

# Coaching and Leadership for Equitable Outcomes

Educational equity means that every student has access to the resources and educational rigor they need at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability\*, sexual orientation, family background, and/or family income (Aspen Institute & Chief Council of State School Officers, 2017, December, p. 3).

## Advancing Educational Equity in Wisconsin

In nearly every measurable area, (i.e. academic achievement, discipline practices, gifted and talented placement, and graduation rates) across all ages and grades, Wisconsin's education system has yielded persistent inequitable outcomes for learners along demographic lines. In particular, learners of color and students identified as English learners have experienced significantly lower rates of success than their peers. In addition, students with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) (including but not limited to students of color) and learners eligible for free and reduced lunch experience similar results.

Achieving equity in Wisconsin schools demands a bold commitment to deliberately address these unacceptable outcomes.

An intentional focus on equity accounts for and adapts to the diversity of learners and families served by Wisconsin schools. To become equitable, schools and educators engage in a journey of deep and honest examination of who they are, their beliefs and assumptions about the learners and families they serve, and what they value and affirm.

## Statement of Intent

This document - jointly crafted by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction and its partners from the Wisconsin RtI Center/PBIS Network and The Disproportionality Technical Assistance Network (the Network) - is intended to push your thinking about the specific role of coaching and leadership in advancing equity for all of Wisconsin's students. While advancing equity requires systems level changes in schools and beyond, it is also a very personal experience. The self-reflection and new learning involved in this experience often involves discomfort and emotion. Anticipating, acknowledging, and moving forward from this discomfort and emotion allows each of us and the systems we serve in to better meet the needs of every Wisconsin student.

\* The original quote uses the term "disability". The authors substitute "ability" to be more inclusive.



Developed by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, the Wisconsin RtI Center, and the Disproportionality Technical Assistance Network

Suggestions for using this document:

- Set a purpose for yourself before reading. Options include - noticing discomfort, listing ideas to learn more about, selecting ideas to discuss with colleagues, creating a plan for how you can utilize coaching to support school/district efforts to advance equity.
- Begin group discussion with norms (i.e. the Four Agreements). Revisit the norms during discussion and debrief their application after discussion.
- Consider supporting group discussion with a protocol (such as the Four As).
- Make connections between work already happening in your school/district and ideas within this document.

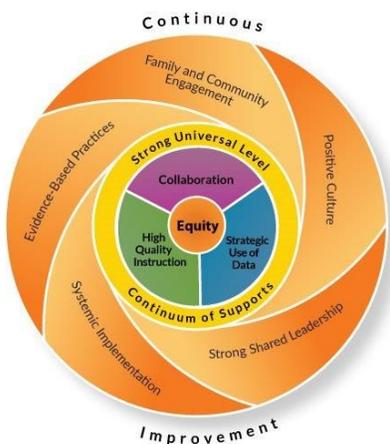
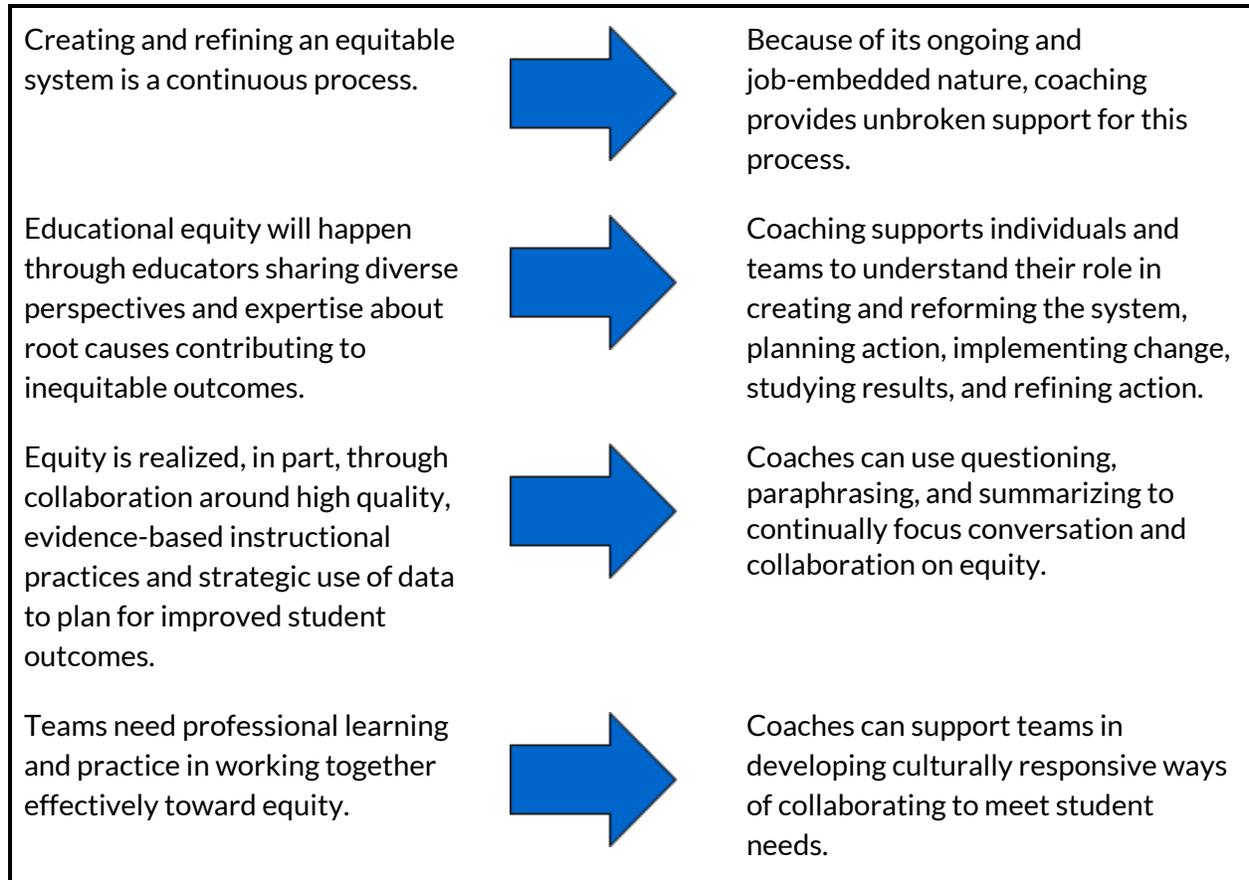
This document makes the following assumptions. A school/district:

