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## Equitable Leadership on the Ground: Converging on High-Leverage Practices

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**Abstract:** What would leadership standards look like if developed through a lens and language of equity? We engaged with a group of 40 researchers, practitioners, and community leaders recognized as having expertise on equity in education to address this question. Using a Delphi technique, an approach designed to elicit expert feedback and measure convergence around a question of interest, these leaders participated in three rounds of data gathering. In Rounds One and Two, the 40 participants described and then rated leadership practices they believed to be most likely to mitigate race, class, and other group-based disparities between dominant and nondominant students. In Round Three, 14 of these experts participated in focus group sessions, using the findings from the first two rounds to ultimately converge around 10 high-leverage leadership practices for equity. Findings highlight the importance of leadership centered on countering systemic and structural barriers that maintain disparities, with implications for leadership preparation, policy, and tools to support organizational leadership for equity.

**Keywords:** equity; leadership; standards

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**Liderança equitativa “on the ground”: La convergencia en las prácticas de alta influencia**

**Resumen:** Como serían los principales estándares de si se desarrollan a través de un lenguaje de la lente y la equidad? Nos comprometemos con un grupo de 40 investigadores, profesores de educación básica y líderes comunitarios reconocidos por su experiencia en la equidad en la educación para abordar esta cuestión. Usando una técnica Delphi, un enfoque conocido para extraer información y medir la convergencia en torno a una cuestión de interés, estos líderes participaron en tres rondas de recolección de datos. En las primeras rondas, los 40 participantes describen y clasifican las prácticas de los líderes que ellos pensaban que eran más propensos a mitigar las disparidades entre raza, clase y otros grupos, incluyendo a los estudiantes de los grupos dominantes y no dominantes. En la última ronda, 13 de estos líderes participaron en sesiones de grupos focales, utilizando los resultados de las dos primeras rondas para finalmente convergen alrededor de 10 prácticas de liderazgo de alto impacto para la equidad. Los resultados ponen de manifiesto la importancia del liderazgo centrado en la lucha contra las barreras sistémicas y estructurales que mantienen diferencias con implicaciones para la preparación de líderes, políticas y herramientas para apoyar el liderazgo de la organización para la equidad.

**Palabras clave:** equidad; lideran a; est ndares

**Liderazgo equitativa “on the ground”: Convergindo em pr ticas de alta influ ncia**

**Resumo:** Como os padr es de lideran a seriam se fossem desenvolvidos atrav s de uma lente e linguagem de equidade? Nos engajamos com um grupo de 40 pesquisadores, professores da educa o b sica e l deres de comunidades reconhecidos por terem experi ncias em equidade na educa o para abordar essa quest o. Utilizando uma t cnica de Delphi, uma aproxima o designada para extrair um feedback e medir a converg ncia em torno de uma pergunta de interesse, esses l deres participaram em tr s rodadas da coleta de dados. Nas primeiras rodadas, os 40 participantes descreveram e classificaram as pr ticas de lideran as que eles acreditavam serem mais propensas a mitigar as disparidades entre ra a, classe e outros grupos, entre estudantes de grupos dominantes e n o-dominantes. Na  ltima rodada, 13 desses l deres participaram em sess es de grupo focal, usando os resultados das duas primeiras rodadas para, finalmente, convergir em torno de 10 pr ticas de lideran a de alta influ ncia para a equidade. Os resultados destacam a import ncia da lideran a centrada na luta contra as barreiras sist micas e estruturais que mant m disparidades, com implica es para a prepara o de lideran as, pol ticas e ferramentas para apoiar a lideran a organizacional pela equidade.

**Palavras-chave:** equidade; liderazgo; padr es

**Equitable Leadership on the Ground: Converging on High-Leverage Practices**

Despite widespread recognition of the ways in which schools – and the mainstream policies, practices, culture, curriculum, and instruction in them – function to reproduce or exacerbate existing inequities (Delpit, 2006; Jordan, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Nieto, 2005), students and families from nondominant groups (i.e., groups who have historically had limited access to power in the system) continue to experience persistent gaps in resources, opportunities, and outcomes. Educational leadership plays a fundamental role in either sustaining or redressing these disparities (Riehl, 2000; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003; Theoharis, 2007), yet educational leaders are more likely to uphold rather than challenge the status quo (Blackmore, 2002; Diem & Carpenter, 2013; Marshall & Ward, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Shields, 2004).

Though leaders seek preparation and tools to address inequities in their settings (Henze, Katz, Norte, Sather, & Walker, 2002; Johnson, 2007), educational leadership as a field has made a

limited contribution to understanding the “actual practice of social justice leadership in K-12 schools and the capacities needed to engage in this practice” (Furman, 2012, p. 192), and persistent inequities “illustrate how woefully unprepared many school and district leaders are to adequately lead, create, and cultivate educational environments where all of the children in their care are achieving academic success” (Evans, 2014, p. 105). Moreover, the field lacks sound tools to measure educational leadership practice (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2009; Kelley & Halverson, 2012), and in particular, the practice of leadership for *equity*. That is, the field lacks explicit articulation of leadership practices and tools focused on fairness in processes, structural and learning conditions, and student outcomes within the context of an unequal playing field for nondominant students and communities (Bensimon, 2005; Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Gutierrez & Jaramillo, 2006).

This gap has historically been exemplified by national policy standards for educational leadership preparation. Specifically, in 1994 the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA) created the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) “to develop standards to anchor the profession as it headed into the 21st century” (Murphy, 2005, p. 155). This body came out with its first set of standards in 1996, with minor revisions in 2008. The ISLLC standards have formed the basis of state licensure, preparation, and practicing administrator expectations and have been adopted in over 40 states (CCSSO, 2008). As such, the standards have shaped the basic premise under which we deem professionals fit to lead schools and school systems.

The standards were designed to identify critical functions and responsibilities of educational leaders. For example, the 2008 ISLLC standards, broadly defined, focused on visionary leadership, instructional improvement, effective management, inclusive leadership, ethical leadership, and leadership within the sociopolitical realm. Yet both the 1996 and 2008 standards gave sparse attention to equity, historically oppressive systems and practices, and resulting outcome disparities experienced by nondominant students and families (Anderson, 2001, 2009; Anderson et al., 2002; Cambron-McCabe & McCarthy, 2005; English, 2005; Marshall & McCarthy, 2002; Tillman et al., 2003). None of the standards, nor the specific functions/responsibilities of leadership described alongside each standard included the terms “race,” “ethnicity,” or “color” (Davis, Gooden, & Micheaux, 2015). This silence made issues of race, ethnicity, class, ability, gender, sexuality, and other group-based marginalizations an afterthought in leader preparation and has reified dominant discourse and practice (Davis et al., 2015; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Gooden, 2012; Lopez, 2003).

In 2014, the NPBEA collaborated with the Council of Chief State School Officers to propose a refresh of the standards to more appropriately mirror the roles, responsibilities, and complexities facing today’s PK-12 leaders. The refresh underwent numerous revisions, with opportunities for public comment and input from the field along the way. In October 2015, the NPBEA released the new standards with a new name: Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). See Table 1 for a crosswalk of the 2008 ISLLC standards with the 2015 PSEL standards.

Table 1

*Crosswalk of 2008 ISLLC and 2015 PSEL Standards*

2008 ISLLC Standards*	2015 PSEL Standards**
<p><b>Standard 1:</b> An education leader promotes the success of every student by facilitating the development, articulation, implementation, and stewardship of a vision of learning that is shared and supported by all stakeholders.</p>	<p><b>Standard 1. Mission, Vision, and Core Values:</b> Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of <i>each</i> student.</p>
<p><b>Standard 2:</b> An education leader promotes the success of every student by advocating, nurturing, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning and staff professional growth.</p>	<p><b>Standard 4. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment:</b> Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p> <p><b>Standard 5. Community of Care and Support for Students:</b> Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of <i>each</i> student.</p> <p><b>Standard 6. Professional Capacity of School Personnel:</b> Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p> <p><b>Standard 7. Professional Community for Teachers and Staff:</b> Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>
<p><b>Standard 3:</b> An education leader promotes the success of every student by ensuring management of the organization, operation, and resources for a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment.</p>	<p><b>Standard 9. Operations and Management:</b> Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>
<p><b>Standard 4:</b> An education leader promotes the success of every student by collaborating with faculty and community members, responding to diverse community interests and needs, and mobilizing community resources.</p>	<p><b>Standard 8. Meaningful Engagement of Families and Community:</b> Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote <i>each</i> student's academic success and well-being.</p>

Table 1 cont.

*Crosswalk of 2008 ISLLC and 2015 PSEL Standards*

<b>Standard 5:</b> An education leader promotes the success of every student by acting with integrity, fairness, and in an ethical manner.	<b>Standard 2. Ethics and Professional Norms:</b> Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote <i>each</i> student’s academic success and well-being.
<b>Standard 6:</b> An education leader promotes the success of every student by understanding, responding to, and influencing the political, social, economic, legal, and cultural context.	
	<b>Standard 3. Equity and Cultural Responsiveness:</b> Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote <i>each</i> student’s academic success and well-being.
	<b>Standard 10. School Improvement:</b> Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote <i>each</i> student’s academic success and well-being.

