

Socratic Circles:

Building OER Tools for Racial Equity Classroom and Community Discourse

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About Digital Promise and the Center for Inclusive Innovation

Digital Promise is a global nonprofit working to expand opportunity for every learner. We work with educators, researchers, technology leaders, and communities to design, investigate, and scale innovations that support learners, especially those who've been historically and systematically excluded.

Our mission is to shape the future of learning and advance equitable education systems by bringing together solutions across research, practice, and technology.

Guided by three Impact Goals, we are working to ensure the following by 2031:

1. 75% of historically and systematically excluded learners in America are learning in education systems with the knowledge and tools to create the conditions for them to succeed.
2. 30 million historically and systematically excluded learners have sustained and meaningful experiences of Powerful Learning, putting them on a path to postsecondary completion.
3. 30 million historically and systematically excluded learners are enabled to achieve postsecondary credentials that offer economic security, well-being, and agency.

The Center for Inclusive Innovation at Digital Promise reimagines education R&D by resourcing the creative ingenuity of communities to create liberatory education innovations rooted in self-determination for students furthest from opportunity. This brings together developers, entrepreneurs, researchers, educators, as well as students, families, and community members to define challenges and build solutions.

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Executive Summary

Today's student body is more racially diverse and has unparalleled access to political and social information through news and social media. While many students may be eager to discuss topics related to race, racism, and racial justice, teachers, administrators, and district leaders are often hesitant to discuss these sensitive topics. Still, these issues remain important to students and central to many students' lived experiences. Being able to discuss these social issues with adults and peers has positive benefits for students' personal development and academic achievement. Thus, this project relied on [Inclusive Innovation](#) to develop Open Educational Resources (OER) and materials that support teachers in discussing racial equity and social justice in the classroom.

Through the Inclusive Innovation process, a local team of students, parents, community members, teachers, and district leaders—the Reynoldsburg City Schools (RCS) Core Team—co-led equity-centered co-research and co-design to create OER and materials. The RCS Core Team established a shared commitment to the challenge, co-researched underlying root cause issues, and designed the OER and materials that they implemented in four classrooms. During the course of their Inclusive Innovation project, the RCS Core Team determined that a major factor impacting teachers' ability to lead racial discourse in the classroom was the support of the community. Therefore, the RCS Core Team developed a guidebook, professional development for teachers and accompanying materials that support both classroom and community implementation of structured conversations centering healthy racial discourse. Community-based discussions were intended to inform teachers and students of the perspectives of the community and build support for teachers to lead these discussions in their classrooms. This report describes how Inclusive Innovation was used in the Reynoldsburg district-community to support healthy racial discourse in the classroom. The data presented emphasize:

1. The importance of district-community collaboration in centering equity in research and development (R&D) to ensure solutions are aligned to the implementation context.
2. Inclusive Innovation as a vehicle for fostering district-community partnership in supporting students' leadership and academic success.
3. The usefulness of OER and materials that structure and support teachers in facilitating dialogue on sensitive topics.

Racial Discourse in the Classroom

Today's student body is more racially diverse and maintains greater access to a wealth of political and social information across news and social media than previous generations. Youth today are grappling with social issues that are at the fore of mainstream American discourse, such as racial equity, and they need support in developing the critical reflection skills necessary to participate in healthy dialogue across lines of difference. Despite the growing need to unpack social issues relevant to the lived experiences of an increasingly diverse student body, teachers and district leaders remain hesitant to discuss such politically, socially, and culturally sensitive topics in their classrooms.

Teacher education programs often focus on the technical skills of educators, but they provide little support related to the social and cultural aspects of curricular and instructional practices (Chang-Bacon, 2022). Teachers enter diverse classrooms without receiving training in the equity-centered teaching practices that facilitate powerful learning for today's students, such as class discussions of relevant social issues. This is particularly true for the 79% of teachers (Spiegelman, 2020) who do not share the backgrounds and lived experiences of the growing subset of ethnic-racial minority students (Knowles & Hawkman, 2020). How ethnic-racial minority students see themselves (or not) reflected in their teachers has implications for how they assess school climate, cultural acceptance, and connectedness at school (Parris et al., 2018); all of which have demonstrated impacts on academic achievement. All students need learning opportunities that contribute to their well-being and prepare them for navigation of a pluralistic society, such as those in the U.S. In support of equity in achievement, it is critical that educators provide students opportunities to see themselves authentically reflected at school. Open dialogue is one robust strategy teachers can rely on to bring student voice and authenticity to the classroom through discussions of social issues that hold meaning for their students.

Classroom dialogues allow students opportunities to process their learning and practice engaging responsively with different points of view and ideas (Aldana, et al., 2012). Structured dialogue in the classroom increases learning, promotes prosocial behavior, and improves student perceptions of classroom culture (Applebee, et al., 2003; Fletcher, 2008). Thoughtful dialogue with educators is integral to how students shape their thinking on social issues (Fullam, 2017), especially when dialogues are structured to surface new information and perspectives about relevant issues (Clark & Seider, 2017). Exploring and developing self and social perceptions is also an essential adolescent developmental process (Quintana, 1999). Students, especially those from ethnic-racial minority communities, need opportunities to discuss and learn about race, racism, and racial justice to be able to develop positive racial identity, make social and structural comparisons that promote racial literacy, and learn how to productively cope with opposing perspectives (Hope & Spencer, 2017). Though it is often assumed that open dialogue in the classroom uniquely benefits students of color, all students show positive social and academic outcomes when given opportunities to challenge and discuss social issues (Carrasco & Torres Iribarra, 2018). Structured opportunities for dialogue are more important than ever following the lull in peer-to-peer interaction during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ni & Jia, 2023), limiting organic peer-to-peer learning across differing perspectives. To facilitate these dialogues, educators need support to approach the conversations in thoughtful ways that ensure the psychological safety of themselves and their students.

It is critical that educators are trained and prepared to facilitate developmentally appropriate discussions of racial equity and social justice undergirded by mutual respect and emotional safety with their students (Sue, 2013)—that is, teachers need training to support healthy discourse and avoid the potential harm to their students if discussions are miscarried. Educators should first spend quality time reflecting on their own racial identities and engaging in dialogue about racial justice across lines of difference with adults before starting a dialogue with students (Howard, 2003). Although teachers and schools may rightly feel compelled to discuss pertinent issues of racial equity and social justice, many educators do not know how to start. This report highlights one district’s journey to developing an innovative and district-community aligned solution to support teachers in leading racial discourse in the classroom using an inclusive re-search and development (R&D) process, [Inclusive Innovation](#).

Inclusive Innovation for Teacher Racial Discourse

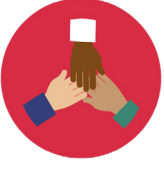



[Inclusive Innovation](#) is an equity-centered R&D process in which district-community equity challenges are co-researched and innovative equity-centered solutions centering the needs of HSE students are co-designed in partnership with district and community stakeholders (Exhibit 1). Throughout the process, districts and communities work in partnership on district-community Core Teams to co-construct an inclusive team culture that enables power-sharing and equitable decision-making to surface context-dependent insights and foster emergent innovations. Digital Promise’s Center for Inclusive Innovation worked closely with Reynoldsburg City Schools and their community to use Inclusive Innovation to create a community-district-centered solution to support students and teachers in engaging in racial discourse in the classroom.

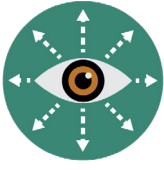

Exhibit 1. Inclusive Innovation Model

Inclusive Innovation 2.0 Model										
Readiness	Equity Check & Synthesis	Connect & Commit	Equity Check & Synthesis	Inquire & Investigate	Equity Check & Synthesis	Design & Develop	Equity Check & Synthesis	Implement & Iterate	Equity Check & Synthesis	Sustain & Scale
Ensure team readiness for the work, introduce the Inclusive Innovation model and the concepts of co-leadership, co-research and co-design		Build relationships, trust and a shared commitment to tackling a challenge		Deeply investigate the challenge from multiple perspectives and arrive at target outcomes for addressing and measuring progress against the challenge		Create one or more prototype solutions that can be tested for the target outcomes		Implement one or more prototypes, tracking multiple progress indicators and target outcomes to iterate and improve		Implement and codify refined solution(s) in multiple contexts, improving local implementations and gathering knowledge for scaling
INCLUSIVE INNOVATION PRIMER		COMMUNITY EQUITY CHARTER		PROBLEM STATEMENT AND PROGRESS INDICATORS		SOLUTION PROTOTYPE		CODIFIED SOLUTION		SCALE MODEL DEFINED

The process of Inclusive Innovation is anchored by six Inclusive Innovation Core Tenets that embody what it means to put the concept of equity-centered R&D into practice (Exhibit 2).

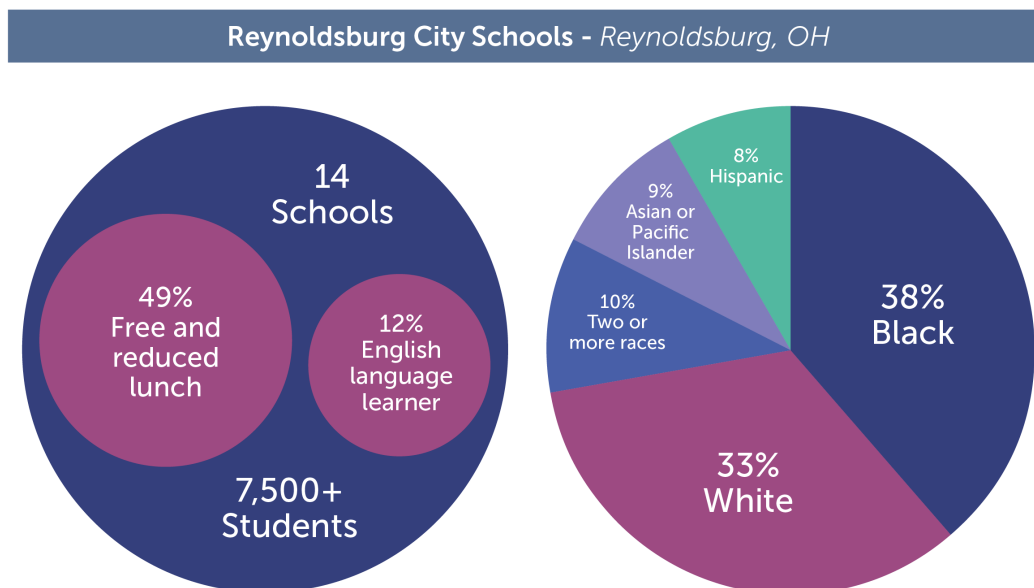
Exhibit 2. Inclusive Innovation Core Tenets

