Equitable Education

The Breaking Ranks *framework can be used to evaluate educational equity in your school.*

By Judy Richardson

Judy Richardson *(richardsonj@principals.org) is the director of diversity, equity, and urban initiatives at NASSP.*

The U.S. Census Bureau now predicts that "minorities" will constitute the majority of children under the age of 18 by 2023 (Roberts, 2008). If that prediction is accurate, educational leaders will be increasingly challenged to provide training for staff members and initiatives for students that provide a nurturing environment that can enable each student to achieve academically and close the achievement gap.

Many educators believe that closing the gap can only be done by addressing the academic and social inequalities that exist in our schools. Because U.S. schools are enriched by an increasingly diverse staff and student body and are challenged to provide a world-class education for each student, it is time to ask yourself, your leadership team, and your staff, How equitably does this school serve each student?

You must begin the conversation in your school community about equal opportunities for academic success for each student. Just saying that you have an equitable school doesn't make it so. *Breaking Ranks II* and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* provide self-assessment tools and a collaborative process that can support focused conversations about what you have versus what you want. Those differential surveys can provide a platform from which you can address the factors that are fueling the achievement gap in your school. Staff members and students will have an opportunity to examine school data and identify structures in the existing school culture that may inhibit the academic success of every student.

Closing the achievement gap and increasing academic achievement means addressing four main areas as a staff:

Equity of opportunity. Does your school culture provide the flexibility and support for each student to fully develop academically? Equity of opportunity for students involves examining the very foundation of your school's culture. Of course, every educator can think of at least one school inequity that has not been addressed, but providing "equity of opportunity" is more than that: it means that all consequences of all policies, instruction, and curriculum—intended or not—must be discussed and addressed. Do all your staff members have high expectations for each student? Teacher expectations and student achievement are directly correlated. Do your teachers expect and encourage each student to participate in challenging school programs?

Access to valued knowledge. Does each student in your school have an opportunity to experience and meet rigorous course standards? Does each student have access to valued knowledge? In many districts, gifted and talented students are identified in elementary school. Does your school make provisions for identifying and accelerating students who were not identified in earlier grades? Equity of access to school programs means that students who are prepared and willing to complete IB or AP classes receive the chance to do so. It also means that students are encouraged to prepare for and enroll in accelerated or honors courses and that support programs are available for struggling students.

Data from the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress show that English language learners and linguistically diverse students earned significantly higher test scores in mathematics than in English and writing. Are these students given an opportunity to complete rigorous

national association of secondary school principals

mathematics courses in your school? Studies have shown that for minority and low-income students, learning is primarily school-based (Gladwell, 2008). How have you addressed the disparity in achievement among subgroups with initiatives that specifically address the culture surrounding access to rigor in secondary schools?

Teacher quality. Is teacher quality equitably distributed? Are teachers assigned to classes on the basis of student needs and teacher skills? Equity of teacher quality means that each student has access to teachers who have knowledge and experience. Is the assignment of the teachers in the honors classes and the freshman classes the same when you look at certification, degrees earned, and years of experience?

Discipline and rewards. Are school rewards, discipline, and resources fairly distributed to students? Is the system of student rewards and discipline equitable for all subgroups? Who is honored and who is suspended? Demographic data can answer whether or not these are equitably distributed. Equitable distribution of school resources means that funding for school initiatives is identified by assessed school needs and not by the politics of the local school culture or the influence of a particular teacher or parent. Are all school subgroups affected equally by budget expenditures?

Breaking Ranks II and *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* address the challenges of school equity. Practical examples throughout both books give pointers for having conversations with all staff members and stakeholders and for using local school data to address the following questions:

- Who are the effective analysts of your school culture and the catalysts for a culture change?
- How do you raise the equity consciousness among teachers?
- How do you raise teachers' expectations for each student?