\*(CCSSO, 2008, pp. 14-15)

\*\*(NPBEA, 2015, pp. 9-18)

Unlike the ISLLC standards, the PSEL for the first time include an entire standard devoted to equity and cultural responsiveness in leadership. Additionally, one of the elements designed to “elaborate the work that is necessary to meet [this] Standard” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 8) takes a bold step to incorporate explicit language around issues of marginalization as called for by many in the field (see Anderson, 2009; Davis et al., 2015; Fuller, Nash, Williams, & Young, 2016; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015). Specifically, the element indicates that effective leaders: “confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11). Six of the nine remaining standards also include an element that incorporates one of the following terms or phrases: “equity,” “equitable practice,” “inclusiveness,” “social justice,” “diversity,” “culturally responsive,” and “fair and equitable.” None of the remaining standards or their elements, however, explicitly address issues of race, racism, class, classism, or other marginalizations and the systems that sustain them.

Before the process of revising the ISLLC standards began, we were in the midst of a project designed to explore what standards and core responsibilities of leadership might look like if developed through the lens and language of equity, using the 2008 ISLLC standards as a point of departure (see also Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). During the refresh, we used this work to advocate for placing issues of equity at the center of the new leadership standards (Ishimaru et al., 2015). The new PSEL standards are indeed a significant step forward in recognizing the need for educational leadership preparation, professional development, and practice to focus on equity, culturally responsive policies and practices, and outcome disparities. At the same time the new standards were not developed with equity as the central guiding lens. If, as the PSEL state, educational leaders are to “address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of

leadership” (NPBEA, 2015, p. 11), the explicit confronting of institutionalized and systemic racism and oppression should not be confined to a distinct standard but should be put at the center of every standard. Thus, the PSEL standards do not yet reflect equity as a central thread through all areas of leadership.

The current paper begins to address the core competencies of leadership that center issues of equity in policy and practice. We present the research study that facilitated our development of a set of equity-centric leadership practices. In this study, we examined how a group of experts in educational leadership for equity – the majority of whom were practitioners of color – identified and came to consensus around a set of standards-based equitable leadership practices they perceived as most likely to mitigate or eliminate disparities for students and families who have not been well served due to their race, ethnicity, class, and/or home language. Though we recognize inequities exist across multiple and often intersecting marginalities such as gender, sexual orientation, disability, religion, etc., we invited experts to focus first on disparities related to race, ethnicity, class, and home language, as these are often the most challenging for educators to address (Singleton & Linton, 2006). We seek to highlight how a bottom-up standards development process focused squarely on leadership for equity resulted in the identification of leadership practices that challenge and seek to redress racist, oppressive, and deficit-based systems and structures that have sustained educational disparities.

Notably, the educational leaders who participated in this study did not reflect the national demographics of administrators, in which only six percent of school superintendents and 20 percent of principals are people of color (Hill, Ottem & DeRoche, 2016; Kowalski, McCord, Peterson, Young, & Ellerson, 2011). Rather, we intentionally sought to privilege the greater expertise of those who center their leadership on equity and those whose own identities likely give them insights on the dynamics of race, racism, and other forms of oppression in schools. Applying an equity lens to our own methods, we suggest that this expertise is critical for the field to consider, as recent scholarship has unveiled how gender and culture shape research and the construction of knowledge in consequential ways (Medin & Lee, 2012). We address how this research process resulted in a set of practices that weave equity throughout all leadership domains and include more explicit and direct language than the refreshed PSEL standards. Finally, we offer the practices as a guide for enacting the call for equitable leadership in the current standards and as a foundation for leadership tools and processes to catalyze organizational learning and develop leadership for equity in PK-12 schools.

We do not aim to suggest that the high leverage practices we describe in the paper provide a new “single, unifying grand theory of educational administration” or all-encompassing knowledge base (Donmoyer, 1999, p. 39). Nor as Donmoyer and others have argued do we believe a singular, uncontested, normalized knowledge base is warranted or possible (e.g., Anderson et al., 2002; Donmeyer, 1999; English, 2006; Littrell & Foster, 1995; Scheurich, 1995). Rather, as Scheurich (1995) has argued, our goal is to trigger alternative forms of discourse and action focused on improving the lives and outcomes of nondominant students. Such continued discourse is embedded within the assumptions guiding the standards refresh, with the NPBEA (2015) describing the PSEL standards as “aspirational” (p. 3), “evolving” (p. 7), and “future-oriented” (p. 3).

We begin by sharing our theoretical framing of leadership through an equity lens. Next we describe the study’s methodology, using a Delphi expert convergence approach to engage a group of experts in the identification of a set of standards-based leadership practices for equity by asking: What are the “high-leverage” leadership practices for equity around which “experts” in the field

converge?<sup>1</sup> Collectively, our quantitative and qualitative results highlighted ten practices that experts identified as most likely to decrease educational disparities. We conclude by tying these practices to the research literature and highlighting implications for the field.

### Leadership through an Equity Lens

The framework of educational equity used in this study recognizes that achieving equity requires an *unequal* distribution of resources, opportunities, and focus, coupled with transformations in the spoken and unspoken norms that guide how people relate to one another (Brayboy et al., 2007; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Jordan, 2010; Ryan, 2014). Such a shift is critical for addressing the systemic and structural barriers that have led to an accumulated education “debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006), manifested by persistent racial and other group-based disparities (Brayboy et al., 2007; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006). Like Gutiérrez and others, we seek to differentiate equity from equality, moving away from the principle of “sameness as fairness” (see Gutiérrez & Jaramillo, 2006). To carry out *equitable* leadership practices, leadership and organizations must shift from efforts that manifest a deficit articulation of problems and solutions that seek to address individual deficits or poor socialization to practices that reflect an *equity lens* with actions that address structural and systemic conditions, processes, and barriers that exacerbate societal inequities (Bensimon, 2005).

This definition of equitable leadership aligns with a growing body of literature on transformative, socially just, and culturally responsive leadership. In particular, social justice leaders are concerned principally with “addressing and eliminating marginalization in schools” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 223), embody an urgent moral call to disrupt the institutional systems and barriers that reinforce historical inequities (Murtadha & Watts, 2004; Rapp, 2002; Shields, 2004; Wilson, Douglas, & Nganga, 2013), and couple their understanding of power, privilege, and the political nature of schooling with advocacy and action to redress existing inequities (Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013; Dantley, 2005; Shields, 2010; Shields & Warke, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013).

### Equitable Leadership Practices

Previous research has also begun to articulate the particular leadership practices that could mitigate disparities between dominant and nondominant students. To begin to identify high-leverage leadership practices for equity, we conducted an extensive review of the literature on social justice and equity in leadership and education (Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014). We found the following leadership practices consistently described as those most likely to effect educational change towards equity: inclusive development of an equity vision (e.g., Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991; Kose, 2009; Stone-Johnson, 2014; Theoharis, 2007), creating and sustaining an equitable culture (e.g., Louis & Wahlstrom, 2011; Scheurich & Skrla, 2003), facilitating rigorous and culturally responsive teaching (e.g., Gay, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Rigby, 2014), supervising instruction for equity (e.g., Kose, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2008; Rigby, 2014), equitably allocating resources (e.g., Brayboy et al., 2007; Byrne-Jimenez & Orr, 2013; Darling-Hammond, 2010), authentically collaborating with families and communities (e.g., Auerbach, 2007; Ishimaru, 2013; Khalifa, 2012; Moll et al., 1992; Wilson et al., 2013), modeling equitable practices (e.g., Brown, 2004; Furman, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2008), and influencing policy (e.g., Anderson, 2009; Evans, 2013; Koyama, 2014).

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<sup>1</sup> This research was situated within a broader collaborative effort to articulate and support leadership development for equity by the paper’s authors, Education Northwest, John Lensen, and the Oregon Leadership Network. Some of the results reported here were also shared in an earlier AERA paper (Galloway, Ishimaru, & Larson, 2013).

These equitable leadership practices formed our initial basis for defining the leadership functions, responsibilities, and actions most likely to mitigate inequities between dominant and nondominant students. Yet because the field's research and understanding of the actual practice of leadership for equity are so nascent, we sought out experts in the field to help articulate and extend what leadership for equity looks like in practice.

