

EIGHT

Leadership for Racial Equity

From Theory to Practice

To act is to be committed, and to be committed is to be in danger.

—James Baldwin¹

As a fifth-grader at Hilton Elementary School in Baltimore, I remember the tension I felt deep in the pit of my stomach whenever a friend or I was sent to the principal's office for misbehaving in the classroom or on the playground. Mrs. Emma Bright, the principal, carried herself with a no-nonsense flair. She commanded respect, and a bit of fear, from students and teachers alike. She was our leader, and we all marched to the beat of her drum.

Aside from my Nana, Mrs. Bright was the most powerful and influential person in the world, as I saw it then. It wasn't until later in my professional life that I learned that schools were led by superintendents and governed by boards of education, not by principals. But as a kid in elementary school, I had no idea what all those other district leaders did all day, particularly with a woman like Emma Bright in charge.

Today, I understand quite clearly the enormous roles both superintendents and school boards play. I still believe, however, that the effective principal does the heaviest lifting at the school-building level and is thus the determining factor in whether equity theory is converted into practices that transform teachers, who in turn influence student learning. Like Mrs. Bright, principals—when they are true, on-site (school-building) racial equity leaders—must be able to attract, hire, develop, and support teachers who share their vision for racial equity and commit to achieving it. It is also the principal's job to buffer highly qualified teachers from the district minutiae that are certain to interfere with racial equity work in particular and effective instruction in general. Principals' leadership notwithstanding, achieving equity and excellence in schools requires leaders at

every level to commit to their own personal transformation before attempting to engage others in the difficult process of uncovering, examining, and eradicating racism at the personal, professional, and organizational levels.

In this chapter, I will revisit one of the most important understandings I have gained and developed over the years about the process of achieving racial equity in schools, and that is the essential role of purposeful, passionate, and skillful leadership. In my first book, I talked about an equity-centered principal, Yvette Irving, who not only had the will to eradicate racial disparities at Del Roble Elementary School in San José, California, but also crafted and executed a plan that transported her, her staff, and her students to that vision. You've met other principals in this book. This chapter is focused on providing detail about how other key leaders for racial equity—namely, school board members, superintendents, independent school heads, university presidents, and executive teams—must participate in holding a place and setting the stage for systemwide equity and excellence. Their efforts, in turn, ensure that courageous principals are nurtured, supported, and rewarded for doing all that heavy lifting.

From the outset, I want to be clear in stating that no matter how courageous and skilled a principal may be—or, for that matter, an entire district administrative team of principals—achieving equity is a systemwide matter. It must be envisioned and led, competently and enthusiastically, by the superintendent and his or her executive cabinet. Without this centralized and prioritized leadership from the top down, the “random acts of equity” and pockets of excellence that I described in Chapter 7 will be the result, especially in schools led by equity-focused and -centered principals.



I often wonder why all districts with racial achievement disparities do not engage in a robust, prioritized equity and excellence strategy. What is it that gets in the way of superintendents and boards taking the Courageous Conversations approach or, more important, moving Courageous Conversations from theory to practice? One answer might be that talking about race as a behavioral trait runs counter to how many White people are socialized, thus the logic of having courageous conversations about race would seem to run counter to the prevailing beliefs. As I noted in the *Courageous Conversations* field guide, the public school superintendency continues to be the most White- and male-dominated aspect of our entire national education system. Given this race- and gender-lopsided leadership scenario and because leaders typically enjoy working from their existing skills sets and strong suits, it is easy to see that the tools for challenging racism typically would not be a part of the existing superintendents' arsenal of problem-solving skills. Moreover, developing those skills probably is not thought of as an activity that might elevate superintendents' self-efficacy or competence.

Our understandings of adaptive leadership and systems thinking illuminate several reasons why leaders with authority fail to tackle thorny issues like systemic racism. For one, too often the public rewards school leaders for finding quick, technical solutions to education challenges. Rarely do we invite those leaders to invest time and energy in transforming their systems into learning organizations that are capable of examining the problematic beliefs and behaviors that hold change captive. The lack of congruence between our desire for change and our willingness to equip and require leaders to enhance their racial equity will, skill, knowledge, and capacity is also at the heart of this challenge. Simply put,

school leaders often do not know enough to care appropriately about why so many children of color are under-served in our various systems of education or they are not encouraged or courageous enough to learn what they need to know—and *do*—to ensure racial equity.

Another reason for the relative lack of commitment to racial equity programming at the highest levels of school system authority is that many district leaders are not familiar with the Courageous Conversations Protocol as a tool for talking about race, nor is the Pacific Educational Group (PEG) Systemic Racial Equity Framework part of their knowledge base. Because *they don't know what they don't know*, they cannot examine the merits of the Framework's theory of transformation or gauge the appropriateness of implementing Courageous Conversations in their systems.

Among the leaders who are familiar with PEG's work, some have chosen to embrace the Courageous Conversations Protocol, and some have not. Those who fall into the latter category most likely are not reading this book. But perhaps you, as one of their subordinates, are. Thus, the enormous job of getting your supervisor to shift his or her beliefs about the importance of confronting race directly falls on your shoulders. To you, I suggest that you encourage your superintendent to engage in one-on-one or, perhaps more broadly, an executive team book study of the *Courageous Conversations* field guide. A nonthreatening, strategic introduction to the Courageous Conversations philosophy and Courageous Conversations Protocol as well as the PEG Framework might unlock some entrenched leadership blocks and barriers.

In the meantime, the understandings you can gain from this second *Courageous Conversations* book can help you personally to develop, support, and maintain whatever random acts of equity and pockets of excellence exist within your school or school system. Simultaneously, because systemic racial equity transformation demands top-down leadership, I encourage you to petition your district leadership for a systemwide vision of and commitment to racial equity. For those of you who work in systems that are currently implementing the Courageous Conversations Protocol and perhaps the PEG Framework, ask yourself these questions: To what degree is my district's engagement truly systemic? Does my superintendent have clear and obvious proficiency in the Courageous Conversations Protocol? Does his or her administrative team, including all site and central office leaders, feel invited and supported in (and are they evaluated for) their own emerging and applied leadership for racial equity? Last, do their efforts to further the envisioned transformation elevate them, personally, professionally, and organizationally?

EQUITY DEVELOPMENT FOR SCHOOL BOARDS

A number of school superintendents have telephoned my office asking for advice on how to get their school boards “on board” with their implementations of the Courageous Conversations Protocol so that together they can begin engaging site and central office leadership in more comprehensive racial equity professional development. As I will discuss later (in Chapter 10), lay boards, in my experience, typically lack the requisite level of understanding about the intersection of race and schooling to make qualified decisions about the importance of districtwide engagement in racial equity programming and development. But because school boards typically approve district expenditures for large-scale improvements, superintendents first must convince board members about the importance of racial equity work before this essential training can take place.

The controversy surrounding this work certainly does not help equity-centered superintendents gain school board members' confidence. The fact that this controversy is almost exclusively generated by White parents, educators, policymakers, and other community stakeholders, most of whom have never personally engaged in racial equity work, presents another significant challenge. The amount of blogging about the issue on the Internet is also considerable, even though most of this chatter, upon closer scrutiny, simply amounts to unsubstantiated personal attacks on the proponents of racial equity work and "fringe" or lunatic expressions.

What does help is the abundance of data, disaggregated by race, that is available to superintendents to illustrate the problem, including data on racial disparities in educational achievement, by district and nationwide. Such data also clearly demonstrate the fact that existing programmatic interventions have proved to be insufficient to address systemic racial disparities in achievement, discipline, special education and gifted/talented placements, and graduation and dropout rates. Racial equity leaders must arm themselves with a constant, current, complete, and irrefutable storehouse of data that clearly and concisely illustrates the racial equity challenge.

Using data and language that board members can understand (like *achievement gap*), a superintendent may be able to obtain board buy-in for racial equity programming with less-than-ideal understanding of the programmatic concepts and ideas involved. Once the board is thus engaged, however, the superintendent should immediately schedule racial equity training for those very board members so that their will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to have courageous conversations about race can be strengthened. Only then can this governing body develop and ratify the essential racial equity policies that must follow to hold the district accountable for achieving its vision of equity and excellence and thereby meeting the needs of *all* students.

DISTRICT EQUITY LEADERSHIP TEAMS (DELT AND DELTA)

The superintendent who is impassioned and purposeful about achieving racial equity must also be effective in transferring his or her vision to the executive leadership teams whose job it is to supervise the execution of racial equity programming and practices throughout the system. According to PEG's Systemic Racial Equity Framework and its theory of transformation, the superintendent—using an unapologetic, top-down approach—guides his or her executive team in determining the depth, breadth, and velocity at which equity programming occurs.

To move Courageous Conversations from theory to practice, district superintendents have five primary roles.

1. They must serve as the primary keepers of and voices for their districts' racial equity vision. They must also be recognized as being highly advanced themselves in executing racial equity practices.
2. They must assist in the professional development of their boards of education, transforming them into bodies that can effectively oversee the ratification and execution of sound racial equity policy.

3. They must spearhead the transformation of their executive team into a District Equity Leadership Team (DELT) charged with developing, monitoring, and assessing the districts' movement toward equity. As a prerequisite, DELT members also must receive professional development to help them uncover, examine, and address the ways in which race influences their own personal, professional, and organizational beliefs and behaviors. An effective DELT engages in its own development and that of key site and central office leaders, and members also craft, execute, monitor, and evaluate their districts' equity transformation framework.
4. Superintendents must lead their DELT to establish a professional learning community ethos for site administrators and central office directors in which all are expected to develop their individual and collective will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to lead their schools and divisions toward embracing a culture and climate of equity and excellence.
5. After the racial equity work is under way at the district level, superintendents must create a multiconstituency team who can offer honest feedback on the nature and impact of the equity work systemwide. This group, known as District Equity Leadership Team Advisory (DELTA), should be made up of people who are uniquely determined and situated to understand and speak to how the equity work is being experienced “on the ground.” These constituencies include, but may not be limited to, principals, department managers, teachers, parents, students, and community-based organization leaders. Superintendents must also ensure that the DELTA is well supported and that its members feel empowered to have courageous conversations about race at the system's highest levels.

