Opportunity Restored: Supporting Kids to Unleash Their Potential in the 9th Grade

Kevin Gallick, Cahn Fellow

Julie Burnett, Cahn Ally

George Washington High School

https://www.gwashingtonhs.org

kjgallick@cps.edu | jlburnett@cps.edu

Cahn Cohort #16, 2018-19 SY

ABSTRACT

Over the past seven years Washington High School has experienced a transformation in school culture and academic achievement; however, not all Washington students have benefited equally from the school's improvements and we aspire to be more. While we are committed to supporting all students to achieve, the focus of our project is explicitly on our Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls. Our project is focused primarily on providing a space to share and cultivate new ideas and practices, while at the same time growing in our capacity to lead for equity.

INTRODUCTION

We recognize that our journey to be a more just Washington High School requires that we intentionally support and focus on our students' sense of belonging and connectedness to our school community.[1] Our leadership practice is focused restoring opportunity[2] and to moving beyond the rhetoric of equity to equitable outcomes. This work is directly aligned to our core mission of preparing all students for meaningful, productive futures by empowering students to earn and maintain strong academic qualifications with the skills and relationships needed for success in high school and post-secondary. Key measures that suggest we are making good on our mission include both graduation rates and college enrollment rates.[3] Despite considerable success,[4] we are still falling short with boys and African American students. These disparities are

[1] Washington is a neighborhood high school serving just about 1,456 students in the communities of East Side, Hegewisch and South Deering on the far south east side of Chicago. Our student body is 91% low-income and comprised of Hispanics (87.5%), African Americans (5.9%), and Whites (5.4%).

[2] Restoring Opportunity is a concept that we borrow from Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2014). Restoring opportunity: The crisis of inequality and the challenge for American education. Harvard Education Press. The book contextualizes our work in the current socio-political context and supports a deeper and more explicitly social justice informed team.

[3] Improving graduation rates and reducing dropout rates have become important issues on the national agenda for high school reform and it is an important metric for success at Washington. In fact, we, in 2017 we established a long-term goal of 90% graduation rate by 2020 (the national average is 86%). This focus is well supported by research: "There is increasing recognition that a high school diploma is a minimum requirement for success in the workplace and that too few students obtain this minimum standard" (Allensworth, E.M. & Easton, J.Q 2007, p. 1). The dropout issue has attracted increased attention through the efforts of policy research organizations like the Brookings Institution, which has increased awareness of the dropout issue through the publication and dissemination of public policy research on the economic and social costs of not adequately addressing the problem. In addition to our "on-time" graduation focus we also commit to preparing students for college. Given the importance of a four-year college degree college degree in terms of employment prospects, earning potential and access to a middle-class life, a focus on increasing the number of students to attain a college degree should clearly be part of how we measure the effectiveness of any high school. Our long-term goal of a 70% college enrollment rate by 2020 is reflective of the role that post-secondary education plays in our students lives and future.

[4] Over the past 6 years, we have demonstrated dramatic improvements in instructional practice and student outcomes. Teacher observation data indicates dramatic improvement in terms of both instructional quality and alignment to the espoused curriculum. Moreover, both teacher and student responses on the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research My Voice My School surveys provide additional evidence of teacher and student perceptions of improvement in program coherence, collaborative practices, student-teacher trust, academic press, and quality of instruction. In terms of student achievement data, we have demonstrated substantial gains in key metrics: increased freshman on-track from 80% to 93% and increased the 4-year cohort graduation rate from 64% to 82%. Likewise, the Class of 2017's college enrollment rate was 70% which is double the 35% rate in 2012. Moreover, the graduating Classes of 2017 and 2018 GPA dramatically improved, demonstrating stronger outcomes than any previous class. In other words, we have dramatically improved our students' academic qualifications for college (GPAs & ACT/SAT).

especially observable in our 4-year graduation rate gap between Black, White, and Latino students, where 58% of Black students graduated on-time in 2018 compared to 86% White students, and 79% Latino students. We also see achievement gaps by race when we drill down into the data to academic qualifications of the 2018 graduates, where 11% of Black students graduated with a 3.0+ GPA compared with 21% White students, and 34% Latino students. Along the same lines, the 2018 4-year graduation rate for boys was 72% compared to 86% for girls, and 49% of girls graduated with a 3.0+ GPA compared with 19% of boys. Similarly, the college enrollment rate gap between boys and girls in 2017 is significant, where 79% of girls enrolled in college compared to 57% of boys. We also see college enrollment gaps by race with 52% of Black students enrolling in 2-year or 4-year colleges compared with 62% White students, and 71% for Latino students (see Appendix D).[5] We believe that these current levels of performance suggest that we need to continue working to close the opportunity gap between our students and wealthier students, while at the same time beginning the intentional work of promoting equitable outcomes among our students.

While significant efforts had been invested over the past seven years in providing our students with access to high quality academic programming and talented teachers, we have not adequately attended to the inequities and the underlying conditions that give rise to the current outcomes among our students. While we are committed to supporting all students to achieve, the focus of our Cahn Inquiry Project was explicitly on our Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls. In other words, this project demonstrates a concern and focus on improving outcomes for

[5] The historical data cited here is gathered from the To & Through on-line data tool all other data comes from official CPS data sources.

students who, if changes are not made to our system, will fall further behind despite the fact that we believe these kids have the most potential to be unleashed. Reducing these gender and racial achievement gaps is necessary if we are going to become a more just Washington High School where all students are supported to develop the agency, identify, and belonging required for success in high school and beyond. Moreover, we believe that these inequities begin (or continue to persist) during 9th grade and the research suggests that the foundation for student success begins during 9th grade with the work of our Freshman teachers. As such, our Cahn Inquiry Project was focused on our work leading adult learning and supporting a successful transition for students in Freshman year.

Our work supporting Freshman to have the qualifications and skills to graduate on-time with access to post-secondary options necessitates a focus on credit accumulation and grades, also known as "being on-track" and earning "B's or Better." Our current system and leadership practice is supporting 93% of Freshman to finish on-track.[6] The freshmen on-track rate is up from 80% in 2013, which positions us above the District and state average despite the fact that we serve a more vulnerable student population.[7] Moreover, we have sustained a Freshmen On-track Rate of over 90% for the past 3 years which is a strong performance and academic qualifications have improved with 39% of students on-track with a GPA of 3.0+ (up from 31% in 2013).

[6] The researchers at the Consortium on Chicago School Research have been examining the complex decision that Chicago Public School students make to persist in or leave school. They discovered that inadequate credit accumulation in the freshman year is highly predictive of students eventually dropping out. As a result of their research, they developed an indicator "to gauge whether students make sufficient progress in their first year of high school to be on track to graduate within four years" (Allenswoth, E.M. and Easton, J.Q., 2005, p. 1). Chicago Public Schools (CPS) has been using the Freshman On-Track indicator since 2003, when it first included it in the high school accountability policy. Over the years the Freshman On-Track Rates have improved significantly with corresponding increases in the high school graduation rate. The combination of a researched-backed indicator from the UChicago Consortium, actionable data CPS, and the support from NCS has proved to be one of the most dramatic improvement in a large urban district.

[7] Washington currently serves 1456 students: 93% Low-Income, 87.7% Hispanic, 5.0% African American, 4.7% White, and 0.6 Multi.

However, significant gaps exist between and among sub-groups: Latinx (91% male/96% female), Black (71% male/73% female), White (100% male/91% female). There is evidence of improvement within demographic groups, but there remains a gap between young women and men. Along the same lines, there are significant achievement gaps with 33% of Black students who were on-track with a GPA of 3.0+, compared to 41% for Latinx, and 32% for White students. We are especially concerned with the transition to high school, and how best to support our priority group students to improve. For this project we focused on our young men and Black students to learn more about how they experience the transition to 9th grade. We monitored progress on our goal through the Freshman On-Track metric which measures course performance and credit accumulation and enables us to assess progress every five weeks, as well as through student perception data collected via surveys which were administered on a quarterly basis concerning students' sense of belonging and support, as well as their ownership of the learning process. We also gathered survey data around student attitudes about identity and race. We believe that this work develops organizational capacity around our *All Students Learn Priority* while building our capacity to prepare all students for meaningful, productive futures.[8] This work requires adults to coordinate their efforts and intentional practices across all the settings students inhabit on a daily basis. The intentional coordination of the adult work is rooted in our

[8] All Students Learn was identified as one of 3 school-wide priorities in the Fall of 2016 but has its origins in the work Senior Leadership Team members who continued to surface concerns and a commitment to better serve ALL of our students. Having demonstrated significant gains between 2012-2016 the team became increasingly aware that, despite good growth and impact, many students still demonstrated significant need. Having identified the priority in August of 2016, our initial step was to create an inquiry space for adult learning focused on equity and instructional practice by making space for teachers to examine classroom instruction and engaging in authentic inquiry about our students. In February of 2017, a guiding coalition was identified to support initial implementation and to ensure that students do not fall through the cracks through progress monitoring and implementation of effective, evidence based, instructional practice. By the Fall of 2018, we had committed to an inquiry cycle for adult learning focused on equity and instructional practice through the integration of the non-cognitive research in 9th and 10th grades focused on: 1) Establishing clear expectations and routines in classrooms so that students know how to engage as learners including procedures and visuals that support their individual organization. 2) Providing regular, specific feedback on student work which give a clear roadmap for improving. 3) Building the conditions for developing academic mindsets, which support a sense of belonging, efficacy, relevance, and ability to grow with effort.

commitment to social justice which begins with ensuring that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum and class experiences that maximize success.[9]

Moreover, we believe this work will support our continued development as transformational teachers and leaders. We believe that our teachers are ready for this work because: (1) our faculty have developed their capacity as teachers and now have solid common instructional practices and (2) we have engaged both our Senior Leadership Team[10] and the faculty in the data and we believe that a critical mass are committed to working on this problem. Our definition of transformational leadership draws from James MacGregor Burns (1978):

> The potential for influence through leadership is usually immense. The essence of leadership in any polity is the recognition of real need, the uncovering and exploiting of contradictions among values and practice, the realigning of values, the reorganization of institutions where necessary and the governance of change. Essentially the leader's task is consciousness-raising…The leader's fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what they feel—to feel their true needs so strongly, to define their values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action (pp. 43-44).

We aspire to support our teachers to see the discrepancy between our core values and current outcomes, in particular the gaps in outcomes among our students, and be moved to action, thereby growing in their own leadership practice through this adaptive leadership process. Our hope is that this project will help us to better tell our story of how we are challenging the status quo to better support our teachers and students. However, we also expect that this project report will include "a clear-sighted view of how great the obstacles are, how daunting the

[9] All Students Learn is one of three long-term school improvement priorities listed in our CIWP as a strategy: " If we prioritize All Students Learn by engaging all stakeholders on the importance of being "On-Track" and earning 'B's or Better' through a multi-tiered approach and regular data deep dives, the provision of timely and targeted student interventions and providing intentional instructional in-class supports/routines on the non-cognitive skills that serve as scaffolded opportunities that empower students (i.e. agency, positive academic identity) to be more involved in their own learning and become members of a learning community to increase the percent of students who are on track to graduate."

