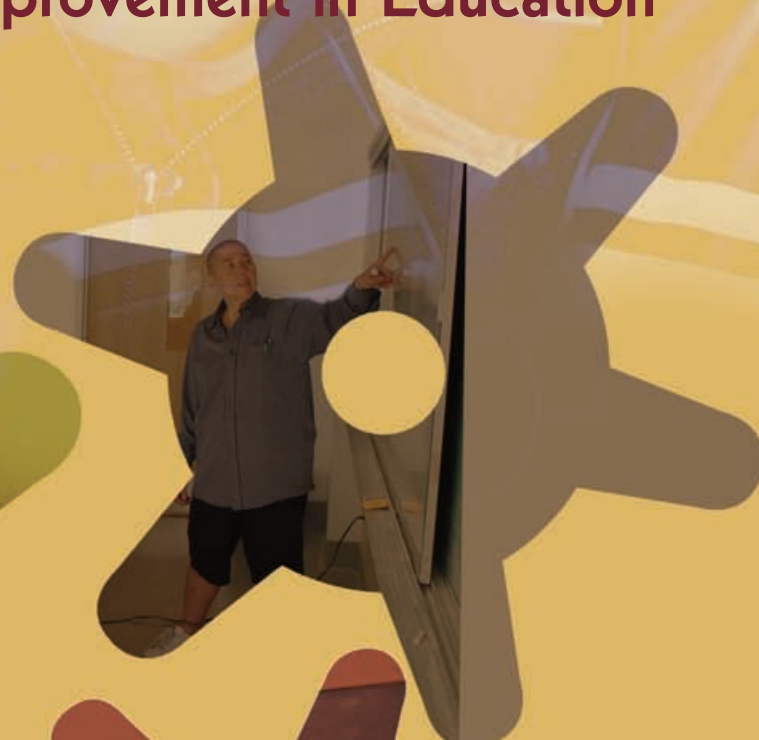


# The New Frontier: An Integrated Framework for Equity & Transformative Improvement in Education



By Sheryl Petty, California Tomorrow  
October 2010

## About California Tomorrow

Since 1984, California Tomorrow has specialized in the development of strategies to bring about equity and inclusion. We have worked with schools, districts, community colleges, after school programs, community building organizations, and philanthropy to provide vision for just and inclusive communities and build the capacity of institutions to effectively serve all students, with emphasis on those marginalized and underserved. We have worked at local, state and national levels using research, advocacy, and technical assistance. We focus on ensuring that students have rigorous academic preparation from culturally responsive practitioners grounded in their communities, to develop skills of compassion and understanding for themselves and others, to become critically conscious citizens able to reflect on the strengths and structural inequities in society and work collectively to create a more just world.

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**CALIFORNIA TOMORROW**  
vision & action for a just and inclusive society

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By Dr. Sheryl Petty, California Tomorrow

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## Introduction

*“Local tensions, national struggles, global conflicts, [rapid technological changes, and environmental urgency] call upon us to be sure that [generations] come of age able to develop the wisdom, attitudes and understanding to thrive as a diverse community of people”*

*(Olsen, Bhattacharya, Chow, Jaramillo, Pulido Tobiassen, & Solorio, 2001, p.8).*

There is considerable work being undertaken by numerous educators and change agents in the field, doggedly committed to improving outcomes for students. But there are significantly different approaches being taken to improving schools and school systems – from those seeking to improve standards, align curriculum, and build better assessment systems, to those seeking to deeply engage with marginalized parents, families, and communities, meaningfully involve students in their schools, planning, and community improvement, and infuse robust, culturally responsive practice into every facet of teaching and learning. Even further, many of these educators and change agents are focused on significantly different goals for student success, and the fact of this difference is often hidden or not discussed in public discourse about the purposes of education. After billions of dollars and a plethora of reform approaches, we have yet to see lasting, deep, widespread, substantial improvement for the most marginalized, as well all, students (Payne, 2008).

In the midst of this, too many students are disengaged, under-challenged, bored, apathetic, and disillusioned. They do not see schools and classrooms as places that can inspire their curiosity and passion for learning; deepen their understanding about themselves, the world, and other people; and support their ability to make significant, positive change in their communities.

### Why This Framework Now?

This Framework responds to recurring and seemingly intractable frustrations and challenges that educators, families, students, and other change agents have shared with us over the years, including frustrations with narrow tests that don’t measure the robust skills that students have and need; improvement efforts embroiled with political infighting among educators, community members, parents, families, and politicians; and a lack of understanding around how to intentionally plan for and address these issues.

We constantly reflect on the larger goals and needs for our educational systems, namely that they be preparing youth and adults with the largest array of skills possible so that they can truly participate in the co-creation of more effective public institutions and vibrant, joyful communities. Yet, we are constantly reminded that these are not the stated goals of our educational systems. Much of the reform efforts and literature are focused on the content of change with insufficient focus on the process of change. There is even less attention to the intricacies of process that relate to power and privilege differences, and this country’s legacy of race and class relations, as well as how under-addressed

tensions shape the way educators, reformers, and students interact with each other to conceive, plan, implement, and evaluate change (*Payne, 2008*).

This Framework is intended to address these issues, by placing the various goals and approaches in the field in relation to each other, so that we can have a shared, more comprehensive understanding of our collective efforts and why, how, and when we are working at cross-purposes. From this place, we hope this document makes a contribution to help integrate the efforts of everyone in the field who is truly interested in preparing all students to become compassionate, self-reflective, civically engaged, globally literate people who can create more joyful, socially, and economically prosperous communities.



## Table of Contents

<b>Purpose of the Framework</b>	<b>9</b>
Vision for Society .....	10
Underlying Values & Sensibilities .....	10
Purposes of Education .....	11
<b>Broadening Notions of Student “Success”:</b>	
<b>Global Skills &amp; Competencies for Youth and Adults</b>	<b>13</b>
Traditional Academic Skills .....	13
Cultural Competency & Self-Efficacy Skills .....	14
Critical Reflection & Change Agency Skills .....	18
<b>Why It’s Hard to Promote Broadened Notions of Student Success</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>The Focus of Reform Work / How Educational Improvement is Pursued:</b>	
<b>Structural &amp; Cultural Dimensions of Systems Change</b>	<b>25</b>
Structural Dimension of Systems Change .....	25
Cultural Dimension of Systems Change .....	26
A Blended Approach: Structural/Cultural Systems Change .....	33
<b>The Process of Change: The Need for Robust Approaches to Change Management</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>The Ecology of Learning Supports &amp; Opportunities</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<b>40</b>
Policy .....	41
Educator Preparation .....	41
Professional Development, Leadership Development, & Training for Teachers & Administrators .....	41
Practice .....	42
Textbook & Curricula Publishers and Developers .....	43
Assessment System Development .....	43
Technical Assistance and Consulting for Planning & Change .....	44
Organizing .....	45
Research .....	45
Education Funders .....	46
Media .....	47
Information Resources/Clearinghouse .....	48
Networks & Coalitions .....	48
<b>Overarching Diagram for the Framework: An Integrated Framework for Equity &amp; Transformational Improvement in Education</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Caveats &amp; Reminders in Using the Framework</b>	<b>50</b>

<b>Concluding Thoughts</b>	<b>51</b>
What Do We Believe Is Needed & Possible? .....	51
Continuum of Readiness .....	53
Vertical Levels of Systems Change .....	54
Uses of the Framework .....	54
Locus of Change .....	56
Significant Work is Afoot, Yet There is More to Do .....	56
The Need for Personal Transformation .....	57
This Moment in History .....	57
<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>63</b>



## Purpose of the Framework

Because there is so much fragmentation and contention in the field about how educational improvement and “equity in education” are discussed and pursued, the purpose of this document is to:

- share with the field our understanding of educational equity and an integrated approach to catalytic improvement and transformation;
- shed light on the relationship between the various ways that improvement and equity are being pursued in the field;
- promote alignment in semantics and approach, and inspire opportunities for deeper collaboration among practitioners, policymakers, and other change agents;
- provide a Framework that can lead to more strategic and impactful collaborative efforts precisely because the relationship between various approaches is illuminated; and hence,
- improve policymaking and practice toward the greatest benefit possible for marginalized students, all students, and society as a whole.

The audiences for this document are systems leaders (district, local, state, and federal); education intermediaries; education funders; and other practitioners and change agents with a systems interest and/or lens across the pre-K–16 (and beyond) spectrum.

The primary stipulation this document and our work rests upon is that *in order to build healthy societies and promote full democratic participation, we need knowledgeable, engaged, reflective, compassionate, global citizens*. As others have noted, “we want all our children to emerge from their educational experience prepared for college, work, and citizenship...[W]e also expect schools to help transform children into flexible and broadly capable adults” (*Camp, 2007, p.25*). We believe that our educational systems hold a core responsibility for supporting these goals and fostering the development of individuals with these qualities. We also feel it is critical to delve deeply into what we mean by the terms citizenship, flexible, capable, and democratic participation. We offer this Framework as a part of the answer to the question “What’s at stake if a broad cross-section of people do not develop these skills?”

We all know that there are huge educational opportunity gaps and achievement gaps between predictable subgroups of students along racial and class lines (see, for example, Education Trust-West, [www.edtrust.org/west](http://www.edtrust.org/west)). Many large school districts in urban areas have improved significantly and students are gaining basic knowledge. Yet arming students with this basic knowledge, none of these districts can claim to be preparing all of its students to be fully competent citizens in today’s society (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2010). Further than this, of those who do graduate from high school, many are underprepared for higher education or for meaningful, living wage employment (*Biswas, 2007; Esch, 2009; Lumina, 2008; Price & Roberts, 2008*). And even further, students getting high test scores does not necessarily mean they have deep skills for living, thriving, and being engaged, compassionate community members and citizens.

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In order to build healthy societies and promote full democratic participation, we need knowledgeable, engaged, reflective, compassionate, global citizens.

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There is a “mismatch between the skills and knowledge requirements of the global economy and democratic society and the limited conceptions of learning assessed by standardized tests” (*Simmons, 2007, p.2*).

As we are aware, limited educational success “is correlated with many social costs, including unemployment, homelessness, crime, and poor health. When children don’t get the education they need, everyone loses” (*Camp, 2007, p.3*).

Efforts focused on educational equity and improvement often do not start by deeply examining the larger vision for society and the purposes education should serve to help produce such a society. Because of this, we do not have a foundation for thinking about what students need to be able to know and do as a result of their education. And this in turn means there is a lack of clarity about what schools need to teach and the type of learning environment they must therefore provide. For these reasons, this Framework rests on several critical components:

**Vision for Society:** the overarching vision to which our efforts strive

**Underlying Values & Sensibilities:** the sensibilities that underlie how we choose to pursue educational improvement and equity

**Purposes of Education:** the understanding of the purposes of public education and how broadly or narrowly this is conceived

***Vision:***

We have a vision (and hope) for broadly diverse communities that are socially, interpersonally, economically, and environmentally safe, healthy, joyful, and prosperous. “Diversity” here can be conceived of both in terms of ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and other demographic areas of diversity, as well as in diversity of thought, perspective, and action. Note that the terms “safe, healthy, joyful, and prosperous” qualify what our commitments to each other need to be in order to create communities that we want to live in together.<sup>1</sup>

***Values & Sensibilities:***

We feel it is important to focus on the types of internal sensibilities that should undergird the creation of a prosperous, healthy society with the possibility of full democratic participation by all. For us, sensibilities are qualitative and affective skills that dictate or provide the orientation to the quantitative and cognitive skills typically focused on in education discussions. These are the qualifiers that – (if we can agree on them) – can give us confidence that we are each committed to and can be in rigorous dialogue with one another to improve our collective conditions. These sensibilities include:

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1 For example, what social conditions would it take for every person to feel safe walking through their communities or having their children play with their neighbors – and who currently does and does not feel this safety? What social conditions would it take for every person to have access to all the resources they need to promote their greatest physical health and well-being – and who currently does and does not have access to such resources? What social conditions would it take for every person, family, and community to be economically prosperous; that is, to not have to worry about the next meal, the next month of bills, or whether their basic needs will be met? What skills and knowledge would it take to create these social conditions in every neighborhood, for every community, for every citizen? And how do we help build these skills and knowledge, en masse?

- deep and ongoing self reflection work;
- openness and receptivity to dialogue;
- humility;
- openness to self-transformation and shifts in thinking;
- commitment to the thriving of not only one’s own communities and affinity groups, but to that of others;
- commitment to authentically seeking out, learning about, and elevating the voices, perspectives, and experiences of those who have been historically marginalized in our public sectors (education, healthcare, environment, legal system, workforce, etc.) and seeing these voices as a barometer of the real impact of our policies, practices, and the overall health of our society; and
- belief that all people – regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, religion, sexual orientation, language, national origin, or past transgressions (where the individual is authentically striving to repair them) – have the inherent wisdom, capacity, and right to help co-create our collective institutions and future.<sup>2</sup>

***Purposes of education:***

In order to achieve this vision, and with these sensibilities guiding our efforts, we see the purposes of public education broadly, as they have been conceived in past generations and historical periods. Namely, public education has the responsibility to help prepare citizens to 1) have the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and behavior to be lifetime learners; 2) exhibit the above sensibilities as the expected norm (rather than the exception); and 3) engage in the most authentically informed ways in reflection on and decision-making about the conditions of our collective life and our society, thereby “developing the full human and communal potential of all students” (*Justice Matters, n.d., p.4*).

Certainly this duty is not the sole responsibility of education. We recognize that families and spiritual institutions also hold this duty. We also recognize the significant power of media and technology to influence and shape information access, perception, worldview, knowledge, and discourse. These aspects are equally critical in supporting the development of such citizens.

With the above vision, sensibilities, and education purpose as a foundation, the components of the Framework are:

**Global Skills & Competency Needs for Youth & Adults:** the skills and competencies youth and adults will need in order to meet these purposes of education and help move communities toward the vision for society, including traditional academics, expanded academics, cultural proficiency, self-efficacy, critical reflection, and change agency;

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<sup>2</sup> This sensibility is critical because, from our perspective, students who have struggled in education or in life for years, who are many grade levels behind, and who may have grown up in and/or been victims of or committed crimes in the course of their lives, have the ability to participate fully in this Framework (with rare exceptions).

**The Focus of Reform Work / How Educational Improvement is Pursued:** *Structural & Cultural Dimensions* – typical approaches to school and district reform, where they fall short, and what’s really needed to strengthen the capacity of educators, students, and institutions.

**The Process of Change:** common and needed approaches to *change management* in educational systems (schools and districts).

**The Ecology of Learning Supports & Opportunities:** the structures within which students of all ages grow and develop, including parents/families; preschool and early childhood supports; in-school/in-system structures; afterschool, out-of-school-time, summer, and youth development opportunities; community-based organizations; faith-based institutions; and government entities.<sup>3</sup>



3 For those desiring a visual at this stage for how the Framework’s components relate to one another, see p.49.

## Broadening Notions of Student “Success”: Global Skills & Competencies for Youth and Adults

Within the “skills & competency” area, the dominant approach to equity in education in the field focuses on “*raising achievement and closing the achievement gap*” between demographic subgroups of students, with the goal of success in traditionally understood academic skills. With this focus on raising achievement and closing the gap also comes a focus on “economic competition and success” as being the purpose of education, i.e., promoting a globally competitive citizenry.

