

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR *GROWING INTO EQUITY:
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND PERSONALIZATION
IN HIGH-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS*

By Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon

In Growing Into Equity: Professional Learning and Personalization in High-Achieving Schools, Gleason and Gerzon provide rich examples of school-based practices that optimize professional learning and provide students with personalized learning opportunities. The detailed, insightful case studies illustrate what a visible commitment to equity looks like in high-performing schools.

Bob Wise, President
Alliance for Excellent Education
Former Governor, West Virginia

Gleason and Gerzon focus their lens on four “regular” schools that are paying attention to the whole child and getting results. In these school communities, professional learning for educators produces personalized learning for students. Growing Into Equity offers readers wonderful insights into the structures and strategies, time and talents it takes to make that happen.

Randi Weingarten, President
American Federation of Teachers

Equity is not an afterthought to high achievement. Gleason and Gerzon’s new book on outstanding equity-driven practice in four very different schools shows that if you want to raise the bar, you have to start by narrowing the gap. From Tennessee to Vermont, from Dallas to LA, this attractively written, morally uplifting and deeply practical book shows how extraordinary schools address and achieve social justice by making learning personal and engaging for every student, and by ensuring that professional learning is stimulating and practical for every teacher.

Andy Hargreaves, Thomas More Brennan Chair in Education
Boston College

Who says that schools can’t personalize learning, improve achievement and provide an equitable and high-quality education for all students? As monumental as these goals may seem, they are possible. By highlighting four schools that do these things well, Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon provide a valuable lesson about personalized and equitable schooling and, in the process, remind us what public education should be about.

Sonia Nieto, Professor Emerita, Language, Literacy, and Culture
University of Massachusetts, Amherst, School of Education

Growing Into Equity is a timely and important new book which provides compelling evidence of how teachers, principals, school district leaders and policy makers can

create and embrace equity in school districts, schools and classrooms to ensure that all students are learning and achieving.

Thomas Payzant, Retired Superintendent
Boston Public Schools
Retired Professor of Practice
Harvard Graduate School of Education

Excellence and equity in public school classrooms don't happen by accident. In this book Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon use detailed examples to show how sensitive, thoughtful and courageous leaders build school communities that favor every learner, including not only every child, but also every adult.

Ronald F. Ferguson, Faculty Director
Achievement Gap Initiative at Harvard University
Founder, The Tripod Project for School Improvement

Growing Into Equity is both instructive and inspiring. Gleason and Gerzon emphasize the importance of professional learning, collaboration, shared leadership and a strong sense of collective accountability that envisions every student achieving his/her potential through personalized instruction. Should be required reading for anyone interested in transforming schools.

Dennis Van Roekel, President
National Education Association

Growing Into Equity dispels the notion of the principal or teacher as hero. It takes a team of people to raise achievement. It takes clarity of mission and vision. We are never "there" but always getting better—asking better questions so we CAN get better.

Linda Nathan, Executive Director
Center for Arts in Education
Founding Headmaster, Boston Arts Academy

The authors delve into four schools—located in California, Tennessee, Texas and Vermont—revealing how personalized learning promotes equity. Their discoveries provide an encouraging roadmap for K–12 educators in urban, suburban or rural settings who wish to promote “favoritism” for each student. The core belief that “every child is a complex and compelling story as a person and as a learner” drives the need to personalize learning, and the how-to is well documented in this breakthrough work that provides hope the American dream may still be realized through public education.

Kathleen Sciarappa, Ed.D., Educational Consultant
Mentor Trainer and Coach for Principals and Aspiring Leaders
National Association of Elementary School Principals
New Hampshire Association of School Principals
Principal for 26 years

Growing Into Equity provides an essential understanding of how critically important it is for schools to both create and sustain conscious willfulness and intentional practices among all stakeholders. Growing Into Equity reminds us of the complexity of creating equitable learning opportunities in schools and at the same time provides diverse illustrations of personalized learning to move educators and students to that point.

Deborah Childs-Bowen, Ed.D, Chief Learning Officer
Alliance for Leadership in Education

The authors capture stories of caring, committed practitioners who challenge their students' thinking and excite their imagination.

