CAPP Leadership Network Year 2 Report 2019-2020

Disrupting Educational Inequities & Leading for Change

CALIFORNIA ACADEMIC PARTNERSHIP PROGRAM

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CAPP MISSION

The California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP), established by the California State Legislature in 1984, is an intersegmental program whose purpose is to develop cooperative efforts to improve the academic quality of public secondary schools with the objective of improving the preparation of all students for college. CAPP supports partnerships and collaborations that focus on improving the academic preparation and college-readiness of California students and that serve schools with low student participation in institutions of postsecondary education or with a concentration of students from groups underrepresented in postsecondary education.

Established by statute in 1984, CAPP is administered by the Trustees of the California State University in cooperation with Regents of the University of California, the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, and the Superintendent of Public Instruction. Each of these segments, and the California Student Aid Commission, appoint members to an advisory committee that plays a major role in setting CAPP's criteria for awarding grants and selecting applicants for receipt of CAPP grants.

(California Academic Partnership Program, 2015)

CAPP LEADERSHIP NETWORK
YEAR 2 REPORT

The purpose of this CAPP Leadership Network (CLN) Year 2 Report is to capture the CLN program activities for 2019-2020. It includes a summary of the activities, an overview of the CLN documentation and evaluation efforts, a description of lessons learned, and next steps.

INTRODUCTION
CLN Year 2:
Becoming a Change Agent

Seminal research looking at the relationship between school leadership and student learning and achievement, concludes that, "Leadership is second only to classroom instruction among all school-related factors that contribute to what students learn at school." (Leithwood, Seashore, Anderson, Wahlstrom, 2004).

The important role that leadership plays in ensuring access to equitable and excellent education cannot be over stated. School leaders must not only cast a vision that creates the conditions for educators to understand and pursue equity in their teaching practices, but they must also empower the educators with whom they work to examine, and change if necessary, the norms, values, and beliefs that guide the daily operations of the school.

With that being said, The California Academic Partnership Program (CAPP) Leadership Network (CLN), which is based on more than 30 years of experience and lessons from previous CAPP grants, is designed to support educational leaders from secondary public schools throughout California. It provides a structured and professional space that supports continuous leadership development for current and aspiring leaders who are interested in leading for equity and excellence to transform the educational chances for students in their schools.

The CLN initiative is intended to:

I. *Serve as an enduring professional community for selected leaders*
   * Who serve secondary schools with significant achievement gaps between groups of students, particularly those who are underrepresented in postsecondary education.

II. *Provide opportunities for leaders to deepen their professional practice grounded in*

   * Equity
   * Access
   * Academic Excellence

III. *Collectively explore ways to create an educational environment that:*

   *Reflects the entire school community

   *Courageously and systemically transforms organizational structures, policies, and practices.

In addition to learning from each other, CLN participants engage and learn *with* a cadre of CAPP partners and university faculty, with related research and teaching expertise, focused on building the capacity to lead for *equity* and *academic excellence*. This unique collaborative K-12 and postsecondary education partnership utilizes a range of strategies drawn from participants' practices, educational theory, and research on leadership development. This collaborative professional learning builds on the requisite leadership skills, knowledge, and dispositions that support reflective, strategic, innovative leaders for underserved students throughout the state.

The inaugural CLN cohort is comprised of fourteen assistant or vice principals from secondary schools across California. Enrollment across the schools reflects the diversity in the state and ranges from the smallest with 150 to the largest with 2,603 at the time the schools were selected.

