STUDENT VOICE

An Educator's Toolkit

BC CAISE

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect the territories of the First Peoples of what is now known as British Columbia.

We honour the many First Nations people who have lived on and cared for these lands for thousands of years and continue to do so today. We recognize the importance of their cultural heritage, laws, and relationships with the land that continue to shape, sustain, and enrich British Columbia. We are committed to learning, understanding, and respecting these connections and fostering meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and reconciliation.

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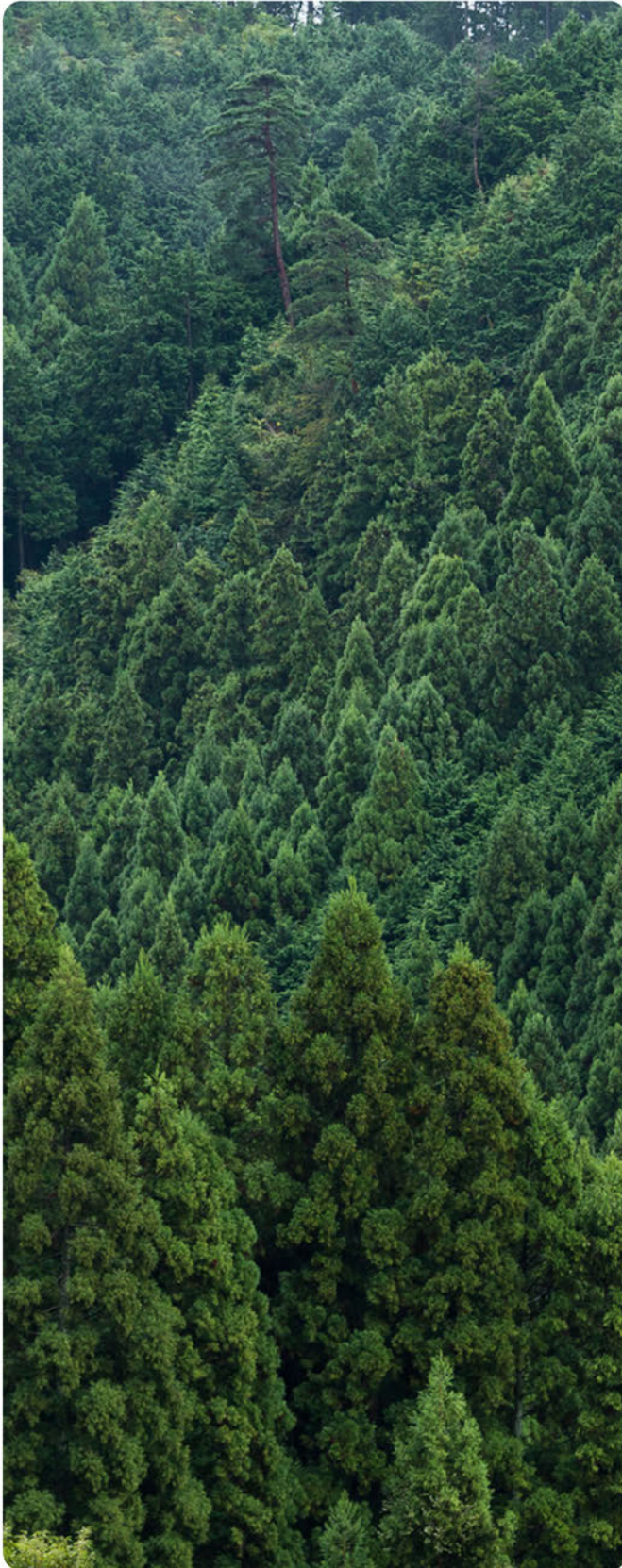
This resource includes content that addresses racism and systemic inequities in public education. Some sections may be sensitive or challenging to engage with, as they explore lived experiences and historical injustices. We encourage readers to approach the material with openness and care, recognizing the importance of these discussions in fostering understanding and positive change.

Special thanks is extended to Shane Safir, Dr. Jamila Dugan, and the Abbotsford School District.

STATEMENT OF INTENT

The information, tools and protocols shared in this toolkit are suggested as a way to support transformational change in the school system through the use of student voice. While focused on setting the stage for system transformation, this resource can be used at the classroom, school or district level to support the inclusion and empowerment of students in issues that matter to them.

UNDERSTANDING STUDENT VOICE

WHAT WE'RE LEARNING

Empowering students to participate in decision-making transforms their educational experience and fosters a more inclusive, collaborative school environment.

Within the K-12 public education system, student voice emphasizes the inclusion and empowerment of students in decision-making processes. Studies have shown that educators can create a more engaging and relevant learning experience by actively listening to students' perspectives. Key aspects within the student voice movement include collaborative and personalized learning, student-led initiatives, establishing feedback mechanisms, mentoring, advocacy, and cultural relevance. Implementing student voice enhances student engagement, motivation, and academic success while fostering critical thinking, leadership, and communication skills.

Recognizing that students' perspectives matter, student voice actively involves them in classroom, school, and district decision-making processes. This approach fosters greater agency and change through authentic listening and collaboration with students. It is a critical tool for shifting inequitable approaches and dominant discourses in our classrooms and schools by positioning students in leadership roles to support the transformation of our BC education system.

KEY BENEFITS

Increased Engagement

Improved Academic Outcomes

Enhanced Skill Development

CONNECTIONS TO THE K-12 ANTI-RACISM ACTION PLAN

According to the BC Ministry of Education, the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan is a framework designed to address systemic racism and discrimination in BC schools.

The plan has four main goals:

1 Strengthening accountability and leadership at all levels of the education system to support anti-racism policies and practices.

2 Enhancing curriculum and learning resources to reflect the diversity and history of BC communities and promote anti-racism education.

3 Supporting professional development and training for educators and staff on anti-racism, cultural competency, and human rights.

