



**BRIEF**

# ENSURING RACIAL EQUITY IN EDUCATION

## Landscape Scan and Next Steps

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# Ensuring Racial Equity in Education: Landscape Scan and Next Steps

## The National Comprehensive Center

The National Comprehensive Center (NC) is one of 20 technical assistance centers supported under the U.S. Department of Education’s Comprehensive Centers program from 2019 to 2024. The NC focuses on helping the 19 Regional Comprehensive Centers and state, regional, and local education agencies throughout the country to meet the daunting challenge of improving student performance with equitable resources.

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## Context and Purpose

In light of the disproportionate effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on historically marginalized communities, an unprecedented education funding cliff, and nationwide protests for racial justice, the CCNetwork’s commitment to supporting its clients with evidence-based practices and high-quality capacity-building is perhaps more important than ever.

[Access the CCNetwork Racial Equity in Education Landscape Scan](#)

The unfortunate events of the past six months have provided an opportunity for the CCNetwork to coordinate with other Centers and national organizations to more deeply understand racial inequity in education and work to erase its deleterious effects. The extraordinarily grave and urgent challenges faced by states, districts, and schools require the CCNetwork to quickly and thoroughly determine when existing resources and services can be leveraged, or when new action is needed to effectively support our clients. To better understand how best to leverage existing resources and determine the extent to which capacity-building supports are needed, the National Center’s Capacity Building Team conducted a landscape scan of social and racial justice work being conducted by federally funded technical assistance and research centers.<sup>1</sup> We focused on these Centers because they are the designated resource for equity promotion in education under the purview of the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE).

### Two key purposes drove this work:

- » provide the CCNetwork with actionable information regarding the racial equity resources, services, and initiatives that Centers, their partners, and states currently have in place, and
- » identify gaps, needs, and high-leverage problems that may inform the CCNetwork’s future capacity-building efforts.

This brief will explain our methods and findings, along with next steps for the CCNetwork to consider as it works toward its goal of ensuring equitable education for all children, regardless of their race.

## Guiding Questions

Several circumstances shaped our decision to conduct a landscape scan for resources related to racial inequity in education. In addition to the breadth and complexity of the topics, current events brought urgency to the need to understand the field’s resources and additional needs. Additionally, Regional Centers expressed a need for additional support on this topic, and at the National Center (NC), we wanted to understand the high-quality resources that other Centers may have already developed.

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, “Centers” refers to federally funded technical assistance and research centers.



Six questions guided the scan:

1. What products, services, or initiatives related to racial inequity in education do Centers currently have in place?
2. In what ways is this work related to equitable educational approaches to addressing the impact of COVID-19?
3. What are the high-level goals, purposes, and intended audiences of these products, services, or initiatives?
4. Are there any resources that address intersectionality to better serve students who have been multiply marginalized (e.g., students of color with disabilities)?
5. How might the CCNetwork add value to high-quality work identified in the scan (i.e., leverage tools to build capacity, support broader communication and dissemination, etc.)?
6. In what ways does the broad set of resources available from Centers fall short of the needs of states, districts, and schools? How might the CCNetwork address those gaps?

## What Can the CCNetwork Do to Address Racial Inequity In Education?

While we hope that the data collected as part of the scanning process will be useful to the CCNetwork and other Centers, we understand that the results are more valuable as an input to answer our final two research questions: *How can we add value to existing work?* and *Are there unmet needs that the CCNetwork can address?* To answer these questions, we analyzed and synthesized what we found across our data sources, with the express goal of understanding how our high-level findings and gaps might inform our next steps at the NC.

### Key Findings

1. **Many Centers publicly acknowledge racism in the education system.** Many Centers have released statements declaring the belief that Black lives matter, denouncing systemic racism, and discussing their organization’s approach to dismantling racist structures within the education system. These statements were often paired with resource guides that linked to webinars, publications, studies, articles, and other media (e.g., books, podcasts, websites) for districts and school teams to use in their local work.
2. **Centers do not appear to share language around or definitions of the key terms that drive this work (e.g. equity, racial justice, bias, etc.).** Though this shared language may indeed exist, it is not documented in any one place, which may mean that different Centers are in fact working from different assumptions or toward different outcomes.
3. **There are gaps in capacity-building products and services.** The existing capacity-building products and services seem quite focused on universal capacity-building, and less on targeted or



intensive capacity-building. Moreover, the existing products and services don't address all dimensions of capacity-building; there are particular shortfalls when it comes to policy and resource capacity-building focused on addressing racial inequities. Finally, while there are a fair number of recorded webinars and presentations, there is a lack of implementation guides or case studies that might be more instructive to states or districts that are looking to specifically shift or improve equity policies or practice.