Practice Tenets	
	<p>COLLECTIVE LEADERSHIP</p> <p>The work is co-led, co-researched and co-designed by collaborators who are reflective of the diversity of communities and schools to ensure mutual benefit</p>
	<p>STUDENT VOICE AND LEADERSHIP</p> <p>Students are collaborators and their perspectives are prioritized in the creation of solutions to education challenges</p>
	<p>CONTEXT EXPERTISE AND PROXIMITY</p> <p>The history, culture and perspectives of those with lived experiences relevant to the challenge are centered</p>
	<p>CONTINUITY OF EQUITY</p> <p>Deeply integrated equity practices create research and design conditions to address inequities – poverty, race, language, and learning differences and their intersections</p>

Impact Tenets	
	<p>REIMAGINE PROGRESS</p> <p>Progress measures must be multi-dimensional – access, participation, and benefit – to enable students to thrive</p>
	<p>BUILD CAPACITY</p> <p>Communities are resourced to sustain capacity for equity-centered R&D into the future</p>

Reynoldsburg City Schools' Inclusive Innovation Project

Exhibit 3. Reynoldsburg Ethnic-Racial Demographics



In fall 2021, RCS partnered with Digital Promise's Center for Inclusive Innovation (CII) to pilot the Inclusive Innovation process and develop a solution to support teachers in leading racial equity and social justice discourse in their diverse district. In collaboration with Digital Promise's CII team, the district assembled a district-community Core Team of district leaders, teachers, parents, community members, and students in an intentional partnership to address the challenge area (i.e., teacher racial discourse in the classroom). Three Core Team members representing the district and community took on the role of team co-leads, who were primarily responsible for guiding the research and design activities and providing access to supportive resources. The contentious sociopolitical climate surrounding racial discourse in schools in many parts of the country became magnified over the course of this project and introduced complexity into the Inclusive Innovation process. Nevertheless, the RCS Inclusive Innovation team remained committed to seeing through the Inclusive Innovation process and developed a solution that they were able to pilot with one grade-level team at one middle school campus.

"I wanted to be involved to have the opportunity to create change around systemic racism within education. I wanted students to have more opportunities to be exposed to culturally relevant curriculum and teachers to feel comfortable having conversations around racial equity with students." - RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team District Leader

"I've been in a lot of uncomfortable conversations and have had a lot of heated conversations about bias. And I knew coming into a school where we do have a lot of diversity, there would be people with those same challenges, and I wanted to be able to get more resources and be able to have those conversations with them in a productive manner." - RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

An Exploratory Analysis of Inclusive Innovation in Context

The purpose of this report is to highlight the work of the Reynoldsburg Inclusive Innovation Core Team¹. This report explores two questions regarding the RCS' Core Team's pilot Inclusive Innovation project:

- 1. How did the Reynoldsburg Core Team use Inclusive Innovation to develop a district-community-aligned solution to empower teachers to lead racial discourse in the classroom?
- 2. How were the [Core Tenets of Inclusive Innovation](#) demonstrated through this district-community collaboration?

Method

Reynoldsburg Core Team and the Racial Equity Discourse Community of Practice

The RCS Inclusive Innovation pilot project was rolled out in two phases based on a number of dynamic factors, including time availability of Core Team members (Exhibit 4). The Phase I Core Team members participated in the first three Inclusive Innovation phases between fall 2021 and summer 2022, in which they established a shared vision, researched the problem, and designed a solution prototype. Phase II of the project spanned late fall 2022 to spring 2023. The Phase II team worked on implementing and iterating on the solution, and establishing sustainability. Two district co-leads, one teacher and two students from the Phase I team continued on with the Phase II team. Three additional teachers and three additional students joined the Phase II team.

Exhibit 4. RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Members

Role Type	Phase 1	Phase 2
District leaders	2	2
Teachers	2	2
Community members	3	3
Parents	1	1
Students	2	2

In concert with the work of the RCS Core Team, we facilitated the Center for Inclusive Innovation's *Racial Equity Discourse Community of Practice* (CoP), which consisted of 12 member districts across seven states. Over the course of the RCS Inclusive Innovation project, the CoP districts met via Zoom to discuss and learn about various issues and practices related to racial discourse in the classroom. Additionally, the CoP districts provided feedback to the RCS Core Team at various junctures of their Inclusive Innovation project. Due to the multiple competing priorities, the CoP ended in fall 2022 after participating districts shared their feedback on the solution design.

¹ Critical analyses interrogating the merit of Inclusive Innovation can be found in the [Emerging Findings from Inclusive Innovation](#) series.

Data Collection and Procedures

Inclusive Innovation Artifacts and Outputs. During the Inclusive Innovation process, Core Teams met at a regular cadence to build relationships, co-research challenges, and co-design solutions. The session materials and outputs developed by the Core Team are used as sample artifacts throughout this report.

Inclusive Innovation Survey (IIS). The IIS is a 15-item measure of Core Team members' agreement with Inclusive Innovation beliefs aligned with the Core Tenets (e.g., "Students, teachers, parents, family members, and caretakers who are most affected should guide the solution to the problem.") and their confidence in their capacity for Inclusive Innovation (e.g., "Include students, teachers, parents, family members, and caretakers in creating solutions to problems in education."). This measure was designed for use with Core Team participants before and after engagement with Inclusive Innovation; therefore, additional items assess the extent of experience with R&D practices (e.g., "coming up with solutions or tools to solve challenges in education") and perceptions of their experience with the process on the post-implementation version of the IIS (e.g., "Student voice and input was central to our Inclusive Innovation process."). The IIS includes three demographic items regarding age, grade (for students), and role type. This measure has been used with three other multigenerational district-community Core Teams. The RCS phase I team completed this survey at the end of *Design and Develop*.

Phase I and II Interviews. At the end of Phase I, the Digital Promise Center for Inclusive Innovation research team developed a 60-minute semi-structured interview protocol to explore interviewees' perspectives of their experience with the Inclusive Innovation process. The protocol consisted of questions that were intended to elucidate the extent to which factors such as student voice, context expertise, capacity-building, and racial equity are central to the Inclusive Innovation process as they experienced it, from the vantage point of Core Team members.

Following the third and final pilot implementation of the solution, the Digital Promise Center for Inclusive Innovation research team developed a semi-structured interview protocol to explore Phase II RCS Core Team members' perspectives of their Phase II experience. The interview protocol consisted of items that surfaced perspectives of how well the solution met the team-defined outcomes, capacities that were developed, prospects for sustainability, and how lived experience and student voice were incorporated into the project.

All Phase I and II RCS Core Team members ($N = 19$) were contacted via email by a Digital Promise researcher at the end of Phase I in spring 2022 and at the end of Phase II in spring 2023. All Core Team members who agreed to participate ($N = 7$) were scheduled for an interview that took place over Zoom. During the interview, participants were first asked for their consent to a recorded interview. All interviews took approximately 30–60 minutes to complete.

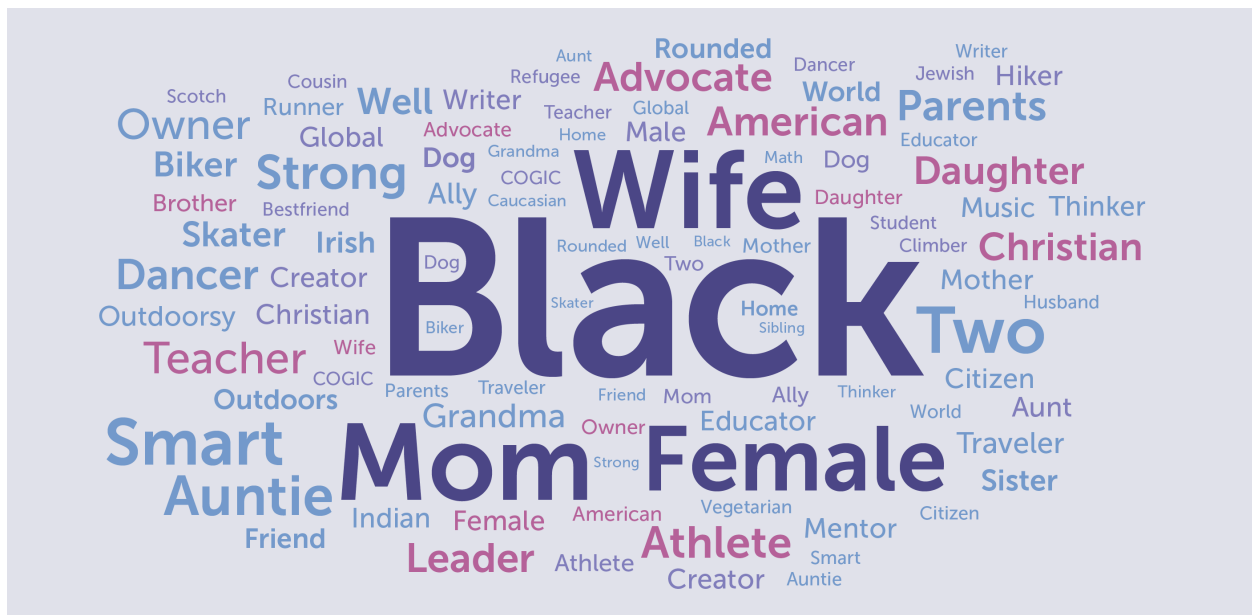
Using Inclusive Innovation to Support Racial Discourse in the Classroom

The following section of this report is organized by phases of Inclusive Innovation. Each subsection highlights how the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team completed the major milestones of each phase.

Connect and Commit

The RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team was recruited and launched in fall 2021 with team members across varying backgrounds, district-community role types, and several ethnic-racial communities (Exhibit 4-5).

Exhibit 5. RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Member Identities



Note: Larger font size represents common identities across the Core Team.

During *Connect and Commit*, RCS Core Team members collaboratively defined their challenge and established a working definition of *racial equity discourse*.

Our central challenge is that

"teachers and students struggle to have meaningful discourse about racial equity and social justice."

We define racial equity discourse as

"intentional conversations about race and equity designed to increase understanding of racism, identity, dynamics of power and privilege, historical context, and social justice issues at interpersonal, institutional, and/or systemic levels."

Upon establishing an agreed upon definition of the challenge area, the RCS Core Team then established a team community charter that expressed the team consensus on their shared core values, commitments to equity, vision for addressing systemic oppression, and community agreements for their engagements with one another (Exhibit 6).