[10] The theme of our August 2017 two-day Senior Leadership Retreat was Restoring Opportunity and our core text was Duncan, G. J., & Murnane, R. J. (2014). Restoring opportunity: The crisis of inequality and the challenge for American education. Harvard Education Press. The book contextualized the work in the current socio-political context and supported a deeper and more explicitly social justice informed team. During the 2017-18 school year our Senior Leadership Team continued to keep the text and the ideas present in our collaborations.

challenges continue to be, but also an attainable strategic vision of what can be done to create communities where everyone has a fair chance of becoming their best selves as learners, active participants, and leaders" (Preskill & Brookfield 2009, pp. 183-184). The upshot of this is that we believe our Cahn Inquiry Project will enable us to begin working on our problem of practice, while at the same time developing the skills, commitment, and a plan to take this work to scale and make it sustainable.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Despite our considerable success at Washington High School, we are still falling short with Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls. Moreover, we believe, and the research suggests, that the foundation for student success begins during 9th grade with the work of our Freshman teachers. As such, our project is focused on our work leading adult learning and supporting a successful transition for students in the Freshman year. In selecting a project that was so deeply connected to the core of our work, we recognized that our project involved the continued growth and adaptation of existing key leadership routines and tools, focused on continuing to grow and support adult and student success, while at the same time deploying a more focused research and development approach with a smaller group of professionals focused on learning and growing as leaders known as our Equity Team. As such, in addition to impacting 9th grade Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls, this project has the potential to impact organizational capacity among teachers and students in the 9th grade, as well as beginning to impact school culture at large.

METHODS

In this section we will describe the arc of our project in three phases which includes analysis of the data that led us to a deeper understanding of the problem, the plans we made, what we were able to implement, and the challenges we encountered. Also included in this section is the external research that supported our work.

PHASE 1: PROBLEM FINDING

We named the initial phase of this project the problem finding phase and its duration was the Summer of 2018.[11] By problem-finding we mean the act of "transforming an uncomfortable irritating situation into a question which can be answered, or into a hypothesis which can be tested" (McPherson, Crowson, and Pitner, 1986, p. 273-277). Problem-finding is the first and most crucial element of problem-solving. For us, the "uncomfortable irritating situation" was clearly centered around the critical importance of the freshman year experience for our students; we knew we needed to do more to uproot the structures, practices, and beliefs that engendered the inequitable outcomes in our current system.

Phase 1 started when we arrived in New York City with a problem that was not well-defined; the problem had to be discovered. It is this situation, our initial thoughts turned to problem-finding, and that is exactly what we focused on in Phase 1 of the project. Summer 2018 served as a critical period for problem finding and launching our project. We made use of this time as Cahn Allies to achieve a "balcony" perspective that allowed us, and other team members to take themselves out of the dance or off the dance floor to gain a clearer view of the work and

[11] Peterson (1985) argues that the methods by which school leaders "identify problems is perhaps as important as the ways they go about solving them, for if the key problem is not identified then energies are not expended on tasks which solve central organizational problems" (p. 88). We refer to these methods, used by school leaders to identify problems, as the problem-finding process.

maintain the big picture/goals.[12] The balcony metaphor refers to the process of physically or otherwise "distancing yourself from the fray" so as to achieve a "clearer view of reality"*(*Heifetz and Linsky 2002, pg. 53). In doing so, we leveraged our experience at the *Cahn Summer Leadership Institute*, with the amazing support of Barbara McKeon and her team together with the faculty of Teachers College, to begin thinking about how to get a clearer picture of the nature of the problem that we would select for the project.[13] We returned to Chicago having named "priority" group experience in 9th grade as the problem that we knew we wanted to know more about, and an issue that would require the support of a community of committed teachers and leaders to re-examine our system and our practices with the end goal of disrupting the inequities that were occurring while students were in our care. Back in Chicago, we were able to invest time and energy into developing our capacity as equity leaders via a 4-day *Equity-Based Leadership* training sponsored by our school partner the Network for College Success at the University of Chicago. This provided us with the opportunity to learn alongside four of our 9th grade teachers who were also enrolled in the training. In fact, we planned this Summer learning opportunity, and carefully selected the participants, because we knew that more intentional work around equity at the freshman level was required. Along the same lines, we recognized

[12] Early on in the Summer, Julie and I encountered Ellie's article Growing Bigger Selves for Social Justice and we found that the article spoke to us of the potential of being more explicit in our believes around WHY we do this work. We started thinking that, as a school, we needed to explicitly ground our work in a social justice mission.

[13] An initial Leadership for Equity Cahn Model was crafted in July of 2018 which described a theory of action beginning with a situation where "opportunity gap" is transformed into "restored" opportunity via a new system of supports that included shifts in instructional practice coupled with social supports (case management, post-secondary advising, SEL, and On-Track/GPA work). Our initial research question was crafted during this time: "As they transition to high school, how can we support our priority group students to improve?" The Teachers College faculty provided critical support for our work during PHASE 1: PROBLEM FINDING. Carolyn Riehl provided critical early support around structuring the project and developing a research question that would drive our action for learning and impact. Ellie Drago-Severson helped us to think more deeply about the implications for adult learning and the opportunities and challenges inherent in working with our teachers to better manage the complex demand of teaching and leadership for social justice. And, Jeffrey Young supported our critical awareness around the politics of leading adaptive change.

that the *Equity-Based Leadership* training would provide a critical support for our Cahn project.[14] Our return to Chicago also provided much needed Administrative Team time to share our experiences and ideas with our Admin Team colleague to continue to collaborate via a "balcony" perspective. Our team was thinking and dreaming together about how we could retool and re-imagine freshman year, and even the entire school experience, so as to be more supportive and aware of the current inequities that persist and even grow during students' years at Washington HS.

In preparing for our annual *Senior Leadership Team Offsite Retreat (*which was just a few weeks away) our Administrative Team was convinced that the retreat provided an ideal opportunity to run a trial balloon to assess the readiness of our staff in key leadership positions to deepen and more explicitly name our social justice mission, while also naming problems of practice focused explicitly on inequities in student outcomes based on race and gender.[15] We left the retreat having "named the problem" that lies at the heart of our Cahn project. That is, not all students were having the same experience at Washington; specifically, boys and African American students were struggling. The August retreat resulted in a clear commitment of the team to more firmly ground the school's mission and vision to our core social justice values,

[14] Equity Leadership PD (Aug 6-9) This PD was provided by our school partner, the Network for College Success at UChicago, and attended by 5 team members (Julie, Kevin, together with 3 members of the Freshman PLC). Through this learning opportunity we had the opportunity to go deep on our own stance in this work while also beginning to form a core group who would become part of our "Cahn Team." Each of us were provided a critical learning opportunity designed to push our thinking, provoke questions, prompt critical reflection, and collectively make deeper meaning of our practice. The four-day workshop served as a learning space to engage in challenging work around identity and leadership as well as an opportunity to explore your impact within our school community. This provided a foundational piece of learning for Julie, Kevin, and members of the Cahn team as well as a foundational support for teaching and leadership for social justice. The core reading for this training were: Changing Professional Practices Requires Changing Beliefs (Guerra and Nelson, 2009); Changing Discourse in Schools (Eubanks, Parish, and Smith); and, Constructivist Listening for Empowerment and Change (Weisglass 1990)

[15] Senior Leadership Retreat (Aug 14-15) Our 2-day offsite retreat provided the school's guiding coalition of 35 teachers, staff, and external partners with an opportunity to (1) engage in a comprehensive assessment of school performance; (2) Continue to develop our 3-year vision by going deeper and grounding the work in a social justice mission; and (3) build relationships, leadership capacity, and group accountability for school improvement. Critical elements that supported the Cahn project included significant diagnostic work around core values and further diagnosis of alignment of practice to core values, followed by strategic planning.

coupled with clearly crafted a problem(s) of practice focused on addressing underperformance among our priority groups. As we moved into Phase 2 we focused on engaging stakeholders in the problem; that is, investing in teachers and student's capacity to release the potential of all 9th grade students, with a special focus on our Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls.

PHASE 2: PLANNING AND WORKING THE PROBLEM

After the Phase I work and based on extensive feedback from Senior Leadership Team members, we deepened our theory of action for our schoolwide priority *All Students Learn* by explicitly stating social justice as a goal. Phase 2's duration was Semester One 2018-19 (August 27th - February 1st). We began this phase by naming the schoolwide challenge (August 2018):

> Our goal is to prepare all students for meaningful, productive futures. This work requires adults to coordinate their efforts and intentional practices across all the settings students inhabit on a daily basis. The intentional coordination of the adult work is rooted in our commitment to social justice which begins with ensuring that all students have access to a rigorous curriculum and class experiences that maximize success. This is not new work. We've been working on the work for over 6 years. The work began with a focus on improving postsecondary outcomes. The current work recognizes the evolution of establishing a culture of high expectations to include high supports while fostering all students sense of belonging. We recognize that our journey to be a more just Washington high school requires that we intentionally support and focus on students sense of belonging and connectedness to our community. Thereby, increasing the number of students who have a strong sense of belonging to Washington high school, earning and maintaining strong academic qualifications with the skills and relationships needed for success in high school and post-secondary (GWHS Administrative Team).

With this statement also came the Administrative Team's commitment to build teachers capacity to teach and lead for social justice. In the end of August 2018, the *Opening Week of School,* faculty and staff engaged in professional learning experiences to begin the work. We shared core texts/readings on teaching and leading for social justice. Faculty and staff engaged in a text-based protocol and we shared working group norms for equity (see Appendix A). The National Equity

Project provided professional development on implicit bias and its impact.[16] In addition to explicit new learning we supported our grade level and content Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to integrate this new focus into their opening week activities as well. However, in selecting a project that was so deeply connected to the core of our work, we recognized that our project would have to get to our core culture for student and adult learning. As such, this project would involve the continued growth and adaptation of existing key leadership routines, practices and tools.

Existing Key Leadership Routines

We leveraged existing key leadership routines like our *Freshman Cafe* and *Freshman PLC* to support a successful transition for students in Freshman year, adapting existing routines to better serve the emerging needs of both students and adults. At its essence, Freshman Cafes involved our faculty and students in quarterly conversations about students' academic performance, sense of belonging, and aspirations for the future. In adapting this routine during the 2018-19 school year, we significantly improved the *Freshman Cafe* so as to further support students to unpack their experience via a discussion protocol that empowered students to voice their experience, while providing teachers an opportunity to advocate for students' emergent needs by providing "just-in-time" diagnostic data to support students with a 1-1 counselor follow-up.[17]

[16] Whole Staff Opening PD (August 27-31) Significant time and energy was invested in setting the tone for the year and getting clear on the WHY that informs our work. With that said, we spent time as a faculty connecting our core values to the work and making sense of the core texts that our SLT has worked with earlier in the month. Along the same lines, we reviewed our priorities and engaged the faculty in three problems of practice which surfaced at the retreat. We also invited facilitators from the National Equity Institute to support us to begin a dialogue about race, equity, and implicit bias.

