2016 Educational Equity in Action:
Event review

About the convening
On June 20 and 21, over 600 Minnesotans attended the first-ever University of Minnesota convening of K-12 and higher education leaders, researchers, policymakers, and non-profit organizations committed to improving educational equity in Minnesota. There were even some high school students in attendance! The event was held on the University of Minnesota West Bank campus, in Willey and Blegen Halls, and Carlson School of Management.
Day 1

The convening kicked off with introductions from President Eric W. Kaler and Regent Abdul Omari who emphasized the importance of equity in education.

Keynote 1: Pedro Noguera

The first keynote speaker was Pedro Noguera, Distinguished Professor of Education at the University of California and Director of the Center for the Study of School Transformation. Dr. Noguera is a sociologist whose scholarship and research focus on the ways in which schools are influenced by social and economic conditions, as well as by demographic trends in local, regional, and global contexts. A graphic interpretation of Dr. Noguera’s talk is pictured below.

“I had the privilege of attending the Educational Equity conference a couple of days ago. The event has had a huge impact in me. I learned new things and ideas and met amazing people who have the same passion for equity that I have.” - High school teacher
Keynote 2: Jeff Duncan-Andrade

The dean of the College of Education & Human Development, Jean Quam, addressed the group and introduced Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Associate Professor of Raza Studies and Education at San Francisco State University. Dr. Duncan-Andrade is the founder of the Roses in Concrete Community School, a community responsive lab school in East Oakland and the Community Responsive Education Group (CRE) working with schools and districts around the world to develop and support effective classroom and school cultures. As a classroom teacher and school leader in East Oakland for the past 23 years, his pedagogy has been widely studied and acclaimed for producing uncommon levels of social and academic success for students. A graphic interpretation of Dr. Duncan-Andrade’s talk is pictured below.

Following dynamic presentations by both speakers, participants broke into reflective discussion groups to process the information. Get a full discussion summary at the end of this document.

Day 1 ended with a reception hosted by University of Minnesota President Eric W. Kaler.
Day 2

ProAction Cafés

On the second day, participants interacted in ProAction Cafés after being welcomed by University of Minnesota Vice President for Equity and Diversity, Katrice Albert. The ProAction Cafés helped harness the collective wisdom of the group and inspired creative conversation. Dave Dorman and Jen Mein facilitated the discussions, in which participants proposed action ideas or projects (questions) and gained input from small groups, or cafés, to help move them to action. Nearly 100 cafés were held. Most of the callers – people who proposed ideas – submitted notes (summary available at: http://z.umn.edu/edequitycafe).

“Brainstorm” → “Idea” → “Action”

“It was an honor to have a space to share some of my ideas and enlightening to hear from colleagues who have such important things to say and share. I learned a lot and have strengthened my commitments.”

“We had an incredible conversation.”

“Amazing and well-planned conference.”
Closing

The convening ended with a panel consisting of Kent Pekel, CEO Search Institute, Tyrone Brookins, Roseville Area Middle School principal, Mistilina Sato, College of Education & Human Development professor, and Jenny Collins, Executive Director University YMCA and Beacons Network. The panel members reflected on what they experienced during the two days and connected it to their experiences. Important points included: building capacity, trusting lived experiences, two-way partnerships, anticipating the need to defend hard choices, changing behaviors as a start to changing beliefs, no decisions about us without us, and asking hard questions up front.

Audience members shared their commitments to action through an application called Padlet. See what they committed to below.

I commit to....

