



# Organizing for Equity Work in Diverse Settings

MARCH 2017

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Produced by Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools (RIDES)  
A project of the Harvard Graduate School of Education

We use the term “reimagining integration” since for so many people—especially people of color—bad experiences with poorly done desegregation in the past have left scars that need to be addressed. Because of the baggage and different perspectives, any attempts to reimagine integration and promote diverse and equitable schools should start with creating a common vision for what that would look like in the school or organization. We recommend the following steps:

## 1 | Form a Working Group

Form a working group with diverse racial and economic backgrounds to develop some guiding principles for the work—ideally not just including educators, but parents, community members, and where appropriate students. For example, Derby (CT) Public Schools, when it started its partnership with RIDES, brought a working group to the launch consisting of six high school students, two parent/community representatives (and their children), four teachers, one paraprofessional, one school board representative, the district’s culture and climate specialist, and the superintendent. School level working groups might be smaller and consist of teachers, parents, administrators, and sometimes students.

## 2 | Build a Sense of Community

Build a sense of community in the group to help make this topic personal. There are many ways to do this. One is to briefly define the differences between schools that are desegregated (diverse bodies in the building) and integrated (conscious efforts made to provide positive academic and social experiences outcomes for all students). Then invite members of the group to reflect on their own experiences in segregated, desegregated and truly integrated schools-- how those experiences affected them academically, socially, and emotionally. Have diverse members of the working group share in pairs or trios, noting what they are learning from one another, but also giving them the opportunity to make this topic personal, and to get to know one another better. Other ways include asking each member to take some time to draft a short personal narrative about his or her experiences in school, and then to share in pairs, or with the whole working group..

## 3 | Build Common Understandings

Build common understandings of the nature of individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic racism. RIDES takes a systemic approach to increasing equity and undoing racism, so it is helpful to get some common language and understandings early -- helping people reflect on their blind spots and improve the way they will work together around equity. There are many resources to help with this. A four minute [Jay Smooth video](#) can be a good way to start the conversation. There are also multiple short articles and other resources that can be custom-selected for the working group ([information on developing a common vocabulary](#), [resources on culture](#), The amount of time

focused on this topic may vary considerably, depending on what prior work and discussion has taken place at the school, district, or CMO. For example, Niles West High School (Skokie IL), before getting involved with the RIDES work, had spent several years reading and discussing race and racism, so there was considerable common language as they engaged in the work.

## 4 | Establish Guiding Principles

Have the group establish some guiding principles that will be used to shape the goals and process of the equity work. Asking participants two questions can help get to this quickly:

- 1) What would you want to avoid so we don't repeat the bad experience of segregation or of desegregation done badly?
- 2) What would positively attract you to want to attend (or have your children attend) an integrated school?

Typically a working group can quickly generate lists of things to avoid, and elements that attract; these can be summarized and become a useful as the group moves to articulate outcomes, and can continue to serve as a helpful reference point as the work continues..

## 5 | Develop Desired Outcomes

With those guiding principles in mind, have the group develop a short list of the desired outcomes they would hope for their students in a diverse and equitable school. These may be similar to, or variations of the [four outcomes developed through RIDES](#). In either case, it is important for each school setting to discuss what participants mean by each and be able to articulate and own the outcomes that will drive their work.. This stage is critical, since so many educators use words without having clear shared definitions of what “diverse” and “equitable” mean or a common vision of what “integrated” means in their setting. The more granular the better, since as working groups dig in to making equity improvements, they need to have a clearly articulated, shared vision of what, for instance, they think teachers would be doing in an “equitable and diverse” classroom, or what the curriculum content would look like. If they are choosing to look at, say, disproportional impacts of school disciplinary systems, the group needs to have a common vision of what an equitable system would look like.

## 6 | Conduct a Broad Systemic Diagnostic Self-Assessment

The next step for the working group is to conduct a broad systemic diagnostic self-assessment. The group should decide how to get multiple stakeholder perspectives on where the district or CMO or the school is in its equity journey. Groups can use the 7 factors of the [Systemic Improvement Map](#) (students, teachers, curriculum; family and community partnership, systems and structures, culture, and leadership) to gauge this, and also to look with a critical lens at the role race and racism play at all levels. (For more see *Diagnose Equity in Your System* [here](#))

## 7 | Select an Area to Improve

Growing from its diagnostic work, the working group selects an area to dig into further for a deeper specific visioning, diagnosis, improvement planning, and follow up cycle.

