



THE POWER TO MAKE CHANGE

Expanding Equity in
American Schools



AUG. 2024



Introduction	3
Key Findings	4
Methodologies	6
Belonging Matters	8
Shared Voice, Shared Power	9
Belongingness for Educators	10
Well-Intentioned DEI Efforts Aren't Enough	12
Your Community Has the Answers	14
The Role of Senior Leaders in Advancing Equity	16
Barriers to Sustainable Change	18
Conclusion	19
Recommendations: What Is Your Work to Do?	20
Works Cited	23
Acknowledgements	24
Who We Are	27



Since 2020, there have been 807 pieces of proposed or adopted legislation aimed at limiting education related to [Critical Race Theory](#). In 2024 alone, there have been 527 bills [targeting LGBTQ students and teachers](#) at the district, state, and federal levels. This body of legislation seeks to dismantle the very nature of equity in schools.

“The Power to Make Change: Expanding Equity in American Schools” is a wide-ranging report that studies 140+ schools, districts, and charter management organizations (CMOs) in 28 states. Our findings reflect quantitative and qualitative data from approximately 1,100 teachers and administrators across all functions of preK-12 operations. This report gives policymakers, district and school administrators, and philanthropic funders insight into how to build sustainable equity and inclusion practices that will strengthen education outcomes for students throughout the entire nation.



WE HAVE PARTNERED WITH:

140+

Schools, districts,
and charter
management
organizations

28 States

1,100

Teachers and
administrators



KEY FINDINGS

- 1. Belonging matters for youth and adults.** School leaders want research that ties experiences of belonging in preK-12 to academic performance.
- 2. Policy protects practice.** School, district, and state policy can either support the work that educators have been doing for decades or dismantle it. Policy advocates and policymakers can protect education research and practices that have shown great promise for all youth.
- 3. Elected and appointed school board members need their own training and accountability for equity measures.** For those who are willing, this training helps them contextualize and support leadership recommendations.
- 4. People change systems.** The readiness level of building principals, district superintendents, and state commissioners to lead on equity measures is a primary indicator of sustainable practices in their community.
- 5. Build it right the first time.** We're not engaging BIPOC youth and families enough in decisions that impact them. When we do equip them with the tools to act, we still need to build opportunities for them to leverage those tools in the school community.
- 6. Black and Latine women in education benefit from a network effect.** When supported to learn and grow together, Black and Latine educators feel more empowered to advocate for their needs.

In an era where the very fabric of democracy is being questioned, education stands as the cornerstone for an informed and engaged citizenry. This brief comes at a critical juncture, as debates around Critical Race Theory (CRT) and educational equity reach a fever pitch in the national discourse.

If we believe that the ultimate purpose of education is an informed citizenry, then we are responsible for providing education that values all of our students, teaches them accurate information, and prepares them to analyze and interrogate the world around them. In most of our communities, that responsibility lies with school, district, and state leaders. It's critical that we examine the opportunities that education leaders have to positively impact civic education across the country.

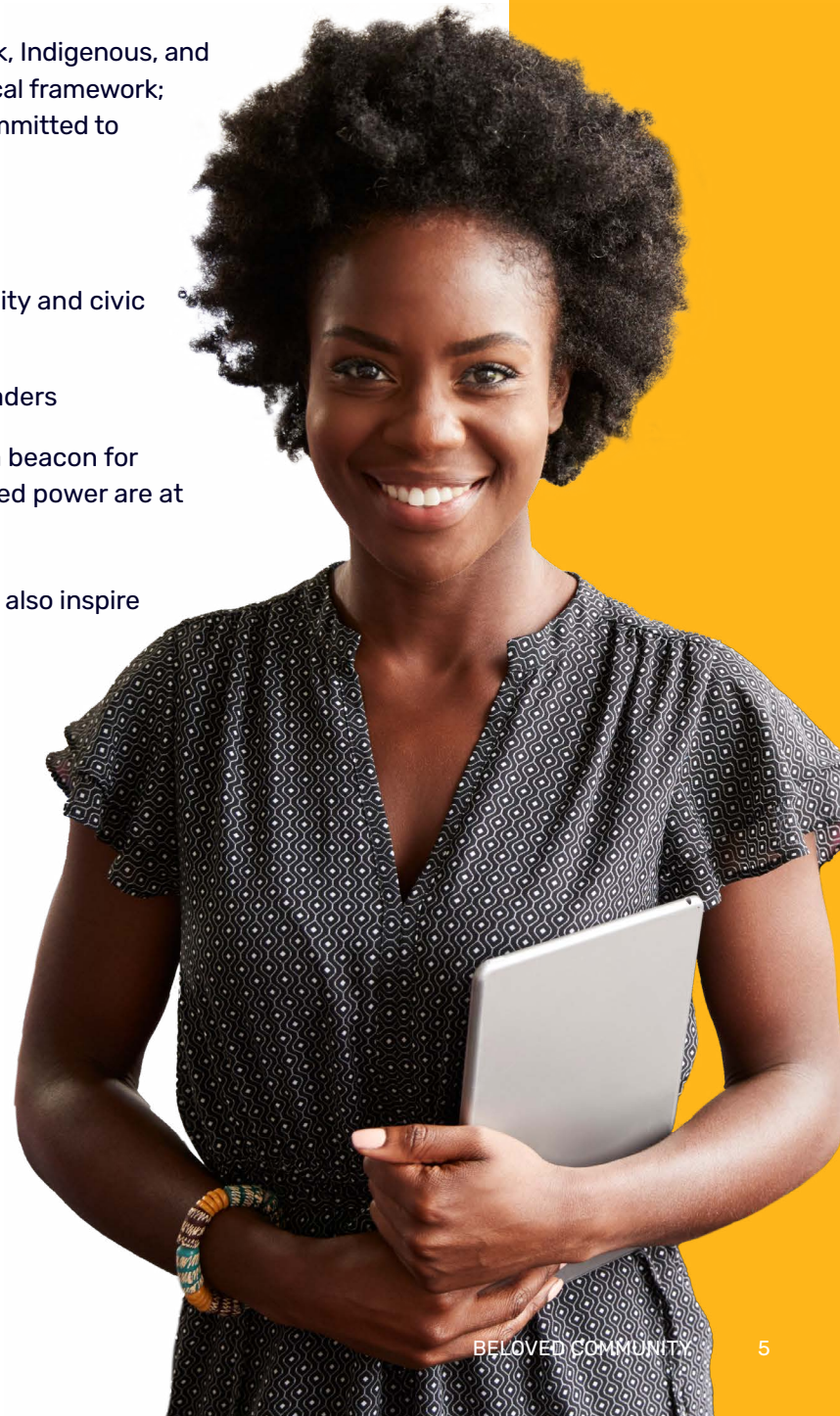
The concept of shared voice/shared power with Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) families is not just a theoretical framework; it's an imperative for educational leaders who are committed to positively impacting civic education.

