

The S.T.A.R. Academy's Equity Journey



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Introduction

The S.T.A.R. Academy, P.S. 63, is a pre-kindergarten through fifth grade elementary school located in the Lower East Side serving 200 students. Former special education teacher Darlene Cameron has been the principal for the past ten years. Six years ago, Jodi Friedman, who had taught at the school for seven years, became assistant principal. Also, six years ago, they changed the name of the school from P.S. 63 William McKinley to The S.T.A.R. Academy: Students Taking Active Roles, so that the name would reflect their belief that all children regardless of age can play an active role in their learning, school, and community.

Darlene and Jodi both bring a strong commitment to social justice and racial equity to their work. Darlene, a Black Haitian woman, had a family and teachers who ensured she was aware of the historical context of race in America, proud of her culture, and confident in her capacity for growth and success. She believed it was her mission as an advocate for social justice to empower her students in the same way. Jodi, who is White and Jewish, grew up and attended public schools in Louisiana. She saw firsthand that not all students had access to equitable education: there were not many Black students in her AP and honors courses, and she saw the poor physical conditions of other schools in her district.

Over the past eight years, Darlene and Jodi also worked on increasing teachers' ownership of the teaching and curriculum. In conversations with the school leaders, teachers often named the quality of the curriculum that they used as a barrier to student engagement and learning. For that reason, the school stopped using curriculum created by publishers, and the teachers spent time creating their own units through *Understanding by Design* (Wiggins & McTighe, 2005). As the staff taught their revised units, however, they found that many students were disengaged and not connecting to the lessons. Darlene and Jodi recognized that even with the higher level of teacher ownership of the curriculum, there was still a gap between the vision for student agency and ownership expressed by their school's name and the disengagement and lack of ownership students were experiencing with the classroom.

Starting by Looking Inward

As long as they have worked together as school leaders, Darlene and Jodi have talked frequently about social justice issues in education. However, they were unsure about how to start discussions with their teachers around racial equity and culturally responsive because while 90% of students and most paraprofessionals were People of Color, the teachers at The S.T.A.R. Academy were predominantly White and unaccustomed to discussing race.

Three years ago, several White teachers who had recently joined the school began initiating individual conversations with Darlene and Jodi to talk about race and how it impacted schools. Darlene and Jodi decided that because they now had teachers who wanted to help lead this work, it seemed a great way to engage with the staff and begin the conversation about race. In the initial staff-wide conversations, some teachers voiced disagreement with the idea that racism was an issue they needed to deal with in their school. While Darlene and Jodi recognized the dissension, they wondered about the conversations teachers were or were not having with their students if they were uncomfortable talking about race with their colleagues. Their recognition of the potential impact on students led the school leaders to move forward with leading the staff in learning around race and equity with a greater sense of urgency.

The S.T.A.R. Academy Background Information

District 1

Grades Served: PK, K, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Student Enrollment: 200

Student demographics by ethnicity: 65% Hispanic, 19% Black, 10% White, 4% Asian

% of students with special needs: 35%

% of students who are ELLs: 3%

Last year, the school leaders started a school-wide equity team in order to advance the work. This team generated goals focused on creating inclusive and supportive classrooms, an inclusive and creative school, and an inclusive curriculum. The equity team designed and facilitated professional development in which staff analyzed school data through a racial equity lens. They found, for example, that while 10% of their students were African American, these students represented almost all of their suspensions.

In addition to critically analyzing data, the equity team recognized that it was important that they engaged in self-reflection and talked about how race shaped them each as educators before beginning their work on shifting the school curriculum and culture. To this end, the team brought in Border Crossers, and organization that focuses on training educators to disrupt patterns of racism and injustice, to facilitate professional development on Election Day. Jodi shared how helpful it was to have external facilitators start these conversations about race:

Our Border Crosser facilitators were able to address issues we weren't prepared to discuss, like the history of racism in our country and the forms of racism. It raised for us the point that if we don't do anything, we are part of the racism. This day felt like an important starting point. It took some of the personal out of it; it framed racism as: it is our history, it is the nation's, and it is in our schooling.

This experience motivated Darlene, Jodi, and the equity team to plan and facilitate a series of professional development sessions focused on restorative justice and looking at school policies through a racial equity lens (like how their homework policies and interactions with parents were influenced by White culture). In another professional development series, the teachers and school leaders began investigating the content standards through the lens of multicultural standards transformation (see Appendix A on page 25). They recognized that if they did not critically examine the standards, they would unintentionally perpetuate the dominant Eurocentric, White perspective.

Moving from Looking Inward to Examining the Curriculum

At the end of last school year, Darlene and Jodi decided they were ready to start finding ways for the equity work to shape curriculum and instruction more directly. They also recognized that the teachers were at different places in their personal equity work. To make the next steps manageable and allow each teacher to have a choice in what their own journey would look like, Darlene and Jodi asked the teachers to pick one marginalized people group who they wanted to learn about and research over the summer in preparation for revising a unit the following year to include perspectives from that group. Many teachers chose specific ethnic and racial groups, while some teachers chose other marginalized groups like people with special needs. As one of the teachers shared, this opportunity for self-directed learning “put the heavy lifting on the teachers” in a way that honored their autonomy as professionals while pushing them to further their equity work.

At the start of this school year, Darlene and Jodi invited the teachers to share about the research they had done over the summer in their Initial Planning Conferences. As the teachers set professional learning goals using the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*, the school leaders asked them how they were thinking of incorporating their summer learning into that goal. For example, a first grade teacher who had researched the North's role in slavery wanted to plan a unit incorporating that content that would allow for increased student choice (component 1e: Designing Coherent Instruction) and would include intellectually engaging tasks that allowed for meaningful, real world application of students' learning (component 3c: Engaging Students in Learning). A fifth grade teacher shared that she wanted to grow in component 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques by having her students take the lead in asking questions to their discussions about equity as she integrated what she learned from researching LatinX communities into their social studies curriculum.

The four case studies that follow show a glimpse of seven The S.T.A.R. Academy teachers' equity work over the course of this school year—their personal journey to this work, how it is shaping their curriculum in age-appropriate ways, and how it is impacting their students—and their plans for the future.

Author's note: This case study, developed in Spring 2018, highlights the work that the school leaders and teachers at The S.T.A.R. Academy engaged in prior to and over the course of the school year (2017-2018) to promote racial equity and culturally responsive teaching throughout their school community.

Emily and Erica's Kindergarten Classroom

Emily and Erica are ICT co-teachers who are committed to making the school's equity work be a more central element in their kindergarten classroom in a way that is appropriate and meaningful for their students. This year, drawing from their experiences as educators and their knowledge of their students, they made their entry point a yearlong focus on the concept of fairness.

While this year was her ninth year of teaching, it was Emily's second year at The S.T.A.R. Academy. As a White woman, it was also the second year she taught primarily students of Color. When she first began at the school, Emily was invited to attend a district racial justice professional development session that sounded interesting to her called "The Truth that I Owe You: Advancing Racial Justice in District 1" facilitated by Dr. David Kirkland. At the session, participants were invited to do a case study project through an equity lens at their school. Emily and the other members of The S.T.A.R. Academy team chose to analyze which students they perceived to be the most "challenging." Each team member submitted a photo of that child, and the team created a spreadsheet with the children's demographic information. In their analysis of that spreadsheet, they saw that while there was a fairly even breakdown of the students by gender (45% were girls and 55% were boys), almost all of the students were students of Color (91%). While that closely matched the percent of students of color in the school, it sparked conversations of how race impacted who they perceived to be most challenging. After sharing their findings with their staff as well as at a district-wide conference, Emily and the other members of the case study team joined the equity team.

Emily explained that while there no one moment where she formally committed to the equity work, she found that the more she was part of these conversations with her colleagues and other educators, the more she was inspired by how she could bring this work to her students. These conversations led her to examine more the power that comes with her role as a White teacher: "I'm being more aware of the way I'm walking through the world and in my classroom and how I'm giving my students more of a voice." Specifically, she challenged herself to consider if her existing social studies units were relevant and engaging for her students. After asking herself, "Was that the best that I could do?," she took up the challenge to embed the theme of fairness and equity throughout the units. Emily's professional goal this school year was to engage students in doing the "heavy lifting," especially in classroom discussions, which connected to *Framework for Teaching* components 3c: Engaging Students in Learning and 3b: Questioning and Discussion Techniques. Emily has been working to move away from primarily asking more surface questions like: "What do you look like, and what do others look like?" to deeper questions that touch on issues of equity and fairness, like, "What do you think about this kid standing on the box who can't see the game [because of the fence blocking his view]?" Emily shared, "Those kind of juicy questions delve into deeper issues that lead to increasing the students' engagement. Those questions have been a jumping off point for me to step back and see what the kids can truly do."