4 Increasing engagement and communication with students, families, and communities on issues of racism and discrimination, and how to prevent and respond to them.
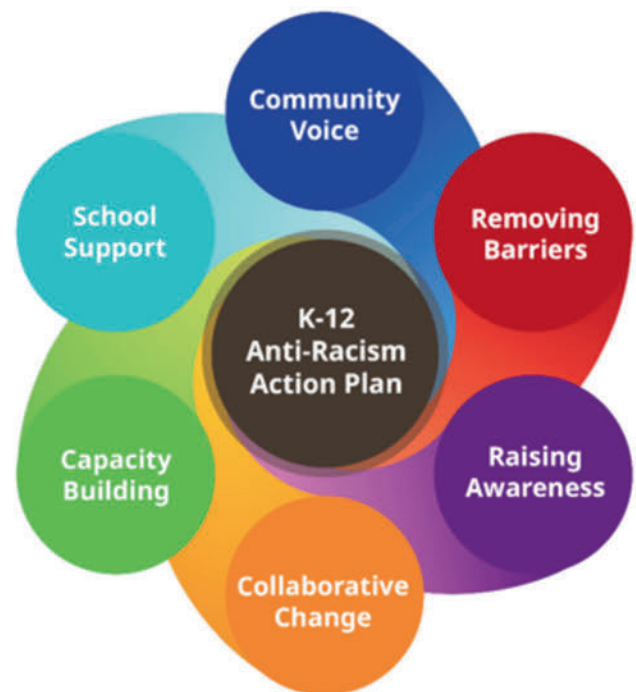
Image Source: BC Ministry of Education

Student voice is an integral part of the K-12 Anti-Racism Action Plan as it involves listening to and learning from the experiences and perspectives of students who have faced racism and discrimination in schools. It also means providing opportunities for students to participate in anti-racism initiatives and activities such as student-led clubs, campaigns, events, and projects. Additionally, student voice can help inform the development and evaluation of curriculum, learning resources, policies, and practices that aim to create a more equitable and inclusive education system for all students.

THE ROLE OF STUDENT VOICE IN ANTI-RACISM

Enhanced Sense of Belonging: By actively seeking and valuing the voices of students from diverse backgrounds, schools can foster an inclusive environment where every student feels they belong.

Improved Identity and Self-Esteem: When students are encouraged to express their thoughts on racism and their personal experiences, it helps them develop a stronger sense of identity and boosts their confidence.

Creating Safe Spaces: Schools that prioritize student voice create safe spaces for students to discuss and share their lived experiences of racism, which is crucial for mental health and well-being.

Developing Leadership Skills: Engaging in conversations about anti-racism helps students develop leadership skills as they learn to advocate for themselves and their peers.

Whole-School Approach: A whole-school approach to anti-racism puts student views at the center of all decisions, promoting a culture of equity and justice.

Informed Decision-Making: Incorporating student feedback into school policies and practices ensures that anti-racist efforts are informed by those who experience the impact of these policies firsthand.

EDUCATOR RESOURCES

Overview

The following tools offer approaches for meaningfully implementing student voice in classrooms and schools. The work focused on an equity imperative based on a framework inclusive of meaningful student voice actions. Strategic priorities and connection to extensive work and research should be considered to avoid tokenistic actions.

The educator resources and tools included in this document are adapted from the work of Shane Safir, author of *The Listening Leader* and *Street Data*, and are shared with her permission. We thank her for contributing to this student voice resource.

In conjunction with Shane Safir, work in the Abbotsford School District from 2019 – 2024 focused on an equity imperative based on a framework, inclusive of meaningful student voice actions. Consideration of the strategic priorities of a district, along with connection to the extensive work and research by Shane Safir should be considered as tools in this toolkit are used to avoid tokenistic actions.

INDIVIDUAL
Deepening Equity Consciousness

INTERPERSONAL
Healing for Equity
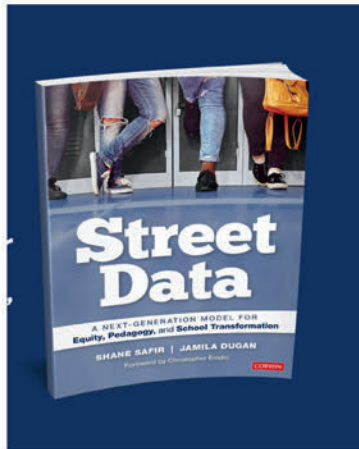
EQUITABLE & INCLUSIVE
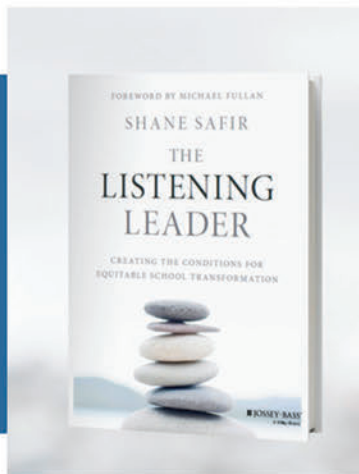*Schools*

STRUCTURAL
Dismantling Oppression

PEDAGOGICAL
Embracing Responsive Pedagogy

EDUCATOR RESOURCES

Education can be transformed by shifting focus away from big data like standardized test scores as the primary measure of equity and learning. Safir and Dugan break down the fundamentals of street data—what it is, how to gather it, and how it complements other data forms—to provide an actionable framework for school transformation.

The Listening Leader: Creating the Conditions for Equitable School Transformation supports teacher leaders, administrators, and district leaders to creatively tackle complex equity challenges, resulting in lasting change.

ABOUT SHANE SAFIR / www.shanesafir.com

For 25 years, Shane has worked across all levels of the education system, from classrooms to boardrooms, bringing passion, skill, and innovative solutions to the challenge of school transformation and educational opportunity for every child.

In 2003, she co-founded San Francisco's June Jordan School for Equity (JJSE), a national model praised by scholar Linda Darling-Hammond for its success with low-income students of color. For over a decade, Shane has coached and developed hundreds of leaders in schools and educational organizations across the U.S. and Canada.