This brief aims to:

- 01** Explore the current state of educational equity and civic engagement
- 02** Provide actionable insights for education leaders
- 03** Highlight the success stories that serve as a beacon for what's possible when shared voice and shared power are at the forefront of educational policy.

By the end of this brief, we aim to not only inform but also inspire a national conversation around these critical issues.

“Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the process of collaboratively seeking answers to community-informed and -driven questions in a way that is edifying, inclusive and regenerative. Research should be leveraged to help people change systems. When research is done right, it has the potential to be emancipatory.”
– Dr. Nnenna Odim, Associate Director of PAR



METHODOLOGIES

At Beloved Community we have a dedicated data, research and policy arm, also known as our Data, Research, Impact, and Policy (DRIP) Center. In this way, our staff includes data and analysis experts, ethnographers, psychologists, anthropologists, and sociologists, to name a few. Not only are we experts in a myriad of fields (e.g., Positive Youth Development, behavioral psychology, public health, early childhood education) and sectors (e.g., K-12 education, hospitality) but we also have both breadth and depth of experience across diverse research methods.

Our Beloved values – create with abundance, interrogate neutrality, Black Lives Matter, center justice and joy, and people change systems – undergird not only the object of inquiry or what we research but also the manner in which we gather and analyze data. We design all projects in the spirit of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (see Beloved’s PAR Overview [here](#)). Also, we believe in the value of mixed methods to lend rigor to our research and data analysis, and are constantly innovating and learning about how to integrate new data and research methods and practices into our toolkit.

That said, the data that inform the insights highlighted in this report have surfaced from:



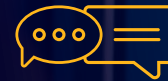
Focus groups



Focus groups
Beloved’s Equity Lens
Map (ELM) Tool



Semi-structured
1:1 interviews



Pre- and post-surveys
with cohort and program
participants



Surveys



Participant-observation
or ethnographic research
(e.g., school site visits)



Beloved’s Equity
Audit Tool “Awa”

By gathering multiple sources of data we are able to produce a much more nuanced, holistic understanding of whatever it is that we are seeking to learn more about – whether it’s the impact of Beloved’s cohort programming on school leadership in the Midwest, the growth opportunities for Diverse-by-Design schools in North America, or the role of Beloved-trained community researchers in shifting childcare policy in New Orleans.

A woman with dark curly hair, wearing glasses and a grey textured cardigan over a dark top, is pointing her right hand towards the camera. She is smiling and looking directly at the viewer. The background is a bright room with large windows and blue structural elements. In the foreground, the back of a person's head and shoulder is visible, out of focus. A red bag is partially visible in the bottom left corner.

“We had just the right amount of content facilitated with us and team time to directly connect and dive into planning around our district needs. The CRT discussion was timely and appreciated. Loved the student voice from the panel!”

- Kansas City Equity in Schools Cohort Participant

BELONGING MATTERS

We've conducted **550+ Equity Audits** across multiple sectors, geographies, and communities. The Equity Audit is a comprehensive tool that assesses 13 substandards and nearly 200 indicators of diversity, equity, and inclusion for all populations in the school community. **What we found is that the most consistent areas of need are in the inclusion indicators, especially the ones related to belonging.** While Equity Audit results demonstrate average scores of 58% for Diversity and Equity, Inclusion scores have an average of 51%. Moreover, the average Belonging score is 46% and Belonging indicators result in lower scores more frequently than other measures of Inclusion on the tool. For example, 67% of organizations score 50% or less in Belonging, while this figure is just 55% of organizations for inclusion overall. This doesn't necessarily mean that student, family, or faculty sense of belonging is low across all of these schools. What it does mean is that schools cannot say with certainty that any of these communities feel a strong sense of belonging and that they have the data or evidence to support that assertion. We often talk about data at Beloved as the difference

between thinking, feeling, or hoping that inclusion exists within a school from having evidence that it does. And when it comes to belonging, schools aren't willing to say that

they know that anyone feels a sense of belonging, because they know that they have yet to implement baseline data collection practices.

Average Equity Audit Results



When faced with the realization that they knew very little about the sense of student belonging in their schools, administrators identified needs for support. There are several research studies about belonging in K-12 contexts ([Gray, Hope, Matthews 2018](#); [Korpershoek, et al 2020](#)) and higher education contexts ([Gopalan, et al 2019](#); [Walton & Cohen 2011](#)) that help schools think about how to apply these learnings to their work. With respect to data collection instruments, school administrators can access a variety of tools ([Panorama](#), [Elevate](#), [CASEL](#)) to learn more about students' sense of belonging. These bodies of research present compelling correlation between students' sense of belonging and persistence, lower drop-out rates, and engagement with academic content. School system leaders, under the pressure of standardized assessments and school performance scores, want to learn more about how increasing belongingness also increases student achievement in K-12 settings.



SHARED VOICE, SHARED POWER

Leaders have also noticed an increase in the need for another component of inclusion: shared voice and shared power. Most schools and districts engage in unidirectional communication. Shared voice, shared power asks schools to identify which opportunities they create for students to bring their voice to bear, especially for decisions that impact them. Not only has there been higher recognition among educators that shared voice, shared power practices matter in their schools, but there has also been acknowledgment that the populations who are least likely to access those structures are BIPOC youth and families.

Improving shared voice, shared power can look like a school leveraging technology to create more inclusive spaces for dialogue and decision-making. For example, in today's digitally connected world, schools can utilize various platforms to enhance the principles of shared voice and shared power. From hosting virtual town halls to conducting online surveys and engaging through social media, these digital avenues offer unique ways to gather a wide range of perspectives. The goal is not merely to adopt technology for its own sake, but to use it as a vehicle for fostering belonging, especially for BIPOC youth and families who may have been marginalized in more conventional settings.

For multilingual families, hosting these practices in their languages can increase a sense of belonging and shared voice, shared power for families and students. When school administrators create an



opportunity to learn from multilingual students and families in their language, they often identify different pain points and needs than their English-dominant peers.

We've observed that even when school leaders were able to articulate a focus on belongingness with young people, they didn't have the capacity to add meaningful opportunities for youth voice. Furthermore, when youth voice is the focus of an intervention, leaders may not know how to leverage the tools of youth voice to empower youth leaders.

These two findings – that belonging still matters and shared voice, shared power can improve experiences – are also true for adults in our school communities.