Margot Stern Strom, Klarman Family Executive Director
Facing History and Ourselves

Many schools across this country are “doing” PLCs or data walls or walkthroughs, but adult learning activities have not translated into significant improvements in student learning. Growing Into Equity provides real examples from real schools where equity, personalization and leadership are enacted in every classroom in a variety of ways every day.

Jeanne M. Harmon, Executive Director
The Center for Strengthening the Teaching Profession

In a series of compelling and vivid case studies, authors Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon uncover a vision for education in which all students matter and each student succeeds. For anyone concerned with social justice in our nation's schools, this is a must-read book.

Margaret Heritage, Assistant Director
University of California, Los Angeles
National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards,
and Student Testing

The book is an amazing compilation of real stories of high level practice in schools focused on the belief that all students can achieve and the extraordinary work of educators to ensure that the school accomplishes that task. This is a book written for the heart and mind of every educator. It is long, long, long overdue. It is not preachy—it is action oriented! I truly hope those that lead innovation and reform at the federal, state and local level will read this book to consider how real transformation takes place. Perhaps this should become a mandatory read for those dealing with reform.

Victoria Duff, Senior Consultant
Learning Forward
Former Coordinator, Teacher Quality
New Jersey Department of Education

This book provides concrete evidence through in-depth case studies of successful schools from different walks of life that the needs of all learners, students and educators alike can be met with an unwavering focus on equity and professional learning.

Melissa Kagle, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of Educational Studies
Colgate University

“Every child is a complex and compelling story, and part of educators’ work is to uncover their gifts,” the authors write. With robust case studies, thoughtful analysis, and practical tools, the authors inspire and equip us to bring that statement to life. By examining professional learning that is tightly linked to equity and personalization, the authors offer their unique perspective on how to uncover teachers’ gifts to serve each of their students.

Nancy Love, Director of Program Development
Research for Better Teaching

We find in these pages sensitive approaches for creating a culture of “high achievement, appreciation of individuality, and encouragement of lifelong learning” for both teachers and students. The inspiring examples of these four schools demonstrate what is possible when teachers and administrators collaborate in order to personalize instruction for every child.

Diana Lam, Head of School
Conservatory Lab Charter School

Growing Into Equity provides four vivid pictures of schools that have successfully responded to the elusive excellence with equity challenge that faces our public schools and society today. The four school descriptions that lie at the heart of this book bring to life those common elements—democratic leadership, focused professional learning, continuous improvement for individuals and schools and a thoughtful and intentional approach to whole school quality—that are critical for successful personalized learning for all students and teachers. The pictures of the four exemplar schools and the synthesis of the critical work by the authors have the power to provide both inspiration and concrete guidance in supporting our work to achieve equity and excellence for our students and teachers very, very soon.

John J. Freeman, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools
Pittsfield, New Hampshire School District
Nellie Mae Education Foundation
District Level Systems Change Grant Recipient

The authors offer a rare view into the practices of the principal and teachers at Social Justice Humanitas that serves as an example to districts and schools seeking to increase school accountability as an outcome of districtwide reform: A continuous cycle of

instructional improvement and personal reflection undergirds deep levels of personalization for students and staff alike. The process is intentional, methodical and uncompromising. As principal Navarro notes, "There are no short cuts to equity."

Jane Patterson, Ed.D., Senior Director
Transform Schools, Los Angeles Educational Partnership

For years, we've celebrated the power of focused collaboration. The authors share wonderful examples of effective practice that are accessible, inspirational and most important, actionable in our own schools . . . Each of the chapters is great! Really well presented.

Dr. Peter Dillon, Superintendent of Schools
Berkshire Hills Regional School District

This book shows a global need for rethinking the professional growth needs for educators and the leadership in schools to breed success for our students in the 21st century.

Karen Brainard, National Board Certified Teacher
Hilliard City School District

To my mother, Albina Vidas Caus, who personalized my learning with all that she was, while scouting out others to do what she could not, and to my father, Germano Caus, who taught me about exactitude and equity.