[17] Freshman Cafe* (Sept 20-21 & Oct 18-19) The Cafes are one of our key routines and tools that we embed into the PLC Learning Cycle and which continue to support our faculty to work together and have a collective impact on our students, the school, and each other. At its essence, Freshman Cafes involve our faculty and students in a conversation about students' academic performance, sense of belonging, and aspirations for the future. While this is an established practice at Washington, we have significantly improved the cafe routines so as to further support: (1) students to unpack their experience via a discussion protocol that empowers students to voice their experience (2) teachers to provide additional diagnostic data to support tier 3 interventions and counselor supports (3) teachers and leadership by building our understanding of the freshman experience via extensive surveying of students, and (4) adding additional Cafes focused on early diagnosis and support It's our belief that by

Likewise, we tried to strengthen teacher professional community in the *Freshman PLC* by building teacher understanding of the freshman experience via extensive surveying of students.[18] Data collected during the 1st Quarter Freshman Cafes on students perceptions of schooling indicated that about 66% of our Freshman arrived believing that education was important and they set their sights on college, 22% indicated a clear commitment to schooling driven by a strong desire to "graduate from high school" and the other 12% indicated that "the could care less about school" or that by attending they were simply going along with what their "parents and society require" otherwise they would not be here. Data also indicated that most students thought they were doing well--56% said they were "proud of their grades" and 57% indicated that they were "satisfied" but had some areas to work on. This survey data, together with student grades and attendance were socialized via the *Freshman PLC* during the first 9 weeks of school.

Much like our work in the Freshman PLC, our Post-Secondary Team identified an equity-based problem of practice. Our post-secondary data indicated that we were sending female students to college at a significantly higher rate than our Black and Latino male students. The data led the team to focus on learning more about how our boys were experiencing school. Over the course of the first 18 weeks of school, they read *Boys Adrift* and engaged in research and development around the problem of practice.[19] Moreover, and in addition to "owning" our Cafe routines, the Post-Secondary Team members engaged in an equity walk to learn more about our school culture and our students' experience.

---

strengthening core supports, and deepening our focus on supporting our students' sense of belonging, that we will better serve all students which we posit will this result in improved outcomes for our priority groups too.

[18] Freshman PLC* (Aug 28, Sept 26, Oct 24, Nov 02, Dec 05, Jan. 16th, March 6th, May 1st, May 29th) nb. Chanel's leadership and 2X per day

[19] Post-Secondary Team R&D: Aug. 29th, Sept. 4th, Sept. 18th, Oct. 17th, Nov. 7th, Nov. 15th, Nov. 28th, Dec. 12th

Our work with our *New Teachers or New to Washington Teacher Mentoring* was an illustration of our commitment to social justice and how it impacts more everything we do. Rather, than simply providing a new teacher induction program focused on teacher moves, we made the decision that this year each new teacher would be provided with a paid mentor who would support induction. Although it was true that our new teachers needed support around classroom management and finding their way at Washington, we felt that our monthly PLC of teachers and mentors would be best served by building teacher capacity to teach and lead for social justice and providing a space for mentors and mentees to meet, break bread, and be part of a community focused on our evolving vision. During this time with the new teachers and mentors, we provided a short text for the group to explore and discuss such as chapters from Zaretta Hammond's (2015) Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain, and TedTalks such as Rita Pierson's "Every Kid needs a champion". The teachers were provided time to reflect in their role alike and with mentor/mentee. Dinner was provided each meeting to promote collegiality and learn more about each other. The group met about once every five weeks and we believe it represents our best work around new teacher induction to date.

We were also intentional around leveraging our next *Whole Staff Professional Development* meeting time at the end of the quarter as an opportunity to continue our faculty discourse around equity and what it means to teach and lead for social justice. The November PD day provided us with an opportunity to share progress on our 3-year vision while continuing to push forward to adapt our work to better serve each other and our students. Grade level teams met to continue the work of all students being on-track with a renewed focus on our priority groups performance. In addition, we invited feedback from the faculty via a PLC Survey to get a

pulse on how well were supporting the conditions for deeper learning. Likewise, we offered teacher-led and school partner-led workshops focused on core instruction and developmental relationships with our students. Finally, we spent time again as a faculty connecting around core values with each other and reflecting using the core texts that we had worked with earlier in the year. More than anything else, our hope was that the PD day would provide the faculty an opportunity to reconvene and witness that this work, the work that we discussed in August, was alive. In just a short time, our staff had initiated projects focused on learning how to better to serve our priority groups and to "learn by doing" by jumping into work explicitly focused on priority groups.[20]

The *Q1 Senior Leadership Team Meeting* provided us with the opportunity to continue the work that we started at the Summer retreat to deepen and more explicitly name our social justice mission.[21] A key objective of the meeting was to develop a vision and mission statements that represented who we are as a school and our vision for the ideal George Washington High School. Building on our work at the Summer retreat and the language in the *All Students Learn* challenge statement, team members provided feedback on draft mission and vision statements that envisioned "a transformational learning experience for all students rooted in our commitment to social justice and focused on supporting our students sense of belonging and connection to our community." Following that meeting we committed to further engaging the stakeholder groups in the process of providing extensive mission and vision statement that

[20] Whole Staff Professional Development (November 02) Our Post-Secondary Leadership Team shared their research into the trouble with boys and our Rooted group shared their initial work around mentoring, and the BSA was introduced too. Moreover, our Freshman PLC continued to problem solve and reflect on our work to support all students by surfacing teachers values and grading practices through scenarios focused on priority groups.

[21] Q1 Senior Leadership Team Meeting (November 15) Three months after the Summer Retreat, the SLT reconvened, at the Q1 Meeting the team continued this work by developing a mission and vision.

represent who we are as a school and our vision for the ideal George Washington High School. Our *Q1 Pride Through Excellence Straight A Breakfast* provided us with the perfect opportunity to invite feedback from about fifty students on these draft statements. Students encouraged us to simplify our language. Local School Council members also provided input in the process.

We continued to leverage *Freshman Cafe* and *Freshman PLC* to support a successful transition for students in the Freshman year during Q2. Data collected during the 2nd Quarter Freshman Cafes on student perceptions of adult relationships indicated that 68% of students felt they had an adult in the building that supports them, and 25% indicated "maybe" to the same question. Along the same lines, 46% of students said that their teachers want them to become a better thinker, "not just memorize" *all of the time*, whereas 40% indicated most of the time, and 12% *once in a while.* This data, together with student grades and attendance were socialized via the *Freshman PLC.*

Our Q2 *Whole Staff Professional Development* provided us with a critical opportunity to return to our core values by engaging the staff in our draft mission, vision, and guiding principles and through focused work on our All Students Learn priority. Members of our Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) Team guided the staff through a process that included connecting with each other around core values, reconnecting with our core text, and then providing feedback on our Draft Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles 2.0 which had incorporated feedback from students and LSC members.[22] The CIWP Team gathered feedback

[22] The Continuous Improvement Work Plan (CIWP) is the strategic planning process for schools that also meets the federal and state requirements of a school improvement plan. This plan establishes a school's mission, and the strategies and milestones the school will take to accomplish its goals. The CIWP follows a continuous improvement cycle, where goals, strategies and milestones are monitored regularly and adjusted as needed" (CPS Instruction Manuel, pg. 4).

from the entire staff and then continued meeting for another 3 weeks to respond to feedback and finalize the language.

In addition to our work with existing leadership routines, we also deployed a more focused research and development approach with a smaller group of professionals who were engaged in their own equity work. This latter group, was comprised of members of our Post-Secondary Team who were focused on understanding what might lie at the heart of underachievement of our young men, as well as Freshman teachers who were engaged professional learning experienced focused on young adult development and culturally responsive teaching. These four teachers and a counselor later became founding members of our Equity Team (see Phase 3).

New Leadership Routines

This year, we created new student supports designed to engaged our priority groups in meaningful ways. These supports were the foundation for long-term solutions for increasing the number of students, specifically Black and male, who are on-track and successfully matriculating through our school.

- *Rooted Mentoring*: We are now offering students a near-peer mentoring opportunity through a new after school club, Rooted. Students are paired with an older mentor who is then supported by a faculty member. Monthly convening's connect adults and students to check in, discuss and encourage students and dinner was provided where mentees engaged in team building activities, discuss the skills needed to be successful, student's current grades, attendance and behavior.

- *Black Student Alliance*: The Black Student Alliance (BSA) serves as a forum for communication amongst diverse students and faculty. Through open discussion, exploration and reflection on issues that impact African American students, the BSA hopes to involve the community in its efforts to ensure respect for cultural diversity and excellence for all members of the school community. BSA membership is open to all faculty and students. This work is aligned to the school's vision for social justice teaching and leadership and the school-wide priorities.

- *Freshman Seminar** (Sept 13 & Nov 5) The objective of Freshman Seminar was to engage students in academic and social emotional supports that will enhance their transition to high school while also prepare them for post-secondary plans. Our Admin Team led this routine by welcoming our new class, usually in groups of 2-3 classes at a time, and sharing key insights like the power of grades and begin on-track. We were supported by upper-classmen who would support 9th graders to make the transition by sharing their stories.

- *Network for College Success--School Leadership for Young Adult Success* (November 27) - presentation

The Cahn study sessions provided the right mix of accountability and support for our work project during Phase 2 Planning and Working the Problem. *Cahn Fall Leadership Summit* (October 5-7) assisted us in clarifying, planning and working the problem by providing time and structures that supported us in getting perspective on our work. We were provided time to not only to workshop our project with alumni advisors and colleagues, but also the critical opportunity to think about our own leadership styles and how we might be getting in the way of our own goals. By the end of the weekend, we had engaged in deep reflection and created a written record of our path to date. Up to this point, we might characterize our work as the planning phase of change where "leaders prepare the community and educators for the transformations and hard work that lie ahead" (Wagner, T., Kegan, R., Lahey, L. L., Lemons, R. W., Garnier, J., Helsing, D., & Rasmussen, H. T. 2012):

> To generate the much-needed momentum and urgency for change, people need to fully understand the *why* behind the journey they are beginning. This understanding can reinvigorate people who entered schools and districts with the most ideal of intentions but who, over the years, have gradually become skeptical, resigned, or lethargic (p. 138).

We had arrived at a point in the school's history where significant and transformational work had occurred, but we knew we needed to grow as teachers and leaders to support our students and the school to realize its potential.