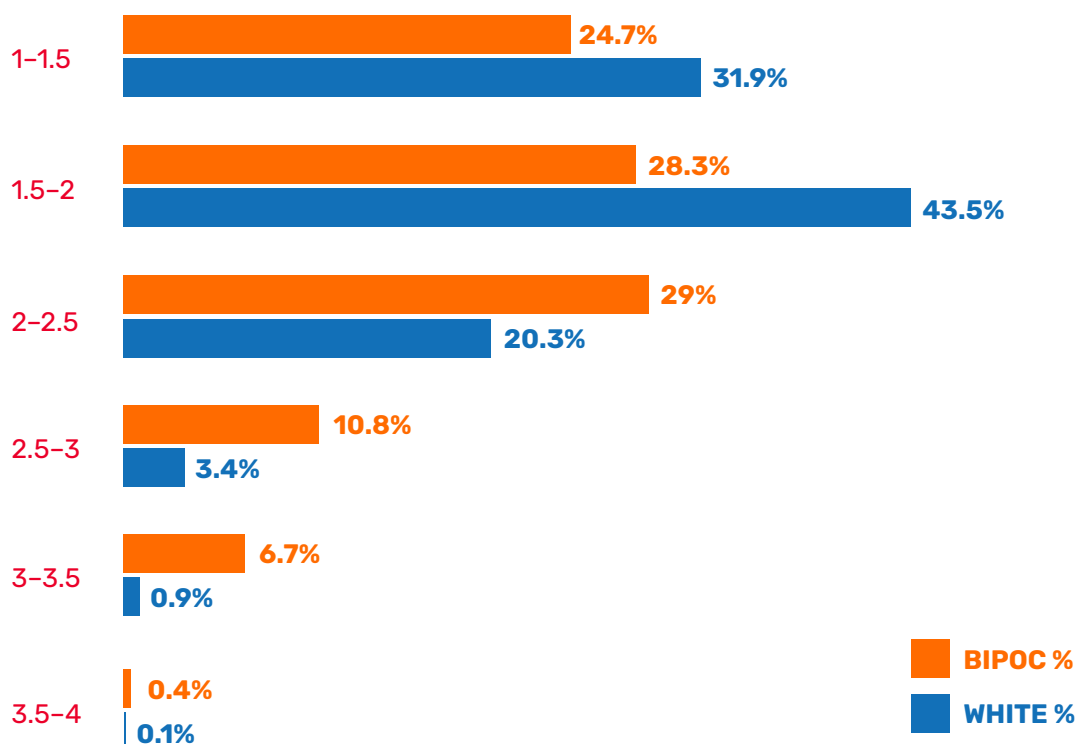
"This (Belongingness Part 1: How to Cede and Share Power) opened up some very interesting thoughts around what it means to hold power and to be a leader within an organization. It created consideration on how power can lift up or put down individuals within an organization. It also provoked ideas on how to create more transparency and more opportunities to share power in positive ways, making an organization stronger as a whole."

- Indianapolis Equity in Schools Cohort Participant

BELONGINGNESS FOR EDUCATORS

Recruitment and retention of BIPOC faculty and staff are the most common priorities in Equity Work Plans facilitated by Beloved Community. In 2022, [The Economic Policy Institute](#) analyzed teacher shortage data by school type and found that not only did the pandemic exacerbate teacher shortages, but that the shortage of teachers is more pronounced in schools with higher populations of students of color and students from low income communities.

Fatigue Scores by Racial Identity



What we know is true: Employers have a better [chance](#) at retaining diverse [staff when their staff experiences of fatigue are lower](#) and where [staff reports of belonging are higher](#).

[With the Equity Lens Map \(ELM\)](#) tool, we collected and analyzed data from over 1,700 individuals working in 20 organizations in the United States (K-12 schools, districts, CMOs, and education-adjacent non-profits). The ELM tool assesses individual staff experiences with bias and discrimination in the workplace: Self-Awareness, Understanding, Interrupting, Fatigue, and Internalized Oppression. We found that a mid- to high level of Fatigue is experienced at nearly twice the rate for BIPOC staff (46.9%) than staff with other marginalized identities, including LGBTQ+ individuals and straight, cis white women (24.7%). Coupled with persistently low data on staff or faculty belonging from the Equity Audit, we conclude that belongingness and fatigue are the most important indicators for how we should support educators.

What does this data mean for school systems? Educators need differentiated professional development support to effectively reduce fatigue and advance belonging.

We collected and analyzed data from over **1,700** individuals working in **20** organizations in the United States



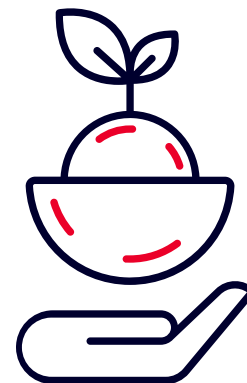
WELL INTENTIONED DEI EFFORTS AREN'T ENOUGH

Our ongoing, multiyear research study on Diverse-by-Design (DbD) schools in North America highlights the aforementioned points concerning belonging and shared voice, shared power.

The Equity in Schools research project is a multiyear, mixed methods study designed to interrogate diversity, equity, and inclusion in Diverse by Design (DbD) charter schools. The Equity in Schools research project pairs quantitative insights from the Beloved Community Equity Audit with qualitative insights from school visits, interviews, focus groups, and visual culture audits of Diverse by Design schools. The Equity Audit is a [research-validated tool in Awa by Beloved](#) that allows individuals to explore hundreds of indicators on how diversity, equity, and inclusion manifest within their school. The research project draws upon quantitative data from 210 schools nationwide and insights from case studies at three Diverse by Design schools.

Diverse by Design schools are making attempts to advance DEI efforts and impact students and their families. Examples of initiatives that surfaced in data gathering include the representation of student diversity in the visual culture of the school (for example, one school included visual displays as a celebration of Dia de Los Muertos and Black History Month). In the Dual Language Bilingual Education (DLBE) schools audited in the study, we found linguistic diversity represented in the visual culture of the school. Classrooms included practical information, as well as thematic and curriculum-related materials in both Spanish and English.

Despite evidence of well-intentioned efforts, there are gaps between DbD schools' DEI rhetoric and language and the unintended consequences of DEI policies. One school, in a bid to increase the Spanish-speaking families and students attending the school, inadvertently excluded Black students and families, threatening belongingness and lowering the enrollment of Black students in the school. A well-intentioned effort to include one marginalized group had the unintended consequence of excluding another.



Quantitative data from 210 SCHOOLS nationwide and insights from case studies at 3 DIVERSE BY DESIGN SCHOOLS



Where DEI efforts did show up, some considered them seasonal.