This section discusses why we believe that such a focus on traditional academic skills alone (in mathematics, reading, science, history, etc.) is insufficient to prepare students for full participation, understanding of life, and to become transformative, engaged, compassionate change agents. We discuss traditional academic skills and also propose two additional domains of skill sets that the education field needs to focus on and advocate for.

### Traditional Academic Skills

Within the domain of traditional academic skills, we include two strata:

- 1) “facts, figures, and formulas”; and
- 2) expanded academics and “deeper thinking,”<sup>4</sup> including the capacities of critical inquiry and interpretation, collaboration, self-reflection, knowledge of one’s own learning style and approach, and the ability to relativize one’s own understanding and embrace multiple perspectives and approaches to knowledge and learning.

The first strata that we call “facts, figures, and formulas” is currently the focus of most reform efforts, standards-based curricula, and assessment strategies, which according to our vision for society and goals for education, are necessary but not sufficient for thriving, prosperous communities. In this domain, the typical outcomes include test scores, graduation rates, college-going rates, and employment earnings (*Camp, 2007, p.6*).

In our experience, the areas in the second, *expanded academics* strata noted above are rarely emphasized in educator preparation and teaching in classrooms (or in the work of educators with each other, for that matter) in our public educational systems. Yet, it has become increasingly understood that these skills are critical for effective functioning in today’s society, as we have moved to a knowledge economy (*Camp, 2007; Cisco, Microsoft, & Intel, 2009; Hewlett, 2010; Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2010; Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010*).

Still, for us in our work with K-12 and community college systems, we have found that these skills are inadequate to fully prepare youth and adults for competent, compassionate, and engaged citizenship and democratic participation. In particular, we

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<sup>4</sup> This term was inspired by the William & Flora Hewlett Foundation’s new focus on “deeper learning” [www.hewlett.org/programs/education-program/deeper-learning](http://www.hewlett.org/programs/education-program/deeper-learning).

agree that “basic skills alone cannot catapult all students, especially those on the unfavorable side of the achievement gap, to the educational achievement levels required for success in today’s world” (*Simmons, 2007, p.2*).

Furthermore, we must emphasize a critical point: traditional academics are already cultural, and are already largely couched in the dominant culture (*Tyler, Stevens, & Uqdah, 2003*). That is, academic skills and knowledge are acquired within and mediated through culture (including language, race, gender, age, nationality, socioeconomic status, worldview, etc.). This Framework strives to make this fact explicit so that we can intentionally attend more deeply to both the context and content of learning for youth and adults.

From this backdrop, we move to the additional skill areas for which we are advocating.

### **Cultural Competency & Self-Efficacy Skills<sup>5</sup>**

Most people are aware of how diverse the U.S. is and our legacy of tense and painful intergroup relations. This legacy is still very present across every sector, with egregious stratified outcomes for low-income people and people of color. When we enter school systems and talk to both practitioners and students, we often hear the following:

“Students’ cultures, languages, and histories are not included in the curriculum [and furthermore, students] are given the message that to be successful, they must leave behind their culture, languages, and histories – that their background will get in the way of formal education...Students are given the message that their literature is not the real canon, their history is not significant, their dialect is not intelligent, their families do not have the correct family structure, etc.” (*Justice Matters, n.d., p.15*).

Students “are often exposed to negative messages from the media, from peers, and from society about their backgrounds and identities. Many attend schools in which their experiences and communities are not part of the curriculum. And they are more likely than young people from other groups to live in communities with weak infrastructures, overcrowded and dilapidated schools, high levels of underqualified teachers, and little access to services and support” (*California Tomorrow, 2003, p.6*).

We see evidence of ongoing ethnic and other intergroup strife and violence;<sup>6</sup> we see over-identification of students of color (especially black boys) into special education despite widespread knowledge of the presence of bias in this over-referral; we see

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- 5 Readers may be familiar with the terms cultural proficiency, cultural competence, cultural relevance, and/or culturally responsive practice. Practitioners and change agents may use these terms interchangeably or have different meanings for them. We have attempted to illuminate our meaning in the use of several of them.
- 6 It is important that we simultaneously recognize and address the harsh realities that many students are living within, while not being deficit-focused alone. We must equally recognize the tremendous assets that all students and communities bring.

students of color being referred for disciplinary action in profoundly disproportionate numbers; we hear students talk about their difficulty in being respected by their teachers; and we hear educators talk about their continued biases against students from specific racial, ethnic, language, and income backgrounds (*Countinho & Oswald, 2006; Klingner, Artiles, Kozleski, Harry, Zion, Tate, et al., 2005; Kozleski, Zion, & Hidalgo, 2007; Trumbull, Rothstein-Fisch, & Greenfield, 2000*).

We also hear from and see technical assistance providers, consultant trainers, and intermediaries struggle greatly in whether to address these issues, and how to do so effectively. (As one example, we spoke with a national intermediary organization about the coaches they were providing to educational institutions around the country [personal correspondence, Spring 2009]. We asked how they were addressing issues of race and class and how these play out in improvement efforts. The intermediary indicated that they and their coaches know this is a critical area, but that the coaches had no knowledge of how to effectively address these issues and were afraid to do so.)

For these reasons, we include the need for rigorous focus on developing deep cultural competency skills for both youth and adults.

A useful definition of cultural competency for the education field is the following (*adapted from Oregon State Department of Education, 2004; California Tomorrow, 2010; and Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2007*):

- a set of values and principles, demonstrated behaviors, attitudes, policies, and structures that enable people to work effectively in cross-cultural settings;
- demonstrated capacity to 1) value diversity, 2) engage in self-reflection on one's own cultural reference points, conscious and unconscious assumptions, biases, power, and areas for growth, 3) build cross-cultural understanding over time with an on-going commitment to continual growth, 4) build knowledge and understanding of historical and current systemic inequities and their impact on specific racial and other demographic groups, 5) adapt to the diversity and cultural contexts of the students, families, and communities served, 6) effectively manage the dynamics of difference, 7) support actions which foster equity (not necessarily equality<sup>7</sup>) of opportunity and services; and
- institutionalization, incorporation, evaluation of, and advocating for the above in all aspects of curricular development, instructional practice, leadership, policy-making, administration, practice, and service delivery while systematically involving staff, students, families, key stakeholders, and communities.

We argue that these skills are important for both educators and students.

Many students, families, and practitioners from low-income backgrounds, or who are people of color, have been told repeatedly that they “would not amount to anything”

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<sup>7</sup> Since students with greater needs or barriers may need additional resources not required by students who already have access to such supports.

and have had their intelligence and capacity doubted (*Brown & Uhde, 2001; Watson & McFarland, 2007; Holman, 1997; Ramirez, 2003; Sohn & Wang, 2006*). Many have felt an uphill battle to be perceived and engaged with as legitimate. This is not to say that White and/or affluent individuals do not experience many of these same issues. It is to say that people of color, low-income people, and other marginalized communities experience these realities in greater relative proportion to their numbers than their White and more affluent counterparts.

In addition to addressing the ways in which some groups of students are actively damaged by the current system, cultural competence also prepares all students to take steps toward creating the vision of society described above. Developing knowledge and appreciation of one's own cultures and others' is a core skill area for all of us to develop if we are to create healthy, understanding, compassionate, and supportive environments (as critical friends, change agents, and leaders) in our neighborhoods, schools, families, communities, and institutions. Beyond "holidays, heroes, and food," (*Gorski, 2005*) significant adaptations to existing curricula, instructional practices, and assessment strategies will be necessary to pursue this area (and the critical reflection area below) with rigor.

Furthermore, beyond cultural competency, developing "self-efficacy" is critically important for all people in its related dimensions of confidence, the ability to advocate for oneself, to navigate personal and professional environments effectively, to locate and utilize helpful resources for growth and advancement, build social capital, and to deal with adversity as a normal part of everyday life. Self-efficacy is related to the cultural competency skill of self-awareness, but extends this further into self-advocacy. For students (both youth and adults) and practitioners who have experienced challenging, unsupportive, or even devastating and violent life circumstances, the development of this domain of skills is much more difficult and necessary.

As one example, some equity-based community college change agents focus on helping students to "reset their approach to formal education," thereby transforming past individual dynamics of failure and challenging experiences<sup>8</sup>. This approach can include skill-building in navigating college, offering peer support, developing personal responsibility, and helping students to become intellectually curious, more aware of themselves and their learning style, and motivated (*Navarro, 2008, p.1-3*). The requisite skill-building needed for educators to support students in these ways includes high expectations; challenging assumptions about students; belief in the capacity of low-income students, students of color, and those who have historically struggled; treating students with "trust, respect, compassion, and empathy"; interactive instructional practices; high support; and building community among students (*Navarro, 2008, p.4-5, 8-10*).

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<sup>8</sup> It should be noted here that transforming individual dynamics and preparing students to navigate existing educational and societal contexts is critical and important work. But this is not the same as preparing students to participate in transforming the larger institutional and societal conditions within which individual choices are circumscribed. This is the focus of the next domain of skills to be discussed.



## Culturally Responsive Practice

We introduce the term “culturally responsive practice” to illuminate this area that may be familiar to some educators and change agents, and less familiar to others. There is a great body of literature on this subject (*for example Burns, Keyes, and Kusimo, 2005; Ephraim, Scruggs, LeMoine, & Maddahian, 2006; Gorski, 2005; Lachat, 1999; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2003; Oregon State Department of Education, 2004; Singleton & Linton, 2006; and Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2003*), yet, as we have noted, this conceptual and practice arena does not typically find its way into mainstream educational improvement discussions, policymaking endeavors, systems improvement efforts, or research agendas.

All of the cultural groups to which we each belong impact how we see, listen, understand, and interpret the world (*Ephraim, et al, 2006; Olsen, Bhattacharya, & Scharf, 2006; Tyler, Stevens, & Uqdah, 2003*). While it is acknowledged that “great teachers are masters at making learning interesting and relevant, especially when they are supported by compelling and relevant curricular materials” (*Camp, 2007, p.6*), the notion of “relevant” often does not include deep inclusion of culturally relevant curricular materials and instructional practices. There is “a direct link between student achievement and the extent to which teaching employs the cultural referents of students” (*Ephraim, et al, 2006, p.3*). Hence, the degree to which we focus on cultural responsiveness will greatly shape students’ experiences of their education, for better or worse.

Students of color and low-income students in particular (including immigrant students) often do not see themselves deeply reflected in the curricula across disciplines, or in the faculty or support staff in schools. These issues are compounded by negative stereotypes that persist about such students and their families and communities, which can lead to “miscommunication, confrontations between the student, the teacher, and the home, alienation, diminished self-esteem, and eventual school failure” (*Ephraim, et al, 2006, p.3*). In addition to issues of alienation, motivation, and self-esteem, culturally responsive practice also relates to cognition. We assimilate and analyze new information by connecting it to what we already know. Furthermore, when learning does not make connections to prior knowledge, that task becomes much harder (*Tyler, Stevens, & Uqdah, 2003*). Therefore, grounding learning in the experiences of students – (while exposing them to new information) – increases students’ ability to learn.

Culturally responsive approaches to teaching include a focus on curriculum, environment/ climate, the relationship between students and teachers, instructional

There are several levels of focus in **Cultural Responsiveness** that are distinctly recognizable in the field:

- from **generic awareness** of culture including appreciation for and tolerance of “*diversity*” often characterized by a focus on demographic representation of historically marginalized groups, and a focus on “*food, fairs, heroes, and holidays*”;
- to a focus on **culturally responsive practice** including uncovering individual *conscious and unconscious bias*, how these play out at classroom, school, and district levels, and beginning to *draw on the backgrounds and knowledge of students* and their communities as strengths and assets to the curriculum, approaches to instruction and assessment, and the overall educational environment;
- to a focus on **structural inequality** and how power differentials among demographic groups, conscious and unconscious bias, and decisions about how to structure public institutions and deliver services have created predictable barriers and stratified outcomes for people of color, low-income people, and other specific groups.

The distinction in these levels of **Cultural Responsiveness** is important so that we can recognize where we are in our goals and practice as individual change agents and as institutions. Which of these levels is focused on will determine how teaching is pursued, how students are engaged with, and the requisite skills that educators must build in order to be successful. Each subsequent level includes the previous.

practices, assessment strategies, and how particular types of knowledge are valued over others. Culturally responsive approaches draw on the students' cultures and backgrounds of students as assets, strengths, and building blocks for learning, and recognize them as valid and relevant aspects of core content across every discipline and every aspect of schooling (Cordova et al, 2010; Ephraim, et al, 2006; Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2003).

### Critical Reflection & Change Agency Skills

Different from the more generic "critical thinking" term that may be more familiar to readers, this skill area is perhaps the hardest to grasp, yet it is a natural extension of the last "cultural competency" area. Beyond simply *learning about* and *appreciating* one another's differences, our contention is that societal and interethnic tensions, and continued conscious and unconscious discrimination and stratification, must also be addressed if we are to create healthy, prosperous communities. As the (paraphrased) adage goes, if we do not develop deep knowledge of the past and how we have created our present social conditions, we will be doomed to continue them.

Becoming aware of our biases and tendencies is an essential first step in addressing discrimination in society. Yet, as the field of critical race theory has nicely elaborated (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Finn, 1999; Freire, 1970 and 2005; Ladson-Billings, 1999; McLaren, 1989), we also need to understand how these biases (whether conscious or unconscious) have evolved and been institutionalized into our public systems – educational, legal, healthcare, media, workforce, economic, and environmental.

"Students are not exposed to traditions of resistance to injustice and to times in history when societies have taken important steps towards [creating more] just and compassionate relations" (Justice Matters, n.d., p.15). Without this knowledge of *structural inequality* and how to remedy it, we will not have the understanding of how inequities are playing out in our systems, and hence will lack the skills in our current and future generations to restructure social systems so that they can become more just. This focus deepens the notion of "civic engagement," which is important, but may not always be transformative for our communities. Without knowledge of structural inequity and how to remedy it, we will not have the capacity to become true agents of change for a more just society.

This is the pinnacle of the other two domains of skills: the ability to take the technical knowledge of facts and figures, collaborative capacity, knowledge of oneself as a learner, and cultural competence, ground them in the vision and sensibilities we outlined at the beginning of this document, and turn these formidable capacities into the willingness and ability to create social institutions that truly work to benefit everyone. Within this Framework, popular notions of "civic engagement" are deepened because students are being equipped with more robust information as well as analytical skills, and in this way have the opportunity to engage in more meaningful and impactful schoolwork and community involvement projects (Watts & Guessous, 2006). Further than this, such a focus on this domain of skills can "awaken students' curiosity, passion, and desire for ongoing growth, and develop the thinking skills and sense of agency that is needed for students to help solve the problems our society faces" (Justice Matters, n.d., p.8). Such passion is

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As an example, California Tomorrow's Bridging Multiple Worlds curriculum includes a focus on building strong cultural identity, leadership skills to act for change, critical thinking skills, cross-cultural skills, bilingual skills, knowledge of history and social justice movements, and understanding one's community (Bhattacharya, Quiroga, & Olsen, 2007). We believe these should be additional, essential outcomes of our educational systems.

