Pursuing Social and Emotional Development Through a Racial Equity Lens: 5 Strategies for System Leaders to Take Action

To support proactive leadership, the Aspen Education & Society Program proposes five potential strategies system leaders can use to implement the ideas proposed in the *Call to Action* and, ultimately, to pursue social, emotional, and academic development (SEAD) through a racial equity lens.

1. Sponsor a text-based discussion with the system leadership team.

Facilitating a conversation with senior leaders about the *Call to Action* can help create a shared language and understanding for the equity implications in SEAD and to identify opportunities for the system to improve the ways it supports students and teachers. The following prompts may provide a starting point for the conversation:

- What passage most resonates with you? Why this passage?

- How are these issues experienced by students and teachers in our schools? How do we know?

- Whose voices/perspectives inform our understanding?

- What data can we use – from school climate surveys, early warning systems, SEL or tiered-intervention systems – to understand how these issues play out among different groups of students, and with regard to different schools and groups of teachers?

- In our system, how should we prioritize addressing the considerations articulated in the *Call to Action*?

- What are options/opportunities for making progress in our system? What do we need to learn, and how can we develop new competencies and practices? How could that happen?

2. Organize and engage in discussions with students, families, caregivers, and community members to hear how they are experiencing these issues in school, using the *Call to Action* as a framework.

Advisory Stakeholders	Are there advisory groups of stakeholders that come together to inform system leaders? If not, or in addition to existing groups, can principals nominate students and adults who can share valuable, lived experiences about current issues around SEAD and equity and identify potential solutions?
Students	Is their school is a warm, welcoming, nurturing place in which they can be their authentic selves? What enables this type of learning environment for students, and what detracts from it? How do they feel race and culture are discussed and treated in schools? Do they feel like their cultural backgrounds and personal strengths/assets are validated and affirmed in schools?
Caregivers and Community Members	How do community members and the families of students feel race and culture are discussed and proactively addressed in schools? Are there differences across schools and/or across racial/ethnic groups in how adults understand these issues? Are there differences in how students experience welcomeness and belonging in schools?

3. Host a working session with the board of education and use the *Call to Action* to update policies.

Investment from the board of education is an important sign that SEAD and racial equity work are not only valued, but prioritized. Boards must robustly address SEAD and support students' healthy identity development, including their racial identity, because although these are sensitive issues that often have not been acknowledged or brought to the fore, they are critical to students' development.

- Board members can hold a session where they share their own reflections and perspectives on the *Call to Action (see text-based discussion above)* or participate in a racial autobiography activity— depending on the board's level of engagement and sophistication on these issues. This discussion can be supported with presentations from system leaders across various offices or divisions on how schools are integrating SEAD with equity.

- Board members can set policy to affirm the priorities in the *Call to Action* as priorities of the system, create leadership positions and allocate resources to this agenda, and/or set measures for baseline and progress monitoring.

4. Utilize a cross-disciplinary team to audit existing practices and programs with respect to race and SEAD using the *Call to Action* as a framework.

- Identify a cross-cutting team. Because aspects of SEAD and equity are usually led by different teams, it is important to ensure representation from different offices and divisions (i.e., Teaching and Learning, Student Supports, Equity, Community Engagement, etc.) so that differences in strategy, approach, and framing can be brought to the fore and addressed.

- Produce data analysis to ground the audit in current conditions. Data should include student and teacher responses to school climate surveys, as well as discipline, attendance, and grades cross-tabulated by race of student and race of teachers to understand patterns at baseline. Both acute problems and bright spots should be identified for further inquiry.

- Use the *Call to Action* to identify ways in which strategies for achieving racial equity and the integration of SEAD might be occurring in schools. Examine significant system initiatives as well as implementation decisions that happen in schools and identify opportunities for greater alignment.

- Develop practices for intentionally building racially-, linguistically-, and culturally-affirming pedagogy and practice into student learning experiences.

5. Share the *Call to Action* with principals and school leadership teams to use in professional learning communities and/or text-based discussions at the school level.

While critical work on inquiry and alignment can be sponsored at the system level, schools are the context for integrating racial equity work with SEAD initiatives that is closest to students, families, and teachers.

- Principal supervisors might launch this work by sharing the *Call to Action* with principals and facilitating a PLC or dicussion group *(see text-based discussions above)* that considers implications for how school leaders create welcoming learning environments, support students and adults, and connect SEAD and equity more intentionally.

- Central office staff can develop prompts *(see text-based discussions above)* and encourage principals and school leadership teams to use the *Call to Action* to examine how these issues play out in their school – and to make plans to improve practice.

- Central offices can also provide training and time to prepare for these conversations, and can supply school-level data and system comparisons, such as the analysis described in #4 above, to ground the con versations in the real challenges and opportunities of the school.

For more information, please visit www.aspeninstitute.org/education or email us at educationinfo@aspeninstitute.org.