As one Black parent shared:

“But come January, Martin Luther King takes over and then all through February and it’s Black on Black on Black everywhere. Malcolm X. I mean, they’re not hiding love of Blackness in that [school] at all. It’s just seasonal. And then April it’s about testing, so nobody talked to me about anything about culture until the end of the year.”

This duality between the intentions of a school and their unintended impact highlights the importance of mixed methods research design. It was through the juxtaposition of quantitative data on school demographics with interviews from Black families and school administrators that the unintended consequences of well-meaning DEI efforts emerged to our research team. Leveraging mixed methods research helped us capture a more full picture of how DEI efforts show up – and at times contradicts themselves – in a school environment.

YOUR COMMUNITY HAS THE ANSWERS

(Y)PAR Thinking about incorporating (Youth) Participatory Action Research into your education equity work? Start with the end in mind.

What do you expect participants to do with their research skills after the program ends? At Beloved, our intent is to leverage (Y)PAR as a path to policy advocacy. That requires having sustainable resources to support community researchers beyond training. Partnerships, long-term grants, and subcontracts provide an opportunity for PAR researchers to deepen their skills, continue to engage their community in supported research and provide incentives to their research participants. Most importantly, longer term opportunities like these empower (Y)PAR researchers to keep their learnings in their own community.

On the Equity Audit, the majority of schools indicated that they needed to develop shared voice, shared power practices for youth and adults in their community. Research has shown that incorporating student voice within school increases students' well-being, increases leadership skills, and [has positive effects on student achievement](#).

A few tools to advance shared voice include satisfaction surveys, advisory groups, focus groups, town halls, etc.

Those practices all provide opportunities for leaders to receive feedback from a wide range of community members. When we think about how to advance shared power, we focus on “power with” and “power to,” specifically power with other community members and power to define the agenda and potential solutions. To that end, we support schools and education nonprofits to develop durable research skills in the communities they serve with tools like Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR).

[Cammarota and Fine](#) describe YPAR as an opportunity for young people “to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems.” [YPAR aids in college and career readiness](#) for students, which builds skills such as “agency, critical thinking skills, and tools to advocate.” They become involved within their communities and schools. In addition, [youth can gain skills](#) such as leadership, critical consciousness, interpersonal, and cognitive skills.



We've trained 70 youth participants to conceptualize, design, carry out, and analyze research questions that are important to them and to their community. Graduates from our 2023 YPAR Academy asked research questions like:

- ✓ Who is keeping an eye on the kids? Examining the Effects of Community and Recreational Centers on New Orleans Youth
- ✓ Teen Behavior: What Makes a Safe Space?
- ✓ What are the experiences of international high school students in the United States?
- ✓ Does music continue to be a release for Black Americans?
- ✓ How is mental health represented in the eyes of social media?

Imagine if these youth researchers were supported to advocate for change in their schools, based on their research findings? Ultimately, our YPAR model is about positioning young people to lead on local policy change based on their research and their lived experience. In future iterations of the YPAR Academy, we will include training on policy advocacy and coalition building.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) has taught us similar things about how adult educators experience the world of equity at work. As a part of [New Orleans Creating Access and Resources for Equity \(NOLA C.A.R.E.S.\)](#), we train 75+ early care educators and administrative staff in Participatory Action Research. They designed research questions on family literacy, special education, and wealth building that are similar to the research agenda of well-resourced foundations with professional research staff. Their projects have engaged 150 community members through interviews or surveys, community events, and online partnerships. At the [54th Annual Association of Black Psychologists \(ABPsi\) International Convention](#), PAR researchers presented “I know what I’m doing and it feels good”: Black and Latinx Women Transform New Orleans Childcare Practice and Policy With Participatory Research” where they demonstrated PAR tools as well as shared their individual research and experience claiming their identities as community-engaged researchers. They describe their experiences of infusing joy, creativity, and community-building into their research. They aim to produce accessible and conscientious findings that resonate with a wide audience. By embracing their perspective and employing a collaborative spirit, these researchers are actively working to challenge the status quo and foster meaningful progress.

In addition to their leadership training and formation in PAR, our initial cohort of PARTICIPANTS named important concerns about shared voice, shared power in their workplaces. For many of the women, this program was the first time that they were exposed to less hierarchical leadership. After seeing a different type of leadership in practice, they wanted to advocate for it in their organizations. Most of these women are working in organizations with Black and/or Latine women in leadership, so it’s important to name the need for shared voice, shared power persists in BIPOC-led environments.





THE ROLE OF SENIOR LEADERS IN ADVANCING EQUITY

School district and Charter Management Organization (CMO) leadership teams are the primary audience for our Equity in Schools cohorts. They have unique roles to play in advancing equity for their students, families, and communities. District leadership and charter school leadership also have different pressures and opportunities to champion equity. Some of the barriers that they have identified include access to resources, professional development, and governance and community engagement.

Given the current scourge of pushback for antiracism efforts in schools and attacks on schools' efforts to broaden access to diverse, equitable, and inclusive education for all, our participants noted the growing pressure for them to shift course or stop efforts toward equitable and antiracist education altogether. We have responded to support our schools in several ways including: giving time and space in session for them to talk in community with other schools experiencing the same pushback, plan a course of action with their communities including ways that they can elevate the voices of the most marginalized to the level of the voices of the privileged few,

and the creation of the [General Advocacy Pages](#) focused on providing talking points for educating the community on Critical Race Theory and Culturally Responsive Teaching.

In our first cohort with suburban school districts, we experienced these concerns firsthand. We recruited six school districts to participate in Equity in Schools in 2021 and during our kick-off session, two organizations decided to terminate their participation in the cohort experience due to the lack of support and commitment from named leaders (i.e. superintendents). Beloved is unwavering in its belief that white supremacy culture is dangerous and must be dismantled. It is clear that if the named organizational leader cannot articulate that white supremacy culture has a negative effect on everything in this country, and therefore shows up in org-wide practices and procedures, then they will not be successful in this cohort experience. Additionally, this has negative consequences on the personnel at the organizations who are excited to take part in the cohort experience and increase their own individual capacity.

In the current climate where anti-CRT sentiments are gaining traction, the role of district-level leaders in standing firmly behind CRT and DEI initiatives is more crucial than ever. These leaders set the tone for the entire educational community, and their unwavering commitment to equity can serve as a powerful counter-narrative to the divisive ideologies that are permeating the national discourse. By publicly endorsing CRT and other DEI work, district leaders not only validate the importance of these initiatives but also empower educators to continue this vital work without fear of reprisal.