- 4. There are not clear structures for collaboration or knowledge sharing.** Our scan uncovered few rich opportunities, such as roundtables, panels, or peer-to-peer conversations for staff at Centers to discuss and learn from each other about the complexities of race, equity, and education. Additionally, there does not appear to be a database of expertise across Centers related to racial justice and equity. This could potentially exacerbate duplication of services or prevent Centers from building upon one another's work.
- 5. Many of these resources lack overt input from students, families, and educators.** While people in these groups aren't the CCNetwork's primary "clients," equitable capacity-building should be informed by the needs, experiences, voices, and expertise of students, their families, and the teachers who work most closely with them.

### Racial Equity and Justice Resources from Federal Technical Assistance and Research Centers

#### [Supporting Black Students' Excellence](#) | REL Midwest

This short documentary connects strategies to improve educational outcomes for Black students, with a research review of promising practices educators can use to support Black students. The resource set also includes a viewing guide for the documentary.

#### [Inequities in Online Classrooms: How Do We Bridge the Distance \(Learning\)?](#) | Great Lakes Equity Center

This research-based brief explains the inequities marginalized students and families face related to online and distance learning. It also offers resources and supports to address inequities, including an exploration of what a culturally responsive online educational environment looks like, and thoughts for ensuring equity in online and distance learning.

#### [Addressing Persistent Disparities in Education Through IES Research](#) | IES

This blog post includes links to IES-funded studies that are exploring, developing, or evaluating programs, practices, and policies that education stakeholders can implement to help reduce bias and inequities in schools.

## Potential Next Steps for the CCNetwork

Given the extreme and complex challenges students, their families, and educators will likely continue to face over the course of the school year, there are a variety of next steps that the CCNetwork can pursue. That said, we recommend four short-term next steps that will allow the



Centers to continue to assess needs and establish priorities for ongoing work to address racial inequity in education.

**1. Catalog the equity-focused efforts across the CCNetwork.** This scan focused on the work happening across Centers. It is becoming increasingly clear that there are several equity-focused efforts across the CCNetwork. It is an urgent and worthwhile effort to examine, document, and coordinate those efforts, so that what we've conceived to date as a "throughline" of equity becomes a top line.

**2. Build relationships with staff at the Equity Assistance Centers (EACs),** working to understand their strategies, activities, outputs, and outcomes. Initial conversations (which could be facilitated by or in partnership with the National Center's CCNetwork's Liaisons or RC Directors), could allow us to develop relationships, catalog expertise, understand the landscape of equity organizations and efforts happening in regions, states, or districts, and support a partnership that could foster more thoughtful and focused needs-sensing. Most notably, a partnership with the EACs can support the CCNetwork as it begins to determine priorities in adding value to existing racial justice and equity efforts.

**3. Develop internal capacity to facilitate productive conversations about race, education, and equity.** Within the CCNetwork, there are varying levels of experience and expertise when it comes to discussing racial justice and, more specifically, conducting needs-sensing in this area. Before conducting additional needs-sensing, it may make sense to invest in building internal capacity among CCNetwork staff to facilitate conversations about equity and effectively understand needs, challenges, and opportunities among our primary and secondary clients. This internal capacity-building could come in the form of one or more CCNetwork calls/sessions led by the EACs or other Centers. Goals of these capacity-building sessions might focus on developing shared language, creating a supportive, collaborative atmosphere for complex conversations around race and equity, or understanding ways that the CCNetwork may access the expertise and consult with EACs related to universal and targeted capacity building. As a final note, it would be vital for any internal capacity building to be aligned with the principles of adult learning.

### Equity Assistance Centers

Funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, the country's five Equity Assistance Centers (EACs) promote equal educational opportunities in the areas of race, gender, national origin and religion. EACs provide TA designed to foster a range of improved outcomes, including reducing bullying, including harassment and hate crimes; improving school climate; addressing the needs of diverse learners; ensuring that schools employ a diverse workforce, and reducing drop-out rates among vulnerable populations.