- Has and is continually improving an equitable multi-level system of support; this document specifically references Wisconsin's framework for an equitable multi-level system of support.
- Engages in robust, ongoing professional learning to advance equity; collaboration between the coach and educator furthers this learning.
- Positively impacts the achievement of all students from historically marginalized groups by focusing support efforts on groups who experience the greatest marginalization; in Wisconsin, Black students are the group who experience the greatest marginalization.
- Includes leadership (including administrators, educators, school board, and community) in systemically and systematically advancing equity.
- Utilizes coaching as a way to further the goals of the school/district and that advancing equity is a primary goal of the school/district.
- Benefits from a coaching model, whether that is through specific coaching roles or through someone else in the system (such as a principal) serving through a coaching style of leadership.

### **Coaching and Leadership**

The complex work of improving outcomes for all and eliminating inequities depends on authentic dialogue, learning, and planning among learners, staff, families, and the community. As explained in Figure 1, coaches and leaders are uniquely situated to facilitate this deep equity-focused dialogue, professional learning, and collaboration by entering into partnerships with stakeholders. In a partnership, coaches and leaders engage in collaboration for learner success by supporting educators to achieve their goals through careful listening and guidance instead of telling them what they need to know or do.

**Figure 1. How coaching furthers educational equity**



**Wisconsin’s Framework for Equitable Multi-Level System of Supports**

The work of coaches and leaders - like all educators - is done within an equitable multi-level system of support. For Wisconsin schools and districts, implementing an equitable multi-level system of supports means providing equitable services, practices, and resources to every learner based upon responsiveness to effective instruction and intervention (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction [WDPI], 2017). In this system, high-quality instruction, strategic use of data, and collaboration interact within a continuum of supports to facilitate learner success.

Collaborative teams use a range of data to match learner needs with evidence-based practices and resources, monitor learner progress, and determine and adjust the intensity and nature of

practices and programs. Implementing equitable multi-level system of supports can help PK-12 schools and districts across the state realize their mission to ready every learner for college and career success. Visit <https://dpi.wi.gov/rti> for more information about Wisconsin's Framework for Equitable Multi-Level System of Supports.

## What Does this Mean for Coaches and Leaders?

"Coaches are in a unique position to influence teachers and administrators, to interrupt inequitable practices, to engage them in safe, reflective, transformational conversations that shift beliefs and ways of being" (Aguilar, 2014).

Just as equity is at the center of Wisconsin's Framework for Equitable Multi-Level System of Supports, equity must also be at the center of the work of coaches and leaders.

Core Competency 6 of [Wisconsin's Coaching Competency Practice Profile](#) (WDPI, 2018) states that:

"[a] coach applies their knowledge of culturally sustaining pedagogy by actively naming and standing up to oppression and engaging in conversations with others about it".

Coaches must adjust to a variety of content and clientele (the educators with whom the coach works), but no matter the situation they should bring a lens of equity to every interaction.

Coaches generally operate within a continuum: at the far left is directive coaching where the coach tells the client what to do, versus transformational to the far right where the coach mediates the learning process. If the coaching partnership is approached through directive coaching, change in regard to equity may be superficial because the client is not authentically engaged in the journey. For lasting and meaningful change, individuals and teams are empowered to examine and explore their values, beliefs, and mental models (or mind-sets) about students representing underserved groups, as well as the potential impact of these mental models on student outcomes.

In order to achieve systems change for equitable outcomes through transformational coaching, it is crucial to note the importance of a partnership between coaches and leaders. While the roles of the coach and school leadership may vary, they are both ultimately working towards the same goal of school improvement. If these two parties are conveying different messages about keeping equity at the center of all work, it is unlikely there will be any substantial or sustained change.