SITE AND CENTRAL-OFFICE DEPARTMENT LEADERS ENGAGED IN EQUITY/ANTIRACISM DEVELOPMENT (LEADs)

With superintendents thus focused on achieving systemic equity and excellence, the key leaders at the school sites and in central office departments are challenged to embed the Courageous Conversations principles and Protocol deep into the culture and climate of their schools and departments, and therefore into the beliefs and behaviors of teachers as well as operational and instructional support staff. Genuine reform—reform that is significant and sustainable—occurs only once the vast majority of classroom teachers and other school site personnel challenge their harmful assumptions about the abilities and potential of under-served students of color, those students' families, and their community support systems.

Principals and central office department managers play a huge role in guiding this transformation of beliefs and behaviors. Their task is to create the safe environments in which educators feel encouraged and expected to grow and change. For this difficult work truly to take hold, systems must develop a culture of trust and openness. This is especially

important when leaders will be presented, as they most likely will as a result of racial equity efforts, with tough decisions to make about personnel issues, professional challenges, and organizational “non-discussables.” If leaders are not accustomed to collaboration, data-based decision-making, or inquiry-based learning and development, addressing systemic racism will prove virtually impossible.

Superintendents must work to empower DELT members to own and actualize their districts’ vision of equity and excellence in ways that outlive their leadership. Similarly, principals and directors must infuse their passion for equity into their school-site or department staffs. Given these challenges, racial equity leadership professional development activities must help principals and central-office managers not only to embody a commitment to racial equity and excellence but also to “spread the good news” about racial equity efforts generally and specifically.

Mere compliance will not suffice if achieving racial equity is the ultimate goal, nor will leading by intimidation help to engage school site and central office staff in equity work and practice. At best, it will result in compliant people who will do only what is asked of them and no more. Equity-focused development activities must also provide both leaders and those whom they lead with sufficient practice and feedback on their equity thinking and actions.

The following outline should provide insights into the topics school-site and central office leaders have found useful as they develop their transformative racial equity plans.

PEG (PACIFIC EDUCATIONAL GROUP) EQUITY SEMINAR CURRICULUM SAMPLE TOPICS

- What will it take? A professional development strategy for addressing racial achievement disparity
- Introduction to the Courageous Conversations Protocol
- Mindfulness: Listening, inquiring, and responding
- Understanding critical race theory and schooling
- Systems thinking and organizational learning
- Principles of adaptive leadership for racial equity
- Positive deviance approach: Examining our professional learning community
- Key Factors in the Development of Culturally Relevant Teaching
- Collaborative Action Research for Equity (CARE) Introduction: CARE Team Roles and Responsibilities
- Exploring the Levels of Family Interaction: Involvement, Engagement, Empowerment
- Partnerships for Academically Successful Students (PASS) Introduction: PASS Team Role and Responsibilities; PASS Guiding Principles and Implementation Phases
- Leading the Process of Change
- Characteristics of an Antiracist Leader

EQUITY TEAMS

When principals and central office managers have developed the requisite will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to hold a systemwide vision for racial equity and are able to lead others into understanding and action toward this goal, racial equity efforts can rise to the third level: that of planned and purposeful distribution of leadership and authority. At that level, principals and central-office managers are guided in how to select a team of teachers or operational support staff to help lead, under their supervision, the dissemination of their vision, will, skill, knowledge, and capacity school- or departmentwide.

This is where the Courageous Conversations Equity Team (E-team) comes into play. E-teams truly are the engine of transformation for moving Courageous Conversations from theory to practice, with the school-site principals or central-office managers being the conductors. Given that educators at all levels tend to learn a great deal from those who function in the same or similar roles, E-teams should include a broad sampling of site or central-office department leaders of diverse races, genders, roles, and seniority and disposition levels. Given the system's propensity to marginalize or isolate certain departments such as Special Education and English Language Development, leaders should always strive to put these educators on the E-team. Such teams can facilitate role-alike, job-embedded courageous conversations about race more readily and effectively, in a way that guarantees relevancy and engenders trust and credibility. Once properly selected, however, they must guard against trying to "fix" other school personnel or find "quick-fix" solutions. Instead, they should dedicate their time and attention to internalizing the Courageous Conversations Protocol among themselves and to assessing the key ways in which racism affects each E-team member personally and professionally. By growing collectively in their ability to uncover, examine, and address racism, E-teams can begin planning and executing professional learning and development experiences for themselves and their colleagues that can have a meaningful impact on the larger organization—that is, the school.

Although students' educational improvement and success hang in the balance and the need to demonstrate a sense of urgency in their efforts to advance equity transformation is great, E-teams should also avoid attempting to carry out racial equity actions in a vacuum or prematurely. Their school-site or central-office colleagues might suffer from such incompletely framed actions, and the avoidable blunders of a passionate yet unskilled E-team member might become ammunition to challenge equity work as a whole.

Several factors help explain why the E-teams created in different PEG partnering districts have moved at different speeds and sometimes in different directions. First, principals and central-office managers have tremendous influence over who is selected to serve on each E-team. Quite often, E-team membership is a reflection of these leaders' racial equity will and skill. If a principal or central-office manager is challenged to gain staff confidence and collaboration around nonequity aspects of their school or department vision, this lack of staff support will become even more evident when it comes to leading for racial equity.

Second, educators are themselves quite unique as far as their commitment to racial equity and their skill to lead in racial equity work. Potential team members come with varied levels of will, skill, knowledge, and capacity to uncover, understand, examine, and

address issues of race in their own lives and in the lives of others. When members collectively demonstrate a high level of passion for this kind of work, their teams tend to move faster.

A third reason E-teams across PEG's partnering districts struggle to maintain a unifying pace is that school cultures, climates, challenges, and strengths relative to addressing and eliminating racial disparities vary significantly. After a certain level of professional development, the teams are charged with supporting their school or department colleagues in embracing and advancing a vision of equity. This responsibility can be quite challenging, even for skilled E-teams when a high proportion of educators resist or struggle to understand the importance of racial equity. In such cases, PEG's work is slowed. Conversely, when an E-team's work, and the goal of racial equity generally, are embraced universally by that team's colleagues, the pace of its efforts is quicker, and the deeper meaning of equity is realized.

THE BEACON PROJECT

Among the more successful E-teams are those working with principals who are also quite motivated to move Courageous Conversations from theory to practice rapidly. For such schools, PEG designed the Beacon Project as a means of accelerating equity transformation and providing tangible markers and models for other schools in those schools' districts.

Principals self-select their schools into the accelerated Beacon Project process by committing to prioritize racial equity work above all other reform efforts in their schools. Beacon Project E-teams receive intensive equity seminars and immediate, direct coaching support so that each member can begin focusing on realizing his or her personal and professional racial equity leadership transformation. Later in the process, these E-team members are led to create and execute a collectively generated plan for institutional or organizational change. Beacon Project site principals share their racial equity learning and work-in-progress with their fellow principals via administrative team meetings; they also sometimes participate in designing and leading racial equity professional development exercises for other district leaders.

Launching a Beacon Project within the broader framework of school-site and central-office racial equity leadership development is one way of ensuring that systemic progress on this front does not suffer from the predictable gradualism and incremental change that has delayed the arrival of quality education for all children in this country. Beacon Projects also provide opportunities for school systems to develop their internal capacities for leading equity transformation more quickly by offering accelerated schools earlier access to the resources and supports they need to convert racial equity theory into practice and providing mechanisms for sharing the results of those practices with others in their schools and districts in advance of overall system change.

STAFF OF COLOR EQUITY DEVELOPMENT

Even more essential than the need (discussed in Chapter 6) to support school staff and administrators of color in racial equity leadership development is the need to include

educators of color in the systemic racial equity transformation process. In most instances, these educators require specialized and supplemental professional development and encouragement to “stay the course” in that process. This is so for several reasons.

First, much of the existing racial equity leadership literature targets and is geared toward White educators and blatantly lacks any focus on the needs and perspectives of educators of color. Why? Because White educators typically hold the vast majority of leadership roles in schools and districts across the country and because they typically have the most work to do to divest themselves of color-blind perspectives and embrace the color consciousness that fosters true racial equity. The process of developing this consciousness, and the courage to act on it, proceeds along distinctively different trajectories for White school leaders and school leaders of color. Thus, while many White educators typically resist or struggle with the process of racial self-discovery and require more time to grasp the concept of color consciousness, many educators of color “get” those processes immediately and are eager to engage in them.

Requiring educators of color to participate in their White colleagues’ racial consciousness development can be exhausting for them, can damage their emotional and physical health and well-being, and also wastes time. As Janet Helms² contends in her discussions about the six stages of White identity development, many White people experience periods of guilt or shame as they move from color blindness to color consciousness. This reaction often is prompted by the disintegration or shattering of their perceptions of Whiteness as a race-neutral existence. As White educators delve more deeply into how White skin color privilege plays out in their personal lives and in society, and as they learn how that privilege contributes to the oppression of people of color, they are likely to experience anger, consciously or unconsciously, which they may unload or project toward their unsuspecting non-White peers.