Subsequent study sessions in December and February empowered us to move beyond the planning phase, moving deeper into the envisioning and enacting phases. In December 2018, together with our colleagues at Teachers College, we reflected on our journey and felt good. We felt that we had moved into a new phase though the process of "naming and the problem" as Allies, and later as an Administrative Team and Senior Leadership Team, and still later sharing the problem during the opening week of school. We recognized that getting at deep culture would require a sustained systems approach if what we were doing was going to surface and change beliefs and values. We could see the potential and power of a collective commitment to an evolving mission and vision, and we saw our key leadership routines and tools as critical levers for the work. Moreover, we were thrilled with the organic movement which had occurred over the past 20 weeks with the Rooted mentoring, Black Student Alliance, and a budding research and development practices all focused explicitly on our Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls. However, we also recognized that getting at deep culture was a long-term commitment that would require sustained efforts and we also recognized the need to begin to develop deep, shared goals and strategies. With that in mind, we committed to forming a committee that would meet regularly to help guide the next phase of the work. In doing so, we turned to the smaller group of professionals who were engaged in their own equity work. Our initial January meeting enabled us connect and share our intentions for a future collaboration.[23]

[23] *Teaching & Leading for Social Justice Cahn Team Convening* (January 17th) Our initial step was to gather the group together for coffee and sweets to put all the player in one space (i.e. Equity Leadership Cohort, Post-Secondary Leaders, and Cahn Allies). We recognized that each are currently engaged in a struggle that will generate better outcomes and new learning and we would like to get everyone in the same room so that we have better learn from each other and so that we can share with you our vision for how our collective efforts contribute to a project that we are working on through our 1-year fellowship at Teachers College.

20 Week On-Track Data: A Lever for the Change Process

Phase 2 came to end with the close of Semester One; this was a critical milestone for assessing our progress because, unlike elementary school, high school students earned credits at the semester. In other words, for the first time in their lives, our new 9th grade students (Class of 2022) were at risk of "dropping-out" or not graduating on time as the result of course failure. This is why we put so much effort into educating our students, teachers, and families about the importance of grades and being "on-track" to graduate during the initial 20 weeks of school. We had leveraged our school routines like Freshman Seminar, Freshman Cafe, Progress Reports, Lunchbox Recovery, Report Card Pick-up, and other similar routines to build understanding and monitor progress. Prior to the 20th week of school (the end of Semester One) students were in a position to course-correct; however, by the end of the semester students either earned credits in each of their seven classes or they did not. The Freshman On-Track metric provided us with a clear accounting of progress at the 20th week. This year, our Semester One Freshman On-Track Rate was 96% which was about where we had been for the past three years (see Appendix B). The 20-week Freshmen On-track Rate among sub-groups had improved: Latinx Male 94% (down from 95% in 2018-19), Black Male 100% (up from 92% in 2018-19), and Black Female 83% (up from 80% in 2018-19) (see Appendix B). These number represented what we refer to as the "high-water mark" because, at this point, our Freshman On-Track rate(s) could no longer increase because an off-track student was unable to get back on-track; however, it was possible for the number of off-track students to increase before the end of the year, which would result in a decrease in the number of student completing the year "on-track."[24] In fact, that was what

[24] While students who are deemed "off-track" cannot return to an on-track status during their Freshman year it certainly is possible to graduate on-time via course recover during Summer school and night school; however, this is a tough road and it proves to be an unlikely path to on-time

usually happened: in recent years we had a 2% to 4% drop from week 20 to week 40 (see Appendix C) in the number on-track students. This drop was due primarily to the fact that a student who incurred a core course failure in Semester One could not incur another or he/she would be considered "off-track." For this reason, and the fact that getting off to a good start was critical in any human endeavor, we really focused on supporting our freshman to get off to a good start because we knew that the Semester One grades and the on-track rate was a key indicator of 9th grade and high school success.

We share this detailed explanation of this metric and our rhythm of progress monitoring to provide some insight into the time and energies our teachers and leaders (and yes students) invested in a successful semester one experience, which in many ways could be measured by the Freshman On-Track Metric. Moreover, it is worth noting that when committed educators start a movement to support all students to achieve, and then begin to focus more intently on our more vulnerable population of Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls it goes without saying that there was a lot riding on student success because committed educators tutor, support, and advocate for their students. And, it is quite likely that teaching and leading for social justice resulted in a real and personal investment and identity connected to the success of all students. Along the same lines, these committed educators began to challenge traditional norms of schooling by engaging in crucial conversations and confronting barriers to student success. While many of these end of the semester conversations among colleagues and between faculty and administration were powerful and collegial, others interactions, which indicated deficit or even racist and classist language, could be difficult to process:

---

graduation. For this reason, we have a laser like focus on supporting all students to be on-track. According to research by the UChicago, students who are on-track after freshman year are four times more likely to graduate than those who are not.

> I am constantly thinking about how to engage faculty in new learning and reflection that support them to grow and learn by examining their own bias in order to interrupt inequities… this means that I am constantly balancing daily micro-aggressions and negative beliefs and expectations – conscious or unconscious - held by others about our students (Equity Team Member Reflection).

These interactions left a number of committed educators feeling defeated in this conversation and wondering how the child felt in the class. We hope this explanation of our mid-course progress monitoring provides some insight into the emotions and politics involved when engaging in adaptive leadership work.

PHASE 3: REFINING PRACTICE AND BUILDING ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM

After the Phase 2 work, we moved forward with Phase 3: Refining Practice And Building Organizational Capacity To Address The Problem. This phase had a dual focus: (1) Continue to engage our whole school in the work through implementation of existing key leadership routines and new leadership routines; and, (2) Initiate the next phase of the work focused on the notion that action research will support deeper understanding of the problem and the development of leadership that would sustain this work. Phase 3's duration was roughly Semester Two (February 4th-June 20th).

Despite the fact that tensions between adults grew high at the end of the semester, student outcomes were strong. The 20-week Freshmen On-track Rate was 96% overall and had increased for 2 of 3 sub-groups. So, while the end of the semester offered new tensions and challenges, there was initial evidence that our work was moving in the right direction and we found ourselves at the *February Cahn Study Session* emotionally drained but committed to moving forward with our plans to form a committee that would meet regularly to help guide the

next phase of the work. Carolyn Riehl, Alumni Advisors, and our colleagues from Chicago and Dallas were on-hand to help us reflect and assess how well our project had worked out, and to use that experience moving forward. We committed to focus on learning (the process). For us this meant "doing the right thing every day" and "celebrating the wins, even if they didn't result in the intended change." We also committed to shifting our time to better align to our goal and Carolyn supported us to reframe the way we speak about our priority groups moving from problem to opportunity language: "The kids with the most potential to be unleashed...our treasure…"

By the end of the semester one, we had engaged the whole school in some new behaviors which included retooling existing leadership routines, as well as introducing new learning and new practices. However, we had but not yet engaged in the sustained and deeper work around what teaching and leadership for social justice looks like in terms of core instruction and counseling. At this point, our work could be characterized as moving into the envisioning whole system change phase where "leaders help educators and community members understand the need and urgency for change" (Wagner, T., Kegan, R. et al, 2012):

> These shareholders begin to focus on how they need to adapt their roles to enable their students to succeed in the twenty-first century. They begin to work together in new ways, especially more collaboratively. Change leaders form communities of practice for themselves, where their work increasingly focuses on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. They intentionally model this different way of working, with its clear focus, to leaders and teachers throughout schools and district. (p. 145).

Our school-level work moved forward with key leadership routines like *Freshman Cafe* and *Freshman PLC*, coupled with work around grounding the school's mission in our core values and being more explicitly about who we are why we do this work.

Mid-year, our CIWP Team was deeply engaged in finalizing the language for our new mission, vision, and guiding principles.[25] Now, to be clear, we were not under the illusion that a few words on paper or the vision-building work that we had engaged in thus far could serve as a key lever for whole-system change. However, our Senior Leadership Team felt strongly that clarity and focus would be critical elements to ongoing and sustained change and we thought going public with core values could really let our teachers, students, and community know that that we supported their work. Building on the work begun in August with the Senior Leadership Team, our CIWP Team engaged stakeholders in an iterative and inclusive process that resulted in Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles 6.0:

MISSION: Who We Are

Washington High School prepares all students to enter adulthood with the 21st century knowledge, skills, dispositions, and agency to be productive as well as contributing members of our democracy. As teachers and leaders, we serve as the catalysts for ensuring that all Washington students are supported to engage in rigorous and relevant learning experiences that will prepare them for post-secondary success.

VISION: Where We Are Going

Washington High School envisions a transformational experience for all students rooted in our commitment to social justice. By developing student agency, identity, and belonging, we deepen our students' connection to our community and global society. We are building an environment that ensures all students are academically, socially, and emotionally prepared for a successful transition to life after high school.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- Students become independent learners when teachers develop their intellectual capacity and confidence while explicitly growing students' academic mindsets
- Students have equitable access to academic, social, and post-secondary supports required for success in the 21st century and democratic life
- Families and students are supported to develop a post-secondary plan that supports students to dream and transition to life after high school
- Students and adults are leaders who examine their own biases and question dominant culture in order to interrupt inequities in schools and communities

[25] The CIWP Team met on five occasions in January and February to respond to feedback and eventually finalize the language that became our new Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles. After signing off on the final version on February 20th we sent it out to our design team who made banners and signage which was installed beginning in March.

- Family and the community are essential resources for student success and we are invested in cultivating strong relationships between and among students, staff, and the community by fostering a welcoming culture and inviting their contribution to making our school improvement efforts successful
- School improvement happens when teachers and students make their practice public and are supported to critically examine their work collaboratively and inspired to learn and grow as individuals and as a team.
- For every increment of performance demanded from students, staff, and families, we have an equal responsibility and accountability to support them to meet our expectations.

This marked a milestone in our journey to become a more just Washington High School. We had arrived at a point in the school's history where students and families had demonstrated greater commitment and pride in their school and now we were committing to "a transformational experience for all students rooted in our commitment to social justice." Of course, Evans (1996) reminds us:

> What matters most about a vision is how much it matters. A vision's main function is to inspire people to concentrate their efforts on the pursuit of a meaningful common agenda. This is how it engenders followership and invigorates performance and why its personal impact, not just intellectual content, is so important (p. 206).

Now, we needed to take the steps that would result in the development of new practices, beliefs, and a way of being that would stay true to our commitment to social justice by ensuring that we are our Latinx Boys, Black Boys, and Black Girls were academically, socially, and emotionally, prepared for a successful transition to life after high school. To initiate the next phase of the work we focused on the notion that action research would support deeper understanding of the problem and had the potential to develop leadership that would sustain this work. To that end, we took steps to form a community of practice focused on the continuous improvement of teaching and learning.

Equity Team: Learning by Doing

While our initial January meeting enabled us connect and share our intentions for a future collaboration, an offsite retreat was scheduled for February 28th which provided us with time to begin to unpack what it means to be a lead learner in equity work and to begin to develop a common understanding of what it means to be an equity team. During our equity retreat opening, we resituated ourselves in our *why* and shared our reflections with our new teammates, and in doing so, the sharing created a space of both vulnerability and trust. Our new team was comprised of 9 members (4 teachers[26], 1 counselor, 3 administrators, and 1 leadership coach from the Network for College Success). Team members were identified to provide both a critical cross-functional skill set as well as diversity: gender (2 men, 7 women), race (3 Latinx, 3 African American, 2 White, 1 Asian), roles (2 ILT Leads, 2 Post-Secondary Leads, 2 Department Chairs, 1 Grade-Level Lead, 3 Admin, 1 External Facilitator). The team was designed to serve as a holding environment focused on supporting each other in addressing core equity issues that we believe begin (or continue to persist) during 9th grade. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2002):

> When you exercise leadership, you need a holding environment to contain and adjust the heat that is being generated by addressing difficult issues or wide value differences. A holding environment is a space formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart. Creating a holding environment enables you to direct creative energy toward working out the conflicts and containing passions that could easily boil over...In a holding environment, with structural, procedural, or virtual boundaries, people feel safe enough to address problems that are difficult, not only because they strain ingenuity, but also because they strain relationships (pp. 102-103).