## **Methods**

To determine what, if any, set of high-leverage leadership practices for equity would be collectively identified by a group of experts, and whether the practices identified would align with those in the literature highlighted above, we undertook a study using a Delphi technique. The Delphi technique is a rigorous and systematic methodological approach designed to elicit expert feedback and measure convergence around a question of interest (Keeney, McKenna, & Hasson, 2011). The technique is particularly useful when seeking group communication and consensus-building around a complex problem (Linstone & Turoff, 2002) and has a long history in health fields and in guiding policy determination (Ager, Stark, Akesson, & Boothby, 2010; Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Keeney et al., 2011). In a Classical Delphi study, participants respond to an initial exploratory survey on the topic of interest, where they are asked individually to generate as many ideas as they can on the topic. In our case, we wanted to gather ideas about high-leverage, standards-based leadership practices for equity. These responses are then coded by the research team, and a pared down list of statements is returned to participants for further refinement. Participants rate or rank these statements in a second round survey. This process continues until a set level of convergence is reached (Keeney et al., 2011; Linstone & Turoff, 2002). Participants remain anonymous to each other throughout the process.

We elected to use a modified Delphi approach in the current study by collecting anonymous responses through an electronic survey in Rounds 1 and 2, and then using focus group sessions in Round 3. We chose this modified approach with focus groups in the third round to provide richer discussion for defining equitable leadership practices. Such thick qualitative descriptions could not have been captured with a third round survey.

### **Participants**

We deliberately sought to engage a broad range of participants whose expertise lay in scholarship, practice, and community leadership for equity in PK-12 schools. We initially invited a total of 63 experts. To identify experts, we examined scholarly publications on social justice in education and leadership and drew upon practitioner and community leadership networks in the Pacific Northwest (to leverage our knowledge of local expertise). We defined and purposively selected individuals as "experts" who were known either through their local or national work for their commitment to the study and practice of equitable leadership. We had a 63% response rate, with 40 experts from the field participating including 25 building and district level PK-12 educational leaders, six higher education faculty, two policy consultants, and seven community leaders. Gender representation included 26 females and 14 males. More than half identified as people of color. Participants self-reported their race and/or ethnicity as: six African American; one Black; one American Indian; one Chinese American; one Japanese American; two Asian American; four Hispanic; one Chicana; two Latino(a); one Pacific Islander; one Latina and White; two mixed; one Native American, Latino, and Irish; 14 White; and one Caucasian. One participant elected not to report race and/or ethnicity. Though those who were invited and responded included some experts from across the country, the majority, 82%, were located in the Pacific Northwest.

In an attempt to get diverse perspectives during the focus group sessions, we looked across our experts to invite a racially/ethnically diverse group with long-standing expertise in equity-



focused leadership. We also purposefully invited multiple participants from each role (i.e., school and district practitioners, higher education faculty, and community leaders). We invited 22 individuals who participated in the survey to take part in the focus group sessions. A total of 14 participated, with the majority coming from school or district positions ( $n=10$ ) and a smaller number from higher education and/or research and consulting work ( $n=3$ ) and community ( $n=1$ ). Seventy-one percent of focus group participants identified as people of color. Thus, across all three rounds of the Delphi method, the participants were not representative of the mostly white, male educational leaders in public schools. Rather we intentionally selected for people with expertise related to the study focus, based on their track records, professional affiliations and networks, organizational or departmental missions, and scholarship. Not coincidentally, many of those with such expertise identified as people of color whose personal identities and experiences provided insights into racism, cultural repertoires for enacting leadership practices beyond the normative, and deep commitments to equity.

### Procedure

Using a Classical Delphi technique for the first two rounds of convergence, we invited the experts to respond to an initial survey, generating ideas about high-leverage, standards-based leadership functions for equity for each of the six 2008 ISLLC standards. First round Delphi surveys are designed to be exploratory, inviting each participant to share ideas and information about the issue. To elicit participant responses on the Round 1 survey, we asked the following about Standard 1 on visionary leadership:

If visionary leadership at its core, was about addressing inequities and improving schools for those who have not been well-served due to their race, ethnicity, class, and/or home language, what would you identify as the most important leadership practices for creating visionary leadership for equity?

Participants responded to this same exploratory question for the remaining five standards of instructional improvement, effective management, inclusive practice, ethical leadership, and sociopolitical leadership. We also invited respondents to include leadership practices not affiliated with any of the standards.

The second phase of a Delphi study is typically characterized by developing an understanding of how the group views the emergent themes from Round 1, including the level to which they agree or disagree and how relatively important they view each theme to be (Linstone & Turoff, 2002). In alignment with this approach, in Round 2 we presented participants with a set of pared down equitable practice statements generated based upon commonalities across Round 1 responses. We first asked individuals to rate how “high leverage” they perceived each of the statements to be as a leadership practice for equity, from 1=lowest leverage to 7=highest leverage, defining “high leverage” as those practices that would be most likely to eliminate race, class, and other group-based disparities. Participants then selected which 10 leadership practices they thought were the highest leverage of all those identified in Round 1.

In Round 3, we used a modified Delphi approach, inviting a smaller set of experts from the original group to participate in two focus group sessions. Over the course of the sessions we asked the participants to critically examine and deliberate about the content from the Round 2 practices to determine, by consensus if possible, the 8 to 15 practices they thought would be most likely to mitigate disparities for nondominant students. We allowed participants to recommend changes to the Round 2 practice statements, such as merging practices or modifying language in practices to be clearer or more robust. We had a small set of guiding questions to elicit discussion about the Round

2 statements including: What, if anything, strikes you about the practices that had most consensus from Round 2? Why do you think each of these behaviors has consistently been identified as a high leverage leadership behavior for equity? What are your recommendations for including or excluding the most often identified practices from Round 2 as high leverage leadership behaviors for equity? When you look at how we have described these behaviors, what major content or concepts are we missing, if any? Finally, we invited participants to indicate whether or not they agreed with each of the final focus group statements as being high leverage. We audio recorded and transcribed the focus group sessions and also took extensive fieldnotes.

### **Data Analysis**

Round 1 in a Delphi study is designed to be open-ended and thus requires qualitative analysis, where participant responses are grouped by similarities in content. The goal is to collapse repetitious comments into single statements for participants to rate in Round 2. We used the 2008 ISLLC standards and their associated functions as a guide (see CCSSO, 2008), coding participants' responses that aligned with the ISLLC functions, and expanding and adding to the functions as new concepts emerged from the data. In some cases we developed entirely new codes not identified or explicit in the ISLLC standards. We then examined the coded segments both within and across the functions and standards for common content, concepts, and terms. We incorporated the commonalities into a condensed set of statements for participants to rate in Round 2. In a few cases, the number of participants who identified a particular concept was small. We still maintained these statements for rating in the Round 2 survey in order to preserve the initial ideas generated.

We used a typical Delphi Analysis for Round 2, setting a consensus threshold (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). We considered participants to be near consensus on a practice when 75% or more of them rated the practice as 6=high leverage or 7=highest leverage. In addition we examined the equitable practice statements that more than 50% of participants selected in their top 10; that is, the 10 practices they thought would be most likely to mitigate disparities. Because we did not analytically consider differences in participants' responses by race, gender, or role, we report survey findings for Rounds 1 and 2 without participant identifications.

In the Round 3 focus groups, we were interested in exploring what emerged from the group as they discussed findings from the two earlier rounds. We reviewed the transcripts for similarities and differences in participant responses. As we engaged with the transcripts, we continually asked: What does this response or discussion represent an instance of? What is being illuminated? What is the meaning behind it (Charmaz, 2006; Glesne & Peshkin, 1992)? We developed initial codes through this process. We then looked across the initial codes for commonalities, connections, and patterns to identify the categories that formed the basis for the focus group findings. Because focus group participants' positionalities and identities were present in the discussion and were part of our Round 3 analysis, we identify participants' role, race, and gender alongside quotes in the Round 3 findings below. Through our analysis, we show how the group shaped and came to consensus around the final high leverage equitable practice statements.

## **Results**

### **Round 1 Survey**

The Round 1 survey generated 556 unique statements regarding leadership practices for equity. Though we asked participants to respond by ISLLC standard, at times participants' statements also included leadership practices germane to another standard. In these cases we double coded the statement, giving us a total of 763 coded statements. Table 2 shows the percentages of responses for each standard and leadership function. We have grouped participant responses by

order of 2008 ISLLC standards and functions. The percentages in bold represent the overall percentage of responses that aligned with that particular standard (for instance, 11.8% of all responses corresponded to Visionary Leadership). The percentages to the far right indicate the frequency of responses *within* each standard that pertained to a particular function (for instance, 56.7% of the Visionary Leadership statements corresponded to vision content and development).

Overall, the vast majority of participant responses aligned to one of the six ISLLC standards. Nearly half of the responses corresponded to two areas: instructional improvement (26.3%) and effective management (21.8%). Just over one-quarter of responses aligned with inclusive practice or visionary leadership. Less than 10% were connected to either ethical or sociopolitical leadership. Within each standard, certain leadership functions were also more likely to be identified than others. See Table 2 for all percentages.

