Northern Valley Regional School District

Building School Community Equity Literacy Project

**2020-21 Proposal**

**Submitted by**

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**Solving Disproportionality Through Equity Lab**

Proposal for Northern Valley Regional High School District

**About the Lab at Temple University:**

The lab serves as a **clearinghouse** for practice, research and policy thinking partnership regarding arenas of educational practice that continuously lead to patterns of disproportionality (i.e., over and under-representation of racial/ethnic minoritized population in school practice).

The lab is based on the over twenty years of applied research work of Dr. Edward Fergus, *author of Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity: A Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds*. His research findings demonstrate the following patterns: 1) root cause analysis identifies substantive gaps between self-efficacy (i.e., confidence in capacity and impact), school practice development and implementation (Fergus, 2011, 2016, 2018); 2) schools with disproportionate patterns maintain bias-based beliefs (i.e., colorblindness, deficit thinking, and poverty disciplining) of racial/ethnic and linguistically diverse populations (Fergus, 2016, 2017); and 3) educators, at times, utilize limited understanding of practice implementation and bias-based beliefs to explain practice implementation (Ahram, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011; Kramarczuk-Voulgarides, Fergus**,** and King, 2017).

The Lab provides a range of thinking, knowledge-building, pilot, and progress monitoring partnership opportunities. The Lab team works with a district leadership team, and a cohort of schools to incubate the process of reform within the school district in order to embed a set of laboratory schools the district can utilize to learn the process of improvement that is steeped in an equity frame.

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1. **Proposed Scope of Work**

**Goal:** Developing an anti-racist and social justice framework requires that educators review how bias may be baked into school system, dismantle those systems and replace those ideas and systems. The goal of this work is twofold 1) develop *equity literacy* among Northern Valley Regional School District’s Equity Team in order to identify a developing district equity lens by Spring 2021 and 2) support the district’s ELA team to apply equity literacy into review and revamping of ELA thematic approaches.

Individuals committed to equity literacy develop the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary to address institutional and societal manifestations of inequity in order to create a more just society. At the individual level, when we embrace *equity literacy* we learn to become a *threat to the existence of inequity* and an active *cultivator of equity* in our spheres of influence. This scope of work is meant to provide guidance in the development of the type of change (i.e., knowledge, attitude, skill, aspiration, and behavior) and the strategy (i.e., counter-stereotypic, improved decision making, individuation, intergroup contact, and perspective taking) for achieving equity literacy.

The goals of the workare to: 1) support the district equity team in their development of equity literacy; 2) develop book club cohort equity literacy knowledge and skills application in one area of curriculum; and 3) develop, plan and pilot an implementation/action plan specific to one area of disparity (e.g., ELA curriculum, gifted/AP/honors tracking, special education referrals and/or placement, behavioral referrals and/or suspensions).

**Anticipated outcomes:**

* Participants will understand how bias based beliefs create disproportionate educational outcomes for students.
* Participants will develop an equity literacy lens to help them identify and interrupt practices in at least one area (curriculum, discipline, gifted/AP/honors, or special education/academic interventions) that leads to inequitable outcomes.
* Participants will develop/revamp one educational practice for 2021-22 school year.
* Participants will explore their own cultural identities and ideologies in order to better understand the lives of their students

***Phase 1: Equity Literacy Development of District Equity Team***

The first phase of work will focus on developing equity team literacy (i.e., knowledge and skills) in order understand how bias-based beliefs operate in policies, practices and procedures regarding at least one area of outcome (e.g., curriculum, gifted/AP/honors tracking, special education referrals and/or placement, behavioral referrals and/or suspensions). This will include: 1) unpacking the history of racist ideas in education and consider how some of these foundational policies and systems shape our current moment; 2) developing equity literacy in order to engage educators in professional learning series; and 3) identifying one school practice or policy to change that requires application of equity literacy. This phase will involve an equity belief survey as pre-work to the first session, reading several chapters in between sessions, and develop a working definition of equity for the district team. [*Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity: A Leader's Guide to Using Data to Change Hearts and Minds*](https://us.corwin.com/en-us/nam/book/solving-disproportionality-and-achieving-equity) by Dr. Edward Fergus will be the anchor text for this work.

