DIVERSITY SYMPOSIUM OF THOUGHT LEADERS: CULTIVATING EXCELLENCE & EQUITY

By L. Oliver Robinson, Superintendent, Shenendehowa CSD

On December 8, 2017, something special and powerful occurred in education in New York State. No, it wasn’t a political announcement or unveiling of a new reform measure. It was the gathering of more than 100 educators, board members and others committed to the work of transforming our schools into places where the value of each student stands alone and where diversity is embraced. The Council’s Commission on Diversity and Inclusivity held the Diversity Symposium of Thought Leaders – Cultivating Excellence & Equity.

Across the state, there is a clear recognition and appreciation that educational leaders have the awesome responsibility of fostering an environment that is conducive to learning and pedagogical mastery. The work and leadership revolve around the simple reality that the varied needs of all students must be first and foremost to extinguish the academic gap and yield the long-hoped-for results.

WHY is this cultivating excellence and equity so important?

As Frederick Douglass so eloquently penned, “Poets, prophets and reformers are all picture-makers—and this ability is the secret of their power and of their achievements. They see what ought to be by the reflection of what is and endeavor to remove the contradiction.”

This initiative is just the kind of work that needs to be happening, if public education is truly going to serve every student. I look forward to follow-up opportunities.

The New York State Council of School Superintendents is a professional and advocacy organization with over a century of service to school superintendents in New York State. The Council provides its more than 800 members with numerous professional development opportunities, publications and personal services, while advocating for public education and the superintendency.
VACANCIES

SUPERINTENDENT VACANCIES

Location............... Tri-Valley CSD
Grahamsville, NY
Salary.................. Up to $165,000

Location............... Haldane CSD
Salary.................. Open

Location............... Canton CSD
Salary.................. Open

Location............... Dryden CSD
Salary................. $140 – 160,000

Location............. Mohonasen CSD
Salary.................. Open

Location... Belleville Henderson CSD
Salary ......... Starting at $115,000

Location............... Dolgeville CSD
Dolgeville, NY
Salary ............. Starting at $125,000

Location............ Long Beach PS
Long Beach, NY
Salary .................. Open

Location........ South Glens Falls CSD
South Glens Falls, NY
Salary .................. Open

OTHER VACANCIES

Assistant Superintendent
for Finance & Operations
Location............... Fort Edward, NY
Salary .................. $145 – 160,000

Director of Physical Education,
Health & Athletics
Location............... Schalmont CSD
Salary .................. Open

High School Principal
Location........ Hewlett-Woodmere PS
Salary ................. Open

EXCELLENCE & EQUITY... CON’T FROM / 1

These are not times for imitating, these are times of embodying. These are not times for mimicking, these are times for manifesting. Action-oriented leadership, keenly focused on diversity and inclusivity is essential to eradicating the “what difference would it make, anyway” type attitude, that has discouraged, depressed and disabled far too many students.

The work of the commission is multi-faceted. It is about... Painting the picture... Seeing what ought to be...Reflecting on what is...Removing the contradiction.

The purpose of the commission is two-fold, ensuring that our schools and school districts have leaders who:

- Reflect the changing faces of education
- Possess the skills to be responsive to the changing faces of education

The notion of changing faces of education means that the educational context and landscape is far more diverse and far less homogeneous. As the market place, customer base and talent pool changes, so does the need for schools to adapt and change. Fundamentally, this is about cultivating an inclusive mind-set by:

- Nourishing the capabilities of leaders for learning for individuals from varied backgrounds,
- Building a culture of shared aspirations and personal responsibility, and
- Optimizing a diverse talent pool.

The question of WHY the work of the commission, and subsequently the commitment of every educational leader across New York is important, speaks to the fact that equity and excellence are not opposing concepts.

- Excellence without equity is simply privilege.
- Equity without excellence is merely tokenism.

Cultivating excellence & equity is more than just equity in opportunities; it extends to equity in excellent outcomes.

WHAT are we trying to achieve?

Equity in opportunity and equity in outcomes that is WHAT the work is about. WHAT needs to be done revolves around the Trifecta of People>> Process>> Performance.

When it comes to people, it is about not submitting to the norms when the norms are designed to discriminate, diminish, and disenfranchise. It is about leading to open blind eyes, which means your eyes as education leaders must be focused on the prize of cultivating excellence and equity. CONT / 3
From the people perspective it is about having an authentic agenda, recognizing that perceptions-interpretations-actions...are all tainted by our experiences, by our biases. It is about possessing an unwavering commitment of conviction, which means having the fortitude to challenge our own suppositions and challenge others to see their behaviors and impact of those behaviors. Finally, it is ensuring processes and policies are in place to help recruiting and developing diverse talent pools, proverbial pipelines...doing so with fidelity, focused on equity in outcomes.