Table 2

*Percentages of Round 1 Responses by 2008 ISLLC Standard and Function*

<b>2008 ISLLC Standards and Functions</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Visionary Leadership</b>	<b>11.8%</b>
Vision content and development	56.7%
Vision assessment, monitoring, and evaluation	20.0%
Data gathering and use for planning and assessment	12.2%
Plans for achieving goals	7.78%
Continuous and sustainable improvement	3.33%
<b>Instructional Improvement</b>	<b>26.3%</b>
Fostering a climate of trust, collaboration, learning, and high expectations	20.9%
Developing rigorous, culturally responsive curriculum and instruction	21.9%
Supervising instruction for equity	20.9%
Developing instructional and leadership capacity for equity	17.4%
Personalizing student learning	5.47%
Creating systems to monitor student progress	5.47%
Monitoring and evaluating instructional program	2.99%
Using technology	0.50%
Other	4.48%
<b>Effective Management</b>	<b>21.8%</b>
Resource allocation	31.9%
Planning, monitoring, and evaluating systems	20.5%
Fostering organizational learning	13.9%
Distributing leadership	7.23%
Welfare and safety	7.23%
Organizing school and staff time to maximize teaching and learning	5.42%
Other	13.9%
<b>Inclusive Practice</b>	<b>14.0%</b>
Partnering with families and caregivers	44.9%
Collaborating with communities	24.3%
Understanding and using community resources	17.8%
Community data collection and use	7.69%
Utilizing two-way, culturally responsive communication	5.61%

Table 2 cont.

*Percentages of Round 1 Responses by 2008 ISLLC Standard and Function*

<b>Ethical Leadership</b>	<b>1.40%</b>
Modeling	59.1%
Valuing democracy and equity	26.3%
Having systems of accountability to ensure student success	4.38%
Considering consequences of ethical decision making	3.65%
Other	6.57%
<b>Sociopolitical Leadership</b>	<b>6.60%</b>
Advocacy	27.5%
Influencing policy	23.5%
General sociopolitical leadership	11.8%
Other	37.3%
<b>Not aligned to a 2008 ISLLC Standard</b>	<b>1.40%</b>

As is customary in a Delphi approach, we used participants' responses to generate a smaller set of equitable practice statements based on the most common responses. We condensed the statements from Round 1 into a smaller set of equitable leadership practice statements for the Round 2 survey. Table 3 below includes the 27 condensed statements we generated based upon the emergent themes from the Round 1 survey, drawing together the key ideas, terms, concepts, and actions articulated by participants. Below we review the data, sharing representative participant responses as evidence for how we synthesized the full statements into the condensed equitable practice statements.

Table 3.

*Delphi Round 1 Condensed Equitable Practice Statements*

<b>Equitable Practice Statements</b>
<p>1. <b>Vision Content:</b> Leadership develops a vision focused squarely on equity (i.e., eliminating disparities, naming systemic inequities, expressing a social and moral obligation to end inequitable practices and policies, or setting an expectation that each child will succeed regardless of background).</p>
<p>2. <b>Vision Development:</b> In developing the organization's vision, leadership is inclusive from the beginning. Nondominant voices are central to defining and implementing the vision.</p>
<p>3. <b>Assessment Cycles:</b> Leadership has ongoing systems using data to monitor and assess the organization's work (policies, practices, systems, decisions) to examine disproportionate impacts and confront barriers and inequities.</p>
<p>4. <b>Safe and Welcoming Culture:</b> Leadership creates a culture and climate that is inclusive and welcoming to children, families, and community members of nondominant groups. The culture authentically reflects all of the unique backgrounds and characteristics of the students and their families. Leadership openly addresses racism, classism, homophobia, harassment, discrimination, bullying, etc. and uses instances to further the community's understanding.</p>
<p>5. <b>Discipline:</b> Leadership examines disproportionate disciplinary impacts on particular student groups and implements policies and strategies that address cultural issues, engage parents and families, maintain student access to instruction, and focus on conflict resolution, relationships, and restoration.</p>

Table 3 cont.

*Delphi Round 1 Condensed Equitable Practice Statements*

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**Equitable Practice Statements**

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6. **Accountability:** Leadership holds itself accountable and develops a culture of high expectations for teachers and collective adult responsibility for decreasing inequities for nondominant students and families.
7. **Culturally Responsive Instruction:** Leadership facilitates and monitors implementation of culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy for every student, including multicultural curriculum, context, activities, and approaches.
8. **Classroom Discussions of Oppression:** Leadership supports ongoing classroom discussions and student exploration about forms of oppression (including racism, classism, sexism, homophobia, religion, age, ableism, language of origin, etc.) to increase students' understanding and promote compassion and cooperation.
9. **Student Placement and Access:** Leadership eliminates programs and practices that are by nature exclusive, such as separate/pullout/self-contained programs and tracking, and ensures access to rigorous, comprehensive curriculum for every student regardless of race, ethnicity, class, and/or home language.
10. **Differentiated Instruction:** Leadership supports staff in tailoring content and pedagogy to meet the needs and interests of diverse learners, moving away from a "one size fits all" model of instruction.
11. **Teacher Supervision and Improvement in Equitable Instruction:** Leadership supervises teachers with a lens of equity, including support and scaffolding for implementing equitable practices (such as culturally responsive curriculum and pedagogy, expressing high expectations for student achievement, heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, drawing on community funds of knowledge, differentiated supports, English learner instructional strategies, etc.). Leadership provides individualized feedback on instructional practices for equity during classroom observations and holds staff accountable for providing equitable instruction for every student.
12. **Organization-Wide Equity Professional Development and Growth:** Leadership has created a culture of inquiry and ongoing, embedded opportunities for staff professional growth around equity.
13. **Teacher Collaboration:** Leadership provides ongoing opportunities for staff (teachers, aides, specialists) to collaborate, share, and observe best practices, and learn together in ways that will provide equitable instruction and improve their ability to see and teach each child.
14. **Resource Allocation:** Leadership equitably allocates resources, redistributing financial, material, and human resources to support teaching and learning for students who historically have not been well-served due to their race, ethnicity, class, or home language.
15. **Hiring and Teacher Placements:** Leadership recruits, retains, and promotes staff of color and staff with strong equity commitments, understanding, and skills. In addition, leadership makes equity-based staff placements, such as placing the most skilled teachers with the students who have greatest need.
16. **Developing Leadership:** Leadership develops others in the community (staff, parents, community members, students) as leaders and supports and empowers these leaders to collaborate in creating more equitable schools.
17. **Cultivating Relationships:** Leadership builds and maintains trusting relationships with all communities in the school, particularly those who have been historically marginalized.

Table 3 cont.

*Delphi Round 1 Condensed Equitable Practice Statements*

<b>Equitable Practice Statements</b>	
<b>18. Understanding of Communities:</b>	Leadership builds deep understanding of the diversity of beliefs, values, practices, and ways of learning in the school community. Diverse cultural, social, and other resources are authentically valued and used as assets to support the learning of each student.
<b>19. Parents and Families as Partners:</b>	Leadership creates partnerships with families and caregivers, particularly from nondominant communities, such that parents are centrally engaged in the educational process and school improvement for equity. Parents and families are seen as critical partners in instructional improvement.
<b>20. Communication:</b>	Leadership creates ongoing two-way communication within the school and the community to articulate equity issues and keep parents, families, and community members abreast of plans, programs, activities, etc. and receive feedback.
<b>21. Decision-Making and Inclusion:</b>	Leadership creates decision-making processes that are inclusive and democratic by authentically and deeply engaging multiple voices and perspectives -- including those of nondominant parents and communities -- at every level.
<b>22. Collaborating with Community:</b>	Leadership develops and maintains meaningful and ongoing relationships with community leaders. Leadership positions the school as part of the community and builds community capacity to be meaningfully and strategically engaged in enacting a collective equity vision.
<b>23. Modeling:</b>	Leadership must lead by example, demonstrating integrity, advocacy, conviction, transparency, and persistence for pursuing equity and following through on commitments even in the face of risk, challenge, and push-back.
<b>24. Leader Self-Reflection and Personal Equity Growth:</b>	Leadership must do their own personal and intellectual work around privilege, power, and forms of oppression to lead for equity. This includes deep exploration of their own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and privileges, as well as the history and permanence of privilege and oppression in schools and society.
<b>25. Sociopolitical Work:</b>	Leadership collaborates with teachers, parents, community members, unions, and other organizations and coalitions to publicly advocate and influence policy for equity and social justice.
<b>26. Strategies for Push-Back:</b>	Leadership develops strategies for handling inevitable push-back for creating and sustaining equity agendas.

**Visionary leadership.** In Standard 1 on visionary leadership, more than half of the responses were related to the content and development of the vision, with another 20.0% related to vision assessment, monitoring, and evaluation. Fewer responses were associated with data gathering and use for planning and assessment; plans for achieving goals; and continuous and sustainable improvement (see Table 2).

When describing the leadership practices for creating a vision for equity, participants expressed the need for the vision to include explicit language around systemic, institutional, and structural barriers and disparities. Participants shared, for example: “The vision must address systemic inequities”; the vision statement must “explicitly address race, class, and equity and student achievement”; and “visionaries who are purposefully strategic about crafting an equitable vision directly address and increase awareness of power and privilege as it relates to race and class and how that historically and continually impacts climate and student success.” Based on participants’

responses we identified a theme of creating and enacting a vision that, at its core, is about countering systemic inequities; naming race, class, and other group-based disparities; and shifting power structures.