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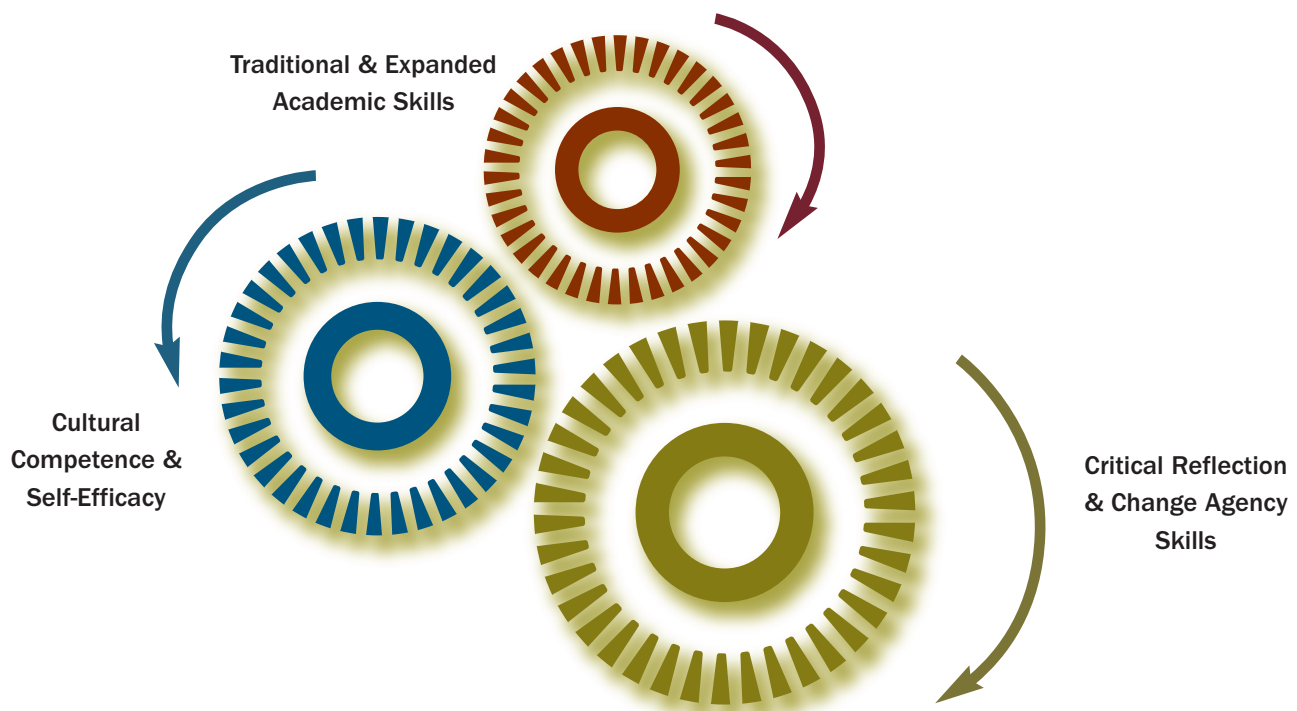
awakened because of connecting directly to and valuing students’ lives, cultures, backgrounds, interests, and histories.

Engaging youth as agents for self-, peer-, and community development can contribute to students building powerful skills for participation in society for the purpose of community improvement. It also contributes to the formation of young people entering adulthood with a self-identity as people who care about, act for, and are effective at improving their communities, and as people with the skills, knowledge, and relationships for lifelong community leadership and responsible citizenship (Scheie, Robillos, Bischoff, & Langley, 2003). As an example, California Tomorrow’s *Bridging Multiple Worlds* curriculum includes a focus on building strong cultural identity, leadership skills to act for change, critical thinking skills, cross-cultural skills, bilingual skills, knowledge of history and social justice movements, and understanding one’s community (Bhattacharya, Quiroga, & Olsen, 2007). We believe these should be essential outcomes of our educational systems.

As one of the principles from *El Puente Academy for Peace and Justice in New York* notes,

“Learning is the individual and collective practice of freedom. It creates understanding of the historical, cultural, social, and political conditions, events, and issues that shape our world. It is a process that moves us to use our skills and insights to design and work towards a more equitable and just world for ourselves and the global community.” (Justice Matters, n.d., p.31)

The diagram below expresses our perspective about how focus on these skills should be integrated:



Now we discuss the most common challenges we have encountered to focusing on these domains of skills.

## Why It's Hard to Promote Broadened Notions of Student Success

- 1 Belief that the three domains of skills are sequential for students (youth and adults), and that pursuing them simultaneously will interfere with the acquisition of “basic skills”

and/or

- 2 The myth that “some students” (i.e., low-income and students of color who are struggling in school) can't be expected to do that “hard” stuff in the cultural proficiency and critical reflection skill areas

The most commonly voiced concern we have heard regarding the skill domains is that each level is a prerequisite for the subsequent levels; that is, until a student has mastered the facts and figures, they should not engage in expanded academics, developing cultural competency, or critical reflection because it would just be “too difficult,” confusing, or overwhelming for them. We have found in our practice and research (*Stanford University & Justice Matters, 2007; Watson & McFarland, 2007*)<sup>9</sup> that quite the opposite is true: namely, that *students who struggle the most are both more engaged and more successful* when educated in a style and environment that includes a focus on both strata of traditional academics, *plus* a focus on cultural competency and self-efficacy, and a focus on critical reflection. Indeed, it is possible to “incorporate academic, cognitive, social, and cultural components of learning without sacrificing high standards and attention to basic skills” (*Simmons, 2007, p.8*). Or as other researchers have noted, “you cannot have critical pedagogy without academic rigor, and you cannot be academically rigorous without drawing from critical pedagogy” (*Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p.181*).

We find that students from all walks of life are tremendously reflective about their life conditions and circumstances and the world around them. And yet both youth and adults infrequently have access to information and forums for critically reflective, as well as safe and respectful, dialogue about their life conditions, the state of the world, the challenging and discriminatory circumstances they find themselves and their friends, families, and neighbors in, and means to collectively transform these conditions. In addition to wanting to analyze and more deeply understand challenging and oppressive conditions, we find that youth and adults also want supports to explore and create new visions and strategies for improving upon those circumstances. This two-pronged need and desire: critical *inquiry* into stratified social conditions and co-creation of more just *solutions* – is all but absent in today's public education, with the exception of anomalous teachers, schools (inc. some small, charter, and/or alternative schools), colleges, and professors.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Though much more research is needed, particularly at the district level.

<sup>10</sup> Historical efforts striving toward similar goals of liberation, robust democratic and civic participation, and social transformation include the Freedom Schools movement within the Black community in the 1960s in the south (see Neumann, 2003, p.11).

We realize that accomplishing the above requires considerable skill, which brings us to the next area of feedback most commonly heard in relation to this part of the Framework.

### 3 Educator Preparation and Continued Professional Learning

To accomplish the above goals with quality and effectiveness, and with a wide variety of students, will require formidable improvements in our current approaches to both educator preparation and professional development. Educator preparation programs across the country have a focus on preparing future teachers and administrators with the basics: curriculum development; basic instructional practices and classroom management; assessment strategies; and in the case of teacher leaders and administrators, site- and district-wide planning strategies and other areas. Yet, there is little to no evidence of widespread availability of entire sequences of courses or strands of learning<sup>11</sup> (that is, beyond one-off, isolated courses or programs) that comprehensively support students in developing robust cultural competence knowledge (*Trumbull & Pacheco, 2005*).

Even less available are sequences of courses or strands of study that support educators in developing an understanding of critical race theory *and* how to translate this knowledge into curriculum and instructional practices appropriate for students at grade levels from pre-K to college, in each discipline area (*i.e., Language Arts, History, Science, Math, etc.; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008*).

In addition, as we know, professional development is often fragmented and non-strategic in the midst of the competing and considerable demands on teachers, administrators, and the professional learning goals of those in higher education. Further than this, typically a focus on “culture” seems like an “add-on” and not a “core” skill set for educators to build (*Ramirez, 2003*).

As discussed above, given that the three areas of students’ skills are usually seen as sequential (if they are seen at all), and any focus on cultural competence (not to mention critical reflection) is viewed as “extra” or as an area best addressed at a later point in students’ academic careers, there is little incentive for focusing rigorous educator preparation and learning in these areas.

We are well-aware that there are significant pipeline issues. It is easy to understand how change agents could balk at the need for more robust requirements for educator preparation when there are teacher shortages and many teachers are ill-prepared to teach even “the basics.” Yet, we believe our efforts must be focused on what is necessary to promote the development of youth and adults who have the skills to create institutions that work and communities we want to live in together. This necessity gives us our marching orders in terms of a long-term agenda for preparing educators.

An additional challenge to incorporating such a focus into educator preparation and continued learning is the need for competent faculty and trainers who can *develop* culturally

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<sup>11</sup> Such as California State University, East Bay’s Social Justice doctoral program, and the University of California, Los Angeles’s Center X.

responsive curricula (that promotes critical reflection) in universities and preparation programs, and *deliver* robust services to schools, districts, afterschool programs, and colleges.

Finally, our country’s legacy of not focusing skillfully on these areas at large, and even shying away (*Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009*) from a rigorous focus for fear of volatile dialogues and outcomes, makes even the most dedicated educational improvement advocates hesitant to take on this work. Fear of confronting issues of personal and institutional/systemic bias and the requisite ongoing self-reflection needed are significant for us all. Despite these challenges, educators, students, parents, and families have made it clear that the need for such an expanded focus in our educational improvement work is strongly evident. As some authors have noted, “Our experience while visiting many schools and working with pre-service teachers at several universities reveals a sense of apathy, defeat, and cynicism that enters into the conversations of teachers before they even set foot into urban classrooms” (*Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008, p.177*). Hence, educators are well aware of the need for complex and robust preparation and skills in order to have a hope of being successful with a wide variety of students.

This area of educator preparation and professional development is part of the “new frontier” to which this Framework speaks and toward which we are advocating we strive as educators, practitioners, and people interested in transformational approaches to educational improvement.<sup>12</sup>

We now move to the final area of feedback commonly voiced as a response to this notion of broadened skills needs for youth and adults.

#### **4 Ultimately, there are currently very few broad-based forums to discuss the fundamental purposes of education.**

Such forums are all but absent in practitioner circles, policy circles, the research literature, and mainstream media. Few are even questioning that there may be something missing from or an additional goal that we may need besides “raising achievement and closing the achievement gap” to create a prosperous, thriving society. This issue goes back to the previously discussed area of believing that the skills are sequential and that a focus on all three simultaneously is not possible – either not possible ever, or not possible for “some students,” namely, students of color and low-income students who have a history of struggling in school. As already noted, there is a wealth of literature to the contrary.

The youth development field is a particular exception to this issue of believing in the skill areas as sequential, containing extensive research on the robust competencies that all youth need in order to thrive and participate fully in society. This field identifies a number of goals, supports, and opportunities that youth need, including: intellectual, social, and emotional growth; self-efficacy, self-esteem, conflict resolution, and problem-solving; physical and emotional safety; healthy and supportive relationships (guidance

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<sup>12</sup> An inspiring example of a systematic approach to this work is that of Alaska’s “Standards for Culturally Responsive Schools,” which includes guidelines covering: preparation of culturally responsive teachers, culturally responsive school boards, nurturing culturally healthy young children, cross-cultural orientation programs, respecting cultural knowledge, and strengthening indigenous languages (*Justice Matters, n.d., p.37*).

and being known by peers and adults); meaningful youth involvement (decision-making input, leadership development, responsibility, and belonging); and community involvement (*California Tomorrow, 2003; CNYD, 2006; Durlak & Weissberg, 2007; High/Scope, 2005; LaFleur, Russell, Scoee, & Reisner, 2009; Pittman & Tolman, 2002, p.11; Sagor, 2002; Tolman, Ford, & Irby, 2003; and Wallace Foundation, 2008*).

Until we create more and ongoing, robust forums for dialogue about the purposes of education and the comprehensive skills that youth and adults need across different ethnic, racial, language, and other communities, these principles and notions will likely remain obscure and our efforts to broaden the objectives of our educational systems to better serve us will be frustrated.

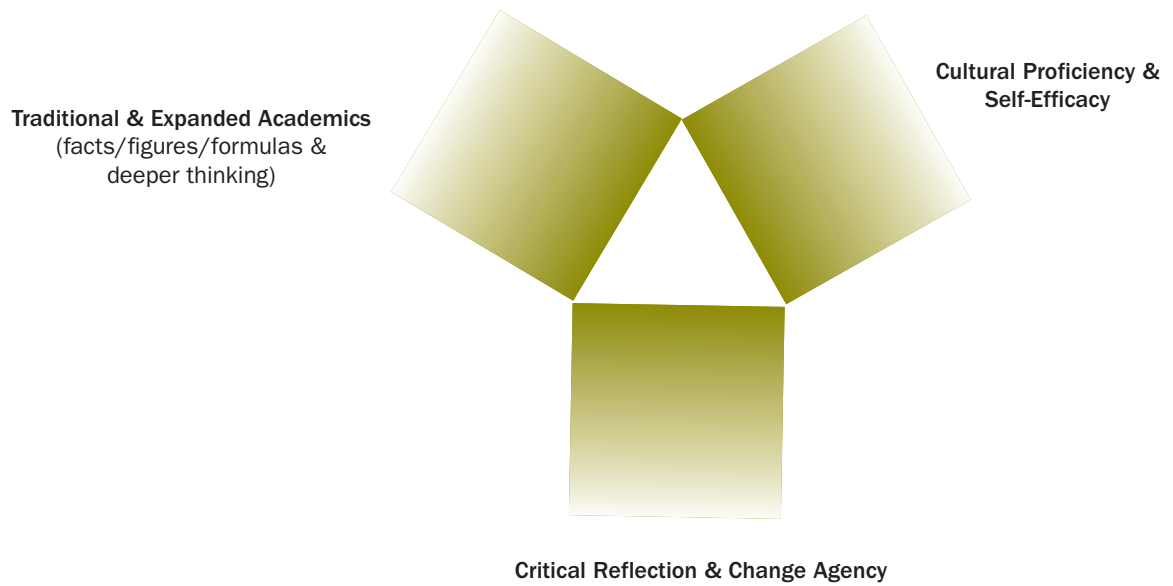
Below is a table to summarize this discussion:

**Figure 1. Skill & Competency Needs for Youth & Adults**

Broader Notions of Student Success:	Challenges in Promoting Broadened Notions of Student Success:
<p>1 Traditional Academic Skills</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Facts, Figures, &amp; Formulas</li> <li>■ Expanded Academics &amp; Deeper Thinking – critical inquiry, analysis, and interpretation; collaboration; knowledge of one’s own learning style; ability to embrace multiple perspectives and approaches to knowledge and learning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Belief that the three domains of skills are sequential (when they are not)</li> <li>■ Myth that low-income students and students of color who are struggling in school cannot be successful in domains two and three</li> <li>■ Educator Preparation and Continued Professional Learning – lack of historical focus, priority, or deep understanding of cultural competence and critical reflection; limited supports and resources for robust attention</li> </ul>
<p>2 Cultural Competency &amp; Self-Efficacy Skills</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Few broad-based forums to discuss the fundamental purposes of education</li> </ul>
<p>3 Critical Reflection &amp; Change Agency Skills</p>	

We believe it is critical to support development of each domain of skills for youth and adults if we are to have a greater chance of creating stronger, healthier societies, both economically and socially. We are positing that these skills are essential and not optional for our collective well-being because these competencies will determine how students participate in the world as citizens. Yet, we recognize that each educator or change agent, as well as each school, district, intermediary or other educational improvement entity will have different starting places in our degree of understanding, embracing, and readiness to take on each domain of skills. Therefore, we believe that each change agent or institution must locate ourselves along a continuum in order to gauge our starting places and understand the next steps to take in deepening our learning and our strategies toward these skills.