CAPP established a Leadership Network (CLN) to provide a structured professional space that supports continuous leadership development for current and aspiring leaders who are interested in leading for equity and excellence to transform the educational chances for students in their schools. The network engages leaders in a series of professional development opportunities with the explicit focus on leading for equity.
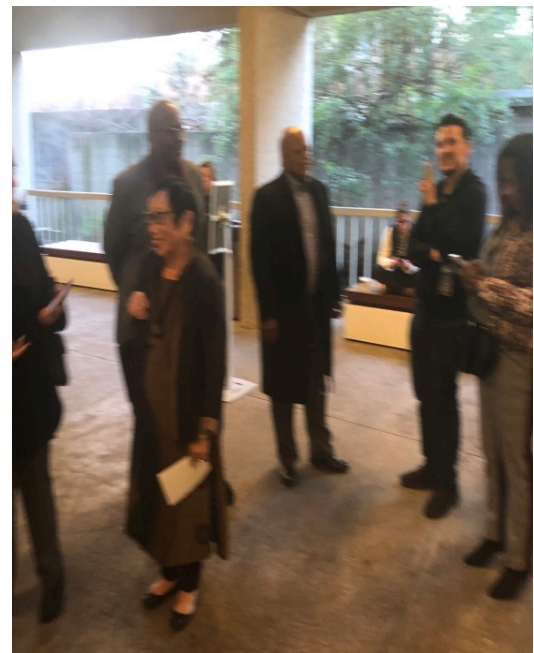
For the purposes of CLN, equity is assessed through the following lenses: academic, climate, and systemic. Leading for equity recognizes that inequitable conditions persist within public schools throughout the state of California. Equipping school leaders with the tools needed to address and disrupt these inequitable conditions is imperative and the charge of CLN.

The inaugural CLN cohort was comprised of assistant/vice principals. The decision was made to focus on this particular group of school leaders due to the disproportionately low amount of professional development opportunities available to assistant/vice principals, as compared to principals. Further, the job description of school principals has evolved and now requires more distributed leadership to meet the needs of students and other stakeholders. In most cases, these additional responsibilities fall upon assistant/vice principals.

This report is intended to serve as a summary of Year 2 (2019-2020) CLN efforts. In this report, readers will be introduced to the programmatic theme of Year 2 (Becoming a Change Agent: Mindsets, Values, and Beliefs), documentation and evaluation efforts, and lessons learned. For additional information about CLN, see our Year 1 CLN Report. Please note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, CLN transitioned to virtual meetings in March 2020. The 'Next Steps' section of this report will outline strategies, resources, tools, and opportunities available to not only CLN participants but also leaders across the state of California as we collectively move forward in the fight for equity, for all students, in the face of a global health pandemic.

Disrupting Educational Inequities & Leading for Change

Mindsets, Values, and Beliefs

As institutions, schools are comprised of policies, structures, resources, opportunities, and individuals—including educators, administrators, staff or students. These elements exist in a delicate system and work together in defined ways and towards a defined goal, ideally, success as measured by high academic achievement. Unfortunately, however, for many students from underserved backgrounds—those being, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds—schools have become synonymous with underachievement or 'failure'. As a contrast from other programs and models that label students as the singular cause of such 'failure', CLN takes a different approach and focuses intently on the elements of the institution and the institution's culpability in this issue.

That is, as an institution, schools are designed to perform in a particular way and to reach the academic achievement outcomes that they achieve. In short, 'failure', or underachievement, is a defined goal that can and must be addressed; this is an issue of equity. However, to address this inequity, one must first change how the various elements of the institution function together. Those individuals that facilitate this radical change are *change agents*.

The role of the *change agent* is far more complex than the title may appear. *Change agents* identify inequities in the accessibility of opportunities, in the application of policies and practices, and in the achievement outcomes of particular student groups. Though they often push for change alone, a real *change agent* brings together appropriate stakeholder groups to ensure that changes are systemic and sustained over time. As its' aim, CLN works to prepare all assistant/vice principals to be *change agents* in their schooling environments. Unfortunately, inequities abound; thus, so too must *change agents*.

Becoming a *change agent* begins first with an examination of one's mindsets, values, and beliefs as it pertains to educational equity. As individuals entrenched in institutions that have a legacy of not serving the neediest students well, CLN participants must examine and where necessary unlearn mindsets, values, and beliefs that promote inequity in opportunities, resources, and outcomes among student groups. Murphy and Torre (2015) share this important note about values and beliefs

I appreciate having CAPP leadership, facilitators, and cohort members interacting together during each of the activities. It broadened the sense of community in the room with equal participation and professionalism. The conversations themselves were beneficial, especially having like-minded individuals in the room to bounce thoughts and ideas off of without judgment.

Stacie Alexander
Vice-Principal
Cabrillo High School

when they expound upon the significance of a school's mission and vision:

> Vision is about moral purpose and possibilities, concepts forged from values and beliefs that define the instructional program and shape the school climate in ways that enhance student learning…Mission influences the instructional program and the learning climate, which, in turn, shape the behaviors of teachers and students (p. 179).