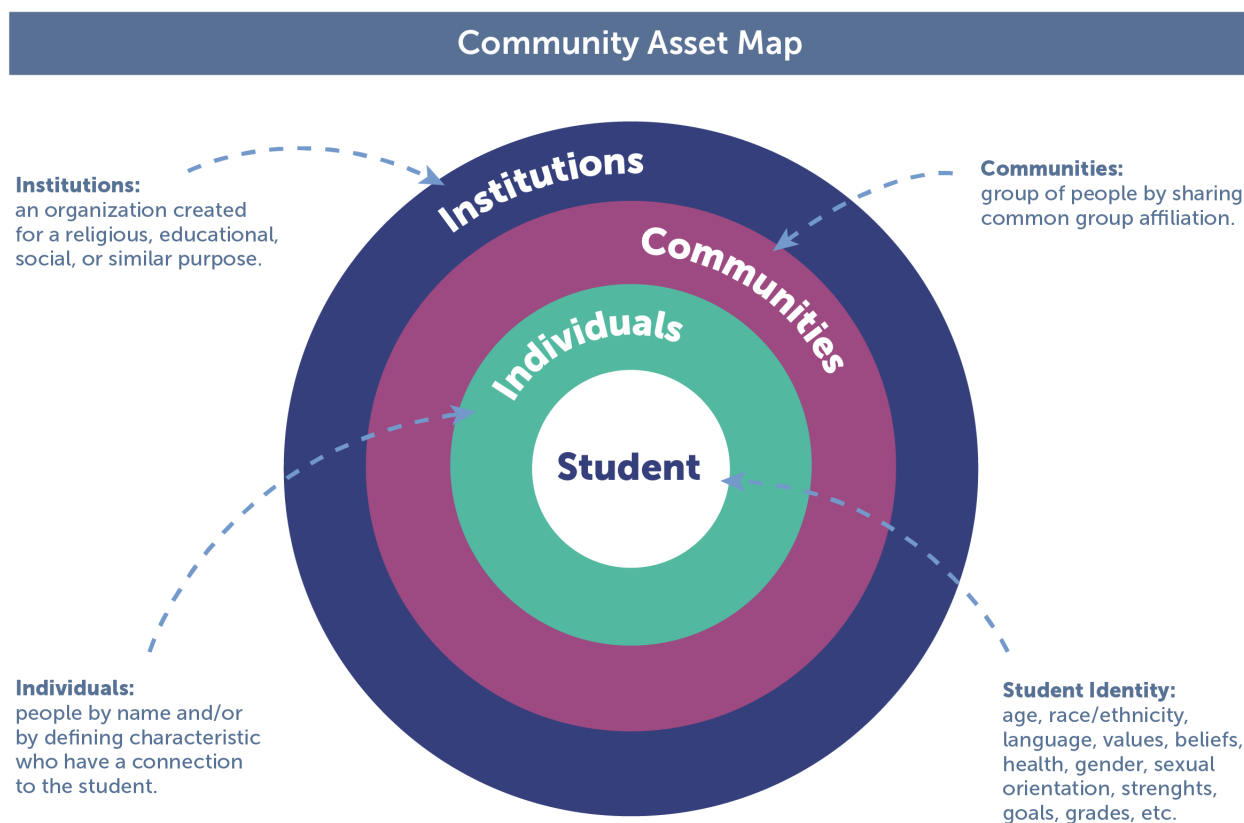
Exhibit 6. Examples from the RCS Core Team Community Charter

Core Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Telling the truth! Receiving truth = honesty, integrity, authenticity• A flow of real info based on people's real experiences = empathy, authenticity• Trust is at the foundation of it all
Equity Commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Make sure everyone has a voice• Purposefully seek a variety of perspectives• Have the hard conversations about history bias and racial equity
Vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Students who struggle in school will be able to get the support they need and have their educational needs met in order to be successful adults with choices.• All students will have a voice in our community and give our community more ideas on what to change.• All teachers will be able to discuss and explore current events within the classroom from various cultural perspectives.
Community Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speak your truth. We speak from our experiences instead of using generalizations.• Assume good intentions but name and own our impact. Regardless of our intentions, the impact still occurs. Seek to repair and learn.• Find comfort in discomfort. Lean into the feeling of discomfort—hearing, seeing and learning about inequities.

Note: The full community charter can be found in Appendix A-1.

Finally, in preparation for the research and design/development phases of Inclusive Innovation, the RCS Core Team prepared a community asset map (Exhibit 7) to identify community members, groups and institutions that could be integral to the direction of the project (i.e. community assets). Incorporating community assets into the research, design, and development of solutions is essential because doing so honors and integrates expertise resident in the community into the process. That is, expertise about the local context, the challenge area, and how it is experienced by district-community members.

Exhibit 7. Community Asset Map



Note: The community assets displayed do not necessarily reflect those identified by the RCS Core Team.

Inquire and Investigate

With an established definition of the challenge area, the team charter, and the community asset map, the RCS Core Team moved into the second phase of Inclusive Innovation, *Inquire and Investigate*. First, the team reviewed resources (i.e. research articles, news podcasts, etc.) relevant to the challenge area and discussed the application of the findings to their district-community context. With their shared learnings about the relationship between the broader context for teacher racial discourse in the classroom and particularities of their district-community, the team designed measures that probed education stakeholders' perceptions of teacher and student experiences with racial discourse in the classroom. The data was used to construct student and teacher representations that ranged across experience, openness, and intentions (Exhibit 8). These representations of teachers and students helped the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team reflect on the strengths and needs of teachers and students as they collected and interpreted data on the challenge area.

Exhibit 8. RCS Student and Teacher Representations for Inclusive Innovation

Teachers	Students
<p>Bob/Brenda: <i>"I am a subject matter expert and follow the curriculum given. I see and treat all kids the same. I don't feel like it is my job to discuss race and wouldn't feel comfortable based on my relationships with parents. I need support from my administrators, training, and tools if I am going to talk about these issues."</i></p> <p>Hope/Nick: <i>"I am a compassionate teacher who believes that teaching is a way toward peace. I make mistakes in talking about race and racism, but I have the support to keep trying. I encourage my colleagues to try to address hard issues. I need opportunities to network with others who are doing this work."</i></p>	<p>Motivational Monica: <i>"I am a student of color who aspires to speak up and speak out while encouraging my peers to do the same. In addition to my personal experiences, I have researched the topic on my own, and I am always eager to participate in class discussions about race/racism."</i></p> <p>Maddy the Ally: <i>"Like Monica, I also welcome discussions of race and racism in class. I am happy to participate in discussions, as an ally. Although I may not have the same experiences as some of my peers, I have researched the topic on my own."</i></p> <p>Concerned Chris: <i>"I generally dislike participating in class discussions regardless of the topic because I do not enjoy being the center of attention. I don't feel comfortable discussing race and racism in class because it is a personal topic and my viewpoints sometimes oppose my peers. In addition, the topic makes me uncomfortable because of the possibility that some of my family members may have caused racial harm."</i></p>

As they worked through *Inquire and Investigate*, the RCS Core Team repeatedly returned to their working user personas as anchors for critical reflection and consensus around the features and needs of their target students and teachers. Next, the team engaged in a root cause analysis that led them to identify three central issues underpinning the challenge area (Exhibit 9). They did so by first hypothesizing several root causes and then organizing them thematically to identify three central root causes: fear and political influence, lack of comprehensive and inclusive curriculum, and lack of awareness.

Exhibit 9. RCS Challenge Area Root Cause Analysis

Challenge: Teachers and students struggle to have meaningful conversations about racial equity and social justice.

Root Cause	Cause 1: Fear and Political Influence	Cause 2: Lack of Comprehensive and Inclusive Curriculum	Cause 3: Lack of Awareness
Why?	Lack of support from administrators and district—when is the time to have these conversations? How will I know I will be supported?	No time or flexibility in the scope and sequence.	Lack of ongoing, intentional, and in-depth professional development that gets deeper on issues of racial equity.
Why?	Lack of relationships between teachers, families, and community; need someone who can relate to in order to feel safe in starting these conversations.	People making decisions about resources don't know the needs/reality on the ground AND don't have the lived experiences of BIPOC students and communities.	Few districts are taking a system wide approach to addressing teachers' lack of awareness and providing recommendations on how to handle scenarios in the classroom.
Why?		No systemic approach to having deeper racial equity conversations.	

The RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team then designed focus group protocols and collected and collaboratively analyzed focus group data to further understand the experiences associated with the team-defined root causes of the challenge area. After making sense of the data through thematic analysis, discussion, and reflection, the Core Team decided on a central problem to solve for and three outcomes that they wanted their solution to lead them to (Exhibit 10).

Exhibit 10. RCS Team-Defined Problem and Outcomes

In our community, “teachers need training with techniques to help create a safer environment and guidelines of how administrators will support teachers and handle complaints through official channels to get out of the loop of fear.”

Team-Defined Outcomes		
Outcome 1	Outcome 2	Outcome 3
Teachers will feel more empowered to facilitate discussions of race/racism and create a mutual understanding of the importance of DEI because they are supported (e.g., by community, families, and district and building administration).	Teachers will know how to understand students and take on different points of view.	Teachers will develop classroom cultures that support maturity/civility in both planned and unplanned conversations about equity.

Design and Develop

With a clear problem statement in mind, the RCS Core Team then moved on to the third phase of Inclusive Innovation, *Design and Develop*. In *Design and Develop*, the Core Team (along with additional invited district-community members) ideated solutions and used collaborative decision-making strategies to narrow their ideas to four potential solutions that seemed promising for addressing their priority problem (Exhibit 11).

Exhibit 11. Solution Ideas to Support Teacher Racial Discourse

Make a Difference Project	Student Curriculum Advisory	Community Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Events	Developing an Equity Tool for Discussions in the Classroom
Students would research and design a community-based project that would create change.	Student curriculum advisory that would work with the district and teachers to incorporate ways for students to learn about one another and their cultures and experiences.	Students would lead community events that support community members and district staff in discussing issues of racial equity.	The team would create a tool and professional development that teachers could use to support conversations in their classroom.