[26] The Equity Team's 4 teachers were provided with extensive equity-based leadership learning opportunities via the Network for College Success. Each teacher participated in the August PD with Julie and Kevin and then continued their learning via the Transformational Learning Lab community which works under the Building Equitable Learning Environments Network.

The work of this team would be focused primarily on providing a space to share and cultivate new ideas and practices, while at the same time growing in our capacity as leaders. It followed then that the team's focus as a team was on deepening our learning through extensive diagnosis around our problem of practice, while also committing to acting and learning from their actions. That is, they were charged with initiating new practices and learned by doing, thereby refining and developing new routines and practices and processing their work together as a team.[27]

Over the next 7 weeks (March & April) the team engaged in learning by doing while leveraging the structure of the team for support. Teammates left the retreat moving in a variety of directions and committed to action and periodic team check-ins. Our 4 teachers were invested in collaborative action research around the role that empowerment and relationships play in support priority group student engagement in their own learning. Teachers selected students in each of their classes and engaged in reflection on my classroom structures and procedures and how structures serve different students and how they can setback or maybe not reach other students. One teacher witnessed the function that leadership plays in the classroom. In another case, a teacher cited her efforts to give students more control of the classroom and different learning options by allowing students to choose between normal seating options and flexible seating options. Another teacher examined a lack of engagement and wondered how her communication and lack of interaction had contributed to the situation. In her case she cited

[27] In thinking about our work, we leaned on Michael Fullan's concept of learning leader— "one who models learning, but also shapes the conditions for all to learn on a continuous basis." In other words, in addition to hard work, regard for others, and the characteristics that support effective relationships, the success of our team would be fostered by a very personal desire and willingness to be open, to learn, to serve as a catalyst for supporting others to develop similar characteristics. Along the same lines, we will look to Hermina Ibarra's ideas in Act Like a Leader, Think Like a Leader to reorient us to notion that learning by doing is how we learn to become a leader. It follows then that while our focus as a team would be on deepening our learning through extensive diagnosis around our problem of practice, we are also committed to acting and learning from our actions. That is, we will initiate new practices and learn by doing. We will be refining and developing new routines and practices and processing our work together as a team by initiating what Earl and Hannay refer to as cycles of knowledge work wherein the focus of the work is innovation and the development of new collective knowledge that can be codified and made accessible to the rest of our colleagues.

improvement among all of her target students. Each of the 4 teachers made some reference to their stance and how they were more intentional in terms of leading from their equity stance. In each case, the teachers indicated that the 5-7-week journey of action research fostered opportunities to learn about themselves as equity leaders, citing self-awareness, intentionality, and reflection. Teachers shared their reflections during team meeting and via a mid-course reflection which the entire team completed. Also, the four teachers advocated for additional time to collaborate to support their action research and to begin planning for next year. Time was provided on the day of the SAT (nonattendance for 9th graders) to plan and reflect, resulting in well-articulated proposals for a Breakfast with the Principal focused on providing students who are not normally recognized a space to be celebrated by administration, staff, friends, and family. They also shared plans for engaging their colleagues in this work via a Book Club designed to hold time and space for adults to reflect on their own instruction practices and the needs of our sub groups (black boys, black girls, latinx boys). One of the more significant proposals was for a new 2019-20 Freshman Seminar course to engage students in academic and social emotional supports that will enhance their transition to high school while also prepare them for post-secondary plans.

Our counselor committed to working with students that were identified as at risk from their elementary schools due to their attendance, behaviors or academics. He met with a group of 13 students working on academics, social emotional issues and attendance issues, and setting short term goals to pass their courses. He found that students were receptive to his outreach supports because he took the time to build a rapport with some students. Through the process, he was reminded that it takes time for students to open up about issues they are dealing with

outside of the building. Moreover, he found the process made him feel an even greater sense of purpose and commitment to continue to work with our off-track students to reduce the number of classes they might fail.

Our Equity Team Administrators committed to supporting 9th grade teachers to engage in reflective practice around student success with the right mix of accountability and support. For example, we developed a new routine, *Student Success Conferences*, specifically designed to support the students that have fallen most behind and are in danger of losing hope. These conferences, which are led by an Administrator and Social Worker, and attended by all the child's teachers and our Equity Team counselor, are designed to support a proactive conversation about off-track students in efforts to co-create a collective strategy that will support the students' experience in upcoming weeks. In *Student Success Conferences* we hold one student at the center and re-examine and reframe the situation to be asset focused and urgent. One great aspect of this routine is the fact that we demonstrate care and commitment to our most vulnerable students.

Our Administrative Team also committed to conducting grade conferences with teachers whereby teachers and administrators sit down and review grade data and talk about next steps. While grade conferencing is not a new leadership practice it is one that we have struggled to make routine, with the major barrier being time. With that in mind we have committed to refocusing our conversations to integrate new research on the development and shifting from individual to course team conversations[28] which we have scheduled for three dates in the end of

[28] **Teacher Grade Conferences Reflection & Reporting:** STOP analysis (Strengths, Threats, Opportunities, and Plan) is a framework designed to support reflection on instructional practice as demonstrated by student outcomes. As we engage students more in own their own learning, we also hold ourselves accountable for progress monitoring, setting targets, and tracking their outcomes. Moreover, we take responsibility for supporting our students to make meaning of their experiences at George Washington High School. In other words, we will not allow them to fail and define themselves by that identity.

Semester 2 (May 24th, May 31st, and June 3rd). We will leverage our adapted STOP Protocol to support reflection on instructional practice as demonstrated by student outcomes and in doing so we will be relying on research from The University of Chicago Foundations for Young Adult Success (2015) report states:

> As they move through their daily lives, children and youth engage in an ongoing process of interpretation and meaning-making, learning from a complex array of ideas, experiences, and interactions with others, and incorporating new information into their existing understanding of the world. It is through experience that youth develop the foundational components for success and a set of competencies. But if experience is to have lasting benefit, it must be assigned meaning and be integrated into one's emerging sense of identity. (p.44).

We know that grades are a key indicator of high school graduation, but they are also an indicator of how we support critical developmental experiences that impact students' academic performance.[29] Moreover, we believe that grade conferences are a critical support for teachers who will benefit from making their practice public and aligned to their colleagues as well as ensuring that students are supported in the final weeks of school.

In reflecting on their work in Semester 2, the Equity Team teachers shared personal connections and thank you notes they received from their "special treasures" during Teacher Appreciation Week. They also shared reflections on how the work had impacted their leadership,

[29] **The STOP reflection includes four elements: Strengths**– Internal supports and resources that address student challenges, maintain student success and improve student outcomes. **Threats**– internal or external factors that could jeopardize student success. **Opportunities**– internal or external factors you can capitalize on or use to support students. **Plan**– Action plan for successful outcome. Things for course teams to consider: 1. At the 20th week students' grades begin to drop and negatively change the trajectory of student G.P.A. Research indicates that G.P.A. is the best predictor of post-secondary success. Do students know where they stand in your class at the end of each week? 2. Do you have enough academic grades to support the current student course average? An academic grade is a subject area assignment or learning task. There should be 2 grades per week for every student. We're at the 5th week of Semester Two. Students should have at least 8 -10 grades in Gradebook. Students grades should reflect more than compliance activities i.e. points for turning in field trips slips or receiving credit for bringing supplies. Student's grades should also reflect subject area progress. 3. How many students are progressing? What interventions were applied? When the student 'opts-out' what is the intervention? 4. Identify the students who are almost passing i.e. class average of 50% or more. What can be done to support them? 5. Identify students who are on the cusp between C's/B's and B's/A's. What can be done to support them?

their understanding of our students, and student performance. One Equity Team teacher reported:

> I am continuing to learn and process how male students experience school. I recently took students on two field trips and I was much more aware of who I was bringing on the trips (gender and racial identity) compared to field trips in previous years. I am also really grappling with this idea of traditional schooling for some of our students. A few weeks ago, I noticed that my male students were more successful during verbal assessments and less successful during formative assignments where they had to write. During the field trip, I notice a similar trend. Students who are struggling in the classroom, were thriving on the field trips. I am going to continue to use a variety of assessments in my classroom. However, this is something that takes a lot of pre-planning and self-accountability (Equity Team Member).

Another Equity Team teacher shared:

> I have experienced a lot of success with 2 out of 3 of my “equity students.” Our relationship within the classroom has strengthened a lot and I find the 2 students seeking out approval and academic support. Today, I took a cell phone from one of my “equity students” because he was playing phone games and could not self-regulate. I expected him to shut down, however the exact opposite happened. While I was taking attendance, he left his desk and came up to me to ask for help. He said “alright I know you keep explaining this, but please help me.” He started the year as a student who was passive and would go all period not working if I allowed it. He also tends to follows his table’s vibe, but today he removed himself from his peers and made sure he advocated for himself (Equity Team Member).

A teacher on the Equity Team also shared what she was learning about herself, her colleagues, and her students:

> Our students need opportunities for internal growth and development. If we do not allow them or give them the opportunity to work on this "internal growth", then we are not appropriately guiding them to be successful academically. There are many times when we as teachers feel that we just aren't reaching our students and that our methods have failed somehow. We go home after a long day and reflect on our work with specific students. We reflect and think and rethink. We reflect, think, unlearn and relearn, "What does he/she need to be successful in my class? Does he/she need more support? I gave them the worksheet to study off of. I don't think that was enough. Does he/she need tutoring after school? I told him/her to come by but they never showed up. Maybe they need the support to get started? Maybe they just need some coaching on how to be a

> student? We ask ourselves these questions daily and sometimes we burn ourselves out looking for an answer (GWHS Equity Team Member).

An Equity Team Teacher also shared how they were learning from their students:

> Yesterday, I had lunch with one of my focus students and another student who had an incident in the classroom that I needed to address and this is what I have learned from that meeting:
>
> - Not all of our students come to our school knowing how to be students.
> - Not all of our students understand the word "success"
> - Our students love to talk about themselves, when properly prompted to open up.
> - Our students love when you listen.
> - Our students love food because it brings them together and gives them a sense of belonging.
> - Our students communicate well when they are in a room with other students who are going through the same conflicts/struggles/challenges as they are.
> - Our students enjoy each other's presence which enables them to learn, unlearn and reflect with one another.
> - Our students not only need these spaces, they want them! They see these spaces as opportunities (GWHS Equity Team Member).

