Our Goal

In 1974, Justice Thurgood Marshall wrote "Unless our children begin to learn together, then there is little hope that our people will ever learn to live together." Those words feel prophetic in a country with increasingly resegregated schools, routine police violence against people of color, and escalating racist political rhetoric. But there is a growing interest in fighting these trends – in supporting diverse and equitable schools that provide better academic and social outcomes for all students. **Reimagining Integration: Diverse and Equitable Schools (RIDES)** is a Harvard Graduate School of Education project which aspires to find ways to increase the number and quality of the settings where "our children *can* learn together" so "our people [can] learn to live together."

Launching RIDES

During RIDES' planning year (2015-16), we talked formally and informally about integration and desegregation with hundreds of local and national educators, parents, community members, policy makers, and researchers. We visited schools, did an "environmental scan" to see who else was doing important school diversity work, read deeply in several strands of literature, attended, hosted, and presented at several regional and national conferences and overall, immersed ourselves in the big issues of the field.

Developing a Framework for the Field and Early Vision for the Work

We have found that many people think about and use the terms "desegregation" and "integration" interchangeably. However, we have come to see how critical it is to distinguish between them. Most often, when people use *desegregation*, they are focusing on "body count" – percentages of students from diverse backgrounds in the same school building. Through listening to what parents and other stakeholders want, we understand how important it is to use "integration" when referring to schools that are consciously and pro-actively working to provide the ABCD's: high **academics** for all students, a sense of **belongingness** for all (so no students have to check their culture at the door), **commitment to dismantling racism**, and an appreciation of **diversity** in thought and in people.

After analyzing the data collected from all aspects of the environmental scan of the field, we developed a framework to organize what we have learned into three interrelated action areas:

- Policy—to promote environments that enable, incentivize, and sustain integrated schools
- Perceptions—to understand and shape how people think and talk about integrated schools
- Practices-- to provide research- and practice- based resources and tools to help diverse schools, districts, and charter management organizations become better integrated.

We learned that most who work in the field primarily are focused on only one of these action areas – siloed by habit, practice or specialization. This is concerning and underscores how important it is to see and maintain the connections between and among the three areas. For example, without a consensus about the perception of what the public value of integrated schools is for different stakeholders (including the mixed or negative experiences that many people of color have had in desegregated schools), it will be hard to mobilize a municipality, or state to create incentives for more diverse schools. Similarly, without plenty of existence proofs and clear protocols and practices to help schools and school systems move from desegregated to truly integrated, it will be hard to change the public value of integration conversation, which makes it hard to change the policy environment.

Current Work

Our environmental scan showed us that since there were many others working on policy and perception issues, we could add the most value by focusing on <u>practices</u> while consciously making connections across the three action areas. Accordingly, to address the latter work, our current focus in the policy and perception areas are:

- Write updates that synthesize policy developments.
- Keep track of and share current national op-ed pieces, blogs, videos, and podcasts about desegregation and integration.
- Compile legal/historical research, social science evidence related to school desegregation and the move to integration.
- Research resources and frameworks for community conversations about school integration.

We will make available all of the above on our website http://rides.gse.harvard.edu/ (expected launch in early Spring) and through other avenues of communication.

The core of our work will focus on providing diverse schools with the <u>practices</u> that will help them be better integrated. We have put together a suite of diagnostic tools, resources, and processes to help schools and school communities approach this work systemically. For example, we often see schools trying to improve integration in their setting by training teachers in cultural proficiency or in holding courageous conversations about race. While these are good approaches, we would argue that building based improvements will only be effective in making changes in classrooms when tied to the broader system-level changes. For example, districts and CMOs may well have spoken and unspoken expectations for students and the roles students in their education which shape decisions about curriculum, assessment, "tracking" and discipline. Our work addresses three components of systemic thinking:

- **Classroom** - We start in the classroom, since at the heart of a diverse and equitable school are classes that are academically challenging, culturally connected for all kids, and places where courageous conversations about race and equity can take place. Three factors matter inside of classrooms — what <u>teachers</u> do, what the <u>content</u> (curriculum) is, and what the expectations and experiences for <u>students</u> are. If you change one without the others, you don't get lasting impacts. For example if you bring in a powerful new equity-based curriculum without training teachers on how to teach it, or students how to learn it, you don't get much impact or sustainability.
- **School** - The second type of systemic thinking looks at the way factors outside classrooms, in the school as a whole, affect what goes on inside them. For example, systems and structures like tracking or discipline approaches that disproportionately affect students of color are bigger than any one classroom and yet affect all of them.
- **Systemic Understanding of Racism and Oppression** - The third systemic thinking we bring into our work is about racism and power. It is critical to help people move beyond seeing issues around race in schools (e.g. tracking, discipline systems) as only individual or interpersonal. It is important for the adults in a system to also see, for instance, that it is not just coincidence that it is four times more likely that a black student will be suspended in the school, or that almost all the students in its honors classes are white.

