

Center for Innovation in Education - Declaration of Intent

Who we are and why we do the work we do.

Many of the members of the C!E team have had the privilege of working inside education systems. As a mostly white team working in education systems cast in the mold of white supremacy, we acknowledge the dual definitions of the word “privilege” - as both an honor bestowed and as a set of unearned advantages and powers. We believe both definitions apply to the role that many of us have played in education systems. We were honored to do the work, but also know that our access to power relative to our Black and Latinx colleagues often represented an unwarranted privilege.

Our Declaration lays out our beliefs about the system. We hope that by naming the flaws of the system and our complicity in sustaining it, we can be clear about our desire to be allies with those who see some of the same problems and want to work together to dismantle them. We hope that our years in the system, and our efforts to champion equity in the ways available, will be of use in this shared work. In service of being strong allies and co-conspirators, we humbly commit ourselves to be continually equity-seeking.

We define “equity-seeking” as the orientation of constantly striving to be antiracist. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi describes this orientation in this way: “Like fighting an addiction, being an antiracist requires persistent self-awareness, constant self-criticism, and regular self-examination”. Or in the words of Sala Udin, who nearly lost his life to a Mississippi State Trooper in 1961, “I want to be a Freedom Rider for the rest of my life.”

The below is a list of definitions put forward by Dr. Kendi that shape our analysis of the current educational system.

Racism: a marriage of racist policies and racist ideas that produces and normalizes racial inequities

Racial inequity: when two or more racial groups are not standing on approximately equal footing

Racist policy: any measure that produces or sustains racial inequity between racial groups

Antiracist policy: any measure that produces or sustains racial equity between racial groups. There is no such thing as a race-neutral policy. All policies either produce or sustain racial inequity or equity.

Racial discrimination: the immediate and visible manifestation of an underlying racial policy, when someone is either carrying out a policy or taking advantage of a lack of protective policy. Enacting policy in this way is not inherently racist. If the discrimination is creating equity, then it is antiracist.

Racist idea: any idea that suggests that one racial group is inferior or superior to another racial group in any way.

Antiracist idea: any idea that suggests that racial groups are equals in all their apparent differences - that there is nothing right or wrong with any racial group and that racist policies are the cause of racial inequities

In addition to Dr. Kendi's work, we are compelled by John A. Powell's work on targeted universalism: a theoretical framework that leaders can use to create antiracist policy. John Powell describes it as an approach for creating policy "so that people, or groups, can achieve a universal policy goal, such as all people being adequately fed, producing housing for all those who need shelter, or having affordable health care for all. Targeted universalism is based on exploring the gaps that exist between individuals, groups, and places that can benefit from a policy or program and the aspiration-establishing goal. Targeted universalism policy formulations do more than close or bridge such gaps, but ultimately clarify and reveal the barriers or impediments to achieving the universal goal for different groups of people. The focus on gaps, while important, should be measured by reference to a universal goal, not just between groups."

The concept of targeted universalism helps us understand how the lack of common and universal aims for our society have undermined equity-seeking efforts in education. Without universal goals based in equity to knit our society together, systemic reform of sectors like education, health care, housing, and criminal justice seem beyond our capability. At C!E, we believe that all children are capable and curious people with multi-dimensional identities who belong to local and global communities, who learn in different ways, and who need to be prepared for a wide range of societal, civic and professional possibilities. We believe that this broad but aspirational vision captures deep veins of shared interests between communities, but allows for important local variation to be explored by unique communities. This definition also invites sincere reflection on how systems of white supremacy prevent non-white children from attaining these aims.

Octavia Butler writes that "[s]imple peck-order bullying is only the beginning of the kind of hierarchical behavior that can lead to racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, classism, and all the other 'isms' that cause so much suffering in the world." We believe that racism normalizes a hierarchy of human value and intersects with sexism, classism, ableism and other forms of marginalization to hold people back from our vision for children and society. We may often start with racism as the key barrier, but our proficiency with targeted universalism will help us seek greater equity across the many barriers our society has erected to concentrate and withhold opportunity.

How did we get here?

Our shared history of racism:

- From its founding, our nation established a social order based on race that centered on white, English-speaking males as the norm. This social order benefited white males everywhere, regardless of the demographics, then or now, of their individual states.
- White, English-speaking people have traditionally occupied the top of this order. Depending on the local context of specific communities, non-white, non-English speaking people have been sorted and ranked in various ways, but always below the dominant group. This includes indigenous groups and immigrants from many countries.
- This social order has shaped our nation's development from its earliest days by concentrating wealth, property and privilege in the hands of the white majority.

Our society's barriers to equity:

- Over time, and in different local contexts, who has been included in and excluded from privilege varies. But what is unchanged and unarguable is that legal, economic, civic, social and

educational systems across our nation were designed and shaped by those with privilege and power to uphold this asymmetrical concentration of resources and influence.

- Each of these systems evolved a resilient and complex network of policies, beliefs, behaviors and practices that continue to create and maintain inequity.