SCG

To my husband, Len, with enduring gratitude for the countless ways in which you recognize, honor, and cultivate the unique gifts and talents of the people you love. Through your nurturing of my strengths, over time, you've created the conditions through which this project could take root and grow.

NG

Growing Into Equity

*Professional Learning and Personalization
in High-Achieving Schools*

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Nancy Gerzon

Foreword by Stephanie Hirsh
and Joellen Killion

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Additional materials and resources related to *Growing into Equity: Professional Learning and Personalization in High-Achieving Schools* can be found at www.corwin.com/growing-intoequity

Foreword

Schools in which social justice permeates both student and educator learning are schools where students are not only academically successful, but also are transformed into leaders who aspire to practice social justice in their daily lives. Schools such as these emerge from the passion, purpose, and professional learning of their staff members. Authors Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon share stories of four schools in which staff achieve equity and model social justice through personalizing student and educator learning. The lessons learned from these schools provide concrete actions other schools can and should study for guidance in their efforts to prepare every preK through grade 12 student for college and careers.

Stults Road Elementary School, Social Justice Humanitas Academy, Montgomery Center School, and Tusculum View Elementary School have succeed by providing environments firmly grounded in shared values of equity and social justice and in the practice of continuous professional learning. Firm commitment to ensuring that every student achieves success provides educators with the impetus to break out of routines and commit to expand their knowledge, skills, and practices. This commitment also brings educators to question and clarify their personal and professional values and assumptions, challenge those that are barriers to student success, cement common values and goals among members of the school community, and unleash all possibilities to achieve student success.

In the communities where these four schools exist, student academic success moved from improbable to reality. These achievements are a result of educators learning and working together within a culture that valued continuous professional learning as well as enacting research-based practices of effective professional learning. Other schools can achieve similar results when they study and apply the standards for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011). These standards define the conditions and actions essential to improving educator effectiveness and results for all students.

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Professional learning in these schools provides exemplars of how the standards for professional learning are enacted each day. Educators learned in communities that use a cycle of continuous learning that integrates use of student data, frequent professional learning aligned with goals, and continuous assessment of the success of learning (**Learning Community standard**). Each school has strong leaders, both administrators and teacher leaders, who commit not only to build the capacity of all staff to learn and lead, but who establish the structure for ongoing learning (**Leadership standard**). While these schools are not unusually wealthy in terms of funding, they are rich in terms of resources of dedicated staff, often with coaches or other teacher leadership, time for teacher collaboration, technology, and other professional resources to support effective learning and instruction (**Resource standard**). The school models use student, educator, and system data to identify the focus for individual, team, and schoolwide professional learning to evaluate the effectiveness of professional learning (**Data standard**). In each school educators experience multiple forms of professional learning that address their individual, team, and schoolwide learning needs as defined by student achievement (**Learning Design standard**). Educators apply research about change as they sustain support over multiple years and ensure that educators receive peer and supervisor feedback as a lever for refining the application of professional learning (**Implementation standard**). Finally, professional learning in these four schools aligns to the performance expectations for each educator and to the curriculum students are expected to achieve (**Outcomes standard**).

Every student deserves effective teaching every day. Gleason and Gerzon show us that this is not a pipe dream. They provide four models of data-driven, personalized instruction that not only embrace the idea of equity, but also achieve it with all students, not just some, achieving high levels of academic success. By sharing and analyzing the professional learning practices at Stults Road Elementary School, Social Justice Humanitas Academy, Montgomery Center School, and Tusculum View Elementary School, Gleason and Gerzon provide readers with not only the inspiration to achieve this outcome, but also the guidance to achieve it by highlighting the unique and common attributes of professional learning that contributed to both student and educator success.

Preface

It was not easy to find high-achieving schools with significant free-lunch eligible populations that also personalize learning across the board. When we asked educational leaders around the country to recommend schools, there were three typical responses:

I know a teacher who personalizes for every student. She's/He's incredible;

I know a private school that does that;

I don't know any, but let me know when you find them.