Thus, in PEG’s Staff of Color Equity Development Training, non-White educators are shown how to recognize and address the racial identity dynamics at work among their White colleagues, even if those efforts seem painful and cause temporary stress. They also come to understand these signs as an indication of growth and progress.

Educators of color also deserve and require specialized support for racial equity leadership development because White staff members often perceive courageous conversations about race as more threatening, and thus less effective, when they are initiated or led by people of color. For example, when I speak my own racial truths as a Black man in my seminars (or even in conversations with my White friends and professional associates)—which I try to do as gently and nonthreateningly as I can—I am often perceived as “attacking” White people in general or as causing them to feel fearful. Apparently, my racial reality (and I suppose that of many other Black people as well) shatters one of the dominant myths of Whiteness: that we Americans exist in a post-racial, color-blind society. Staff of Color Equity Development Training shows educators of color how to navigate these predictable situations without sacrificing their integrity and how to enhance the quality of their own engagement in courageous conversations about race as well as that of their White counterparts.

School districts that partner with PEG must also commit to advancing educators of color to higher levels of positional and decision-making authority, and racial equity work

is often a good way to begin that process. Most White Americans live their entire lifetimes in a habit of mind that Joyce E. King³ calls *racial dysconsciousness* or a skewed, uncritical awareness about race, particularly about their own Whiteness. African Americans, on the other hand, often become conscious of their own and others' racial identities at an early age. According to William Cross's theory of Black identity development,⁴ this process, for most Black people, begins within the first 3 years of life. Thus, an educator's depth of experience in addressing racial consciousness issues can serve as a determining factor in identifying who is best suited to lead a school system toward a vision of racial equity.

Racial consciousness alone, however, is an insufficient criterion for leadership in this regard. Educators of color must demonstrate a thorough understanding of how to effectively engage and lead White educators in racial equity work. They must also be equipped with the proper tools and demeanor to challenge and support other educators of color, who often have struggled with their own racial identities and/or have been socialized to adopt the color-blind, race-neutral perspectives of the dominant (White) society in which they live and work.

Intentionally and effectively dedicating resources to develop racial equity-focused educators of color as leaders assures that PEG partnering districts will improve in their ability to attract, maintain, and promote people of color. It also goes a long way toward advancing a system in which the adult population of professionals truly represents and reflects the rapidly changing student racial demographics.

STUDENTS ORGANIZED FOR ANTI-RACISM (SOAR)

A year after I launched my Beyond Diversity seminars in the San Francisco Bay Area, Diana Levy, then principal at an alternative high school in nearby Castro Valley, contacted me with a special request. She wanted to enroll several of her students in the 2-day training. Although I was somewhat skeptical about putting students in the same room with adult educators, who often struggled through their personal racial histories and baggage, I never doubted students' ability to understand and engage with the training's content or processes. I wondered, however, if the mere presence of students would give the adults reason to be silent or, worse, to relate to the students in inauthentic and even patronizing ways. Diana's confidence in her students' ability to hold their own led me to table my concerns and approve her request. The training that followed signaled the beginning of my developing philosophy about how to engage students as leaders for racial equity in their schools.

By paying especially close attention to Diana's students and many groups of middle and high school students in subsequent trainings, I discovered several important nuances relating to adolescents' emerging racial consciousness and racial identity development. First and most critical, students are hungry for safe and meaningful opportunities to understand better how race affects their lives. With this desire comes an eagerness to say what is on their mind, sometimes without any understanding of or particular attachment to the language and intonation filters that society encourages its members to use. In other words, young people often express their truths about race in raw and piercing ways, using language that often creates heightened discomfort for the adults charged with their instruction. Another opportunity (or challenge) associated with bringing students into Courageous Conversations is that students, and particularly students of color, often bring a higher level of consciousness to the dialogue than many White adults.

The downside of engaging students in my seminars is that their earnest and honest approaches may be one of the primary reasons educators often choose *not* to engage their students in courageous conversations about race. As I discussed earlier, many White educators have lived and successfully operated with a color-blind, race-neutral mindset their entire lives. Similarly, many educators of color, although not perceiving the world to be post-racial or color-blind, have been socialized to avoid open and honest interracial interactions and dialogue. In those school and district settings where a culture of adult silence around race and racism prevails, students often feel that they do not have permission to speak publicly and openly on the matter, and getting students to speak up can be a long and painstaking process. Breaking through adults' barriers to courageous conversations about race can be extraordinarily difficult and time-consuming, but I have found that when granted permission to talk about race in a safe environment, students, both White and of color, seem to get right to it—or, at least, they seem to get to the core of the matter in much shorter time frames.

Perhaps young people approach racial issues with greater humility and velocity because they carry less accumulated baggage, both in terms of prior experience and socialization. Maybe their relative racial innocence or their seemingly innate resistance to problematic adult rules of engagement affords them greater access to and opportunity within the Courageous Conversations framework. But as an adult facilitating and supervising the interracial and intraracial discourse, during and after that first Beyond Diversity seminar with Diana Levy's students, it was hard for me not to feel hopeful about the possibility of a less racially charged and destructive future.

It is important to note, however, that students, both White and of color, have been raised and educated in a society and schools that encourage—maybe even force—them to be racially dysconscious. As a result, they sometimes mistake racial desegregation (or perhaps, integration) for racial awareness and equity. Subsequently, when students of color fail to recognize the presence and role of Whiteness or the existence of White privilege as counterforces to their success, they often unfairly blame themselves when they fall short. Similarly, White students can develop a false sense of superiority when they fail to acknowledge how their Whiteness advantages them, their culture, and their perspectives. As such, all students need opportunities to explore and expand their understandings about race. But before engaging with students in courageous conversations, educators should spend some time thinking about which aspects of the school culture and climate students might begin improving and which aspects might be addressed more appropriately by adults.

Like strategies used to transform adult educators into racial equity leaders, the process for students should first involve personal consciousness-raising followed by a focus on specific school-based race-related challenges. For example, in 2002, at one of PEG's partnering districts, Chapel Hill-Carrboro City (North Carolina) Schools, student leaders participating in the Beyond Diversity seminar were first invited to write their racial autobiographies and their emerging views on race in poetry form and share them during a "slam." (I wanted to ensure that their day away from traditional coursework would be one they could enjoy while still engaging in rigorous academic skills and knowledge development.) The students then listened to each other's poems and selected a few they believed indicated the most personality, depth of content, and stylistic precision. A poem written by 10th-grader Pablo Vega was selected as the contest winner, and his poem, "I Dream," was used to support the remaining seminar activities. It was also published in the *Courageous Conversations* field guide.

Let's take another look at Pablo's poem here. Only this time, think strategically about how it can be applied to our efforts to engage students intentionally in systemic racial equity transformation in schools.

I Dream

**I am from a clash of color, from an idea of love, modeled for others' perception.
 I see me as I am, but I am hidden from others' views.
 I am who I am, but a living contradiction to my peers.
 I see life as a blessing, a gift granted to me.
 Why should my tint describe me? Why should my culture degrade me?
 Why should the ignorance of another conjure my presence?
 Too many times I've been disappointed by the looks,
 by the sneers and misconceptions of the people who
 don't get me, who don't understand why it hurts.
 I dream of a place of glory and freedom, of losing the weight of
 oppression on my back.
 I dream of the enlightenment of people, of the opening of their eyes.
 I dream for acceptance, and for the blessing of feeling special just once.
 One moment of glory . . . for the true virtue in my life.
 For the glimmer of freedom, and a rise in real pride.**

As this poem attests, not only are student voices essential to our work in eliminating the barriers to racial equity that often are unseen or overlooked by adults, their leadership can be a significant force in accelerating that transformation.

Soon after working with Pablo and his peers in Chapel Hill, I sat down to review all of the racial equity work PEG consultants and I had been doing with students since the late 1990s, beginning with Evelyn McClain's seventh and eighth graders at the Park School in suburban Baltimore County; Diana Levy's sophomores and juniors from Castro Valley; the fourth- and fifth-graders at Eastridge Elementary School in the Cherry Creek School District near Denver, Colorado; and the kids in the Scholars and Girls Growing to Greatness program, also in Cherry Creek. The first thing I realized was that all of the students we had engaged in this work were ready and willing to talk openly and honestly about race. They were curious to learn how race operates in their own and others' lives and society. At times, however, their confusion around the topic caused them to arrive at conclusions that actually diminished their racial consciousness, such as the notion that they were living in a post-racial, color-blind America and that the nation's legacy of racial injustice and inequality was a relic of the past. Interrupting students' belief that theirs is a racially just world and that, by extension, their schools are racism-free is an essential part of PEG's Framework and, more specifically, its work in student antiracism leadership development. It is also critical that students' ignorance or misinformation about race be challenged in developmentally appropriate ways that arm them with greater capacity to face and surmount the racial barriers in their lives and particularly in their schools.

In 2004, PEG began offering racial equity leadership programming specifically targeted toward middle and secondary school students. Called SOAR (Students Organized for Anti-Racism), this seminar series addresses student racial equity leadership development in three distinct phases. In the first phase, students are invited to write or voice personal narratives that depict how they experience school as racial beings. Given that many students are unversed in the specific terminology used in racial equity leadership work and often are confused in their understandings about race and how it operates, these narratives are analyzed for their qualitative value only and are not regarded as definitive or conclusive. We continue to evoke student voices throughout this and the remaining SOAR phases to track how students' understandings change and (we hope) deepen during the course of the training.

Pablo's poem is a wonderful example of how PEG engages student voices in the first phase of its SOAR training. Although organized as a contest to deepen students' understanding and engagement of racial equity, the poetry exercise clearly enabled Pablo to articulate more precisely how race and racism affected his life. This precision ultimately helped the adult educators in his district address the more salient issues relating to these topics as they were experienced by real students in their schools.