In addition to the content of the vision, participants focused on who was at the table in developing the vision. They identified the need for voice and authentic participation of communities traditionally marginalized by the system. One expressed:

Communities who have not been well-served have also often been left without a voice. Communities must be given opportunities to determine a vision of learning from the inception of the vision. Underserved communities are often left feeling as if educational systems are imposed upon them rather than feeling served by them in ways that lead to success for the entire community.

Similarly, another participant stated it is critical to “ensure that multiple perspectives from multiple stakeholders – specifically those who are under-represented in our school systems – are systematically sought out and considered when both defining and implementing visionary leadership.”

Finally, participants indicated the need to utilize data and conduct ongoing assessment to understand whether the organization was meeting or “making improvements toward equity goals.” Based upon these responses, we included three visionary leadership practice statements for the Round 2 survey, including one for vision content, one for vision development, and one for assessment cycles (see Table 3, practices 1-3).

**Instructional improvement.** In Standard 2 on instructional improvement, 81% of responses focused on the following leadership functions: creating and sustaining an equitable school culture (which included fostering a climate of trust, collaboration, learning, and high expectations); developing rigorous and culturally responsive curriculum and instruction; supervising instruction for equity; and developing instructional and leadership capacity for equity. In addition, a smaller number of statements reflected other Standard 2 functions including: personalized student learning, systems to monitor student progress, instructional program monitoring and evaluation, and technology. Five percent of fell outside of these initial or expanded ISLLC categories and were related to student access to rigorous curriculum, student placement, and teacher collaboration (see Table 2).

Nearly one-quarter of participants’ responses focused on the importance of creating a school climate built on trust and inclusion, with instructional improvement at the core. One participant described that equitable school and district cultures must be “representative of all of the different unique backgrounds and characteristics of the students and their families that attend.” Two others concurred, expressing: “An instructional environment must be safe and free of harassment, intimidation, and threats,” and “All people (staff, parents, community, students) must feel welcome, accepted and integral to the day to day functioning of the educational environment.” Though less common, a few participants discussed the importance of using restorative justice practices for discipline. We used such responses to generate two equitable practices statements, one around creating a safe and welcoming school culture and the other around discipline (see Table 3 practices 4 and 5).

Another common thread emerged around the need to create a culture of high expectations and mutual accountability, “in which every person feels genuinely responsible for the success and/or failure of every student.” Critical to the work of equitable leadership is “helping adults presume competence of all students and rejecting deficit views.” Practices 6 and 7 on high expectations and accountability in Table 3 reflect these notions.

Participants' comments also focused on culturally responsive instruction, student access to the curriculum, and differentiated instruction as key to instructional leadership for equity (see Table 3, practices 8-11). For example, a participant stated, "Curriculum, activities, and approach need to reflect the school's population of learners." Others described that equity-focused leadership requires "actively exploring the 'funds of knowledge' each student brings to the learning situation in order to build on strengths." Instruction must be "designed to meet the unique needs of students" who historically have not been well-served. Moreover, leadership for equity should entail "access of marginalized students to the general education/core curriculum." This participant went on to recommend the elimination of "separate/pullout/self-contained programs. Isolating students by a particular aspect (ability, reading level, race) is a tried and tried and tried and failed idea."

Participants also articulated the critical role of equity-focused leadership in creating the conditions for teachers to ensure that their instructional practice was equitable. This could take the form of "district wide equity focused professional development...to build and support equitable environments, climate, and culture so all teachers demonstrate culturally relevant pedagogy, teaching strategies, and practices." It could also include:

Opportunities for teachers to practice and strengthen their use of an equity lens tool for identifying, acknowledging, and challenging institutional barriers for student success. These may be in areas such as classroom environment, instruction, discipline, or building relationships with students.

Through this process, leadership must provide the "tools and resources necessary for educators to be successful *and* hold them accountable for instructing all students to high standards." Because many teachers lack the preparation to implement equitable practices in their classrooms, this coupling of support with accountability is crucial. We drew on responses such as these to generate equitable practice statements about supervision focused on equitable instruction, continuous support of professional and organizational growth, and opportunities for teacher collaboration (see Table 3, practices 12-14).

**Effective management.** When participants considered key leadership practices around Standard 3 on effective management for equity, they focused primarily on resource allocation, including material, financial, and human resources; planning, monitoring, and evaluating systems; and fostering organizational learning. Leadership functions with fewer responses included: distributing leadership, welfare and safety, and organizing school and staff time to maximize teaching and learning. We also coded over 10% of the comments as outside any of these functions. These other identified leadership practices included how leadership structured systems for equitable discipline policies and practices and how leadership engaged with marginalized communities in decision-making within the organization.

Participants indicated the importance of allocating resources equitably, rather than equally, recognizing that traditionally marginalized, nondominant students have experienced a persistent resource deficiency. One described that leadership must:

Differentiate resources to focus on providing equitable outcomes for underserved students. This may look like moving highly qualified teachers to classrooms where students have the greatest need...It may look like changing institutional structures to be more culturally relevant to student populations that are served (i.e., summer break may be resituated to acknowledge the 'winter movement' of Latino families to Mexico).



Another participant expressed that resources need to be “directed to students most in need.” These and similar comments prompted the creation of equitable practice 15 (Resource Allocation) in Table 3.

Several participants also focused specifically on recruitment, hiring, and retention policies and practices in relation to human resources. For example, some recognized leadership’s role in “hiring and retaining racially conscious and culturally competent administrators and staff.” Another participant described hiring practices as crucial to mitigating inequities, stating: “If norms and expectations are clear, people who do not believe all children have the same rights to learn might be discovered before they are hired.” There were also calls for staff to “reflect the student population (across all levels). Leaders need to remove barriers to achieve this goal. Leaders must ensure the recruiting, hiring, retaining, [and] promoting policies, procedures, and practices reflect this commitment/principle/goal.” Drawing from responses such as these, we generated practice 16 on hiring and teacher placements (Table 3).

Participants expressed the need for leadership to engage in “routine” equity audits around anything from “discipline and special program placement” to “facilities, curriculum, communication, instruction” and “physical space [and] resources.” While some did not use the term “equity audit” in their responses, the focus of their responses was on consistent and continuous monitoring of how “how organizational policies and procedures are (or are not) disproportionately impacting students of color or poverty,” requiring close examination of such “structures, policies, programs, and practices to identify and take action to change those that may perpetuate inequities based on race, ethnicity, class and language.” These statements aligned with the responses regarding assessment cycles from visionary leadership, so we merged them together into one common equitable practice statement (Practice 3 in Table 3).

Participants also highlighted the importance of developing leadership beyond those in the formal title role (such as principal). To respondents, this meant for example, “finding leaders at all levels to promote equity and equitable practice in the school/district/community level,” and “empowering others to lead – Make leadership an expectation for all teachers and also for all students, not just for those who have already proven themselves as capable leaders.” These and similar statements shaped equitable practice 17 in Table 3 on developing leadership.

**Inclusive practice.** More than two-thirds of the responses to Standard 4 on inclusive practice referred to partnering with families and caregivers and collaborating with communities. Comments also included understanding and using community resources and collecting and using community data. A small subset of comments fell outside of these functions, with responses focusing on utilizing two-way, culturally responsive communication.

Participants highlighted the importance of going far beyond “visiting underserved communities as a short-term project or interviewing people of color once a year.” Rather, participants argued that equity leadership is about authentic partnerships and two-way communication with a particular focus on nondominant communities including: “Creating, maintaining, and strengthening relationships with all stakeholders and the communities, specifically the disenfranchised communities”; “Ensuring timely, proactive, ongoing two-way communication with the community regarding district plans, programs, activities and current issues”; and “Involving communities at every level of the decision making process.” Additionally, the knowledge and cultural ways of nondominant students, families, and communities act as assets in equity-focused leadership. Under-represented families must be “valued, included and seen as critical partners in instructional improvement.” We incorporated these ideas into equitable practice statements 18-23 in Table 3.

**Ethical leadership.** Participants focused primarily on modeling for equity in Standard 5 regarding Ethical Leadership. More than half of responses under Standard 5 were about modeling and self-reflective transparent practice. Over 25% were about valuing democracy and equity, with fewer related to systems of accountability to ensure student success and consequences of ethical decision making (see Table 2). Outside of these original functions, we also included engaging in open, two-way, culturally responsive communication and creating strategies for pushback. These latter concepts were subsumed under Practice 21, which is associated with inclusive practice, and Practice 27, which is associated with sociopolitical leadership as described below.