This year was Erica's seventh year of teaching kindergarten, her first year at The S.T.A.R. Academy, and her first year teaching in an ICT setting. As a White woman, she has always taught in schools in Brooklyn and the Bronx where her students were Black and LatinX. However, until this year, she had never worked to integrate the concept of racial equity into her curriculum. This year, she learned with Emily how to make equity issues accessible to kindergartners and to open their eyes to the diversity around them in their school and neighborhoods. Since it was her first year teaching in an ICT setting and having many students with IEPs, Erica's professional goal was focused on how to make learning accessible for every student in ways that took into account their needs while also being creative, engaging, and rigorous. She also shared, "I've been thinking about who is classified as what and where is that coming from?" Erica critically examined the fact that 6 out of their 7 male students with IEPs were Black and

Brown boys. She recognized that the classifications could be a way of perpetuating harmful stereotypes and low expectations that could follow students from elementary through high school. In her role as their kindergarten teacher, Erica focused on helping students with IEPs get what they need and supporting them in ways that did not perpetuate low expectations.

“What does it mean to be fair?”

To make the concept of equity accessible for kindergartners, in the beginning of the school year Emily and Erica posed the question: “What does it mean to be fair?” They shared a hypothetical story, asking the students to help three kids solve a problem. They explained that these kids wanted to see a baseball game, but there was a fence in the way. One kid was very tall, one was medium, and one was shorter. They found three boxes and were not sure how to use them to help them all see the game. Next, Emily and Erica shared the “Equality” image (see Figure A) and asked their kindergartners to discuss: “Can they all see the game? Is this fair?” And many of the kindergartners

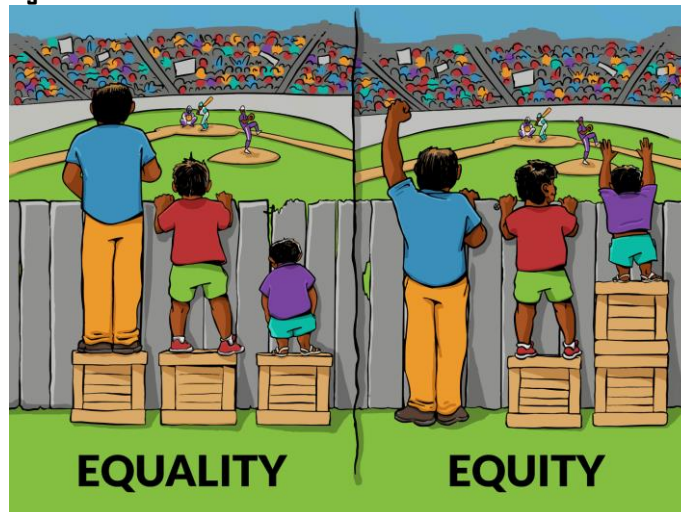
responded, “He has one box, she has one box, and he has a box—that’s fair” and “It’s all the same thing; it’s fair.” Then, they shared the “Equity” image and asked the students to discuss if that scenario was fair. The teachers then gave an exit ticket with both images side by side and asked the kindergartners to circle the picture that they thought was fair. Almost every student selected the Equality image.

A few months later after more conversations and lessons about fairness, Emily and Erica revisited these images and the question: “What does it mean to be fair?” This time, most of the students selected the Equity image. One student asserted, “It’s not fair! The little one can’t see. The box is too short.” Other students also realized that despite the fact everyone had the same box, not everyone was able to see the game and ultimately not everyone was getting the same benefit. The class began to discuss: “Well, is equal fair? Doesn’t equal mean fair? If you are getting this [extra box] and another person is not, it is because you need this and the other person doesn’t?” As in their fall discussion, Emily and Erica let the students sit with these ideas and did not push them to adopt a specific definition or revise their conceptions of fairness.

Examining Representations of Families

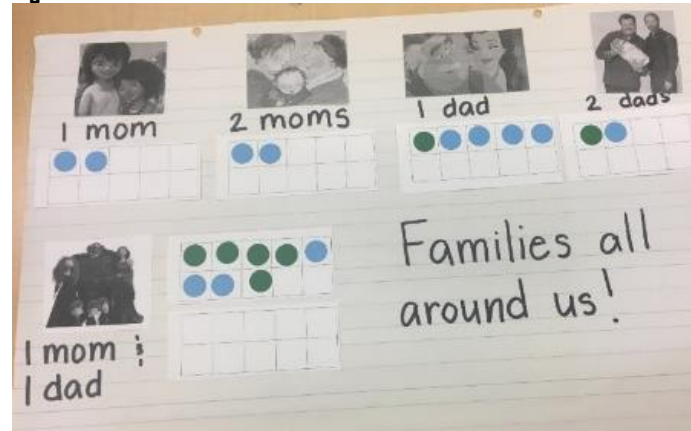
After learning about other schools’ critical thinking and advocacy around representation in their classroom libraries, Emily and Erica brought a similar activity into their “Self, Others, and Families” unit. Emily and Erica wanted to recognize the diverse types of family structures in their students’ lives as well as in the world around them, so they asked their students to examine what types of families were represented in their classroom library. First, they created a document with images of families taken from popular culture that they thought many students would have seen (like *Moana*, *Cinderella*, *Aladdin*, *Little Mermaid*, and *Modern Family*). The students then analyzed what types of families were identified in each of the images (e.g., 1 mom and 1 dad, 1 mom, 2 moms, etc.).

Figure A



Next, Emily, Erica and their students tackled analyzing their classroom library. The teachers asked their students: “How many books do we have where there’s a mom and a dad? Where there’s one mom? Where there are two moms?” The teachers had pulled all the books with families from their library, and the students then sorted them by the type of families they showed: 1 mom, 2 moms, 1 dad, 2 dads, and 1 mom and 1 dad (see Figure B). Then, Emily and Erica asked them, “Let’s think about ourselves and our families represented in our

Figure B



classroom—is everyone here? Is it fair?” The students concluded that many of their books depicted families with one mom and one dad. The students were quick to say that it was fair because: “Everyone has a mom and a dad!” Emily and Erica turned the question back to the students: “Is that okay?”, noting that not all children have or live with a mom and a dad. That question led to a really interesting conversation, and the students decided, “No, that’s not okay,” and they agreed to figure that out together. Emily reflected, “It has fostered some strong discussions between students. They have discussed that it is okay to have different opinions and different families because there are some students with different kinds of family structures.” This activity encouraged them to start questioning representation in media and books, and reinforced a strong self-identity in affirming that family does not have to look one way in order to be “good.”

A Work in Progress

In the spring of this school year, as Erica and Emily were starting the writing unit on opinion pieces and persuasive writing, they were eager to see to what extent the kindergartners build on this idea of fairness when they select their writing topics. In this unit, they asked students to notice a problem and write to convince someone about their solution to that problem. In previous years, Emily taught the unit using Dr. Seuss’s book *The Lorax* and the problem of having garbage on the floor. This year, they integrated examples of children who identified an issue related to inequity and worked to solve it. In a recent professional learning session, Emily and Erica heard about 11 year old Marley Dias, a child who had the goal to find 1,000 books with Black girls as the main character. They planned to share that example with their students as an example of someone who noticed a problem in her school and did something about it. Marley’s actions also raised the larger issue of representation in children’s books and helping other people change their minds. Emily and Erica shared, “Our hope is that this will give them the opportunity to become an advocate, standing up for these issues, taking a side, and speaking up.”

Emily noted, “The equity work is very much a work in progress, and I’ve given myself a little bit of slack to know that it’s okay that it’s part of a process.” She sees it as her work to continually grow as an educator. She added:

This is a year where we are testing the waters and seeing what happens when we throw examples [of activism] out to our kids. Can they get there, and is this inspiring to them? Are we giving them examples to think about how they can be active members of society? What does that look like in kindergarten so they can take it to first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grade so they’re really impacting change?

Looking forward to next school year, Emily and Erica want to find more opportunities to include issues of equity and fairness in authentic ways. They are considering how to embed it in social studies and it informs their heterogeneous selection of texts and writing tasks. Also, they want to modify the end product of the unit so that it gives students an opportunity to take an activist stance to demonstrate to their learning. Lastly, they want to deepen their work to involve more of the input from the families more to help ensure that students' experiences in the classroom reflect and affirm their lived experiences.