By Phase 2 of our SOAR efforts, the student leaders have gained a higher level of confidence about how to engage in courageous conversations about race and can demonstrate deeper levels of understanding about how race influences their own and others' lives. The program's emphasis then shifts to have students collaborate with adults in projects, focused efforts, and other activities aimed at addressing racial disparities in their schools and district. The quality of this work often varies widely, based on how much educators invest in developing students in Phase 1. It also varies according to the ambitiousness of the overall school and district racial equity transformation plan.

For many students of color, the second phase of SOAR offers opportunities for meaningful leadership that most had not thought was available to them in their schools or districts. Given the higher levels of relevance and meaning SOAR activities provide for these students, they often rise to the occasion, thus challenging some beliefs educators have about the students' dedication, determination, and potential to be leaders and scholars. At Prairie Middle School in Cherry Creek, Colorado, for instance, students participated in every aspect of the planning, fundraising, and execution of a weekend-long equity symposium for African American and Latino students, families, and educators in their district. This included working to bring nationally recognized speakers to the school.

SOAR's Phase 2 collaborations also provide the additional data necessary to challenge institutional complacency and unwillingness to engage with or seek understandings about under-served students of color. Providing White students with opportunities to collaborate with their peers of color as racial equity leaders helps to dispel old and ingrained notions about White students' scholastic superiority as well as harmful institutional messages about students of color. These opportunities also enable White students to develop deeper understandings about racial privilege and the specific ways society and schools inequitably support their high-level achievement and engagement at the expense of that of students of color.

Finally, using Pablo's poem to facilitate SOAR's Phase 2 equity transformation, educators and students together might explore a section of the narrative and investigate

and address specific ways in which the institution is indicted. For example, a conversation could be organized around the following prompt: “How do district/school policies, programs, or practices degrade Latino students? (Identify some of the ways this takes place.)”

In SOAR’s Phase 3, students have been prepared to take racial equity matters into their own hands, and most often, they also express a hunger to do so. Given that all the phases of SOAR programming are overlapping rather than linear, the adult-student equity collaborations quite often continue throughout Phase 3, as do opportunities for student racial consciousness development via professionally facilitated seminars and workshops. During this final phase, however, students may wish to challenge systemic racism in ways that have greater meaning and importance to them. For example, they may organize to coach or tutor middle school students to be racially conscious or take on various racial equity leadership roles as part of their extracurricular activities or community service projects. High school students could develop, for example, a training module for middle school students in which they invite their younger peers to read Pablo’s “I Dream” poem and compare or contrast it to their own lives. By so doing, older students can help younger ones develop racial consciousness and voice. While students are not autonomous in terms of their school activities, it is critical for the adult racial equity leaders, be they educators or family/community members, to allow students to truly lead these efforts—even if it means allowing them to sometimes make mistakes—and learn from them.

It is worth reiterating that even though I view student racial equity leadership development as an integral component of systemic transformation, and thus essential to our efforts to move Courageous Conversations about race from theory to practice, we adults must be cautious about asking students to say or do that which we ourselves fear saying or doing. When students—who typically carry less racial baggage and fear—develop greater confidence and understanding to speak and challenge the racial status quo, resistant adults sometimes feel threatened and use their power to punish the students for their leadership. It behooves adult racial equity leaders to step up and ensure these students’ safety and security so that their intrinsic motivation and authentic participation can grow and expand.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

Think about the students in your school district as you answer these questions.

1. What evidence suggests that students in your school/district are ready and willing to engage as leaders for racial equity?
 2. Which adults are fortified with the requisite will, skill, knowledge, and capacity, and thus, are qualified to lead students in your school/district in becoming leaders for racial equity?
 3. How will you ensure that students are safe to develop racial consciousness and lead for racial equity in your school/district?
 4. What will be your way of buffering them from known and unknown resistant adults and, perhaps, other students?
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Voices From the Inside: Carla Randall

As I reflect on my personal journey to understand my own racial identity and my professional journey toward racial equity leadership, I identify several specific events that have affected me in a significant way. These events include (1) the decision by Portland Public Schools to not hire me as the principal of Jefferson High School (the only historically Black high school in Oregon); (2) an incident in which a seventh-grade Black boy was shadowed throughout his day at a middle school in Tualatin, Oregon; (3) an opportunity I missed to use my new power as chief academic officer of the Portland Public Schools to talk about race; and (4) the occasion when I read my racial autobiography to 250 Portland Public Schools leaders.

The first significant event that launched me on my journey as a leader for racial equity occurred in 2002, when I was told that instead of being hired as the principal of Jefferson High School, I was going to be placed as the principal in a seemingly suburban school in Portland with primarily White, affluent students. Let me share some background to this event. After demonstrating in my first vice principal job in Portland that I am an instructional leader with an equity focus and a continual learning ethic, who deals with performance management effectively, I was involuntarily transferred to Jefferson High School on August 25, 2001. A well-respected educator and former superintendent in Oregon had been called out of retirement to serve as the principal, and I was to be the vice principal, joining a Black vice principal who had been named 2 weeks earlier. Jefferson High School had been a failing school for decades and had been reconstituted 3 years previously. Jefferson had recently lost three Black principals, all of them leaving by November of their first year. Since 2002, Jefferson High School has lost three more Black principals.

Despite those odds, our 2001 administrative team made it through the entire year. I found a school of young, willing-to-reform teachers, and 920 students, who, with their parents, won my heart. By November, I knew that I wanted to be the principal at Jefferson High School.

I had many new experiences during my year at Jefferson. The Black vice principal refused to engage after November because he could not work with two White administrators. I had no idea what he was talking about. I observed the Black administrator being unwilling to interact with many Jefferson students because they were seemingly of a class below his own, while I was having positive interactions with many Jefferson students including smiles, conversations, and hugs. They expected to see me in hallways and in the classrooms because I had a consistent presence there. I observed that within the Black Portland community, those with lighter skin have higher status. I also watched the White principal hand out money to students at lunchtime simply because they asked for it.

I engaged in reform efforts with a primarily White staff to support students of color, and I collaborated with a team of teachers to establish freshman academies that, when implemented the following year, led to gains in student achievement. I watched a consultant from the Black community, during a meeting with the three administrators, tell the Black administrator that it was difficult for Black students to have an all-White administration. The Black administrator did not live or participate in the Jefferson neighborhood.

I learned that Black skin was not enough to make someone part of the Jefferson community. But I wasn't allowed to be the principal, even though many people believed I had the technical skills to turn the school around. Was it reverse racism? I thought so at the time, but we did not have a deep enough understanding about race.

Was it lack of experience? Experienced administrators had failed the 3 previous years, so why did I believe I could do it? Did it matter that I didn't live in the community? Other schools had principals that didn't live in their communities. Why did I have this intense emotion about not being allowed to be the principal at Jefferson High School? Did I believe I was entitled to the position?

I continued to ask these questions for 7 years, continuing to experience the intense feelings about not serving where I was most needed. I had yet to learn about Heifetz's Zone of Productive Distress or the protocols that would allow me to talk about race and discover who I am racially and what race had to do with that decision. My work with Courageous Conversations has significantly increased my understanding of White privilege. I have a deeper understanding of my White racial identity. Was it a mistake for Portland Public Schools to assign me as a strong leader to a White, affluent school rather than the lowest-performing high school in the state of Oregon?

I left Portland Public Schools in 2005, returning to the suburbs in the role of director of curriculum and instruction/director of secondary schools for the Tigard-Tualatin School District. In this role, I was introduced to Courageous Conversations at a National Staff Development Council Conference pre-session on culturally relevant teaching in 2006.

One specific event in my many racial experiences in Tigard-Tualatin occurred when as part of a District Equity Leadership Team (DELT) activity, I shadowed a seventh-grade Black boy in an attempt to understand the experiences of a Black boy in our system. I was often in classrooms in the schools I supervised, and I did not share with staff that I was shadowing this particular student. What I saw broke my heart and caused me intense distress. The principal, who served on the DELT, had a theory that our disproportional discipline data was the result of students of color accumulating experiences throughout the day in which they were dismissed or treated differently than White students in similar situations, which eventually caused them to act out. I observed this Black boy being directed throughout the day by stern-voiced White teachers. He was talking with a group of White students during class, and he was isolated and told not to speak. Nothing happened to the White students. His math teacher talked down to him constantly throughout the period, actually asking him to behave like John, a White student sitting quietly next to him. I saw an enthusiastic, likeable seventh-grade boy being treated as if he was misbehaving. He was eventually expelled, and he moved to Texas with his mother.

This experience took me beyond my limit of tolerance. I was so far in the feeling quadrant of the Courageous Conversations Compass that I questioned whether I could ever go to other corners of the Compass. I experienced intense discomfort with Whiteness and the impact it was having on the students in my schools. My initial reaction in the math classroom was to scold the teacher for her Whiteness. I did not do that, however. It is difficult to stay patient but persistent in working for change when you see a child being hurt by his experiences.

I brought my data back to the DELT, reporting what I observed so we could apply the Courageous Conversations Protocol. Others brought similar data, and we discussed the pattern for students of color as they interacted with White staff throughout the day. We listened to the staff of color on the DELT describe how it feels to be treated like this Black boy. This data informed our Equity Transformational Plan; and, in the short term, the principal began having conversations with her school equity team and staff about what had been observed in their school.

The math teacher left the district at the end of the year, and the principal continues to engage in courageous conversations about race with her staff. As someone who used to consistently enter racial conversations from the thinking quadrant of the compass, I learned that it is a good thing for me to have personal racial experiences that cause me to enter conversations from the feeling quadrant, followed by courageous conversations to move me to the remaining corners of the compass to create transformational change.