Figure 2. Interlocking Skills for Youth & Adults



We are now ready to move to the second focus area of the Framework: *approaches to school and educational systems improvement*.





# The Focus of Reform Work How Educational Improvement is Pursued: Structural & Cultural Dimensions of Systems Change

## Structural Dimension of Systems Change

Most of the efforts we hear about in the media, read in the research literature, see policy efforts focused on, and hear many practitioners challenged with are *structural or technical*.

Typical areas of a “structural approach” to educational systems improvement fall into what we have categorized as three areas:

- 1) *overarching*,
- 2) *structural approaches to teaching and assessment*, and
- 3) *opportunity-to-learn (OTL)* issues.

These important areas cover structural changes and approaches to improve the conditions students are learning in, and technical analysis of data and outcomes. The areas below are not exhaustive lists, but are intended to give the reader a sense of what types of educational foci fall into each category.

The “*overarching*” category includes the following: (Asera, 2008; California Department of Education, 2010; Cisco, Microsoft, & Intel, 2009; Zachry, 2008):

- defining commonly agreed-upon *standards*;
- vertical and horizontal alignment of *curriculum* (across grade levels and across subject areas), corresponding to the standards;
- working to ensure rigorous, relevant, engaging, differentiated *instruction* (often with limited or no focus on cultural responsiveness as part of the barometer to determine the meaning of “rigor,” “relevance,” “engagement,” and “differentiation”);
- improving *assessment* (inc. state and local ability to compile and distribute useful data disaggregated by race, class, language, and other key demographic categories; building educators’ skills to use data to improve their practice); and
- creating more effective approaches to institutional *planning, leadership, and management* (inc. short- and long-term planning for improvement related to the above areas plus budgeting, human resources, data and evaluation, support services, leadership development, facilities management, information technology, communication systems, etc.).

The “*structural approaches to teaching and assessment*” category drills down on the above overarching areas and begins to address how to engage students in the classroom, including: (Cisco, Microsoft, & Intel, 2009; Conley, 2002; Cotton, 1996; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Justice Matters, n.d.; Navarro, 2008; Raywid, 1999):

The **Structural** dimension of equity-driven systems change:

- focuses on an institution’s **formal systems, processes, and roles** found in established literature and documents (such as institutional planning, budgeting, leadership, facilities management, internal organizational processes, etc.);
- focuses on **quantitative** inputs and outcomes; and
- includes attention to **differentiated outcomes** uncovered by reviewing data disaggregated by race, income, and other key factors.

- creating small, caring, *personalized* environments to support student learning (including small schools, learning communities, and cohorts);
- instructing students in *group work* formats so that they can learn from one another, gain peer support, develop collaborative skills, etc.;
- implementing *project-based* approaches to curriculum; and
- developing *portfolio* and other forms of *robust* assessment.

The “*opportunity-to-learn (OTL)*” category includes attending to the following (Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Mitchell, 2004; Oakes, 2005; UC ACCORD, 2010):

- *student placement* in grade-level, advanced placement, special education, English-learner, and remedial courses (ensuring that there is no tracking into low-level, non-rigorous environments);
- *resource distribution* (e.g., locating, cultivating, and distributing quality teachers, facilities, materials, technology; and funding distributed with attention to students with greater needs);
- use of *time* (e.g., classroom minutes; collaboration, planning, and professional development; etc.);
- *attendance* and *discipline* policies, practices, and patterns by race and other key demographic categories;
- monitoring *graduation rates* by race, class, English Learner status, and other key demographic categories; and
- addressing the processes and patterns of *segregation, resegregation, and desegregation*.

All of these areas are critically important and difficult to address. There is also overlap and interrelationship between each of these categories. There is a great need for focus on each area given our history in the U.S. of not being systematic and intentional in addressing these areas. Yet, from our perspective, even focusing on these areas with attention to how specific subgroups of students (especially marginalized students) are receiving and experiencing each area (teaching, assessment, placement, graduation, segregation, etc.), is a necessary but insufficient approach to equity. Focusing on the structural dimensions of systems improvement is important, but if done *alone*, it will fail to address some of the most challenging nuances and barriers to change in each of the structural areas above.

Hence, there is a **second and equally important dimension of educational improvement that is often underemphasized and not addressed deeply and systematically**; namely, what we call the “Cultural Dimensions of Systems Change.”

### Cultural Dimension of Systems Change

We note (as with the three domains of skill sets above) that addressing structural and cultural dimensions of systems change are *not* sequential endeavors. We have found in our practice and work with educators and change agents, that *it is the very inattention*

to the cultural dimensions that impedes and limits the efficacy of success in any structural dimension (echoed in Payne, 2008). Because the cultural dimensions of change are not discussed robustly in the research literature and public discourse about education reform *in tandem* with structural efforts, this absence obscures the complexity of what successful and sustainable systems change requires.

Because the cultural dimensions of systems change are less familiar to many educators and change agents, we strongly emphasize the need for change agents and institutions to locate themselves along a *continuum* to determine their current status and readiness to pursue each strand of this work. Our forthcoming rubric<sup>13</sup> will aid the field in this endeavor. For now, we note that development along each of these dimensions is a lifetime process for us all.

The “Cultural Dimensions” of educational systems change attend systematically to 1) organizational culture as well as to 2) cultural responsiveness as they relate to institutional and system functioning. These areas include: internal reflection, collaboration, personal and group accountability, developing constructive relationships between people (staff, faculty, students, parents/family, boards, unions, and community), political dimensions, affective dimensions, cultural competence, and structural inequality. Cultural dimensions include the following (non-exhaustive list):

***Individual Awareness, Commitment, & Accountability***  
(Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 2009; Osta & Perrow, 2008):

- *beliefs, assumptions, and conscious and unconscious biases* of educators (teachers, support staff, counselors, principals, central office staff, boards) and community members about students of color, low-income students, English Learners, immigrant students, special education students, and what they are capable of, what they and their families care about, etc.;
- *high expectations and belief in all students’ capacity* to learn and grow in profound ways, with specific attention to expectations of and beliefs about marginalized students;
- prioritizing and locating supports for ongoing *personal reflection* on the

The **Cultural** dimension of change includes two aspects:

■ Dimensions related to **Organizational Culture**:

- focus on *relationships, communication habits, norms, degree of collaboration, etc.* among leadership, faculty, staff, students, and the surrounding community;
- emphasize the importance of *personal and group reflection, commitment, and accountability* to marginalized students and all students;
- focus on *qualitative* inputs and impacts; and
- strive to uncover *why* particular patterns are seen in the structural dimension.

■ Dimensions related to **Culturally Responsive Practice**:

- focus on leadership, faculty, and staff’s *attitudes, beliefs, and assumptions* about students from various racial, income, language, gender, ability, and other groups;
- actively solicit and use robust qualitative data about the *experiences and perspectives of marginalized students* as they maneuver through educational systems;
- emphasize the importance of faculty and staff *learning about and drawing on* the life experiences of students to inform curriculum, instruction, assessment, and the provision of support services; and
- infuse an understanding of *how conscious and unconscious biases and assumptions* about various racial, income, and other groups *impact student experience and success, faculty and staff relations, decision-making, provision of services, and institutional practice* at all levels of an organization’s functioning.

<sup>13</sup> The rubric will be shared with the field this fall/winter 2010.

impacts of individual practice on students (especially marginalized students), colleagues, and the institution. As some change agents have noted:

“[O]verlapping and systemic forms of oppression [of racism, classism, sexism, and language bias] narrow people’s view of what is possible, limit adults’ ability to collaborate effectively across their differences, and prevent them from taking responsibility for learning about and changing how they work with students. Such ‘equity traps’ undermine adults’ agency: their ability to take action to effect positive change in a school system on behalf of students.” (*Osta and Perrow, 2008, p.2*)

***Interpersonal Dynamics & Accountability*** (*California Department of Education, 2010; Osta & Perrow, 2008; Singleton & Linton, 2006*):

- creating *collaborative relationships* and effective communication structures (versus working in silos) for educators across grade-levels, schools, and central office departments, as well as with practitioners working in other youth development sectors (e.g., afterschool programs, social work, counseling, public health, public housing, probation, foster care, etc.);
- prioritizing and locating supports for structured and ongoing *collective reflection* on the impacts of institutional practice on students, especially marginalized students, including “courageous conversations about difficult topics”;

***Stakeholder / Constituent Engagement, Parent/Family Engagement, & Robust School / Community Partnerships*** (*Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Justice Matters, n.d.; Osta & Perrow, 2008; Simmons, 2007; Sohn & Wang, 2006; Sosa, 1996; Stanford University & Justice Matters, 2007*):

- establishing meaningful *criteria* for deciding on *who needs to be involved* in developing goals, plans, and strategies, and evaluating progress and impact at each stage of a school, district, or other educational institution’s improvement efforts;
- including both those who *implement* and those who are *impacted* by educational institutions’ policies, strategies, and programs;
- establishing robust and ongoing *dialogue and feedback mechanisms* for each stakeholder group;
- establishing structures and *building skills for healthy, candid dialogue and consensus-building* between constituents who have different priorities and ways of communicating, as well as attending to power dynamics in the conversations and partnership development;
- creating robust, authentic, and effective collaborative approaches to engaging with *parents and families, school boards, and unions* in particular;
- “strengthening students along with their families and communities...as an essential component of school reform,” including offering *coordinated services* with city agencies, cultural institutions, and grassroots organizations (*Simmons, 2007, p.5, 6, 10*);

**Student Voice & Leadership Development** (Bhattacharya, Quiroga, & Olsen, 2007; Justice Matters, n.d.; Levin, 2000; Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Tolman, Ford, & Irby, 2003; What Kids Can Do, 2003; Zion, in review):

- working with a wide range of students – (by race, income status, first language status, special education status, gender, age, and relative success in school on standardized tests) – to develop strategies to ensure ongoing meaningful student voice in school and district issue identification, planning, implementation, and evaluation;

**Cultural Approaches to Teaching and Assessment**<sup>14</sup> (Asera, 2008; Bhattacharya, Quiroga, & Olsen, 2007; deWit & Colondres, 2009; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2009; Ephraim, Scruggs, LeMoine, & Maddahian, 2006; Justice Matters, n.d.; National Association for Multicultural Education, 2003; Stanford University & Justice Matters, 2007):

- devoting attention to *deep learning about marginalized students'* experiences, perspectives, hopes, fears, families, and communities (with an asset- vs. deficit-based approach);
- engaging a wide range of *students*<sup>15</sup> as co-creators of rigorous curricula and effective instructional strategies;
- using *culturally responsive and multilingual curricula, instruction, and assessment practices* across subject areas and grade levels (e.g., mathematics, reading, science, history, etc.);

**Socio-Emotional Support** (California Tomorrow, 2003; Ephraim, Scruggs, LeMoine, & Maddahian, 2006; Stanford University & Justice Matters, 2007):

- creating adequate *structures* (e.g., advising, mentoring, counseling, peer support, etc.) for students, with particular attention to those who have struggled and are facing considerable challenges at home, in their communities, and/or in school;
- ensuring adequate and *culturally competent* staff for these duties, and ensuring that their support for students includes encouragement and guidance as well as academic support<sup>16</sup>;

**Environment** (Joselowsky, Thomases, & Yohalem, 2004; Stanford University & Justice Matters, 2007):

- school and classroom *climate* (safety and culturally representative aesthetics

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14 It should be noted that there are both structural and cultural approaches to teaching and assessment, per the above discussion.

15 Per above list under “Student Voice.”

16 Because of the difficult funding environment that many school systems find themselves in and not having enough support staff to serve these functions, as well as the need to ensure that practitioners are trained in culturally responsive approaches to engaging students, a better solution may be to incorporate this expectation into educator preparation and professional development for teachers themselves, as many small and alternative schools do (Mottaz, 2002; Petty, 2008; Raywid, 1994). Certainly there are issues with how swamped teachers already are, so the challenges remain with: structure of the school day and teachers being overloaded, overall use of time (short blocks with students, hence lack of time to create supportive relationships), the training pipeline (lack of sufficient individuals seeking to enter the profession and staying), competitive compensation and adequate supports for growth and success (esp. in more challenging urban environments), etc.

of the hallways, classrooms, and surrounding community environment and their impact on the feelings of welcoming and enjoyment of both students and educators); and

- ensuring sufficient focus on *political and power issues* within the communities that schools and districts are serving, the history of potential disenfranchisement of specific communities of color and/or low-income communities, and providing support for deep, transformative dialogue among all stakeholders.

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The absence of a deep focus on the Cultural Dimensions of Systems Change – inc. organizational culture, authentic constituent engagement, and culturally responsive practice, among other critical areas – obscures the complexity of what is needed to promote deep, lasting change at school, district, college, and policy levels...

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As examples of work happening in the cultural dimensions of systems change, in the community college realm, equity advocates include broader program review criteria to include: multiculturalism principles in curricula; attention to climate and messaging to ensure openness and inclusivity; human resources focus on attracting and retaining a diverse workforce; and grants, programs, and other initiatives that further equity (*Chiabotti, Clay, Ortiz, Raola, Smith, Thomas, & Williams Melendrez, 2010, p.19*). They recommend similar criteria for evaluating faculty competency in supporting equity. They also include recommendations to gather student perspectives as part of assessing equity efforts on campuses (*Chiabotti et al, 2010, p.27*).

Other community college equity-based change agents advocate for inclusion of “equity dialogues,” moving from “dialogue to data,” and providing training on “equity-mindedness” (among other areas) to support institution-wide change, and cultural competence to improve classroom practice (*Cordova, Fulks, Mecom, Parsons, Pittaway, Smith, Elliott, Foster, Ikeda, Ortiz, & Ramirez, 2010, p.2-3, 40*).