Working as a staff and completing the equity self-assessment process with the tool that follows will give your staff a collective assessment of their perception of the effectiveness of the school culture. Comparing those perceptions to actual school data will open conversations about where the school is, how satisfied the school community is with the results, and where the school must go to become culturally and academically equitable for each student. **P**L

REFERENCE
- Gladwell, M. (2008). *Outliers: The story of success*. New York, NY: Little, Brown, and Co.
- Roberts, S. (2008). In a generation, minorities may be the U.S. majority. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from www.nytimes.com.

Because U.S. schools are enriched by an increasingly diverse staff and student body and are challenged to provide a world-class education for each and every student, it is time to ask yourself, your leadership team, and your staff, How equitably does this school serve each student?

How Well Does Your School Serve Each Student Equitably?

Step 1: Write a "best guess" response to each of the questions below.

Step 2: After you write each response, rate your degree of satisfaction with the response using the 5-point scale below.

Step 3: Combine the responses of all staff members to determine the staff's overall degree of satisfaction. Or in departmental, grade-level, or instructional teams, compare and discuss satisfaction ratings.

Step 4: Identify the questions that have poor satisfaction ratings, which indicate that a change is needed to serve your students well. For each rating of 3 or less, consider what actions must be taken to improve your satisfaction rating for that item to a 5.

Step 5: Consider the implications for you and your colleagues if you believe that your answers are accurate indicators of how well your school serves the needs of each student. Review the school data to see whether it supports the responses given.

1	2	3	4	5

Highly Dissatisfied ← → Highly Satisfied

Question	Write your best response	Degree of satisfaction
What percentage of your students is involved in classroom lessons that develop skills in critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, or communication?		
What percentage of your students is involved in ongoing programs that develop skills in organization, study skills, conflict resolution, self-awareness, personal safety, and/or stress management?		
What percentage of each student's classroom assessment is authentic (e.g., portfolio reviews, student-led presentations, student projects) and provides multiple opportunities to demonstrate mastery?		
What percentage of your students is achieving at a proficient or higher level? How well does that percentage reflect the demographics of the student body?		
What programs/interventions are in place to help struggling students? What percentage of students is taking advantage of the additional help?		
What percentage of your students says they are well known by at least one adult in the building who knows their aspirations, strengths, and weaknesses and who helps them be successful?		
Does every member of your faculty expect each student to meet high course standards?		
How often do the instructional teams or departments in your school regularly use data to plan, differentiate, and deliver developmentally appropriate instruction?		
How much time is scheduled and used each week for teachers to collaborate on planning instruction, reviewing student work, aligning instructional units with standards, and encouraging interdisciplinary learning?		

Question	Write your best response	Degree of satisfaction
How often do school administrators attend team/department planning meetings?		
What percentage of your teachers would say they have received adequate professional development and the time to collaboratively and regularly assess student data and plan for instruction?		
What percentage of instruction at each grade level relies on active inquiry, hands-on, or project-based learning?		
What percentage of the curriculum and instruction has links to real-life applications and helps students connect their education to their future?		
What percentage of your graduates must take remedial courses or other recovery programs as they transition to high school or college?		
What percentage of the teachers, students, and parents would say that the transition into and out of your school is effective and appropriate?		
What opportunities are students given to provide input and feedback into the academic and social activities at your school? What percentage of students takes advantage of these opportunities?		
How often do staff members interact with parents—especially those who are hard to reach or who are non-English speakers?		
What programs or services does the school provide that promote awareness and preparation for college and/or the workforce? What percentage of students takes advantage of these opportunities?		
To what extent does the enrollment in advanced courses or special programs reflect the school's demographics? What percentage of your English language learners and linguistically diverse students are mainstreamed?		
How does your school's recognition system value diversity, service, and academic achievement? How well does the percentage of students receiving recognition reflect the demographics of the student body?		
How well does your school's discipline statistics reflect the demographics of the student body?		

Source: *This self-assessment tool is adapted from NASSP. (2009).* Breaking Ranks: A Field Guide for Leading Change. *Reston, VA: Author.*