Missing my opportunity to join in a citywide conversation about race as the new chief academic officer of the Portland Public Schools is the third event that I identify to be significant in my journey as a racial equity leader. I was busy with the transition to this new position in July when I received a request to call a reporter for one of our local newspapers to discuss Courageous Conversations About Race. I had been immersed in budget and staffing conversations and assumed the reporter wanted to know what Portland Public Schools was spending for this equity work. I had not seen that budget yet, so I sent the reporter an e-mail telling her I didn't have enough information to provide her with a quote. A week later, I picked up two local papers and read two articles on racism in Portland. I experienced intense distress because I realized that I had missed an opportunity to use my new position of power to engage in a conversation about race that was citywide.



As I read the two articles, I realized that in these two lengthy articles not one person talked about the presence and role of Whiteness and its impact on racism within our systems. I was so agitated by my decision that led to this missed opportunity that I spent 3 hours on a Friday night writing an apology letter to the reporter in which I expressed my opinion about the missing perspective of Whiteness in her article. She responded immediately, asking me to rewrite the apology as an editorial opinion piece for the following week. I did as she asked, primarily because, as the new chief academic officer, I wanted the people of Portland to know my perspective that race matters. I was indicating to the community that I was claiming my Whiteness; I was planning to engage people in a conversation about race, and I was willing to take personal responsibility for institutional racism in the Portland Public Schools.

In the article I submitted, I wrote,

I have great confidence in the Courageous Conversations About Race work, because I've seen a change in the belief systems of White educators, and I've seen the experiences of people of color validated while engaging in this process.

The work is not about technical solutions. You can train teachers how to use a culturally responsive instructional strategy, but if the teacher lacks racial consciousness, students of color will know, resulting in an opportunity for a meaningful connection and appropriate teaching and learning being lost.

Community members and district staff reference my article when they come to discuss issues with me. They are waiting to see if my actions will be consistent with my words.

The final significant event I will share about my personal journey as an antiracism leader occurred when I read my updated racial autobiography to 250 district leaders as I transitioned to chief academic officer of the Portland Public Schools in August 2010. I had led the Courageous Conversations work in the Tigard-Tualatin School District, taking responsibility for designing activities for district leadership meetings that provided opportunities to apply the Agreements, Conditions, and tenets of critical race theory between training events with Pacific Educational Group. Portland Public Schools had had several starts and stops with Courageous Conversations, with fluctuating central office leadership.

Two things became apparent to me in my new role: (1) the Courageous Conversations Protocol was not being applied between training sessions with PEG, and (2) a large number of principals were reluctant to write and submit their racial autobiographies at the end of the 2010 school year because they were worried that their racial autobiographies would be used against them in a negative way in their evaluations. (Are you kidding me? We fail students of color for decades and the system worries about whether a White administrator will be identified as racist on an evaluation?)

I was tasked with designing an activity for the Executive Committee (10 people) during the August retreat. I asked people to identify where they were on the Courageous Conversations Compass, and I facilitated an activity to review the Agreements and Conditions and asked people to identify which Conditions resonated with them. As I read my own racial autobiography, I experienced unanticipated discomfort, a sure sign that I was doing the appropriate work. When we had completed the activity, participants expressed how powerful the activity was for them in terms of increasing their skill in using the Conditions. They couldn't believe how honest and vulnerable I was about my racial experiences and the development of my White racial identity. The superintendent asked me to use the same activity the following week with the District Management Team (about 70 people). I led that group in the activity, and the reaction was similar. "I can't believe you just did that," one member stated afterward. "You were willing to be so vulnerable in front of all of us," said another. Still another told me: "I understand the Conditions and Agreements on a deeper level." We engaged in deep conversations about race using the Courageous Conversations Protocol. People of color shared their own experiences within our system, which created discomfort in the room but also an amazing feeling that we were each privileged to be having this experience together. The superintendent asked me to share this activity with the entire leadership group (250 people) the following week.

Sharing my personal racial autobiography with the 250 leaders in the district caused me discomfort. I knew that I personally was in the Zone of Productive Distress and that I was facilitating others to be there as well. You could hear a pin drop as I read my racial autobiography. I was exhausted when I finished facilitating the activity, but people sought me out throughout the remainder of the day.

I heard from at least 10 White administrators that they had written their racial autobiographies but were reluctant to share with their staffs. After providing them with a protocol for the conversation and modeling, they found the will to do the same with their staff. At least five administrators of color told me that they really appreciated the courage it took for me to read my racial autobiography. When I asked them if they were going to read theirs to their staffs, their response was, "No, it's different for me." I learned later that a group of Black administrators, in discussing the activity, expressed the following view: "Here we go again with another White person thinking she can teach about equity. She's probably not going to claim her Whiteness." But when I did provide examples of my Whiteness, my increasing awareness of my racial identity, and my self-study, which allowed me to wrestle with my own weaknesses in dealing with racism, they were surprised.

Developing the will to transform a school district into one where race is not a predictor of success begins with me taking personal responsibility for racism and for my personal journey to increase my understanding of my own racial identity. I need to continue to work at keeping myself focused on the personal, local, and immediate while examining the role and presence of Whiteness as I live my life and engage in the profession I love so much. I need to continue to read articles and books and attend conferences at which I intentionally place myself in racial situations that create discomfort for me. And when I feel that discomfort, I need to reflect and engage in courageous conversations using the Courageous Conversations Compass, Agreements, and Conditions, as well as the tenets of critical race theory to know myself better and to leave room for the missing perspective that will ultimately allow me and those I lead to arrive at an adaptive solution rather than a technical one.

Carla Randall is the chief academic officer of the Portland (Oregon) Public Schools, a PEG partnering district. She is a White American.

Voices From the Inside: Patrick Duffy and Anthony Galloway

Patrick's story

I was born and raised in the small town of Grand Marais, Minnesota. Grand Marais is the gateway to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. It's the largest town in Cook County and a haven for city dwellers who long for a quaint, artistic atmosphere along Lake Superior when they take the ritualistic trip "up North" as so many Minnesotans do each summer. Many locals believe Grand Marais to be quite cosmopolitan, despite its size and rural location, but almost all agree that it is, as my father put it quite often, "one of the most beautiful small towns in the United States." Grand Marais was not unlike most small towns in Minnesota, however, in that it was populated almost entirely by White people.

We did not talk often about race in my hometown, but my experiences there developed my passion for developing student antiracist leaders. I was taught early about

the importance of my ethnic identity. My mother, an Arab American of 100% Lebanese descent, would tell me stories about her experiences growing up in Duluth (Minnesota), often being mistaken for Jewish, where she learned from her parents the unwritten code of voluntary assimilation and, from her own experiences, the impact of oppression on those with little or no voice.

I learned much about culture and ethnic pride from my father. He was Irish Catholic, born and raised in the college town of Northfield, and he instinctively practiced culturally responsive teaching with me by letting me know I could not fail academically because of the great accomplishments and developments of “my people” from the Middle East—that is, honoring my mother and recognizing that this was a part of me that was not reflected in others in my community.

For example, while peppering me with a healthy dose of Irish pride, my father instilled in me the notion that I must succeed in mathematics because my ancestors introduced the Arabic numbers from which I was learning. He realized that subtle aspects of my Arab American ancestry would lead some to consider me somewhat of an “other” in the homogenous, rural north woods of Cook County.

I was not often conscious of my White race, but various encounters throughout my childhood led me to see that I was ethnically different from my peers. My middle name, Abalan, was not only unique but also a source of ridicule with many of my peers, once they heard it. In elementary and middle school, I often hid my middle name from others so they would not laugh at me. I was surprised that my peers did not have Lebanese sfeeahas, tabouli, Syrian bread, and hushwa with their turkey, cranberries, and pumpkin pie on Thanksgiving. Once, when I was out playing at a friend’s house in my neighborhood, an older kid found out I was Lebanese and pulled a knife on me, saying he was going to kill “Ahab, the Arab.” In middle school, one of my social studies teachers announced to the class that I must be related to Saddam Hussein. By this time, however, I had grown more secure with my ethnic identity; still, I had a quick temper with acts of bigotry. I directed an expletive at the teacher and walked out of the room. When I shared this story with my father, I remember him asking me to wait in the hallway while he went into the classroom to give this teacher a piece of his mind.

None of this had as profound an impact on me as when a classmate said, in a group of our peers, that my mom could not “be White.” His argument: “White people can’t have black hair” as my mom did, so therefore she must be Black. Not only was I dumbfounded by his ignorance, but for the first time I felt an uncertainty that others might not consider me White. That uncertainty came from the unspoken messages I had learned about race, despite all of the explicit, positive messages I heard from most of my peers about my ethnic identity. I did not discuss this incident with my parents, however; I was not sure how to raise it. Despite all the conversations with my parents about ethnicity and culture, I had never had a personal conversation with them about race. Up until that point, racism to me was something from history. It was associated with a southern accent and was often accompanied with stories about the many accomplishments of the Civil Rights Movement. It was certainly not something that I ever would have considered to be a part of my personal identity development.

At the time, I was unaware of the impact that the normalization of Whiteness—that is, the color-blindness, the race neutrality, and the unearned and unconscious privileges—would have on my life and how it would continue to impact me. Throughout my formative years, a number of incidents and relationships influenced the way in which

I constructed meaning about race in my own life. In Montessori School, for example, I remember vividly my encounter with Justin Porter. The teachers had prepared the class for a new student. When Justin arrived, I, like most of the students in my all-White class, was fascinated to see a Black student. I approached him to welcome him and, on shaking his hand, noticed two things: One was that his hand felt coarser to the touch than any I had shaken before, and the other was that his hair and skin had a smell that was foreign to me. I turned and said something to one of my friends about my observations and was quickly whisked away into a corner by one of the teachers. The teacher told me that I was being racist and that she never wanted me to say anything ever again about how this boy was different. Thus, at 4 years old, it was modeled for me that I should not see difference, in particular, with people who *were* racially different from me.