*Culturally Proficient Coaching* states that in transformational coaching, the coach must, "mediate a person's thinking toward values, beliefs, and behaviors that enable effective cross-cultural interactions to insure an equitable environment for learners, their parents and all members of the community" (Lindsey, Martinez, & Lindsey, 2007, p. 16). Since issues of gender, class, culture, and

race may be accompanied by feelings of distrust, guilt, defensiveness, and other strong emotional responses, coaches and leaders must work to become confident, flexible, and responsive when engaging in dialogue around these topics.

Wisconsin’s Model to Inform Culturally Responsive Practices (Wisconsin RtI Center/Wisconsin PBIS Network, n.d., p. 2) “describes the beliefs, knowledge, and practices Wisconsin educators, schools, and districts need to reach and teach diverse students within their culturally responsive multi-level system of support.” The Model is an ongoing process in which every educator, including coaches and leaders, engages in their own personal and continuous journey between will, fill, and skill. It is common to experience disequilibrium while developing will and fill; however, this is a crucial step before feeling confident enough to apply learning (skill).



The desire to lead and a commitment to achieving equitable outcomes for all students (**will**)

gaining cultural knowledge about ourselves and others (**fill**), and

**applying** knowledge and leading the change, skillfully putting beliefs and learning into action (**skill**).

Within the Model, a coach or leader may partner with client or team no matter where the client or team finds themselves in the journey to become culturally responsive.

More information can be found at

<https://www.wisconsinrticenter.org/reuseable-contents/culturally-responsive-practices.html>

The following table provides *some* concrete examples of coaching and leadership actions for equitable outcomes. Although the table specifically names coaches, this work is best accomplished in a partnership with leadership.

Coaching and Leadership Competencies	Possible Actions
Continually strengthen self-awareness of how identity and culture affect who they are and how they interact with learners and families	Engage in reading, viewing, and listening about unconscious bias, color blindness, and micromessages

<p>Lead, model, and advocate for equity</p>	<p>Investigate systems and problem solve for lasting change. Provide resources and support for ongoing professional learning focused on equity, such as a book study focused on anti-bias education and culturally responsive pedagogy.</p>
<p>Support staff in continually strengthening self-awareness</p>	<p>Facilitate the use of protocols which provide for safe environments to engage in reflection and courageous conversations about unconscious bias, color blindness, and micromessages.</p> <p>Ask questions that prompt a client to examine their own culture and how it shapes their actions. Protocols for equity work may be found in <i>The Power of Protocols: An Educator's Guide to Better Practice</i> (Donald, Mohr, Dichter, &amp; McDonald, 2013).</p>
<p>Support individual staff members' and teams' focus on equity through active dialog and consideration of whether mismatches in systems, structures, policies, practices, values, and beliefs inhibit learner success and contribute to inequitable outcomes for students representing underserved groups.</p>	<p>Challenge assumptions in the disaggregation of data, root cause analysis, and calculation of risk ratios. Lead courageous conversations about disproportionality.</p>
<p>Support staff in knowing and understanding their students and families strengths and identities and in using evidence-based practices, curriculum, and policies that respect the identities and cultures of learners and families served by schools</p>	<p>Facilitate learning about the unique strengths and blend of identities that families bring to the school setting. Explore practices and procedures for seeking knowledge and relationships with students, families, and communities. Support staff in incorporating these strengths and identities into school practices, policies and curriculum.</p>
<p>Create positive school cultures, characterized by what Kent Peterson refers to as "an unwavering belief that all students can and will learn" (Cromwell, 2002, p. 3). In a positive culture, adults accept responsibility for learner success.</p>	<p>Collaboratively examine the assumptions and implicit biases that create barriers for historically marginalized students to fully access the learning environment.</p>

## Resources

Coaches and leaders avail themselves of opportunities and resources to learn about best practices regarding equity.

- **Promoting Excellence for All (PEFA) eCourse and accompanying facilitation guide**  
<https://dpi.wi.gov/excforall/ecourse>  
*Promoting Excellence for All* provides information and strategies successfully used by Wisconsin educators to raise achievement of students of color, closing the gap between them and their peers. These schools represent all grade levels, urban, rural, and suburban settings.
- **Department of Public Instruction**  
Coaching: <https://dpi.wi.gov/coaching>  
Instructional Coaching: <https://dpi.wi.gov/literacy-mathematics/instructionalcoach>
- **Disproportionality Technical Assistance Network (The Network)**  
<http://www.thenetworkwi.com/>  
The Network works with preK-12 educators, schools, districts, and other community partners to reduce racial disproportionality in special education through a multi-tiered system of compliance activities and improvement supports. On their website you will find a variety of learning opportunities.
- **Wisconsin RtI Center**  
<https://www.wisconsinrticenter.org/>  
The Wisconsin RtI Center offers learning designed for school and district teams interested in addressing equity issues, developing cultural competence, exploring the relationship between power and privilege, and examining the subtleties within culture and diversity. In particular, the courses Building Culturally Responsive Practices and Leadership and Coaching for Systems Change support work toward equity. The Center also supports districts and schools in setting up, implementing, and measuring the equitable multi-level system of supports.

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