Unrealized Impact 2.0

The Hard Truth About Where We Are and Ways to Move Forward

Michael Corral | Lucerito Ortiz | Xiomara Padamsee

Topline Summary

"Unrealized Impact 2.0: The Hard Truth About Where We Are and Ways to Move Forward" supports leaders of education organizations to grow, strengthen, and sustain diversity, inclusion, equity, and antiracism within their organizations. Since we published the original report in 2017, the field has acknowledged that advancing diversity, inclusion, and equity (DEI) alongside racial justice is critical, yet education organizations remain grossly unrepresentative of the students they serve and struggle to build and sustain inclusive cultures and equitable systems and structures. To honor the promises of the Brown v. Board of Education verdict more than half a century ago, this updated report assesses the state of DEI across the education field, identifies and shares lessons from organizations experiencing success, and supports leaders to define clear and tailored paths forward.

Below are the top headlines from our full report and illustrative examples of our findings, promising practices, and recommendations. What you won't find in this, our shortest version of the report, is an explanation of our values-based approach, methodology, or key terms. You're also missing out on a myriad of robust data points and visualizations supporting each key finding, detailed examples related to the promising practices, and specific actionable next steps related to our recommendations. For those additional details, we sincerely hope you'll read the full Unrealized Impact 2.0 report or the Executive Summary. For easy access, we've hyperlinked to to the Unrealized Impact 2.0 Full Report (FR) and Executive Summary (ES) throughout this Topline Summary.

Key Findings

- **Who Runs the (Education) World? Still White People. That Needs to Change.** The education sector remains overwhelmingly white, with little progress since our original 2017 study. 80% of the students served by organizations in our surveys are Students of Color, yet only 53% of staff at these organizations are People of Color. This gap only increases when looking specifically at organizational leadership roles. School district and charter school leadership teams are the most racially diverse, but only marginally so, as 73% of CEOs are white. Philanthropic organization leaders are the least diverse: 80% are white. The most pronounced representation disparity is within the fast-growing Latinx population, which comprises 40% of all students in our surveyed organizations but only 8% of leadership. Learn more: FR p18, ES p8

- **Diversity Without Inclusion and Equity Perpetuates Harm.** Diversity is important, but not enough. Many organizations believe diversity is the most accessible, actionable, and measurable aspect of DEI, and therefore the place to start. Many also believe that if you achieve diversity, the rest will naturally follow. That's not what the data shows. In fact, 25% of

surveyed organizations experienced relatively high levels of diversity without accompanying higher levels of inclusion or equity. At best, we see this exclusive emphasis on diversity result in a costly revolving-door staff attrition phenomenon along with perceptions of an assimilationist culture. At worst, organizations focused exclusively on diversity perpetuate pain and trauma that disproportionately impacts staff with historically marginalized identities. Learn more: FR p22, ES p9

- **Oppression Is at Work...at Work.** As we look across a multitude of identities, including race, sexual orientation, and gender identity, we find that nearly all participating organizations had significantly different staff experiences for at least one or more identity subgroups. For example, on the question of how likely staff are to feel they can bring their "whole selves" to work, more than half of organizations had a gap of at least 20 percentage points between their highest-scoring and lowest-scoring subgroups, and this gap was more than 30 percentage points for over a quarter of participating organizations. Further, white staff are far more likely to be the highest-scoring subgroups within their organizations (74%) than they are to be the lowest-scoring subgroup (26%). The inverse is true for Black (lowest scoring 75% of the time and highest scoring 25% of the time) and Multiracial staff (lowest scoring 77% of the time and highest scoring 23% of the time). Learn more: FR p23, ES p9

- **Oppression Compounds.** All people carry multiple and intersecting identities. Our data highlights that negative experiences often compound at the intersection of multiple historically marginalized identities. For example, while people who identify as LGBTQIA+ experience higher rates of bias across every racial and ethnic group, Black staff who also identify as LGBTQIA+ reported the highest rates of experiencing bias (46%). Learn more: FR p32, ES p10