SEAs, LEAs, and school boards can request services from EACs. Learn more from the [U.S. Department of Education Office of Elementary and Secondary Education](#).



**4. Conduct additional needs-sensing.** It's likely that the CCNetwork's primary and secondary "clients" are inundated and overwhelmed by challenges and opportunities when it comes to addressing systemic educational inequity. A key first step is supporting our clients as they reflect on the current crises, come to understand their needs, and begin to think about how to respond. We know needs-sensing is always important; our unique roles within the CCNetwork position us to support a cycle of reflection and needs assessment. Ongoing needs assessment will help our clients understand evolving challenges and opportunities and assess the most urgent needs that are within our collective mission.

## A Glance Ahead

In addition to next steps, we should also consider longer-term priorities that could advance the CCNetwork's goals. These could include:

- » Continuously cataloging expertise within the CCNetwork and other Centers
- » Facilitating interactive conversations and peer-to-peer knowledge-sharing
- » Elevating and sharing evidence-based practices related to advancing equity
- » Defining and pursuing equitable capacity-building
- » Building awareness and human/organizational capacity around the exponential impact of COVID-19 on students of color, students with disabilities, and students at the intersection of these identities
- » Building policy and resource capacity-building related to increasing and ensuring equity for all students

## Landscape Scan Methods and Limitations

We collected data from Center websites, newsletters, and Twitter pages where available. Our goals were to learn what resources and initiatives Centers were providing, and also *how* they were communicating about and disseminating resources (e.g., websites, newsletters, and Twitter). We originally conducted the scan between July 18 and August 18, 2020. However, related current events (i.e., the August 21 killing of Trayford Pellerin in Lafayette, Louisiana, the August 23 shooting of Jacob Blake in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and subsequent protests) signaled the need for a re-scan to determine whether Centers had added statements or additional resources in response to the racial unrest. This extended the scan through August 28, 2020.

We began by checking Center websites for statements in response to the recent racial unrest. Next, we appraised any and all news stories, features, and/or events shared on the websites to determine if Centers sought to address potential constituent concerns about racial inequity in the nation broadly, and in education more specifically. For the Centers that do not currently have websites,<sup>2</sup> we collected data from the RC project summaries and the CCNetwork Liaison notes from their July 2020 calls with RCs. We then searched Center publications and resources to determine whether

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<sup>2</sup> Regional Centers 2, 4, 5, 6, 8, 10, 13, 14, and 15.



they'd created or shared evidence-based supports to address concerns about racial inequity and injustice in education. Finally, as a way of capturing any resources Centers may have shared on social media instead of their websites, we examined Center Twitter pages for relevant tweets shared between May 25th (the date of the death of George Floyd and the beginning of most protests and national uprisings) and August 28th.

Often, we came across resources, events, etc. related to racial equity on Center websites that did not appear to have been created or shared in response to current national unrest. To provide information on the full scope of Center resources, we documented these data as well, differentiating in our notes between these more generalized racial equity resources and those that had been added in response to recent events.

We also scanned data sources from leading education organizations, as we believed that any resources from these organizations would be readily available to states, districts, and schools as capacity-building supports. We selected organizations based on a few general criteria:

- » formal partners of Centers (e.g., CCSSO)
- » thought leaders on the topic of interest (e.g., Education Trust)
- » recommendations from Center staff

### Limitations

As the scan was conducted using web-based sources, it is not without limitations. First, we methodically searched each Center for resources, but we quickly learned that many Centers use different terminology related to this work (e.g., equity, equality, social justice). This complicated our search, and it is possible that the scan failed to uncover all of the relevant resources.

Additionally, we know that web-based searches do not capture work or initiatives that may currently be in production or preparation for public use. Finally, this scan was necessarily broad, lacking input from Centers regarding potential barriers to producing such materials. It also lacks constituent input regarding the utility of existing materials or additional types of materials they might need.

Nevertheless, the scan allowed for the thorough documentation of information that can be shared across and outside the CCNetwork to inform our next steps in response to dire inequities that threaten the educational opportunities, academic outcomes, and well-being of students who have been historically underserved by our nation and its education system.

