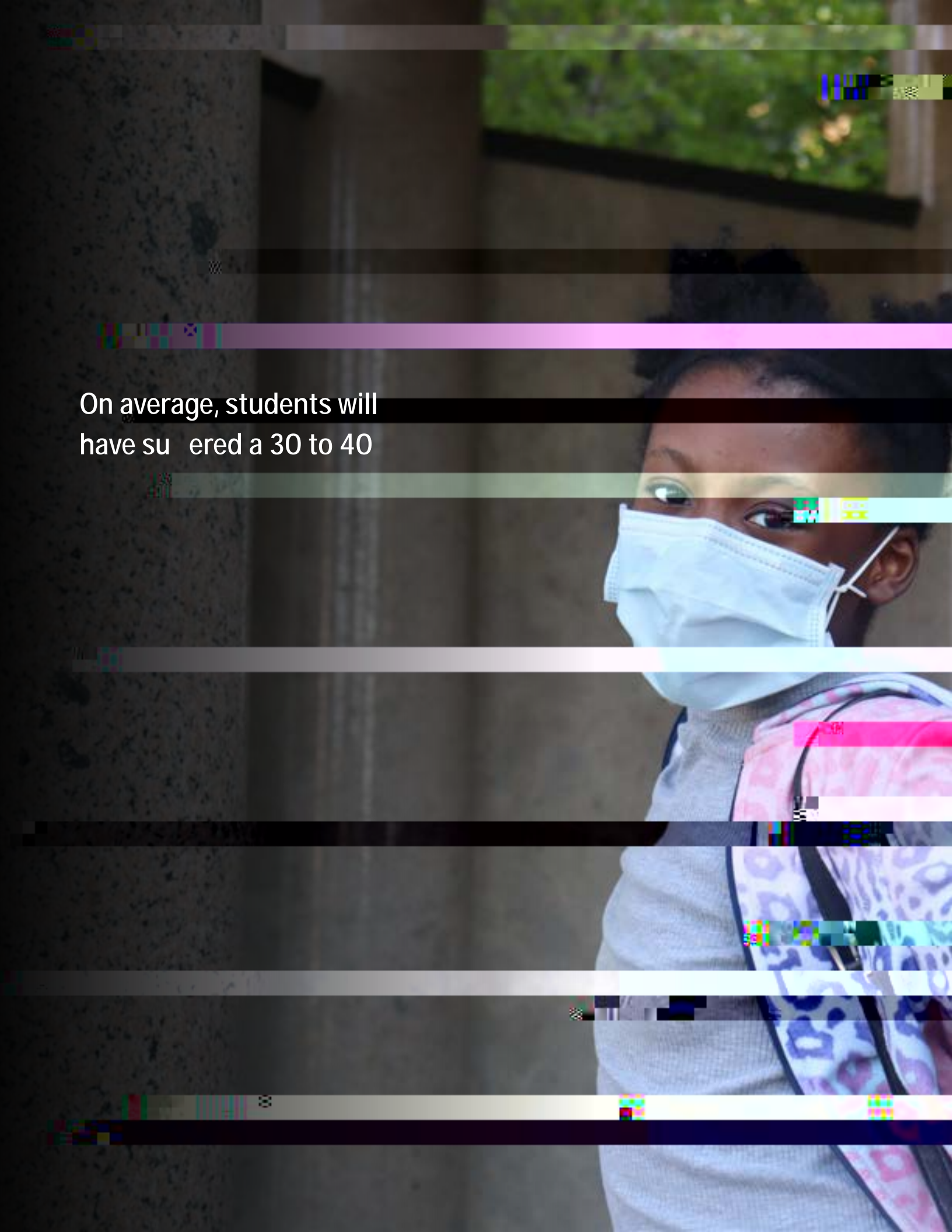


Table of Contents

Foreword.....	1
What Do We Mean by “Equity”?.....	2
The Culturally Responsive Board.....	3
Designing Your Portfolio of Schools for Excellence, Equity, and Integration	5
Ensuring World-Class Teaching and Learning.....	7
Taking a Whole Child Approach to Safety and Well-being	11
Providing Safe Spaces for Learning.....	13
Including Parents, Family, and Community.....	16
Equity Cannot Wait.....	17
Additional Resources	18
About NSBA.....	21



