Advocacy in Diverse Settings

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Oak Park High School

Demographics (2018)

- 54% White
- 21% Black
- 12% Hispanic
- 10% Asian
- 3% Two or more races

Additionally:

- 94% graduation rate
- Average SAT score 1142
- 72% of graduates enroll in college or vocational program
The school supports nearly all of its White students to graduate in four years, while one in ten Black students doesn’t graduate on time.
More than 80% of White students meet or exceed expectations on the SAT, but less than a quarter of Black students do.
One critical role advocates can play in the school improvement process is to raise equity-focused questions – questions that go beyond overall averages and ask about the experiences and outcomes for different groups of students.
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<td>What percentage of students in our school or district take at least one AP course?</td>
<td>How does the percentage of students who take an AP course in this school compare to other schools in the district? To statewide averages?</td>
<td>Are low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities and/or English learners more or less likely to take at least one AP than their peers? By how much?</td>
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What percentage of students in our school or district take at least one AP course?

35% of students take one or more AP courses
Although nearly half of White students take at least one of the many AP courses offered at Oak Park, the school enrolls only 14% of Black students.
General Question

What percentage of students does our school or district suspend out-of-school each year?

Question about between-school inequities

How does the suspension rate in our school compare to other schools in the district? In the state?

Question about within-school inequities

Are low-income students, students of color, students with disabilities and/or English learners more or less likely to be suspended out of school than their peers? By how much?
What percentage of students does our school or district suspend out-of-school each year?

5% of students are suspended each year.
Oak Park takes very few exclusionary discipline actions with White students, but it suspends more than one in ten Black students every year.
“One of the year’s best shows”
– The Hollywood Reporter

“Affecting, insightful, and vital. Grade A.”
– Indiewire

America to me
Witness it through their eyes.

STARZ
Based on the clips you saw, how do the experiences of students of color differ from the experiences of White students at Oak Park?
For years, school improvement efforts have overlooked these schools, focusing solely on the lowest performing 5% of schools in each state.
Schools are often reluctant to confront disparities in opportunity and achievement in their buildings – and district and state leaders are often reluctant to push them to so.

Pressure from advocates to question the status quo is critical.
Guiding Questions

1) What are the opportunities under ESSA to push for change in schools that are underperforming for groups of students?

2) What are the other opportunities for advocacy at the state, district, and school level?

3) What questions can advocates ask to prompt change in schools with large inequities in opportunity and achievement?
Advocacy at multiple levels means many opportunities to push for change.

- Tennessee has ...
- 146 school districts ...
- With 1,800+ schools ...
- With many, many classrooms
Tennessee Department of Education
State Responsibilities Under ESSA

- **Identify schools** that are consistently underperforming for any group of students.
- **Allocate money** for school improvement and set criteria for receiving that money.
- Provide **technical assistance and support** to – and may take action in – districts serving a significant number of schools identified for improvement.
- If a school is doing *especially badly* for any group of students (Additional Targeted Support and Improvement) doesn’t make sufficient improvement, the state must reclassify it as a CSI school and provide it with the same level of support as the lowest performing schools.
Key State Responsibilities

• Allocating funding to districts
• Setting criteria for principal and teacher preparation, licensure, and (in some states) evaluation
• Setting learning standards and high school graduation requirements
At the state level, advocates can push for ...

• **Tools and data** that prompt schools and districts to identify disparities in opportunity to learn, including per-pupil expenditures at the school level (required under ESSA for the first time ever) reported in a clear and accessible way

• Meaningful **engagement** with families of historically underserved students throughout the improvement process

• **Resources and technical assistance**, including sharing evidence-based practices across districts and schools

• **Action** in districts with many schools that are consistently underperforming for a group of students.

• **Escalated interventions** if – after getting sufficient time, resources, and support – these schools do not improve
Promising Practice: The Florida Partnership

- Collaboration between the College Board and the Florida Department of Education
- Provide technical assistance and professional development to participating districts
- Significantly increased access to AP coursework for Latino students
- Increased number of Latino students earning 3+ on AP exams
District Leaders
District Responsibilities Under ESSA

• **Critical role** to play in supporting schools that are consistently underperforming for any group of students.

• **Approve improvement plans** for Targeted Support and Improvement Schools (TSI)

• **Provide support** to TSI schools

• Take “**additional action**” if a TSI school doesn’t improve after a number of years
Key District Responsibilities

• Allocating funding across schools
• Hiring administrators, teachers, and support personnel (and often placing them in schools)
• Providing professional development and ongoing support
• Selecting curricula/instructional materials
• Establishing policies (e.g., codes of conduct) that impact school climate
• Engaging families and building relationships with community
At the district level, advocates can push for ...

