



Equity, Anti-Racism, and Social Justice in School-University  
Partnerships: *A Position Paper by the National Association for  
Professional Development Schools*

Policy, Advocacy and External Relations Committee  
Sub-Committee for Policy  
NAPDS  
1300 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, #190-611  
Washington, DC 20004  
Copyright 2023

## **Equity, Anti-Racism, and Social Justice in School-University Partnerships: A Position Paper by the National Association for Professional Development Schools**

The 2021 revisions to the Nine Essentials explicitly articulated the NAPDS belief that a commitment to social justice is central to school-university partnerships (SUPs).

### **Essential 1: A Comprehensive Mission**

*A PDS is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims **to advance equity, anti-racism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners** (NAPDS 2021).*

The author team of the Nine Essentials (second edition) and the leadership of NAPDS made a deliberate choice to identify this as the first of these core values and structures of SUPs. The statement expresses our association's most strongly held conviction; this was the Essential on which there was the greatest consensus. Thus, it seems reasonable--*essential*, even--that we begin consideration of the implications of the Essentials for policy matters with this proclamation.

One would think that the meaning of this declaration is clear to all audiences, but that may not be so, likely due to the inclusion of what are sometimes called "blinking words." Terms like "equity," "antiracism," and "social justice" are interpreted differently by different readers and segments of the population, yet they are so pervasive in the everyday lexicon of society that most *assume* a shared understanding. Yet, it is not the literal definition of these words that is so often assumed and can create conflict, but the figurative meanings imparted by them. To some, these terms suggest the very best of human intentions. To others, they are red flag expressions that demand too progressive an ideology.

The NAPDS Essentials uses these terms as coda to clarify its commitment to the ideals of educating citizens in a democracy. These words have roots in the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and in policy statements published by state and local governments throughout the United States. Most are mentioned in the mission statements of universities and public schools nationwide. Some might argue that they represent important, uniquely American standards.

No one can deny that issues of social justice continue to be politicized. Examples are all around us, all the time. While there is a promising current attention to racial injustice and inequities, the effects of past injustices and inequities continue to plague our communities and schools. The examples of the damage from and dysfunction of these injustices are omnipresent--in the news nightly, taking the extreme form of homicides from gun violence to incessant, everyday strings of social aggressions.

Educators--and, by extension, *teacher* educators--have a special responsibility for explicitly aiming to improve society by upholding the ideals we profess in policy documents (like the Nine Essentials) and in the law. Schools are largely responsible for preparing the next generation of citizens. We all want students to be knowledgeable and prepared to make good

choices. We all want students to be critical thinkers capable of making informed and ethical decisions.

In education, these objectives are conveyed through the curriculum--the content of what teachers teach. Our nation is currently engaged in a particularly tense series of debates around the central curriculum question: what knowledge is of most worth? Agreements about schools' curricula are typically worked out through democratic processes where educators, parents and families, community leaders, and elected officials craft policies that address the question of what content should be taught in schools. Educators, mindful of these policies, make decisions about what thoughts and theories will guide their curriculum content and design: policy makers determine the "what," and teachers are responsible for the "how."

Complicating this equation and these exchanges is the fact there is not *one* curriculum, but at least four, which overlap but are not synonymous. Curriculum theorists and practitioners inform us that there is the *planned* curriculum, the *taught* curriculum, the *learned* curriculum, and the *assessed* curriculum. Ultimately, though, it is through the curriculum that we can endeavor to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among our schools, within and across our school-university partnerships, and in our P-12 and teacher education classrooms.

If you agree that those curricula must continue to bear all that we know about social justice, we urge you to view recent attempts to narrow those curricula and to "scrub" them of these equity ideals as an opportunity to open dialogue with education officials in your local, state, and even federal governments. And, ultimately, to impact the policies related to these ideals.

Five everyday actions you might take to begin to address these concerns and have *real* policy implications:

1. **Build your network:** Find two allies in your circle, community, faith group, etc. and begin the conversation about the issues and how you could start to organize even at the most local level. Allies aren't individuals who live in an "echo chamber" with you; they can offer the daily moral support we all need to realize we're not alone and to begin some larger advocacy work.
2. **Be an ally:** Support friends, neighbors, and colleagues whose work is impacted by the political discussions and legislation in question. Send an email (or, better yet, give them a phone call--putting a real human voice to expressions of support goes a *long* way) to let them know they are seen. Lend an ear by listening to their concerns. Connect them to resources or others who can offer additional support.
3. **Attend an event:** Few of the policy issues in question are decided in a vacuum; virtually all are addressed at local events, where the public is invited to engage. You *are* the public, and even showing up for a forum, a school board meeting, or a parent (family)/teacher/student association is a form of letting others know that oppressive policies are not reasonable.
4. **Plan an event:** Extend invitations and provide space for dialogue about issues by hosting a session and invite a spokesperson to come explain why these new (oppressive) policies have been put in place. Invite an elected official and others knowledgeable about the issue to engage in a public discussion. Be sure to invite the press.

5. **Engage with organizations:** There are numerous organizations that are doing equity and social justice work; writing an email to their leadership in support of their efforts (or, better yet, making even a small donation to the organization) can provide a morale boost to them and potential to demonstrate the broader support of the public for their efforts. Such organizations include the Southern Poverty Law Center, Learning for Justice, Rethinking Schools, and Teaching for Change.

NAPDS is committed to advancing equity, antiracism, and social justice through school-university partnerships. We recognize and endorse the critical importance of these essential constructs in order to actualize the renewal of education in a democratic society.

#### Recommended Citation

NAPDS (2023). *Equity, anti-racism, and social justice in school-university partnerships: A position paper by the national association for professional development schools.*  
[Policy statement].