- **Anti-Blackness Persists.** On nearly every measure, Black staff, and in particular Black women, report among the least positive experiences. Black women report one of the highest rates of experiencing bias among all women (39%), and among the least positive experiences on both the Inclusion and Equity Indices. Our data points to the fact that education organizations, even those working explicitly to advance equity and justice, have a persistent challenge around anti-Blackness — and may in fact be perpetuating it. Learn more: FR p36, ES p11

- **No Quick Fix:** The hiring of a single person, or even a team, on its own will not transform an organization's outcomes. For example, our data shows that organizations with Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) are no more likely than organizations without CDOs to have stronger DEI staff experiences. What matters most is not whether you create a position or structure to lead DEI and antiracism work but rather how it is implemented. Learn more: FR p37, ES p11

- **Stronger DEI, Stronger Organization.** Stronger staff experiences of DEI translate to stronger organizations. Our data reveal a direct correlation between staff experiences of DEI and their Net Promoter Score (a measure of satisfaction) as well as their Intent to Stay (a measure of retention). Given the organizational risks and costs of negative staff perceptions and high turnover, this data is a compelling call to action for organizations to invest in DEI work. Learn more: FR p39, ES p12

Promising Practices

Based on our analysis of practices most strongly correlated with Advanced DEI Profile placement (organizations scoring relatively high on diversity, inclusion, and typically also equity), we identified a number of promising practices. These practices are not one-size-fits-all solutions, but strategies that should be tailored to each organization's unique context:

- **Moving Past Random Acts of DEI:** Organizations that integrate DEI as part of their ongoing work, and align on a clear vision and direction for advancement of all three mutually reinforcing dimensions of diversity, inclusion, and equity simultaneously, are more likely to be Advanced. Learn more: FR p42, ES p14

- **Diversifying Leadership Beyond the CEO:** Organizations with more racial/ethnic diversity across their entire leadership team, including but not limited to the CEO, have more positive experiences with organizational diversity, inclusion, and equity overall. Further, staff at these organizations are more likely to agree on key individual metrics (like "our organization recognizes and eliminates exclusion"). Learn more: FR p45, ES p15

- **Sharing Power Through Meaningful Engagement:** Organizations that enact practices enabling authentic participation from across the organization (such as inviting employee feedback on DEI and including diverse input in decision-making) have more positive staff experiences of DEI. Learn more: FR p48, ES p15

- **Moving to Authentic Relationships:** DEI work requires people coming together to navigate through uncomfortable moments. Organizations that create structures to support authentic and trusting relationships and help staff members build skills to connect across lines of difference, engage in critical conversations, and spot and interrupt bias, are more likely to be Advanced. Such structures include mentoring programs, affinity groups, and DEI training. Learn more: FR p51, ES p16

- **Infusing Accountability for Things That Matter:** Organizations improve most at the things they measure. As such, we find that organizations that focus on equity-based outcomes of policies and processes (such as staff promotion, pay, and retention) rather than just inputs (such as candidate pool diversity) are more likely to be Advanced. Learn more: FR p54, ES p16

Recommendations

There is no "right" or "best" strategy to become diverse, inclusive, and equitable. Organizations and individuals need to utilize approaches tailored to their context and where they are on their journey. What follows are starting points to help support that process.

Personalize a Path Forward Based on Your DEI Profile:

Early Stage organizations are characterized by relatively low staff perceptions of diversity, inclusion, and typically low equity. Individuals who perceive their organization as Early Stage report experiencing bias at higher rates and tend to have low Intent to Stay and Net Promoter Scores. Learn more: FR p57, ES p18

- **Commit and Invest.** Clearly articulate the value and benefits of DEI. Put a stake in the ground related to DEI beliefs. Prepare for a multi-year, non-linear journey including appropriate resourcing to position efforts for success.