Moreover, the stance of a Superintendent or CEO on these issues can be a telling indicator of their genuine commitment to equity and inclusion. Leaders who are not truly invested in this work may seize upon the negative rhetoric surrounding CRT as a convenient excuse to withdraw support or dilute DEI initiatives. Such actions not only undermine the efforts to create more equitable educational environments but also send a damaging message to students and staff about the values for which the district stands. Therefore, it's imperative for district-level leaders to take decisive action that demonstrates their unequivocal support for CRT and DEI, especially in these challenging times.

It is critical that we continue to refine and develop tools to grow the equity lens of individual leaders, as this is a significant gap in existing leadership measurement tools. Currently available tools tend “to focus on the organization level rather than the person level.” That is, they are more interested in employee opinions of the organization rather than an employee’s individual experiences and feelings. For example, the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM), the most prominent affiliate organization of human resource professionals in the United States, has a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion survey they recommend to their membership (SHRM, 2021). It contains 25 questions, 18 of which contain the word “company” or “management” in them; only two contain the word “I”. Organizational climate is



an essential aspect to measure, but it overlooks individual aspects of DEI, so any analysis or plan based on climate surveys alone would not have the complete picture.” Tools like the Equity Lens Map actually provide leaders with a window into how they could design their individualized professional development plan and become a more effective leader for equity in their school community.

Another opportunity for increased accountability metrics for school boards is an annual review of DEI performance indicators. Each school and district define their annual performance targets with respect to marginalized populations. Each school board should review that performance annually. In

addition, the school board could also establish board-specific targets around equity and assess their annual progress within their governance function. A lack of oversight can lead to stagnation in DEI efforts at best, and a failure to serve our highest-need students at worst. Boards and school leaders should endeavor to be transparent about their DEI goals, strategies, and performance metrics, making this information readily accessible to all stakeholders.

Lastly, district-level leaders play a crucial role in shaping equitable educational environments, especially when it comes to engaging BIPOC families and students in decision-making. For DEI initiatives to be successful, it's essential to involve the community in the decision-making process. This includes parents, students, teachers and local organizations. Their input can provide valuable insights and lend credibility to DEI efforts. Effective engagement requires more than just token gestures; it demands a commitment to actively listening and responding to the unique needs and perspectives of BIPOC communities. This can be achieved through initiatives like targeted town halls, focus groups, and culturally responsive training for staff. By removing barriers to participation and fostering a culture of inclusivity, district leaders can make more informed decisions that truly reflect the diversity of their communities.

BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Research demonstrates the value of [sustainable change](#) vs repeated change efforts that undo previous change work. Measuring sustainable change for equity in schools will take generations, so it's important to identify potential leading indicators that change can occur and that then the change can be sustained.

What do we know about the factors and barriers that contribute to sustainable change in schools?

- 01 Education leaders have a well-founded fear of sunshine laws and [Freedom Of Information Act \(FOIA\) requests related to any instructional or administrative text referencing diversity, inclusion, or equity efforts](#). In addition to the time-consuming nature of fulfilling these requests, they can eventually represent a financial burden on school budgets.
- 02 The mindset of the named leader matters. From 2020–2023, during the rise of anti-CRT and anti-trans legislation, we facilitated Equity in Schools communities of practice in New Orleans, Indianapolis, and Kansas City (MO/KS), serving seven districts and 29 LEAs. In the face of anti-CRT legislation/threats, 2 suburban school districts left the community of practice and cited political concern about engaging in CRT work as the primary reason. School leaders invested in this work on a personal level, regardless of school type or student demographics, were able to advance their schools/districts the most towards their equity work plan. We noticed that leaders who struggled to define CRT, but who demonstrated a deep commitment to equity for all, did choose to remain in the program.
- 03 Education leaders need resources to respond to anti-CRT and anti-trans rhetoric. In the midst of leading their schools through the Covid-19 epidemic, leaders were faced with legislative bills and, in many states, legislative wins that threatened the emotional safety of already vulnerable students. They needed access to resources that would help them counter anti-racism efforts in their schools and elevate CRT and culturally responsive pedagogies. Beloved dedicated time in our Equity in Schools cohorts where leaders could work together to develop sample communications for their school communities.
- 04 Schools don't have universal definitions for DEI, nor do they have tools to accurately analyze DEI data for teachers and students. Quantitative School data collection and analysis is largely driven by required state and federal reporting. For example, states don't collect emerging identity markers like sexual orientation, non-binary or gender non-conforming experience, so that quantitative data is rarely reflected in disaggregated school data. To counter this, schools could use mixed methods data collection (i.e. survey data, focus groups, interviews) to understand the context of previously collected data.
- 05 Schools need to improve mutual accountability for equity work. While the organizational leadership & DEI teams are likely the group conducting an equity audit, they indicate that other groups within the organization (like parents, students, the board of directors) are not actually holding themselves accountable to audit their own practices for DEI (i.e., Is a representative sample of parents engaged in parent leadership activities?).



