

Are you an equity warrior?

Warriors to Advance Equity: An Argument for Distributing Leadership

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You can't mandate things that matter most! Equity matters most to many in our schools and society, and the charge of changing schools and districts to achieve equitable outcomes is certainly something that we have not been able to successfully mandate. Equity is hard work and requires the collective commitment and energy of the entire school or district education community. Achieving equitable outcomes for all learners is beyond the capacity of individual, highly talented leaders and requires the knowledge and expertise of others in the school or district organization working with a shared sense of purpose.

"Equity warriors" are needed at every level of the organization in equity focused schools and districts. Leaders must build capacity and provide support to multiply the force of contributors prepared to advance the equity mission. Who are these "equity warriors" and what are their roles? Equity warriors are people who, regardless of their role in a school or district, passionately lead and embrace the mission of high levels of achievement for all students, regardless of race, social class, ethnicity, culture, disability or language proficiency. They view themselves as having the power to influence the teaching and learning agenda in meaningful ways. Equity warriors often act outside their formally assigned roles; communicate effectively and persistently with diverse publics to influence the core business of schools and districts; participate successfully in cross-functional teams; work to improve their knowledge, skills and disposition; engage in risk-taking; and model these values, beliefs and behaviors for others to emulate in the quest for higher levels of learning for all groups of children and youth.

Equity warriors occupy a variety of roles, including, but not limited to, coaches, mentors, curriculum leaders, classroom teachers, school management team leaders and members, community leaders, parent education specialists, technology coordinators, library media specialists and guidance counselors. They are found laboring in nearly all other roles commonly found in schools and districts. Typically, equity warriors are driven by personal values and beliefs, have an area of knowledge or expertise that they are passionate about, contribute freely to equity work beyond their assigned role and are willing to grow and learn to become more effective in advancing the equity agenda in their school, district or community. Any effort to achieve equitable outcomes for *all* learners requires the presence of these mighty warriors for social justice.

We know through experience, research and documented best practice that school or district leadership models that solely rely upon principals, superintendents or other appointed, formal leaders to change systems without using the vast resources of the school community are often not successful in developing the needed critical mass to force the abandonment of old paradigms to improve the core business of schools and districts— teaching and learning. The elimination of bad practice in classrooms, schools and districts is more attainable when leadership is spread across the school or district horizontally and vertically and when people in the organization share the zeal and commitment to make meaningful change happen.

An organization cannot flourish—at least, not for long—on the actions of the top leader alone. Schools and districts need many leaders at many levels. (Fullan, 2002).

We are all too familiar with short-lived change efforts led by highly capable, charismatic school and district leaders. We know that person-dependent change strategies are not likely to result in sustained support of long-term equity agendas. We have witnessed frequent turnover of principals and superintendents and the rapid-fire introduction of multiple, poorly supported improvement efforts that are fragile and have short life spans. The “equity war” calls for many leaders in many different roles who join in the movement today for our students.