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ORGANIZING DISPOSITIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE PRIMER

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About CYCLE

The Center for Youth and Community Leadership in Education (CYCLE) at Roger Williams University formed in 2017 to partner with communities and schools to build capacity, alliances, and power, through learning, relationships, and organizing. We support youth, families, and educators to organize, fight for, and win policies and practices that create equitable opportunities and just outcomes for every student.

We believe that quality public schools and equitable educational structures are the cornerstone of an authentic democracy and just society. By centering and prioritizing the experiences and expertise of people most negatively impacted by racial, cultural, and class-based hierarchies, public education can be a means to achieving collective liberation through dismantling systems of oppression.

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REFOCUSING EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON EQUITY AND RACIAL JUSTICE

Most popular educational leadership frameworks tend to focus on increasing the capacity and effectiveness of the technical (instructional) core and managerial skills. However, school and district leaders are beginning to more explicitly name and contend with the importance of the social, cultural, and political elements of educational institutions,¹ and it seems that public K-12 educational leadership efforts are seeking to put issues and goals of equity and racial justice at the center.² More explicitly, in the context of the Black Lives Matter movement and uprisings against police and white vigilante murders of Black people, more (largely white) educational leaders are finally interrogating the ways in which they must practice anti-racism, resist white supremacy, and promote racial justice in schools. It is important to note that leaders of color have long been working inside and outside school systems to address these issues. However, now with the advent of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) plans and initiatives, it is not clear where and how educational leaders have been trained or are getting support to lead for equity and racial justice, even when there is greater recognition that public education should serve these ends.. Moreover, without proper training and support, there is a danger that the current, seemingly widespread, focus on DEI, anti-racism, and racial justice could dilute what should otherwise be important contributions to advancing a more just society.³

¹ Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Cheung, et. al., 2018; Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Shields, 2013

² Brown, 2004; Holmes, 2018; Theoharis, 2007

³ Holmes, 2018

LEARNING FROM COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

Community organizing has long placed the issues of equity and racial justice at the center and the past two decades have seen rapid growth in communities, especially communities of color, organizing for educational justice in their schools.⁴ Some research has begun to explore how the principles and practices of organizing might offer educational leaders guidance more broadly.⁵ In addition, school improvement efforts are increasingly seeking to engage youth, parent, and community leadership.⁶ Yet, these efforts can fall flat when traditional educational leaders are not prepared to partner effectively with community leaders, including youth and parents.

Too often, district and school leaders often parents and communities of color through a deficit-laden lens that disregards or condescends their wisdom, power, and leadership.⁷ In contrast, frameworks like “community cultural wealth” center the assets embedded within communities of color that mainstream frames overlook due to white supremacist and patriarchal notions of leadership.⁸ Likewise, community organizing theory assumes leadership exists in grassroots communities, especially in communities experiencing discrimination and oppression, from those who are most impacted by the problems we seek to solve.⁹ In the case of public education, then, that means youth and families must be understood as leaders alongside educators. Further, as outlined by the

⁴ Braxton, Buford, & Marasigan, 2013; Torres-Fleming, Valdes, & Pillai, 2010; Warren, 2010; Warren & Goodman, 2018

⁵ Ishimaru, 2013; 2020; Welton & Freelon, 2018

⁶ Connor, 2016; Mapp & Kuttner, 2013; Reform Support Network, 2014

⁷ Welton & Freelon, 2018

⁸ Yosso, 2015

⁹ Mediratta, Shah, & McAlister, 2009; Oakes & Rogers, 2006; Ransby, 2003; Sen, 2003; Warren & Mapp, 2011

USDOE’s Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships,¹⁰ we need *both* traditional educational leaders and community-based (parent) leaders to receive training and support to partner for school improvement.

For public schools to be remodeled in ways that are truly responsive and relevant to the needs, hopes, and dreams of the communities they serve, leadership must understand how to effectively engage, partner, and lift up the wisdom and expertise of community members whose roles and titles do not traditionally fall within the scope of the day-to-day operation of schools and districts. High quality educators and leaders cannot be understood outside of this context. To do this work over the long haul, we need educational leadership theory and frameworks that will ground and support efforts to build the necessary dispositions and capacities in our traditional school and district educational leaders to lead for equity and racial justice.

DEFINING ORGANIZING DISPOSITIONS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

If we must hone in on how to integrate what we know about educational/school leadership with what we know from organizing theory and practice, then it is important to identify and define organizing dispositions for educational leadership. While some research hints at the promise of organizing approaches being integrated into education leadership and practice,¹¹ there have been few studies taking up questions directly related to this topic. Our conference seeks to answer a call to apply a community organizing framework to educational leadership practice.¹²

¹⁰ Mapp & Kuttner, 2013

¹¹ Catone, 2017; Hong, 2011; 2019; Ishimaru, 2013; 2020; Warren & Mapp, 2011

¹² Welton & Freelon, 2018

“Organizing Dispositions for Educational Leadership,” will explicitly take up the questions of what constitutes organizing dispositions for educational leadership and whether and how organizing dispositions might be employed by educational leaders serving in both traditional and non-traditional leadership positions. We offer a working definition of *organizing dispositions* as the particular sensibilities to understand, harness, and follow the wisdom, expertise, and leadership of those most negatively impacted by inequities. Organizing dispositions give special attention to the cultivation of trusting relationships and strategic partnerships in order to build power for equity-oriented change and racial justice. In practice, organizing dispositions orient leaders toward developing the capacities to **trust community expertise, agitate toward values of social justice, develop the leadership of others, and build collective power to make change.**

As you prepare to attend any of our conference sessions, please reflect on the following questions and come ready to learn and engage in dialogue with others so that we might deepen our collective understanding about: **What are organizing dispositions for educational leadership? What do they look like in educational practice? And, how do we support the development, growth, and application of organizing dispositions in educational leaders?**

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