**Session 1-Introduction:**Dr. Fergus will frame the history of inequality promoted through racist ideas in American schooling and will ask:  *How do we sustain a level of humanizing children through our belief systems?* This discussion-based online session will encourage participants to consider where they are on their journey of becoming anti-racist. Also participants will review disparity data patterns within their district and practice asking *how do these patterns promote racist ideas of ability?*

**Session 2-Developing Equity Literacy**: In How to Be Antiracist Ibram Kendi writes “The only way to undo racism is to constantly identify it and describe it--and then dismantle it.” The goal of this session is to practice using the language to identify and describe racism by reflecting on our own identities. We will:

* Define and unpack culture, race, and ethnicity
* Explore our own identities and beliefs and learn about our colleagues
* Consider how racist language lives and operates in our school community

**Session 3-Unpacking Bias Based Beliefs:** The goal of this workshop is to build participant knowledge about how bias based beliefs impact school-based policy and procedures. These sessions will define bias-based beliefs (colorblindness, deficit thinking, and poverty-disciplining belief) and how these beliefs are often in our practices and policies. Participants will examine one area of practice (e.g., behavioral support systems, academic support systems, gifted/AP/honors enrollment, etc.) and identify the implied beliefs of cognitive and/or behavioral ability.

***Phase 2: Building an Equity Focus of ELA:*** This phase of work will focus on building the capacity of an ELA team to apply an equity lens to their work and practice. The core text of this work will be *Solving Disproportionality and Achieving Equity* by Dr. Fergus. This phase requires that stakeholders have already done some level of equity literacy development and are ready to apply that lens to their educational practices and will practice how to systematically address bias based beliefs in order to lead for equity *(Chpt 1, 2, 3 and 5).*

**Session 4:** Bias Based Beliefs in Pedagogy and School Practice: Substantive research highlights the relevance of bias, both implicit and explicit, operating in educational practice. In this session we will explore how colorblindness/color evasiveness and deficit thinking operates in ELA curricular themes.

**Session 5:** Practicing an Equity Belief Lens: In this session participants will practice implementing replacement beliefs such as colorbrave and cultural safety in the development of ELA curricular themes.

**Session 6*:*** Building Universal Equity Principles: As equity driven beliefs become embedded in the fabric of a school community, it is important to understand how to apply an equity lens to other curricular/instructional (i.e., small group work, identity criticality framework) and school climate dimensions (e.g., interaction, greetings, affirmative identity language use, etc.). In this session participants will outline other curricular and school climate dimensions to practice for 2021-22.

**Prior Experience**

*Dr. Edward Fergus*

Dr. Edward Fergus, will be responsible for supervising and organizing all aspects of program and budget, including content and delivery. Prior to joining Temple University (2017-present) and New York University (2013-2017) as a professor, Dr. Fergus served as the Deputy Director of the Metropolitan Center for 9 years (2004-2013) and supported dozens of schools with program evaluations and technical assistance.

Most recently Dr. Fergus has led the following projects to support the identification, development and implementation of targeted reform strategies for addressing disproportionality in special education, discipline, and gifted, AP and honors programming: Denver Public Schools (2017-present); Franklin Township Public Schools (2019- present); West Windsor-Plainsboro School District (2018-present); North Penn School District (2019-present); New York City Department of Education (2018-present). Including co-writing state plans on disproportionality for California Department of Education (2010), Texas Education Agency (2013), and Maryland Department of Education (2018). In addition to operating a research center, Dr. Fergus has been a secondary history teacher, evaluator of state and federal programs, and program director of out-of-school time programs at BGCA club sites in NYC. He has published numerous articles and books on disproportionality in special education, race/ethnicity in schools, and achievement gap patterns. He has also conducted research and evaluation studies on school violence, bilingual programs, magnet schools, out of school time programs, expanded learning, and disproportionality in special education and suspensions (See Appendix B).

*Dr. Tonya Leslie*

Dr. Tonya Leslie, will be responsible for content development and delivery. Dr. Leslie has worked with educational organizations including Scholastic, PBS, The Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Sesame Workshop and Girl Scouts of the USA to develop culturally responsive content in their educational curricula.

Dr. Leslie has worked with Dr. Fergus for over 10 years supporting school districts nationally around equity literacy, academic resilience and culturally responsive pedagogy. When Dr. Leslie is not teaching or deepening her craft, she writes children’s books including So Other People Would Be Also Free: The Real Story of Rosa Parks for Kids.

1. **Proposed Cost and Timeframe**

Sessions will involve online or in-person workshops. Session cost includes development of work packets for each session, and time and effort. **The total cost of the proposed project will be $16,000.**

Timeframe

This contract is for monthly sessions (6 Sessions), during 2020-21. Work will commence on January 1, 2021 through June 30, 2021.