As integral components of schools, we find that missions and visions are shaped by an individual's, or groups', mindsets, values, and beliefs and in turn shape the school and impact student learning.

Better understanding these concepts will provide administrators with a starting point from which to examine their own mindsets, values, and beliefs and to address them in the event they promote inequity. We present definitions for each of these terms in the space below:

a. **Values** – a person's principles or standards of behavior; one's judgement of what is important in life
b. **Beliefs** – something that is accepted, considered to be true, or help as an opinion: something believed
c. **Mindsets** – collection of beliefs and values that make up the mental attitude, inclinations, habit or disposition that predetermines our interpretations and responses to events, circumstances and situations.

Not only can administrators that are more aware of their own mindsets, values, and beliefs regarding educational equity map out how these core ideals shape the opportunity structure within schools, but they can lead from a position of equity and help colleagues do the same. In practice, *change agents* use data to drive decision making; they set realistic, measurable, and achievable goals; they work to build consensus with colleagues so that change is sustained over time; and, they ensure that "equity for all students" means "equity for all students", not a select few.

Over the course of Year 2 of CLN, program participants were led through a targeted curriculum that explored these

ideals in greater depth, as well as concepts surrounding educational equity to support their growth as change agents and provide the skills and knowledge necessary to transform their schools. Participants engaged in a leadership symposium, quarterly convenings, structured mentoring and networking activities, and crucial conversations with educational leaders. Together, these structured experiences introduced participants to the concepts of mindsets, values, and beliefs and provided an opportunity for participants to examine their own ideals and how they manifest in practice. Participants were then encouraged and supported in addressing instances where their own mindsets, values, and beliefs adversely impacted the opportunity structure within schools and promoted inequity among student groups. Finally, participants were able to engage in nuanced conversations with educational leaders and to ask these veteran leaders how they managed their own mindsets, values, and beliefs and commitment to educational equity for all students.

Documentation and Evaluation

Measuring and assessing the impact of CLN on program participants is paramount to ensuring that both resources are being used responsibly and to ensuring that the program is meeting its' yearly goals. As compared to evaluation research, documentation research focuses more intently on the overall process that participants undergo as they engage in CLN programs and activities. Subsequently, the methodological approach taken has been one that mixes quantitative and qualitative methods in order to assess process-oriented data and how participants engaging in such work change and change their schools over time. In CLN, we've endeavored to document change through participant interviews and questionnaires, a SWOT analysis, evaluations of convenings, and inquiry projects. We explore each in greater detail in the space below.

To elaborate, in Year 2, participants were invited to engage in an individual interview and to share their original conceptions and understandings of educational equity and how those conceptions and understandings changed over time and as a result of their participation in CLN. Thereafter, participants were invited to respond to a questionnaire and rate their overall experience in CLN, as well as the importance of different programmatic components (e.g., mentoring, convenings, symposium, etc.). Additionally, participants shared how they have become change agents and how they see their own mindsets, values, and beliefs manifesting in their professional practice.

The *S.W.O.T Analysis* presented participants with an opportunity to identify strengths, areas of growth, opportunities for change within their sites, and some of the challenges that exist and delimit their leadership practice. Participants were encouraged to use this tool to identify strategies for maximizing strengths and opportunities.

Additionally, the *evaluations of convenings* presented participants with an opportunity to reflect on content covered during convenings and to articulate how said content connects to their leadership practice. Feedback from these reflections helped improve subsequent convenings and illuminated participants' level of understanding and content areas that needed to be re-emphasized.

Finally, *Inquiry Projects* helped participants explore and address an equity issue at their school sites using the three-pronged equity lens: academic, climate, and systemic. The inquiry process was designed to build the skills necessary for participants to engage in continuous improvement utilizing a rigorous data-driven process for investigating and addressing educational inequities. Though this was not a research project, participants applied a conceptual lens to real-world equity issues and endeavored to address them.

Year 2:
Lessons Learned

Year 2 of CLN was not without its' challenges, namely COVID-19 and the impact of the global health pandemic on schools and longstanding educational inequities. Nevertheless, CLN participants demonstrated learning and growth in their understandings of educational equity, in how they put their mindsets, values, and beliefs into practice, and how they can be change agents for equity and academic excellence. We explore each of these points as valuable lessons learned in Year 2 of CLN.