• **Rigorous criteria** for approving improvement plans, including the use of evidence-based interventions that have been shown to work in similar schools

• **Attention to all schools** with disparities in opportunity and outcomes, regardless of whether they are identified by the state’s accountability system

• **District ownership** of its role in providing support and establishing or revising policies that prompt school leaders to eliminate disparities in opportunity to learn rather than impeding improvement

• Creating the **conditions for improvement**, including **equitably allocating resources**
School Responsibilities Under ESSA

• In collaboration with the community, submit to the district an evidence-based improvement plan
Key School Responsibilities

• Creating the master schedule (determining which teachers meet with which students, for how long, and about what topics)
• Establishing and enforcing discipline policies
• Implementing curriculum
• Providing professional development and time/structure for teacher collaboration
• Engaging parents and community members
At the school and district levels, advocates can ask questions that prompt conversations about specific challenges, disparities in opportunity to learn, and what school and district leaders are doing to confront them.
School leadership

High-quality Early Learning

Strong teaching

Positive School Climate

Rigorous Learning Experiences

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School Leadership

Schools that consistently struggle to serve a group of students need equity-oriented leaders who:

- **Believe** all children can succeed
- Set **high expectations** for all students and adults
- **Engage families** and members of the community
- Committed to identifying, discussing, and **changing systems** that create and perpetuate inequities in their buildings
Questions to Ask District and School Leaders: School Leadership

1. How will district leaders ensure that schools that is consistently underperforming for groups of students have equity-oriented leaders?

2. What supports will the district provide to leaders of schools that consistently underperform for one or more groups of students?
Strong Teachers

• Teachers are the most important in-school factor for student success

• Students of color and low-income students are more likely that their White and higher-income peers *in the same school* to be assigned to teachers who are brand new, lack certification, or have lower evaluation rating

• Students of color are far less likely to see a teacher who looks like them
Questions to Ask District and School Leaders: Access to Strong Teachers

1. How are decisions made about which teachers teach which classes?

2. How will the district support principals in – and hold them accountable for – assigning strong teachers to the students for whom the school is underperforming?

3. In what areas are teachers struggling to serve students for whom the school is underperforming? What will district and school leaders do to support them?

4. What will the district do to support the recruitment and retention of teachers of color?
Promising Practice: Assigning the best teachers with the students who need them the most

“We took our best teachers and put them in the remedial classes.”

– Conrad Lopes, Jack Britt High School’s founding principal
Rigorous Learning Experiences

• Every student deserves to have rich, well-rounded, and rigorous learning experiences that prepare them for the college or career or their choice.

• But in many schools, students of color, low-income students, English learners, and students with disabilities are far less likely to enroll in and succeed in rigorous and college-level coursework.
Questions to Ask District and School Leaders: Access to Rigorous Learning Experiences

1. Do all students receive instruction and classroom assignments that reflect the high expectations demanded by the state’s college- and career-ready (CCR) standards?

2. How do the curriculum and instructional materials incorporate the cultures and backgrounds of your students?

3. Are students from the group(s) for whom the school is underperforming expected to complete a college- and career-ready curriculum that aligns with the minimum standards required by your state’s higher education institutions?

4. What will you do to increase participation and success of students for whom the school is underperforming in advanced courses (e.g., Honors, AP/IB, dual enrollment) that maximize the range of options available after high school?
Promising Practice: Eliminating barriers to participation and success in advanced coursework

- Open enrollment policy, rather than relying on teacher recommendations
- Support and training for AP teachers
- Smart scheduling

Learn more at https://edtrust.org/resource/systems-success-thinking-beyond-access-ap/
Positive School Climate

• Students who experience a positive school climate have higher self-esteem, are less likely to be absent, and are more likely to complete school.

• But within the same school, students’ experiences of school climate may vary drastically by race.

• Students of color may be chastised or punished for failing to confirm to the White norms and standards that dominate most schools in America.
Questions to Ask District and School Leaders: School Climate

1. How will school leaders establish and communicate high expectations for all students and adults?

2. What will the school leadership team do to build trust and improve relationships between adults and students who the school is underserving?

3. What will the school leadership team do to foster relationships between the school, families, and community, as well as communicate that parents are necessary partners in school improvement?

4. What will the district do to support school leaders and staff to improve the ways in which students for whom the school is underperforming experience school?

5. How will the school leadership team ensure that students of color, low-income students and students with disabilities are not disciplined more harshly or more often than other students?
Promising Practice: Building a positive school climate for all students

- Collaborative, data-driven meetings with educators
- Purposeful family engagement
- Student cohorts
- Short lessons to build students' social-emotional skills
- Focus on relationships between teachers and students
High-Quality Early Childhood Education

• High-quality early childhood programs have long-term benefits for children.

• But these programs often fail to reach the children who can most benefit.

• Young children from low-income families and children of color, particularly Latino children, are less likely to be enrolled in early childhood education programs.
Questions to Ask District and School Leaders: Access to High-Quality Early Childhood Education

1. What efforts have been made to understand the experiences of children and their families from the group(s) for which the school is underperforming before they enter school?

2. How do school and district leaders ensure communication and continuity between early childhood programs, especially those that serve children of color and children from low-income families, and elementary schools?

3. What is the process to invite families with young children (in pre-K or kindergarten) to the school community?

4. How are district and school leaders working or supporting efforts to increase access to high-quality early childhood programs for children of color and children from low-income families?
What questions would you ask to prompt a school like Oak Park to change its policies and practices?
Advocacy guide to be released mid-March 2019

www.edtrust.org
Questions?

For more information, please contact:

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