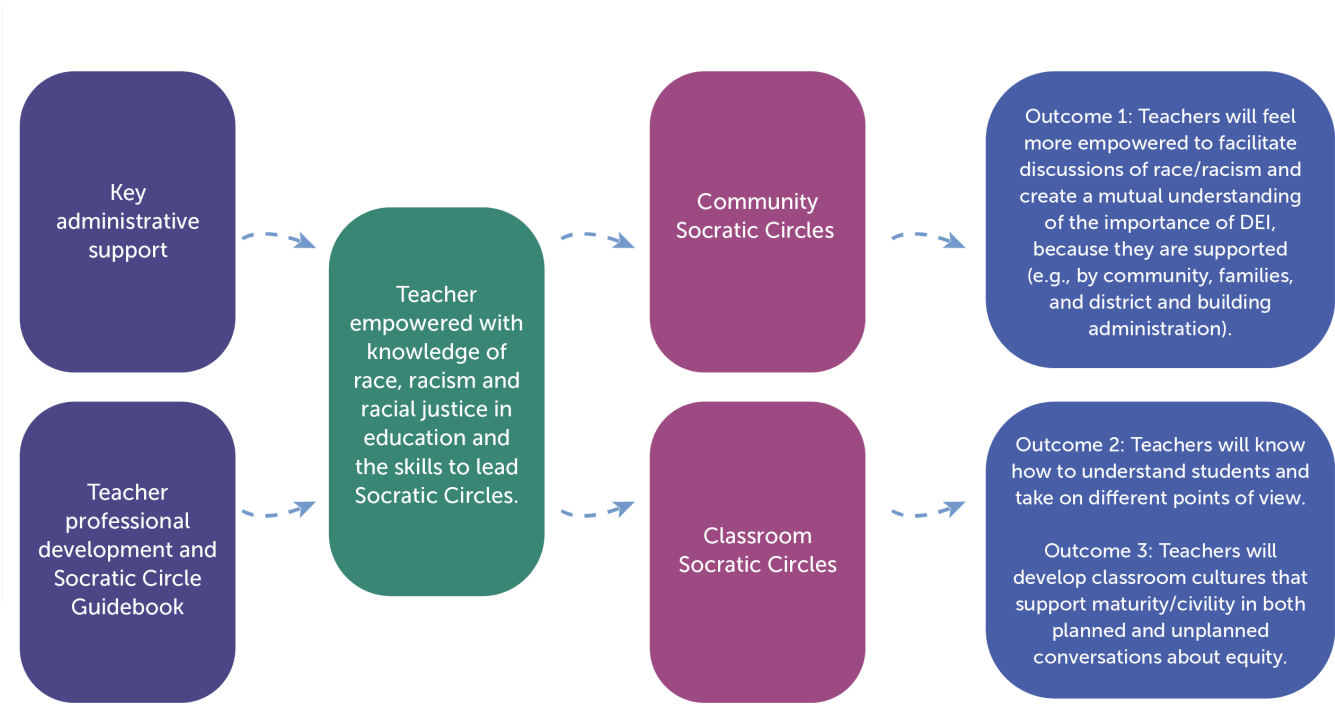
The team then hosted focus groups with students, teachers, and district leaders, the data from which ultimately informed the Core Team's consensus around a top solution that combined features from their solution ideas: a Socratic Circles model to support discourse on racial equity and social justice in the classroom and community, with accompanying professional development and materials to support teachers during implementation.

The RCS Core Team centered their decision on a solution around equity and impact, feasibility, and the needs of the teachers and students of their district (Exhibit 12). Teachers needed:

1. Professional development to expand their awareness about the landscape of current and historical racism in education.
2. A structure that would enable them to foster healthy racial discourse rooted in maturity and civility. Socratic Circles are learner-centered group discussions in which participants learn from one another with discussion centered around a text or essential questions. Teachers and students can lead or co-lead Socratic Circles. The structure of the Socratic Circles would allow students to participate at their individual levels of comfort, maintain civility, and serve as a safeguard for the potential harms of open dialogue about culturally sensitive topics.
3. The support of administrators and the community to safeguard them from political and social backlash for having conversations centered on race, racism, and racial justice with students. The RCS Core Team recognized teachers' fear of social backlash for leading these discussions and felt, based on local precedence, that one way for teachers to gain support for leading racial discourse in the classroom was to bring these discussions into the district-community.

Elevating the Socratic Circle model to both the classroom and community (Community Socratic Circle) seemed like a logical choice to build the connection from school to home and build comfort in discussing racial equity.

Exhibit 12. RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Theory of Action



With a clearly defined focal solution, the Center for Inclusive Innovation team facilitated a working relationship between three subject matter experts who contributed to the content, design, and development of the final solution, and the RCS Inclusive Innovation district co-leads in order to develop a solution prototype. Ultimately the team developed the following assets listed in Exhibit 13:

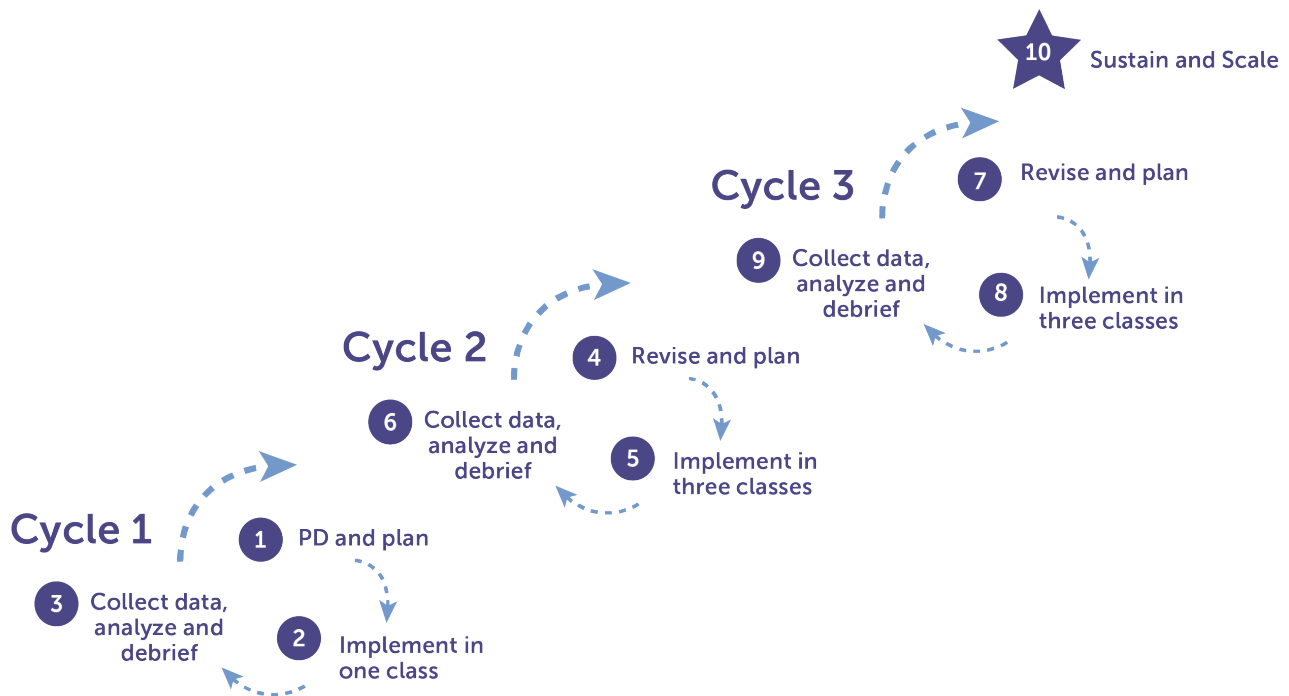
Exhibit 13. RCS Inclusive Innovation Solution Prototypes

Solution	Description	Outcome
Professional Development Modules on Racial Equity and Social Justice in the Classroom	The scope of learning for teacher professional development on how to use Socratic Circles to discuss issues of race and racism organizes the learning experience in a way that develops both theoretical and technical information to equip teacher participants with the knowledge and dispositions required to implement Socratic Circles in their classrooms.	Outcome 1 & 3
Socratic Circle Classroom Guidebook	The guidebook serves as a playbook for the implementation of Socratic Circles both in the classroom and the community. The guidebook identifies the steps and resources required to build a strong classroom culture to prepare educators to have the conversations. It also provides materials that are student facing to provide scaffolding to support youth in speaking to peers and others about racial equity in the classroom.	Outcome 2 & 3
Community Socratic Circle Materials	A community Socratic circle on race and equity is a helpful way to hear various perspectives from the community. The team built this solution with the hope that by engaging community members, students, and school staff in Socratic Circles they would build broader support for discourse about racial equity and social justice in the district. Various community members are included to build the connection from school to home and increase a broader range of support for students and educators.	Outcome 1 & 2

Implement and Iterate

After creating a prototype of their solution, the team entered the fourth phase of Inclusive Innovation, *Implement and Iterate*, where they created a plan for three implementation cycles (Exhibit 14).

Exhibit 14. RCS Inclusive Innovation Implementation Cycles



First, the implementing Core Team teachers completed the professional development modules. The RCS Phase II teachers then co-designed lesson plans and observed one teacher as they led a Socratic Circle in their class. In the second implementation cycle, all of the remaining implementing teachers on the RCS Phase II Core Team led Socratic Circles in their classes. Between each implementation cycle, the RCS core implementing teachers completed the Teacher Post-Implementation Survey and participated in an ongoing Professional Learning Community (PLC) where they engaged in deep discussions about the factors of successful implementation, challenges, and opportunities for improvement. The Core Team co-leads participated and guided these conversations. In the final implementation cycle, district leaders, teachers, students, parents, and other community members gathered in a Community Socratic Circle led by two RCS Core Team students.

The RCS Phase II Core Team relied on co-designed measures to assess their progress toward the team-defined outcomes in collaboration with the Center for Inclusive Innovation team (Exhibit 15).

Exhibit 15. RCS Implementation Outcome Measures

Measure	Description	Number of Items
Teacher Post-Implementation Survey	Phase II Core Team teachers' self-report of how well they were able to meet the team-defined outcomes through implementation of the solution in the classroom. An example item reads, "I felt comfortable leading a discussion about race, racism, and racial justice with my classes using the Socratic Seminar method."	17
Community Post-Implementation Survey	Based on the Teacher and Student Post-Implementation surveys, the RCS Phase II Core Team members developed a measure assessing teachers, students, parents, and other community members' perspectives of how well the team-defined outcomes were achieved through the Community Socratic Circle.	26
Post-Implementation Debriefs	After each implementation of the solution, teachers and other district leaders engaged in semi-structured debrief sessions in which they discussed their experiences with implementation, learnings, and observations of areas for iteration of the solution.	~13

The post-implementation debrief sessions revealed learnings that improved subsequent implementations (Appendix A-3):

1. Teachers needed guided preparation for expanding their awareness of the historical and modern underpinnings of the racialized landscape of education. They also needed practical knowledge about Socratic Circles, how to monitor the tensions that may arise, and how to utilize effective discourse facilitation moves for healthy open dialogue.
2. Students needed preparation with topic area vocabulary and concepts, and practical knowledge about Socratic Circles.
3. Students needed variation in access points for participation and leadership of Socratic Circles.

Overall, responses to survey items after each implementation cycle trended in the affirmative toward team-defined outcomes (between *agree* to *strongly agree*; see Appendix A-2 for survey items and response frequencies). Data from each implementation cycle revealed that teachers felt comfortable and supported in facilitating healthy dialogue using Socratic Circles and were able to understand their students' perspectives. Students' responses mirrored their teachers' perceptions and community members indicated that participating in the community Socratic circle helped them feel comfortable with teachers using Socratic Circles to facilitate classroom racial discourse.