Challenging my k-12 partners to extending the idea of who deserves college credit • refusing to act due to perfection paralysis • continuing the work of Generation Next, which has built a coalition that has helped us align around strategies that work for all kids leading my colleagues and school in introspection and honoring the roses • encouraging and supporting colleagues and leadership as we address our biases and hold each other accountable for equity • continuing the Minneapolis Foundation’s leadership on education equity, where Sandy Vargas has been a real leader building relationships with all students and wanting for them what I want for my own children • modeling vulnerability and to create a safe platform for students to share their thoughts and ideas • exploring Intentional Social Interaction (ISI; marinitastable.org) as a model for focused conversations among diverse parents at my children’s school • learning more about toxic stress and trauma and bringing the information back to my staff to inform our work with students giving HOPE • listening to community need before jumping off to plan big programs looking at the soil when my seedling aren’t growing • developing practical strategies for teachers to use to teach academic language features to make the language of school explicit to all students • making connections between students’ home language, home dialects, and social language to bridge over to academic language being a caring adult for all of my students and loving them as my own children • working on my schools Equity Team and through my union to continue to push for racial and educational equity • continuing to be a leader for racial and educational equity despite superintendent or boards changes • working with undergraduates to more clearly define what is being asked of them in practicums and what they will be asked to do as teachers • defining teaching as an equity and social justice issue bringing EdEquity as a more central theme in courses I teach • developing a guide for schools to interpret MCAs supporting schools, institutions, community organizations • continuing to be a truth teller despite push back in work and community • connecting to CEHD about preparing teachers to use nature-based settings to engage ALL students prioritizing the development of my instructional staff in recognizing trauma and being • contacting Natalie at Sumnerfield Library and increasing my single efforts in supplying books to north Mpls residents by attempting to have libraries promote “free libraries” and find continued resources to keep libraries filled • providing opportunities for my colleagues and those we serve to engage in meaningful conversations and activities around race, age, gender and class • putting people before the program treating my students culture as an asset • engaging and listening to the needs and wants of parents and provide them with the support to advocate for their children bringing ideas and resources to our staff • putting equity at the front of my work, not an add-on • asking: “what do the students think?”
Summary of Reflection Discussions

These are summaries of the reflection discussions following the two keynote talks. They are loosely organized into a number of themes, in no particular order or priority.

Impact and messages from keynote talks

There was worry that we may listen to the talks, and then take home the message of “at least we aren’t Oakland.” This point itself should be a call to action, but if we are inspired by these talks what is our response as stakeholders? How can we move beyond professional development to make change? What will be the spark that ignites this change, because there are many sources of inspiration, but few real lasting movements. What incremental steps must be made to lead to this catalyst, or change?

The amount of research information in the presentations was strong – need to summarize it in useful ways. Duncan-Andrade provided a deeper context for teaching – that it is not about teachers pouring information into classrooms, it is about engaging themselves as they are harvesting and cultivating thinking among students. I’m always interested in literacy and learning. I struggle with literacy not reflecting the students’ race/ethnicity in the classroom. What can we do to make literacy curriculum and instruction reflect family histories in classroom learning?

One issue was presented in the keynotes in a compelling way: “It’s not students are not engaged in literacy, it’s that they are not engaged in the literacy we are giving them.” Noguera’s presentation provided a broad political perspective, helping us to think more broadly about educational equity. Duncan-Andrade provided compelling practical implications, connecting practical approaches with political realities.

A compelling message in the presentations was to be more audacious – be willing to have more hard conversations. Also the reminder of love, and realizing that love can be tough and it takes a lot to sustain it. The keynotes were important models of how to take research into consideration while being real to oneself.

In Hmong culture, everything is collective. You don’t just raise your own kids, you raise everyone’s kids. A strong message from Duncan-Andrade is the idea of how you change the whole thing, he said it is not how you change things, it is about every single one of us making changes and together we change the system.

A key message was about Audacious hope from Duncan-Andrade. There are times when I feel like I don’t have hope, but I love my job and care about students, and the presentations gave me energy to think about the possibilities. Student facing challenges in language learning situations (e.g., both parents don’t speak English) also face a lack of language help in the classroom. How can we provide supports so that students can get more connected so that they can learn more and feeling more empowered in learning?
A key message was about the role of Post-Traumatic Stress: actionable if we choose to make change. We need to consider this issue as a priority. We can develop programs to support those kids. The teachers who heard about this can bring the issue to other people, to their schools. We need to develop teacher training for those students with post-traumatic stress and other psychological challenges.