An innovator with a unique blend of leadership and instructional expertise, Shane inspires educators to transform their schools into equitable learning environments. She contributes regularly to Edutopia and ASCD's Educational Leadership and is the author of The Listening Leader and Street Data, which focus on equitable school transformation.

Shane holds degrees from Brown University, Stanford University, and California State University East Bay. She is the proud mother of Camilo and Maximo and is bilingual in Spanish.

TOOLS FOR
LISTENING TO STUDENTS

UNCOVERING: Street Data Analysis Protocol

Time Required: 20-30 minutes per round

Seek root causes over quick fixes.

Purpose: In the Uncover phase, we probe available street data to uncover the root causes of our equity challenge. It is critical to do this in a collaborative fashion by studying the data with a team. By listening deeply to voices at the margins, we have disrupted the "improvement" habit of diving into planning before gathering street data. Even at this stage, however, it's easy to jump into a solution space before we have thoroughly explored the data. Uncovering helps us slow down, reflect, and *value* the street data by making it the centerpiece of team conversations. A good team meeting will help us stretch our thinking and assumptions.

Facilitation: This protocol uses a structured format of question, reflection, and dialogue to help the presenter analyze the street data they have gathered and unearth root causes. It takes place in trios or small groups, with participants taking turns presenting artifacts and getting the benefit of collegial attention. Each "round" of the protocol should take a minimum of 15 minutes though longer is fine as well. Be sure to designate a note-taker who is not the presenter for each round.

Key Concepts

- **Confirmation bias**: The tendency to interpret new evidence as confirmation of one's existing beliefs or theories.
- **Listening without an agenda**: Applying a mindful awareness to taking in street data without jumping to conclusions; counteracts confirmation bias.
- **Nonverbal cues**: Wordless signals that illuminate people's emotions, social needs, and cultural norms, they account for 55% of meaning conveyed in interactions that have emotion at play.[1]
- **Group dynamics**: The positive and negative forces and dispositions that arise within a group.
- **Power framework**: An analytic tool developed by Brené Brown to understand and unpack the human tendency to exert power *over* (Being right is more important than getting it right) vs. build power *with*, *to*, and *within* others (Getting it right is more important than being right).

Process

1. **Overview and framing:** Presenter provides a brief overview of the equity challenge/inquiry question they are investigating before sharing their street data artifact(s). (5-8 minutes)

2. **Clarifying questions:** Partners ask any yes/no, factual questions they need to understand in order to fully engage in the protocol. (3-4 minutes)

3. **Low-inference observations:** Group members (can include the presenter) engage in several rounds of strict observation. Possible sentence starters include: *"I heard…" "I saw…" "I observed…"* Refrain from interpreting the data at this point. (5-7 minutes)

4. **Uncovering:** Group engages in another series of rounds in which participants lift up questions, possible interpretations, and additional data needs. This might sound like: *"I wonder…" "A new question this raises for me is…" "A pattern that may be emerging is…" "Additional street data we may need is…"* (5-9 minutes)

5. **Presenter's final words:** Presenter shares what s/he/they learned, what is sticking with then, and what a next step of two might be. (2 minutes)

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[1]A. Mehrabian, 1981.

Equity Transformation Cycle Tool

Opportunity/Challenge Area
- Mental health/social-emotional learning
- Assessment (tests, grades)
- Pedagogy (teaching and learning)
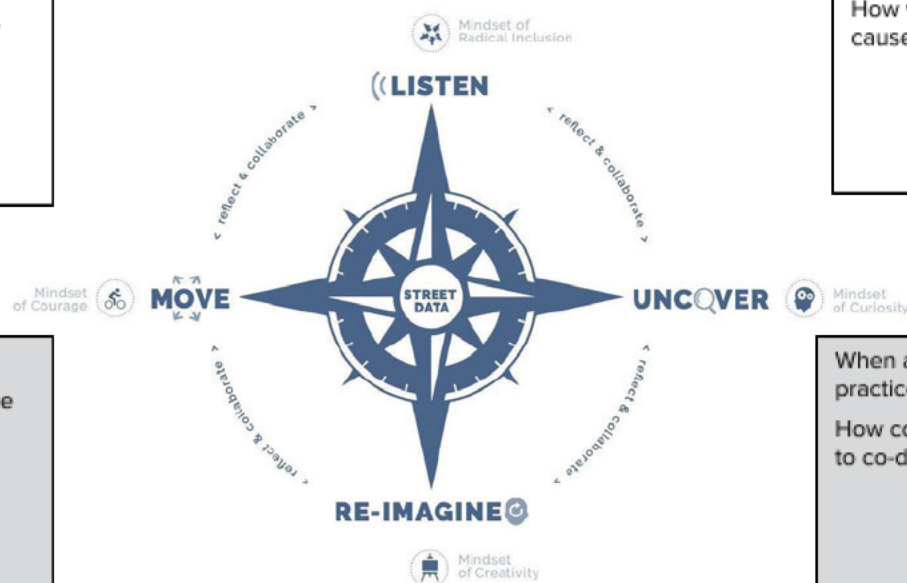- School policies (dress codes, bathrooms)

Emerging Problem of Practice (After sifting through satellite and map data, generate an initial *inquiry question* and any other questions coming up)

Which students do we need to listen to through a lens of radical inclusion?

HOW will we gather Street Data at the margins? (Consult the 10 ways tool or Chapter 3, 4, & 8))

When can our team meet analyze the street data with a mindset of curiosity? (November 30th?)

How will we uncover hidden stories and root causes of inequities?

Mindset of Radical Inclusion

((LISTEN

MOVE — Mindset of Courage

STREET DATA

UNCOVER — Mindset of Curiosity

RE-IMAGINE — Mindset of Creativity

reflect & collaborate

How will we move with courage and clarity?

What new approaches will we try as we embrace vulnerability?

When and how might we reimagine our current practices and systems, based on what we hear?