Several responses about modeling focused on “leading by example.” Participants felt those who demonstrate ethical leadership with equity at the core “live [their] values,” “take a clear stand about equity and opportunity,” “model what [they] want,” “demonstrate integrity,” and “take a public stand about inequitable laws and practices.” One participant summarized many of the responses in articulating: “Leaders who practice equity are intentional, purposeful and courageous in the decisions that they make that often afford opportunity to smaller groups of students who have been out of power for far too long.” Equitable leadership practice thus requires unwavering action to address inequities and redistribute power and opportunity “even when there is personal risk involved.” The modeling practice, practice 24 in Table 3, incorporates these threads.

In addition, respondents felt deep self-reflection and learning were critical to equity-focused leadership practice. For example, one of the participants suggested leaders must:

[Do] their own emotional and intellectual work around these areas of diversity (race, class, ability, etc.) to have language and comfort in leading specifically around these issues....An educational leader cannot promote the success of every student or even come close to understanding, responding or influencing the context in a way that is equitable and accurate if they do not first study their own biases, privileges and misconceptions brought about by white privilege and other forms of privilege in their own lives.

Similarly, another participant articulated the importance of each leader engaging in:

A deep study into how white privilege and other forms of privilege have impacted the leader’s life [and] decisions....Once the leader has looked inward, they may be able to actually see the stakeholders and their needs. Without this piece, I believe leaders continue to promote a dominant culture perspective opinion and thus dominant culture solutions of sometimes imaginary needs.

Drawing on these and similar responses, we articulated an equitable leadership practice focused on deep and continued self-reflection and learning about one’s own privilege, power, identity, biases, etc. (practice 25 in Table 3).

**Sociopolitical leadership.** Finally, for Standard 6 on the Sociopolitical Context, just over one-half of the responses dealt with advocacy and influencing policy. A smaller percentage of comments related to general sociopolitical leadership. Standard 6 also included our largest percentage of codes falling outside the original leadership functions identified in the 2008 ISLLC standards, with individuals most often focusing on building coalitions across agencies and people to address marginalization and injustice, but also on developing strategies for pushback or resistance to efforts to lead for equity.

Participants described how equitable practice entails working “beyond the boundaries of the campus” and “being a consistent and skillful advocate within the larger district system to ensure that the school’s population is served according to their needs.” They expressed the need to examine and

counter systemic barriers outside schools. For example, an equity coordinator explained that sociopolitical leadership for equity requires “understanding, acknowledging and challenging racially unconscious political, social, economical, and legal barriers to providing learning to underserved populations and advocating for systemic change of practices.” Another participant similarly responded that equitable practice requires “proactively interrupting the political, social, economic, legal and cultural systems and structures that perpetuate oppression of under-represented groups in school systems and society as a whole.” We integrated these notions into practice 26, focused on the sociopolitical work of leadership.

Finally, a few participants indicated the importance of developing “strategies for dealing with inevitable pushback” they will face when enacting equitable leadership. For this reason, we included a final practice on strategies for push-back (see Table 3).

## Round 2 Survey

We next invited participants to rate these 27 condensed equitable practice statements from the Round 1 responses based on how high leverage they thought each practice would be in mitigating disparities for those who have not been well-served by the system. The rating scale was from one to seven, where seven indicated highest leverage. Consistent with classic Delphi methodology (Hsu & Sanford, 2007), we first focused on the six practices identified by more than 75% of the participants rated 6=high leverage or 7=highest leverage (see Table 4). We also examined the practices that more than 50% of participants included in their top 10 lists. These were the 10 leadership behaviors they felt were the highest leverage out of the 27 (see Table 4). Between the two lists, there were eight distinct high leverage practice statements. These included the statements on: (a) vision content, (b) safe and welcoming culture, (c) culture of high expectations, (d) culturally responsive teaching, (e) accountability/collective responsibility, (f) hiring and teacher placements, (g) parents and families as partners, and (h) modeling.

Table 4

### *Delphi Round 2 Top-Rated High-Leverage Leadership Practices for Equity*

<b>Practices Rated at 6 or 7 by &gt;75% of Participants</b>	<b>Practices Selected in Top 10 by &gt;50% of Participants</b>
Modeling (88%)	Vision Content (67%)
Vision Content (85%)	Safe and Welcoming Culture (56%)
Culture of High Expectations (83%)	Culturally Responsive Instruction (62%)
Hiring and Teacher Placements (78%)	Culture of High Expectations (56%)
Collective Responsibility (78%)	Parents and Families as Partners (56%)
Culturally Responsive Instruction (78%)	

## Round 3 Focus Groups

In Round 3, we aimed to engage a subset of participants in discussions around the Round 1 and 2 results to examine whether the group could come to further consensus around a set of high leverage equitable leadership practices. We opened the focus group sessions by sharing the survey findings with participants. Several participants argued that if we were “seeking a radical shift in the way we do things” in K-12 leadership, we needed to produce something “radically different.” There appeared to be group consensus that we could not simply “tinker around the edges.” Rather, the group needed to include “breakthrough practices that really expose the conflicts, the values and beliefs, the contradictions” that occur in educational and K-12 leadership contexts.

In general participants agreed that the eight top practices identified from the Round 2 survey aligned with their notions of equitable practice. Over the course of two focus groups, they did, however, offer ideas for expanding, merging, and deepening several practices. In addition, they highlighted and explored several crucial processes and practices they felt were missing from the eight, most of which had been addressed in some way in the 27 themes generated by Round 1. In particular, over the course of the two sessions, participants focused on: (1) the personal nature of equity work; (2) the organizational capacity that must be built to sustain the work; (3) the shift required in the supervision of teachers and school staff to engage in and improve equitable instructional practice; (4) the need for creating a culture of high expectations and collective responsibility; (5) the need for authentic partnerships with community to drive advocacy and decision-making; (6) the systemic and sociopolitical nature of equity leadership work; (7) the importance of allocating human, financial, and material resources from an equity stance; and (8) the will and modeling required to lead equity work. Table 5 includes the final list of practices. Below we share the focus group results that helped shape this final list. Because we were intentional about the selection of participants to prioritize nondominant cultural participation and equity-related expertise and representation across leadership roles, we report our findings from the focus group with racial, gender, and role identifications.

Table 5

*Delphi Round Three 10 High-Leverage Leadership Practices for Equity***Leadership Practices**

1. **Engaging in Self-reflection and Growth for Equity:** Leadership engages in personal and intellectual work to understand how privilege, power, and oppression operate – both historically and currently – in school and society, as well as to examine their own identities, values, biases, assumptions, and privileges. This includes defining core values around democracy, social justice, and equity; having the will to act; taking risks to put themselves on the line; and modeling continuous learning and inquiry in pursuit of equity. Leadership continually asks: Who are we serving/not serving and why? Who is being included/excluded and how?
2. **Developing Organizational Leadership for Equity:** Leadership develops others (staff, parents, community members, students) as leaders and builds their capacity to examine their own and others' practices and underlying biases and assumptions, dialogue about equitable teaching and learning grounded in systemic and historical understandings of disparities, and collaborate to change educational practice to provide a high quality education for each student.
3. **Constructing and Enacting an Equity Vision:** Leadership engages in an inclusive process with the entire school community – particularly those traditionally marginalized in educational processes – to develop an explicit vision of collective responsibility for the educational success of each student regardless of background. Leadership enacts a vision that explicitly recognizes inequities as systemic in nature, rather than as something rooted in individual children or their families. Leadership models the vision in action, demonstrating high expectations for educator practice and for student learning and achievement; utilizing inclusive, democratic decision-making processes; and employing strategies for countering push-back to sustain the vision and its enactment.
4. **Supervising for Improvement of Equitable Instruction:** Leadership supports staff in improving equitable instructional practices (such as culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, drawing on

Table 5  
*Delphi Round Three 10 High-Leverage Leadership Practices for Equity*

<b>Leadership Practices</b>	
	community funds of knowledge, English learner instructional strategies, etc.). Leadership provides individualized feedback on instructional practices for equity during classroom observations, facilitates ongoing opportunities for educator collaboration to engage in collective learning and improvement, and holds staff accountable for providing equitable access to content and meeting the learning needs of each child.
5.	<b>Fostering an Equitable School Culture:</b> Leadership builds authentic relationships across the school community, furthers community understanding, and deepens belonging and voice for students, families, and staff who have been traditionally marginalized, openly addressing instances of racism, classism, homophobia, bullying, etc. Leadership challenges the belief that student capacity is limited by race, ethnicity, poverty, language, etc. and emphasizes learning in all interactions to foster a culture of high expectations and collective responsibility for each student's learning and achievement. Leadership examines disproportionate disciplinary impacts on particular student groups and implements policies and strategies that maintain student access to instruction and prioritize relationships, restoration, and learning.
6.	<b>Collaborating with Families and Communities:</b> Leadership develops and maintains meaningful and ongoing relationships with parents, families, and community leaders, especially those from nondominant communities, to centrally engage them in the educational process and school improvement for equity. The leadership engages in ongoing, two-way communication to gain and build deep understanding of the diversity of beliefs, values, practices, and cultural and social capital in the school community. The leadership positions the school as part of the community and builds community capacity to be meaningfully and strategically engaged in enacting a collective equity vision.
7.	<b>Influencing the Sociopolitical Context:</b> Leadership collaborates with teachers, parents, community members, unions, and other organizations and coalitions to address the roots of systemic inequities by publicly advocating, creating and influencing equitable and socially just policy and implementation. Those in formal leadership roles (e.g., principals) strategically use their power and authority within the system and act as allies to educators, students, and parent/community leaders in prioritizing policies and systems to ensure a high quality education for every student.
8.	<b>Allocating Resources:</b> Leadership equitably allocates resources, redistributing financial, material, time, and human resources to support teaching and learning for students who historically have not been well-served due to their race, ethnicity, class, or home language. Leadership also advocates for the equitable use of resources throughout the system, not only within the sphere of control designated by the institution or district.
9.	<b>Hiring and Placement Personnel:</b> Leadership recruits, retains, and promotes staff with strong equity commitments, understanding, and skills and staff of color. In addition, leadership makes equity-based staff placements, such as placing the most skilled teachers or principals with the students who have greatest need.
10.	<b>Modeling Ethical and Equitable Behavior:</b> Leadership leads by example, demonstrating integrity, advocacy, conviction, transparency, and persistence for pursuing equity. Leadership follows through on commitments even in the face of risk, challenge, and push-back.