As an undergraduate student, one of my advisers, David Roediger, taught explicitly about the social construction of Whiteness in his U.S. History class.⁵ My collegiate studies thereby affirmed my thinking about the presence of a racial narrative shaping our common history and the impact of individual and collective racial and ethnic identity on our past and present. Roediger and Dionicio Valdes, my other adviser, encouraged me to take graduate classes that would allow me to explore the impact of race and privilege and how those forces affected the labor and social movements, political interactions, and foreign policy. Subsequently, as a junior undergraduate at the University of Minnesota, I audited a graduate-level class on Whiteness that was both intimidating and exhilarating; and, as a student leader at that university, I was exposed to antiracism teaching through a training course that used Lee Mun Wah's 1995 *The Color of Fear* video⁶ and a simulation of the Underground Railroad that brought the history of antiracism alive through a powerful intellectual, emotional, and physical experience.

In my teaching career, both these earlier opportunities became curricular staples of my own classes and trainings for student leaders. I became fascinated by the social construction of race and developed an intellectual curiosity to find out more. I did some research on the topic and found that there had been a movement in the U.S. Congress to debunk the notion that Jesus may have been Black, which was raised by at least one scholar and which had caused quite a bit of debate in the 1980s. Then, in 1970 and 1980, the Census suggested that people of African descent (which included North Africans and Middle Easterners) were considered African American (or Black) by the U.S. government. (By 1990, however, the Census indicated that people of Middle Eastern descent fit into a category along with European Americans, who were labeled White or Caucasian.)

Thus, it seemed that my life was a personification of how race can be socially reconstructed to meet the political needs of a few in power. As I dove deeper into this phenomenon, I was surprised to find out how often the social construction of race had been shifted to maintain a racial hierarchy—that is, a caste system—in our nation. In the 1840s, I learned, I would have been considered Black not because of my Lebanese ancestry, but because of my Irish ancestry. I also discovered that numerous other groups of people in the United States have had the lines of race and ethnicity blurred

to determine their citizenship, voting rights, housing, and internment. In the post-9/11 world, it came as no surprise to me that my own race was once again a point of debate by the U.S. government, in a political climate that most certainly wants to keep track of the number of Arab Americans in the country.

That is why today I often check the "Other" box on official forms and documents and welcome the opportunity to write in any explanations about the curious dichotomy between the complexity and arbitrariness of race in the United States. I never lose sight, however, of the fact that, as a visibly identifiable White male, I continue to have many unearned privileges that allow me to engage in all aspects of my life in the United States and elsewhere throughout the world far differently than my non-White peers.

Early in my professional career, I came across Beverly Tatum's book,⁷ *Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria?* I sat on the bookstore floor between the shelves for more than 2 hours, enthralled by the themes addressed in that book and how they resonated with my own personal experiences. Over the next few years, as a social studies teacher and coach, I made a point to share not only the antiracist voices of Abraham Lincoln and Eleanor Roosevelt but also the narratives and wisdom of antiracist pioneers who received less ink in the traditional textbooks, like Frederick Douglass, Harriett Jacobs, and Chief Joseph. In doing so, I made a point to ask my students to engage in critical thinking and writing about the political, social, and economic state of our union by incorporating these diverse narratives.

In 2004, I was asked to work as a social studies teacher and equity coordinator at my high school. These roles helped me grow as a leader; they also opened the door for the most important work I had ever done. That year, an interracial group of students—inspired by seeing staff members at Midwest High School engage in dialogue around racial equity and sparked by their own intellectual curiosity—started reading Tatum's book. Indeed, I came back from the school cafeteria one day to find several of my students sitting outside my classroom door engaged in study of the book. When I asked them why they were reading that particular book, one girl replied simply, "Duh . . . we wanted to read it! We see it in classrooms all over the school, and the title looked interesting."

Around that same time, our school's Equity Team had asked the entire staff to read the book and engaged in a professional learning community dialogue about the impact of racial identity on curriculum, instruction, and school practice. The provocative title had gotten my students to take notice, but their engagement in culturally responsive instruction and racially conscious curriculum in my classes had created in them a passion for learning more about this topic. As I engaged in continued dialogue with them, I recognized that they raised many of the same questions about race that I had never had answered as an adolescent. I was inspired by their passion for change as well as their unrequited desire to engage in antiracism practice.

A few weeks after the students organized their own learning community, two interns at the local YWCA branch approached the school about piloting an antiracism curriculum in four high schools around the region. Their plan was to provide training in antiracist methods to 10 to 15 students at each school. I quickly worked with colleagues to engage some of our students with these passionate interns. As the numbers dwindled, I recognized that something more systemic was needed. Several students from my classes attended the training, but they kept coming to me afterward, asking

if they could do more. I approached the original four students from my social studies classes who had been reading outside my door and asked them to work with me to develop curricula that would support systemic student leadership development. Using a model similar to the one the adults in our building were using for the same purpose, they became a sort of interracial student Equity Team.



That summer, I periodically met with these students at restaurants and at my home to develop a comprehensive, antiracist, student leadership program that could be implemented in the fall. We sent out postcards to all incoming sophomores notifying them of a one-day antiracism retreat we were planning for mid-August that would serve as the foundational training for this effort. Sixty-seven students attended the retreat, and most of them became the first “Dare 2 Be Real” student leadership group. The name of the group harkened back to the work the students had done with the YWCA interns, who asked them to dare to be real about race.

Over the course of the next 8 months, the students from this group met weekly with me to develop their will, skill, knowledge, and capacity as racial equity leaders. I recognized the importance of creating a safe space for them as they put this theory into practice. Twice a month, they would pair up and facilitate discussions and activities on racial equity in homeroom classes throughout the school. Many staff members shared their views. The student-led groups were dependent on interracial dialogue. My facilitation of those sessions focused on bringing out multiple racial perspectives, but my lone voice did not model the students’ core values.

The following year, a district administrator told me to consider partnering with Anthony Galloway, whom she told me had contacted her about working with some of our students. Anthony had coordinated programming that promoted integration in various districts in the metropolitan area. Unknowingly, he and I had worked together indirectly through experiential learning programs that I had used with my classes in previous years. We soon became fast friends because of our common passion and commitment to developing the capacity of student leaders to do this work.

I invited Anthony to meet with some of the students from our equity groups after school. From the beginning, Anthony and I felt comfortable working and challenging each other because we both were interested in learning about each other’s perspectives and we both recognized how our collaboration could benefit students. We spent many days visiting each other and making plans to create a program that would incorporate themes such as confronting fear, team building, mindful inquiry, antiracist scholarship, and individual and collective understandings of racial and cultural identity. I was impressed with Anthony’s knack for connecting with my students and for sharing a counterstory to my own that clearly helped my students to deepen their understandings of racial perspective.

In 2008, I moved into a new school district as a school administrator. This school district was just beginning to address racial equity systemically. In my role there, I found little of the urgency needed among the staff or the community to engage in racial equity work because of the relatively small numbers of students of color and the

district's reputation as one of the best in the state, if not the nation. Issues for students of color were largely invisible, but the capacity for growth among White students and staff was immense. I spent the first half of my first year there observing, discussing, and planning strategically about how to create a safe space for racial discourse. I put together a FAQ (frequently asked questions) sheet about Dare 2 Be Real and how it would benefit the school. I found that there were a number of passionate and committed racial equity leaders in the district. Equipped with information and data, I was able to get their support. I went to various staff members and asked for their input on students. Most of them had a hard time picturing White students in a group like the one I was describing, but soon I had the names of about 30 students, whom I then invited, along with a few staff, to a retreat at which Anthony and I intended to present them with information on the foundations of our leadership development work.

Over the course of the next year, our equity work gained credibility as we trained students in the Courageous Conversations Protocol and amplified their shared voice by inviting them to speak at numerous regional conferences and community forums. We also shared some videotaped images of students presenting their racial autobiographies to members of the staff. These narratives were pivotal as staff members began to understand the impact of institutional racism on all students. They also opened the door for Anthony and me to talk about racially predictable achievement at the school and throughout the region.

My collaboration with Anthony proved to be an essential and symbiotic relationship that helped move the work forward. His role as a regional leader helped keep the students and adults in my district from feeling as if they were doing this work in isolation. My success with the group, in a prominent and predominantly White school district, gave Anthony enhanced credibility in his efforts to share our model with others in the region. Combined, our interracial perspectives and blended narratives only strengthened our message and our work. We were able to model our alliance for both students and staff in other parts of the district and state.

Anthony has been a great ally for me. He challenges my thought processes and helps me to live out my mission: to work side by side with people of color to draw out and develop the skills, strengths, and brilliance of *all* children. I know that I can teach many students effectively, but as a White educator, my alliance with Anthony has helped keep me engaged in interracial discourse that gets me to challenge my discomfort and reflect on my own personal capacity to better recognize the needs of Black and Brown students.

Along the way, I have learned many lessons. For one, even though I am a racially conscious White male, I have found that it is essential to have commentary from a trusted ally of color with me in my leadership journey. In my case, a blind spot was Omar, an eighth-grade Black male student who had a reputation of being sent to my office quite regularly for disciplinary action. The day before a Dare 2 Be Real retreat, I faced a choice: either suspend Omar from school or invite him to the leadership retreat. Despite the concern of some other staff members, I invited him. After 3 hours of activity and interracial discourse, Omar told me that the retreat was one of the first times that he had really felt that people wanted him to be at school. On reflection, I wondered what had kept me from inviting him sooner. Did I feel that the group could

take on only so many Omars, or that perhaps he and other students like him would turn their predicament around on their own? After the retreat, Omar showed increased classroom engagement and fewer behavior referrals, but he still failed to climb from the academic hole that had been created by our system's lack of service previous to that point. I have since recognized the need to increase the capacity of our leadership groups to engage all students who need our attention.