Those answers reveal the reason for this quest. There *had to be* public schools where personalizing efforts led to outperforming other schools. And we wanted to know how they balance challenge and supports for students, and just as important, see how educators were challenged and supported to sustain and deepen that work over time.

The sparkly Sophia Nolan, who attends King Middle School in Portland, Maine, understood what this book was about right away. We explained we were looking for schools where every single student mattered and did well, whatever their background. She thought for a minute and then wistfully said, "Oh, you mean schools where there's favoritism for *every* kid." That's it, Sophia.

Every student deserves to be a favorite. And nothing less than an all-out effort to build professional capacity makes that happen. This book explores how educators at four schools learn, facilitate learning, and systematically grow into equity while personalizing instruction. It explores the professional learning, leadership, and systems that enable this to happen.

WHO WILL FIND THE BOOK USEFUL?

This book seeks to serve preK–12 educators and those who work with them. It particularly speaks to those interested in how equity leads to personalizing student learning in order to support maximize student

potential, and can transform professional learning and leadership as part of that process. This book is written for the following:

- *School-based educators—teachers, teacher leaders, and administrators.* This book provides specific professional learning and leadership strategies with examples, strategies, and tools to deepen and extend capacity to help every student get what they need.
- *Professional development providers.* Professional learning practices, protocols, and routines encourage continuous improvement and reflection. They appear across the book and can be used both to help create a vision and to align and deepen current practices.
- *Teacher and administrator educators.* Professional learning and leadership are increasingly present in educator preparation courses. The cases here describe effective practices for individualized instruction and professional learning communities.
- *School board members and other policy makers.* This book's findings point to leadership and systems that enable personalization to happen systemically, so that successes are long lived and not reliant on individual school leaders' tenures. It can inform policies and practices for scaling up the work of equity and personalization.
- *District and state-level educators creating supports for school improvement.* These examples of school-based practices, along with the chapters on findings, provide specific scaffolds for district and state initiatives to provide resources and encourage focus. There are also accounts of particular ways districts provide both supports and freedoms that enable schools to be student centered.
- *Equity and change agents in school reform.* This book offers a vision and practical strategies for professional learning and leadership to advance equity through personalizing student learning. It shows how professional learning and personalization are effective, but emphasizes the specific ways an equity commitment can maximize the impact of these strategies.

FOCUS OF THE BOOK

This book sets out to answer two questions:

- What does professional learning look like in underserved school communities that are working systematically and successfully to meet the needs of each learner?
- What leadership and systems enable professional learning that advances equity and personalization?

We studied each school as a unit to understand how learning specifically works for both students and educators. We wanted to understand what conditions and practices made personalization work. The school cases allowed for a closer analysis of professional learning and leadership strategies that could be obscured in a broader district examination. They reveal specific implementation and professional learning issues that are more visible and immediately evident at the school level. Examination of these schools at work reveals what is possible, and it provides rich information for districts and states to consider when providing resources and guidelines to shape professional learning practice. Their work suggests avenues of research and advocacy for national reform.

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

This study offers four concise cases and complementary analyses that are the fruits of site visits using semistructured protocols and observations, documents review, and a cross-case analysis. Findings are related to professional learning practice. This research employed the case study method and cross-case analysis as laid out in the work of Miles and Huberman (1994). We relied extensively on interviews and observations in the four site visits, and extended written and phone conversations both before and afterwards. Site visits produced a wealth of student and professional learning experiences in action. In all, 23 educators were interviewed. This total includes interviews of seven school-based teams, as well as individual interviews and those with other combinations of educators. Nine teams were observed in action. There was also at least one classroom observation and a walk-through took place in each school, to counterbalance a focus on professional learning experience with exposure to student learning experiences.