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have suffered a 30 to 40

Foreword

In response to grave public health concerns caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, school districts across the country closed campuses and made a sudden pivot to remote learning in the spring of 2020. At the same time, school districts found themselves serving as first responders during a public health crisis, connecting students and families to basic needs, essential services, and support. As summer began, millions of Americans took to the streets to protest police brutality and systemic racism in the wake of the killings of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, George Floyd, and others. Both COVID-19 and the movement to uproot systemic racism have continued into the 2020-21 school year. For many school districts, distance learning remains the sole delivery path for learning, while other districts have opened campuses with new protocols for physical distancing, hygiene, and the mandatory wearing of masks.

The Brookings Institution estimates that, on average, students will have suffered a 30 to 40 percent learning loss due to the disruption in face-to-face learning caused by COVID-19. This assessment is alarming for any student but is even more troubling when one considers the persistent performance trends for students of color, students with disabilities, and students who are English learners. A 40 percent learning loss for the most vulnerable students coupled with meager achievement in a normal school year will turn the achievement gap into a chasm.

Yet, the challenges of the present circumstances present a unique opportunity for long-needed change. We are collectively experiencing a watershed moment where many sacrosanct aspects of society—from law enforcement to the structure of work—are being scrutinized and reimagined. As the pandemic and the Black Lives Matter movement endure, it has become increasingly clear that it will not be possible to return to the way things used to be. The only way out is through a different and better way of living. For school districts, this means a different and better way of schooling.

Since the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, student performance data has exposed the uncomfortable truth that “schooling as usual” is a system that produces and perpetuates intolerable inequities. But after almost 20 years of reports, accountability measures, and reform movements, U.S. schooling has largely failed to move far from “one model fits all” approaches. In large part, the opportunity gaps that lead to disparities in student achievement have come to be expected and accepted.

If we understand that a system generates the outcomes it was designed to produce, then the silver lining of these current crises is that school districts and the school boards that lead them have an opportunity to reimagine and redesign systems for learning.

If school boards rise to the challenge in this moment, public education across the U.S. can be transformed so that its highest promise is fulfilled—equitable access to a world-class education, so that every student is prepared to succeed in life.

What Do We Mean by “Equity”?

The promise of public education is that every child succeeds in school and life. To realize this promise, children must be provided resources, supports, and interventions based on their needs. The nation’s school boards are uniquely positioned to fulfill this promise to all students, which is why NSBA is committed to educational equity for all children in public schools.

If all students are to be educated in a manner that prepares them for success in school and in life, school board members must lead with an equity lens. Because the notion of educational equity means different things to different people, it is important to clearly define what educational equity is and is not.

NSBA’s Center for Public Education defines educational equity as being achieved when all students have the opportunity to succeed in school and in life.

