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# Equity Dispatch

Theme: Educational Equity

January 2012



**IMPACT:** *Educate, Engage, Empower--For Equity.*

*"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." - Nelson Mandela*

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## Educate

All students can and do achieve when given the right conditions. Many schools, however, struggle to address the academic and social needs of students who have been historically underserved in the education system for any of a number of social factors including race, gender, socio-economic class, ability, religious affiliation, gender identity, and/or linguistic diversity. Promoting educational equity involves creating and sustaining educational systems that will allow *all* students to benefit from quality instruction.

### What is educational equity?

Educational Equity occurs when a school system has created policies, curricula, and a social culture that is representative of all students, such that all students have both encouragement and access to engage in high quality learning experiences. Educational equity ensures that each student, regardless of her or his race, gender, socio-economic class, ability, religious affiliation, gender identity, linguistic diversity, and/or any other characteristic, is supported to achieve academically and can access educational resources.

### Why is educational equity important?

Equitable educational systems support student excellence in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, gender, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate and inform their learning and development (Gay, 2000). When students are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources they are empowered to use their creativity in dynamic and tangible ways (Klinger et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009). An equitable learning environment is designed to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by

## Great Lakes Equity Center Equity Spotlight:



As Director of the *Great Lakes Equity Center*, Dr. Donna Hart-Tervalon brings over 35 years of experience in the field of education and has proven herself to be a valuable asset in the successful launch of the new Center. Prior to joining the *Great Lakes Equity Center*, Donna was a consultant on the special education team with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. She also served as a former Assistant Director of Special Education for the state of Wisconsin. Her combined experience in the field includes cross categorical teaching, early childhood and special education consulting, grant writing, professional development, and implementing and evaluating

using race, linguistic, and gender referents to actively engage them in the learning process. The right to an education that expands and elaborates the cultural capital that a student brings to school is a fundamental right of each individual student.

Unfortunately, the current state of educational systems does not always foster this kind of equitable education. Racially and linguistically diverse students are regularly mis-identified as having special education needs. These student populations are at heightened risk for over identification in special education categories such as intellectual disability, specific learning disability, and emotional disturbance. Likewise, historically underserved students regularly go unidentified for academically gifted programs, routinely barring them from access to some of the most rigorous curriculum (Gregory et al., 2010). Further compounding the issue of disproportionality in certain educational programs, students of color, specifically Latinos and Black males, tend to receive more disciplinary referrals than White students and are punished more severely for the same offenses (Ferguson, 2005). In addition to disproportionality, there are significant gaps in academic outcomes across student groups.

There are several variables that lead to the disparities in student educational outcomes. Generally, these factors can be grouped into three primary arenas: people's dispositions and competencies, educators' everyday practices, and district and school policies.

Educational scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) suggest that different teacher and student demographics often lead to misinterpretations of student behavior and performance because many teachers lack authentic experiences with the values, norms, and belief/knowledge systems of their students. Unexamined and often unconscious biases, resulting from the absence of cultural responsiveness, often lead to teacher misunderstandings about student behavior and aptitude and affects decisions regarding an equitable inclusion of diversity in curriculum and everyday classroom practices.

The lack of racial diversity in faculty and administration seen in many school systems also contributes the disparities in student outcomes. Although *sometimes* unintentional, policies that are created and enacted in schools institutionalize racially biased practices (Lynn & Adams, 2002). A diverse staff brings different perspectives and is more likely to recognize the impact of a particular policy on historically underserved student groups.

Staff diversity is also important for cultivating a learning community where all students feel a sense of belonging. Students from diverse backgrounds are less likely to feel connected to a school environment that does not represent the achievements in knowledge that have developed within their own cultural communities. All students should have access to support from educators who share similar understandings about their lived experiences. Students in systems with limited representation of racially diverse educators unequivocally have less access to the kind of support available their White peers.

Achieving educational equity may seem like a daunting endeavor. However it is important to keep in mind that accomplishing educational equity is not an event but a process. As such, the work of educational equity requires schools and districts to make thoughtful, incremental steps towards an outcome of equity. It is also important to connect with others who share a vision of equity. There are many resources available to assist administrators and teachers in equity-driven work. Building networks, engaging in professional learning, and seeking out resources are all effective and necessary strategies for creating and sustaining equitable learning communities.

**Working towards educational equity is**

projects for public and private schools and preschools. Dr. Hart-Tervalon has taught undergraduate and graduate level courses and provided professional development to educators on issues of equity, diversity, cultural awareness, and culturally responsive practices. Her most recent efforts have been focused on addressing systemic issues of racial disproportionality in education/special education, the achievement gap among diverse student populations, and eliminating race as a predicting factor of participation in special education.

## Upcoming Events:

### Illinois:

*April 13-14, National Harbor*

National office for School Counselor Advocacy  
[Destination Equity 2012](#)

### Indiana:

*February 24-25, Indianapolis*

[Midwest Conference on International Education 2012](#)

*April 26-28, Indianapolis*

[Indiana Association for the Education of Young Children 44th Annual Indiana Early Childhood Conference](#)

### Minnesota:

*May 5, Minneapolis*

[Educational Equity Leaders Conference](#)

### a journey that includes these essential steps:

1. Increasing self-awareness of one's own cultural and personal identities.
2. Exploring issues of power and privilege as they relate to race, culture, and difference.
3. Engaging in ongoing conversations with colleagues about the role culture has in teaching and learning.
4. Participating in professional learning to gain knowledge in areas such as, intercultural communication, culturally responsive teaching and leadership practices to support equity.
5. Pursuing social justice in all school practices by actively addressing institutional bias.