- **Define Your Terms.** Explore and define DEI beliefs and terms tailored to your organizational context to enable aligned expectations and consistency in the work.

- **Take Stock.** Surface and amplify often invisible pain points throughout the organization. Interrogate the root causes to help inform tailored next steps. Get clear on which assets to leverage for progress.

- **Plan and Prioritize.** Invest in a plan for forward progress. Build in mechanisms for transparency and accountability through implementation. Be sure to drive toward simultaneous growth across diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Diversified organizations are characterized by relatively strong diversity levels but lower levels of inclusion and typically also equity. Individuals who experience their organization as Diversified report experiencing bias at higher rates and tend to have low Net Promoter Scores and Intent to Stay. Learn more: FR p59, ES p19

- **Shore Up the Basics.** Commit and invest, define your terms, take stock of strengths and challenges, and create a strong plan for forward progress.

- **Interrogate and Shift Culture.** Identify and re-imagine cultural norms that contribute to exclusion. Make previously coded language and unspoken expectations explicit. Interrogate systems, policies, and structures to check for disparate impacts on marginalized identity groups.

- **Develop Capacity.** Support staff and leaders to build skill and comfort engaging in difficult conversations. Strategies include sharing feedback, (re)building trust, and spotting and interrupting inequitable practices and habits.

- **Ensure Accountability.** Implement accountability structures like DEI-infused competencies, a process for auditing decision-making through an equity lens, and 360 reviews built into performance management cycles.

Kindred organizations are characterized by relatively low diversity with high levels of inclusion and typically high equity as well. Individuals who experience their organization as Kindred experience bias at lower rates and tend to have high Net Promoter Scores and Intent to Stay. These organizations are commonly homogeneously white and do not enjoy the myriad benefits that come with a more racially/ethnically diverse staff. Learn more: FR p61, ES p21

- **Define the Value.** Align on and clearly communicate the benefits of diversity to an organization's mission, culture, and work, and name why these changes are critical and must happen now.

- **Rebuild for What You Want to Be True.** Interrogate for whom you want to be inclusive and equitable, who the current state serves, and what values, assumptions, and practices maintain current homogeneity. Then invest boldly in necessary shifts.

- **Increase Diversity.** Hire staff at all levels who bring new and different identities, beliefs, and experiences (especially racial/ethnic diversity). Intentionally sequence this to happen after efforts to rebuild culture and practices are meaningfully underway.

- **Prepare for Nonlinear Progress.** In our experience, Kindred organizations may see an initial decrease in staff experiences of inclusion and equity as they make progress on diversity. Kindred organizations must sustain their commitment and work, despite often nonlinear progress, to reach material improvements on DEI and antiracism in the long term.

Advanced organizations have relatively high staff perceptions of diversity, inclusion, and equity. Individuals who experience their organization as Advanced experience low rates of bias and have high Net Promoter Scores and Intent to Stay. There are two kinds of organizations that land in this profile: *Organic Advanced* organizations were typically founded with DEI and antiracism as a key part of the organizational fabric. Alternatively, *Learned Advanced* organizations developed into this DEI Profile through ongoing work over time. Learn more: FR p63, ES p22

- **Remain Diligent.** Avoid complacency. Regularly assess and reassess changing staff needs and refine strategies and priorities as the organization changes over time. Be sure to disaggregate staff experience data to discern and address any concerning trends and gaps in experience.

- **Support Staff to Toggle Between Worlds.** Advanced organization staff often toggle between internal culture experienced as strong on DEI and antiracism and broader external systems still deeply anchored in white supremacy culture. Acknowledge the effort of toggling by offering recovery time, celebration habits, and grace for one another.

- **Shift the Paradigm Toward liberation.** Make space for conversation and alignment around what role staff can and should play in deconstructing white supremacy culture in interactions with partners, funders, communities, and external systems. Where possible, push toward a new liberatory paradigm based in Radical Humanity as opposed to white supremacy.

