



## Ann Arbor Public Schools Strategic Equity Plan

### 2022-23 Focus: A Culture of Dignity

Fall Update  
Board of Education  
December 21, 2022

For the third school year, we have continued our all-staff work to learn and develop our own individual, team and organizational capacity to implement equity centered practices in the Ann Arbor Public Schools.

During this 2022-23 school year, the focus has been on ensuring a culture of dignity.

**2022-23 Affirmation: In the AAPS, we will nurture a climate of belonging through shaping and maintaining a culture of dignity for every student (staff & family member) on every day.**

***Dignity 22-23 Mission:*** We are committed to honoring the dignity of each student, ensuring connections, learning and growth for students at school through listening to and getting to know our students, celebrating the unique gifts and strengths each student brings to the classroom community.

To ensure a culture of dignity, we will begin by listening, take actions to know our students by name, strength, culture, story and need, listen closely to the experiences of students and act affirmatively on what we learn, so that all in our schools feel validated, appreciated, accepted, and treated fairly. (Minor work)

***AAPS Working Definition of Equity:*** Equity is the moral responsibility of each member of our learning community to take the intentional actions necessary to continue to create a learning community free of barriers, biases, and disproportionality for each and every person regardless of personal characteristics and social circumstances.

***Work for Change in the AAPS:*** In our work together to shape a culture of dignity as the organizational foundation for equity, we will continue progress in equity practice across three key domains of the AAPS organization:

- 1) a transformation of **culture**,
- 2) the shift of classroom, school and organizational **practice**, and
- 3) the redesign of **systems** to honor dignity.

## 22-23 Learning & Development Series

### Leadership Learning Sessions:

- ***Framing A Culture of Dignity for 2022-23***  
**August 9th, 2022** Instructional Leadership Team Session  
Understanding a culture of dignity as the foundation of our equity work in the AAPS.
- ***Importance of Culture in Ensuring a Culture of Dignity***  
**October 4th, 2022** Instructional Leadership Team Session  
*To visualize successful equity implementation, consider this horticultural analogy. Inclusion is the precious, flowering plant we are trying to cultivate. Belonging is the root system that sustains the plant, yet it remains unseen and often underappreciated. The organizational Culture in our schools is the soil out of which the plant must grow. As any gardener will tell you, to successfully grow plants, you must first know your soil, what it is, how it works, the minerals involved, and then know how to adjust and enrich that solid to nourish the root system to yield vitality. If you neglect the soil or if you have bad soil, your results will be compromised, perhaps dismal.*

“As educators serious about equity implementation, **we must be intentional about the environments we are creating, rather than just uncritically accept the environment we have inherited.** To return to the gardening analogy..., we need to attend to the soil.

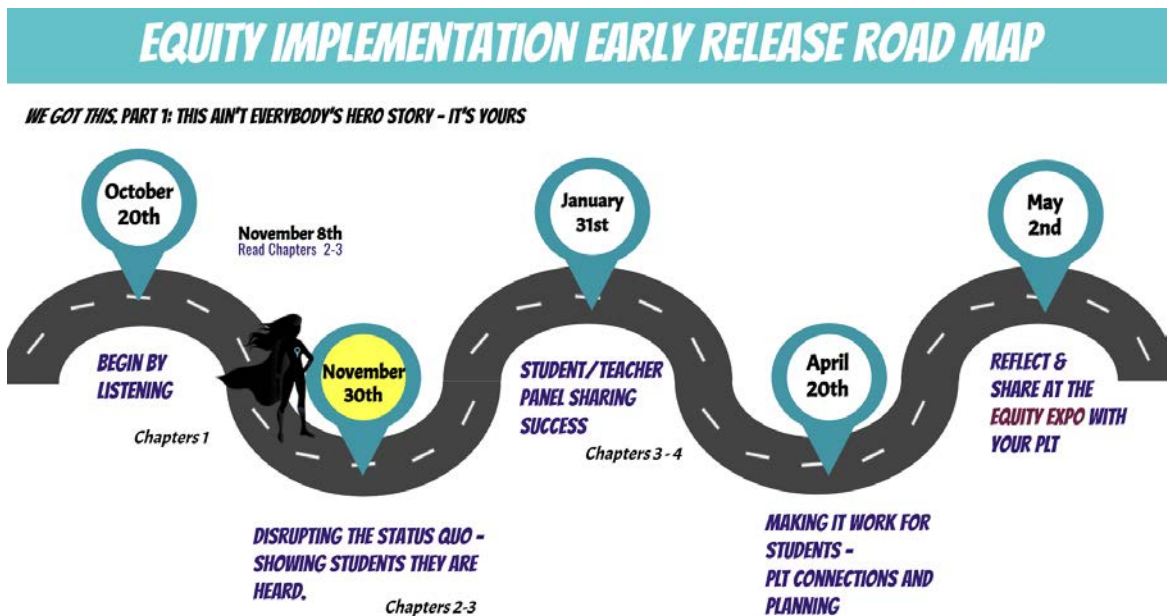
In considering the research, all our strategies for diversity, equity, and integration will disappoint unless the basic culture is positive and inclusive. But once we've transformed our current culture into a positive one, we can expect a many hundred-fold return on our investment. Our task at hand is to shape a positive school environment - healthy soil - that allows everyone to feel included.” p. 89