As Emily and Erica have used the equity lens to revise their curriculum, they have seen how it supports them in demonstrating Effective and Highly Effective levels of practice described in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- **1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students:** The teachers understood that kindergartners need to be able to revisit complex concepts like "fairness" many times, talking about and seeing them in many ways. Emily and Erica also purposefully continued to acquire knowledge about individual students' interests and cultural heritages so the "Self, Others, and Family" unit reflected their families and experiences.
- **3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques:** Asking questions like: "Compare your family to what you see in these books. How do you feel about that?" led to students having genuine discussions and not just "ping ponging" answers between themselves. Students responded to one another and made unsolicited contributions.
- **2a: Creating an Environment of Respect and Rapport:** Emily and Erica have seen the focus on fairness and equity impact the culture of respect and rapport in their classroom as their kindergartners verbalized more what they need and want from their classmates and teachers. Erica explained, "If someone is doing something you like or you don't like, you can tell that that. So students are telling each other at time, 'I didn't like when you did that; please stop.'"

Suzanne's First and Second Grade Classroom

Suzanne has taught for 17 years at The S.T.A.R. Academy in classrooms ranging from first through fourth grade. This school year, she taught a first and second grade self-contained combination class.

When the staff at The S.T.A.R. Academy started focusing on equity in their professional development a few years ago, Suzanne experienced it as separate from her classroom work, and she did not integrate it into her lesson plans or curriculum. She shared, "I wasn't totally on board as a White Jewish girl from a White neighborhood." As the staff talked more about how the equity work could live in their curriculum and instruction, Suzanne thought it could work for the upper elementary grades, middle school, and high school, but not in the early elementary grades that she taught.

Then, when the school leaders Darlene and Jodi asked the teachers over the summer to read and learn about a marginalized group to then include in one of their units, Suzanne felt unsure. Suzanne expressed, "I was lost. I kept panicking all summer. I was wondering, 'What do they mean?'" While she struggled with where to start, she decided to focus on social studies, since that was where she most saw an opening to incorporate a marginalized group in the curriculum.

As a second grade teacher, Suzanne had been teaching the "New York City: Then and Now" unit for a long time. Based on the social studies standards, she planned units on how European explorers and colonists contributed to building New York City. In order to further develop this unit, she decided to learn for herself more about New York City. In that process, she realized:

It was kind of serendipitous. In my reading, I realized I had no idea how prominent slavery was in New York City. And I was shocked and a little embarrassed for myself that I had thought of New York as an abolitionist state, that the North was good. I had no idea that this was the center of the slave trade.

Through her reading, Suzanne realized that in her unit design, she had been leaving out a major group of people, African Americans, who had contributed to building New York City in significant ways.

When this school year started, Suzanne shared her learning with her second grade team, and they decided to focus on how to include African Americans into their "New York City: Then and Now" unit. In addition to revising this unit, Suzanne also began to examine ways that she could "plant seeds" across the curriculum by addressing the experiences of African Americans at different points in history (like the enslavement of Africans, Jim Crow and segregation, and the Harlem Renaissance) throughout the school year. In addition to working with her team to incorporate multiple perspectives into the "New York City: Then and Now" unit they would teach later in the year, Suzanne also made changes to her literacy and social studies curriculum to more greatly reflect the racial and ethnic backgrounds of her students.

Bringing in More Diverse Voices: Shifting the curriculum

In September, Suzanne asked her students to take inventory of their classroom library, analyzing the characters who were represented in their books as well as the authors represented. As the students catalogued the books, they found that many of the books represented White people, homes with moms and dads, animals, and many nonfiction science books. In addition, many of the authors were White. Then, they reflected on the question: "What do we want to see in our library?" They came to the conclusion: "We want to see people like us," with books featuring more people of color, different types of families (not just nuclear families with a mom and a dad), and settings similar to where they live (cities with apartments and urban neighborhoods). In response, Suzanne and her students selected new books for their classroom library.

At the same time, Suzanne began examining her read aloud choices. She had always used the read aloud selections that their literacy curriculum recommended, or ones that she had used for many years. This year, she focused on choosing books that teach about what life was like for marginalized groups across different time periods. For example, in the spring she shared:

The read aloud we're in the middle of now is *My Name Is Maria Isabel*, which is about a Puerto Rican girl who gets called "Mary" by her teacher. But that's not the one [the literacy curriculum] recommended. They recommended *Houndsley and Catina* about a dog and a cat. And I said, "I think we can do better than that for character development." I'm still able to teach what I need to teach, the foundational reading and writing and thinking skills, but I'm using different, more meaningful materials than using a silly book about a cat and a dog to do it.

Another read aloud we did was *Going Somewhere Special*. I was able to show them the time period when this was going on was during Jim Crow about a little girl who goes off on her own around town and the hardships that happen throughout the day, showing a lot of racism and how she comes out stronger at the end of the day. We discussed in what ways is it different and similar to today. We do a lot of read alouds that are helping build this foundation for the "New York City: Then and Now" unit so this won't feel so isolated when we start it.

In their poetry unit, Suzanne was mindful of the poems she selected and analyzed with students. While she still taught on poetic devices like metaphors, similes, and alliteration, Suzanne selected poems like Maya Angelou's "Still I Rise" and Langston Hughes's poem "Mother to Son." These poems have supported students in really thinking about the deeper meaning behind the poems (see Figure C).

Because of these changes in her curriculum, Suzanne shared that she has seen more open conversations as she asks students to discuss what they wonder about race and ethnicity. For example, Suzanne and her students engaged in an activity looking at "The Colors in Our Lives," asking the question: "What is the race/skin color of most of the people you often see?" (see Figure D). After they made their observations and wrote about what the prompt made them think and the questions they have, the class gathered to share what they noticed and their questions:

- I wonder why all my neighbors in my building are black or brown but the building across the street is fancy with all white people?
- I see most of my teachers are white and most of my friends at school are black or brown. I notice my doctors are usually white but the nurses and other people who work in the doctor's offices aren't white.

Figure C: Students' written responses to why they think Maya Angelou wrote the poem "Still I Rise"

- "I think she wrote this because She wants to help everybody feel like they should never give up. IN stanza 3 it says, 'Just like moons and like suns, With the certainty of tides.' I think this part mean she is alway going to be there and never go away. Also, stanza 1 is about how she talk about how the history book is wrong it wont do anything to stop her power as a african american." -Star
- "I think she wrote this poem because to tell african American women and all women to allways be persistent and keep rising. In stanza 7, it says, 'Im a black ocean, leaping and wide, welling and swelling I bear in the tide.' I think this part means today is a good day but a hundreds of years ago people were treated badly." -Ryan
- "I think she wrote this poem because she wanted everyone to not get treated badly. In stanza five, it says, 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines Diggin in my own backyard.' I think this part means that she has the rich stuff in side her. Also, stanza 3 is about how she will always stand strong like the sun and the moon and nothing can stop her." -Katrina

- My dad is brown and my mom is white but I have the same skin color as my mom. Why do kids sometimes have different skin color than their family members?

Figure D: Student response to “The Colors In Our Lives” activity

The Colors In Our Lives

What is race/skin color of most of the people you often see?

Teachers <u>white and brown</u> brown Neighbors <u>tan and latino</u> Sanitation workers (help clean) <u>spanish</u>	doctors <u>white</u> friends <u>white, tan and black</u> police <u>white</u>	transit drivers (cabs, bus, subway) <u>white</u> <u>spanish</u> <u>latino</u>
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What does this make you think?

Rich jobs are white.

Dirty jobs are latino and sometimes black

What questions do you have?

Why does MY sanitation worker are all Spanish but all of MY neighbors are tan and latino?

My teachers are white mostly

Why is there only 3 black teachers?

Diversifying the reading texts and writing activities has helped students ask the questions that they have always wondered about race and ethnicity, as well as creating more space for students to read about and voice different points of view.

While making these shifts to embed equity in her teaching this year, Suzanne noticed that her students were more intellectually engaged. She noted, “I’m asking them to do some heavy lifting and presenting them with heavy ideas, things that I didn’t think younger kids could necessarily handle. But they are, and I think they appreciate it.” While previously she had some classroom management issues with a few students, Suzanne observed that when they were doing their poetry unit, talking about what a book means or making connections to their skin color and their families, “you can feel the energy shift. I don’t have those behavior problems. They feel like these lessons are about them.” Suzanne connected that to her experiences as a child:

I’m Jewish, and I remember when we were learning about the Holocaust my ears would perk up. I liked hearing about myself and my heritage. When I was in public school I would get excited because I would be learning about something that I connected with. [Similarly,] in *My Name is Maria Isabel*, Maria is from Puerto Rico and so are many of them. They’re more into the book because they feel a connection and it has enhanced their engagement.