“There is no rigor without social justice.” We can talk with students about social justice and what they think about social justice; learning from them and encouraging them. Teachers should be allowed to take risks with students, even if it might not work out well in the end.

**Actions to consider**

- Share the learning from this convening with stakeholders and discuss next steps
- There may not be total agreement about what we should do. Politics may come into play.
- Cost of not doing anything vs. cost of helping students – prevention vs. incarceration • Character, courage, and commitment – recurring themes in key note speech
- Get more involved in your community – talk to parents and families, profit and nonprofit leaders, and board of school • Help support teachers • Recruit students and families in planning stage
- Get your community members involved in finding the solution: ex) Get community members involved in monitoring bullying on a school bus
- Ask our students about their daily experiences

**Maximizing the role of professional development**

How can we, at the school level, relay the importance of professional development to the community (i.e. how can we convince parents that closing school for PD is beneficial for everyone)? Also how can we get stakeholders to see that experimentation for change may sometimes fail, but that it is an important part of improving? Grit also applies to teachers.

Many educators work in isolation (even within a school district). Collaborating in schools may be helpful. Start with what you have and it doesn’t have to cost anything. Dig with what you have where you are standing. Who can help us “start digging”?

How can we communicate to students that teachers are not ALWAYS RIGHT? How can we help students understanding the realities of the world. We also need to help teachers to be open to learn from students and be eager to learn themselves. Developing more authentic interaction between teachers and students has to do with building students’ empowerment: Heart–work rather than the head–work.

**As adults, we must model behaviors for students**

- Treat everyone with respect
- Model loving caring relationships
- Connect to each other
- Bring great minds and works to schools e.g., GE nutritionists tutoring at school Having children connected with businesses – outside of school
Professional Development – what does this look like? Focus on equity? Under fire for civil rights work in schools? How do we balance this? If we take a sequential approach, we should recognize that annual progress on a few goals adds up.

We are focusing on the wrong things rather than focusing on people (e.g., the students, community helpers, teacher collaboration). How can we be more preventative instead of reactive as educators and as non-profit support organizations? How can students be mentors to teachers? Need for training all school personnel as first responders to trauma. We still need to figure out how to train and support individuals at all positions in the schools (e.g., teachers, bus drivers, custodians) in creating strong connections with students.

**Additional questions:**

- Can mindfulness and coping skills be useful interventions to alleviate stress, especially in the early grades?
- How do we maintain authentic empathy?

**Creating internal personal change**

How do we get an internal (self actualized) shift? Given that we are all very busy, have a lot to think about - how do we make this a priority for ourselves to focus on?

Can we create internal shifts? How do we bring this out in ourselves – how do we bring this out in other people? A student equity group was formed in one school in response to the Trayvon Martin case. Kids made spaces to talk, and knew more about the process to unpack this than the teachers were able to provide.

**We can start by sharing ideas and telling the truth:**

1. School districts can change the ways we get people to move forward, top-down, bottom-up, ideas from every level, create safe spaces to share ideas. We can create enough momentum and safety to make changes in the environment.
2. Address teachers’ beliefs in speaking up and bringing changes. We need to recognize that senior teachers can shut down the new teachers.
3. We can stand behind people and push them (who? administrators and everybody). Continually work to build environments to encourage teachers to speak up.
On the role of student voice and leadership

Importance of student lead groups --> Groups that prioritize student ownership/asking students for their opinions. Several key points in this area: (1) Being truly open to their voice, even on topics we may not have considered a priority - we aren’t leading and directing the discussion all of the time. (2) Are we providing authentic opportunities for student feedback? (3) How can we best promote student feedback/talk. (4) How do we shift adults’ views/help them listen to students even when they are saying things that we do not want to hear? (5) How do we deal with the scary aspects of this dialogue, i.e. balancing what students may see as favorable/important to them but may not be right for the school (potential backlash of letting go of a teacher who is popular with students, but does not teach with rigor may lead to student protest).