How could we bring *students* to the design table to co-design with us?

Street Data Mini-Action Plan

Gathering street data requires deep listening, keen observation, and trust. Street-level data can help us determine the root causes of our equity challenges and shape our next moves in a thoughtful, intentional way.
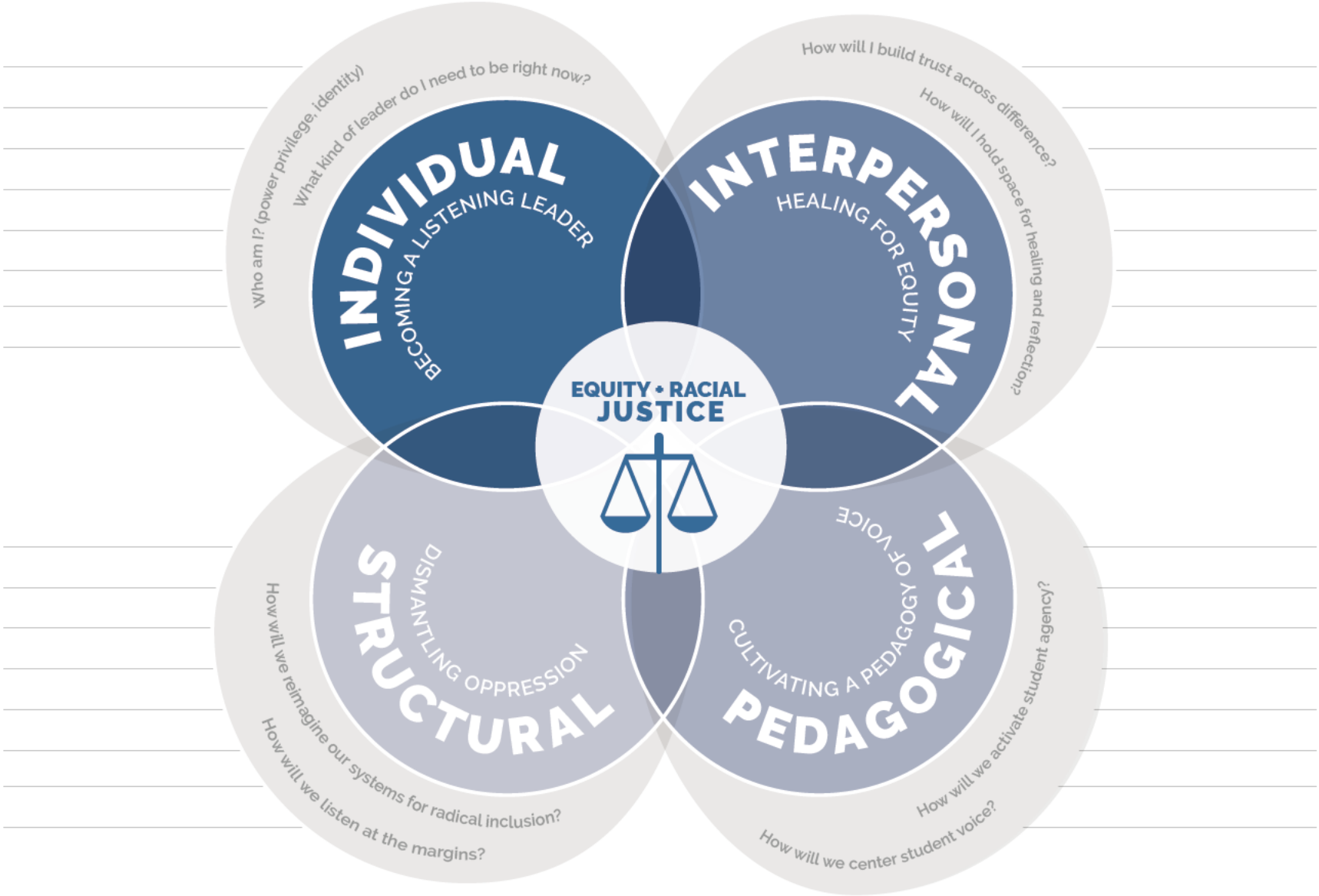
Planning Questions	Reflection Questions
1. **What is an equity challenge you want or need to probe in the next 4-6 weeks? What data (satellite, map, or street) led you to identify that challenge?**	*Why does this equity challenge matter to you and the team?*
2. **Identify a group of students** you want to listen to better understand the root causes and the impact of your equity challenge. Name that group below: be specific.	*Who is most affected by the problem you are trying to solve?* *Whose voices are least heard but most critical to hear?*

3. **Identify the structure(s) you will try out to gather street data. Set a # goal of how many focus groups or interviews you want to conduct.**
   a. Focus Groups
   b. Audio Interviews
   c. Empathy Interviews
   d. Other:
 	
Goal: **Deadline:**
	Can the data be used in a formative way to open people up to change?

4. Generate 3-5 anchor questions you will pose to students, from a place of curiosity and compassion:	*Sample Questions* ● What is going well for you in school right now? What is something you're proud of? ● What is your biggest challenge or frustration? ● (If an inciting event) How did the incident affect you? ● What do you want or need to heal from what has happened? ● What changes would you like to see in our (classroom or school), and why are they important to you? ● What feedback do you have for me to make our school more equitable and inclusive?
5. The *way* we listen is as important as the act of listening. How do you want to show up as listeners? How will you model deep listening in your tone, body language, and framing of the sessions?[1] Set an intention below.	*How can the process of collecting data build trust and model mature empathy?*

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[1] Mature Empathy can be a powerful stance to enter listening sessions with. See page 110, Table 5.1 for the Six Stances of a Listening Leader and pages 116-120 for more info on Mature Empathy.

LISTENING LEADERSHIP **LENSES**

INDIVIDUAL
BECOMING A LISTENING LEADER

Who am I? (power privilege, identity)

What kind of leader do I need to be right now?

INTERPERSONAL
HEALING FOR EQUITY

How will I build trust across difference?