Using these systemic ways of looking at the work, we are currently partnering with four districts and 12 schools to develop and field test an initial diagnostic tool, a suite of resources linked to a systemic improvement framework, and an improvement process model with associated coaching tools.

For more information or to join us in this work, please contact Lee Teitel, RIDES Faculty Director at Lee_Teitel@Harvard.edu or visit us on line at http://rides.gse.harvard.edu/

Outcomes and Systemic Improvement Map, with bullet point descriptors

Outcomes for diverse and equitable schools

For many of the schools and communities with which we work, the desired outcomes for diverse and equitable schools can be summarized in four categories:

A. Academics All students have strong academic preparation, capitalizing on and connecting to students of all backgrounds, with high levels of knowledge and skills.

B. Belongingness All students have a strong sense and appreciation of their own culture and heritage, as well as of those of their diverse classmates.

C. Commitment to dismantling racism and oppression. All students understand the role that institutional racism and other forms of oppression play in our society and have the skills, vision, and courage to dismantle them.

D. Diversity All students appreciate and value different perspectives, thoughts, and people and have friendships and collaborative working relationships with students and adults from different racial and economic backgrounds.

Systemic approaches used to reach those outcomes

We often work in schools that are trying single, isolated solutions in their efforts to build a better more diverse and equitable school. We find it helpful to think about three kinds of systemic thinking:

- **Classroom** - We start in the classroom, since at the heart of a diverse and equitable school are classes that are academically challenging, culturally connected for all kids, and places where courageous conversations about race and equity can take place. The first kind of systemic thinking we apply is to look at the way the three factors that matter at the instructional core —what teachers do, what the content (curriculum) is, and what the expectations and experiences for students are -- are linked, since if you change one without the others, you don't get lasting impacts. For example, if you bring in a powerful new curriculum without training teachers on how to teach it, or students how to learn it, you don't get much impact or sustainability.

- **School** - The second kind of systemic thinking looks at the way factors outside classrooms affect what goes on inside them. For example, systems and structures like tracking, or discipline approaches that disproportionately affect students of color, are bigger than any one classroom and yet affect all of them.

- **Systemic understanding of racism and oppression** - The third systemic thinking we use is about race -- helping people move beyond seeing issues around race in schools (e.g. tracking, discipline systems) as individual or interpersonal (it just happens to be 4 X more likely that a black student will be suspended in our school, or that almost all the kids in honors classes are white) rather than systemic or institutional.

The next three pages elaborate each of these systemic approaches.
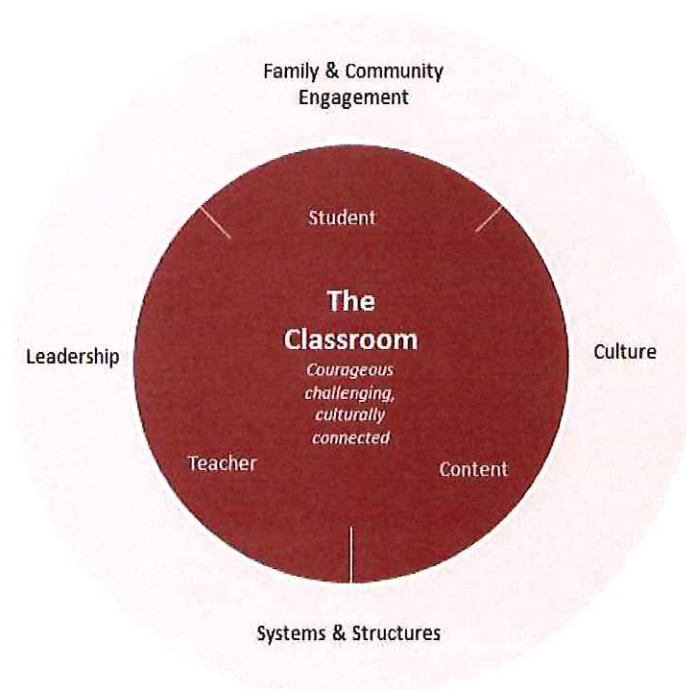
Part I: The Classroom

The curriculum...

1. requires students to think critically and solve problems
2. has multiple perspectives woven into it, and celebrates and normalizes diversity
3. embraces different cultures and connections to families
4. engages student voice
5. uses textbooks and other materials that honor different races and cultures
6. weaves in issues related to diversity and equity

Teachers...

1. create classroom environments that are "courageous communities" where issues of race, socioeconomic status, and other forms of differences, discrimination, and oppression are being discussed
2. have done the personal work to understand their own biases
3. have the skills to facilitate discussions on race and related topics
4. support the development of resilience and empathy in emotionally charged conversations
5. demonstrate the belief that success comes from dedication and hard work, not just innate abilities
6. use curricula that consider the needs of all students
7. relate course content to the cultural context in their classrooms
8. hold the community accountable to the commitments they make to talk honestly about charged material and to stay strongly connected to one another

Students - regardless of background, race, gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity or ability - have access and opportunity to classrooms where...