Anthony's story

I came into this work while I was working full time and attending college. I was your typical youth mentor/camp counselor type, having worked with performing arts summer camps, African storytelling troupes, and an organization that offers a nighttime experiential learning program called "Race to Freedom: The Underground Railroad." I participated in several poetry groups and Black student unions on campus and took on any experience that declared my Blackness to a space where I rarely see Black images in any significant measure and that addressed some of the most glaring racial disparities in employment, education, and housing. I quickly found myself in a place where I had a deep understanding of the intricacies of racial inequity and no language to express it.

I got a job with an integration district that was a partnership of 10 suburban districts and an urban center and that was working collectively on teacher training and addressing racial disparities in achievement. The district also operated two schools focused on the arts and on implementing racially equitable and culturally competent teaching strategies, and this had met with some good success. The PEG Beyond Diversity seminar was offered free to all staff, along with other staff development workshops and training, so I had a lot of support and practice early on with White voices in leadership and training, which was new to me.

My job in the district was to work with families whose children were leaving the urban center to take advantage of suburban school options. The suburban districts were going through demographic shifts that were accelerated subtly by the influx of students through the program with which I was working. As a result, I encountered a mix of gatekeepers, from well-intentioned staff charged with outreach to bus drivers (who unfairly discipline students or decide who is late by who is last to be picked up), who made it difficult for already stressed families to achieve any kind of credibility and therefore support. Although the region was engaged in very good work for the most part, I had at that point encountered only "the choir," those who had self-selected to engage in courageous conversations. I was not exposed to the reality that, in most places, those engaged in equity work were in the vanguard and hard-pressed to push or "sell" their peers on the necessity for racial equity.

At a point of frustration, I retreated to recoup some of my excitement and optimism and begin working directly with students. I was put in charge of overseeing a grant program that our district had created to fund collaborations of partnering districts to support integration and multicultural programming. To begin, I put together a list of suggestions for districts to partner around including the Underground Railroad experience, for which I was now a historian-in-residence. One of the equity

and integration directors in a suburban school immediately put me in contact with a history teacher who had been taking students through the Underground Railroad experience and who was looking for some funding to support some interesting work he was doing with students.

That teacher, Patrick Duffy, invited me to his diversity seminar class to meet some of his students. He wanted me to talk to them about who I was and to share insights on the Underground Railroad experience. When I got there, the students were engaged in a deep conversation about how they were going to lead discussions about race in homeroom classes around the school. I was completely caught off-guard. Patrick's class was a diverse mix of students of different ethnic and racial backgrounds. Both students of color and White students were openly discussing race, its impacts on their schooling, and their lack of knowledge about or experience with various racial topics. What I was not aware of at the time was that these students had internalized the Six Conditions and Four Agreements of the Courageous Conversations Protocol and were running full speed to get the rest of their school on board as well. I was not expecting students to have such a deep understanding of institutional racism—I myself had just started to develop a language to describe it.

What surprised me even more was hearing the students talk about the real experiences of overt racism that they encountered regularly at the school from both their peers and their teachers. No matter what was shared, however, the students protected each other and were very clearly allies in this work. This was my first encounter with the Dare 2 Be Real leadership development group that Patrick had created.

Patrick and I quickly found not only that we have similar artistic and camp experiences, but that he had been taking students through the Underground Railroad experience that I had been leading for several years. He knew exactly who I was. He told me the story of how Dare 2 Be Real was created and of the program's need for deeper experiences and funding. We began to work together to enhance the retreat format that Patrick had been using so that it could become more intentional about growing the knowledge, skill, and will of students for racial equity work.

Patrick and I began to exhaust every opportunity we could find to fund the retreats, so we had to become more creative in our efforts. Because the grant program I oversaw required two districts to work together, we partnered his district's group with a fifth-grade class from my district to create an overnight retreat experience called "Confronting Fear." Thus, Patrick's high school group could still hold its retreat and the fifth-grade class could get high school mentors to lead its intense nighttime experience. The Dare 2 Be Real students also got to practice their facilitation and leadership skills, which they then applied to their efforts to lead smaller Courageous Conversations groups with their peers at school.

Patrick and I became a team that modeled shared interracial leadership, and we modeled it well. Patrick, as a White male, could say things that I, as a Black man, could not. Conversely, I, as a Black male, could bring a level of assumed authenticity to students of color, which helped them to open up. I sincerely believe both of us could have "gotten there" or achieved these ends, in our own way, but there was something about partnering our racial experiences that made conversations go deeper and get there faster. Then, as Patrick trained me on his framework for creating a safe space for interracial dialogue, I became a real part of his Dare 2 Be Real group and began leading conversations myself.

After Patrick and I had been working together for about a year, we began to need more opportunities for retreats and Underground Railroad experiences. I started partnering Patrick's students with high schools students from around the region to fulfill the integration district's student learning grant requirements. As these students began to engage in the Dare 2 Be Real work, their staff leaders began to inquire about starting groups of their own. About this time, Patrick took a middle school assistant principal position in one the most affluent and least diverse districts in the region; but within months of his new appointment, we were already working to establish a Dare 2 Be Real group in his new setting. This was more difficult, however, as Patrick's new district was just starting to engage in Courageous Conversations work, and the staff there seemed very skeptical about my outsider's point of view.

We began by flying in "under the radar" so as not to make the folks in the new district too uncomfortable too quickly. We also didn't want to set up Patrick's new students for adult retaliation and politics—something he had made me aware of in his work from the previous district.



It was a very interesting time, and all the while Patrick's original group in his old district was still very active. However, his new students quickly engaged in the Protocol and, in my view, kick-started the district's equity journey out of pure necessity. It helped to have an equity leader in Patrick, who had some positional power at his new site and in the district. I realized that we were forming a network of students that could help further insulate students and others from the discomfort that so many adults feel about having direct conversations about race. There was already a buzz about the new groups, and I gladly began reporting about all the groups' successes to the joint school board and my supervisors.

In addition to the original and the middle school group in Patrick's new district, I also started a chapter in the two schools my school district operated. The students in that group came from all 11 districts partnering in the integration consortium. Although I knew the basic Dare 2 Be Real framework and was familiar with the progressions of Courageous Conversations Protocol, I had a completely different experience with these two new groups. The students seemed very unimpressed by the Dare 2 Be Real model at first. What had been new and provocative at the other schools seemed merely interesting to them. They had engaged in conversations about race in some way before, had experienced fewer overtly racist encounters, and felt like their school environment, despite a few racial issues, was doing a pretty good job of honoring the experiences of all students. I decided to just follow the framework anyway and found myself running everything by Patrick to decide how to get the students more engaged. I also decided to "be real" myself and to bring my frustrations directly to the group. I even asked them if they felt the group was necessary.

The responses I received completely revitalized my will to carry on in the work. The prospect of the group, the space, not being there put every student on the defensive. One sixth-grade student stood up and stated that the group was the only place she felt like what she had to say mattered. "While it may seem like everything is OK on the surface," she said, "we all still know the stereotypes, the names, all that racist stuff we

talk about in Dare 2 Be Real. It has to come from somewhere, and even if it's not here at school, we still gotta go home."

A Jewish student spoke up next. She explained that she never felt she could "be Jewish" except for in the Dare 2 Be Real sessions. I guess I had failed to realize that regardless of how unprovocative the conversation may have seemed to me, the safe space provided to these students to explore their own identities without fear was indeed important. The uninhibited student voices that came forth in the safe setting of Dare 2 Be Real sessions really helped me grow in my understanding that we needed to be intentional about sustaining a safe space, regardless of the intensity of the conversation. I was looking to engineer an experience instead of engineering a space for students to create theirs. This type of learning makes the framework sound, whether it is applied in an urban or suburban setting.

Patrick and I continued to develop retreat experiences and to form a regional approach to student antiracist leadership. From my position as a staff person of the interdistrict consortium, governed by school board members from all 11 partnering districts, I was able to tell the story often and to build regional support. This support was accelerated when a group of students came to a school board meeting to speak about why they are a part of Dare 2 Be Real. Eight students shared their experiences at that meeting, and two students in particular—one a White male student and the other a Black female—moved the board to tears with their stories of their personal experiences in Dare 2 Be Real and their demonstrations of the knowledge, skill, and will to address race and racism.

Patrick and I resolved that evening to make sure that we would always showcase students speaking about their own experiences. We realized then that the best way to highlight what creating safe spaces for interracial student dialogue can do is to share students' experiences with others. Not only because our students inspire us to do more, and not only because they can convince those in extreme discomfort to lend support to the work, but because students offer us a true litmus test as to where we really are in our equity walk.

Another recent example of this happened at a Dare 2 Be Real retreat held in a suburban district that is contiguous to the urban center. The students there had been deepening their knowledge of the development of race and had been building on their personal ethnic and racial identities. At one stage of the retreat, the students were to undergo a courage activity that involved breaking boards and bending steel. (I had learned this activity at a leadership retreat hosted by a local restaurant chain called Famous Dave's. The owner, Dave, is himself an excellent leadership trainer.)

Starting in the morning, the students wrote about their greatest fear; they were allowed to revise what they wrote throughout the day. As they began to deepen their connections to each other and as their understandings of their personal and collective understanding improved, they were allowed to cross out their original fears and replace them with deeper ones. When the time came for them to break the boards and bend the steel rods associated with this exercise, their school principal, a White male, joined the group. He wanted to observe the group and to be supportive.