### Summary of the Cultural Dimensions of Systems Change

Educators struggle with their own personal efficacy and lack of knowledge about their students. They also struggle with having adequate support for positive reflection and accountability for their practice. Silos exist all too frequently within and across schools and districts, such that practitioners sometimes spend years and decades without meaningful collaborative opportunities. This sense of isolation in a demanding accountability environment is fuel for educators to further retreat into siloed behavior. Furthermore, the area about reflecting on one’s own conscious and unconscious biases and assumptions about marginalized students is a controversial and challenging one. Yet, if we do not each undertake the work of examining our beliefs and views, our beliefs nevertheless play themselves out in our interactions with students and colleagues.

Similarly, parents and families have a tremendous stake in the success of school systems, and yet they often have inadequate information and few forums for engaging deeply in understanding and contributing to the learning environments where their children spend their days. Educators, furthermore, have frequent negative beliefs about the intentions and capacity of families from low-income communities, immigrant communities, and communities of color. This is a great hurdle to promoting mutually supportive school/family relationships that can better scaffold students and their ability to succeed.

Students themselves – particularly those who have struggled in school and who are in the low end of the achievement gap – are rarely, deeply engaged in their own learning, whether in the classroom or at school or district levels. And yet educators are constantly seeking strategies to re-engage students. When given the opportunity and supports to meaningfully contribute to school and district planning, and course curricula, students thrive.

Perhaps one of the greatest obstacles to struggling students succeeding is the need for socio-emotional supports. All people and all students, but most especially students who have seen failure over and over again, and those who live in unsupportive and/or violent home and community environments, benefit from support, guidance, thought partnership, and mentorship from peers and elders. When facing ongoing challenges, this is even more so the case.

*How* students are being engaged (both in the classroom and with counselors) matters. The degree to which teachers and counselors seek to understand and draw on students' life experiences, cultures, backgrounds, interests, and passions, and from this knowledge and respect, help them to reflect on themselves as learners, will have a tremendous impact on students' engagement in their education and cognitive progress. Yet, as we have already noted, such culturally responsive practice is rare in educator preparation, in deep and ongoing professional development, and in within-school practice.

Finally, the actual environment in which students attend school – i.e., the buildings and surrounding context – all impact the sense of safety and enjoyment that students experience. Beauty in schools' surroundings; quality and upkeep of materials, technology, equipment, and the school grounds; and students seeing themselves reflected in the hallways and classrooms all create a sense of belonging and welcome (or not, in the case of the absence of such factors).

In addition to engaging parents and families as consumers of and partners in education efforts, the relationship between the school or district and the community, and various ethnic and racial groups in the community, shapes how school boards can function and what local policies can be passed (or not) with what degree of collaboration and ownership vs. contention.

As noted above, each of these areas is often underemphasized or absent from mainstream discourse around educational improvement in planning documents, policies, research studies, and funding priorities. Yet, it is these same areas that educators (at school, district, and college levels), families, and students often mention and focus on – along with structural areas – as cornerstone impediments to progress in any educational improvement effort.

This gap in priorities and perception among change agents about necessary improvement strategies is significant. We have found that as each of these areas is examined in detail in their on-the-ground manifestations, their potency becomes clear in aiding or hindering reform work. *It is our contention that all educational improvement efforts will be profoundly limited in their effectiveness and sustainability if*

*the cultural dimensions of systems change are not given rigorous attention simultaneous to structural dimensions.*

The *absence of a deep cultural focus* in mainstream discourse about education reform *obscures the complexity of what is really needed* to promote deep, lasting change at school, district, college, and policy levels, and this severely impairs students and educators particularly in the most difficult circumstances and community contexts. For these reasons, we advocate in this Framework for a blended approach.





## A Blended Approach: Structural / Cultural Systems Change

Certainly structural and cultural dimensions are not mutually exclusive. Yet they have different foci and we find in practice in the field, policy approaches, and research literature, a noticeable bifurcation of emphases. Thus, the second core contention of this Framework is that educational improvement efforts will be both *more effective* and *more sustainable* if they are pursued with a blended, structural/cultural approach, since “reform is political and cultural as much as it is technical” (*Simmons, 2007, p.1*).

As examples of how a blended approach might look, we offer the following (*from our own work as well as inspired by the work of Asera, 2008; Bensimon, 2004; Burns, Keyes, & Kusimo, 2005; Dowd, Alpuche, & Bordoloi Pazich, 2009; Lachat, 1999; Mills, 2008; Osta & Perrow, 2008; and Stanford University & Justice Matters, 2007*):<sup>17</sup>

- *curricular* alignment should be pursued with developing robust, culturally representative content;
- *instruction* should be differentiated with deep learning about and attention to the diverse cultures and backgrounds of students, the strengths and needs they bring, their aspirations and fears, etc.;
- *student assessment* systems should be developed that ensure students’ prior knowledge is drawn on and that evaluators are sufficiently familiar with how students from different backgrounds may demonstrate their competency;
- *institutional planning* should be pursued with attention to the systems dimensions of organizational functioning, the cultural and political context within which the school system operates, the history of race, class, and other group relations and tensions – and provide authentic opportunities for collaboration among stakeholders at every level of the school, district, or college (classified and non-classified staff) including parents and families, to support and co-create the school/district/college’s future improvement goals, strategies, and plans for assessing progress;
- *evaluating school/district/college progress* should include qualitative and quantitative data on student placement, students’ experience in moving through the system, and outcome patterns by race, class, language, and special education status, as well as transparent reporting on and sufficient opportunities for meaningful dialogue about this data by all stakeholders; and
- all *practitioners* within the system should be provided high-quality resources to *reflect* deeply and on an ongoing basis on their own cultural background(s), assumptions, beliefs, etc. and how these are shaping how they execute their duties, their interactions with colleagues, students, parents/families, and the surrounding community.

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<sup>17</sup> Our forthcoming rubric will offer a comprehensive portrait of these dimensions for use by change agents at various levels.

The examples here could be virtually limitless in terms of how a blended structural/cultural approach should look in educational system improvement efforts. These are tall orders. We hope to have conveyed a sense for what a blended approach might mean for improvement efforts and strategies.

Figure 3: Continuum of Systems Change Approaches



The *challenges to adopting a blended approach* are many. The following list is intended to give a sense of some of these issues and is not exhaustive:

- *Lack of Understanding of “Robust” Cultural Approaches:* There are significant challenges in raising awareness around what precisely cultural approaches to educational improvement are in their fully developed, robust manifestations. The qualifiers “fully developed” and “robust” are important because less developed cultural approaches will yield less impactful and lasting results for students, classrooms, schools, and school systems, as one could imagine.
- *Robust Cultural Approaches Not Part of Educator Preparation & Professional Development:* As we have already noted, culturally responsive practice and the full range of cultural approaches to systems change noted above are typically not part of educator preparation programs or professional development offerings, or they are offered in severely limited fashions.
- *Lack of Value for Cultural or Structural Approaches:* Educators and change agents from structural and cultural orientations often do not value one another’s approaches and/or underestimate the challenges in implementing powerful strategies under each.
- *Skepticism About Whether Structural & Cultural Approaches Can Be Done Well Simultaneously:* Further than this, the lack of familiarity across the field with high-quality cultural approaches to educational improvement have left many educators and change agents skeptical with regard to whether a blended approach is even possible simultaneously because they have never seen it done well.
- *Fear of and/or Inexperience with Addressing Internal Bias:* Additionally, educators and change agents who lack familiarity with robust cultural approaches may not have deep experience with seeing and recognizing how their own background, cultural perspectives, and biases play out in their work. This is very delicate and critical work for all of us, and requires the

support of skilled coaches and facilitators to aid us in our continued development of more just classrooms, offices, teams, planning, and other work spaces. Many educators express fear and concern over how to raise and help deepen understanding of these issues and dynamics skillfully, in a way that supports further growth and does not shut people down or leave discussions in a non-critical and politically correct atmosphere that does not support transformative growth.

- *Reducing All Cultural Work to Level One/Generic:* There is also an important caution in adopting a blended approach, to continue to recognize and increasingly incorporate into one’s practice the levels of a cultural approach noted above – from generic (diversity/representation and food/ fairs/ heroes/ holidays), to culturally responsive practice, to raising awareness of and addressing structural inequality – and to not mistake one level for another.
- *Structuralists and Culturalists (Often) Not the Same People:* Often practitioners and change agents who are adept at cultural approaches to educational improvement are not the same as those who are adept at structural approaches to improvement. For instance, common approaches to curricular enhancements typically do not include robust cultural representation of different worldviews (beyond food, fairs, heroes, and holidays). This creates a challenge with locating adequate consulting support, because with the challenges noted above about structuralists and culturalists often not understanding and/or not adequately valuing one another’s work, schools and districts are often put in the position of having to choose one or the other approach to focus on at a time, or are unsure and lack the support for creating a strong blend between the two.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Relationship Between the Three Competency Areas for Youth & Adults and Structural & Cultural Approaches to Educational Systems Improvement**

The relationship between pursuing one or more skill areas for students and how to pursue systems change is a critical question. Our contention is that no educational improvement effort will be successful for all students or sustainable unless a robust blended, structural/cultural approach to systems improvement is taken. This is the case regardless of whether one is focused on traditional academics alone, or adds cultural competency and self-efficacy, and/or critical reflection and change agency as goal areas for students.

Our further contention is that it is not possible to pursue successful and sustainable educational improvement to the neglect of robust cultural competency development for educators and students. The students who are in the low end of the achievement gap – i.e., low-income students and students of color – are experiencing significant forms of explicit discouragement, discrimination, harassment, and intercultural strife in their

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<sup>18</sup> As one example, I was speaking with a director of a community college and he shared that his institution had received some very helpful ongoing training around cultural proficiency, uncovering bias, and more deeply understanding their students. He said that the training was very important, but they were still unsure “how to operationalize it and how it should impact our work around planning, instruction, and building stronger assessment systems.” (personal communication, 2009)

classrooms, schools, and communities, as we have noted. This is true from teachers, from peers, and from community members. To truly address the barriers to success for these students, issues of cultural competence will need to be incorporated into how educators understand and engage with students, and how educators from different backgrounds learn about, develop respect for, and engage with one another.

Furthermore, it is equally critical to build the cultural proficiency skills of students who are not the recipients of harassment and discrimination, and who may receive positive feedback and encouragement in their studies (i.e., White, some Asian, more affluent students, heterosexual students, and those who are successful on standardized tests). It is important for these students to develop awareness, understanding of, and respect for their fellow students who are from different backgrounds, and who have had different life and educational experiences. Having curriculum and instructional practices that are culturally responsive will ensure that students and educators from all cultural backgrounds are deeply represented and that there is a learning intention and trajectory for youth and adults, and the desire to foster the development of compassion, a core competency for the creation of healthy societies.

As we have discussed above, these competencies are central for the development of just and inclusive global societies where dialogue and collaboration are seen as key to economic and social health and prosperity.

As discussed in the cultural approaches to change section, culturally responsive practice has a manifestation in every aspect of a school and district's functioning – from curriculum, to instruction, to engaging with students, to assessment, to planning, to parent/ family/ community partnerships. Therefore, quality work in these areas is *determined by* the attentiveness to and sophistication of cultural approaches in each structural area.

In summary, we believe it is necessary to pursue blended structural/cultural approaches to systems change toward developing traditional academic skills, as well as cultural competency and self-efficacy skills, *at minimum*. The additional focus of critical reflection and change agency skills is also important, and should be added as soon as a school or district has adequate, skilled teaching staff, leadership, consulting support, and stakeholder commitment to integrate it with quality for all students.

## The Process of Change: The Need for Robust Approaches to Change Management

Beyond the above *content* areas of competency needs for youth and adults, and the structural and cultural dimensions of educational systems, there is also the need to focus on the process of change itself. Our work in the field and our research in the K-12, afterschool, and community college arenas have shown us that educators struggle with *how* to implement change as much as they struggle with determining *what* changes to implement. Traditional *organizational development* or *change management* focuses on areas such as assembling a planning team, initial assessment, developing a plan and strategies, and evaluating impact in continuous improvement cycles of reflection (Cicchinelli, Dean, Galvin, Goodwin, & Parsley, 2006; Duffy, 2004; Fullan, 2003; Kahn, Hurth, Diefendorf, Kasprzak, Lucas, & Ringwalt, 2009; Senge, 1990; Wallace, 2008; Zachry, 2008). These approaches are formidable and necessary.

Educators and change agents have access to a number of professional development and consulting resources related to curriculum development, improving instructional practices or assessment systems, and other areas. Schools, districts, colleges, and systems leaders also at times have access to organizational development and change management support, which help to place discrete professional development efforts (around curriculum, assessment, etc.) into a larger, more intentional set of strategies. Yet, our work with institutions and individuals has shown us that there is often limited understanding of approaches to comprehensive systems change, and that even traditional organizational development and change management skills are infrequently part of the training and professional development that educational systems leaders receive. So, building an understanding of how to successfully move a change process through an institution, is a significant growth area for many practitioners and systems leaders.

As one example of such an approach, our *Equity-Driven Systems Change (ESC) Model* describes a process for supporting practitioners and other change agents in integrating structural and cultural approaches to change. The Model takes educators and change agents through a process of team-building with a focus on representation from among the levels and departments of a school, college, or district, including meaningful participation of students. The initial assessment phase in this model helps the team examine current realities in the system *from the perspectives of the most marginalized and struggling students* in addition to examining typically gathered quantitative data on student learning and system functioning.

Teams then analyze the *structural and cultural components of their current efforts* and where, with this blended lens, their efforts may be lacking. Teams then move into *visioning together*, identifying potential *structural and cultural barriers* to the changes they want to implement, and *culturally responsive strategy development* with the preceding aspects in mind. From here they can develop *student-centered measures of success*, interim and long-term evaluation plans, and continuous reflection and improvement cycles using structural and cultural measures. At each stage of the process we work with the team to determine the most appropriate two-way communication strategies needed with the various campus and community constituent groups, to ensure

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Building an understanding of how to successfully move a change process through an institution is a significant growth area for many practitioners and systems leaders...

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that the team is drawing on, learning from, and in *meaningful dialogue* with a *broad spectrum of constituencies* to inform and make their work credible as well as strengthen the potential for success because of large-scale ownership.

Each of the italicized areas above is a key component to a blended, structural/cultural approach. From our own experience and from the accounts of numerous practitioners and change agents in the field, the areas in italics are often the very ones that stall even the most promising educational reform and improvement efforts. In addition to the above, other authors have added to this list ensuring adequate time is devoted to change efforts, appropriate pacing and scaling of reform efforts, and addressing potential turnover of change leaders (*Payne, 2008, p. 172*).

A well-facilitated, blended structural/cultural change process should address all of these areas plus issues of practitioner and change agent burnout, disillusionment with past failed efforts, lack of belief in the potential of low-income students and students of color, lack of ownership, backlash, and negative reaction from constituent groups, among other typical issues – all areas that are part and parcel to any educational or systems transformation work.

The challenge for educators and other change agents is that there are few change management consulting resources to draw on that include attention to both the structural and cultural dimensions of systems change (*with some exceptions, e.g., Bensimon, 2004; Dowd, et al, 2009; Osta & Perrow, 2008*). Beyond traditional organizational development, which typically focuses on structural dimensions, we have found that specific attention to the climate and political dynamics of change within a system; the ways that historical race and class tensions, and competing perceptions and priorities have played out to influence change efforts; and the knowledge- and skill-building that practitioners and systems leaders need around power and privilege are largely missing, or available only in fragmented supports in change management efforts.