CONCLUSION

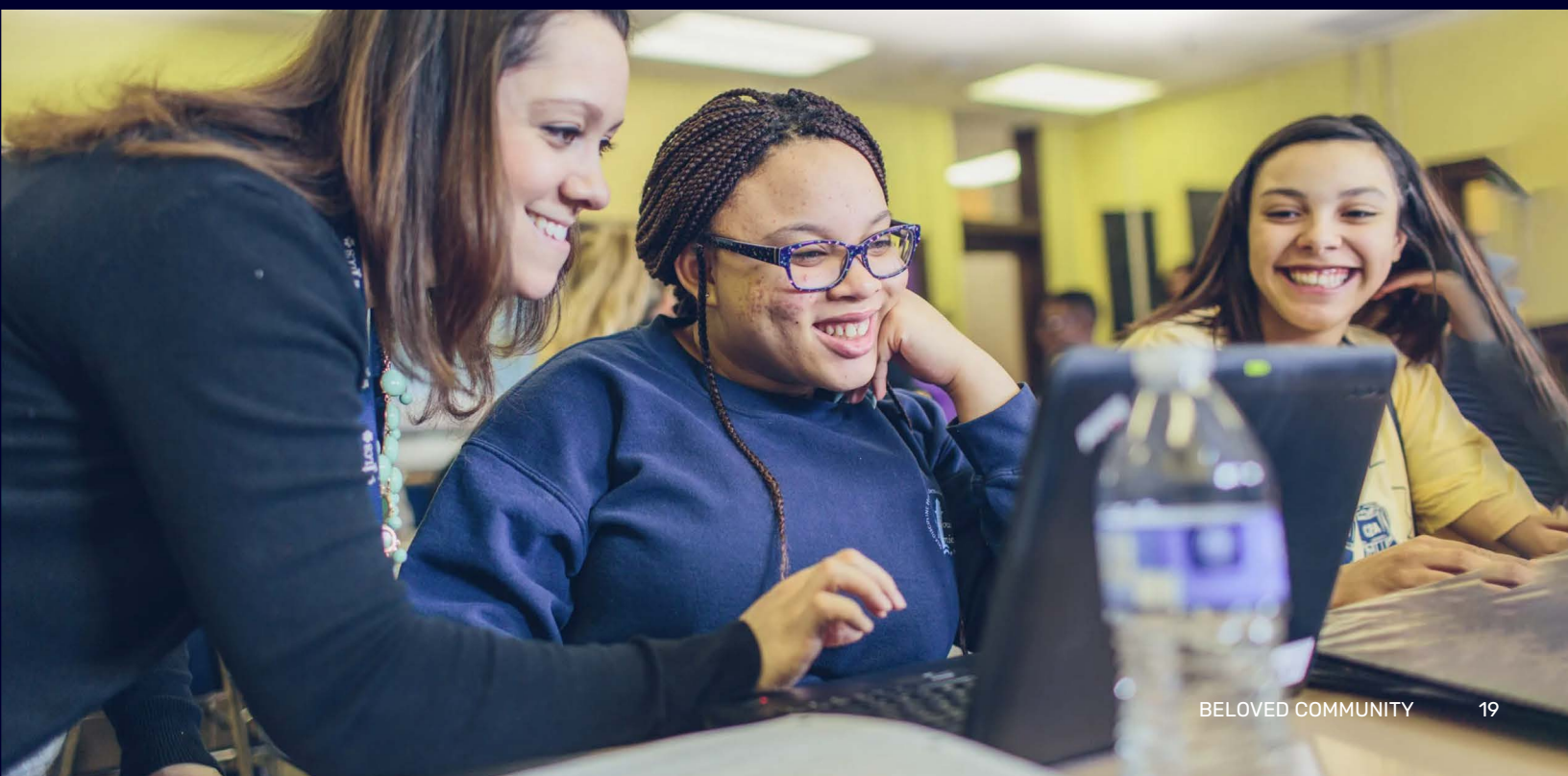
As we navigate the complexities of educational equity in a world increasingly polarized by politics and social issues, the findings of this brief serve as both a guide and a call to action. We've explored various dimensions ranging from the significance of fostering a sense of belonging in schools to the pivotal role that policy plays in safeguarding equitable practices.

This brief underscores the transformative power of shared voice and shared power, particularly among BIPOC communities and youth. It highlights the urgency for school boards to not only review but actively implement DEI performance indicators. Moreover, it brings to light the potential growth and impact of Participatory Action Research, a testament to the actionable steps being taken by the youth for community betterment.

In addition to these key findings, this brief also serves as a testament to the power of collaboration and community engagement. They show that when we prioritize shared voice and shared power, we create environments where everyone, from students to educators to parents, can thrive.

Furthermore, this brief emphasizes the need for continuous measurement and analytics to ensure that DEI initiatives are not just well-intended but effective. As we move forward, the metrics we choose to evaluate our progress will be as crucial as the actions we take. Data-driven decision-making, informed by a commitment to equity, will be key to sustaining and amplifying the gains made.

The timing has never been more critical, nor the need more urgent. As the data and narratives in this brief have shown, the path to equity is neither short nor easy, but it is possible – with shared commitment, strategic action, and the courage to challenge the status quo.





RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT IS YOUR WORK TO DO?

Depending on your role in the education ecosystem, your work to advance equity will be different. We need education leaders, advocates, and funders to identify their unique opportunities to support regional transformation.

Belonging Matters for Youth

Inclusion represents a continuum that includes sense of belonging, agency around voicing your concerns, and being empowered to inform or make changes. Here are a few considerations for school leaders to implement shared voice, shared power practices that span the continuum:

- ✓ Name your intent to share power, **your current stage of engagement** and how/when you anticipate reaching the next stage.
- ✓ Identify clear opportunities for youth to remain engaged after a particular introductory or training program concludes. What should they be able to do with their new skills and expertise to impact the school community?
- ✓ Design programs with action in mind. It's easier for students in the same school or same program to effect change in that program than it is to expect them all to conduct independent activities in different settings.
- ✓ Identify resources and training partners that can help launch shared power practices such as **Pedagogy of Student Voice**, **Participatory Budgeting Project**, and **National Association of Youth Courts**.

Belonging Matters for Adults

Recruitment, hiring, and retention of staff that represent the student population remains the highest DEI priority for most schools. Understanding the relationship between adult sense of belonging and staff tenure is critical for schools. Here are a few ways that administrators can support the practices that contribute to improved recruitment and retention of educators from marginalized communities:

- ✓ Engage every employee in setting accountability metrics for improving welcoming and inclusive climates
 - 01** require ongoing anti-bias training for everyone involved in hiring processes
 - 02** require that staff identify personally and professionally relevant DEI goals as part of their annual review process
 - 03** review individual DEI goals and related performance with staff annually
 - 04** develop and support affinity-based spaces for BIPOC staff
- ✓ In the Equity Lens Map, we found that most adults had a high level of self-awareness about bias and discrimination. The biggest learning need however, was on how to interrupt bias and discrimination when it's happening. Schools need to move on from just learning about implicit bias to engaging in practice-based simulations where adults get coaching on how to make changes in real-time.
- ✓ Develop inclusive data collection and analysis practices. Data doesn't just tell you if you're "reaching equity" but it can help you understand the relationship between student belonging and achievement as well as retention of faculty as a function of belonging, and then you can triangulate those initiatives with resource allocations.
- ✓ Identify safe spaces for senior leaders to engage in their own professional development about equity leadership. Building principals, district superintendents, CEOs, and state commissioners need time, resources, and support to process

anti-CRT and anti-LGBT pressure and proposed legislation. Design intentional space in their PD programming for them to discuss the pushback they're facing, plan a course of action with peers, and identify community advocacy resources that are available to educate different constituencies. They need a safe space to discuss their needs and understand the ecosystem of support available to them. Consider resources from organizations like [Campaign for Our Shared Future](#), [National Council for the Social Studies](#), and [Leading Now](#).

- ✓ Consider your school or district role in public litigation. Even in the face of statewide legislative bans on CRT or DEI, many school districts and public universities are refusing to comply with the legislation. This sends the public clear messages about their commitments to serving all youth with integrity. If your school or district is ready for it, consider serving as a named plaintiff in a lawsuit challenging the legislation. You don't have to know how to do this alone, but can work with legal defense funds at organizations like [Democracy Forward](#) and [ACLU state affiliates](#).