From the beginning our intention for these cases was to capture, to the greatest extent possible, the perspectives and vignettes of educators, and sometimes students, revealing how learning and professional learning happens. An analysis follows each case, and examines values and practices in play, and systems that support those practices. We reviewed field notes and recordings independently and together, while one person took the lead on drafting cases and an iterative fact-checking and consensus-building process. One or more leaders at each school conducted a member-check, giving substantive feedback on both the case and its analysis, and sometimes offered additional artifacts or information to illustrate a finding. All those interviewed at the schools reviewed quotes where they were specifically named. We extensively used memoing in clarifying logistical process, summarizing findings, identifying gaps in information evidence,

and considering angles of analysis in developing both the cases and their analyses.

The cross-case analyses were first based on a conceptual framework that appeared in a *JSD* article, “Digging Deeper: Professional Learning Can go Beyond the Basics to Reach Underserved Students” (Gleason, 2010). This framework spoke to the research-based fundamentals of professional learning: relevant and rigorous content, appropriate process, time, and supportive systems. It asserted that schools making progress with achievement while personalizing would also have deep attention to equity, use a range of data including formative assessment, and measure impact regularly and keep at it. The early findings of the cross-case analysis did not dispute the presence of these factors, but revealed an unexpected depth of and approach to these practices, and required reframing so this could come to light. Memoing continued to be important in this phase and was complemented by developing matrices that juxtaposed findings across cases. Quotes and vignettes were drawn from cases and school-based data that may not have made it into the cases, to illustrate points and offer a range of possible practices to make findings more accessible.

ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The book features four high-performing, Title I schools and the practices and systems needed to personalize student and ongoing professional learning. It provides specific findings and guidance.

- Chapter 1 considers obstacles to equity and argues for a deep commitment to equity leading to personalized learning for students, continuous professional capacity building, leadership, and supporting systems development.
- Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 are four concise cases, showing school-based artifacts, processes, and approaches. As much as possible, the cases tell the story in educators’ voices. Each case is accompanied by analysis that examines the lived values, specific professional learning practices, leadership, and systems we discovered as we visited schools and studied documents. Additional school artifacts are available online at the book website.
- Chapters 6, 7, and 8 reveal patterns across the four cases that have implications for professional capital building. Chapter 6 explains equity and supporting values that ground and shape professional learning. Chapter 7 names the fundamental form and practices of

professional learning required to personalize learning for every student. And Chapter 8 examines leadership and systems that facilitate sustainability and ongoing professional development.

- Chapter 9 provides a practical call to action to help you make the case for change.

WORKING ASSUMPTIONS WITH THE TEXT

The authors began with assumptions that schools making equity gains would show evidence of three themes:

1. Explicit commitment to equity, visible in school practices, that guides and shapes professional learning.
2. Job-embedded professional learning to support personalized student learning, emphasizing collaboration among multiple groups, with one or more knowledgeable professionals working at or with the school to help shape the program.
3. Leadership and systems that ensure continuous and sustained professional learning.

ABOUT THE FEATURED SCHOOLS

Each featured school's students have demonstrated overall gains and gains among students of color, students with special needs, and English Language Learners. The four schools are:

1. Stults Road Elementary School (preK–6), Richardson, Texas (Chapter 2);
2. Social Justice Humanitas Academy (grades 9–12), San Fernando, California (Chapter 3);
3. Montgomery Center School (preK–8), Montgomery Center, Vermont (Chapter 4); and
4. Tusculum View Elementary School (preK–5), Greeneville, Tennessee (Chapter 5).

Between 45% and 80% of students at the featured schools are from low-income families. In the two urban schools, over 90% of the students are African American, Hispanic, Native American, or Asian/Pacific

Islander. The two rural schools have primarily Caucasian student populations. Spanning regions across the country, two are urban and two are rural. Montgomery Center has 155 students across 10 grades while Stults Road has 525 across 7. We sought out diverse populations, sizes, and locations to identify both common and unique ways that professional learning would reveal itself.

Each of these schools is growing into equity and increasingly high achievement. While their journey is not complete, they have developed practices that recognize each student as a person and as a learner, and that use knowledge to provide individualized student challenge and support. This book shares their stories and their focus on professional capacity building to meet equity and excellence.