- ***Understanding the Distortions of Dignity***  
**November 29, 2022** Instructional Leadership Team Session

### 22-23 Teacher and All Staff Learning Sessions:

- **Learning with Cornelius Minor, author of *We Got This* - August**
- October 20 - Began the first of 5 sessions with a launch of our year-long essential questions: **How can I listen fully? How can I use what I have learned about students to make active and longstanding adjustments to my classroom community and to my teaching? How will I know if what I am doing is working?**
- November 30 - The learning continued with staff teams discussing the actions taken in their classrooms to establish a culture of belonging through deep listening. Small professional learning teams (PLTs) engaged in content specific exploration to deepen their understanding of authentic listening and application of that listening to lesson design.

- The professional learning path continues in January, April and May in our efforts to transform learning and learning environments to become places where **ALL** students are deeply engaged and fully connected, validated and active participants in the learning process.



## A Culture of Dignity as the Foundation for Equity in the AAPS

### Ensuring Belonging through a Culture of Dignity

In the AAPS, a culture of dignity is our foundational cornerstone for equity and inclusion.

In the AAPS, we will nurture a climate of belonging through shaping and maintaining a culture of dignity for every student (staff & family member) on every day.

### Dignity Core Beliefs

**We believe:**

- Dignity is our common heritage and birthright as human beings.
- Dignity is the innate equal worth of human beings, as humans.
- Dignity stands above differences.
- Every person has dignity.

**Rationale for Dignity** - “Dignity is *the* precursor to cultural responsiveness and any other equity methodology ever conceived - past, present or future.” Cobb & Krownapple, p.106

“The hidden root problem is that we haven’t recognized and corrected the historically unhealthy and unwelcoming climate in our schools and classrooms.”

“Moreover, such fundamental change requires us to come to terms with the students, teachers, and parents who we’ve harmed along the way by engaging in a system and practices that make certain people feel that they don’t belong. But if we are truly sincere in our efforts to achieve greater equity - actionable instead of purely symbolic - we must correct the climate and cultures of indignity in our classrooms and schools.” p. 180

#### Four Core Organizational Practices to Support A Foundation of Dignity

- 1) We will activate the **dispositions for dignity: Empathy, Patience, Openness, and Listening** to honor the dignity of every student.  
Four personal capabilities and organizational capacities that, if nurtured, make it easier to honor dignity.
- 2) To achieve a culture of dignity, we will embody the **indicators of belonging**, begin by listening, take actions to know our students by name, strength, culture, story and need, listen closely to the experiences of students and act affirmatively on what we learn, so that all in our schools feel validated, appreciated, accepted, and treated fairly.
- 3) We will plan, implement, and assess behaviors, practices, and policies for dignity through the **Standards for Dignity:**
  - A) build partnerships and community,
  - B) repair harm and restore relationships,
  - C) affirm differences and uniqueness, and
  - D) presume competence and positive intent.
- 4) We will take steps to neutralize the **distortions of dignity**, indicators of othering, violations of dignity; we will work to overcome the forces that hinder our ability to see and honor dignity. When the distortions are neutralized, dignity becomes clear.  
Dispositions that lead to violation of dignity: **judgment, apathy, intolerance, denial.**

Theory of change: We will demonstrate our core value of unconditional belonging by taking the intentional actions necessary to transform culture, shift practice, and redesign systems to create a culture of dignity.

Dignity text is based in and gratefully adapted from Cobb and Krownapple, *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation*, 2019

#### 22-23 Resources:

Cobb, Floyd, and Krownapple, John. *Belonging Through a Culture of Dignity: The Keys to Successful Equity Implementation*, 2019.

Minor, Cornelius. *We Got This. Equity, Access and the Quest to Be Who Our Students Need Us to Be*, 2019.

## Core Values Driving the Process of Community Engagement

All voices in the AAPS school community -- students, staff, families, community members and partners -- are valued and welcomed.

- Meaningful engagement begins with authentic listening and open, honest dialogue. It's a process of doing with, rather than doing for, our community members.
- Community engagement uses many strategies to be as accessible as possible, meeting people where they are and hearing their concerns.
- Community engagement is a continuous, long term and systemic process, involving ongoing relationship-building with individuals, groups, and organizations.
- Community engagement is goal-directed, and input is used as an important component of district planning efforts.



Cobb & Krownapple, 2019