The Equity Journey Continues: “It’s a work in progress”

In the spring of this school year, Suzanne shared that the work to embed learning around equity in instruction had been challenging, and the teachers felt some trepidation as they prepared to teach the revised “New York City Then and Now” unit. In preparing to teach this unit, Suzanne continued to identify gaps in the standards and content she has taught in the past. She explained:

Up until now I've been teaching that people wanted to come here [to New York City] and that it was all because of their choice. We've [the second grade team] never taught the concept that people had to come here for different reasons, including slavery. We've never taught that various groups, European explorers and slaves, played a part in changing New York City's environment, jobs, and communities. Down the road we want to include so many more groups, but we needed to start small and be a little more focused.

Suzanne has also continued to expand her own knowledge about how the slave trade was strategically used by Europeans to build an empire. She sees this as ongoing work to deepen her knowledge of the content (component 1a: Demonstrating Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy). As she continues this work, her reading list is expanding, and she finds herself frequently googling questions like learning more about the Harlem Renaissance. As she expressed some concerns about teaching the revised unit, Suzanne acknowledged, "I'm going to make a lot of mistakes and things will be bumpy." She has given herself permission to make mistakes and to learn from them because she holds onto the belief that this is important, ongoing work. Suzanne sees the work that she has done over this school year as the beginning of a process of considering changes to the rest of her curriculum.

As Suzanne has used the equity lens to revise her curriculum, she has seen how it has supported her in demonstrating Effective and Highly Effective levels of practice described in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- **3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques:** Her expansion of the text selections and the topics that her first and second graders discuss supported high-level thinking. Students formulated many questions and made unsolicited contributions. Suzanne explained, "There are a lot of great questions to be asked with this work." For example, when Suzanne and her students were examining photos from Jim Crow of Whites holding signs like "We Want Segregation," her students asked questions like, "Why was this happening?" In groups, they shared what they thought the pictures meant, and because they were photos, it offered students more space to take risks in sharing their ideas since many of the emergent readers were more reluctant to share in text-based discussions.
- **2a: Creating an Environment of respect and Rapport:** As students discussed these important issues, the interactions between the teacher and students and among students were highly respectful. Suzanne shared, "When you hear them speaking with each other, they're able to listen to and respect one another because there's no clear right or wrong answer. It's led to having more room for different viewpoints and opinions."

Ayana and Lauren's Fourth Grade Classroom

Ayana and Lauren are fourth grade ICT co-teachers who have been teaching together for three years. This year, through their involvement in the school's equity work, they have critically examined the fourth grade social studies standards as they teach the history of New York State.

Growing up on the Lower East Side, Ayana was aware of her Whiteness; she observed and questioned how race impacted her life and community. In college, she studied sociology with a focus on race; as she developed a greater understanding of her White privilege, she decided to work to address the opportunity gap that many students and families of Color experience with schooling. She explained, "I wanted to help with that, not as a White savior person, but because I see this problem. It's part of my role as a citizen in this country to help in some way." When she began teaching at a charter school in Brooklyn, the staff often discussed race and what it means to be a White teacher of Black and Brown students. Ayana shared, "There was a lot of talk like: 'How does your position as a White teacher factor into how the relationship with this parent is going south?'" So when Ayana became a teacher at The S.T.A.R. Academy three years ago, she was surprised to find that these types of conversations were not happening. She had conversations with Darlene and Jodi that contributed to the school leaders starting the equity team. Ayana noted, "The equity work wasn't focused initially on pedagogy or on students. It was focused on moving away from the teachers being colorblind and looking at ourselves a little more closely" to explore how the racial make-up of the staff could be impacting their relationships with students and families and students' experiences in school.

Lauren, who is also a White woman, had a very different journey to the equity work. Growing up, her family never talked about race. When she started teaching, Lauren considered herself colorblind; she explained, "I thought: shouldn't I treat all of my students equally?" She thought her role was to teach students the curriculum. After teaching at The S.T.A.R. Academy for four years, she credits her fellow teachers with her growth in teaching for equity. The fact that the push for this work came from her fellow colleagues like Ayana, people she trusted and who cared so deeply about this work, made her want to be a part of it. Through working with them, Lauren came to realize that her colorblindness was not helpful to her students. She explained, "We teach Black and Brown students, and they're going to leave our classroom and go out into the world where they will have to deal with prejudice based on race." Now Lauren believes that her job is not just to teach curriculum, but to critically examine and revise their curriculum to create more spaces for students to engage with the world.

Over the summer before this school year, Ayana and Lauren engaged in a critical examination of the ways in which the fourth grade social studies standards represented a Eurocentric, paternalistic view of New York State history. For example, the existing unit on European explorers depicted Whites as heroes who discovered New York. Ayana shared, "We wanted to turn that on its head and see these people not as heroes, but as people who destroyed the cultures that were here. So we didn't want to take away the standards but to teach them in a different way." Both teachers asked themselves, "What are the really important parts that we've never gotten to because the year gets away from us?" They identified the unit on immigration as a rich one, but because they had previously taught it as their last unit of the school year, it was often too rushed and they did not go as deeply as they would like. They decided to teach the unit earlier in the year, and to modify it to focus less on immigration in the 1800s and more on recent immigration patterns, knowing that many of their students have families who came from the Dominican Republic and South America.

Migrating the Immigration Unit

When they were challenged by their school leaders to learn about a marginalized group to include in a unit, Ayana decided to learn more about migration from Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. While she grew up around many people from both places, she did not know much about when and why so many Puerto Rican and Dominican migrants came to New York City. As a student in the Lower East Side, she had learned about the stories of European immigrants coming through Ellis Island whose experiences were similar to those of her family members who emigrated from Russia; her own education did not include the migration of Brown and Black people to New York City. Ayana realized that so much of what she and Lauren had previously taught in the immigration unit focused on White immigration and reflected her family's experience. She shared, "It's awkward when you see you've been teaching from a curriculum you've been given and it reflects you [and not your students]." In response, Ayana and Lauren planned to widen the perspectives included in the unit, bringing in different people's stories from various times and places. Some of their students had already shared fear and concern about what might happen to their families in response to the national headlines about tightened limits on immigration. This revised unit gave students the opportunity to engage with content relevant to them and their families.

In order to teach immigration earlier in the year and carve out more time for it, Ayana and Lauren looked at the reading and writing historical non-fiction unit that had been focused on the American Revolution. They decided to change the topic from the American Revolution to immigration. They would continue to teach the reading and writing skills of researching and writing informational writing, but the unit would conclude with students writing about an aspect of immigration, with each student choosing from a list of sub-topics.

Ayana and Lauren launched the unit by showing recent photos of protestors with signs displaying phrases like "We are all immigrants" and "Immigrants make this country great." They invited the students to discuss the signs and share their questions. Students raised the question of who constitutes an immigrant. Some students referred back to a past social studies unit to argue that only Native Americans were not immigrants. Other students asserted that because they were born in the United States, they were not immigrants. One student, who was from the Ukraine, wrote on a sticky note, "Am I the only immigrant in this school?" Through this activity, Ayana and Lauren informally assessed their students' understanding and questions about immigration to inform the rest of the unit.

Next, the fourth graders began to research immigration, choosing from a range of stories about immigrants who came to the United States from around the world. Ayana and Lauren offered texts that included interviews, articles, and books. Some of the texts included audio versions so students could listen along as an optional scaffold. Ayana and Lauren noted that students' engagement was higher than they had seen before. For example, one student was quick to say that he wanted "to start reading about the Black boy," choosing the immigration story of a boy from Sierra Leone. This was a student who was Black, reading below grade level, and who was not always eager to get to work. Ayana shared, "If we had just stuck with Ellis Island, there would have been no opportunity for him to be excited and say: 'That's what I want to start with.'" The wider range of immigrants allowed virtually all students to see themselves visually represented in the immigrants' stories supported students in taking ownership of their learning. To guide students through their reading on immigration, the teachers provided six

Figure E: Guiding Questions for Immigration Stories

1. Why did they leave their country?
2. Why did they move to America?
3. What did they gain by moving to America?
4. What did they sacrifice by leaving their home country?
5. What did they have to do to gain entry into America?
6. What was their experience like when they arrived/settled?

questions (see Figure E). Later in the unit when the students wrote their essays on immigration, some students who needed additional scaffolds used the guiding questions to shape their writing.