The Equity Team Teachers also shared how they had created new spaces in their classroom for students to experience school differently. One teacher raised funds to support the transformation of the physical space in her room via bean bag shares and flexible seating options so that her student could “hang out after school.

However, as we moved into the 4th quarter, and the school year’s end was rapidly approaching, Equity Team teachers expressed the need to “prioritize what’s immanent while still trying to keep” their action research with their three students at heart. Our Freshman Team Lead was taking steps to ensure students were actively participating in their own success via Freshman Lunchbox Recovery by handing out blue slips to all students at risk of failing. Proactive and data driven supports like this helped us to begin to reduce the number of students at-risk. Likewise,

our counselor indicated that he “felt the pressure was on” to support his students while at the same time attending to other responsibilities like AP Test Coordinator.

The upshot of all this is that our Equity Team has created a space for innovative practice and personal growth. It is a physical space when we all come together as team to share and learn but also a structure of support and even accountability for the work. One team member said it best:

> If learning by doing is how we learn to become a leader, then leading regular equity-centered routines has supported me to connect to the work in a more personalized way. During our equity retreat opening, we resituated ourselves in our ‘why’ and shared our reflections with our equity team-- for me, it was not so much the reflection, but the sharing that created a space of both vulnerability and trust. Reflecting on *why* we engage in reimagining a system that promotes equity, rather than just define equity, allowed me to situate myself within the work and more deeply understand how I am beginning to understand my own identity within the work. Without that foundation, I would not have been able to engage in the work in the weeks to come at the same level (GWHS Equity Team Member).

In this way, the team has provided a critical support and a holding environment “formed by a network of relationships within which people can tackle tough, sometimes divisive questions without flying apart” (Heifetz and Linsky 2002, pp. 102-103).

Existing Key Leadership Routines

The second half of the year also provided opportunities to continue to integrate our new work into the existing stream of work via existing leadership routines like our Q3 Senior Leadership Team Meeting and our EOY PLC Learning Cycle, while at the same time ensuring that our core “on-track” work is supporting student success. The Senior Leadership Team provided time to support the ongoing development of leadership practice via reflection on individual and school practice. In fact, the team setting provided an excellent opportunity to invite feedback on the

current stage of development of our All Students Learn Priority. Team members were provided the opportunity to rate the level of development from weak to strong (1-4) and to review our new Mission, Vision, and Guiding Principles and provide feedback on the guiding principles that is most and least developed. In doing so, not only did we reaffirm our purpose and direction but we also received critical feedback at the early stages of the work. We also adjusted our PLC Meeting schedule to provide additional time to support the work of the Freshman PLC by introducing a *Grade Level Consultancy Protocol* as a new routine. One of our Department Chairs who is also a member of our Equity Team shared her thoughts on the new routine:

> One thing that we have added to our EOY learning cycle is a Consultancy Protocol focused on how students are experiencing school. My role during the protocol was consultant. I felt very comfortable asking probing questions and speaking about the dilemma. I imagine that I would have thought of similar ideas before, and maybe would have said them; however, I did notice that I was speaking with a lot of confidence and urgency (GWHS Equity Team Member).

Another Equity Team Member reflected on her leadership with colleagues:

> I have also found myself more comfortable paying attention to patterns of participation as a team leader. I have always known that I have a few very vocal colleagues on my team, and a few very quiet individuals, and then a few in between. In the past, I would say an open-ended question like "does anyone else have anything else to say?" and not really sure of who spoke or not. But now I feel very comfortable is saying something like "I want to make sure we are hearing from all voices, I haven't heard from 3 members of our team." This is definitely something that was developed from the equity trainings (GWHS Equity Team Member).

The idea behind this leadership move was to make space among course team members to discuss adolescent development and success in school, rather than simply collaborative planning around curriculum. While this "move" is still in its infancy we are hopeful that we can make space in our high-functioning departments to have more conversations about how students are experiencing school.

Finally, we benefited from having established clear routines prior to the start of the year for ongoing support and effort in educating our students, teachers, and families about the importance of grades and being “on-track” to graduate. These routines like Freshman Seminar, Freshman Cafe, Progress Reports, Lunchbox Recovery, Report Card Pick-up, and other similar routines-built understanding and support ongoing progress monitoring.

RESULTS

We engaged in capacity building through focused collaboration and support in three areas: 1) Student and Adult success, 2) Shifting Organizational Culture, and 3) Building Organizational Capacity.

Student & Adult Success

We improved our overall semester one (week 20) Freshmen On Track metric, which moved to 96% an increase from 95%. Also, 100% of Black boys are on-track Semester One; 94% of Latinx boys on-track Semester One; 83% of Black girls on-Track Semester One. (see Appendix B).

We involved more students in the core instructional work of the school such as the school wide Instructional Coherence learning walks, where they worked with teachers to assess the instructional practice. Also, our peer to peer mentoring was gender aligned to support boys talking with other boys.

Our priority groups received targeted support from members of the Equity Team including the counselor and teachers who provided additional interventions to support them.

The members of our Equity Team engaged in year-long professional development with our partners at the University of Chicago, weekly school-based meetings, and bi-weekly meetings with the administrative team. During the bi-weekly meeting, team members utilized a reflection protocol focus on what they were doing and how it was growing their leadership.

Shifting Organizational Culture

As mentioned, this work requires a change in culture. In support of deep culture changes, we began the school year with school wide professional development from the National Equity

Project. The facilitators discussed implicit bias and challenged faculty to examine their own thinking. This provided the foundation for the Freshmen grade level team to continue to reflect on common grading practices and instructional routines. In our November survey, teachers reported the following from the grade level meetings:

- 94% Agreed or Strongly Agreed that they discussed the school wide priority All Students Learn
- 94% stated that they discussed common instructional routines and practices to support all students being successful.
- 94% stated that they discussed or explored the topics of equity and social justice teaching and leadership.

These initial results suggest that we are moving in the right direction. This began with naming the problem during our Senior Leadership Team meeting and evolved to revising our mission, vision, and guiding principles with all stakeholders. We are planning to survey teachers in June to provide an end of year assessment of the yearlong grade level meetings.

Building Organization Capacity

An important result from this project and work with the Equity Team is a new course for incoming Freshmen students. The Equity Team teachers work resulted in their advocacy for a new class to provide both academic and socio-emotional support freshmen throughout the year. This new class is Freshmen Seminar. The Freshmen Seminar course will impact teaching loads and scheduling. The Equity Team teachers will work over the summer to develop and plan this new course based on their experiences this year in our project. This course will allow our teachers to share their knowledge and mobilize in new and creative ways to address the challenge of the

high school transition. We are exploring ways to have single gender classes and plan to integrate all students including diverse learners in the classroom. The inclusion of diverse learners will require that our special education teachers work differently such as pushing in to a classroom and providing resources supports. This is a different role for our special education teachers from co-taught and separate classrooms and will require that all teachers - general education and special education - to collaborate in new ways.

This work will continue and live in our revised school-wide leadership routines, the newly formed student supports, and we continue to refine and develop routines that engage students in academic and social emotional supports that will enhance their transition to high school and post-secondary success.

A new cohort of 9th grade equity leaders will be cultivated for next year and this work will live on in our school mission and vision.

REFLECTION

> "The stone which the builders rejected has become the cornerstone. The lord of love and mercy has brought wonder to our eyes!" (KJV Psalm 118)
>
> "Joining with others in the ongoing struggle for social justice and witnessing their commitment, self-sacrifice, and strategic intelligence is the best way to learn how to sustain hope in the face of struggle." *(Stephen Preskill and Stephen D. Brookfield)*

From the beginning, we have looked to our Cahn Inquiry Project as an opportunity to inspire our faculty's development as transformational teachers and leaders.[30] Our work this year supported a sustained investment in our *All Students Learn* priority, which was initially identified as a schoolwide priority in August of 2016.[31] At the time, *All Students Learn* was our initial equity stance: *we were going to support all of the community's students, including those who have not had success in school*. Despite our efforts around this priority, we grew to recognize an inadequacy in terms of our impact with adults and students. In other words, despite continued efforts over a two-year period, *All Students Learn* was not fully developed as a priority and there was some evidence of a compliance approach and lack of commitment to this work on the part of some educators. Nonetheless, and despite challenges in implementation, we started to look more deeply into our own leadership practice and our impact through our long-term work around

[30] Our definition of transformational leadership draws from James MacGregor Burns (1978): ""The potential for influence through leadership is usually immense...The leader's fundamental act is to induce people to be aware or conscious of what they feel—to feel their true needs so strongly, to define their values so meaningfully, that they can be moved to purposeful action" (pp. 43-44).

[31] Building on the past work of our Senior Leadership Team, All Students Learn was initially identified as a priority in August of 2016 in a Senior Leadership Team meeting and later during via a faculty meeting: "Washington High School is committed to supporting students with the academic preparation and social supports for success in college and career. This means that we have to put social supports in place for all students and that we must have targeted supports in place for students who are struggling to meet expectations. Interventions/supports must be provided for at risk students. The GWHS Community expects that we are going to support all of the students in the community, including those who have not had success in school" (Opening Week 2016-2017.pptx). Having identified the priority, and then brought Julie Burnett on to lead the work, our initial step was to create an inquiry space for adult learning focused on equity and instructional practice by making space for teachers to examine classroom instruction and engaging in authentic inquiry about our students.

equity as an Admin Team, and in collaboration with principals and assistant principals from Network for College Success partner schools.[32] The upshot of this is that by the end of the 2017-18 school year we had begun to surface our concerns regarding the inequitable outcomes that existed and we were beginning to mobilize people and resources to address the situation. The Cahn Inquiry Project provided is with the balcony time and resources, coupled with clear, accountable structures and supports to help us to re-examine and re-invest in the core beliefs and purpose that lie at the heart of our *All Students Learn* priority.

This project focused primarily on providing a space to share and cultivate new ideas and practices, while at the same time growing in our capacity to lead for equity. In doing so, the Cahn Inquiry Project supported us join with others in "the ongoing struggle for social justice" which we did as Cahn Allies and through our newly formed Equity Team. In each case, we found that the process was generative and as Preskill & Brookfield (2009) would say the act of "joining with others in the ongoing struggle for social justice" is how we learned "to sustain hope in the face of struggle" (183-184). The past year has provided us with an opportunity to reconnect with core values through communities of practice which supported and pushed us and this work forward. In doing so, this work has been transformational for us because at every step it as supported us to be more aware of our core values and, more importantly, we have been "moved to purposeful action" (Burns 1978, pp. 43-44). Likewise, we believe that this work has inspired our team via

[32] The Network for College Success (NCS) "envisions the transformation of public high schools in the United States to communities of powerful learning for students and educators." Their mission is "to cultivate postsecondary readiness and success for all students by translating research into practice and supporting high school leaders to organize their schools for improvement and innovation. The network of 17 schools has provided our school with the social capital to learn with and from colleagues from 16 other schools for the past 5 years, which is a critical resource for capacity development both for me in terms of the Principal Network, which convenes monthly and included an annual retreat, as well as for all of my teacher leaders who engage directly with NCS staff and peers from other NCS partner schools.

learning opportunities and experiences which have supported their journey as transformational teachers and leaders.