1. they feel they belong
2. they can find their voice
3. they can take ownership of their learning
4. they have the physical space they need to engage fully with activities and/or accommodations are made as needed
5. they have diverse classmates, including those who look like them
6. their teachers have high expectations for them
7. they have diverse teachers, including those that look like them

Part 2: The School and System

Family/Community Partnerships

1. Parents and community members are key participants in school decision-making and culture
2. School staff and leadership go out into the community and/or are involved in community projects
3. School leaders connect with diverse segments of the community
4. School partnerships include a racially and economically diverse set of stakeholders that go beyond "tokenism"
5. The school is aware of and draws on community assets

6. Parents and community groups are engaged in courageous conversations about race, class, expectations, and the role of education in the community

Systems and Structures

1. Enrollment policies and practices at all levels (school, district, Charter Management Organization, region, etc.) ensure a diverse student body
2. Within-school policies and practices ensure student diversity in all classes (no tracking, no disproportional enrollments in honors or special education classes, etc.)
3. Recruitment and support systems are in place to recruit, retain, and support a diverse faculty, staff, and leadership that mirror the diversity of the students
4. Discipline systems support growth and there are no disproportional suspensions by race or class
5. Achievement outcomes are high and equitable across different demographic groups. If there are gaps, resources and systems are in place to address them
6. All staff and leadership have training and support on rigorous, culturally relevant instruction for all students
7. Effective practices (e.g. coaching, peer observation) are in place to support staff and leadership in enacting these ideas in their practice
8. Issues of social justice are woven into existing and/or required courses
9. Supplemental courses on race, justice and related topics are offered and available to staff, leadership and students

Culture

1. There are student-to-student supports in place to create multiple, positive cross-cultural contact inside and outside of school
2. The school takes a philosophical stance that it is important for students, staff and families to learn about social justice and about dismantling racism and other forms of oppression
3. There is an active commitment to not only recognizing, but challenging, systemic forms of racism in the school and the larger community
4. There is an understanding among students, staff and families about individual, interpersonal, institutional and ideological racism
5. There are common and effective approaches to address bigotry and racial or economic slights among students, teachers, and families, inside and outside of school
6. The school celebrates different cultures
7. Students, teachers, and families feel like they belong

Leadership

1. Leaders at all levels offer unwavering commitment to diverse and equitable outcomes
2. Leaders articulate WHY diversity and equity initiatives are being put into place
3. Leaders articulate WHAT is involved in their diversity and equity initiatives and how various elements or activities are connected
4. Leaders support the building of trust and of culture inside and outside of school and in the community
5. Leaders help the school community make decisions in ways that prioritize equity and help dismantle institutional racism
6. Leaders are committed to sharing authority with parents and community members
7. Leaders are transparent about their journey towards understanding more about their own biases and how they are building their knowledge of race, social justice and related topics

Part 3: The importance of seeing racism as a systemic and institutional practice, not just individual or interpersonal

- Watch four-minute Jay Smooth video at:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjGQaz1u3V4
- Text below from OppressionMonitor.us.

INDIVIDUAL-LEVEL RACISM

INTERNALIZED RACISM lies within individuals. These are our private beliefs and biases about race and racism, influenced by our culture. Internalized racism can take many different forms including racial prejudice toward other people of a different race; internalized oppression, the negative beliefs about oneself by people of color; or internalized privilege, beliefs about superiority or entitlement by white people. An example is a belief that you or others are more or less intelligent, or beautiful, because of your race.

INTERPERSONAL RACISM occurs between individuals. These are biases that occur when individuals interact with others and their private racial beliefs affect their public interactions. Examples include racial slurs, bigotry, hate crimes, and racial violence.

SYSTEMIC-LEVEL RACISM

INSTITUTIONAL RACISM occurs within institutions and systems of power. It is the unfair policies and discriminatory practices of particular institutions (schools, workplaces, etc.) that routinely produce racially inequitable outcomes for people of color and advantages for white people. Individuals within institutions take on the power of the institution when they reinforce racial inequities. An example is a school system that concentrates people of color in the most overcrowded schools, the least-challenging classes, and the least-qualified teachers, resulting in higher dropout rates and disciplinary rates compared with that of white students.

STRUCTURAL RACISM is racial bias among institutions and across society. It involves the cumulative and compounding effects of an array of societal factors including the history, culture, ideology, and interactions of institutions and policies that systematically privilege white people and disadvantage people of color. An example is the overwhelming number of depictions of people of color as criminals in mainstream media, which can influence how various institutions and individuals treat people of color with suspicion when they are shopping, traveling, or seeking housing and employment – all of which can result in discriminatory treatment and unequal outcomes.