Figure F: Sample learnings and wonderings about Blacks in the colonies:	
Learnings	Wonderings
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Settlers didn't call people black or white. They called them by how they were born as (Ex. English, Christian, etc.) - They started taking people from Africa to be their slaves - There was 200 years of slavery! - The Europeans demanded the slaves to move to a different land. - Slaves were in Jamestown to pick tobacco - They used African slaves to grow and produce sugar 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did African slaves in the colonies identify as "African Americans"? - How did the author of this book [<i>African-Americans in the Colonies</i>] choose the title? - I'm wondering why they used African slaves to grow and produce sugar? - Why do they need sugar so much? - Why did Europeans do that to the slaves? - If I'm Portuguese and Puerto Rican, what does that make me?

As students examined the history of immigration, Ayana and Lauren invited them to turn a critical eye to their classroom social studies texts. The fourth graders noticed a problem: their books about the colonies were all about European settlers. As a result, they started reading about Blacks in the colonies, and students recorded their learnings and wonderings (see Figure F).

As the unit transitioned from research to formal essay writing, students completed a final on-demand writing assessment in which they wrote a nonfiction essay about a topic of their choice. Five of the twenty-five students elected to write about immigration (see Figure G for excerpts from student essays). Lauren noted that in past years, "We've never had a student one time say, 'Can I write my on-demand essay on the American Revolution or the Boston Massacre?'"

Figure G: Excerpts from student essays

From Zephania's essay "Immigration": Why Did They Leave Their Country?

Some people leave their country because of pull factors. Pull factors are when somebody wants to leave their country because of better schools or a better home and many other reasons too. Like for some more money and a better job. Some people moved because they thought the streets wher paved with gold but they really whern't. And some people could have left because of push factors. Push factors are when someone leaves because they wher forced to leave. This could have been because of war or they just couldn't stay anymore.

From Lucas's essay "Immigration": DACA and Dreamers

You may be wondering what DACA and Dreamers is, well I am here to tell you DACA is a program for some people that were brought to the U.S. as children, but the U.S. government did not give their parents permission to come to the U.S. these children are now called Dreamers. Trump wants to shut down the program is no longer excepting people. New laws will be made.

From Juan's essay "Immigration": America not being fair to Mexico

Tens of thousands of people were apart of US when they didn't even know. That land was taken from them by americans. The people in Mexico didn't cross the boarder the boarder crossed them. Then they were called Mexican americans becaus they were Mexicans that became amicans by not even moveing anywere.

Looking Forward

As they were wrapping up the immigration unit, Ayana and Lauren had many ideas for how they plan to improve this unit next year. For example, they want to involve the families more. Ayana shared, “We wanted to include more interviews with people and get more student voice and their families and other people from the school involved, but that just didn’t happen this time.” Also, they would like to have their students do more critical analyses of the immigration books available in the school library and other classroom libraries. In addition, they would like their students to do more of the research and identify resources to study immigration.

Finally, they are considering how this unit might have represented multicultural education and how they can revise it to be more representative of anti-racist education. Ayana noted:

I feel like we planned a more multicultural unit where we planned for different voices and a broader range of stories because of the importance of representation. But I also think there’s a way we can be more culturally responsive addressing how our immigration stories are so different and how immigrants are viewed differently here depending on the color of their skin or the accent that they have.

Lauren added:

Those questions can be scary for us as teachers to let go so much to the students. So we took a baby step this year, and now we need to be more vulnerable to listening to what students have to say and to be more open with them, not silencing them. That means saying how it is, talking about the facts, and not being scared about saying the wrong thing.

With these considerations for further changes to their teaching practice and curriculum, Ayana and Lauren will continue to consider ways to engage students in analyzing multiple perspectives and seeking to uncover “hidden voices” in history.

As Ayana and Lauren have used the equity lens to revise their curriculum, they have seen how it has supported them demonstrating Effective and Highly Effective levels of practice described in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

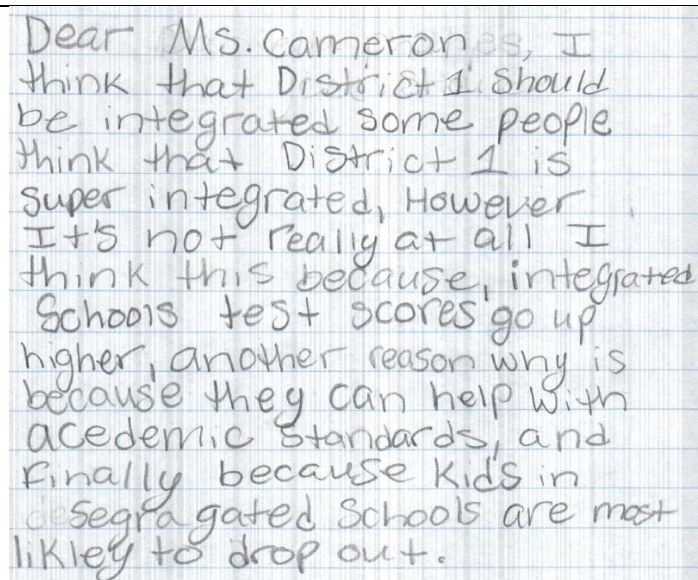
- **1b: Knowledge of Students:** This revised immigration unit led to Ayana and Lauren building a deeper knowledge of their students’ interests and cultural heritage as well as their skills and knowledge. Lauren shared, “We’ve gotten to know our students on a level that we wouldn’t have been able to if we hadn’t gotten into this work.”
- **3c: Engaging Students in Learning:** Throughout the unit, the students had access to many different types of instructional materials so everyone was able to engage in the topic of immigration with suitable scaffolding. Ayana and Lauren allowed their fourth graders to decide which texts they wanted to read, which promoted student agency and supported engagement. They also offered the guiding questions that students could use to guide their research. Some students used them and others identified their own questions they wanted to research (like: What are the dangers of immigration?). “Throughout the unit when students would ask us questions if they could do this or they could do that, our answers were never no. We said, ‘Yeah, go for that! Do research, great!’” This unit led to virtually all students being intellectually engaged in challenging content through well-designed learning tasks and activities that required complex thinking by students.

Abby and Ren's Fifth Grade Classroom

Abby and Ren are ICT co-teachers in a fifth grade class that they teach through a social justice lens. Their goal is to teach all of their students as if they are going to become activists, advocating for themselves and others as they stand up for what they believe in and effect change. Their pedagogy centers on teaching critical analysis skills and supporting arguments with evidence as their curriculum draws upon issues that matter to their students and their families (see Figure H).

Abby and Ren share that they are in different places in their journey as social justice educators. Abby, who is White, started exploring her role as a social justice educator in graduate school and has applied this focus at the schools where she has taught. When she came to The S.T.A.R. Academy three years ago, there were no conversations about race happening. Abby thought these kinds of conversations were sorely needed because the majority of the teachers were White, and she perceived that race was not something they felt comfortable talking about. Because she recognized that she would be contributing to this oppression by staying silent, Abby discussed her concerns with the school leaders at the end of her first year. Darlene and Jodi responded by initiating a school equity team the following school year that Abby was eager to join.

Figure H: Excerpt of student letter to Principal Darlene Cameron arguing for greater integration of schools in NYC District I



Dear Ms. Camerones, I think that District I should be integrated some people think that District I is super integrated, However I'ts not really at all I think this because, integrated schools test scores go up higher, another reason why is because they can help with acedemic standards, and finally because kids in segreagated schools are most likley to drop out.

Meanwhile, Ren sees herself more as a novice, eager learner in the equity journey and has learned much from co-teaching with Abby. She shared:

I'm still trying to figure out my identity. I was raised in an upper-class home, and my parents are an interracial couple—my mom is Chinese and my dad is White, but I was raised mostly as a White kid. I have a hard time talking to the students about their identities because I feel like I am between two worlds as a biracial person who grew up identifying partly as White and experiencing White privilege.

Even as Ren expresses her need for more ongoing exploration of her own identity before she can identify herself as a leader in this work, she has challenged herself to take risks in the curriculum. For instance, when Abby went on maternity leave this fall, Ren took lead in designing and teaching the social justice curriculum. Both of them describe their equity work as an ongoing process; Ren and Abby continue to make adaptations to their curriculum as they work to deepen its social justice lens.