- **Plan for Sustainability.**

  » **Organic Advanced: Codify Your Practices.** Document and codify the strategies and surrounding beliefs that led to the organization's success. This process can serve to concretize strong practices, making Organic Advanced organizations less susceptible to disruptions in DEI and antiracism progress during key inflection points.

  » **Learned Advanced: Make Sure Your Culture Takes Root.** Support staff (e.g., by offering coaching, making space for guided reflection, and employing real-time interruptions) to keep building the deeply ingrained habits and behaviors to live out DEI and antiracism beliefs in real time, every day.

Leveraging Your Vantage Point to Drive Progress:

Organizational Leaders: Learn more: FR p66, ES p23

- **Lead Here, Too.** Engage in a personal journey of reflection and growth to enable strong leadership (e.g., through vulnerability, narrating tensions, inviting alternative ideas, listening deeply, and choosing courage over comfort).

- **Honor Experiences, No Matter the Sample Size.** Provide clear avenues for input, strengthen conditions for psychological safety, understand and amplify historically silenced voices, and then center that understanding in planning and decision-making.

- **Make Necessary Investment to Enable the Work.** Cede and share power with others while supporting realistic allocations of time and budget to enable success.

Board Members: Learn more: FR p67, ES p24

- **Interrogate and Align.** Interrogate how individual identity and privilege impact board communications, decision-making, and governance on the individual and collective levels.

- **Diversify the Room.** Seek out, engage, and center perspectives from the communities served by bringing those individuals onto the board itself and creating accessible opportunities for meaningful influence beyond board membership.

- **Enable Authentic Participation.** Interrogate and actively disrupt the structural and cultural practices that have produced and sustained homogeneity. Instead engage in intentional power-sharing to center voices of the community

- **Find the Optimal Balance.** Find the right balance for providing support and accountability. Identify when to play a more active driving role in supporting the advancement of DEI and antiracism versus moments to follow the staff's lead by listening, learning, and absorbing.

Organizational Staff: Learn more: FR p69, ES p25

- **Divest from White Supremacy Culture.** Examine how personal identities, privileges, and biases impact working norms. Spot, question, and interrupt practices that are out of alignment with values. Leverage individual and collective voices to agitate, support, and hold the organization accountable.

- **Lean in/Lean out With Intention.** When operating with privilege, self-educate and engage in shared learning with other co-conspirators while honoring the experiences of colleagues with historically marginalized identities. When operating through the lens of historically marginalized identities, prioritize self-care and boundaries for healing and recovery.

- **Share the Burden.** When operating with privilege, avoid being complicit, interrogate and interrupt saviorism, and lean in to co-conspiring for progress. When operating through the lens of historically marginalized identities, identify, engage, and activate co-conspirators.

Funders: Learn more: FR p71, ES p27

- **Do the Work.** Make changes internally that the foundation seeks to advance externally while offering transparency with grantees about the ongoing journey.

- **Orient Around Those Most Impacted.** Orient decision-making to engage and center those most impacted. Create psychological safety, interrupt protection of white comfort, and mitigate the impact of hierarchy, privilege, and positional power to enable full involvement.

- **Invest in Leaders From Communities Served.** Invest in leaders who come from and represent the communities served. Shift the distribution of investments to disproportionately focus on leaders who come from communities served to help course-correct an inequitable system.

- **Set and Elevate the Standards.** Leverage power to fuel progress by establishing a set of baseline DEI and antiracism indicators as prerequisites for funding an investment. Invest in maintaining and growing a healthy ecosystem of support for organizations driving progress on DEI and antiracism.

It takes a sustained commitment, an explicit focus on addressing the most acute areas of pain, and an orientation toward continuous learning for organizations to interrupt ongoing oppression and transform the ways in which we operate. We must do better to create radically human environments where people of all identities feel — and are — safe, seen, valued, and included.

> *If you would benefit from partnership or support as you work to create an environment where you and your staff can truly thrive, please contact Promise54 here*