Lesson #1: Equity is not Equality

Far too often, equity and equality are conflated in ways that often reinforce observed disparities in academic achievement outcomes among student groups. As a principle component of all Year 2 convenings, program participants were introduced and frequently reminded that a focus on ensuring educational equity, not equality, is the path forward to mitigating and erasing academic achievement gaps among student groups. In response to a questionnaire, participants were asked to define equity in their own words. Their conceptions of equity demonstrated that the trainings, curriculum, and mentorship from Year 2 were effective in helping them both define and distinguish equality and equity.

Equity-based approaches/solutions to longstanding disparities in academic achievement outcomes focus specifically on ensuring students from underserved backgrounds have access to resources and opportunities and that appropriate policies, practices, and institutional supports are in place. To this point, program participants defined equity in the following ways…

> *"the mindset, belief and practice of providing all students with access and opportunity to resources and services, they need to succeed in schools and in life".*

> *"educational equity means that all students are given the opportunities in a fair and just school system to be successful. It does not mean equal, because different students are going to have different needs and support in order to be successful. In educational equity, stakeholders all understand that historically schools and educational systems were and are inequitable. Educational equity means that all stakeholders understand that there are those barriers and add certain supports in order to create the opportunities for all students to be successful. Educational equity is ongoing work. When one inequity is disrupted, stakeholders understand that the work does not and never ends".*

> *"educational equity to me is that everyone gets what they need to be successful and achieve at high levels. It is different from equality in that it isn't "x" amount for each student".*

> *"educational equity is setting up a system in which every student finishes their educational experience having the skills and experiences that make them ready to be able to make their own decision about the next step in their future, regardless of where that might lead them".*

The abovementioned definitions of equity underscore the importance of systematizing policies, practices, resources and opportunities for all students, not a select few. Doing so increases the likelihood that educational inequities are addressed and that solutions to these inequities sustain over time. Central in that process, as well, is the ability of participants to not only define equity from their vantage point but also to bring along colleagues in the creation of such definitions and the maintenance of the established systems. CLN participants both possess the knowledge of equity and nuanced understanding of why it matters, particularly for students from underserved backgrounds.

As a lesson learned and point for consideration, professional learning opportunities for school leaders, particularly novice assistant principals, must ensure that clear distinctions between equality and equity are made and that leaders understand the historical legacy of inequity that persists within schools and throughout society. By doing so, one best positions school leaders to situate educational inequities within a historical and environmental context and to identify existing inequities within their schooling context.

Lesson #2: It is Possible to Unmask Systemic Inequities with an Equity Framework

The Quality Professional Learning Standards (California Department of Education, 2015) identify equity as one of the foremost standards of interest for administrators and their professional learning. Equity, as outlined within these standards, is comprised of three principal tenets: academic, climate, and systemic. Within the context of CLN, administrators must improve learning outcomes for all students (academic equity), develop equitable and inclusive systems, structures, and policies and align them with implemented practices (systemic equity), and facilitate a safe, fair, and respectful schooling environment for all students and improve educators'

understandings of cultural, intellectual, social, emotional, and physical needs of learners (climate equity). These three levels of equity work together as a framework. CLN curriculum, convenings, and structured activities around equity were designed to facilitate a change in participants' understandings of equity but to also cause a change in behaviors. CLN has been successful in accomplishing this aim.

> Systems don't change just because we identify them; they change because we disrupt them.
> — Cornelius Minor
>
> hein.pub/WeGotThis

To elaborate, in reflecting on their CLN experience and interaction with members of the leadership team, one participant expressed the following concerning changes in their understandings of equity:

> *The conversation I had with Dr. Cooper and Lynn about having a lens of equity about*
> *everything has impacted my work as a leader. When I began thinking like that, everything changed.*
> *In all the work I was doing, whether I highly enjoyed it (instructional leadership) or did not*
> *necessarily enjoy it (overseeing school discipline and behavior) I began to focus on equity as the driving force behind it. This work that I began last year as a result of CLN has helped me continue to disrupt inequities with teams of stakeholders and advocate for greater equity.*
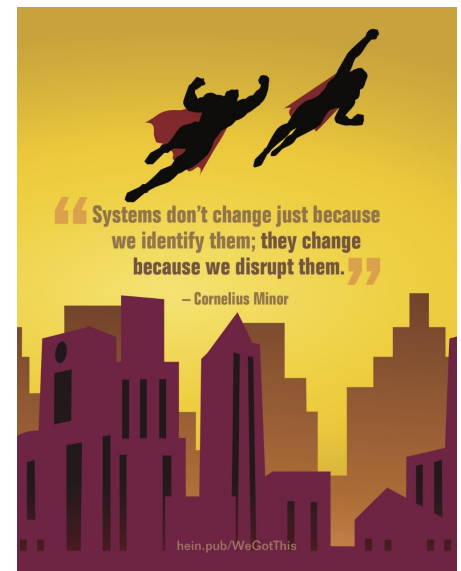
Participating in CLN helped them approach every aspect of their professional practice from a position of equity. For other participants, however, CLN helped them understand and see equity from various vantage points and levels of influence:

> *The biggest evolution has come from a better understanding of the impact of systems on equity.*
> *While what happens at the site level is essential, in order to make lasting changes in equity, the*
> *change must happen to the system itself. School, district, county and state.*

As a multi-year, intensive professional learning experience, CLN aims to help school leaders unmask systemic inequities, especially through and with an equity framework that nuances the academic, climate, and systemic considerations within schools.

As a lesson learned, CLN and other professional learning programs for school leaders must reinforce an equity framework that helps leaders to, first, identify educational inequities but also to situate them at the appropriate level of influence, whether academic, climate, or systemic. As multiple program participants affirmed, equity is both "constantly on my mind in the work that I do" and "I see the layers". All school leaders must be in a position to see the layers and be able to take action on eliminating how inequity manifests within their schools and among their student groups.

Lesson #3: Exploring Mindsets, Values, and Beliefs Transforms and Informs Leadership Practice

Providing participants with professional learning exercises that nuance equity was but a starting point on the path to developing their capacity to unpack their personal mindsets, values, and beliefs regarding student success. It was, and remains, important that participants understood how their personal biases, beliefs, and actions either reinforced or addressed educational inequities within their schools. As participants became more comfortable taking a look within, they would be better positioned to advocate for and help their colleagues do the same. Collectively, participants and their colleagues were able to begin the work of identifying and removing barriers and being change agents. As a lesson learned from Year 2 of CLN, professional learning opportunities for school leaders must begin with a look within. It is imperative that school leaders have an opportunity to be introspective and identify their mindsets, values, and beliefs concerning educational success and then to address any of these personal traits that prove delimiting.

> *"I am better able to articulate my beliefs and have had practice deliberately including equity*
> *in meetings and decision making".*

> *"I have gained more confidence in advocating for what I believe in and having important*
> *conversations with individuals or teams I am working with (with the aid of evidence) about inequities".*

> *"I have come to strongly believe that it takes one conversation to initiate change and that*
> *difficult conversations are necessary for transformation and disruption of inequity and [the] status*
> *quo".*

Next Steps

As CLN looks to Year 3, Lifting as We Climb: Meaningful Mentorship, we cannot help but pause and take stock of where we are as a nation and as a professional learning program for school leaders. COVID-19 has magnified existing disparities and inequities present across multiple social systems, whether education, healthcare, economic, or otherwise. It has also created new ones. Consequently, people of color, people from low-income backgrounds, and those from other historically marginalized and underserved communities are feeling the effects of multiple converging pandemics.

While this annual report serves as a summation of Year 2 efforts, it also presents an occasion to put into practice the theme of Year 3. As we climb out of this global pandemic and towards equity across social systems and for all groups, we must do so together by making sure we lift as we climb and in ways that humanize those individuals and groups that have been dehumanized. To that end, CLN at the end of year 3 will be making available resources, tools, and readings in support of those seeking to be mentors and change agents in their communities, circles of influence, schools, place of work, and homes.

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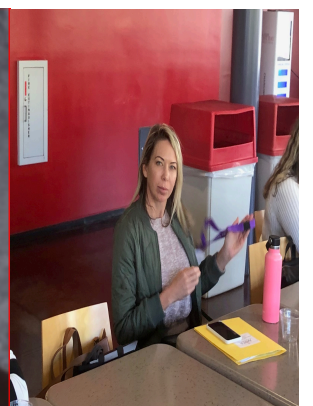Santa Ana High School

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NOT PICTURED HERE
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