How will I hold space for healing and reflection?

EQUITY • RACIAL JUSTICE

STRUCTURAL
DISMANTLING OPPRESSION

How will we reimagine our systems for radical inclusion?

How will we listen at the margins?

PEDAGOGICAL
CULTIVATING A PEDAGOGY OF VOICE

How will we activate student agency?

How will we center student voice?

Example of Kiva Panel Prep Sheet

Hello everyone! Thank you for agreeing to be on a Kiva Panel at principal/vice principal retreat on January 31st. The Kiva Panel is an opportunity for the leaders in the room to hear your voices, perspectives, and insights as students and valuable Abbottsford community members January 31st is devoted to the topic of **educational equity**, including:

- *What does it mean to create an equitable system in which every student gets what he or she needs to thrive?*
- *How can we create schools in which every student feels seen, valued, and cared for?*
- *How can we eliminate racial and other forms of bias from our schools?*
- *How can we create schools that nurture the cultural wealth of indigenous learners?*

The panel will begin at roughly 1:00 pm, but please plan to join me for lunch at noon to prepare together for this experience. You may use this sheet to reflect on and jot down **in advance** any thoughts you have on the panel questions. I invite you to be honest and heartfelt in your responses. The leaders in the room will be reflecting on your words in small groups, but they will <u>not</u> have a chance to ask you questions so you do not have to respond to on-the-spot questions. I will be facilitating the panel, and you can learn more about me and my work at **www.shanesafir.com**. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or want to talk through your ideas!

Question 1: Talk about a powerful, deep learning experience you have had in your school career. What mattered to you about that experience?

Question 2: Share an experience of racism, bias, or inequity that you have faced in your school career. How did that experience impact you as a learner and as a human being?

Question 3: Community cultural wealth is defined as a range of "knowledges, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005). When you think about your own community, what is one element of cultural wealth that you value and are proud of? How could schools do a better job of valuing and uplifting that cultural wealth?

Question 4: If you could wave a magic wand to create more equity and inclusion for indigenous learners in **your** schools, what would you change (or add) and why?
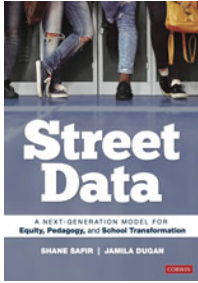
Hello everyone! Thank you for agreeing to be on a Kiva Panel at *[insert meeting, date, time, zoom link]*. The Kiva Panel is an opportunity for the *[leaders, teachers, staff, etc]* in the room to hear your voices, perspectives, and insights as students and valuable community members. This meeting is devoted to the goal of **educational equity**, including:

- *What does it mean to create an equitable system in which every student gets what he or she needs to thrive?*
- *How can we create schools in which every student feels seen, valued, and cared for?*
- *How can we eliminate racial and other forms of bias from our schools?*
- *How can we create schools that nurture the cultural wealth of all learners, particularly those who have been historically marginalized?*

The panel will begin at *[insert time]*, but please plan to join me/us *[insert an optional prep meeting time and place]* to prepare together for this experience. You may use this sheet to reflect on and jot down **in advance** any thoughts you have on the panel questions. I invite you to be honest and heartfelt in your responses. The adults in the room will be reflecting on your words in small groups, but they will <u>not</u> have a chance to ask you questions so you do not have to respond to on-the-spot questions. I will be facilitating the panel, and you can learn more about me and my work at **www.shanesafir.com**. Feel free to reach out to me if you have any questions or want to talk through your ideas!

- Shane Safir

Question 1: Talk about a powerful, deep learning experience you have had in your school career. What mattered to you about that experience?

Question 2: Share something about your life experience or journey that has shaped you and that your educators wouldn't know just by meeting you.

Question 3: Share an experience of racism, bias, or inequity that you have faced in your school career. How did that experience impact you as a learner and as a human being?

Question 4: Community cultural wealth is defined as a range of "knowledges, skills, abilities and contacts possessed and used by Communities of Color to survive and resist racism and other forms of oppression" (Yosso, 2005). When you think about your own community, what is one element of cultural wealth that you value and are proud of? How could schools do a better job of valuing and uplifting that cultural wealth?

Question 5: If you could wave a magic wand to create more equity and inclusion for indigenous learners in our schools, what would you change (or add) and why?

Epistemology Map
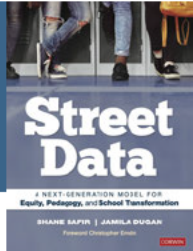
IDENTITY

- When did you first understand your racial identity/"the skin you are in"?
- How did you know?
- Who played a role &/or was involved?

MASTERY

- Recall a moment where you experienced mastery over something that mattered to you.
- Was it valued by others in the community?
- Did your experience of success match the dominant *definition* of "success" or was there a mismatch?

BELONGING

- Recall an experience or moment of deep connection and wellbeing in school. (*If that's hard to find, sit with your feelings.*)
- Who or what contributed to that experience?

EFFICACY

- Recall a moment where you took action around something you cared about...
- Was it painful? What push-back did you get?
- What helped you to be courageous?

EFFICACY
MASTERY
BELONGING
IDENTITY
AGENCY

Student Voice: Considerations & Tools

When gathering and centering student voice, it is important to be attentive to above the green line conditions (structures, processes, protocols) as well as below the green line conditions (relationships, identity/purpose, information flow).