Sustain and Scale

After the Community Socratic Circle, the RCS Core Team entered into the final phase of Inclusive Innovation, *Sustain and Scale*. The students and community reflected on the power of seeing their ideas about how to solve for a district-community equity challenge come to life through co-research and co-design. In addition to reflecting on the growth of their own knowledge, skills, and abilities, the RCS Core Team created a sustainability plan to continue to hold Socratic Circles at the initial pilot middle school and to expand their work to other schools in the district. The sustainability plan included building buy-in with the district board of education through multiple board presentations. From here, the co-leads worked with district administration to include Socratic Circles as a part of ongoing teacher training and development at multiple sites. Additionally, the co-leads are planning community-school Socratic Circles for the upcoming school year and plan to share widely the work that is ongoing.

"I was really hopeful hearing the presentation. It is evident to me that indeed there are good things happening, and the change we need to see in our district is happening." - RCS Board Member

Exemplifying the Core Tenets of Inclusive Innovation

Throughout their work, the RCS Core Team members exemplified the Core Tenets of Inclusive Innovation. The following section highlights the ways in which RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members exemplified the Core Tenets of Inclusive Innovation, in their own words. Frequency bar graphs displaying 11 RCS Core Team members' responses to various items on the Inclusive Innovation Survey (IIS) relevant to their beliefs, skills, and confidence in their capacity to put the Core Tenets of Inclusive Innovation into practice are displayed in the following section.



Collective Leadership

The work is co-led, co-researched, and co-designed by collaborators who are reflective of the diversity of communities and schools to ensure mutual benefit.

"...by participating in the co-lead meetings where we planned how we would develop the team. Also, advocating throughout the district and the community and including community members, parents, teachers, politicians, and professionals in the focus groups and just making sure that the design was inclusive not just of the teachers, students, and admin but a variety of different people within the community."

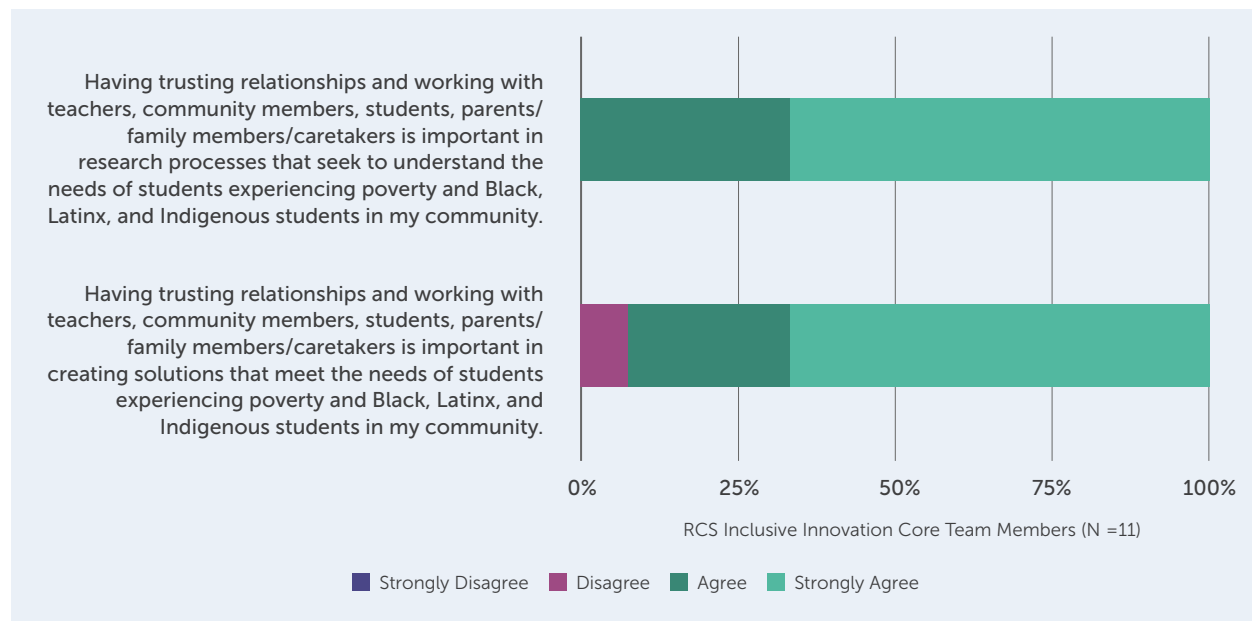
- RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team District Leader

"I just think this project, in general, brought in not only 8th-grade teachers, but other teachers. We also worked with our Assistant Principal and then someone who was in the upper [district] level...and we all kind of collaborated together...And it was co-leadership that way because there wasn't really somebody who was taking the main point. We all had equal responsibilities..."

- RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members also demonstrated positive responses to IIS items measuring their beliefs about collective leadership (Exhibit 16) and their confidence in their ability to use collective leadership in their work in the future (Exhibit 17).

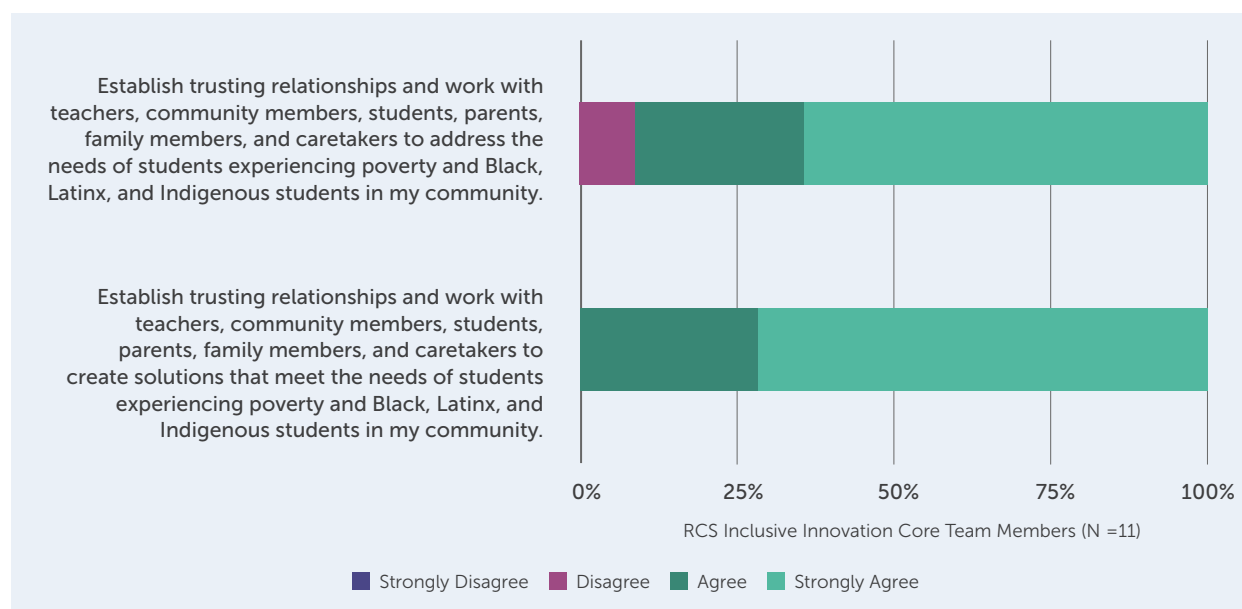
Exhibit 16. Collective Leadership Beliefs



Note: Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

Exhibit 17. Collective Leadership Efficacy



Note: Survey instructions read "Please indicate how confident you feel in your ability to engage in inclusive innovation in the following ways." Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

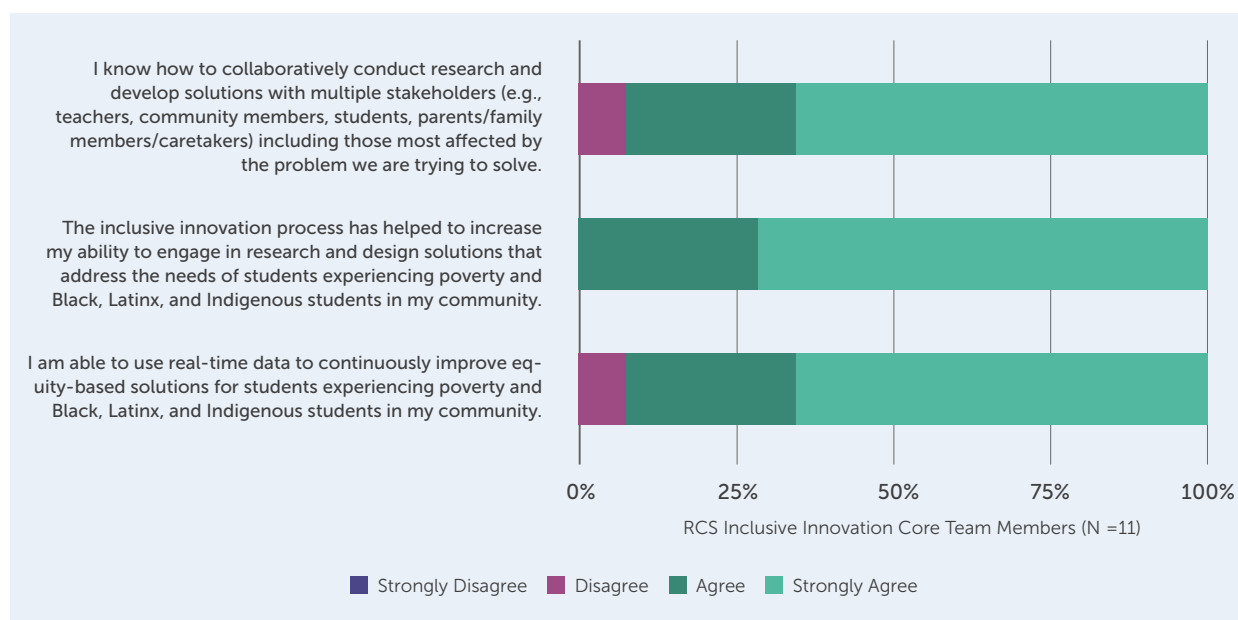
Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

"So definitely students, community members, whether that's people from the [parent-teacher organizations] or from just across the district...Get those parents involved. Let them tell us what they're seeing. What are their neighbors going through? What are their students going through? Just getting voices of the people that are actually going through these things..."

- RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

The majority of the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members who completed the IIS demonstrated positive responses to items relevant to their beliefs and sense of efficacy about co-research and co-design (Exhibits 18 and 19).