This is because, as we noted in the section on challenges to a blended structure/culture approach, consulting supports that schools, colleges, programs, and districts have access to are usually *either* skilled in structural areas *or* cultural areas, but not both. Because of limited time, experience, or other factors, it is very difficult for the leaders of institutional and systems change efforts to figure out how to best blend the disparate consulting resources and approaches they often have available to them. The fortunate school/district/program/college will have staff or faculty already in their midst with this combination of skills – *a structural lens, a cultural lens, and an understanding of change management* – so that they can help design and implement a more cohesive, smooth change process. Such a combination of skills may be rare, and further raises the ante for educator preparation programs, professional development, and the consulting / technical assistance field.

As others have noted (*e.g., Payne 2008*), sustained, deep, and quality implementation of change efforts – attending to both the *content* (programs, goals, etc.) and *process* (how) of change – is critical to whether such change will be impactful and lasting.

## The *Ecology* of Learning Supports & Opportunities

The above discussion regarding student skills, structural and cultural approaches to systems change, and change management sits within a larger “ecology of learning supports and opportunities” for students. In keeping with the long-time efforts of the community schools movement, more recent efforts are also focusing attention on the interlocking resources needed to support the comprehensive growth and development of students from childhood through adulthood.<sup>19</sup>

From the in-school/in-system approaches and structures that are a large focus of this document, to robust partnerships with parents and families; to pre-school and early childhood supports and organizations; to youth development organizations; to afterschool, out-of-school-time, and summer learning opportunities; to faith-based institutions; and to youth-focused government institutions – all of these entities must work in more coordinated and integrated fashions to meet the formidable developmental needs of youth and adult learners outlined in this Framework.

Achieving such integration and coordination will require discussing, addressing and aligning around structural issues, cultural issues, and deep issues with competing priorities and goals for learners.

It is important here to note that increasing school systems’ coordination with the entities noted above *will not* eliminate the need for schools to deepen and expand their own goals for students and approaches to change. That is, even if strong partnerships exist between schools, community organizations, parents, etc., schools *will still* need to prepare students with more robust skill sets (such as the three areas described in this document), and deeply address their issues around cultural competence and culturally responsive practice. This work will still be necessary if we are to prepare students who can create a robust, healthy society with rich civic and democratic participation by all.

Partnership will not alleviate this responsibility for schools. Partnership that includes skillful and ongoing deliberation about structure, culture, and overarching goals for students will help all parties support and empower students more effectively.



<sup>19</sup> See for example: The Broader, Bolder Approach, <http://www.boldapproach.org/>; Coalition for Community Schools, [www.communityschools.org/](http://www.communityschools.org/); and Promise Neighborhoods, [www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/promiseneighborhoods/index.html).

## Recommendations

The previous sections outlined a broadened notion of skills needs for youth and adults, grounded in the vision for society, and the undergirding sensibilities and purposes of education that would make such skills necessary, discussed at the beginning of this document. We also discussed two approaches to educational systems improvement and advocated for a blend of both structural and cultural dimensions to yield the most impactful and sustained efforts. We finally discussed the need for more sophisticated approaches to change management to better support educators and other change agents in the field in their work to transform school systems.

We now turn to the recommendations that are implied in the foregoing. We can now see that the choices an educator or a school system makes about the overall goals for student success (i.e., skills domain 1, 2, and/or 3) will dictate what is seen as important and necessary in terms of:

- how *policies* are developed to dictate educational priorities;
- *curricular* choices;
- *instructional* practices needed;
- what kind of *professional development* should be mandatory vs. optional;
- the meaning of “success,” how students are *assessed*, and what types of instruments and strategies must be used to determine competency;
- what *research* should focus on and indicates is (or is not) “best” or “robust” practice;
- how *educators are prepared* in universities and other preparation programs; and
- what *funders* support as important leverage areas and interlocking strategies.

Our collective future is at stake and rides on how we conceive of the “end game” in public education. If we take the tenets of this Framework as necessary for the creation of *informed, engaged, compassionate, and reflective* citizens who have the capacity to create more just and successful institutions that serve all people well, then we have the following recommendations for how our current educational improvement efforts should be focused.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that the institutional, state, and federal political contexts surrounding the recommendation areas and the strategies that need to be developed to address these formidable challenges are not discussed as part of this document. Readers are encouraged to locate and partner with others in the educational justice movement to determine the best ways to advocate for the changes they support. Potential resources include the Alliance for Educational Justice, the Schott Foundation, University of California, Los Angeles’ Institute for Democracy, Education & Access, Teachers for Social Justice, the Equity Alliance (at Arizona State University), and many, many others.



## Policy

- Local, state, and federal policies should articulate a broader cross-section of skill sets that are desirable and necessary for youth and adult students to build in K-12, afterschool, community college, and four-year institutions (in keeping with the three domains above).
- Policies should additionally prioritize and require *both* structural and cultural strategies as necessary components of improvement plans for schools, districts, colleges, and afterschool programs (including educator preparation and professional development plans).

## Educator Preparation

- Programs for both teachers and administrators should include comprehensive integration of the cultural dimensions of systems change as part of core curriculum.
- Curriculum for teacher leaders and administrators should include approaches like the *Equity-Driven Systems Change (ESC) Model* to build these change agents' competency in how to design and facilitate institutional improvement processes.
- Programs will need to recruit faculty with blended, structure/culture skill sets *and/or* ensure that those hired are truly receptive to learning about and collaborating with their colleagues who have foci in their work that they are less familiar with (i.e., valuing and supporting structural *and* cultural approaches).
- Credential, masters, and doctoral degrees will need to be reevaluated for the depth of inclusion of the three domains of skills, for structural and cultural approaches to systems improvement, for equity-driven change management, and for how mastery of each of these is measured.
- Programs should ensure a deep focus on supporting emerging teachers and administrators to explore their own cultural backgrounds and referents, and conscious and unconscious biases, and how these influence their work with students and colleagues.
- Programs should also develop sophisticated strategies for locating and enrolling potential students with skills in the areas noted above.

## Professional Development, Leadership Development, & Training for Teachers & Administrators

- Professional learning programs should be reevaluated and upgraded to include sufficient focus on the structural and cultural dimensions of systems change in relation to each other. While not every training needs to focus comprehensively on structural and cultural dimensions

combined – (which is likely not possible given the varying experience and expertise of different trainers) – it will be important for all trainers to develop increasing awareness of the need for and best practices in blended approaches, so that they can refer the participants in their workshops to appropriate resources that complement what they offer in their trainings.

- Robust equity-driven change management should be included as an available strand of learning in comprehensive professional learning programs.
- Trainers and programs will need to ensure that offerings in cultural proficiency, the cultural dimension of systems change, the blended structure/culture area, and in equity-driven change management, are significant and are more than cursory and brief courses. This is in order to avoid practices of minimizing these offerings and/or keeping cultural learning at the generic level (discussed above).
- Professional development resources for teachers should include significant support in how to help diverse students build rich cultural proficiency skills, self-efficacy, critical reflection, and change agency skills.

### Practice

- Educators' approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment will need to be reevaluated in light of their individual and institutional goals for student success, as well as the surrounding school, district, college, or other educational context.
- As noted under the Educator Preparation recommendations, educators will need to commit to and actively seek ongoing skilled support for exploring their own cultural backgrounds and referents, conscious and unconscious biases, and how these are influencing their work with students and colleagues.
- School, college, district, program, and systems leaders will need to reflect deeply on their own advocacy and determine in their hearts and with their colleagues, what goals they seek for society and for the education field, and hence, which of the three domains of skills they see as critical for student success.
- From here, these practitioners will need to reflect on where and how in their own work and advocacy they are and can focus more broadly and boldly, what supports they may need to do so, and how they will locate such support.
- Practitioners will also need to assess what is possible in their own contexts, what barriers they may face in trying to advocate for or implement a broader set of strategies, and determine necessary allegiances to support this work.

- In undertaking any expanded approach (in terms of skills, approaches to systems change, and/or change management), practitioners will need to self-assess about where their own skills are strong and their areas for growth, and develop a plan for their own desired and necessary development. This should include meaningfully drawing on the perspectives of students in evaluating educator effectiveness.
- Lastly, schools and districts will need to develop sophisticated recruitment strategies for locating and retaining staff with rigorous skills in these areas.

### Textbook & Curricula Publishers and Developers

- Publishers will need to seek out authors who can include much more content that rigorously integrates traditional academic content with, at minimum, robust cultural competency foci beyond food/ fairs/ heroes/ holidays and diversity/ representation alone.
- In order to accomplish this (and address the third skill area of developing critical reflection and change agency skills), publishers will need to locate and support authors with this expertise.
- Textbooks and other learning resources should robustly represent global communities and worldviews utilizing written and electronic formats, technology, and interactive media.
- In the cases where schools, districts, colleges, and other educational environments are already focusing on broader notions of student success, curriculum development is being supplemented by skilled educators and consultants. Policies and funders can support this work and these experts to develop their content, distribute it, and train others in it more broadly.
- District curriculum adoption policies and committees will also need to address the degree to which they are deeply incorporating a focus on the three domains of skills in their decision-making.

### Assessment System Development

- Following policy priorities and how educational systems decide on their priorities for students (within their broader policy contexts), assessment systems should be focused on determining to what degree students are mastering the three domains of skills – traditional academics (with its two sub-domains of facts/figures/formulas *and* deeper skills of critical inquiry, analysis, collaboration, etc.), cultural competency and self-efficacy, and critical reflection and change agency skills.

- As has been noted, efforts are underway to develop systems that assess the “expanded” academic competencies, but we have made the case that such skills are necessary but not sufficient to promote reflective, engaged, compassionate, global citizens.

### Technical Assistance and Consulting for Planning & Change

- Those in the change management field will need to consider the degree to which they agree with the analysis discussed in this Framework and how these contentions impact their own delivery of services to educational institutions.
- In doing such self-assessment, consultants can identify opportunities for collaboration with others with complementary skill sets and expertise areas.
- Those who are independent consultants can undertake such self-assessment alone or with colleagues, whereas those who are part of consulting firms should undertake this self-assessment through developing an internal, organizational analysis process using the structural and cultural dimensions of change, and the approach to equity-driven change management described above.
- Consulting firms can then decide where and how they may want to expand or alter their foci and offerings, where they may want to collaborate, and where they may want to remain the same with a niche *while* also identifying other consultants or firms that they can refer their clients to who can complement their offerings.
- As was noted under the Educator Preparation and Practice recommendations, consultants will also need to commit to and actively seek skilled support for exploring their own cultural backgrounds and referents, conscious and unconscious biases, and how these are influencing their work with practitioners and educational systems.
- In this way, we can create a more comprehensive, integrated, and collaborative technical assistance field for educational institutions to access. This is critically important since the end goal is to have the highest functioning educational systems possible, and the degree to which the technical assistance field collaborates to support this, in turn supports schools, afterschool programs, districts, and colleges to succeed. (Such an approach is counter to much of the current competitive, niche marketing in the field.)

## Organizing

- Youth and adult organizing can use this Framework to analyze how comprehensive their understanding of the components of educational systems is, help fill out areas that may need deepening, and identify high-leverage areas where they may want to refocus and/or expand their advocacy efforts.
- This Framework can also help organizers to identify potential collaborative areas with other change agents who have experience with aspects of educational systems that may be less familiar to them.
- Having a more detailed sense of the components of educational systems and functioning (and thus, the barriers to improvement) can help strengthen and make more precise advocacy efforts and demands on school systems.
- Such a robust lens can also help with dialogue and negotiation processes with school system leaders.
- Other change agents learning about and implementing the self-reflection, power analysis, and structural inequality portions of this Framework will also help negotiations and dialogue with organizers since these lenses and understandings are crucial to organizing advocacy efforts.

## Research

- The research community can focus on locating and researching schools, districts, colleges and even broader educational systems that are attempting a blended, structure/culture approach to improvement – in what contexts, with what strategies, with what challenges and lessons, and with what impacts and successes.
- They can also locate and examine school systems that are focusing on two or more domains of skills for youth and adult development, in what contexts, using what strategies, to what effect/impact, and with what challenges and lessons.
- In this way, the research community can give legitimacy to and help put on the radar of legislators and policymakers the concepts and approaches in this Framework.
- Researchers and others documenting educational improvement efforts can also help deepen the field's awareness of the complexity of change work, so that we minimize the possibility of conveying watered-down (simplified), cookie-cutter (one-size-fits-all regardless of context), or piecemeal (picking and choosing, and leaving out core elements) efforts as being adequate. Minimizing these tendencies is critical in promoting the most positive, impactful and sustainable work.

- Researchers can also help determine if there are “power” elements of the structural/cultural approach to change. That is, they can help determine whether there are core elements without which transformative and sustainable efforts that truly benefit the most marginalized students are highly unlikely. This would be a critical contribution to the field, and should be done with on-the-ground practitioners, students, and families in key meaningful roles at every stage of the research project.
- As with all other change agents, researchers will also need to commit to and actively seek skilled support for exploring their own cultural backgrounds and referents, conscious and unconscious biases, and how these are influencing approaches to designing research agendas and projects, and engaging with educational systems, practitioners, students, and families.
- This Framework can help mitigate the history of research and researchers being too distant from and thus not deeply understanding or being irrelevant to practitioners’ on-the-ground realities, by providing an opportunity to gain a more textured understanding of what educators, students, and parents/families/communities are actually facing in trying to improve school systems.
- Researchers can also use the Framework to determine where they may need to locate appropriate partners to help fill out their understanding of particular aspects of school systems, and to co-design and implement research strategies.
- Further than this, as with other change agents who have a niche area of expertise, researchers can also more clearly identify where their expertise lies and where their findings and efforts complement those of others. In this way, the field can gain more robust understandings of the various strategies and approaches to systems change and why they may or may not be effective, with which group(s) of students, in which context(s).

### Education Funders

- The education funding world can use the Framework to fill out their understanding of the comprehensive components of systems change.
- In this way, individual funders and others in the funding world can have deeper dialogues within their foundations or government agencies about what their overall goals for educational improvement are and should be, and in this way, more strategically determine their priorities and direct their funding resources.
- Funders can also engage in internal educational activities to fill out their thinking on specific aspects of the Framework that are part of their learning agenda, by seeking out experts in those respective areas.

- One caution here would be to ensure that any experts selected to help funders deepen their understanding of cultural approaches can also aid the funder in achieving an integrated, blended structure/culture view. That is, as we have noted, some consultants who are experts in cultural proficiency or culturally responsive practice may not be knowledgeable about cultural approaches to change management. These are significantly different (but related) skill sets.
- A second caution here would be for funders to ensure that those selected to deepen cultural understanding have proven expertise that extends beyond the generic/level one area of “food/fairs/heroes/holidays and diversity/representation.” As noted above, while these are important areas, they do not include the full thrust of a cultural approach, culturally responsive practice, or cultural competence.
- Lastly, in their own advocacy efforts, funders can direct their resources toward policy efforts, research agendas, technical assistance approaches, and school and systems improvement work, by supporting work that focuses on the three domains of youth and adult skills, a blended structure/culture approach, and sophisticated change management.