At the beginning of the school year, Ren set up their classroom community (Abby was on maternity leave) by designing activities for students to learn about themselves and to introduce the idea of multiple identities. For example, Ren planned a lesson where each student created a handprint that matched their skin-shade and within their handprint they noted their various identities. Ren offered her

own handprint as an example; she shared that she: identifies as Hapa (bi- or multi-racial with partial Asian heritage), uses the pronouns she and her, and is a college graduate, teacher, mom, and wife. In their handprints, students selected and wrote about a range of things, including how they spend their time (like “cook!” and “hanging out with my family”), what they like (“loves books!”), and who they are in their families (like “sister” and “3 brothers”). Students also included identities they have around race, religion (“Muslim”), and gender (“female,” “she”). As the class shared their identities, the idea of “people of color” came up, and Ren asked the students who identified as students of color. While most of their students are Black and LatinX, only one student raised his hand. Many of the students did not know what that label meant, so Ren used that opportunity to explain the phrase and why people use it. Ren used the handprint activity to begin discussions about the multiple layers of identity that each person has.

Conversations about identity did not stop at the handprint activity. Ren and Abby circled back to multiple identities as they taught about things like voting rights (who was allowed to vote and when) and the census (which boxes are included and why). While such discussions were complex, Abby and Ren did not worry about having all the answers. Rather, they embraced the complexity of and ambiguity in these discussions as an opportunity to deepen their students’ questioning and thinking about important, real-world issues. Also, they let students take the lead in how they viewed their own identities and the extent to which they wanted to share about their identities.

Moving from Chocolate Milk to School Desegregation

In past years, Abby and Ren launched their research-based argument and advocacy reading and writing unit by asking students to debate whether there should be chocolate milk in their school cafeteria. This year, they saw an opportunity to go deeper by replacing the chocolate milk debate with the question: “Should New York City schools be desegregated?” Students started the unit by watching a video about how New York City schools are some of the most segregated in the nation. This debate led the fifth graders to research the issue of segregation in their district. They analyzed demographic statistics for various schools in District 1, including their own (see Appendix B on page 27). Some students argued that the statistics supported the fact that their district needed to be further integrated, and others argued that it supported that they were already integrated. Students also read articles from differing perspectives about the proposal to integrate NYC schools (see Figure I).

Figure I: Notes one fifth grader kept as he read articles on the pros and cons of school desegregation:

PRO/FOR

- Students get higher test score when there in a integrated school with different types of kid. -The Benefits text
- Students that go to a integrated school will most likely to live in a integrated setting like you'll live with Chinese African American and more. -The Benefits text

CONS/against

- White familys that don't like the busing will move there kids from public schools to privitye and suburban institutions -Busing and Desegregation text
- When the schools made the kids go to new schools the principals got fired or demoted -Where did all the black teachers go text

Student engagement was high because the students were exploring a topic that was connected to powerful statistics for people who live around them. Abby shared that in the previous unit about “the chocolate milk, there was nothing personal in it for them.” In contrast, examining the issue of segregation in their community district allowed students to participate in the current debate connected to their school community and those who live around them. The students were really passionate about this issue, so after a few weeks of researching and debating, the fifth graders each wrote and mailed a letter to their superintendent and principal (see Figures H and J for excerpts and see Figure K on page 20 for a student’s entire essay). Based on their research, some students argued that their district should be

more integrated, while others argued schools should remain the same (one reason was because they did not want to have to be bussed or leave their own school). Throughout the unit and in their curriculum, Abby and Ren supported students in analyzing both sides of the issues and refrained from sharing their own perspectives because they did not want to influence students' arguments.

Figure J: Excerpts from the fifth graders' mid-unit letters about whether their district should integrate their schools more:

- Dear Superintendent of District One, In my opinion I think that District one schools need to stop busing because busing is expensive, it causes "White Flight," and it is bad for black teachers. -Isabella
- Dear Ms. Cameron, District I schools should keep there schools the same as they are because students will get higher test scores, students will have better leader ship skills and self-confidence and students that go to an integrated school will most likely live in an integrated setting. -Jonathan
- Dear Mayor DeBlasio, Do you think busing should continue? Well I think District I should stop busing because children have to travel long distances, busing is too expensive, and busing can cause conflicts. -Natasiya

As the unit unfolded, the students took a survey to share some of the issues they wanted to research. Based on their responses, the topics were narrowed to research groups including: "Should killer whale shows be banned?"; "Should we build robots to take over human jobs?"; and "Should immigrants who came into the country illegally be deported and sent to their home countries?" As students researched, wrote essays, and prepared to debate their topics, Ren and Abby asked them to take multiple perspectives to defend the argument from either side.

Students' investment in their chosen topics translated to even deeper learning. For example, two students who were reading below grade level were so passionate about their topics they went home and did extra research so they could be prepared respectively for their debates on the death penalty and extreme sports. Their reading levels improved because they were reading so much. For another student who was on the autism spectrum and sometimes struggled to connect emotionally with others, the unit gave her an opportunity to share her passion and demonstrate performance skills in the debate. At the same time, it helped her be more flexible as she had to take a side she did not agree with; this supported her academic and social-emotional development. When the unit culminated with students holding debates, many of their families came to listen. In fact, the student debates were so engaging, the parents sometimes need to be reminded that they could not participate.

The Equity Journey Continues

As Abby and Ren plan for next school year, they aim to increase parent engagement and offer parents the space and time to discuss the topics the students are tackling. Also, they continue to balance being responsive with being focused and not trying to cover everything. There are so many current events that happen every day, and they want to incorporate what students are seeing and sharing into their curriculum. Abby explained, "Right now I'm trying to be responsive but I still feel like I'm overwhelmed with the content. So I'm working on being focused." They continue to approach their curriculum work as a multi-year endeavor, deepening their units each year and providing more opportunities for students to initiate connections between the curriculum and the world.

Figure K: One fifth grader's letter to her principal about District I's need to integrate schools:

Dear Ms. Cameron, I think that District I should be integrated some people think that District I is super integrated, However It's not really at all I think this because integrated schools test scores go up higher, another reasons why is because they can help with acedemic standards, and finally because kids in segragated schools are most likley to drop out.

One reason why I think Districed I schools should be integrated is because at integrated schools kids test scores go up higher. In the next 2016-2017 District I Diversity Snapshot it states that in P.S. 63 we have 64.5% Hispanic, 4% Asian, 18.5% Black, 10.5% White, and 2.5% multi-racial/Other, so we are pretty integrated and our test scores are high, 68.4% in ELA and 57.9% in math. I think this is significant because it shows why we need to integrate schools.

Another reason why we should integrate our schools is because they can help with acedimic standers. I think this because in the text "The Benifits of socioeconomically and racillay integrated schools and classrooms it states that "student learn alongside those whose perspective and all backgrounds are different from their own, because these enviroments promote creativite, motivation, deeper learning, critical thinking, and problem solving skills." As I'm saying this I'm relizing that integrated schools are really changing their student's lives.

My final reason why I think that Distrect I schools should be integrated is because kids in segragated schools are most likely to drop out. In the text the Benefits of socioeconomically and Racially Integrated Schools and Classrooms it states that "Drop out rates are significantly higher for students in intgrated schools.

In counclution, we should integrate schools because integrated schools test scores go up higher, another reason why is because they can help with academic standers, and finally because kids in segragated [schools] are most likely to drop out, but remember that we should integrate Distric I schools.

Thank you, Isabella

As Abby and Ren have used the equity lens to revise their curriculum, they have seen how it has supported them demonstrating Effective and Highly Effective levels of practice described in the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*.