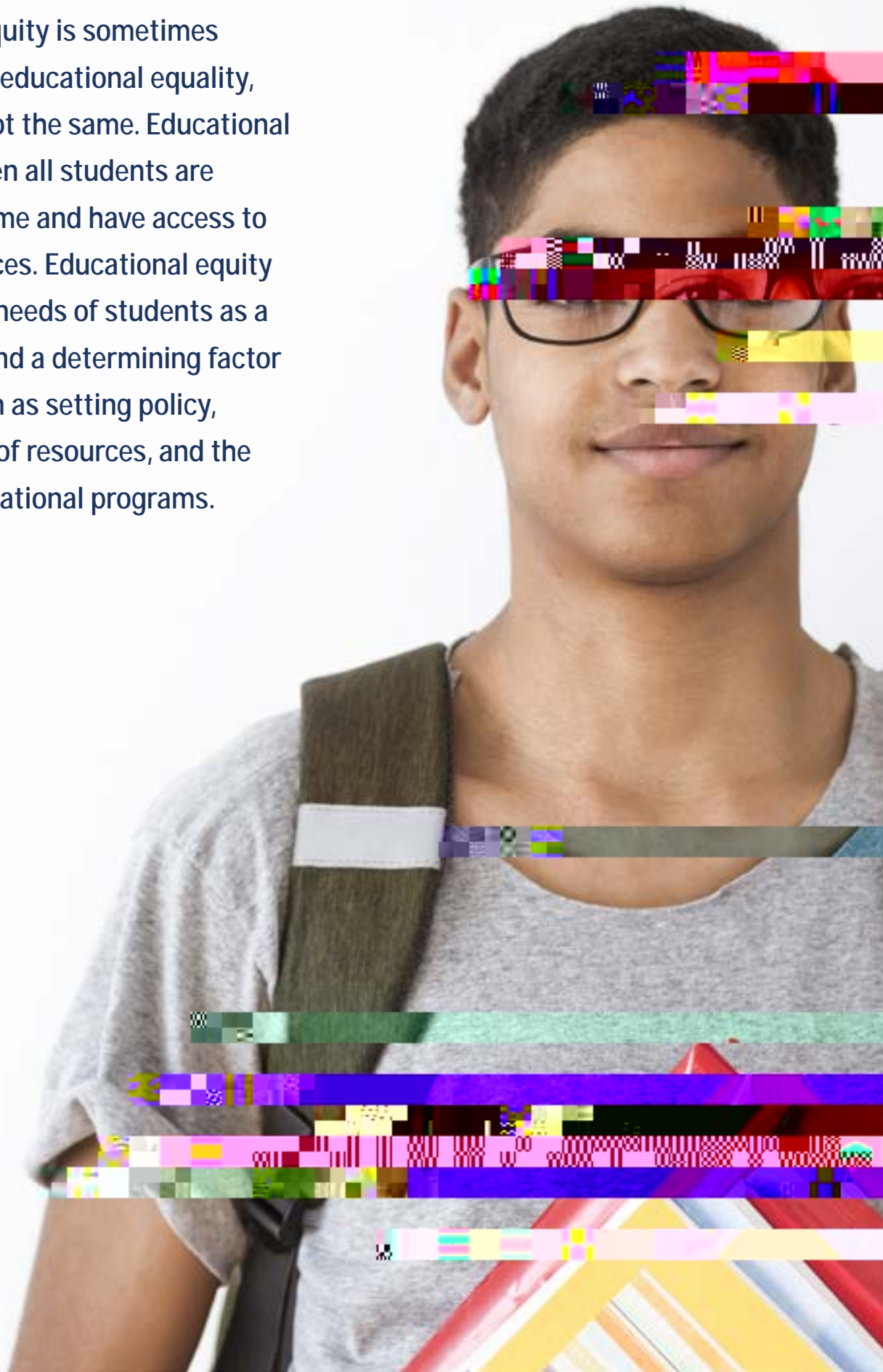
Educational equity is sometimes confused with educational equality, but they are not the same. Educational equality is when all students are treated the same and have access to similar resources. Educational equity considers the needs of students as a precursor to and a determining factor for things such as setting policy, the allocation of resources, and the design of educational programs. On the other hand, educational equality is solely concerned with whether all students get the same resources, even if the resources provided do not adequately prepare students for success after high school.

While conversations about equity can sometimes become politically charged, educational equity is not a partisan issue. Educational equity is first and foremost about ensuring that school districts fulfill their core mission: successfully educating all students so that they are prepared to be productive and engaged citizens. Creating educational equity is of utmost importance because public schools serve an increasingly diverse student population with a broad range of needs. The face of America’s typical public school student has changed and will continue to change.

In 1960, 85 percent of the country was white. African Americans were the largest non-white racial group and comprised 11 percent of the total population. Asians, Hispanics, and Native Americans represented less than 5 percent of the total population combined. Today, approximately 63 percent of the total population is white.