WHAT FUNDERS CAN DO

Philanthropic foundations have supported the advancement of equity and inclusion in schools in myriad ways including direct services to education leaders, strategic communications, and policy advocacy. In addition to these efforts, funders are uniquely positioned to support:



EQUITY TRANSFORMATION TRAINING FOR ELECTED AND APPOINTED SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION LEADERS.

Recent events have underscored that school boards are often the battlegrounds where decisions about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work are made – or undermined. The influence of boards extends to approving or disapproving DEI-related policies, making their role pivotal in the advancement of equitable education. One pressing question is how to effectively mobilize elected school boards in suburban districts. Beloved Community recommends implementing Board-specific Equity Work Plans (EWP) as a strategy. Additionally, there is a need to explore whether appointed school boards face similar challenges, thus highlighting an area for future research. Here are a few organizations that are dedicated to deepening professional development for school board members, state Board of Education leaders, and superintendents: [Council of Chief State School Officers](#), [School Board Partners](#), [Education Board Partners](#), [Latino Board Fellowship](#), [Chiefs for Change](#).

A PIPELINE OF PROGRESSIVE CANDIDATES FOR LOCAL ELECTIONS

Between uncontested seats in local elections, the dearth of women or mothers who run for election, and the rise in extremist groups like Moms for Liberty, local and state school boards are experiencing hostile takeovers. Support and prepare progressive candidates for elected positions up and down the ballot. See: [Vote Mama Foundation](#), [Leaders of Color](#), [LGBTQ+ Victory Fund](#), [Leadership for Educational Equity](#), [Run for Something](#), [Monzón Fellowship](#), [Sister District](#), and [Moms for Liberation](#).

INDEPENDENT SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

Emerging research on the impact of belonging and culturally edifying practices in education outcomes is also under threat in the current anti-CRT climate. In addition to impacting the education of current students, [statewide policies that ban CRT](#) also threaten the capacity of higher education scholars at public universities to conduct independent research about education equity. Scholars who have been researching: [DeLeon Gray](#), [Sapna Cheryan](#), [Yasmyn Irizarry](#), [Kalena Cortes](#), and [Stephanie Fryberg](#).

PUBLIC LAW LITIGATION

If K-12 schools, districts, and state departments are going to fight legislation, they need targeted financial resources to carry the work of the named plaintiff. Consider how your policy advocacy funding can support pooled funds for litigation support with nonprofits like [Democracy Forward](#) and [ACLU state affiliates](#).

WORKS CITED

- "Advancing Social and Emotional Learning." CASEL, casel.org.
- "Awa by Beloved." Awa by Beloved, www.awabybeloved.com/.
- Anyon, Y., Bender, K., Kennedy, H., Dechants, J. "A Systematic Review of Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) in the United States: Methodologies, Youth Outcomes, and Future Directions." *Health Education & Behavior*, vol. 45, no. 6, 2018, pp. 865-878, doi:10.1177/1090198118769357.
- Carr, Evan W., et al. "The Value of Belonging at Work." *Harvard Business Review*, 16 Dec. 2019, hbr.org/2019/12/the-value-of-belonging-at-work.
- "Corporate America's Revolving Door for Black Employees." Pandey, Erica. *AXIOS*, 17 Nov. 2020, www.axios.com/2020/11/17/corporate-america-black-employee-turnover-rate.
- "CRT Forward Tracking Project – Tracking anti-CRT efforts introduced at the local, state, and federal levels." UCLA School of Law Critical Race Studies Program, crtforward.law.ucla.edu.
- "Cultivating a Pedagogy of Student Voice." ASCD, Shane Safir, 1 Apr. 2023, www.ascd.org/el/articles/cultivating-a-pedagogy-of-student-voice.
- "Equity in Schools." Beloved Community, www.wearebeloved.org/equity-in-schools.
- Gopalan, M., & Brady, S. T. "College Students' Sense of Belonging: A National Perspective." *Educational Researcher*, vol. 49, no. 2, 2020, pp. 134-137, doi:10.3102/0013189X19897622.
- Gray, DeLeon L., Hope, Elan C., Matthews, Jamaal S. "Black and Belonging at School: A Case for Interpersonal, Instructional, and Institutional Opportunity Structures." *Educational Psychologist*, vol. 53, no. 2, 2018, pp. 97-113, eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1175609.
- Harrington, H. J., Voehl, F., & Voehl, C. F. "Model for Sustainable Change." PMI White Paper, 2015.
- Kares, F. R., & Broussard, R. J. (2023). Special Issue Introduction: Leveraging Participatory Research Methods to Disrupt White Supremacy Culture in Schools, Nonprofits, Workplaces and Beyond. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, 4(3). <https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.91312>
- Korpershoek, H., Canrinus, E. T., Fokkens-Bruinsma, M., & de Boer, H. "The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: a meta-analytic review." *Research Papers in Education*, vol. 35, no. 6, 2020, pp. 641-680, DOI: 10.1080/02671522.2019.1615116.
- "Mapping Attacks on LGBTQ Rights in U.S. State Legislatures." American Civil Liberties Union, 1 Dec. 2023, www.aclu.org/legislative-attacks-on-lgbtq-rights?impact=school.
- Melaco, C., Austin, M. "How Equity Can Build Better Organizations." *Anti-Racism Daily*, 31 Jan. 2023, the-ard.com/2023/01/31/how-equity-audit-can-build-better-organizations.
- Natanson, H., and Elwood, K. "School Districts Face a Deluge of Foia Records Requests." *The Washington Post*, 27 Mar. 2023, www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/03/27/school-district-foia-records-request/.
- "NAYC." National Association of Youth Courts, youthcourt.net/.
- "Panorama Education | Supporting Student Success." Panorama Education, www.panoramaed.com.
- "Participatory Action Research." Beloved Community, docs.google.com/document/d/1IQHG0AN2kaZzmb5KU2yDCsMz4tKFy-fd_II1sNjora0/edit.
- Patterson, P., Odim, N., & Swift, A. (2023). "I Know What I'm Doing and It Feels Good": Black and Latine Women Transforming New Orleans Childcare Practice and Policy Through Participatory Research. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, 4(3). <https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.90602>
- "PB in Schools." Participatory Budgeting Project, www.participatorybudgeting.org/what-is-pb/pb-in-schools/.
- "PERTS: Elevate." PERTS, www.perts.net/elevate.
- "Participatory Action Resource (PAR)." Ali DeFazio, n.d., express.adobe.com/page/iFX1nzvU2vqRY/.
- Price, C. A., Lauren Young, Rhonda Broussard, Nicole C. Ralston, and Faith R. Kares. 2023. "The Equity Lens Map: Factor Analysis & Validation." *EdArXiv*. February 16. doi:10.35542/osf.io/m2z4c.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Power to Make Change was made possible by so many talented, passionate educators, advocates, and learners.