- **1a: Knowledge of Content and Pedagogy:** In their unit planning, they displayed extensive knowledge of the important concepts in ELA and how these relate both to one another and to other disciplines like social studies (the history of school segregation and desegregation) and mathematics (analyzing District I's student demographic statistics). This also connected to one of Abby's goals to integrate writing into all the content areas this school year.
- **1b: Demonstrating Knowledge of Students:** Abby and Ren systemically acquired knowledge from various sources about individual students' knowledge and skills, interests, and cultural heritages, starting with the community building activities they do in the beginning of the year and continuing through conversations and surveys.
- **1c: Designing Coherent Instruction:** In their unit and lesson planning, the sequence of learning activities followed a coherent sequence, was aligned to instructional goals, and was designed to engage students in high-level cognitive activities (like debating both sides of a real world argument like desegregating NYC public schools). It was appropriately differentiated for individual learners as the students chose from a range of topics and had a choice of reading materials.
- **3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques:** They infused questions (e.g., "Should NYC schools be segregated?") that challenged students to think cognitively, advanced high-level thinking and discourse, and promoted metacognition. Also, students formulated many of the questions as they researched, initiated topics, challenged one another's thinking (e.g., when they debated one another at the end of the unit), and made unsolicited contributions. Another one of Abby's goals she set in her Initial Planning Conference was to use questioning and discussion as a means for students to access content related to the equity work. Rather than delivering information about topics related to equity herself, she set the goal that students would be discussing it, teaching one each other, and challenging each other's thinking.
- **3c: Engaging Students in Learning:** In this unit, virtually all students were intellectually engaged in challenging content through well-designed learning tasks and activities that required complex thinking by students. Ren and Abby challenged their students to explain their thinking and support their arguments with evidence from multiple texts.

Conclusion: A Work in Progress

While all teachers at The S.T.A.R. Academy emphasized that their equity efforts were a work in progress, they have already seen increased student engagement and more authentic, positive relationships with the families as they have made changes to their curriculum. This progress has been facilitated by Darlene and Jodi's efforts to empower teachers to experiment on a small scale, create a culture for learning among staff, and build coherence by connecting the equity work to existing initiatives and practices.

Empowering Teachers to Experiment on a Small Scale

Far from a one-size-fits-all, prescriptive model of change, the school leaders established a shared school-wide commitment to the equity work that allows for and embraces variation across teachers and classrooms. For example, the summer research assignment allowed each teacher to select a marginalized group to research and incorporate in their curriculum. Second grade teacher Suzanne shared how the push to do the research shifted her beliefs, and she appreciated that she was able to choose what to learn about. While Suzanne is making changes to include multiple perspectives in her curriculum, other teachers like Abby and Ren are inviting their students to take action by writing letters to the superintendent about their district's issues with segregation. While much of the staff's equity work has centered on using an anti-racist lens, teachers have the autonomy to choose to also critically examine norms around gender, family structures, language, and nationality in their curriculum, as in Emily and Erica's class where kindergartners surveyed the families represented in their classroom library books.

Darlene and Jodi asked the teachers to start small; this allowed every teacher to have an entry point and move forward in their collective equity journey, and helped ensure that teachers did not become overwhelmed at needing to change everything all at once. Teachers shared ways in which taking small steps in adjusting their curriculum to have more of an equity focus prepared them to make larger changes in their practice. For example, Suzanne spoke of her shifts this school year as "planting seeds" for her second graders about Black history in the United States by spreading ideas over the school year. And Lauren shared that they took baby steps in broadening their fourth grade immigration unit. Many of the teachers started with making changes to their social studies and ELA curriculum, while some teachers experimented with inter-disciplinary learning (like Emily and Erica's kindergartners tallying the books in their library that represented different types of families and Abby and Ren's fifth graders analyzing the statistics of District 1 in their argument unit).

Creating a Culture Supportive of Risk-taking and Learning

The culture of learning that Darlene and Jodi established has supported the teachers in taking risks to change their curriculum and start discussions with colleagues and students in which they often did not have the answers. Several White teachers who were not used to talking about race, shared that knowing they had the support of their school leaders helped them step out of their comfort zones. Jodi agreed that this work requires "living in ambiguity and accepting a lack of closure. This work is messy, and there are going to be bumps, and that's okay. People are going to be angry and emotional, and that's part of it. We're never going to be at the place where [we can say], 'We've got this, we're done,' because it's ongoing."

The teachers have established a similar culture of learning to their classrooms. They created the space for students to decide what they believe and choose what actions they will take. For example, Emily and Erica invited their kindergartners over the course of the school year to discuss and define what fairness means, welcoming different ideas. In their fifth grade argument unit, Abby and Ren invited their students to consider both sides of the arguments and let students choose what issues they would research in the latter part of the unit.

The school leaders have also used distributed leadership to support a culture for learning and to build and sustain the momentum of this work among staff. Teachers have played critical roles in serving on the equity team and in supporting their colleagues in taking on this challenging work. For instance, where Lauren had considered herself colorblind prior to teaching at the school, she credits seeing the passion and push for this work from colleagues

like Ayana with helping her realize that her students needed her to recognize and critically examine race in herself, the world, and the curriculum.

Connecting Equity Work to Existing Practices

Darlene and Jodi have supported this work by seamlessly connecting it to other priorities and structures, such as teacher development and evaluation and the Monday professional learning time. They are doing what Souto-Manning et al. (2018) advocate: “For [culturally relevant teaching] to make sense, we have to see culturally relevant teaching as a reframing or as an overlay—not an addition—to the existing curriculum” and instruction.

Darlene and Jodi used Initial Planning Conferences as an opportunity to discuss the teachers’ learning from their summer research and to invite the teachers to set professional goals. Many of the teachers set goals that linked the equity work to the Danielson *Framework for Teaching*. For example, Emily identified that she wanted her kindergarteners to do more of the heavy lifting in their thinking and discussions around equity, making connections to components 3b: Using Questioning and Discussion Techniques and 3c: Engaging Students in Learning. Throughout the process, school leaders and teachers have approached this equity work as a necessary journey that will support the teachers in demonstrating Effective and Highly Effective practice described in the *Framework for Teaching*.

Recognizing this equity work as a priority, Darlene and Jodi set aside time and financial resources for it. Jodi explained, “Because we valued this [work], we had to dedicate time for this. It was the focus of our PD, and it took time and funding to change systems that have always been in place.” It has often been challenging and complex as they look not only at classroom instruction, but also school-wide practices like their discipline policy. Jodi shared:

In discussing the difference between equity versus equality, we saw that our discipline handbook outlined consequences for behavior. But what are our beliefs about consequences? [We had to look at whether we] were okay with collaborative problem solving now being a consequence without having a punishment that’s outlined in the handbook and clearly spelled out. There continue to be tensions for us in this work.

The Next Leg of the Journey

After starting this year by making changes to a least one unit, teachers will revise additional units for the next school year. Their June professional development day was spent working in redesigning their math units with an equity lens. Also, at the end of this school year, Darlene and Jodi secured substitute teachers for four days so the upper grade and lower grade teachers could each spend two full days revising their scope and sequence for each subject through a culturally responsive lens and looking at the curriculum across grades to see how the concepts build from year to year.

In addition, Darlene and Jodi met with their staff in June to collaboratively create an updated mission statement that explicitly expresses their commitment to equity and creating students who are change agents. They plan in the beginning of the school year to share this updated mission statement with families to invite their input. Then, they will to include this mission statement in materials shared with families so they better know what is at the heart of the curriculum. Similarly, many of the teachers said that they want to be more intentional in planning for ways for their students’ families to be more involved in their children’s learning. The school leaders and teachers are thinking about how to engage parents more in this equity work. They are quick to share that they do not yet have the answer.

Figure L: Draft of Updated STAR Academy Mission Statement:

STAR Academy is an inclusive and diverse family community where all learners’ strengths are valued so that they are empowered to think critically about equity and access with the vision of becoming engaged change-makers and advocates for social justice.

As another next step Darlene and Jodi would like to have a more racially diverse staff reflective of their students, and are keeping that consideration in mind as positions become open. Towards that goal, they have shared their

job postings with groups focused on racial diversity like CREAD, NYC Men Teach, and BLEND. Moreover, in the coming school year they are looking to diversify the equity team; it currently includes the two administrators and six teachers, and two of the team members are People of Color). One idea they are considering is to pay per session for paraprofessionals to join the team.

At the same time, they have started sharing promising practices from their work with others. This spring Jodi led a six-week series for teachers in District 1 schools, sharing ways to bring anti-racist education and culturally responsive teaching into their classrooms and school community. As they move forward working to sustain and grow the equity work, the leaders and staff of The S.T.A.R. Academy will remain focused on their shared goal of engaging all students in instruction that enables them to play an active role in their learning, their school, and their community.

Where to begin?