*The whole world, in Massachusetts, in China, should
have good teachers. Even sharks.*

—Matteo, age 7

Acknowledgments

Educators at the featured schools are making real what many consider impossible. We admire the energy, care, and expertise they bring to their work. We are grateful for their openness about triumphs and challenges alike, so that readers can learn from them. Their commitment and their trust in us made this book possible.

Montgomery Center K–8 Elementary School, Montgomery Center,
Vermont

Social Justice Humanitas Academy, San Fernando, California

Stults Road Elementary School, Dallas, Texas

Tusculum View Elementary School, Greeneville, Tennessee

In particular, the leaders at the featured schools collaborated with us from start to finish. They helped ensure we had all the right meetings, interviews and data needed upfront, and later all the artifacts and details that bring the cases to life. Our special thanks to Darwin Spiller, Amber Leblond, Lin Wall, José Navarro, Samantha Seigeler, Jeff Austin, Beth O’Brien, Patricia Donaldson, and Stacy King. Thanks to district staff and partners who tracked down data and information that provided important context: Robinette Mitchell, Jennie Carey, and Jane Patterson. Three cheers for each of the teachers, administrators, and students interviewed, and to those we observed teaching and learning.

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Arnis Burvikovs at Corwin recognized the potential for this book when he read Sonia's 2010 article on social justice and professional learning in *JSD*. He listened and guided deftly all along the way. Thanks to Veronica Stapleton Hooper, Terri Lee Paulsen, and all at Corwin who ensured a successful publication process, and to Emma Brett for elegant organization of data files.

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It is our high and humble hope that this text honors the efforts of educators at the featured schools, and all who spend their days improving learning for every child they encounter. Their successes illustrate what all of us can and must accomplish.

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About the Authors



Sonia Caus Gleason (pictured right) has over 25 years of commitment to social justice and high performance within and beyond public education, particularly in communities with underserved populations. Her work includes consulting and coaching that raises student achievement; building community to sustain school and district innovation; developing effective partnerships that leverage reform; and designing and delivering research-based, professional learning experiences. Sonia has coached schools and districts around the country, and has supported cadres of coaches and facilitators in building capacity and navigating change processes.

As founding developer of award-winning *Success at the Core* (www.successatthecore.com), Sonia develops online, video-driven professional learning materials that cultivate classroom and collaborative leadership practice, and manages strategic dissemination partnerships. Her writing has appeared in *Educational Leadership*, *JSD*, and other publications. For the Regional Educational Laboratory for the Northeast and Islands, Sonia co-authored *How Eight State Education Agencies in the Northeast and Islands Region Identify and Support Low-Performing Schools and Districts*. She holds a master of education in administration, planning, and social policy from Harvard Graduate School of Education and a bachelor of arts in Italian studies and international relations from Connecticut College.

Nancy Gerzon (pictured left) has been supporting school districts to improve learning outcomes for two decades. As a senior research associate for Learning Innovations at WestEd, Nancy provides technical assistance, professional development, and administrative coaching to support school improvement and reform in New England and New York.

Since 2007 Nancy has been the lead consultant on two state-level implementations of classroom formative assessment, in Rhode Island and New York. In these research-to-practice projects she led professional development and dialogue about formative assessment for state policy makers, regional professional development providers, district and school leaders, academic coaches, and classroom teachers. In these projects, Nancy served as a bridge between researchers and practitioners as she worked to ensure that the voices of classroom teachers were present in policy dialogue, and, that the voices of researchers were a part of school-level dialogue about teacher practice.

In her work with low-performing schools and districts, Nancy works with superintendents, principals, coaches, and teacher leaders in order to build internal capacity and to develop strategies for sustained improvement. In recent years she has focused on supporting teacher leaders to align standards, instruction, and assessment, and to use evidence of learning to guide instruction. Through sustained multiyear work, Nancy has helped numerous schools improve achievement and exit Program Improvement status.

Nancy's work is guided by an enduring interest in how educational systems support individual student and adult learning. She is passionate about helping schools and districts create systemic supports for teacher learning, effective teaming practices, helpful team facilitation, and supportive learning structures. Nancy has a bachelor of arts in psychology from Stony Brook University and a master of arts in human resources from Rivier College.