**Self-reflection and personal growth.** A theme from the focus group session – which also emerged in the Round 2 data – included the need for leadership to engage in critical consciousness raising and deep examination of biases and assumptions, coupled with developing an understanding of the history of racism, privilege, and oppression in schools and society. Such understanding and reflection is still rare. For instance, a White male educational consultant noted: “Many of our leaders can self-reflect, but they don’t reflect with a critical lens or an equity lens or this perspective of justice and injustice.” The group agreed leaders must “start with the self” and “engage in a long-term journey of [their] own practices” and core values. With this capacity “comes the ability to ask difficult questions of ourselves and others” (Japanese American female district leader). The discussion led the group to identify *engaging in self-reflection and personal growth for equity* as a high-leverage practice and prompted us to expand this practice statement from Round 2 to include defining core values (see Table 5).

**Building organizational capacity.** Though participants felt that positional leaders like principals could not guide others in equity work without having done their own self-reflection and growth, they also articulated the importance of developing organizational capacity and leadership to engage in equity work. For example, a Japanese-American female district leader stated, “It’s not just about us as leaders, but we have to be able to intentionally create capacity in our staff to do the same, on an ongoing basis. It’s not once a year, ‘Oh here comes August in-service week, let’s spend 30 minutes on self-reflection.’” Similarly, a Latino school leader expressed:

It’s much more than just supports and empowering leaders; [it’s about] building capacity, especially in your teacher leaders who are going to carry way more weight in the equity conversation than I ever will. It’s having the tough conversation, them having the skills...to ask higher level questions and call out their colleagues. As that evolution happens, that’s when it’s truly systemic...and will last beyond my days as a building principal.

This dialogue led to agreement among the group that *developing organizational leadership for equity* should be included as one of the high leverage equitable leadership practice (see Table 5).

**Supervising for the improvement of equitable instruction.** Participants agreed that supervision for continuous improvement needed to be included as a high leverage practice. A Latina school leader expressed, “What is not in any of the columns (*referring to Table 4*) that surprised me is that teacher supervision and improvement and equitable instruction are not there.” They felt teachers must be assessed on “meeting the learning needs of each child” and on their demonstration of equitable practices, including how they provide “appropriate” access to content or how they incorporate culturally responsive instruction. Several participants spoke to the importance of accountability for change; that the organization and those who work in it demonstrate continued commitment to understanding and implementing equitable instructional practices. Based on participants’ feedback, we included *supervising for equitable instruction* as a high leverage practice, including supporting teacher growth and holding teachers accountable to engaging in equitable practices (such as culturally responsive instruction) and making ongoing improvements in meeting the needs of each child.

**Creating a culture of high expectations and collective responsibility.** The group agreed that leadership must promote and enact a school culture with high expectations, where all members of the school community in and outside of the school’s four walls maintain collective responsibility for the success of each child. This included addressing “exclusionary discipline practices” and enacting restorative justice. Participants highlighted how the high expectations and responsibility for

the success of each child was not only the duty of positional leaders and teachers; it was also a community undertaking. For example, one community leader expressed:

It's not just about my child in that school, but what's my commitment as a member of the Asian Pacific Islander community to all Asian Pacific Islander children and, in fact, all children of color, and, in fact, children who are living on low-income. . . . Building of a high level of responsibility and accountability is not just about me, but is around the greater good.

We used participants' responses to shape a new high leverage practice, *creating an equitable school culture*, which encompassed cultivating a safe and welcoming environment, enacting high expectations, and countering disproportionality through restorative justice (see Table 5).

**Enacting leadership with families and communities.** Participants concurred with the Round 2 findings that equitable leadership requires authentic partnership with families and communities, particularly those who have been traditionally marginalized. The group's discussion focused on: (1) ensuring that families and community members play a central role in the work of leadership, and (2) building family and community capacity for leadership and advocacy. Participants described how decision-making must be inclusive and collaborative. For example, a male American Indian school leader expressed, "We sometimes forget to ask. . . who is not at the table. . . . If we're not working to give underrepresented or underserved populations control over what schools do to or with their kids, then it's a real leadership problem." Those in positional authority must also actively seek out and promote community leaders.

Participants articulated the need to be "courageous" and "strategic" about using their power and position from within the system while also cultivating community voice for change:

Part of it, too, is empowering others to advocate, especially those whose voices have not been heard. As a leader for equity, I may not be the one that's up in a board meeting speaking my mind, but I can educate the parents in my community about what a board meeting is and what power they have as parents in the community and influence them and encourage them to speak out. (Mixed Race Female District Leader)

The discussion confirmed the need to include *collaborating with families and communities* as high leverage, merging the core leadership behaviors from practice statements 19 to 23 generated in Round 2. The sessions also prompted the addition of cultivating community advocacy as part of *influencing the sociopolitical context* (see Table 5). Finally, participants argued that for a leadership practice to be defined as "equitable," it must be enacted collaboratively and constructed across multiple roles and boundaries. We included this thread across the leadership practices.

**Systemic and sociopolitical nature of leadership for equity.** Several focus group participants expressed surprise that the top equitable practice statements did not more commonly address how the system and broader context play a role in leading for equity. They described how leadership must openly and intentionally address systemic and institutional oppression, which lies at the root of educational disparities. One African American educational policy researcher argued that the sociopolitical roots of equity require asking: "What's the purpose of schooling, and what does it mean for democracy, and what has happened over time in our country that erodes that purpose?" Similarly, an Asian American female community leader encouraged interrogation of the word "system." Traditionally, she stated, the term has been "meant to breed good factory workers but really has not made the change that it needs to make to bring the kind of world citizens that are

concerned about the common good.” Instead, as one White male educational consultant added, “the current system is perfectly designed for the outcomes that we’re getting.” This participant went on to describe the social and political questions leaders must pose in equity work:

I think that sociopolitical work requires discomfort, and so I’m just putting it in a very practical sense: Does it mean that you speak up at the school board meeting? Does it mean that you take risks? Does it mean that you risk your job? Does it mean that you write letters to the editor? Does it mean that you call out practices within your own school? Does it mean you interrupt injustice?

For the focus group participants, sociopolitical work went beyond more traditional policy implementation and legal compliance. Rather, sociopolitical leadership meant advocacy; including taking the work beyond the school walls, building coalitions with families and communities – particularly those whom the system has marginalized – to catalyze larger change efforts, and advocating in multiple public spheres.

The focus group discussion regarding the systemic and sociopolitical work guided modifications to our final list of high leverage practices and affirmed the use of an equity lens to address systemic change as a driver that weaves across all the practices. For instance, in *developing a vision for equity*, we refined the language to specify that the vision must explicitly recognize inequities as systemic in nature, rather than as something rooted in individual children or their families. Additionally, we included *influencing the sociopolitical context* as one of the high leverage equitable practices, with emphasis on addressing systemic barriers and influencing policies in ways that counter structural and cumulative disadvantages for nondominant students and families. Lastly, threaded across these practices is the notion that leadership must be enacted through an equity frame, viewing disparities between dominant and nondominant students as systemic, structural, and historically-embedded.

**Allocating resources.** Participants felt strongly about including equitably allocating financial, material, and human resources as a practice, despite its absence among the top eight equitable practices from the Round 2 survey. The group articulated the need to include how leadership thinks about, advocates for, obtains, and distributes money and materials as a one of the high leverage practices and encouraged the addition of advocacy within the system beyond one’s own formally-designated sphere of control (see *allocating resources* in Table 5).