If current trends hold, by 2025, the U.S. is likely to have the following demographic profile: African

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boundaries that determine assignments to neighborhood schools and the power to set policy that defines the makeup of your district's portfolio of schools.

Drawing district attendance boundaries is often a contentious process. For this reason, redrawing boundaries frequently is avoided unless factors like overcrowding due to a growing student population require immediate attention. But school districts would be well served by examining district boundaries with an equity lens. Do district boundaries expose students to segregation by race or socioeconomic level? Are students doubly segregated by both factors?

School boards should consider if redistricting can be used as a tool to ensure that district boundaries can positively disrupt segregation patterns commonly found in residential neighborhoods. When district lines are being redrawn, care should be taken to balance competing priorities of diversifying schools: reducing overcrowding and maintaining manageable travel times for students. School boards also should be prepared to resist pressure to redraw boundaries to maintain segregation during demographic shifts in the student population.

A district's school portfolio can be thought of much like an investment portfolio. The allocation of investments—or in this case the types of schools—will look quite different, depending on the needs and goals of the beneficiary.

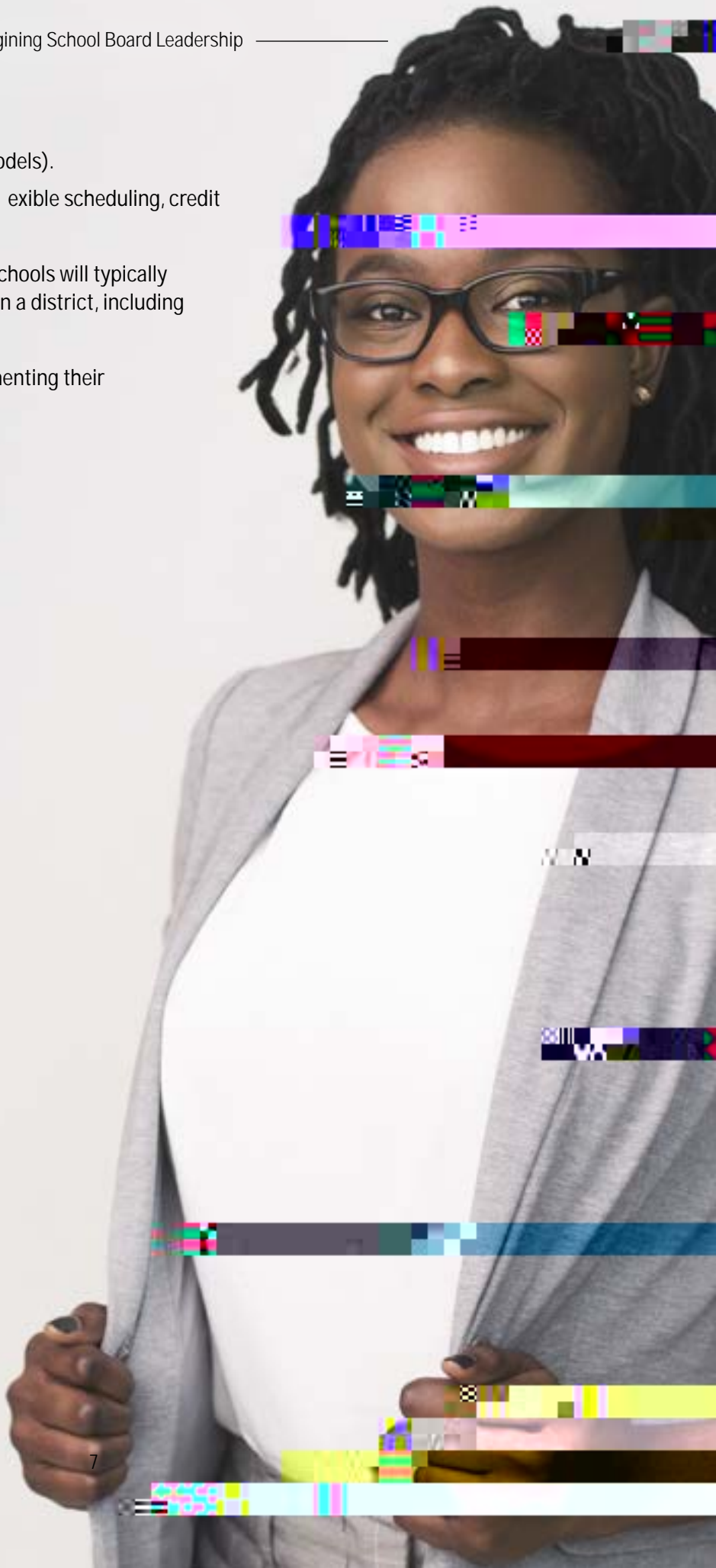
When school boards reimagine their school districts as equitable systems, they will ensure that the portfolio of schools responds to what students need, instead of simply maintaining what has always been done. Data about what students need and how existing schools are performing should drive decisions about portfolio management. To match students with schools that are right for them, your district may begin to use a mixed model to pair students with schools (district boundaries and choice). Depending on student needs, your portfolio may include schools that specialize in:

-

- Dual enrollment (early college models).
- Nontraditional students (virtual, flexible scheduling, credit recovery).

Effective management of a portfolio of schools will typically result in regular changes to the schools in a district, including but not limited to:

- Existing schools revising or augmenting their educational model.
-



students' behavior as disruptive. Further, teachers of color serve as more relatable role models and can often bridge cultural divides between home and school for students of color and their families. (Center for American Progress)

The evidence is clear: Students need teachers who look like them. Because educational equity requires systems to respond to students' needs, school board members should ask the question: How is my district ensuring that the teaching force in my district is diverse so that students are taught frequently by teachers of color?

In addition to ensuring the teaching force is diverse, teachers also need to be qualified and effective. If students have even one highly effective teacher, they are more likely to go to college. If students are taught by effective teachers for every year of their elementary school years, their education experience can offset the negative impacts of poverty.

All teachers, no matter their racial background, should be skilled in culturally relevant teaching—ways of engaging students in learning that leverages the diverse knowledge and experiences of all students to make learning more relevant and impactful. To do this, teachers need regular opportunities to identify and uproot ways that unconscious bias may affect their practice. Implicit or unconscious bias is something that every individual must grapple with—the human tendency to process information based on unconscious associations and feelings, even when these are contrary to one's conscious or declared beliefs. Regular examination of implicit bias is essential to culturally relevant practice for every educator. Culturally relevant teaching is not only important for students of color, but it also helps educators to effectively address the needs of students with special learning needs and those who are differently abled.

Creating and maintaining a diverse and highly effective teaching force are challenging tasks.

Some school districts have successfully implemented "homegro (et)8 each/MCID 3Lang alae suctrica1h0 (trice ch

recruitment? What resources can be allocated to support and retain teachers of color? How does the district ensure that teachers have ongoing professional development?

What's being taught?

What students are taught, commonly referred to as curriculum, is as important as having diverse and effective teachers. Students that have access to high-level, culturally relevant curriculum perform better in school and have better long-term outcomes including college acceptance, college completion, and future earnings.

Curriculum is a combination of the learning materials and learning experiences that students are



Reimagining schooling to create

received by communities of their same racial background, and they often bring fresh insights to the design of academic programs for underserved students.

As is the case with teachers, there is a disparity between the diversity of the student population and diversity among school leaders. While approximately half of public school students are white, about 75 percent of administrators are white. (Brookings Institution)

The dearth of diversity in school leadership is directly related to the lack of diversity among teachers. The school leadership pipeline lacks diversity. The scarcity of school leaders of color underscores the need for school districts to diversify their teaching force and to create transparent and supportive career ladders so that educators of color can advance to positions of school and district leadership.

Taking a Whole Child Approach to Safety and Well-being

Whole child health refers to the physical, mental, and social and emotional well-being essential for students to achieve positive outcomes in their academic, professional, and personal lives. The experiences that students have, especially in their very early years, shape their readiness to learn, including but not limited to language development, social development, and executive functioning that is related to self-control and good decision-making.