We also believe that this project has supported our school to begin to address critical issues around equity that will require significant and sustained investment in the years that lie ahead and we are grateful that our students, teachers, and parents in our school community have committed to continuing to transform our school. Hearts and minds have been moved toward purposeful action, which engenders hope because we are approaching a day when the students who were the least well-served and often overlooked by our community will become our future hopes and the dreams of our community. However, as Paulo Freire (1970) reminds us, this will require a transformational experience for our students, teachers, and school community:

> A deepened consciousness of their situation leads people to apprehend that situation as an historical reality susceptible of transformation. Resignation gives way to the drive for transformation and inquiry, over which men feel themselves to be in control. If people, as historical beings necessarily engaged with other people in a movement of inquiry, did not control that movement it would be (and is) a violation of their humanity. Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects. (p.85)

In sum, this project has supported us to adapt key leadership practices to emerging needs while pushing us to develop and imagine new practices that will more deeply engage students and teachers in a transformational process.

The Cahn Inquiry Project has surfaced clear implications for Washington High School as it relates to ensuring all students are supported to achieve. We will need to be intentional in how we go about ensuring that barriers are removed so as to ensure that our school provides all students with a transformational experience for all students rooted in our commitment to social justice. This project highlighted the multifaceted nature of organizational change and reminded

us that deep culture change requires a sustained systems approach. Likewise, there are clear implications for our leadership practice moving forward in terms of change leadership and organizational change.

We believe the implications for those responsible for leading teacher learning and development are many and varied, but the following four statements capture our learning from this project and continues to guide our work:

1. **We cannot overcome what we ignore.** Using data, research and the situation to name the problem and support working on the problem is critical to addressing the inequitable outcomes that our system is producing. In our situation the timing was right to begin working on the uncomfortable situation of racial and gender inequity. Having addressed many Tier 1 issues including instruction and core supports, relationships, and having made significant gains in all key metrics, the time was right to focus on racial and gender inequity.

2. **We must begin to support the whole school to engage in critical conversations about race and equity.** We have invested significant energies in making the school student centered and focused on supporting a collaborative and professional culture. Now, we must continue to adapt our practice to better support our students and each other in this complex work.

3. **We must support our formal and informal leaders to teach and lead for social justice.** This work requires that we engage in new learning and reflection so that students and adults are supported to grow and learn by examining their own bias in order to interrupt inequities. However, we must be mindful that holding spaces are created to support our formal and informal leaders who feel the pain of implicit bias and the pushback inherent in challenging norms and interests.

4. ***Hope is work* and is sustained by doing the work.** Often times people are challenged and defeated by what they perceive as insurmountable obstacles; however, this work is a reminder that much can be accomplished when we work together to challenge the status quo and fight for what we believe in, and while we are driven by outcomes the process of engaging with others in the work restores hope in each other and the power of community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank our school for providing us with the time and space to learn and grow as leaders and to our Washington High School students who are always the first ones to get on board with the transformational work of school improvement and human development. We are grateful for the amazing support of Barbara McKeon and her team together with the faculty of Teachers College, to begin thinking about how to get a clearer picture of the nature of the problem that we would select for the project

A number of individuals at Washington High School were extremely helpful to us in developing our practice and supporting our growth. Adilene, Ashley, Chanel, Gabe, Grace were spirited partners in the work. Likewise, Barbara provided us with a dedicated and talented teammate who furthered our growth around social emotional supports and student voice and held down the fort whenever we were in NYC. Finally, Kim and the team at NCS fueled our focus on equity via a 2-3 year sustained focus in the Principal and AP Communities of Practice, and offered countless other nudges and learning opportunities along the way.

In addition to our colleagues and advisors, we would like to thank Chuck Cahn, The McDougall Foundation, The Chicago Public Education Fund and the Gates Foundation for their generous support of our work and our journey. Finally, Kevin would like to thank Julie for supporting his practice and partnering in this work. Kevin would also like to acknowledge his wife Bricia who tolerates his work schedule and partners with him in two beautiful and talented Latinx children who are part of his stance. He loves them both deeply and he hopes that this work will improve our public education system for their benefit too. Julie would like to thank Kevin for the

opportunity to work on the Cahn project. Finally, we humbly acknowledge that the work would not have been possible without the support - and push - of the Equity Team members and words cannot express our gratitude to our Cahn team colleagues - in Chicago and out -who constantly put children first so that no dream is deferred.

APPENDIX A

Washington High School Working Norms

Stay Engaged

To stay engaged is a refusal to let your heart and mind "check out" of the conversation while leaving your body in place. It is a personal commitment each person makes, regardless of the engagement of others. It means remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue.

Speak Your Truth

To speak your truth, you must be willing to take risks and be absolutely hones about your thoughts, feelings and opinions and not just saying what you perceive others want to hear. Until we become completely honest, the dialogue will remain limited and ultimately ineffective.

Expect and Accept Non-Closure

To engage in transformative professional practice is to recognize that you/we will not reach closure in every meeting. There is no "quick fix" or solution to the challenge of shifting our practice to better serve all students. Therefore, we must commit to an on-going dialogue as an essential component of our action plan.

Lean Into Discomfort

To stretch ourselves and grow from experiences, it is essential that you/we leave our head and heart space of comfort and enter into a space of dissonance. This is an active process, where you/we take risks and willingly enter into unclear and uncomfortable cognitive spaces.

Pay Attention to Patterns of Participation

To model equitable engagement strategies needed in and for our classrooms, we must recognize and interrupt communication and behavior patterns that stem from and reinforce the unequal power dynamics of dominant culture. This work is more complex than making certain everyone has an opportunity to engage all the time. This norm requires us to maintain an inquiry lens and constantly making meaning of the dynamics between individuals, the content and the goals – in the moment and over time.

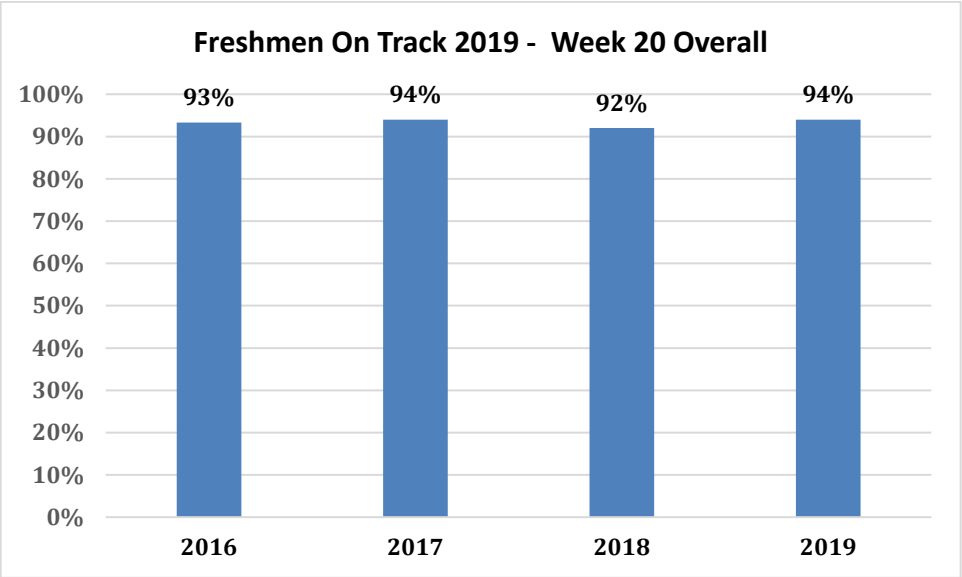
Contextual Confidentiality

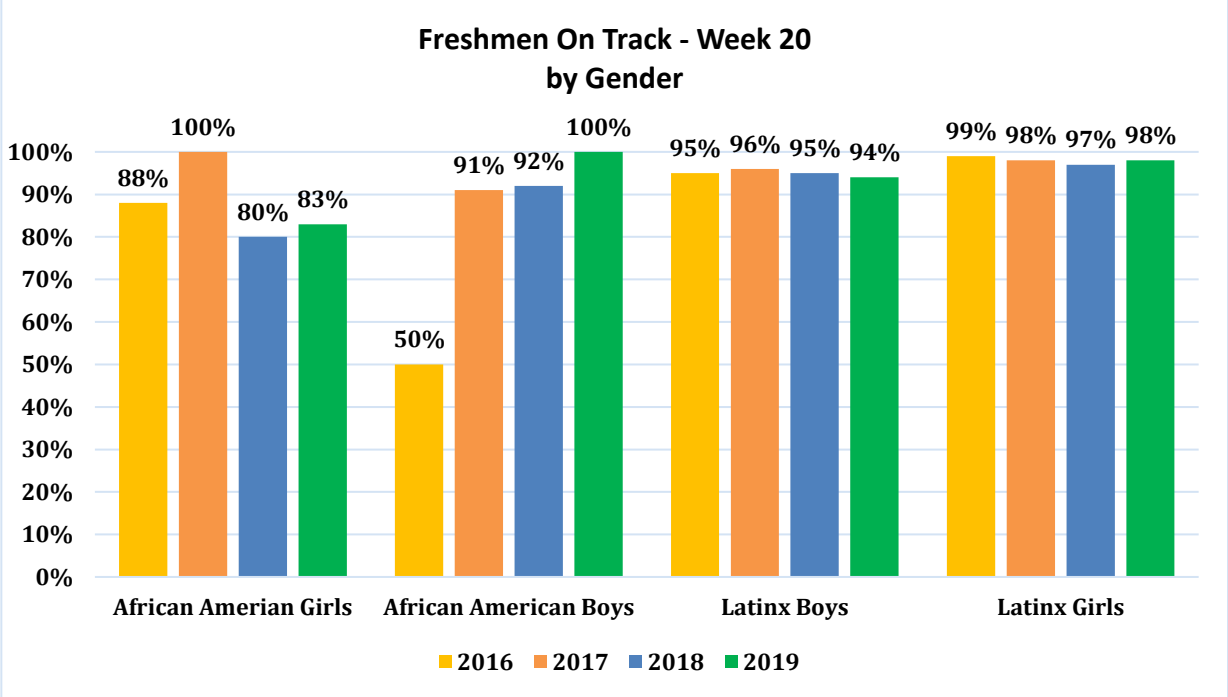
To support each other to take risks and tell our truths for the benefit of our own community transformation, we need to agree (and we need to develop trust) to respect the privacy of each individual's identity, and life experiences, while finding ways to talk publicly about our learning as a result of our shared work. In other words, we keep each other's names and stories "in the room" and own out personal learning and shifts in beliefs.