Sharing Power *With* Students: Preparing Adults	Engaging Youth with Care and Respect
Below are 3 tools that will help you set the stage for sharing power with students and not defaulting to defensiveness.	*Below are 3 tools that will help you engage students in inclusive, supportive, and respectful ways.*
● **Deep Listening Dyads:** Prime adults to listen with dyads that promote mature empathy. Sample prompts include: ○ *Reflect on a time where a student shared something that was hard to hear. How did you feel/experience this in the moment? How did you react?* ○ *Share a time when you wanted to speak up to an adult/authority figure as a young person but were afraid. What conditions did you need to find your voice?* ○ *Reflect on an experience with authority as a young person. What happened? How did you feel? What did you learn?* ● **Mindfulness:** Facilitate a short mindfulness practice to cultivate awareness of how our bodies respond to hard feedback and how to metabolize those sensations. ● **Setting Intentions:** Invite your colleagues to name an explicit intention around sharing power with students: *What is your intention around sharing power and listening, and why does it matter to you?* Share in pairs or small groups.	● **Preparing the Youth:** Meet with your students in advance and use a talking circle to allow them to express how they feel about sharing their experiences with adults. ● **Student Voice Guidelines:** Make it clear that *they* get to decide what they do and don't want to share of their stories. Explain that the goal is to feel a sense of agency and self-authorship. Finally, convey that while emotion and even tears are welcome, they can also step away or take a break at any point if they feel too vulnerable. ● **Pre-journaling:** Always share the prompts with students in advance so they have time to reflect and/or journal. In your pre-meeting, you may offer them a chance to try out what they wish to share. ● **Microaffirmations:** Be ready to employ these "tiny acts of opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening" to affirm the young people who have joined you. Use gentle touch, nonverbal cues, and verbal affirmations to convey that you are holding and caring for them.

TOOLS FOR
ACTION PLANNING
WITH STUDENTS

»

There has to be a serious focus on the voices of students within a building. I'm really big on asking students: "What do you think will work for you?" "I know that some school leaders will say, 'That takes up too much time.' [But] the work would be easier if students had input in shaping it and if leaders, as well as teachers, trusted the input of students.

-Dianne Smith, professor of urban leadership and policy studies in education

6 Ways to Gather Student Street-Level Data

> Listening Leaders recognize that much of the data we need is right before us if we choose to listen: speaking, sending emails, showing up in our offices (and classrooms) every day.

As we begin an inquiry cycle, we need simple, yet structured, ways to gather Level 3 student-centered street data. The purpose of gathering this data is threefold:

- First, to triangulate student *experiences* and *voice* with Level 1 and 2 measures such as test scores, school-wide assessments, and surveys

- Second, to build our muscle at listening to student voice and observing student engagement as primary sources of data

- Third, to build *trust* with students as we value and honor their experiences

It's important to note that any tool is only as good as its user. How we implement these tools—in particular our nonverbal communication, the quality of the questions we pose, and the openness and humility with which we approach students—is as important as the data itself. Chapters 6 and 8 of *The Listening Leader*, "Practicing Deep Listening" and "Listening to Students," serve as text companions to this phase of the inquiry cycle.

Here are a few ways to get started:

1. **One-on-One Interviews**: Interviewing a student one-on-one is a great way to build relational capital and get underneath to the root causes of learning or behavioral challenges. Invite a focal student to meet with you at a time that works for both of you. Tell the student that your purpose is to listen and get to know him or her better so that you can be a better teacher on his or her behalf. See page 253 for a set of one-on-one questions for adults that you can easily adapt.

2. **Focus Groups/Audio Interviews**: Another powerful way to listen to students is through a confidential focus groups or audio interviews with a small group of students. Convening multiple students in the same space can lower anxiety levels and allow young people to build off one another's ideas. Team up with a colleague, find a quiet classroom, and invite half a dozen students to participate. If you audio record the session, edit it to a digestible segment to share with your grade-level team, department, or PLC. See pages 174-175 of *The Listening Leader* for an example of how audio interviews can work as well as sample questions.

3. **Feedback Interviews**: These are similar to audio interviews, but instead of asking students to tell their stories, you ask them for specific feedback on your teaching practice. This can be a

preliminary step toward co-generative dialogues, a structured practice for getting student feedback (Emdin, 2016). Feedback interviews are described on page 177-178 of *The Listening Leader*.

4. **Shadow a Student Challenge**: Put on your tennis shoes and "be" one of your students for an entire day. Get his or her permission, dress comfortably, meet your student before school, and approach observation with a notebook and an open and curious mind. Be sure you set aside time to study the experiential data you've gathered, looking for patterns and raising questions. See pages 172-173 for more details.

5. **Classroom Participation Tracker**: Oral participation is one important indicator of engagement and inclusion. Create a simple "equity tracker" with students' names on the left side and a column for each day of the week. Carry it around on a clipboard, and each time you call on a student or someone volunteers to speak, jot down a tally mark. At the end of the week, add up your marks and analyze the data: Who is participating the most? Who is participating the least? What patterns of participation do I see with respect to race, gender, language of origin, learning ability, location in the room, etc.? Set a small participation goal for the following week. This practice is profiled in my Edutopia blog called "3 Practices to Promote Equity in the Classroom" (12/1/15).

Sample Equity Tracker: Week of May 25th

Student	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Mona	I		III		HHH

6. **Academic Language Tracker**: The ability to internalize and use academic language in class is a gatekeeper skill for many English Language Learners and historically marginalized students. By paying attention to which students are and are *not* employing disciplinary language, you'll gain critical data with which to create scaffolds. Select one or two focal students to listen to during class, preferably when they are engaged in a group task or discussion. Script the student's comments or audio-record them; then take time to analyze the transcript. How many times does the student incorporate academic language? If they attempt to do so, but struggle with correct usage, note that as well. What evidence do you hear that the student understands the *structure* of academic language, not just key terms. Can the student participate in ways that would make him or her feel confident in a college classroom? If not, how will you support this student?

Planning Prompt: Choose ONE or TWO of these strategies to try. Write it down.

Strategy I'll try	Action Plan/Steps

Helping Trios (modified)
Time Required: 30-45 minutes

Purpose: To help an individual think about a teaching or leadership dilemma, issue, or communication in new ways through a structured format of question and response.

Structure: The protocol takes place in trios, with participants taking turns presenting. Each round takes 10 to 15 minutes total before the group moves on to the next person.