Research from the CDC Kaiser Permanente Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) study indicates that almost two-thirds of study participants reported at least one ACE, such as trauma, stress, hunger, environmental conditions, etc. More than one in five reported three or more ACEs. These experiences can have lasting effects and present barriers to the well-being of children and impact their performance at school.

School districts that operate with an equity lens accurately identify and support an individual's physical, mental, emotional, and overall well-being for success in academics, life, and career.

Mental health

In 2019, more than 12 percent of youth reported suffering from at least one major depressive episode, and approximately 30 percent of adolescents reported suffering from anxiety. Sixty percent of youth reporting mental health challenges did not have access to care. According to a recent study conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (April-June 2020) there has been a significant increase in adverse mental health conditions among youth due to the pandemic. Based on this study, over 40 percent of youth reported at least one adverse mental health condition. The prevalence of depression and anxiety reported was significantly higher among youth of color. Optimal learning cannot occur if schools fail to provide for the mental wellness of their students. School boards should set policy that:

- a) Requires staffing models that ensure student access to support staff.
- b) Directs staff to maintain healthy school climates, including bullying prevention.
- c) Integrates social-emotional learning into student-adult interaction across the district.
- d) Requires district staff to learn and implement trauma-informed practice.
- e) Encourages partnership and programs that meet students' basic needs.

When we consider the whole child, it is of critical importance that we recognize that before children are students, they are part of a family. Children's family and larger community play a large part in shaping the set of experiences and readiness for learning that they bring to school.



The socioeconomic status and nature of work in families also varies greatly. This results in some parents or caregivers having more flexibility and availability to engage in traditional forms of engagement such as PTA and other school councils, volunteering during school hours, and attending parent-teacher conferences and school board meetings.

As is true with teaching and learning, one size does not fit all when thinking about engaging parents, family, and community. When considering family engagement strategies, it is important to keep in mind two groups in particular:

- Parents and guardians who have had their own adverse experiences with schooling.
- Parents and guardians who support their child's education but are likely to engage in nontraditional ways.

When the diversity of stakeholders is considered, the possibilities for engagement expand. Many school districts regularly produce written communication in multiple languages, but would a short video or animated content be easier to access and understand? Is the language used accessible to a wide audience? Are school board meetings scheduled to facilitate broad engagement? And for those who are not able to attend, how can school boards make sure that it is easy for community members to share their perspectives?

Equity Cannot Wait

We are living in a time of rapid technological and social change. The world that our students will meet upon graduating will require that every learner possess the knowledge and competencies that enable them to live successfully in the 21st century. Schooling as usual will not produce the outcomes our students need. Our students need equity, and they need it now.

The questions for school boards are where and how to begin to walk the path to educational equity. School board members have the power, the position, and the ethical responsibility to reimagine education by:

- Ensuring equity in school funding.
- Ensuring access to high-quality and high-level curriculum.
- Ensuring access to effective teachers.
- Ensuring safe and supportive school climates.
- Fostering meaningful community engagement.

The future benefits for our students, their families, and our communities are too great to forfeit. School boards that seize this moment for systemic change can fulfill the promise of public education for all their students—an education that prepares every student for a successful life in the world they will inherit. As the saying goes: Show me your budget, and I'll tell you what your priorities are. As school boards take up the work to make certain that all students succeed, they need to begin by restructuring budgets to accommodate the learning environment and experiences that students require, while also providing for their physical and emotional well-being so that they are ready to learn. School board members have a moral obligation to leverage their position as policymakers and fiscal agents to ensure that education equity becomes and remains the norm in America's schools.

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The National School Boards Association (NSBA) is the leading advocate for public education. For 80 years, we have been leading the effort to support and enhance public education. We are succeeding in creating the best possible environment in which students can realize their dreams.

NSBA is a federation of 49 state associations and the U.S. territory of the Virgin Islands, representing their more than 90,000 school board officials. These local officials govern more than 13,600 local school districts serving more than 50 million public school students. Working with and through our state associations, and serving as their



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