As each student shared fears and the context for those fears, it became clear that all harbored deep personal pain and life experiences that most adult educators only read about. The principal, like the students' teachers and other district personnel, was able to

learn firsthand about the real lived experiences of his students, and he too was moved to tears. When it came time for him to break his board, he acknowledged that his fear was that he would fail to educate all students to high academic levels. Even more, he admitted he was afraid that he would fail to educate the students who looked like those in the room.

Later, Patrick and I were able to bring four students to a PEG Summit to speak as student presenters, a common practice for our regional work. As we sat in a hotel room one evening with our students and all of our supervising staff, including the district superintendent, we had a conversation about the students' school experiences. One Black male student—who was recognized by all of his teachers as a school leader, who was the recipient of several internships and awards, and who was a junior with college prospects and great grades—shared that he had faced expulsion during his freshman year for something stupid he had done. The student looked directly at the superintendent and acknowledged that the superintendent was directly responsible for keeping him in school. This was because, he claimed, the decision about whether to expel him or not had rested solely in the superintendent's hands, and the man's refusal to expel students short of legal obligations had made all the difference in the student's life. Because that student had the language and the safe space to speak to his experiences, he was able to validate district policies that promote equity and slow down the pipeline that, in our state, too often leads Black males to prison.

This young man's and other students' stories were the result of Dare 2 Be Real's efforts to build the capacity of students in multiracial spaces to advocate for better school communities. Both Patrick and I believe that when students can speak with a language that captures their experiences and their challenges, school staff are forced to address their own practices in very real ways. But this does not happen in isolation or without the very real support of the staff and administrators who support students. Each Dare 2 Be Real group that has been successful so far has had staff who truly protect and nurture student relationships and who understand the Courageous Conversations Protocol at even its earliest stages. Each program site has principals who support the work and teachers who fight for its safe space and who safeguard it from adult politics. And because of its regional approach, Dare 2 Be Real students can reach out to their counterparts in neighboring districts for support, help, and encouragement.

Our regional network now hosts an annual summit of Dare 2 Be Real students. These summits have inspired citywide forums on race, even in communities that have remained virtually all-White after their restrictive covenants were outlawed. There have also been setbacks. As word of our success spread, one district sought to establish a Dare 2 Be Real group, but it did not want to engage fully in the Courageous Conversations Protocol or framework, nor did it want its staff or administrators to participate in the Beyond Diversity training. This resulted in a new space that was neither safe nor sustainable and that was opposed by a small but powerful group of entitled parents who were made uncomfortable by the work. In that Dare 2 Be Real group, virtually all the White male participants—who often receive the most peer pressure to leave the program, which is often seen as being solely for students of color regardless of its racial makeup—left, as did those Black males who could gain social status with Whites by denying the group's legitimacy. The remaining students did not have a multiracial cohort large enough to sustain multiple perspectives, and the group

eventually unraveled. Even worse, it was seen as anti-White by those students who were made uncomfortable by some of the experiences of students of color.



While engaged in this work, Patrick conducted a critical ethnography that included suburban school student and staff participants. As evidenced by the findings of his study, student voice is an important factor in developing the will, skill, knowledge, and capacity of antiracist leaders, regardless of their position, age, or race. He found that adult leaders, in particular, developed a more positive orientation toward their work and were able to stay engaged for longer periods of time when they engaged in work with interracial groups of students, and even more so when they engaged in antiracist practices with such groups. All participants who engaged in sessions with students developed stronger will and skill to address racial inequities through their prolonged practice in interracial settings. In addition, many adult leaders shared that they felt less defensive hearing perspectives from students than from their peers or supervisors. This suggests that perhaps student antiracist leaders may be able to neutralize some of the negativity associated with adults who are struggling to share privilege and who acknowledge their complicity, albeit often unintentional, in contributing to systems that perpetuate racial inequity.

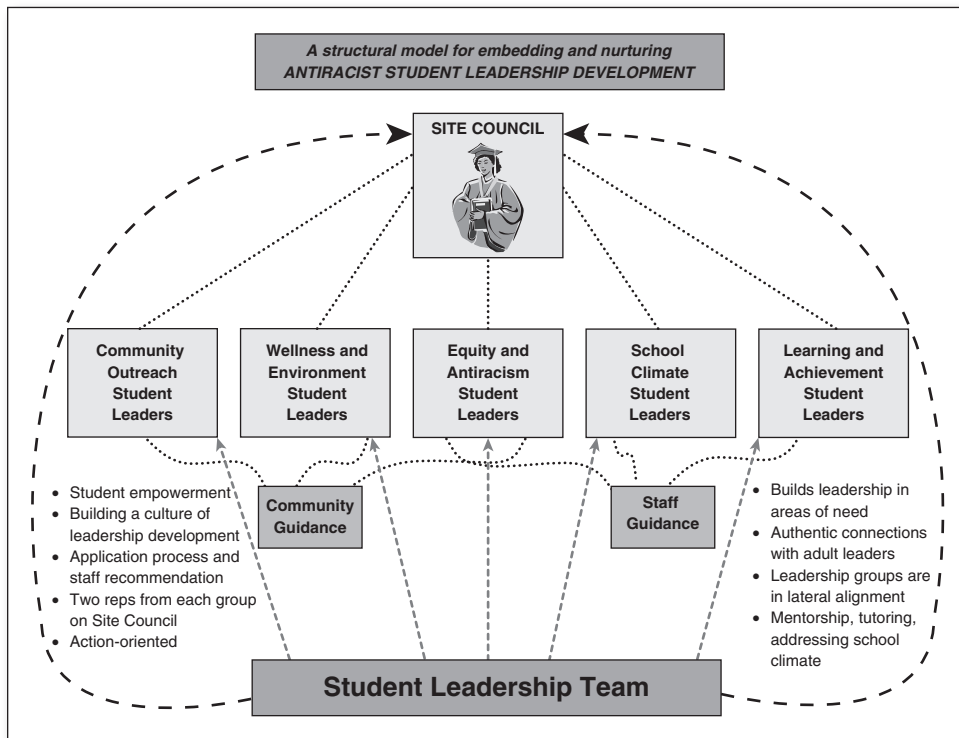
The experiences of leaders in the suburb that Patrick studied informed a model of student antiracist leadership that incorporates both safety for the students involved and the potential for the program to have the greatest impact on the individuals and the sites within which it operates. Patrick's research data indicate that this model could be transferable to similar developmental models for other stakeholders and could be replicated at other sites.

The following keys to success and student safety in the development of a systemic antiracist approach are drawn from that research and from our combined work with Dare 2 Be Real in multiple school districts throughout the region:

- Interracial groups whose membership reflects the racial demographics of the building and which are not dominated by one racial group are best suited for success. It should be noted, however, that these groups should not be developed based on racial quotas, but rather on an openness to developing racial consciousness. White participants should be particularly open to alliances with students of color. In predominantly White settings, it is essential that the group's White students and advisers not further isolate students of color, who are already historically marginalized and hypervisible within the system.
- Program staff members who will work with students should have credibility with students across all racial backgrounds and be able to practice culturally responsive teaching. They should also have an internalized understanding of critical race theory so that they can recognize racial scenarios in the group and help guide students through the leadership development process with pedagogy that fosters student growth.

- Antiracism work that is seen as happening in a silo can be dismissed more easily by groups that may have a more established voice and status within the school. It can also easily be cast as an “add-on” or fringe program by those who want to maintain the status quo. Thus, such efforts should be fully integrated into the structures and culture of the school building. This systemic integration could include scheduling program activities during the school day or horizontally aligning the student antiracist leadership group with other existing student groups (see Figure 8.1). Community support and staff guidance are also crucial, given the vulnerable nature of students; therefore, vertical integration with leadership groups such as site councils, which may have multiple adult stakeholders, can further legitimize the work of student antiracist groups.

Figure 8.1 A Structural Model for Horizontal Alignment of Student Antiracist Leadership



Source: © Patrick Duffy.

- Support for the program must come from the people with the most positional power. It is essential that principals, superintendents, department heads, and even school board members be made aware and supportive of the goals of the program, lest students be set up for failure or pushback.

- The focus of the group should be on students' ability to develop their own individual and collective racial identities and racial equity leadership approaches by exploring the three key themes that are the cornerstones of Dare 2 Be Real: (1) Who we were—that is: What is each student's individual racial history and what is the collective history of all the students? (2) Who we are: What aspects of the students' racial identity development intersect with other aspects of their identities? and (3) Who we want to be: What particular action-oriented movement will allow students to plan strategically for and participate in active antiracism leadership?
- To be successful, students in antiracist leadership programs must be able to share their interracial experiences in a safe setting that encourages questions and growth. These experiences can be simulations or other aspects of experiential learning, but the greatest gains result from antiracist service learning. To maximize the impact of the work and to form authentic alliances with adults who are embarking on a similar journey or greater racial consciousness, the details of student learning about race and racism should be shared with other school staff members and with the students' parents.
- Students must have a protocol for engaging in antiracist leadership activities. Students in Dare 2 Be Real programs are trained in the Courageous Conversations Protocol, Agreements, Conditions, and Compass; in Lee Mun Wah's Art of Mindful Inquiry processes, and in Judith Katz's antiracism frameworks.⁸ These tools help students create a common language for leadership and provide them with opportunities for deeper analysis and action for racial equity.

Patrick Duffy is currently a principal in the Minneapolis Public Schools. He is a White American. Anthony Galloway coordinates student programming for the West Metro Education Program. He is a Black American. They have developed DARE 2 Be Real together.
