

# Introduction

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**I**n this book, we address our ideas and strategies to all students. We define *all* students in a broad and inclusive way. To meet the needs of all students, educators must make it obvious that they include everyone and therefore that they value everyone’s differences. The way educators define *all* and *diversity* must make it obvious to all who come in contact with the school that everyone in the school values and respects each person’s unique differences.

Further, we believe that all people (students and staff) have a continuum of needs—physical, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual—that fluctuate and vary over time, depending on circumstances and situations. These needs are never stable but, rather, are constantly evolving and changing. As such, we often do not agree with the language of opposites usually associated with the terminology in education, such as typical/atypical, disability/nondisability, at risk/not at risk, gifted/not gifted, students of color/white students. For example, we believe that all individuals—children and adults—struggle at some point in their lives. We believe that all people have unique gifts and talents. We believe that all individuals are challenged in various ways that could disable them in some situations (e.g., managing money, social skills, intimate relationships, parenting). As such, we write this text to move beyond categories, not to homogenize individuals but to assert that “we are alike” while “we are each unique.”

Since the publication of the first edition of this book, we have conducted research in integrated, socially just schools and districts. We have served on the planning committees of two national conferences where teams of educators from integrated, socially just schools and districts have shared how they have transformed their schools and districts. Colleen has helped create a new executive PhD cohort program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison that has as its primary focus to prepare district leaders for equity and excellence. From these experiences and other research, we have developed a list of Highly Effective Practices in Integrated, Socially Just Schools (see Handout 0.2). These practices align with the Critical Equity Questions that we list in Chapter 2 as part of the change process.

To be sure, none of the schools we have studied, nor the schools we have featured at our conferences, are the perfect, integrated, socially just school or district. The literature and our experience suggest that leading for social justice is quite complex (see Hoffman, 2008; McKenzie et al., 2008) and leaders must make many difficult decisions in their quest for social justice. However, these schools and districts stand out because they, more than any other schools/district, have made significant strides toward increasing the achievement of traditionally marginalized students and did so in inclusive ways.

Thus, to initiate the change process, we suggest educators review and discuss the Highly Effective Practices in Integrated, Socially Just Schools along with the Critical Equity Questions we present in Chapter 2. In so doing, educators can be clear what the goal for the change effort is as they bump into challenges in the process.

**HANDOUT 0.2** Highly Effective Practices in Integrated, Socially Just Schools

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**Location of Education***District Level*

1. All students in the district attend their neighborhood school (this includes disabilities, English as a second language [ESL], at risk, gifted) or the school they would attend if they did not have a label. That is, no schools are set aside as “specialty” schools where students with particular labels such as English language learners (ELLs) or students with particular disabilities are bussed.
2. The district educates all the students in the district. No students are transported to programs or schools outside of the district.
3. The district does not accept students from other districts whom are being sent to the district because of inadequate services in the sending district.
4. The district or school does not have an alternative school, nor does it send students out of the school or district to an alternative school.

*School Level*

5. No rooms, classes, or courses are set aside for students with particular labels. That is, no rooms, classes, or courses are labeled for special education, gifted, at-risk, Title I, ESL, bilingual, or other labels.
6. All students are assigned to rooms, courses, and classes in ways to reach a goal of a heterogeneous mix of students. The demographics of any room, course, or class are proportional to the demographics of the entire school.
7. No classes or courses are set aside for “lower track” or “higher track” students.
8. Students who need the most structure and consistent learning environment are not asked to leave the classroom to attend a pullout program.

**Student Achievement—Curriculum and Instruction**

9. The school has data to show how the achievement gap has closed or is closing for low-income students, students with disabilities, students of color, and students for whom English is not their first language.
10. Staff do not blame the child, parents, the community, or federal or state support for the lack of educational progress of some students. Staff take full responsibility for achievement gaps between students and hold themselves accountable to raising the achievement of all students.
11. All students in the school are held to the highest possible achievement standard.

12. Effective, differentiated, culturally responsive teaching by the classroom teacher is viewed as the primary educational intervention. The staff do not create new interventions or programs to meet educational needs.
13. State standards, the curriculum, and classroom assessments are aligned.
14. Students are regularly evaluated, at least weekly, to determine their understanding of content, and these evaluations provide feedback to the classroom teacher to adjust the teaching accordingly.
15. Staff members have plentiful opportunities to increase their capacity to effectively teach a diverse range of students to the highest standards in inclusive ways. These opportunities include professional development and plentiful opportunities for staff collaboration.

#### **Educator Roles**

16. All staff are expected to teach all students.
17. All staff are considered reading and math experts.
18. Student services staff support all students with and without labels in flexible learning communities.
19. General education teachers support all students, with and without labels in flexible learning communities.
20. Teachers have opportunities to collaborate with, observe, coach, and network with colleagues as a form of developing teacher capacity to teach a diverse range of students to the highest possible achievement in inclusive ways.
21. Staff are recruited, hired, and participate in induction practices to ensure that only staff who are fully committed to effectively teaching a wide range of diverse learners in their classrooms and who are fully committed to supporting all students in heterogeneous settings are hired.

#### **Funding**

22. Funding is merged at the district and school level to the maximum extent possible to serve a range of students.
23. Regardless of the latest federal or state education policies, educators use these policies to leverage integrated, socially just schools.