1 Introduction

Ethics and equity and the principles of justice do not change with the calendar.

—D. H. Lawrence

There is currently a large national focus on closing school achievement gaps, but practical information for school leaders to actually use in their efforts to close these gaps is in short supply. That is the purpose of this book—to provide such practical information in the form of an expanded discussion of equity audits, a school leadership tool presented previously as a single chapter in *Leadership for Equity and Excellence: Creating High-Achievement Classrooms, Schools, and Districts*, our 2003 Corwin book.

Equity audits are a systematic way for school leaders—principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, teacher leaders—to assess the degree of equity or inequity present in three key areas of their schools or districts: programs, teacher quality, and achievement. These equity audits are designed to put streamlined, practical strategies in the hands of leadership practitioners at a time when such tools are sorely needed.

In keeping with our goal of providing a useful book, we think readers will find it useful if we make clear right at the beginning of this book what we mean by the word *equity*. Understanding how we use the term is central to understanding our discussion of equity audits in the rest of the book. By equity, we mean explicitly *educational equity*, an excellent definition of which is found on the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's Web site:

> Education equity: the educational policies, practices and
> programs necessary to (a) eliminate educational barriers based on

gender, race/ethnicity, national origin, color, disability, age, or other protected group status; and (b) provide equal educational opportunities and ensure that historically underserved or underrepresented populations meet the same rigorous standards for academic performance expected of all children and youth. Educational equity knowledge and practices in public schools have evolved over time and require a comprehensive approach. Equity strategies are planned, systemic, and focus on the core of the teaching and learning process (curriculum, instruction, and school environment/culture). Educational equity activities promote the real possibility of equality of educational results for each student and between diverse groups of students.

This definition of education equity highlights the complexity of the conditions required to achieve it and also emphasizes that its realization is dependent on addressing inequities in access, programs, and results—themes that we highlight consistently in the chapters ahead.

We also wish to emphasize here that our discussion of educational equity in general and equity audits specifically is intended primarily for educational leaders at the campus and district levels. That is because educational leaders are on the front lines in the ongoing battle to achieve education equity in U.S. public schools.

Though substantial educational achievement gaps have existed throughout the history of U.S. schooling, the national focus on closing them has never been more intense. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was signed into law on January 8, 2002, and could be described as the most sweeping reform of U.S. federal education policy since the 1960s. Although changes and modifications have been made to the law, and others likely will continue in the future, at its center remains a *potentially* revolutionary idea—an explicit statement by the federal government that achievement gaps between white and middle- and upper-income children, on one hand, and children of color and children from low-income homes, on the other, are unacceptable and must be eliminated.

This is an important policy statement from the national government; however, its success in achieving the aim of closing achievement gaps ultimately will depend on the law's implementation by hundreds of thousands of educators around the country. This is where school leaders play an extremely important role. They act as policy mediators or street-level

bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980; Rorrer & Skrla, 2005), in filtering and shaping the ways policies (such as NCLB) are implemented in local schools. In other words, school leaders such as principals can block the policies, ignore them, use them in negative ways, or use them in positive ways. We want to maximize leaders' ability to use accountability policy (including NCLB) that is intended to eliminate achievement gaps in the most positive and productive ways possible.

For such positive use of accountability policy to actually happen, however, school leaders need to be assisted in understanding how the force of these polices can be applied to help them achieve the goals they have for their schools, including reducing and eventually eliminating achievement gaps. One of the prime ways accountability at the national, state, and local levels can be of concrete assistance to school leaders is utilizing the data these systems provide to assess the current state of the school or district and to track progress.

Although many state accountability systems, and increasingly the federal system, have been producing this type of data for the past fifteen or twenty years, the simple existence of the data does not automatically lead to school improvement or to diminished achievement gaps. The data must be analyzed, and school decision making must be linked to the data. This sounds like a straightforward process, but it is considerably more complicated in actual practice, particularly when the data show wide gaps in achievement between and among student groups based on race, ethnicity, family income, and language proficiency.

We have found in our work over the past two decades as researchers and as teachers who work with aspiring and practicing school administrators that people in schools overwhelmingly do not have a clear, accurate, or useful understanding of the degree of inequity present in their own schools and school districts. Furthermore, in typical school settings, teachers and administrators frequently avoid the topic of race completely as a possible factor in discussions about achievement gaps (Pollock, 2001). In addition, it is also common that when questioned about why children of color and children from low-income homes do not do well in school, educators almost always give reasons external to schools as the cause, such as the children's parents, their neighborhoods, and even their genetics (Haycock, 2001).