## Media

- Media that covers education issues can strive to represent a more comprehensive and skillfully conveyed, complex portrait of what educational improvement actually entails.
- Media can also seek out the perspectives of educators, students, and other change agents, and how their respective efforts interrelate, or could interrelate.
- Media can also do a much better job of focusing on the exemplary efforts of schools, districts, and other educational institutions who are striving to focus on broader notions of success (incorporating a focus on deeper academic learning, cultural competence, self-efficacy, critical reflection, and/or change agency skills, in tandem with traditional academics).
- These media outlets can show how these schools and systems developed such broader agendas, with what change management processes and constituent involvement, accessibly explained while retaining the complexity of change processes. They can share information about context, what challenges were faced, what support was needed, what lessons were learned, successes, and impacts.
- In this way, media can support the general public in deepening our understanding of what educational improvement entails, what promising work is underway, and how difficult it is, and thereby help us all to make more informed choices in our own advocacy and support for policies and schools, as well as in how we hold schools, afterschool programs, districts, and colleges accountable.

### Information Resources/Clearinghouse

- We need a resource clearinghouse that covers all the domains of the Framework and has the ability to distinguish the levels of practice in the cultural domain (generic vs. culturally responsive practice vs. structural inequality).
- In this way, those seeking research, consulting, exemplar schools/programs/districts/colleges, practitioner experts, etc. – can have fingertip access to such resources and can also have some sense of the breadth and depth of the work of each (according to the Framework).
- Such a source would be a tremendous value-add to the field, and could function in a mediated wiki format.

### Networks & Coalitions

- The field has a great need for networks and alliances that cross each of the actors in this recommendations section – and who deeply understand, and can integrate and advocate for each component of the Framework. Such comprehensive, linked efforts would help our collective work go a long way in terms of efficacy.
- Part of this work should include combining bottom-up demand (families and students) with top-down policy and system leader approaches. In this way, top-down efforts can remain grounded in the realities and desires of the students and families they are intended to serve, and the actors at those levels can continue to learn about the realities of families, communities, and students. And by the same token, families and students can have avenues to deeply engage with and learn about the realities and challenges that systems and policy leaders face in implementing more powerful, just, and inclusive agendas.

We offer the following diagram, on the next page, to summarize each section of the Framework.



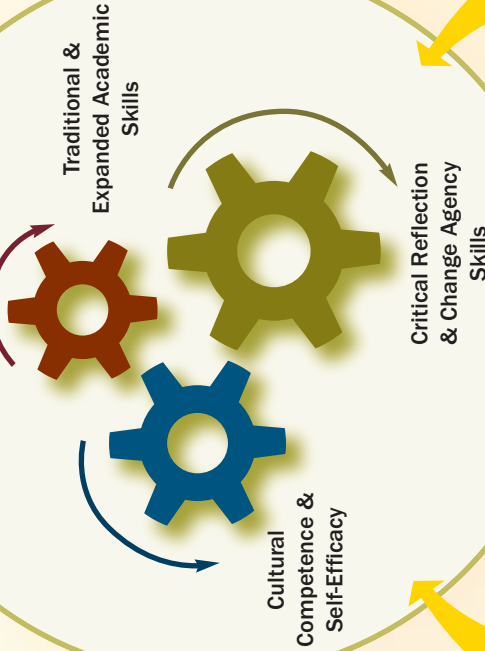
# An Integrated Framework for Equity & Transformational Improvement in Education

- Purposes of Education**
- Life-Long Learning
  - Deep Civic Engagement & Democratic Participation

**Vision for Society:**  
Safe, joyful, economically and socially healthy and prosperous

- Sensibilities**
- Self reflection
  - Openness
  - Humility
  - Belief in all people
  - Commitment to marginalized communities

**Goals for Youth & Adult Skill Building**



**Dimensions of Systems Change**

**Cultural**  
Individual Reflection, Interpersonal Dynamics, Engagement & Partnerships, Student Voice, Culturally Responsive Teaching & Assessment, Socio Emotional Foci, Environment

**Structural**  
Alignment, Planning, etc., Structural Approaches to Teaching & Assessment, Opportunity to Learn

**Levels of Intervention**

**Classroom**

**School/Program/Site**

**District/College/Multi-Site Headquarters**

**City**

**State**

**Federal**

**The Change Management Process**  
(Structural / Cultural Organizational & Systems Development)

Pre K & Early Childhood Supports & Opportunities

Government Institutions

Parents, Families, and Communities

Community Organizations

Faith-based Institutions

Afterschool & Out of School Programs & Youth Development

**Field - Building Domains**

- Student & Adult Learning
- Educator Preparation & Professional Development
- Media
- Research
- Policy Advocacy
- Capacity Building / Technical Assistance
- Education Funding

to ToC

## Caveats & Reminders in Using the Framework

Perhaps one of the greatest considerations in our recommendations is that we will all need to develop a more comprehensive sense of the full components necessary for educational systems transformation toward the goals of this Framework. That is, we will all need to (at minimum): continually deepen our understanding of the structural and cultural dimensions of change; use meaningful strategies for learning about what students are actually experiencing in their education (with a focus on marginalized students, but including the perspectives of all students); and develop structures to deeply reflect on an ongoing basis on how and where our individual and collective practices are going well and going wrong, with a structure/culture lens.

Using this Framework to provide a more robust lens on the comprehensive aspects of educational systems can help all change agents be better capable of collaborating with one other – that is, *so long as* each potential collaborator has committed to and is undertaking his/her own ongoing self-assessment about conscious and unconscious bias, power differentials, uncovering our own cultural referents, etc. This area is so pervasive and under-acknowledged in the public discourse about educational improvement that we mention it here again to draw the reader’s attention to its significance.

Such ongoing self-reflection as an aspect of practice and change agency is a cornerstone in how students (and families) experience education (for better or worse), how colleagues are able or not able to collaborate successfully with one another, and how educational improvement priorities at every level (local, state, and federal) are too often at cross-purposes. Every change agent can tell stories of significant differences in underlying analyses of what the “most important” educational improvement issues are, what potential solutions should and could be, and the challenges in developing trust and belief in one another’s intentions and commitment to engage in joint planning and dialogue.

We will all need to do this work with attention to our own areas of strength and our areas for growth, with compassion for ourselves and each other, and critical honesty. In this way, we will be able to see more clearly how and where we can collaborate, work together more closely, and leverage one another’s knowledge and expertise.

Paying attention to historical power differentials in how we each communicate, our relative access to resources (funding, publishing, media, etc.), and our relative influence on educational improvement discourse (i.e., where and how our and our colleagues’ perspectives are given primacy, and when and how our or our colleagues’ foci are ignored or trivialized) – cannot be overstated in its criticality for our ability to dialogue, partner, and develop more comprehensive, successful, and sustainable transformative efforts.

## Concluding Thoughts

### What Do We Believe Is Needed & Possible?

As we've already noted, the mainstream discourse in the country around educational improvement typically rests in the following spheres of this Framework: raising achievement for all students and closing the achievement gap, toward building traditional academic skills, and using primarily structural approaches to systems change.

We have advocated for a broadened definition of what we mean by “success,” recognizing that a more comprehensive skill set is needed for all people – youth and adults alike – so that we might have a chance of creating more prosperous, healthy, and compassionate communities, economically and socially. Building these broadened competencies – whether in analytical skills, cultural proficiency, or critical reflection – will equip citizens with the capacity to engage more fully in educational settings, in our ability to more fully understand life, and to create more effective public institutions. The “critical reflection and change agency” skill area in particular is vital for building deepened understanding around the complex relationship between our economic, environmental, and social well-being, and participating in helping to improve these arenas and ensure that practices within each are just.

To reiterate from throughout this document: how we frame the ultimate desires and intentions of our educational systems – i.e., how broadly or narrowly we conceive of the skill sets that educational systems should be helping people to build – will shape every decision we make about what is needed in terms of standards, curriculum, instructional practices, educator preparation requirements, assessment strategies, professional development needs, technical assistance needs, policy needs, etc. Hence, *to make a collective decision to narrow the overall goals of skill-building in educational systems is to limit how well we prepare current and future generations to participate in and transform our institutions and social structures.* This is a pivotal choice.

This Framework advocates for broader notions of student success (for the above reasons) with the recognition – from the research and professional experience – that indeed *all* students can master these deeper skill sets and thrive, including those from low-income backgrounds, who are students of color, who may live in extremely challenging home and community environments, and who may have been struggling severely in their academics for many years.

Variety in beliefs about this fundamental contention shapes dialogues in the field about: “which students are worthy” of expending valuable resources on; and whether it is truly possible to expect students from particular backgrounds or histories to be able to access an expanded, rigorous curriculum and succeed. Whether or not we are convinced of the *worthiness* and *capability* of literally all students are the factors that will determine what type and degree of resources we will devote to creating what type and quality of educational systems for students.

The popular discourse about education implies that such goals are “lofty,” too ambitious, unachievable, and unrealistic. Even practitioners and change agents who consider themselves to be equity-minded may balk at these goals for students. This is the very

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To make a collective decision to narrow the overall goals of skill-building in educational systems is to limit how well we prepare current and future generations to participate in and transform our institutions and social structures...

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discussion that we need to be engaged in as a field, because our very future is at stake. Students with more limited skill sets (i.e., traditional academic skills only, whether they are youth or adults), are limited in their capacity to participate, engage in, and help transform society for the better. This is a fact. Numerous sources have acknowledged that these rudimentary skills are necessary but wholly insufficient to meet the needs of not only our future society, but of our current society as well. Given this reality, we have to engage in much more rigorous and meaningful discussions and action planning at policy and practice levels about what is needed to meet our collective needs.

The formidable efforts of those engaged in standards revisions, supporting the development of more powerful assessment systems, and expanding notions of success to include “deeper learning,” are important and critical contributions to the advancement of the field (*Cisco, Microsoft, & Intel, 2009; Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010; Hewlett Foundation, 2010*). Yet, they still fall short of the full call of this Framework. Without blame, it is important to ask “why”? What are our barriers to examining, coming to consensus about, and advocating for a *fuller* repertoire of skills and competencies that youth and adults need to create socially, economically, and environmentally thriving societies? And further, what are the consequences for both the students and society at large if large portions of the student body in our educational systems is only prepared with limited, traditional academic skills? What will they be able to reflect on, analyze, engage in dialogue about, and contribute to the world around them? With what ability to work with others in compassionate, reflective, collaborative ways? We have to ask, what exactly are our understandings of the skills that citizens need in today’s and tomorrow’s world? And what kind of world can they help build with those skills?

We must reiterate here the point made early in the Framework about traditional academics not being a prerequisite for expanded academics, cultural proficiency training, or critical reflection and change agency development. We noted that quite the opposite is true: namely, that students from all cultural backgrounds and academic histories can successfully build these broadened skills simultaneously *if they have* high-quality curriculum and instruction, and are in environments that support them socially, emotionally, and academically.

Furthermore, it should be recalled that the skills domains of self-efficacy, critical reflection, and change agency are important for all students, but especially for students who have struggled greatly academically, experienced outright discrimination and negative messaging in life and in school, and/or live in volatile home and community environments. This is because these groups of students typically have: the most limited support and the greatest barriers for helping them to believe in themselves and their capacity; limited opportunities to meaningfully participate in improving their communities (through service learning or community involvement); and severely limited-to-no access to robust curricular and instructional supports for developing a critical, analytical eye about social conditions. Therefore, pursuing each domain of skills *simultaneously* is all the more important.

The exceptions to these typical limitations in the field are noteworthy and include the formidable work of the youth organizing and youth development fields, where youth from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences – (most notably, marginalized youth) – have access to robust resources for developing their analytical muscle, participating in

powerful community transformation efforts, developing self-efficacy, and supporting one another across racial, class, gender, and other groupings that are often at odds in other parts of their lives. These resources and this body of knowledge should be tapped extensively to support any efforts to implement this Framework. These youth organizations and entities have extensive experience with and expertise in developing curriculum and rigorously engaging students in skill-building in sophisticated ways that often outstrip curricular and instructional approaches in K-12 settings (see for example *the Forum for Youth Investment, 2005; Mediratta & Fruchter, 2003; School of Unity & Liberation www.schoolofunityandliberation.org/*, *What Kids Can Do, 2003; and Youth in Focus, www.youthinfocus.net*).

These examples show that students who may have had limited success with traditional academics can excel in the other two competency areas (of cultural proficiency and critical reflection) while building “basic” skills, and thus the skills need not be built sequentially. We still have the task of integrating and combining the expertise and wisdom of change agents who are knowledgeable about how to work across all the domains of skills in this Framework. This is, again, so we are not left with *either* students with traditional academic skills and yet no rigorous, analytical knowledge, cultural competence, or commitment to improving their communities; or at the other extreme, students with tremendous analytical capacity, cultural competence, and community engagement, and yet lack basic competence in reading, writing, mathematics, science, etc. We need students (and adults) with the *full range* of competencies in order to build stronger institutions and healthier communities.

### Continuum of Readiness

As educators and change agents, we all exist along a continuum of readiness in terms of our ability, openness, and willingness to engage in such integrated, transformative practice. It is important that we locate ourselves, our beliefs, our assumptions, and our practice foci along these continua – in terms of notions of student success, as well as approaches to structural or cultural change. In this way, we can have more meaningful, productive dialogues about where we each are entering, where our learning curves are, where are biases are, what are commitments are, and where we might grow together as organizations and individuals collaborating.

There is also a readiness continuum for each school/district/college/program dictating where they each may want to begin in terms of student skills and/or structural/cultural approaches to systems improvement. Individual change agents and institutions can choose to focus over time in one or more domains or sub-areas of the Framework. But we must be certain to not underestimate the complexity and potential learning curve we may encounter in each area. Given the varying starting places for each of us, it will be important to locate high quality resources to support our continued growth in each area, (which harkens back to the recommendation around needing a clearinghouse of literature, technical assistance, and other resources for each area of the Framework).<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> To further complicate this issue of “where to start,” there seem to be at least four important areas that many are advocating need to be integrated “across the curriculum.” All of these areas up the ante for teacher skills, educator preparation programs, and quality professional development offerings:

- culturally responsive practice – from drawing on students’ own histories and cultures for curriculum content across each discipline area, to drawing from cultures around the world in robust (i.e., not surface/cursory) ways across the curriculum;

## Vertical Levels of Systems Change

As the reader has gathered, this Framework applies to work from the classroom level (or program level, in the case of afterschool programs), to the school level, to districts or networks of schools, to colleges, to states, to the federal level. Application for each level of the broadened notions of success and the structural/cultural approaches to change is specific to the needs and responsibilities of each level. Hence, at the classroom level, teacher skills and practices are paramount. At the school site level, principal skills and leadership, as well as advocacy between the sites and district are critical, as are building understanding, alignment, and commitment among teachers and support staff.