Facilitation and Tips: This protocol allows the presenter to share a dilemma, challenge, or emerging piece of work. During the discussion portion of the rounds, as awkward as it may feel, do not address the presenter directly, but rather talk about him or her in the 3rd person. This allows the presenter the "freedom" of simply listening and reflecting while their trio partners engage with the work.

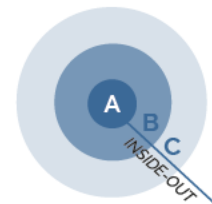| **Round #1**	**Partner 'A'**	**12 minutes**
3 minutes	'A' shares equity imperative while 'B' & 'C' listen & take notes	
5 minutes	'B' & 'C' have a conversation to: • Discuss what they heard • Share their reactions and perspectives • Articulate reflective questions for the presenter's consideration ("I wonder if…") 'A' listens and takes notes	
2 minutes helpful?"	'A' responds to what they heard— "What felt most	

Round #2	**Partner 'B'**	**12 minutes**

Round #3	**Partner 'C'**	**12 minutes**

Bring the courage, bring the passion.

A FRAMEWORK FOR EQUITY

What is equity? Equity means providing every student and adult with the resources he or she needs to learn and thrive. That sounds simple, but we know from lived experience that it is incredibly complex. There are multiple levels at which our work can promote or hinder equity, and it is important to take a balcony view of those elements. This doesn't mean that we need to launch multiple initiatives at the same time, but we should definitely cultivate awareness and a strategy that keeps all three elements on our radar.

	A Personal/Interpersonal Level Collective Consciousness	**B** Cultural Level Shared Practices	**C** Systems Level Equity By Design
DEFINITION	*Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive & just conditions for all**	*Noticing and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, cultural assets, and interests that every person possesses*	*Eliminating predictable patterns of success and failure, dismantling structural barriers to access and opportunity*
KEY BARRIER	**Implicit Bias:** The attitudes and stereotypes that unconsciously affect a person's perceptions, actions, and decisions.	**Cultural Indifference:** The failure to recognize and respond positively to difference, read subtle cultural cues, and embrace humility and a learning stance with respect to cultural difference.	**Structural Racism:** The ways in which systems of education, employment, transportation, housing, health care, and criminal justice conspire to produce racialized outcomes, regardless of the intentions of individual people.
KEY COMPONENTS	• Cultivating awareness of implicit bias, power, privilege, and identity • Cultivating awareness of microaggressions and their impact • Increasing personal capacity to build humanizing relationships	• Developing culturally responsive practices at every level • Listening deeply to students, families, and colleagues • Responding affirmatively to difference and to struggle • Creating counter-narratives about your students, families, and community	• Cultivating awareness of inequitable systems in your organization including structural barriers to equity • Targeting resources to students furthest from opportunity • Redesigning structures and systems to increase access to opportunity
KEY AREAS OF WORK	• Designing a staff retreat • Developing an equity PD plan • Facilitating staff reflection on identity, bias, and behavior • Building capacity of equity teacher leaders • Cultivating self-reflection among leaders: *What am I modeling? Do I call out breaches, reinforce biases, or support staff when incidents occur?*	• Piloting systems and rituals for an equitable classroom *(Ch. 8)* • Piloting systems and rituals for engaging families at the margins *(Ch. 7)* • Developing rituals and routines for engaging your staff *(Ch. 11)* • Redesigning staff meetings *(Ch. 10)* • Launching a collaborative inquiry process or equity learning walks	• Redesigning your master schedule • Reallocating resources through an equity lens • Restructuring your staffing model to increase equity • Redesigning guidance and counseling systems • Rethinking structures and strategy for culture and climate (rituals, routines, student behavior systems, restorative practices, re-entry protocols)

* Definitions adapted from the National Equity Project.

APPENDICES

The Art of Conversation
by author Margaret Wheatley

Behaviors that help take conversation to a deeper realm:

1. We acknowledge one another as equals

2. We try to stay curious about each other

3. We recognize that we need each other's help to become better listeners

4. We slow down so we have time to think and reflect

5. We remember that conversation is the natural way humans think together

6. We expect it to be messy at times

7. We meet people where they *are*, not where we want them to be (added to Wheatley's list)

"Listen for what surprises you. Notice what disturbs you. If what you say surprises me, I must have been assuming something else was true. If something you say disturbs me, I must believe something contrary to you. My shock at your position exposes my own. These moments are great gifts."

"We know how to have deep conversations, but we sometimes have to let go of our modern ways of being in meetings to get past the behaviors that keep us apart. We have cultivated some bad behaviors – speaking too fast, interrupting others, monopolizing the time, giving speeches or pronouncements. Many of us have been rewarded for these behaviors. We've become more powerful through their use. But none of them lead to wise thinking or healthy relationships. They only drive us away from each other."

- Margaret Wheatley, *Turning to One Another*

1. **Audio feedback interviews:** Conduct an audio-recorded focus group with students or parents whose voices are typically absent from the decision-making table. Begin by identifying an equity challenge that you want to gain insight around. Invite a small group of stakeholders to engage in thirty to forty-five minutes of discussion. Prepare and ideally share your questions in advance. Afterward, transcribe and edit the data to highlight key themes and comments (more on this in Chapter 8). With participant permission and/or full anonymity, these data can be used at a staff meeting to ground discussions of the equity challenge.

2. **Listening campaigns:** Listening campaigns involve a set of interviews or focus groups from which the listener assembles and organizes anonymous quotes by theme. The data are usually shared back to the community as an opportunity for growth and reflection. Conduct a series of listening sessions to gain insight and empathy toward a group of people at the margins, for example, LGBTQ students, parents of English language learners, or students with learning differences. Be sure to tap a group of at least five stakeholders so that you are able to get a sense of cross-cutting patterns.

3. **Equity participation tracker:** When visiting a classroom, track who is called on to participate by the teacher, who volunteers to speak, and who is receiving positive versus negative feedback (verbal and nonverbal). Break this data down by race, gender, English-language learner status, gender, learning differences, and other factors. This street data tool will help you study the micro-pedagogies of equity.