This brief was a labor of love across our entire Beloved Community team from 2017 to 2023. The leaders of our Education and Programming team, who have provided all of the coaching and facilitation for education leaders in our Equity in Schools program deserve the first round of kudos: **Dr. Nicole Caridad Ralston, Manny Godoy, Dr. Allisyn Swift, Alisha Keig, and Sonali Chadha.**

Without their work, we would not have been able to build trust and vulnerability with education leaders across the country. The leaders of our Data, Research, Impact and Policy team, who have led on developing our research-validated instruments, the quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis for public data and anonymized data, and the approval of our first IRB: **Lauren Young, Vivian Lam, Cassandra Solis, Dr. Faith Kares, Carla Melaco, Dr.**

Makeda Austin, Dr. Nnenna Odum, Dr. Britany Gatewood, Nicole Ford, María Patrizia Santos, and Abi Mbaye. During the final writing of this brief in 2023, we also want to acknowledge the members of the **Royal Team** who cheered us on from their operational roles. While they may not have authorship credits, it would not have been possible to complete this analysis and brief without the work of: **Stephanie Taylor, Yuliana Quintero, Maurisa Li-A-Ping, Shante Little, Erica Badowski, Lesley Brown Rawlings, Ashley Funk, and Malena Data Ernani.**



In addition to our Royal Team, we are also appreciative of brilliant consultants and contractors who lent their expertise to our Equity in Schools work: **Dr. June Christian** who designed our early EIS cohort content, **Arielle McConduit** who provided critical logistics support for our first cohort; **Dr. Jonas Chartock**, a facilitator for our first cohort; **Dr. Elizabeth Drame, Dr. Lynette**

Mawhinney Gachoki, Dr. Anica Bowe, and Dr. Dominique Duval-Diop, the primary investigators for our Diverse by Design schools study; **Dr. Jorge Hernandez LaBoy** and **Dr. C. Aaron Price** who led the validation and factor analysis for our Equity Lens Map; and our Equity in Schools research advisory members who provided pointed reflections and interrogation of our tools and methodology: **Dr. Nelson Flores, Gina Chirichigno, Sonia Park, Ron Rice,**

Laura McGowan-Robinson, Joe White, Patrick McAlister, Douglas Thaman, David Glasser, Martha McGeehon, Dr. Maya Bugg, Kenneth Ducote, Adrinda Kelly, Holly Paczak, Milly Arbaje-Thomas, Peter Piazza, Tosha Downey, Paula Glover, Kelly Bucherie, Dr. Sasha Rabkin, Dr. Lee Teitel, Dr. Caroline Hill, Michelle Molitor, Maia Blankenship, Erin Trent Johnson, Dr. Claudia Cervantes Soon, Dr. Ana Maria Caldwell, and Dr. David LaViscount. Finally, we owe a great debt of gratitude to the founders of **Kr8 Ventures - Margeaux Randolph and Massimiliano Gasparri** for leading the development of Awa by Beloved, the software platform for our equity audit tools.



To a special mentor, advisor, and champion of our work: **LaShawn Routé Chatmon** – thank you for encouraging us to ask these questions, develop new tools, stay in community with practitioners, and bring our hypothesis to the philanthropic community for investment consideration.



WE ARE THANKFUL

to our Equity in Schools partners in New Orleans, Indianapolis and Kansas City for allowing us to accompany them on their equity journey, our Diverse by Design research study participants, and the 1000+ schools, nonprofits, and businesses who have used our Equity Audit and Equity Lens Map to assess their equity journey. Their anonymized data has contributed heavily to our results, findings, and recommendations in this brief.

The design for The Power to Make Change was developed by Janelle Messel of Novella and supported by the brand assets developed at Cartel Strategies.

In 2021,
Beloved Community became one of <30 nonprofit organizations to receive a 5-year approval to conduct research with human subjects from the Office of Human Research Protections.

We are thankful to our inaugural Institutional Review Board Committee and their guidance on approval of research projects that are referenced in this brief:

Bryn Pernot

Dr. Ana Aparicio -
Committee Chair

Dr. Nicole Williams Beechum

Dr. Rashida Govan-Gyamfi

Dr. Henrika McCoy

Dr. Stanley Thangaraj





SINCE 2019,

Beloved Community has received grants from a variety of education funders and partners, who have supported our wondering about equity in schools:

W.K.Kellogg Foundation
 Walton Family Foundation
 Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation
 Chan Zuckerberg Initiative
 Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
 New Schools Venture Fund

We know that people change systems, so in addition to these philanthropic entities, we give thanks for our individual program officers who have advocated on our behalf and in rooms that we may never enter:

Dr. Deborah McGriff	Lia McIntosh	Brad Bernatek
Frances Messano	Gabriela Lopez	Titilola Harley
Shani Worrell	Marc Chan	Michelle Feist
Melinda Wright	Jannah Garfio	Opokua Odura
Sherman Whites	Julio Chow	

A special thank you to Dr. Deirdre Johnson-Burrell who asked us “So what? Now that you’ve done this work in community, what have you actually learned about the state of equity in our schools?” We hope to always be answering that question.

DISCLOSURE

The school systems studied for this report include those with which Beloved Community is currently engaged as a consultant and/or service provider, as well as those that are unaffiliated with Beloved Community’s work. None of these school systems held editorial control over this report, and the report was independently funded. All participation was voluntary and school systems were not compensated.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Beloved Community. (2024, August) The Power to Make Change: Expanding Equity in American Schools. [brief] <https://www.wearebeloved.org/power-to-make-change>

WHO WE ARE

Beloved Community is a New Orleans-based nonprofit that supports organizations in developing racial and economic equity strategies and comprehensive organizational practices that outlast any single charismatic leader, funding source, or legislative mandate. Beloved works at the nexus of schools, housing and the workplace, advancing three key pillars of work: Equity in Schools, Equity at Work, and Equity in Housing.

We believe that the region is the unit of change. To that end, we center our work in communities in the Midwest and Midsouth with regional cohorts in New Orleans, Memphis, Indianapolis, Kansas City and New England where we have impacted 500,000 students, families, and workers. In 2023, we expanded our reach to Arkansas, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas with a groundbreaking Environmental Justice program.

LEARN MORE

about our work at
WeAreBeloved.org
and our equity
enterprise software at
AwaByBeloved.com.





Beloved Community
wearebeloved.org
Info@wearebeloved.org
(504) 272-7766