From a process perspective, it is critical that we start by assessing our personal and organizational blind-spots. This calls for mitigating the unconscious and subtle biases that ultimately narrow the field of vision, of inclusion, of action and perpetuates the predilection for uneven outcomes that plague our school systems. Cultivating excellence and equity from a process perspective is about facilitating connectedness, leveraging diverse ideas and inputs, embracing and empowering divergent thinking.

From a performance perspective, extraordinary people and extraordinary efforts are fueled by devotion to the cause and not by fleeting expectations of fantastical outcomes. Performance is about challenging the status quo, knowing that it may be comfortable, but comfort is constraining. It is a luxury that paralyzes progress. Addressing the question of what needs to be done to realize the performance outcomes rests with the sanctioning of the inevitability of high performance for all students. Organizations get the results they get because they are designed to get those results.
Your Role in Addressing the Growing Mental Health Crisis Among Students

BE INFORMED. BE AWARE.

Be a part of the conversation. Our public school students depend on it.

ALL NYS EDUCATORS ARE INVITED

MARCH 1 and MARCH 22, 2018
Greece CSD
Odyssey Academy
750 Maiden Lane
Rochester, NY 14615
3:00 pm-6:00 pm

Cost covers BOTH sessions:
$100 SAANYS members
$150 for non-members

Sorry, single session registrations not permitted.

Who Should Attend:
All NYS current or aspiring educators.

For additional information, contact Karen Bronson at kbronson@saanys.org.

REGISTER ONLINE
Register by 2/15/18 to guarantee attendance, saanys.org

Part 1 - 3:30 pm-6:00 pm
3:00 pm – Registration and refreshments
Greece CSD, Odyssey Academy, 750 Maiden Lane, Rochester, NY

Keynote and Welcome: Ken Slentz, Superintendent, Skaneateles CSD and former NYSED Deputy Education Commissioner

Panel Discussion: Where are we now in NYS?
• What is a ‘trauma informed’ school?
• Early detection and response
• Working collaboratively and building partnerships for student mental health
• Learning life competencies to support social and emotional health

This panel will feature leaders from the Office of Mental Health, NYS Association of School Psychologists, Mental Health Association of New York State, Engaging Schools and NYSSBA. An interactive small group session will follow to focus on next steps.

Part 2 - 3:30 pm-6:00 pm
3:00 pm – Registration and refreshments
Greece CSD, Odyssey Academy, 750 Maiden Lane, Rochester, NY

Keynote: Dr. Hal Lawson, Professor of Educational Policy and Leadership and Social Welfare, University at Albany

Two Districts Tell Their Story:
Learn what you can do in your district to create solutions through training, partnerships, and advocacy strategies, from two NYS school districts, Cohoes CSD and Lyons CSD, that are doing the work and meeting with success at different stages of implementation. Their leaders will share their strategies and the important lessons learned along the way to implementation.
EXCELLENCE & EQUITY... CON'T FROM / 3

HOW do we as leaders for learning cultivate excellence and equity?

There is caution as to addressing the question of HOW. It can prove to be a trap, a quagmire. The question of how is unfortunately the place where people get too deep in the weeds, too fast. It is where cynicism about execution rages, paralysis from over analysis looms and rationalization to resort to the status quo lingers.

The work of the commission and the charge of cultivating excellence and equity is not a revolution. It is about a deliberate, intentional evolution of thought, action and outcomes.

The “how to” work is about fostering strong partnerships. It is about leveraging connections to garner advocacy and support. It is about building for viability and sustainability. The work is made lighter with more hands lifting.

There is a clear acknowledgement that we all enter the work at different points, with varied degree of knowledge and comfort-ability. The key is being committed to engage in collective work and reciprocal responsibility, being a resource for each other, sharing proven practices and engendering a collaborative spirit.

This is not about a one and done effort. The work is about now and about the future. The magnanimity of PERHAPS and the grandeur of IF is the crux of the HOW.

Perhaps if I had done this...if I had said this...if I had thought this...perhaps if.

The HOW is realized only after understanding the WHY and articulating the WHAT, which saves us from the tyranny of unassimilated facts.

The work of the commission is to help leaders for learning come to an authentic realization that true excellence in education can only be realized with the absolute manifestation of equity in opportunities and outcomes for learners and for leaders for learning. We must be avant-garde and assiduous in our pursuit. 

“
I was energized, motivated, and affirmed by the charge, because it genuinely challenges us to move out of our comfort zones in ways that matter for young people.

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Special thanks to our Title Sponsor, Signature Partner Utica National Insurance Group for supporting this important initiative!
The Council and LEAF, Inc. offer a special thank you to our Co-Chairs, **Luvelle Brown**, Superintendent of Ithaca City School District and **L. Oliver Robinson**, Superintendent of Schenendehowa Central School District.

We would also like to thank our Commission on Diversity and Inclusivity committee including:

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