Go to the Source or Let It Go! (24 to 36-hour rule)

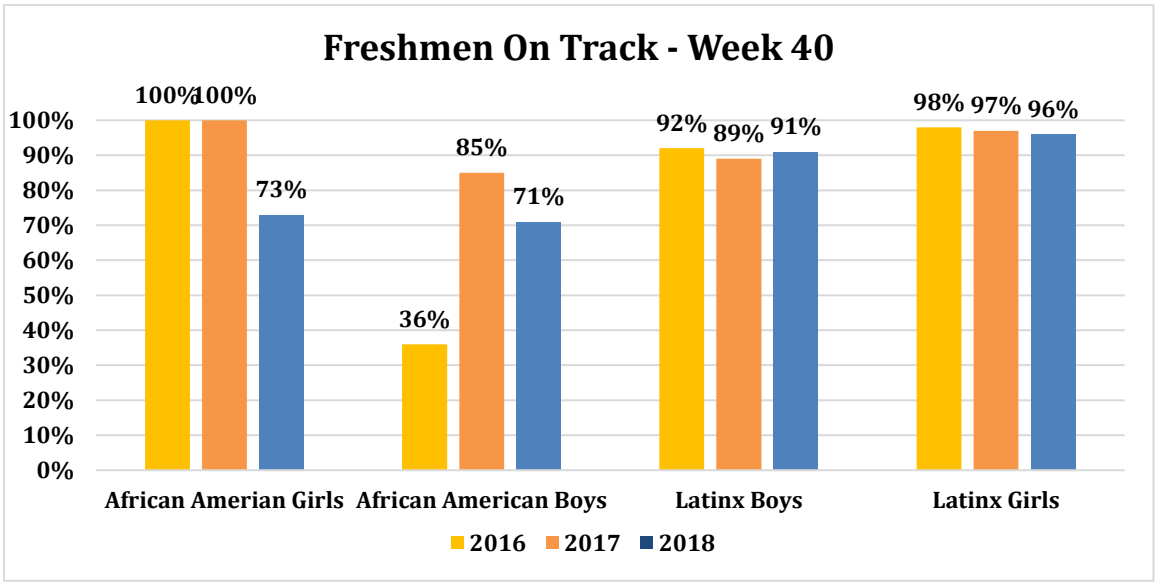
To establish the conditions necessary to build trust and take risks, it is important to provide an avenue for community members to address each other if something comes up. Since this inter/intra-personal work may trigger particular emotions such as pain or confusion, there must be normalized behavior to confront and heal. When necessary, you/we go directly to the person, addressing the specific event – looking to gain clarity, as well as move forward. You/we do no create "parking lot" culture, where issues can become conflated or inflated, past the point of resolution.

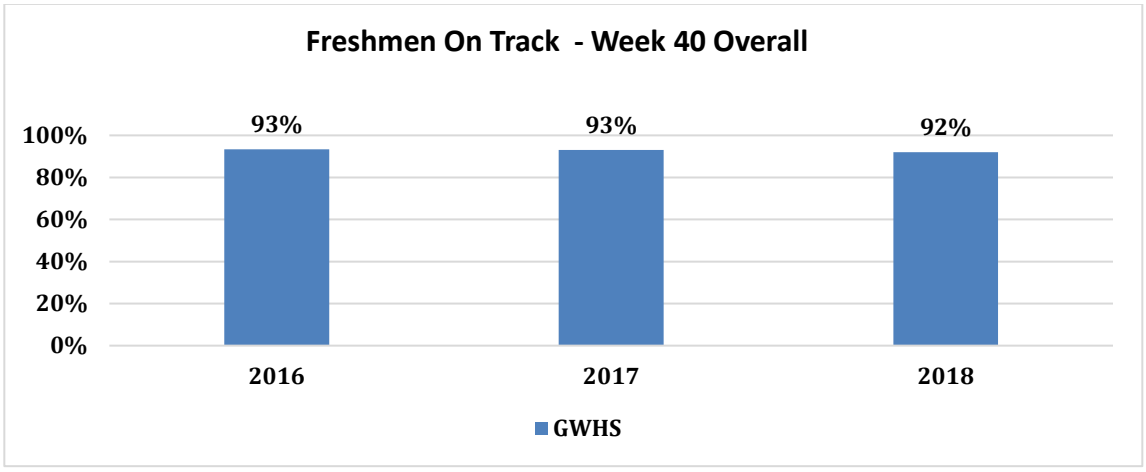
Appendix B

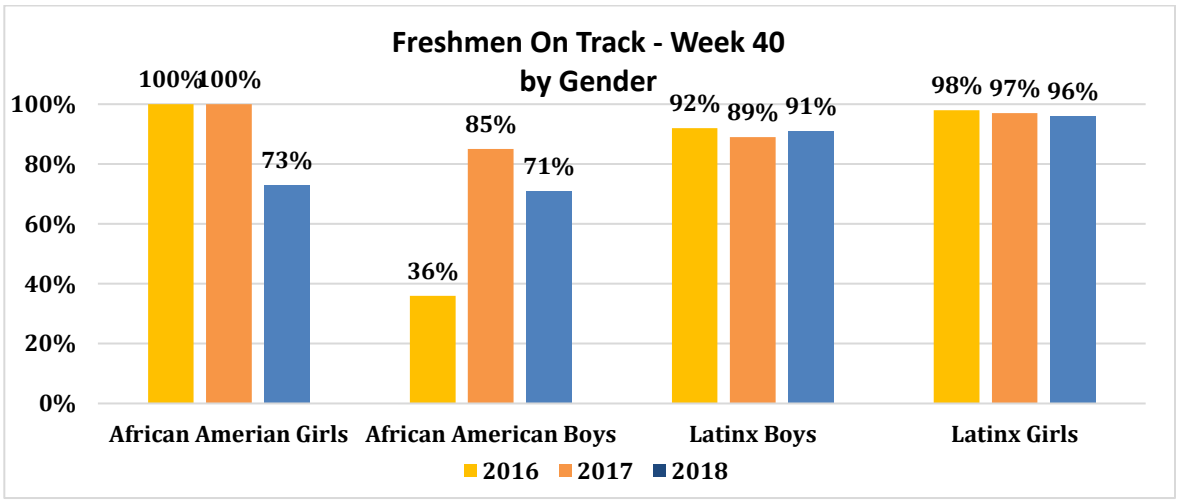

Freshmen On Track 2019 - Week 20 Overall
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
93%
94%
92%
94%
2016
2017
2018
2019


Freshmen On Track - Week 20
by Gender
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
88%
100%
80%
83%
50%
91%
92%
100%
95%
96%
95%
94%
99%
98%
97%
98%
African Amerian Girls
African American Boys
Latinx Boys
Latinx Girls
2016
2017
2018
2019

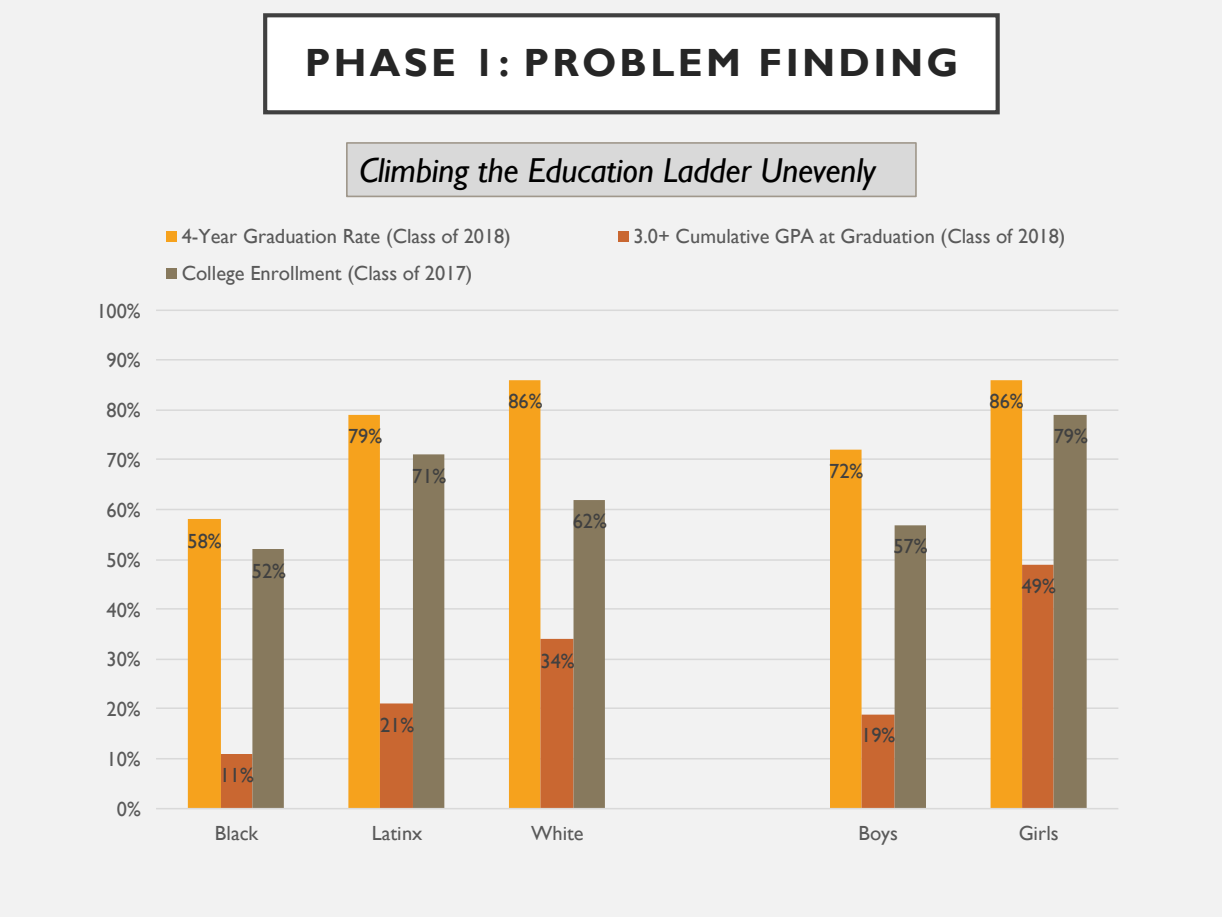
Appendix C


Freshmen On Track - Week 40
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
100%
100%
73%
36%
85%
71%
92%
89%
91%
98%
97%
96%
African Amerian Girls
African American Boys
Latinx Boys
Latinx Girls
2016
2017
2018


Freshmen On Track - Week 40 Overall
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
93%
93%
92%
2016
2017
2018
GWHS


Freshmen On Track - Week 40
by Gender
100%
80%
60%
40%
20%
0%
100%
100%
73%
36%
85%
71%
92%
89%
91%
98%
97%
96%
African Amerian Girls
African American Boys
Latinx Boys
Latinx Girls
2016
2017
2018

Appendix D


PHASE 1: PROBLEM FINDING
Climbing the Education Ladder Unevenly
4-Year Graduation Rate (Class of 2018)
3.0+ Cumulative GPA at Graduation (Class of 2018)
College Enrollment (Class of 2017)
100%
90%
80%
70%
60%
50%
40%
30%
20%
10%
0%
58%
11%
52%
79%
21%
71%
86%
34%
62%
72%
19%
57%
86%
49%
79%
Black
Latinx
White
Boys
Girls