A student reported “there is little connection to school and my life and the world I live in. While I’m a person of color I’m from a middle-class family that lived a fairly sheltered life in a neighborhood without many problems, but the things we are being taught still doesn’t connect with me? What is your story? How do we encourage students to share their journey, both personal and ancestral?

Why is it okay to teach about MLK and Rosa Parks, but nothing about Malcolm X? Where does the curriculum even come from? Everything is so mandated – both students and teachers feel like they are breaking the rules when having deep conversations about important issues during class time rather than covering the required material.

We are too focused on outcomes. Students who continue to ask questions and dig deeper are scolded for being disruptive because teachers feel they must get through the lesson rather than celebrating curious and engaged learners. Students are too afraid to share their own opinions.

A class for perspective teachers at the UofM focuses on social inequality. For many students it is an eye-opening experience because they have lived a sheltered life, but for those who are from communities of color, it is their daily life. This also means for many of the teachers (i.e. those from white middle-class backgrounds) it will be hard for them to ever see students of color as their own children because they come from such different experiences. We should measure the extent to which students feel they have a caring adult in their lives. Too many programs provide temporary caring adults – they don’t stick around for long.
On the role of relationships

We recognize that love is an important part of authentic relationships. But, if you put too much love in place, you can’t control the outcome, such as the health and the wellbeing of the community. This complicates the recipe of dealing with traumatized kids. Sometimes community, which includes schools, contribute to environments of hopelessness. So how can the school play the role of hope at the same time – especially since it can be contradictory?

It’s not entirely clear what the role of love really is. Is it our school’s responsibility to make students feel loved, and are we supposed to challenge them to close the gap or we should show more love to close the gap?

The concept of Love is not clear, particularly as a staff, in the context of “LOVE” each other. Students decide who they are connected with; staff are there for students as professionals.

There are a number of barriers to developing strong relationships and collaboration. Teachers often think: “It’s not happening in my classroom. I’m good. It’s not my problem. Talk to people out there.” Cultural elements need to be considered as well – including how parents and families of different cultural backgrounds internalize or deal with trauma.

Concerning the issue of LOVE – where do we place the emphasis on attitude and approach to students? How do we change our practices or create internal changes with colleagues? It’s certainly not easy since people in different roles have different mind sets, different approaches (e.g., policies). Compliance doesn’t need to be fear-based.

Truth is filtered through our mechanisms for feedback. We need to ask students what their truth is. We have to get this chapter of the story correct. With fluid relationships – everyone identifies as part of the community.

We can strive to create balance between academic skill building and relationship building. There’s not one formula for it. To move forward, we must know the strengths and weakness of staff. We need to train educators and staff to identify where particular supports are and how to access them. We need to make supporting students a team effort. It is not reasonable to expect teachers to be able to do it all. We also need to teach students to do the same – to seek support from multiple people and to learn advanced social problem-solving skills.

Additional questions:
• How does school become an environment of hope and love?
• How can love be linked to practices in schools?
• Is the number of caring adults in one’s life correlated with future success? Does it take just one?
On the role of families and communities

We should strive to incorporate student/family voice in the school. We can create an advisory council for students and parents, developing programs for co-mentoring of student and teacher/administrator so both can learn, and creating opportunities for student voice instead of just talking about it.

The importance of knowing the community/living in the community/being involved in the community and knowing the community.

There is a desire to put schools back within communities. Material hope – community connection; families feel comfortable with schools, increase desire for people to come to school. Broader input in policies development would make real changes.

We need to prioritize community needs. This sometimes means working against policy. The call to action seems to fall apart. We hear this everywhere and people do not seem to be doing anything. Short term solutions to “fund and expect immediate (less than 10 years) results” does not seem to work. What is our "one thing?"

The community does not understand why school needs to be closed when the full staff is in training or PD. It's not seen as important. Childcare is a burden.