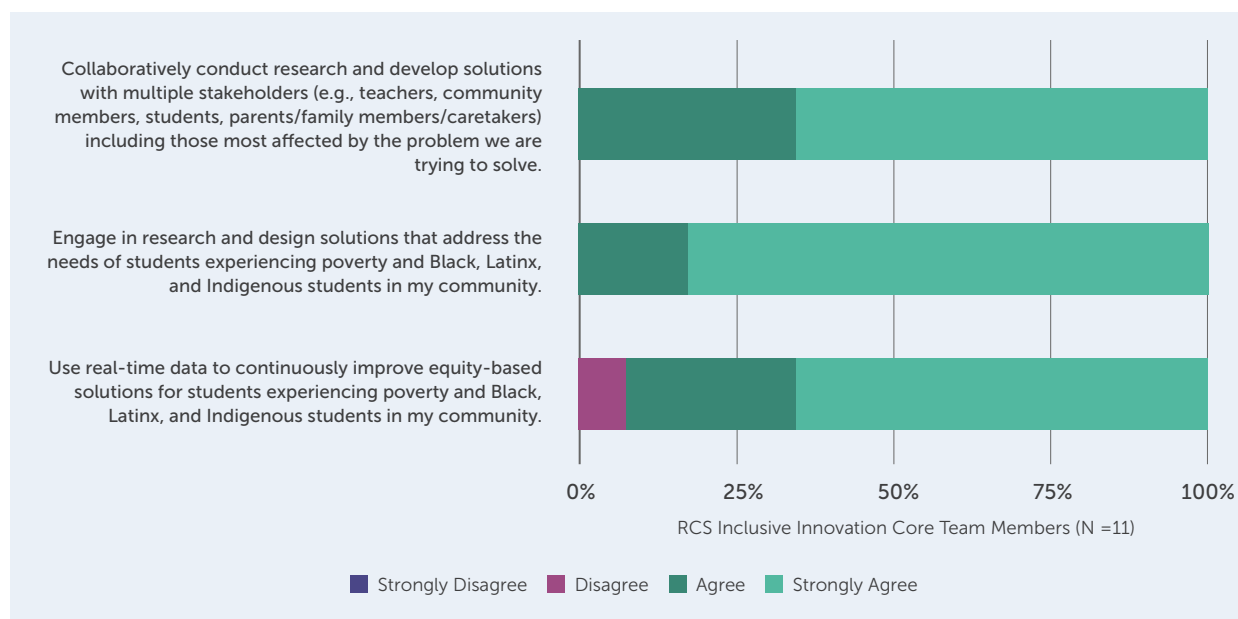
Exhibit 18. Co-Research and Co-Design Skills



Note: Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

Exhibit 19. Co-Research and Co-Design Efficacy



Note: Survey instructions read “Please indicate how confident you feel in your ability to engage in inclusive innovation in the following ways.” Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.



Student Voice and Leadership

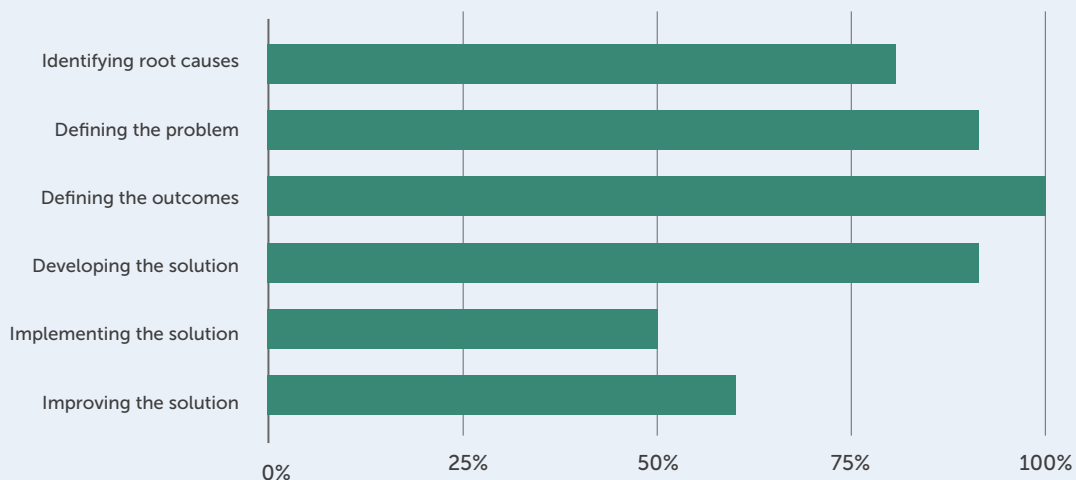
Students are collaborators and their perspectives are prioritized in the creation of solutions to education challenges.

"The students even, as they matriculated into the ninth grade, were still included in the process as we began to roll out the Socratic [Circle]. They were at the Community Socratic [Circle] and helped lead and facilitate those discussions. When we implemented the classroom Socratic [Circle], four of the five were completely student led." - RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

"I think one of the most amazing things that we had with our Community Socratic [Circle] was we had student leaders. And even throughout this process, I remember one of the first meetings we had students on the meeting, and they got to express their feelings and their thoughts about these things." - RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

Exhibit 20. Student Voice Consideration

Student voice was the primary consideration in decisions around:



RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Members (N =11)



Context Expertise and Proximity

The history, culture, and perspectives of those with lived experiences relevant to the challenge are centered.

"Students mainly because that's why we're in education, for the students. But you also need to bring in teachers as the primary role of...delivering the equity. And then I think it is also important to get admin and outside opinion as well, whether that be parents or community members. I think their voice is valuable as well. However, I think the main chunk should be teachers and students since that's the day-to-day. Those are the people that are going to affect the most."

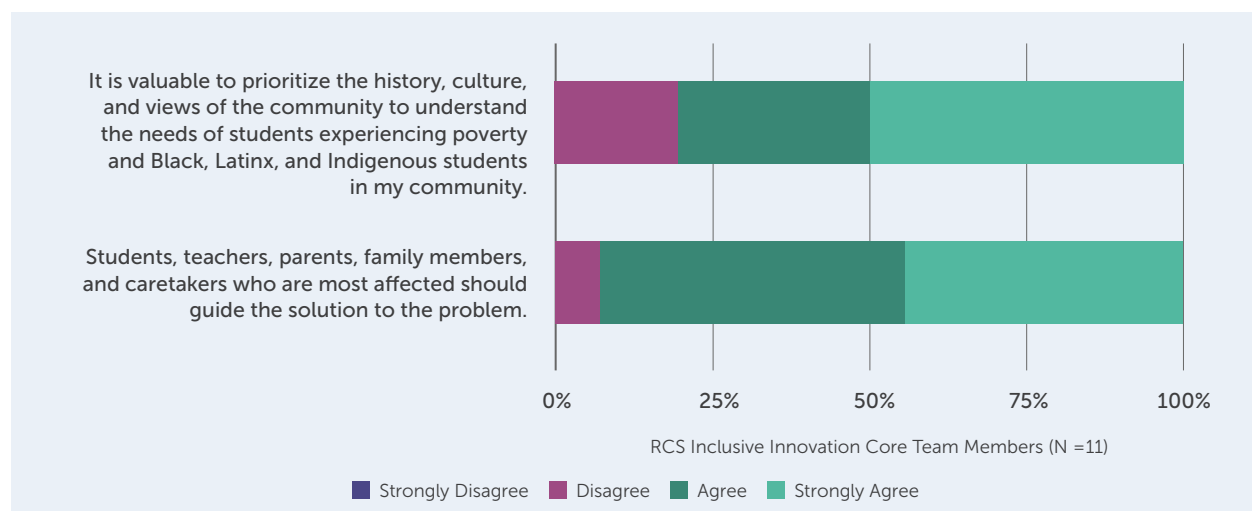
- RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

"...people who have experienced the issue of not being equal to or... who haven't had the most fair opportunities."

- RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team Teacher

The majority of the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members who completed the IIS demonstrated positive responses to items relevant to their beliefs and sense of efficacy about honoring context expertise (Exhibit 21).

Exhibit 21. Context Expertise and Proximity Beliefs

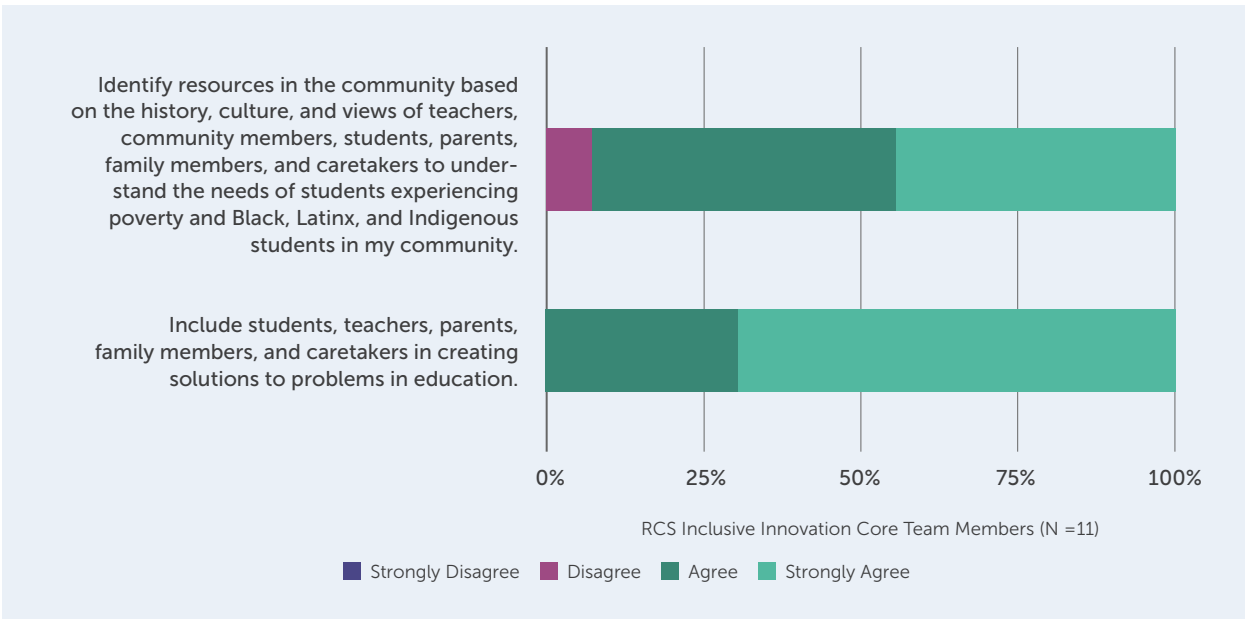


Note: Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

Most of the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members who completed the IIS endorsed Context Expertise and Proximity beliefs that align with Inclusive Innovation Core Tenets (Exhibit 22). In practice, the Core Team demonstrated strong commitment to centering the lived experiences of those relevant to the challenge. It is possible that the above items required more nuance; and therefore, yielded the *disagree* responses.