At the district level, the superintendent, his/her cabinet and other central office staff's knowledge, commitment, and alignment around the Framework's components are also critical; and so on. At all levels, parents and families should be supported to play critical partnership roles in deepening educator understanding particularly of the cultural dimensions of change and cultural proficiency in relation to their communities. We encourage the reader to consider the ways the Framework is applicable to their specific level of functioning and institutional context.

## Uses of the Framework

Among other uses, following are some of the challenges in the field this Framework (and the overarching diagram on p.49) can be used to help illuminate and overcome:

- **Clarify semantics and uses of the term “equity”:** identify which domain(s) or component(s) of the Framework are and are not being focused on in strategy development, planning efforts, research agendas, policy development, etc. aimed at educational improvement;
- **Determine the depth and rigor of improvement and equity approaches and practices** by indicating how comprehensively the various categories of the Framework are being addressed (or not);
- **Identify niche areas** where practitioners, change agents, consultants, technical assistance providers, funders, etc. focus their expertise and resources;

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- writing across the curriculum – the argument there is that there is a much higher probability of strengthening students' writing skills by building these skills in every subject area;
  - arts integration across the curriculum (e.g., Alameda County Office of Education, 2010) – in terms of supporting students to develop as well as express their learning and progress in multiple modalities of communication; and
  - technology integration across the curriculum – as we are all aware, the rapid increase of technological capability of the age 0-25 generation has far outstripped previous generations, hence using these tools as core components to instruction is crucial for student engagement and literacy in today's world.

Our challenge will be not to think of these or the other aspects of this Framework as piecemeal approaches to education, to be added on in sequence, but to discover how to integrate these across the curriculum, so that they are not stand alone and hence, minimally developed skills. We will need to locate and utilize expert supports for doing so for each area, and (as we have advocated) these experts will have to work together across their respective areas so that educators who are building capacity in these areas are not left with the burden of not only learning new domains of knowledge, but also integrating many such new domains on their own, (though some educators are skilled at this, others may benefit from additional support).

- Identify **saturation and dearth areas** in the field so that we can be more strategic about where we currently *concentrate* our efforts and resources and where we need to build funding foci, technical assistance resources, strategy development, etc.;
- Identify opportunities for **collaboration** because of having greater clarity about niche areas, expertise, saturation and dearth in the field, and thus, better defining where and how we can collaborate;
- **Promote local, state and national goals and approaches to change** based on context-specific starting places, readiness, and appropriate local adaptation of the Framework’s components. The Framework is not intended to be cookie-cutter. It is intended to promote shared national goals that state and local contexts can adapt and make movement on based on their contextualized situations, needs, and capacity.

It is worth repeating here that collaboration between practitioners, change agents, and others across areas of the Framework, most especially across the structural and cultural domains, will likely be very challenging for those with limited experience with and/or understanding of the worldview and approaches being brought by collaborators with a different expertise. This is true both for those less familiar with cultural approaches, as well as for those less familiar with structural approaches.

Furthermore, because of our nation’s focus on structural solutions to the overall neglect of rigorous attention to cultural approaches to systems change (in mainstream arenas), there tend to be significant power differentials between those working from structural vs. cultural orientations. Those from structural orientations tend to be in positions of power in relation to perceived legitimacy, “rigor,” and access to resources (such as funding). Given this, in pursuing collaborative ventures, deep attention and intentional training and facilitation around differing perspectives, worldviews, priorities, uses of language, and learning about and examining the effects historical bias will be critical development areas for all participants in collaborative efforts.

Some of the caveats in attempting to use this Framework are: 1) deeply listen to and solicit marginalized voices (students, parents, families, communities, and school-site staff) because they have the deepest understanding of what’s really working and not, and the impact of various strategies and approaches on students; 2) do not underestimate the capacity of historically struggling students and what they can achieve with proper supports and resources; 3) be careful not to trivialize or give short-shrift to culturally responsive practice; allocate sufficient time and resources for learning about what it is, who does it well, the difference between deep and shallow approaches, what it takes in terms of recruitment, training, consulting resources, and time, and implications for changed practice in curriculum, instruction, assessment, and student and parent/family/community engagement; and 4) make sure to give culturally responsive practice equal status and importance to structural solutions, and be careful to not fall into the trap of believing that structural solutions should come first, as this would be counter to the components of the Framework.

## Locus of Change

While this document is intended for educational systems thinkers and leaders, intermediaries (inc. policy advocates and technical assistance/capacity building entities), researchers, and funders, this is not to imply that these are the most important agents of change. As is well known, there are multiple entry points for conceptualizing, advocating for/demanding change, and for enacting/ implementing those changes.

As we have noted, on-the-ground practitioners and the youth and adult organizing communities, have developed some of the most cutting-edge thinking and practice related to student success (toward broadened goals) and methods for supporting it. We have found that mainstream educational systems leaders, intermediaries, policy advocacy organizations, technical assistance/capacity building entities, researchers, and most mainstream education funders *are often not aware of, do not understand, and/or are not adequately engaging in deep dialogue with the most expansive thinking and impactful practice being developed by practitioners, organizers, and youth development workers, particularly related to the cultural domains of the Framework.* We hope this document can help to foster bridge-building between these constituent groups, between structural and cultural approaches, and also between those working toward the multiple skill domains for students.

This document is targeted to the players we see as the middle of the locus of change continuum because these are the individuals who can potentially function as bridge-builders between the deep thinking, conceptualizing, and practice from the grassroots to the tree-tops entities. These camps – grassroots and treetops – are typically divorced from one another in conceptual understanding, goals, priorities, approaches, and language use. Our contention is that we must bridge these worlds and leverage their collective expertise if we are to succeed in creating truly transformative educational systems, and so that we cease working at cross-purposes.

## Significant Work is Afoot, Yet There is More to Do...

The Framework is not intended to minimize the formidable work of practitioners and reformers throughout the country who are advancing much-needed structural improvements. It is to point to additional needs for our collective action so that all of our efforts can be more successful, impactful, and sustainable for the benefit of students and the well-being of society.

As important as raising achievement and closing the achievement gap is for different racial, ethnic, language, gender, and ability groups, as we have discussed, such a focus will still yield insufficient preparation for all students to fully understand, work with others, re-vision, and recreate our collective future. The skills we are preparing students with now are simply not enough.

This Framework is a call to do the even harder work of expanding the public discourse so that we can ensure that the thrust of our efforts around educational policies, standards alignment, building better assessment systems, district and school improvement, etc. – are aiming in the right directions, and are the best that we would want for all of our



children – not just what’s good enough or what we think is possible for now. We have to plan for both short-term needs while simultaneously putting into place goals, structures, and policies for a broader, more robust and just long-term educational agenda.

### The Need for Personal Transformation

At the heart of institutional and systems transformation is individual/personal transformation, including courageous and on-going reflection on our personal and collective practice, our conscious and unconscious biases, reckoning when we discover we have committed egregious errors that have damaged individuals, communities, and institutions, and locating support and building muscle for moving through discomfort. These are all part and parcel to this work. This individual development requires building cultural competence/proficiency skills including deep listening and engaging with folks from different racial, ethnic, gender, socioeconomic, language, and communication styles and backgrounds.

We hope to contribute to the formation of educators and change agents with “deep personal commitment to creating a more just and humane society...[including]...the belief that public schools can become equitable places that serve as a vehicle for larger social transformation” (*Osta and Perrow, 2008, p.2*).

### This Moment in History

We are at a moment in time in the field where there is a great deal of understanding about “what works” both on the *structural* sides of systems change, and on the *cultural* sides of systems change. As we have noted, there are large literature bases for both approaches. As we have also noted, there are also large or growing literature bases for the comprehensive skill areas we discussed in this Framework: traditional academics, expanded academics, cultural proficiency and culturally responsive practice, and critical reflection and change agency. But what we do not have in abundance is a *combined* literature base that unites these approaches in tandem with one another to examine strategies, lessons, barriers, context issues, etc. The combined structural/cultural literature base for systems change (i.e., districts that are attempting a combined approach), is limited.

Furthermore, the knowledge and literature base that combines understanding of and approaches to curriculum, instruction, and assessment across traditional and expanded academics, cultural proficiency and culturally responsive practice, and critical reflection and change agency – is also limited. We, therefore, have a lot of work to do to integrate our understanding of “what works” so that we have a better chance of advancing more impactful and sustainable strategies and approaches.

As has been stated, this will be difficult because oftentimes, those with deep competence in the cultural areas above are not the same practitioners and change agents with deep competency in the structural and traditional skill areas. Furthermore, these two camps often are at odds with one another, or worse, believe that the other’s viewpoint and approaches are damaging to students. These are formidable barriers that we will have

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The combined structural/cultural literature base for systems change (i.e., whole systems / districts that are attempting a combined approach), is limited.

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to overcome, in terms of accepting the legitimacy of each approach (in their most rigorous and sophisticated forms), and committing to opening ourselves to learning deeply about perspectives and approaches different from our own.

“We are a nation scarred from hundreds of years of [oppression and we still have] unfinished civil rights business” (Olsen, Bhattacharya, Chow, et al, 2001, p.8). Hence, there is a large question here about the degree to which we as change agents will be willing to commit to such meaningful, open (and well-facilitated) dialogue and action to expand our understandings and approaches for the benefit of students and ultimately society at large.

The goals put forth in this Framework are lofty but they are not unattainable. We are at a moment in our collective history where we must dream bigger for the sake of our collective future.

Our focus on educational systems is not intended to diminish the responsibility of and need for families, communities, neighborhoods, and spiritual communities to hopefully provide supports, resources, guidelines, etc. for helping individuals to develop skills of self-awareness, compassion and empathy. We have rapidly evolving societies, dramatically increasing technological complexity, and communities that are becoming more and more diverse – and thus an urgent need to determine which mechanisms we will use to help produce citizens who have rigorous academic skills, who can truly work with and care for one another, who can contribute to the creation of healthy communities that we want to live in together, and stronger public institutions to serve us.

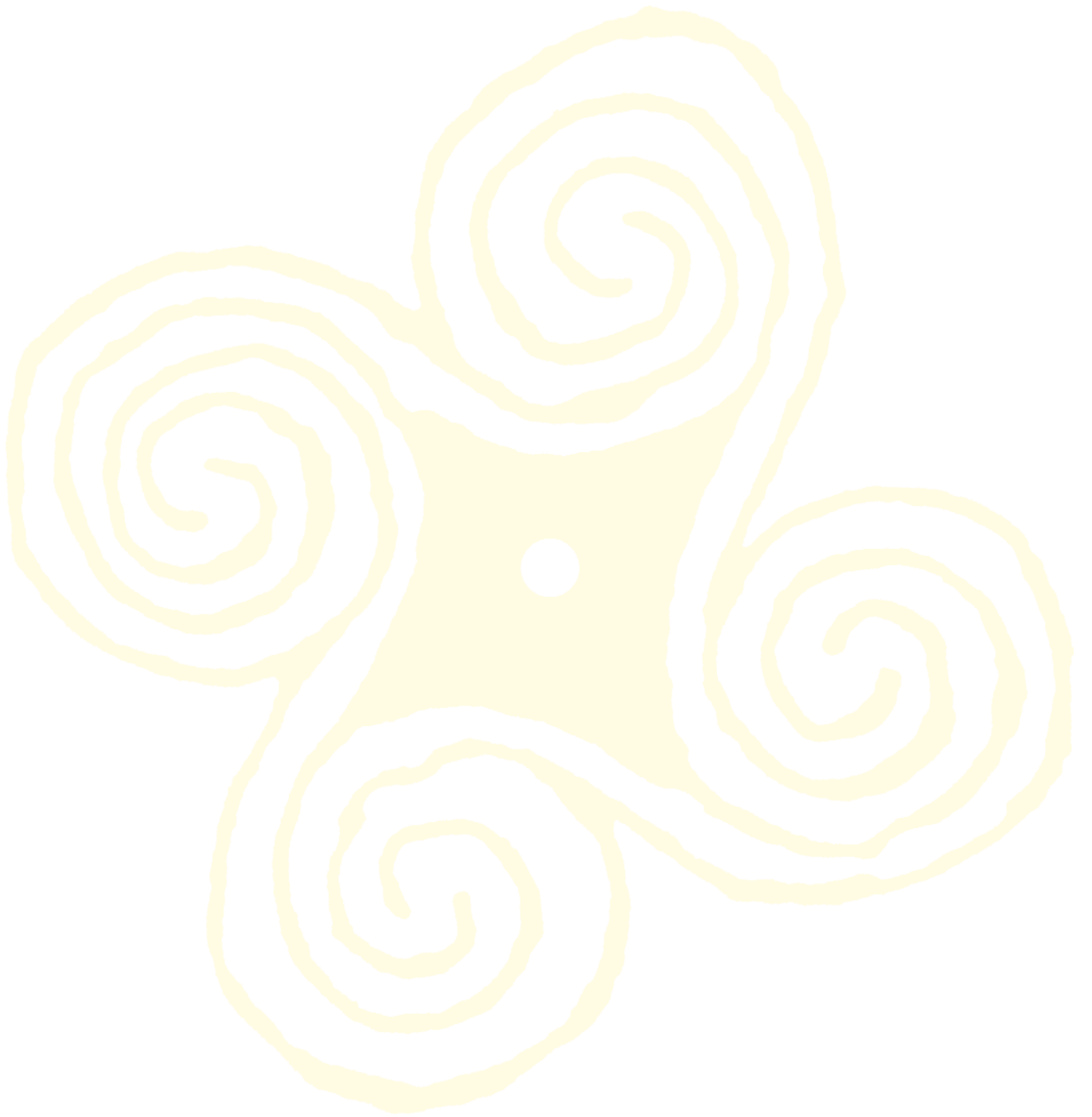
We hope this Framework will help to promote aligned, transformational, equitable approaches in educational improvement that impact:

- *individual* epiphanies, development, and transformation (for educators, students, and other change agents);
- *institutions* (schools, districts, colleges, after school programs, community-based organizations, intermediaries, government entities, and foundations);
- *systems* (local, regional, and national cross-institutional and cross-sector educational improvement efforts); and
- *society* as a whole (families, neighborhoods, communities, and our individual and collective well-being and sense of hopefulness for the future).

In one way, equity can be thought of along a number of dimensions, including: 1) “removing the predictability of academic success or failure based on social, economic, or cultural factors,” 2) “interrupting inequitable practices, eliminating biases and oppression and creating inclusive school environments for adults and children,” and 3) “discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that each human being possesses” within and across schools, districts, and communities in partnership with one another (Osta and Perrow, 2008, p.3-4).

This Framework holds to these definitions of equity while *at the same time* expanding the definition of equity to include broadening the notion of the skills students need to include more robust competencies so that they can succeed, contribute to their communities, and help create institutions that are better capable of serving our diverse world. The Framework also expands the definition of equity by outlining the structural, cultural, and change management approaches that can lead to the most impactful and lasting systemic changes in schools, districts, colleges, and afterschool programs. With this more comprehensive Framework, it is now up to all of us to see what we can accomplish together.





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