The staff shared the following learnings for other teachers who want to bring an equity, anti-racist lens to their curriculum and instruction:

- Darlene and Jodi shared, "This work is important. We cannot address things we cannot name." They urge teachers to start with looking inward at how race and ethnicity personally impact them and the world around them.
- Suzanne advised that teachers start with themselves: "Learn as much as you can as an adult because you cannot plan new units for your students until you first broaden your own knowledge."
- Ayana and Lauren urged, "Just do it – if it's one lesson, one unit. Make the change and do something different because it will be better for the students." In their planning, they hold in mind the guiding question: "How is this [change] going to help my students grow and learn?"
- Abby and Ren suggested that teachers should look at their current curriculum and resources and find an easy place to make a small change about a topic that they feel passionately about. They advised that teachers should ask themselves, "How can I tweak a topic to make it fit?" They must have topics that the teacher is interested in for them to teach it well. Then, start with small steps like asking, "What are the books I read aloud to my students?" and "Who are they written by and for?" Abby and Ren advised educators to consider that the move to social justice instruction is a multi-year journey.

The staff offered the following ideas to other school leaders who want to bring an equity, anti-racist lens to their school environment and curriculum:

- Darlene and Jodi suggested, "It is helpful to create a team to start this work. Starting the work as a small team gets buy-in as well as can support the facilitation of bringing this to the entire school."
- Suzanne shared how her school leaders pushed her and the other teachers over the summer to learn about a marginalized group was necessary to push her out of her comfort zone. She also suggested when giving that push, "Have teachers be in charge of their own learning and choose what they want to learn more about." It is helpful to set expectations that require teachers to become learners again and be excited about their new learning.
- Ayana and Lauren advised that school teams have professional learning time built in to do the work. The fourth grade teachers found it valuable to have the ability to talk to their colleagues, across grades and within grades, while planning, and they referred to that time as being sacred and essential. Also, they advocated for school leaders to give teachers the latitude to say, "I want to cut that whole unit," as long as the decision is purposeful and in service of equity.

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Appendix A: Stages of Multicultural Curriculum Transformation

Paul Gorski, <http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/curriculum/steps.html>

Just as there are several conceptualizations for multicultural education (see Defining Multicultural Education), there are several perceptions as to what constitutes multicultural curriculum transformation. Approaches for multicultural curriculum transformation range from slight curricular changes to a fully-revised social awareness and action conceptualizations. James Banks (1993), Peggy McIntosh (2000) and others have formulated continuums for curricular reform that help move transformation efforts from the former toward the latter.

The following stages of curriculum transformation have been adapted from several existing models including those by Banks (1993) and McIntosh (2000).

Stage 1: Curriculum of the Mainstream

The curriculum of the mainstream is Eurocentric and male-centric. It ignores fully the experiences, voices, contributions, and perspectives of non-dominant individuals and groups in all subject areas. At this stage, all educational materials, including textbooks, films, and other teaching and learning tools, present information in a Eurocentric, male-centric way. This stage is harmful both for students who identify with dominant culture and those from non-dominant groups. It has negative consequences for the former because, according to Banks (1993), it:

Reinforces their false sense of superiority, gives them a misleading conception of their relationship with other racial and ethnic groups, and denies them the opportunity to benefit from the knowledge, perspectives, and frames of reference that can be gained from studying and experiencing other cultures and groups (p. 195).

The curriculum of the mainstream has negative consequences for students from non-dominant groups, as well, failing to validate their identities, experiences, and perspectives. According to Banks (1993), it further alienates students who already struggle to survive in a school culture that differs so greatly from their home cultures.

Stage 2: Heroes and Holidays

Teachers at this stage "celebrate" difference by integrating information or resources about famous people and the cultural artifacts of various groups into the mainstream curriculum. Bulletin boards might contain pictures of Martin Luther King, Jr., or Rosa Parks, and teachers might plan special celebrations for Black History Month or Women's History Month. Student learning about "other cultures" focuses on costumes, foods, music, and other tangible cultural items.

The strengths of this stage are that the teacher is attempting to diversify the curriculum by providing materials and knowledge outside the dominant culture and that the Heroes and Holidays approach is fairly easy to implement. Still, the weaknesses heavily outweigh the strengths:

- By focusing celebratory attention on non-dominant groups outside the context of the rest of the curriculum, the teacher is further defining these groups as "the other."
- Curricula at this stage fail to address the real experiences of non-dominant groups, instead focusing on the accomplishments of a few heroic characters. Students may learn to consider the struggles of non-dominant groups as "extra" information instead of important knowledge in their overall understandings of the world.

- The special celebrations at this stage often are used to justify the lack of effort at more authentic transformative measures.
- The Heroes and Holidays approach trivializes the overall experiences, contributions, struggles, and voices of non-dominant groups, consistent with a Eurocentric, male-centric curriculum.

Stage 3: Integration

At the Integration stage, teachers transcend heroes and holidays, adding substantial materials and knowledge about non-dominant groups to the curriculum. The teacher might add to her or his collection of books those by authors of color or by women. She or he might add a unit which covers, for example, the role of women in World War I. A music teacher might add slave hymns or songs from Africa to her or his repertoire. At the school level, a course on African American History might be added to course offerings.

The strengths of the integration stage are that it transcends special celebrations to deal with real issues and concepts and that it more closely ties diverse material into the rest of the curriculum. But many weaknesses remain:

- New materials and units become secondary resources and knowledge as textbooks and the meat of the curriculum remain based on a Eurocentric, male-centric orientation (Banks, 1993).
- New information is still delivered from a Eurocentric, male-centric perspective. For example, the story of Manifest Destiny is still told only from a European point of view.

Stage 4: Structural Reform

New materials, perspectives, and voices are woven seamlessly with current frameworks of knowledge to provide new levels of understanding from a more complete and accurate curriculum. The teacher dedicates her- or himself to continuously expanding her or his knowledge base through the exploration of various sources from various perspectives, and sharing that knowledge with her or his students. Students learn to view events, concepts, and facts through various lenses. "American History" includes African American History, Women's History, Asian American History, Latino American History, and all other previously differentiated fields of knowledge.

Stage 5: Multicultural, Social Action, and Awareness

In addition to the changes made in the Structural Reform stage, important social issues, including racism, sexism, and economic injustice, are addressed explicitly as part of the curriculum. The voices, ideas, and perspectives of the students regarding these and all other topics are brought to the fore in the learning experience -- the students themselves becoming yet another multicultural classroom resource. The textbook is viewed as a single perspective among many, and the relevance of its limitations, along with those of other educational media, are explored and discussed.

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Appendix B: 2016-2017 District 1 Diversity Snapshot

The following tables give readers a snapshot of diversity in District 1 and in four select elementary schools from District 1. The test score percentages come from 4th graders who took the New York State Test in 2016-2017. Statistics were compiled from “NYC Data” at <http://schools.nyc.gov/Accountability/data/default.htm>

District 1	
Total Enrollment:	11,772
Ethnicity	
Hispanic:	41.2%
Asian:	22%
Black:	16.1%
White:	17.5%
Multi-Racial/Other:	3.1%
Other Stats	
English Language Learners:	9.1%
Living in Poverty:	69.4%
% at level 3 or 4 in ELA	50.9%
% at level 3 or 4 in Math	49.8%

PS 363 The Neighborhood School	
Total Enrollment:	304
Ethnicity	
Hispanic:	34.5%
Asian:	4.9%
Black:	10.9%
White:	46.7%
Multi-Racial/Other:	3%
Other Stats	
English Language Learners:	3.3%
Living in Poverty:	39.9%
% at level 3 or 4 in ELA	53.3%
% at level 3 or 4 in Math	29.4%

PS 63 The S.T.A.R. Academy	
Total Enrollment:	200
Ethnicity	
Hispanic:	64.5%
Asian:	4%
Black:	18.5%
White:	10.5%
Multi-Racial/Other:	2.5%
Other Stats	
English Language Learners:	3%
Living in Poverty:	83.5%
% at level 3 or 4 in ELA	68.4%
% at level 3 or 4 in Math	57.9%

PS 15 Roberto Clemente	
Total Enrollment:	178
Ethnicity	
Hispanic:	59%
Asian:	7.9%
Black:	28.7%
White:	2.2%
Multi-Racial/Other:	2.2%
Other Stats	
English Language Learners:	6.7%
Living in Poverty:	100%
% at level 3 or 4 in ELA	43.5%
% at level 3 or 4 in Math	39.1%

East Village Community School	
Total Enrollment:	315
Ethnicity	
Hispanic:	19.4%
Asian:	10.2%
Black:	5.4%
White:	58.4%
Multi-Racial/Other:	6.7%
Other Stats	
English Language Learners:	1.3%
Living in Poverty:	21.9%
% at level 3 or 4 in ELA	62.9%
% at level 3 or 4 in Math	66.7%