instance, many of our districts are involved with the Office of Civil Rights over disparities in disciplinary actions. Rather than focus on how to reduce suspensions, particularly for students of color, it was felt that districts should take a more comprehensive approach to meet the social, emotional, and academic development of these students. That said, I pointed out that ESSA will require that districts provide information about the amount of funding going to each school and the assignment of the districts' most effective teachers. In addition, schools with the greatest disparities in academic achievement across subgroups will have to develop school improvement plans.

It was agreed that the CCRESA could be helpful to districts in promoting equity agendas in its member districts. For districts that may be hesitant to engage in this work, the CCRESA's promotion of equity programs would provide support to the superintendent and his/her staff when advocating with school boards and their communities. A superintendent also could point to other school districts in our region that are moving forward with equity initiatives.

It was agreed that the Central Carolina RESA could be helpful to its member districts in the following ways:

Professional Learning for School and District Leaders

CCRESA could jump-start and/or expand districts' efforts in achieving greater equity by offering one or two-day programs for school and district leaders that help them to perceive their schools through a racial equity lens and the implications that racial bias has on their institutions. Two districts, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools and the Wake County Public School System, have such programs that they are rolling out to their administrators. We may be able to piggyback on these programs and/or bring in consultants and speakers. The Racial Equity Institute was identified as a potential resource although it was acknowledged that it is expensive and can only work with groups of up to 40 participants in its two-day program. Ideally, superintendents and, possibly, even school board members would participate in professional learning around equity. It also was suggested that I contact the NC School Boards Association to determine what programming, if any, it is doing around race and equity. Perhaps, the CCRESA could partner with the NCSBA in offering a program to school board members and superintendents. After these introductory sessions, the CCRESA could support more in-depth professional learning in areas such as those that promote (1) approaches for reducing out-of-school suspensions, (2) instructional practices that are culturally responsive, and (3) safe, respectful, and healthy school cultures.

Building the Capacity of District Equity Leaders and Sharing Best Practices

Council members expressed an interest in the CCRESA enhancing their capacity to be equity leaders in their districts. In addition to their participation in the sessions described above, Council members would like to meet approximately three times per year to share best practices, to, possibly, engage in discussions around recommended articles, reports, or books, and to share progress that each is making and/or obstacles that are impeding their progress. Another resource that the Council could tap into is the Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN). Although most of the resources are password protected, CHCCS, which is a member, can access resources and share those of interest with other districts.

Supporting Development of Comprehensive Equity Plans

Some of our districts already have equity plans, in some cases incorporated within their districts' strategic plans. Others are just at the initial planning stages or considering whether or not they want to develop equity plans. I asked Council members who had equity plans to share links to them or let us know where they can be accessed.

I will follow up with these ideas, but first I ask that you let me know what I've missed or misrepresented from our discussion this morning. Please let me know of any changes you would like me to make. Thanks for a fruitful discussion today.