To start helping students, choose 1 or 2 students that are getting distant from you and start getting close to them (talk to them more, track them, etc...) and work with small successes in each class; work with it and grow from it. Partner up with the community to help out some of the students if you don’t know how; act like a first responder to help those students in need.

Additional questions:

• How can we best address young children's reactions to violence in their community?
• How will different relationships in different areas vary across regions/cultures?
Addressing the many barriers and challenges in making real change

Policies tend to be reactive, not preventative. Consider preventative things in school; direct service instead of indirect service to make school better. For example, teacher PD with trauma training or curriculum to learn about students’ own history to make learning more relevant.

How do we deal with the fear of backlash/repercussions for not succeeding when striving for change? Change may not always be successful, we know that and this may lead to feelings of nervousness. We need to change the expectations of the short time frame for making change, we need to engage in experimentation with true plans for change, and we need to feel protected in these efforts (not losing job at first sign of struggle), we need to be free to make mistakes (lessons can be taken from improvement sciences and research and development). If we focus only on being successful this changes how students and stakeholders interact with learning. So by being open to change and the uncertainty that brings we may lead to a cultural shift in schools, as well as the positive outcomes associated with these change in mindset.

People talked about proper English all the time, but what is that? Why is that so heavily emphasized? We should figure out how to let students know that what is more important is how you feel when you’re talking in English, not how to talk in English.

We should consider teaching impulse control. Instead of "What’s wrong with you?", ask “What are you going through today?“

How do schools do outreach? What are the boundaries where teachers stop being teachers and engage in community? How can we create environments where administrators are getting invited (and going) to students’ birthday parties? When all students take classes together, everyone succeeds at doing something they like. People in schools are afraid. We don’t know how to solve the achievement gap – if we knew, we would have done it.

We need to contend with the image that teachers are nice, but not truthful.

It seems like we were making progress in closing achievement gaps in the 1970’s. What’s different? What were we doing then that was working?

The concept of HOPE is powerful. We should consider utilizing a measuring of hope - the Hope survey. There are schools in Minnesota using it. In this way we can see how we are meeting indicators and improving important outcomes. As educators, how do we do social emotional learning and what do we do with it? How do we have an impact with that? Teachers need to bring this to the conversation.
We cannot ignore poverty issues – the lack of connection. There is a huge disconnect; barriers to interactions between students with traumatic stress and teachers for example; even disconnection with staff and communities. How can these elements can be connected in various contexts?

There are a number of disconnections. Consider public policy issues and how schools are actually funded. We need system-level strategies that need to be coordinated and tailored to mean the unique contexts of communities. We must also understand how the individual is represented in systems – these are not mutually exclusive, but have different challenges.

Systemic changes in schools /districts are needed that are designed to achieve equity. Systems with all kinds of choices sometimes make segregation worse. Technical support for poor students are needed (even though key note speakers was sarcastic about technology).

Who must we bring to the table to make this happen?
• Teachers
  - We need to support teachers.
  - Teachers are under so much stress. How do we support teachers (very important piece of puzzles)? Care givers cannot give relevant care if they are not taken care of themselves.
  - Sometimes principals are not prepared to lead staff.
  - Teachers have to compromise with reality – caring matters more than following rules and standards.
• Community
  - Connection with communities are too often on the surface only.
  - It is hard to actually work to change systems and policies.
  - Healthy relationship between school and community, between parents and schools.
  - Community engagement; community trust; empower the parents and community as part of the system, giving them meaningful and useful roles.
• Students and Families
  - Bring up student voices; one conversations sparks another one.
  - Parent engagement: parent input; how to create parent engagement; change the culture and start with small things like, calling home and providing feedback. Explore the many things parents can offer.
  - Home-visit project: with no agenda except for relationship building.
  - Recognize unique cultural backgrounds: step 1 is to gain trust; reaching out to families, communities.

Additional Questions:
• How do we build a holistic perspective on equity vs. a sequential piece-meal approach to equity?
• Is there a role for reparations? How can we make that work?
• What is the role of vocational schools?