Thus, educators, school leaders in particular, need assistance in learning to recognize that there are large and persistent patterns of inequity *internal* to schools—patterns that are embedded in the many assumptions, beliefs, practices, procedures, and policies of schools

themselves. In fact, as one of our reviewers pointed out, such patterns of inequity not only result in differential experiences for students who differ along race, social class, gender, and disability lines, the systemic inequity present in schools may actually create differences among students (see also McDermott, 1997). Therefore, in response to this need for assistance in identifying and addressing internal patterns of inequity, equity audits are intended to provide such assistance in a very concrete way. In other words, these audits are designed to provide insight into, discussion of, and practical responses to systemic patterns of inequity in schools and school districts. Our discussion of equity audits continues in more depth and detail in the next eleven chapters.

CHAPTERS 2–12 PREVIEWS

The chapters in this book are roughly divided into three parts. The first part of the book (Chapters 1–3) contains more theoretical content; these chapters lay out the background and historical context for our version of equity audits. Part II (Chapters 4–7) describes the equity audit process for schools and districts. In Chapters 8 through 12 (Part III), we concentrate on attitudes, beliefs, strategies, and examples that are intended to help leaders address inequities uncovered by equity audits in their schools and districts. A brief preview of the content of each individual chapter follows.

Chapter 2. The Case for Systemic Equity

In this chapter, we include a discussion of historic inequities in U.S. public schools, offer a brief history of successive "waves" of school reform, and make the case for the need for systemic equity. That is, we argue that achievement equity is not possible without equity in other parts of the system, specifically teacher-quality equity and equity in the instructional programs to which children have access.

Chapter 3. History and Overview of Equity Audits

Here we trace the three streams of earlier research on which our version of equity audits builds—civil rights, curriculum management audits, and state accountability systems. We also suggest a simple process for conducting equity audits and provide the overall model that will be expanded upon in Chapters 4, 5, and 6.

Chapter 4. Teacher Quality Equity

This chapter explains and provides examples for the four indicators of teacher quality equity: (a) teacher education (bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees; number or percentage holding a particular degree), (b) teacher experience (number of years as a teacher), (c) teacher mobility (number or percentage of teachers leaving or not leaving a campus on an annual basis), and (d) teachers without certification or assigned outside of their area of teaching expertise (e.g., language arts teachers teaching a math course).

Chapter 5. Programmatic Equity

This chapter provides explanation and examples for the second component of the equity audit, programmatic equity, which includes four indicators that research has consistently shown to be significant sites of inequity. These four include the following: (a) special education, (b) gifted and talented education (G/T), (c) bilingual education, and (d) student discipline.

Chapter 6. Achievement Equity

Here we provide explanation and examples for the third audit area, achievement equity, including the four indicators: (a) state achievement test results, (b) dropout rates, (c) high school graduation tracks, and (d) SAT/ACT/AP/IB results.

Chapter 7. Equity Audits for School Districts

This chapter extends the equity audit model to the school district level and provides an extended illustration of how one district operationalized district-level equity auditing.

Chapter 8. Strategies: Becoming an Equity-Oriented Change Agent

This chapter focuses on leaders acquiring and maintaining the equity attitude required to implement equity audits. The leadership to implement the equity audit requires a change agent, and being a successful change agent requires skills and assumptions for working with others. Chapter 8 discusses these skills and assumptions, many of

which we have learned from or have had reinforced by our own efforts to be change agents.

Chapter 9. Strategies: Increasing Equity Consciousness Among Teachers

In this chapter and Chapter 10, we discuss two aspects of improving teaching: equity consciousness and well-developed teaching skills. Chapter 9 focuses specifically on equity consciousness. First, we define the four central beliefs on which an equity consciousness is built. Next, we describe the four levels of a developing equity consciousness. Finally, we offer strategies instructional leaders can use to help themselves and teachers further develop their equity consciousness.

Chapter 10. Strategies: Developing High-Quality Teaching Skills

This chapter focuses on the second aspect of teacher quality: well-developed teaching skills. In this chapter, we offer nine teaching skills that high quality teachers employ. Included with each skill is an evidence statement to assist one in knowing what this skill would look like in practice. We conclude Chapter 10 with strategies for helping teachers develop high quality teaching skills.

Chapter 11. Strategies: Avoiding Equity Traps and Developing Equity Skills

In this chapter, we define and give examples of the traps that prevent schools from being successful with all students, what we call "equity traps." Additionally, we describe and offer examples of a matching set of "equity skills" that prevent one from falling into these traps or allow one to be released from these traps. In this chapter, we also provide strategies to assist leaders in helping themselves, and those who work alongside them in schools, to develop their equity skills.

Chapter 12. Conclusion

Here we provide a review and summary of the main concepts outlined in the book.

CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Our overall goal for this book is to describe and discuss equity audits with an emphasis on detail and practicality that was not possible in our earlier discussions of this topic due to space limitations. We see equity audits as an important tool for educational leaders' toolboxes—one that has the potential to be extremely useful in the current highly pressurized accountability climate in U.S. public education.