Exhibit 22. Context Expertise and Proximity Efficacy



Note: Survey instructions read “Please indicate how confident you feel in your ability to engage in inclusive innovation in the following ways.” Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

Continuity of Equity

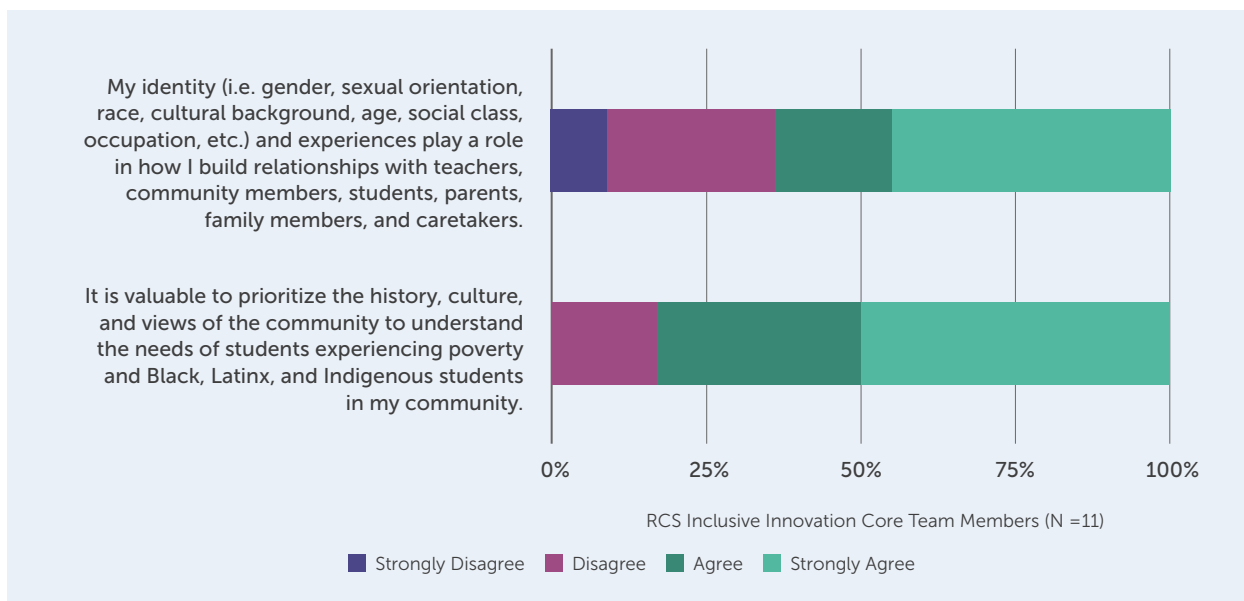
Deeply integrated equity practices create research and design conditions to address inequities — poverty, race, language, learning differences and their intersections.

"We've got to call a spade a spade. And we have to quit dancing around things that we know exist. We have to announce the elephant in the room. So acknowledging and naming those inequities, I feel like is the first step before we can do anything about it. And then once we name and know those inequities, we can start to have those conversations and to develop and design those solutions." - RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team District Leader

"Well...having been a Black female student and educator and having my own experience in different parts of the country at different levels of my career and my upbringing and my education... I think that I helped to articulate and even share experiences to help bring other people to a level of understanding of what we're dealing with and what we are trying to accomplish."
- RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team District Leader

The majority of the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members who completed the IIS demonstrated positive responses to items relevant to their beliefs (Exhibit 23) and sense of efficacy (Exhibit 24) about recognizing their own positionality and centering the needs of those closest to equity challenges in education.

Exhibit 23. Continuity of Equity Beliefs

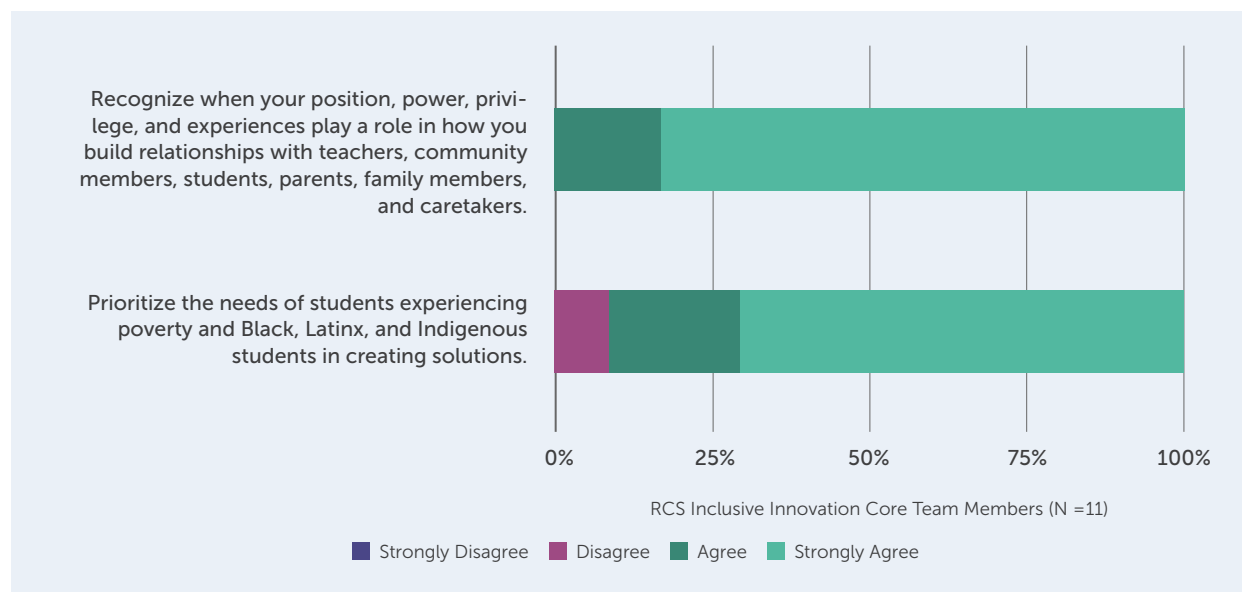


Note: Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

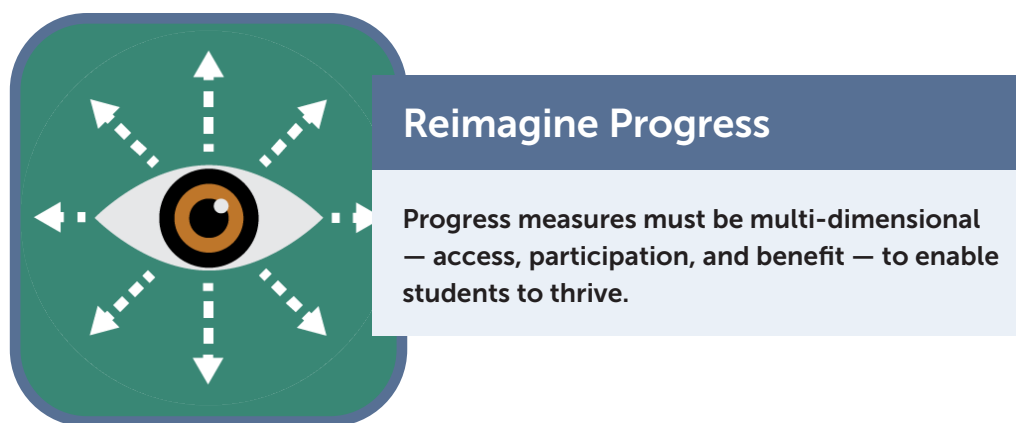
Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

As with the Context Expertise and Proximity items, most of the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members who completed the IIS endorsed Continuity of Equity beliefs that align with Inclusive Innovation Core Tenets. It is possible that the above items required more nuance; and therefore, yielded the *disagree* responses.

Exhibit 24. Continuity of Equity Efficacy



Note: Survey instructions read “Please indicate how confident you feel in your ability to engage in inclusive innovation in the following ways.” Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.




“Everyone can share things [in Socratic Circles]. The teachers feel more comfortable talking about things in the classrooms, and then...the students can help lead the conversation rather than just listening.”
- RCS Inclusive Innovation Student

“And the biggest thing that made it successful is that the students really felt like they had voice. They also had that choice to choose what spoke to them to talk about. And they were also beginning to think beyond about what could they do as a generation of peers and colleagues to make some of the inequities different...”
- RCS Inclusive Innovation District Leader

Note: Note: The IIS did not contain any items relevant to this Core Tenet at the time of administration.

RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members thought about progress toward supporting teachers in leading classroom racial discourse in terms of a number of factors, such as student and teacher comfort with sharing their perspectives and gaining broader understanding as well as empowering student voice.



Build Capacity

Communities are resourced to sustain capacity for equity-centered R&D into the future.

"So one of the biggest things that I've gained is I know how to talk to administrators and community leaders a lot better now than I did before to have my voice heard by them. And I've gained a lot of good friends...It really helped me realize how much planning goes into creating a solution and how much thought and effort goes into it."

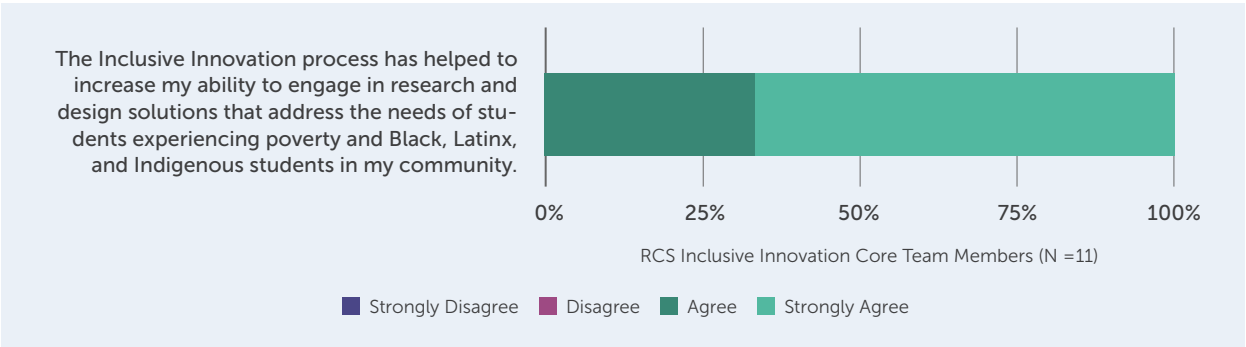
- RCS Inclusive Innovation Student

"Number one, I will say district support at the highest level. So having a superintendent and a school board that were very supportive and understanding why the work needed to be done. And wanting us to move forward in the work. This work could not have been done without them. So that is number one...I think having a community of people, students, teachers, parents, that understood the necessity and wanted to have these conversations is also a key component..."