Our educational system's role in perpetuating inequity:

- Those with privilege designed the educational system based on principles of social Darwinism, the driving construct of the time, to sort out a small number of elites and consign the remainder to an industrial system of learning, and then life.
- A complex set of policies, beliefs, behaviors and practices maintain the system of social asymmetry by limiting the access that some students have to deeply enriching learning experiences that are common to others, both in and out of school.
- Our actions have resulted in too many communities isolated from schools and educators overlooking the community assets that have potential to dramatically enhance learning.
- The political costs of change mean that we regularly trade stability for perpetuating a system that preserves historical patterns of inequity based on race, class and gender.

Our leadership barriers to addressing inequity:

- The systems that maintain a concentration of privilege are complex, and we often engage one aspect of these systems without engaging adequately with other parts that are resilient to change. For example, we all likely have the experience of addressing policy without attending to instructional practices, or focusing on instruction without accounting for the habitual behaviors that run counter to changes in practice.
- Even when we have played the "perfect game of chess" and won, we are often dismayed to realize that the system we just partially re-formed is nested within yet another set of policies, beliefs, behaviors and practices that are resilient to our limited wins.
- As leaders, we often make decisions in ways that isolate the system from the communities, and fail to listen to their needs or trust what they say. This insularity leads to an ever-growing sense of alienation between schools and the communities they purport to serve.
- And when we pass on from the seat of leadership, the resilient system tends to rebound - whether at the local, state or federal level.

Our identities' impact on systemic change:

- As leaders, we recognize that the intersectionality of any individual's many identities contributes to the richness and complexity of a person's experience.
- We also acknowledge that poverty, especially generational poverty, is sometimes entangled with race and identity in different ways in different parts of the country.
- This intersection of identity and class brings a different set of contexts and must be addressed differently in rural and urban settings.
- But we acknowledge that race remains the most salient identity in predicting a range of health, social and economic outcomes, the core disparity that crosses every dimension of modern life.

What have we tried?

- We rallied behind "A Nation at Risk" and "No Child Left Behind" to augment the legacy design of the educational system with renewed equity considerations.
- We made great strides in increasing our ability to identify and make visible inequities in certain types of learning outcomes.

- We responded to the newly measurable, but always felt, inequity with new standards, assessments and teacher evaluation systems that were meant to fuel a system of continuous improvement that would yield more equitable outcomes.
- More recent efforts around assuring quality instructional materials and practices have more sharply focused on the learning experience, but these efforts tend to be independent of broader systemic changes required to remake legacy designs.

We acknowledge that the systems we inhabit and lead must be transformed to break the hold of a legacy design that protects racial inequity. We gladly take up our responsibility to be curious, to learn, and to teach so that we can challenge each other and get better together.

To fulfill this charge, we commit to a shared agenda based on:

Identity...

- Building knowledge about our legacy systems and how they preserve inequality
- Exploring our own intersectional identities and the way they impact our beliefs and actions
- Redesigning curricula and learning experiences that recognize, respect and honor the contributions of black and brown individuals, organizations and movements.

Leadership...

- Intentionally seeking and repairing relationships across historical lines of difference
- Leading in ways that build “power-with” communities versus “power over” communities

System...

- Building open systems: systems that co-create, learn from the field and distribute power
- Seeking equity through a commitment to constant reflection and renewed action
- Building systems that develop resilience to any movement away from equity.
- Commit to correcting the gross inequalities in resource allocations.

Nation...

- Driving a national dialogue that a system of social stratification no longer serves our collective interest
- Elevating proof points that more equitable systems generate greater prosperity for all

When we commit to these ideas, we become a community that learns and leads to actively seek equity, a world where each child receives what he or she needs to develop the identity, agency, and competency that supports successful pursuit of the path of their choosing.

Working towards equity involves:

- Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor
- Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children
- Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that every human possesses.
- Repairing broken relationships and establishing trust and community across lines of difference.
- Keeping our eye on the universal aims that hold us in community while targeting specific barriers that keep groups from attaining those aims.
- Staying aware and vigilant about emerging threats to equity and opportunities to seek out greater equity.

(adapted from [National Equity Project](#))

The Center for Innovation in Education advances the development of systems that seek greater equity in how children develop the identity, community, agency, and competency that will pave the way for greater equity in our society.

We act on this aspiration by forming learning communities of leaders who are committed to striving for the kind of extraordinary leadership that builds, sustains and repairs relationships across traditional lines of difference. We believe that this kind of inclusive leadership builds power that can reshape systems so that they are, by design, always seeking greater equity.

This declaration articulates our beliefs about how our leadership and our systems must transform in order to shape a more perfect future for our nation. We believe in the power of shared learning to advance shared purpose and we hope that a public statement of intent will form a foundation for building common understanding across the many partners who must collaborate in equity-seeking work.

We recognize that each of us is an individual and a leader of a community, and that each of us and our respective communities is at a different place on this journey of learning and action. It is our shared aim to support each other with this challenging work, wherever we may begin.

To seek greater equity, we believe the community must share an understanding of the field of American education, honestly reflect on what has been tried and make sense of why efforts to date have failed to reach the lofty aims they sought to attain. From this shared understanding, the community can organize collective work and enact the commitment to learn, act and grow together and thereby affirm our collective support of every learner.