#### Home School Connection

Working toward educational equity not only entails reflecting on our own dispositions, classroom practices and school policies; it involves reaching beyond the school building to engage all families and community members in the educational process. While families differ in composition and culture, they all share a common desire to promote the well-being of their children. Educators for equity use this shared goal to build cooperative relationships grounded in mutual respect.



Engaging all families is not always easy. Some family members may be hesitant to engage with school officials because of their negative schooling experiences in their past, while others may need additional supports - such as translation services, transportation, or alternative meeting times in order to build successful partnership with teachers and school staff.

This month, schedule a time to engage your colleagues in discussion about your school's efforts to reach out to families. The research synthesis *School, Family, and Community Connections* from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory might help to focus your discussion on concrete strategies for promoting stronger home-school connections with all of the families in your school community. Based on a review of 64 research studies, this synthesis offers general information on family attitudes toward education, common barriers to families' engagement in schools, and research-based strategies for overcoming barriers.

For a list of this section's references, click [here](#).

## Engage

#### Get to know the Great Lakes Equity Center

With a combined 30 years of experience and work in the area of educational equity technical assistance, Principal Investigator, [Dr. Kathleen King Thorius](#), and Co-Principal Investigators, [Dr. Brendan Maxcy](#) and [Dr. Thu Suong Nguyen](#), undertook the development of a project to house one of the nation's 10 Equity Assistance Centers (EAC) in Indiana University, Purdue University Indianapolis' School of Education (IUPUI). October 1st of 2011 the *Great Lakes Equity Center at IUPUI opened as the Region V Equity Assistance Center*.

Under Title IV of the [Civil Rights Act of 1964](#), the U.S. Department

of Education awards funding to 10 [Equity Assistance Centers \(EACs\)](#) across the nation to help schools and communities ensure that equitable education opportunities are available and accessible for all children. As the region V EAC, the *Great Lakes Equity Center* provides technical assistance and professional learning opportunities, upon request, in the areas of race, gender, and national origin to public school districts and other responsible governmental agencies to promote equitable education opportunities. Although services are provided to state or local education agencies, requests for support from the Great Lakes Equity Center may be initiated by teachers, principals, parents, community leaders, and state and district administrators.

The [Great Lakes Equity Center](#) provides direct service at no cost to educational systems in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. However, many publications, tools and resources are universally available on the center's website. Forwarding a mission to provide technical assistance and professional development to schools and districts dedicated to providing equitable educational environments, *Great Lakes Equity Center* delivers on-demand, context-driven technical assistance and high quality professional development on specific issues of equity that a school or district may be facing. Preventing bullying and harassment through creating safe and inclusive schools, culturally responsive teaching and the common core standards, culturally responsive positive behavior supports and culturally responsive RtI are just a few of the topics the *Great Lakes Equity Center* can help school systems address. The *Great Lakes Equity Center* is an excellent resource for administrators, practitioners and community members who want to find tools, information, and a community of like-minded educators engaged in equity-driven work.



For more information, [visit the website!](#)

## Empower

### Something to Watch!

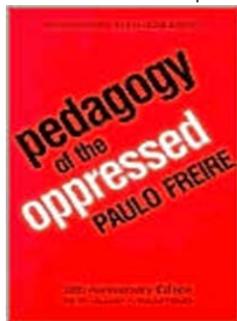


Pedro Noguera, executive director of the Metropolitan Center for Urban Education, discusses the term equity and the forces that sometimes prevent schools from providing children with equitable outcomes. "Schools are set up to be the equalizers of opportunity," he says.

### Something to Read!

In his seminal book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Friere discusses the fundamental necessity to liberate the oppressed through [dialogical](#) education. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was translated from Portuguese and first published in English in 1970

causing a commotion in the field of education and igniting the movement known as Critical Pedagogy. Strongly grounded in socio-economic class-and-power analysis, the late Paulo Friere continues to be a provocative voice in the field's discussions on pedagogy and the aims of education.



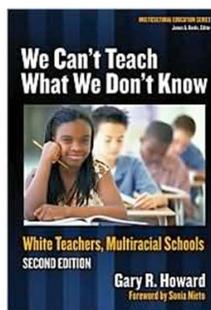
Recently, Arizona's ban on "Ethnic Studies" included the confiscation of this book and others (including Shakespeare's *Tempest*) that teach critical inquiry into systemic equity issues. Despite the fact that the curriculum of such programs in Arizona has established quantifiable improvements in the achievement of Latino/a students, political leaders of the state have decided that such curriculum serves as indoctrination into political

agendas.

This book is sure to facilitate very meaningful conversations and reflections on how individuals and institutions engage students in the learning process and how education can be used to either oppress or liberate.

For more information, visit [www.pedagogyoftheoppressed.com](http://www.pedagogyoftheoppressed.com).

In the expanded Second Edition, Gary Howard outlines what good teachers know, what they do, and how they embrace culturally responsive teaching. In this second edition, Howard brings his bestselling book completely up to date with today's school reform efforts and includes a new introduction and a new chapter that speak directly to current issues such as closing the achievement gap. With our nation's student population becoming ever more diverse, and teachers remaining largely White, this book facilitates and deepens the discussion of equity, race and social justice in education.



<http://www.ghequityinstitute.com/writings/writings.html>

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### Disclaimer

Great Lakes Equity Center is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. Reference in this newsletter to any specific publication, person, or idea, is for the information and convenience of the public, and does not (necessarily) reflect the views and opinions of Great Lakes Equity Center. The contents of this newsletter were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.