- RCS Inclusive Innovation District Leader

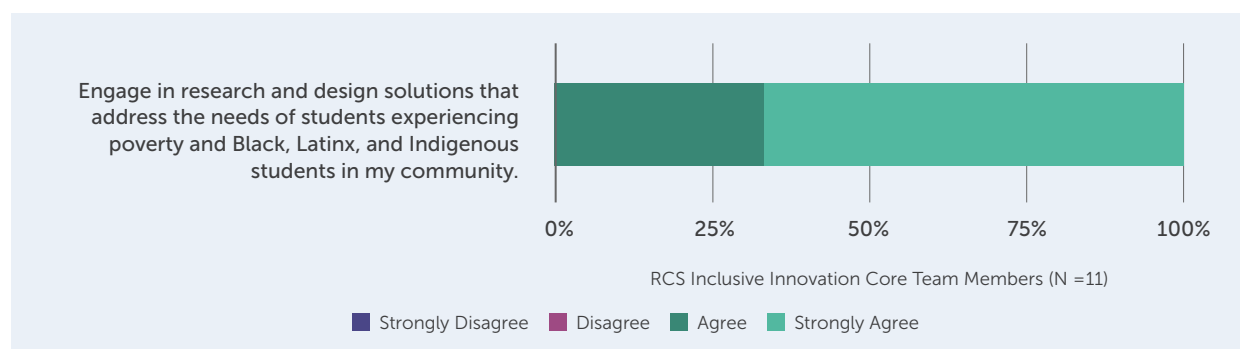
All of the RCS Inclusive Innovation Core Team members who completed the IIS endorsed the idea that Inclusive Innovation helped them build R&D skills and demonstrated confidence in their ability (Exhibits 25 and 26).

Exhibit 25. Build Capacity Beliefs



Note: Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).
Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

Exhibit 26. Build Capacity Efficacy



Note: Survey instructions read "Please indicate how confident you feel in your ability to engage in inclusive innovation in the following ways." Items presented were measured from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree).

Source: Digital Promise Inclusive Innovation Survey, 2022–23.

The Promise of District-Community Collaboration

Discussing racial equity and social justice in the classroom is complex due to the many inhibiting factors that can impact an individual teacher's ability to facilitate properly. Through the Inclusive Innovation process, the RCS core team created a scaffolded approach and tangible resources to support teachers, students, and community members in engaging in classroom dialogue around racial equity and social justice. The Inclusive Innovation process ensured equity of voice and inclusion of diverse perspectives that made the R&D process richer and more complex. Through commitment to students and passion for racial equity, the co-leads and Core Team were able to navigate a myriad of barriers to implement rewarding conversations in the classroom and community. The Socratic Circles were implemented across all content areas, showing ways that all educators can build inclusive practices into their classrooms to ensure all students feel a sense of belonging and that their voice and identity are valued. By utilizing strategies that emphasize sharing power and disrupting traditional classroom hierarchies, educators in any content area can create inclusive classroom cultures and facilitate conversations that support historically and systematically marginalized students in engaging meaningfully with one another and the content.

Overall, the RCS Core Team demonstrated the power of a collaborative team of district and community stakeholders coming together with a shared commitment toward solving for a district equity challenge. In order to build sustainable and inclusive approaches to challenges facing education, district leaders should widen their aperture to include students, teachers, and community members to support design making. Together, teams can leverage the Inclusive Innovation process to improve conditions for decision making, co-leadership, and collaboration in service of improving experiences for students.

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Appendix

Table A-1. RCS Core Team Community Charter

Core Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Telling the truth! Receiving truth = honesty, integrity, authenticity • A flow of real info based on people's real experiences = empathy, authenticity • Trust is at the foundation of it all • Good communication • Being knowledgeable (asking people what they need with an open mind to understand how to effectively help people) • KEEP IT REAL → Authenticity (bring to the team and also create resources that are real and authentic; very important when going out to community and others; relatability brings trust; allowing others to be authentic and let their guard down)
Equity Commitments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure everyone has a voice • Speak up for perspectives that are not at the table • Be inclusive in how we frame conversations • Purposefully seek a variety of perspectives • Identify what needs are so we can meet people's actual needs • We seek to have the perspective of Black men and boys and Nepalese folk included in the work we do • We will communicate well with one another which will help us adapt to the ever-changing nature of the work • Have alternative solutions so that there is choice. Choice in us deciding what we're presenting and also in how implementation happens (for everybody; teachers, students, and core team) • Honor community leadership • Make sure everyone has the same correct information and there is transparency about the process • Make sure everyone's voice is heard and everyone has a chance to talk (have some structure to make sure everyone shares) • Come to conversation with grace remembering that we are all doing the best we can • Have the hard conversations about history bias and racial equity • Make meetings accessible
Vision Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HS students will be able to understand their role in history in order to teach the next generation • Students who struggle in school will be able to get the support they need and have their educational needs met in order to be successful adults with choices

Vision Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All students will be able to make people feel included in order to make their community feel welcomed • ELA and SS teachers will be able to integrate multiple cultural perspectives in order to help students to develop the compassion required to have an inclusive anti-racist mindset • All students will have a voice in our community and give our community more ideas on what to change • All teachers will be able to discuss and explore current events within the classroom from various cultural perspectives • Students will be able to acquire the tools they need in society to make it a better place than they inherited • Students who struggle academically will be able to see themselves in a classroom where everyone can be successful in order to achieve lifelong confidence • Reynoldsburg City Schools will employ more teachers of color to proportionally reflect student racial demographics in an effort to best support academic performance and [inclusion] • Parents will [have] effective ways to speak with their students to help them learn their value in order to find their purpose to add to their communities
Community Agreements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak your truth. We speak from our experiences instead of using generalizations • Assume good intentions but name and own our impact. Regardless of our intentions, the impact still occurs. Seek to repair and learn • Find comfort in discomfort. Lean into the feeling of discomfort – hearing, seeing, and learning about inequities • Make space. Everyone has something valuable to contribute, so be cognizant of how much air time you’re taking • No one knows everything, together we know a lot. We don’t expect perfection; instead, let’s learn together • Stories stay, learnings leave. We don’t share names or specific stories we heard in breakout rooms, but we do take away learnings

Table A-2. Quantitative Data from Implementation Cycles 1 and 2

	Items	Cycle 1	Cycle 2
Outcome 1	I felt comfortable leading a discussion about race, racism, and racial justice with my classes using the Socratic Seminar method.	1 agree	3 agree
	I felt supported (e.g., by community, families, and district and building administration) in leading discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students using the Socratic Seminar method.	1 agree	3 strongly agree
	I would feel comfortable leading a discussion about race, racism, and racial justice with my classes using the Socratic Seminar method in the future.	1 agree	2 agree 1 strongly agree
	I would feel supported (e.g., by community, families, and district and building administration) in leading discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students using the Socratic Seminar method in the future.	1 agree	3 agree
Outcome 2	Using the Socratic Seminar method to lead discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students allowed me to better understand their perspectives.	1 agree	2 agree 1 strongly agree
Outcome 3	Using to Socratic Seminar resources (guidebook and PD), I was able to create a classroom environment that supports mature and civil discussions about race, racism, and racial justice using the Socratic Seminar method.	1 agree	1 agree 2 strongly agree
	I am confident I can create a classroom environment that supports mature and civil discussions about race, racism, and racial justice using the Socratic Seminar method in the future.	1 agree	2 agree 1 strongly agree
	I felt safe and empowered leading planned discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students using the Socratic Seminar method.	1 agree	3 agree

	Using the Socratic Seminar method when leading discussions about race, racism, and racial justice helped me develop the skills to feel safe and empowered to have unplanned discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students.	1 agree	3 agree
	I would feel safe and empowered to have more planned discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students using the Socratic Seminar method in the future.	1 agree	3 strongly agree
	Using the Socratic Seminar method when leading discussions about race, racism, and racial justice would help me develop the skills to feel safe and empowered to have unplanned discussions about race, racism, and racial justice with my students.	1 agree	2 agree 1 strongly agree

Table A-3. Implementation Cycle Learnings and Next Steps Based on Debrief Data

Cycle 1 Learnings	Cycle 1 Next Steps
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers need ways to gauge emotional tension that arises in these sensitive conversations as well as discourse moves to use when tensions run high. • Students need a rubric for participation so they understand the standard level at which they must participate. • Students and teachers need training to understand the Socratic method generally • Students need preparation and guidance to ensure that discussions are successful and that all students feel safe and included. • Teachers need support to mitigate the challenge of time and balancing discussions with other classroom work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers were provided with resources and practical support from their district instructional coach. • Students were provided with a rubric and passive participation hand signals. • Students were given background information about Socratic Seminars. • Students were allowed to choose facilitation roles.
Cycle 2 Learnings	Cycle 2 Changes Made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of student-led seminars or discussions in various subjects seems to be productive, but there may be roles/responsibilities various students take on to facilitate the discussion (e.g. student facilitator, fact-checker, monitor of speaking time etc). • Preparing students for seminars or discussions through vocabulary, reading materials, and hand signals was helpful. • Teachers need to allow more wait time to provide space for students to truly lead discussions. • Observing other seminars and discussions to gain ideas and strategies was useful for the implementing teachers. • The connection of various subjects to social issues, such as slavery, race, and gender inequities may take some work on the teacher's part, but the connections can be made and it is important for students to see those connections. • Teachers need support with knowing when to intervene or correct misinformation in the discussion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers needed continued practice to develop the skills to lead Socratic Circles.
Cycle 3 Learnings	Cycle 3 Changes Made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community support can be leveraged through community Socratic Circles. • Students can lead dynamic conversations about race, racism, and racial justice in the context of community Socratic Circles. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be determined

Recommended Citation

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We extend our deepest gratitude to the students, parents, other community members, teachers, and district leaders (Reynoldsburg Core Team) that co-led the work that is the central focus of this report. Their commitment to this multi-year project and dedication to moving the needle toward educational equity never wavered. It is through their tremendous effort that the accompanying Open Educational Resources (OER) enabling teachers to lead racial discourse in the classroom have emerged.

We sincerely appreciate the contributions of each of the subject matter experts who co-designed and co-developed the OER along with the Reynoldsburg Core Team—[Teach Diverse Lit](#) and PBO Collaborative Consulting.

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