4. **Ethnographies:** If you are part of a team that meets on an ongo-ing basis, consider doing an in-depth ethnography of a group of students. This deep exploration of a campus subculture—for example a group of high-achieving Indigenous students—will entail interviews, observations, and soliciting written reflections from the learners. Begin by articulating an authentic inquiry question that you will investigate through the process. Obviously, get parent and student permission first.

5. **Fishbowls:** Facilitate a fishbowl dialogue to draw out the experi-ences and perspectives of a group at the margins. The structure is simple: A small group engages in discussion in the middle of the room, while other participants encircle this group and listen intently, jotting down key words and phrases. For example, district staff might facilitate a fishbowl of principals, asking, "What is your daily experience like as school leader? What conditions do you need to be successful? What could we do differently to support you?" Principals can facilitate a fishbowl of teachers, parents, or paraprofessionals. Teachers can facilitate a fishbowl of students. Be sure you have identified a central equity challenge; develop and share the questions beforehand with participants. Panel discussions can serve a similar role. Be willing to listen, even when it's hard to hear.

6. **Home visits:** Home visits are a powerful and underutilized street data tool. Over the years, I have found that many educators are fearful of doing home visits. They're either afraid of high-poverty neighborhoods and communities of color due to unconscious or conscious racism; they're afraid of imposing on families in their private sphere; or both. In the years that led to the founding of June Jordan School for Equity, the school where I was a principal, I had the privilege to do hundreds of home visits as part of a community organizing drive. I always asked the family if they felt comfortable having me in their home or preferred to meet in a community space, like a church hall or café. More often than not, they wanted to host the visit and took pride in welcoming me to their home. I felt deeply honored and, more importantly, gained street-level data on the family and student: their cultural wealth, assets, hopes, dreams, and fears.

7. **Shadow a student:** There is perhaps no better way to empathically understand a student's experience than to put on your tennis shoes and shadow him or her. Put on your comfy shoes and, with permission of course, follow a student through his or her school day. This is particularly impactful if done by a network of leaders and focused on students who are currently outside the sphere of success. My colleague Jennifer Goldstein, a professor of educational leadership at California State University Fullerton, has principal candidates shadow an English learner for a day, with tremendous impact. A principal can also shadow a teacher throughout his or her day, and a district leader would do well to shadow a principal or assistant principal.

8. **Equity-focused classroom scan:** Do a demographic scan of different types of classes on campus—gifted, remedial, honors, academies, career tech, advanced placement, and so forth. Note the distribution of students by race/ethnicity, gender, ELL status, students with special needs, and so forth. With this data in hand, facilitate a leadership team discussion about the current landscape of equity and access at your site, where to go next for street data, and what your equity imperative is to address this.

9. **Structured meeting observations:** Be a fly on the wall in an upcoming team meeting. Take notes on who speaks and who does not, much like the equity participation tracker. Take notes on how the facilitator responds to different participants and whether the emotional valence of the response (positive, negative, neutral) tracks to race, gender, tenure, or other factors. Capture observation notes on the group dynamic—the energy of the room, including the ways in which people build off each other's ideas, respectfully challenge each other, and ask questions to probe one another's thinking.

10. **Student-led community walks:** I have written about community walks for *Edutopia* (Safir, 2017a) and in *The Listening Leader* (Safir, 2017b). They are an invaluable tool for flipping the dash-board and uplifting the expertise of students and parents. To experiment with this strategy, identify social or cultural groups in your community about whom it would benefit educators to gain deeper knowledge. Invite students from those groups to meet with you to design a professional-learning experience for educators, typically comprised of two afternoons: one to read about the community and listen to student presenters and one to follow students through a guided community walk of their neighborhood. Support and empower students to design this experience with any tools at your disposal—PowerPoint slides, panels of community leaders, a lunch hosted by families in the community, an itinerary that includes important sites (markets, churches, community centers, etc.), and people.
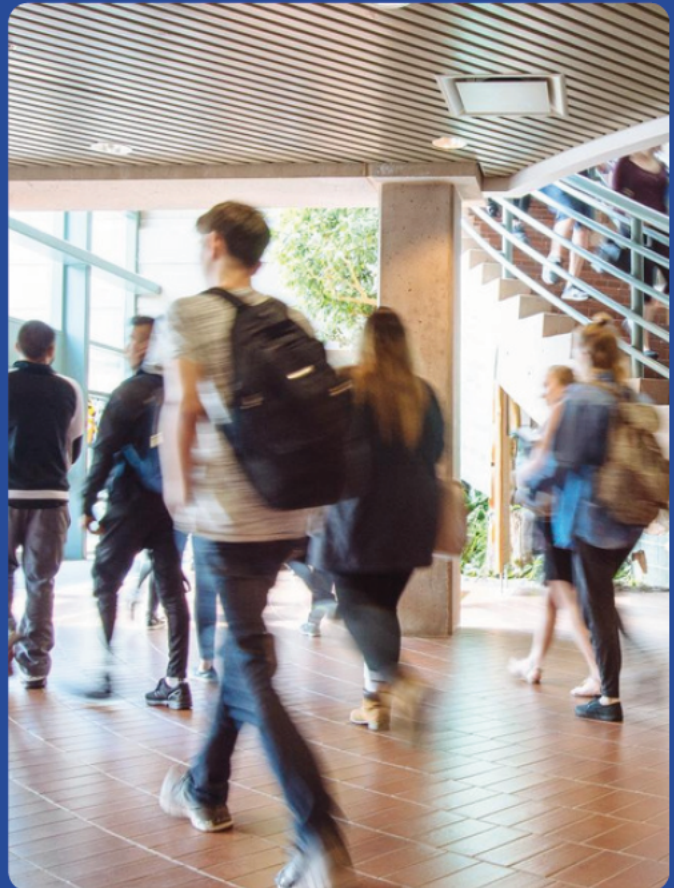
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