In addition, participants confirmed the critical nature of hiring and placement of teachers and school staff. For example, a Latina school leader stated: “From a principal perspective, I think one of the most important things that I do is staff my building, because the people that I select to stand in front of the children make a world of difference.” Another participant, an African American female researcher, corroborated, “Teacher hiring and placement is... one of the biggest and most critical decisions that school leaders are making.... Simple things like who assigns teachers to kids who are considered the toughest kids; that’s a huge choice.” This participant also encouraged a shift in the articulation of the practice, to focus more squarely on the recruitment, hiring, and retention of candidates who have an equity frame and not just diversifying teaching staff:

I agree that hiring and teacher placement is one of the top practices... but... my priority would not be around promoting people of color, though as an African American, I think that that’s critical. I want to promote people who have an equity lens, and I don’t really care what color they are. I don’t make the assumption that all folks of color have equity right.



The group recognized that hiring goes beyond the choice of candidates by a single leader: “It is also about job descriptions and policies and interview questions and who serves on the committees.” This White male consultant went on to provide a specific example: “[One of our local school districts] made the policy decision this year in terms of layoffs to give priority to bilingual teachers over monolingual teachers, a huge equity decision. It’s going to have a great impact on their vision of becoming a bilingual district.” These comments from the group enabled us to refine the description of the *hiring and placing personnel* practice (see Table 5).

**Modeling and the will to act.** Finally, participants agreed that those who engage in leadership for equity must be willing to act boldly and model equitable practice, even in the face of resistance. An African American female school leader noted that often leaders “don’t want to rock the boat;” they say, “it’s not a good time, or they’re a little wary about the support from district leadership.” Yet in leadership for equity, “Somebody has to put themselves on the line and share their personal experiences and call out these inequitable practices when they see them.” An Asian American female community leader described:

Someone has got to be willing to take the risk in the face of all information to the contrary, knowing that you don’t have district support or knowing that that’s not going to make you popular. Those are the moments of grace in leadership where someone says, “Yeah, but I know it’s the right thing to do so I’m going to do it.”

These common responses from participants confirmed “Modeling” as a high leverage practice and also helped reshape the practices related to vision and self-reflection and personal growth, where we added the notions of *enacting* the vision and having the *will to act* (see Table 5).

**Consensus around 10 practices.** At the end of the two focus group sessions we shared the written descriptions of the 10 high leverage practices that had been shaped through the Delphi process, and we asked the group to examine and react to them. All focus group participants verbally agreed on the articulated practices and their meanings as shown in Table 5.

## Discussion

The high leverage equitable leadership practices begin to outline what leadership for equity looks like *in practice*, which has been called for in the literature and in the newly adopted PSEL standards but not developed through a systematic process. Though we began with a large number of statements from the expert participants in the study, consensus emerged around crucial leadership practices the group believed would be most likely to mitigate or eliminate disparities between dominant and nondominant students and families.

Given the importance of instructional leadership (Hallinger, 2005; Neumerski, 2013; Theoharis & Brooks, 2012), it is not surprising that participants focused more on instructional improvement for equity than any other leadership responsibility in the early rounds. Eleven of the 27 equitable leadership practices from Round 1 and four of the eight top practices in Round 2 were related to instructional improvement for equity. And yet, participants in the study also indicated the need for the field of educational leadership to go deeper in describing what equitable leadership practices look like on the ground and to be explicit in the language used in the high leverage practices. For example, they argued for embedding language that openly identifies race, class, power, privilege, and marginalization across the leadership practices; something lacking in the both the ISLLC and PSEL standards. The focus group further insisted on including language that leadership practices must address the systemic, structural, and sociopolitical nature of disparities between dominant and nondominant students and families. In addition, the focus group participants argued

for a shift in the conception of leadership, from traditional, individualistic, and hierarchical to participatory and collective (see also Anderson, 2009; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014; Ogawa & Bossert, 1995; Ospina & Foldy, 2005; Ryan, 2014).

Although our participants reached consensus around standards-based equitable leadership practices, implementing such practices on the ground is far from simple. Most leaders are ill-prepared to enact the kind of practices identified here (see Evans, 2007, 2013; Furman, 2012; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2008). To develop such leadership will require significant shifts in preparation programs, reshaping programs in ways that are transformative, antiracist, critical, self-reflective, focused on the sociopolitical, and rooted in practice and notions of constructionist leadership in which the work of leadership is a collective process of social construction mediated through practices and meanings (e.g., Diem & Carpenter, 2013; Evans, 2007; Furman, 2012; Galloway & Ishimaru, 2015; Gooden & Dantley, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2008; Scanlan, 2013; Shields, 2010; Wilson et al., 2013; Young & Laible, 2000).

The high leverage practices identified here may offer a unique contribution to leadership preparation, adding to a growing but still nascent body of frameworks and tools focused on developing transformative, race-conscious, culturally-responsive educational and constructionist leadership. In particular, faculty who prepare building and systems-level leadership candidates might introduce students to the high leverage practices, read and discuss literature highlighting their theoretical underpinnings in relation to the conceptualization and enactment of leadership, and engage students in using tools to examine their own contexts and leadership development. Additionally, school districts could consider utilizing the high leverage practices to guide professional development of practicing leaders.

Finally, although changes in leadership preparation and practice are critical to achieving equity for nondominant students and families, we are unlikely to redress existing gaps without countering broader systemic, historical, and sociopolitical roots of the disparities. We suspect that our participants' call to make these roots a central focus within the high leverage practices stems from their commitment to countering pervasive colorblindness and unexamined power and privilege that reinforce and sustain inequities. This was evidenced by participants' urging to name race, class, and other group-based disparities; incorporate explicit language on the systemic nature of disparities; and articulate shifts in power structures. Without such changes, colorblind educational policies and practices can continue to appear neutral or even laudable as written (Davis et al., 2015; Gullen, 2011; Urrieta, 2006) yet do not address the education debt owed to nondominant students (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

K-12 leaders can play a role in countering colorblindness and deeply rooted structural barriers. Like our study participants, we concur that doing so will require a different conception of leadership; one that moves away from current policy discourse around educational leadership focused on individual principal or district leader effectiveness (Rice, 2010), and instead toward individuals' engagement in *collective* learning activity, as a community of learners, situated in a particular context and focused on the work of transforming and creating new cultures and practice (Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Nicolini, Mengis, & Swan, 2012; Scanlan, 2013). This model, rooted in sociocultural learning theories, entails members of the community working and learning together across roles and difference to surface current and historical practices that have maintained inequities, negotiate contradictions that emerge in the process, create new conceptions, and try out radically different practices, policies, actions, etc. (Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Miettinen & Virkkunen, 2005). We offer the high leverage practices in this paper as a trigger for such leadership activity.

Though our research is designed to identify a set of high leverage equitable practices to catalyze organizational growth for equity, we recognize the study's limitations. Our experts were

drawn heavily from the Pacific Northwest. At the same time, the experts in this study had greater experience in leading for educational equity than the typical practicing administrator and were predominantly people of color. The converged practices may, thus, reflect nondominant cultural practices, values, and norms that substantively differ from those of white, male repertoires. To the extent that one's own identity and positionality as a leader shape one's practice, these practices may be particularly "high-leverage" for leaders of color. We argue that these perspectives offer important new insights for reshaping leadership standards and practice.

We also recognize that the high leverage practices contain educational jargon that can act as a representation of power. For instance, the term "funds of knowledge" refers to a specific set of ideas by Moll et al. (1992) that are not familiar to many practitioners. Moreover, the initial questions we posed to participants were framed around the six 2008 ISLLC standards (a dominant frame) and focused more centrally on race, ethnicity, class, and home language than other forms of marginalization or their intersections. These lenses may have limited alternate possibilities and paradigms. We expect the language of the practices to evolve as we continue to expand the work.

Additionally, we recognize that schools and districts alone cannot be responsible for mitigating inequities in educational systems (Anyon, 2005). Though the practices identified in this paper are focused on the institutional policies and practices in schools and school systems, the focus on the systemic, historical, and sociopolitical roots of inequities; the conception of leadership as enacted through community; and the focus on building coalitions with people and organizations across the community all have implications far beyond the school walls. Finally, while we and the experts in our study expect these 10 high leverage practices to trigger discourse and action designed to mitigate inequities, there remains a dearth of research on how such practices get taken up individually or collectively in day-to-day leadership. Future research could examine how to develop *collective understandings* about equitable practice; how understandings, contradictions, shared meanings, and behaviors emerge in communities that engage in the process of improving organizational leadership practice towards equity; whether and how these communities are able to learn and develop in their leadership for equity; and what this means for student outcomes.

The field of educational leadership has called for developing leaders who can eliminate disparities between dominant and nondominant groups. Though the consensus reached by the study's participants should not be taken to mean that, as a field, we know everything we need to know in order to produce equitable outcomes for all students (see Edmonds, 1979, for alternative argument), this study provides a step toward describing organizational-level equitable leadership concepts, responsibilities, and actions to mitigate disparities. We share the high-leverage practices and their research and conceptual base in hopes of facilitating leadership in the transformation to an equitable educational system.

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