BELE NETWORK ESSENTIAL ACTIONS

The Building Equitable Learning Environments (BELE) Network is a diverse collaborative of organizations that are working to advance equity in education. We share a bold vision of thriving youth, families, caregivers, and communities – and of education systems that foster academic, social, emotional, and cognitive growth and well-being for all. We envision a world where a child's racial and cultural identity and unique learning path are strong contributors to their success in school and in life, and where zip code and family income do not determine the quality of a child's education.

We seek to change the daily learning experience of every young person to achieve these broader individual and collective goals. To create transformative and equitable learning, schools and districts need to prioritize the voices, experiences, and leadership of the people who are poorly served by the current system, particularly Black students, Indigenous students, and students of color (BIPOC[1] students). By designing schools to meet the needs of the least well served, we can ensure that ALL students meet universal goals of whole child well-being and academic excellence.

The BELE Network established the BELE Framework as a guide for transforming student experiences and learning outcomes. The science of learning and development is abundantly clear and confirms two things educators know:

» A young person's cognitive, academic, social, emotional and identity development are inextricably linked;
» The quality of a young person's learning environments, their experiences, their relationships, and their access to opportunities determine their developmental and educational outcomes.

The BELE Framework and "Essential Actions" are grounded in four key pillars. We believe in…

1. **Equity & Justice through Targeted Universalism:** To achieve equitable outcomes, schools and school systems must partner with students, families, and caregivers to articulate universal goals, engage in rigorous analysis and deep listening to identify and dismantle the structural barriers to reaching those goals for different groups of students, and co-create policies and practices that increase opportunity for meaningful learning experiences and promote collective well-being.

2. **Science of Learning and Development:** We can create experiences that maximize learning and well-being for students and adults by leveraging what we know and continue to learn about individual and contextual contributions to learning and human development.

3. **Centering Student Experience:** Students can be more fully and equitably engaged as learners and leaders in the design of their learning when we seek to understand and respond to their desires, interests, perspectives, and experiences, using that knowledge to drive decision-making, design, resource allocation, and accountability structures.

4. **Collaborative Inquiry and Liberatory Design:** Students will thrive as learners and as human beings when more adults also engage as learners and work to create adaptive learning systems dedicated to continuous improvement. This requires partnering with one another, collaborating to understand and address complex equity challenges, and using systemic, data-driven processes to develop, test, and adapt approaches to teaching and learning and to policies and systems that enable change. Engaging together in shared inquiry and co-design helps to build trust and authentic partnerships among educators, students, families, and communities as it builds the expertise and capacity of all parties to create the kinds of environments that will yield equity and justice. True collaboration requires redistributing power in the visioning, goal setting, and problem identification process as well as in the ongoing co-creation of equitable learning environments.

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[1] We recognize and intend to address the fact that BIPOC identities are intersectional - meaning that these young people are also represented in other social categories including students from low-income families, students with disabilities, students in rural areas, students who are learning English, students who are experiencing homelessness, students who are in foster care, students who are involved in the criminal justice system, students who are LGBTQ+, and students who are from immigrant families. We are aware that non-BIPOC students in these and other categories are underserved and marginalized by our educational, social, political, economic, health, and cultural institutions. However, we are centering BIPOC status because racism undergirds and is built into our system's design and is woven into current institutional policies, structures, and practices such that BIPOC students are generally even more marginalized and less well-served within and across institutions. We invite our partners to join us in centering BIPOC young people, along with their families/caregivers and educators, as we contend that doing so has the greatest potential to ensure that all students receive the opportunities and experiences they need, want, and deserve.

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Grounded in these pillars, we have identified seven "Essential Actions" that describe the *changes* and *processes* necessary to realize systemic transformation.

1. **REDESIGN TEACHING & LEARNING TO TRANSFORM STUDENTS' DAILY EXPERIENCE:** Create learning experiences that prioritize trusting relationships; support an integrated approach to students' cognitive, academic, social, emotional, and identity development; foster critical consciousness; and foster student agency
   o Prioritize routines that build a meaningful, identity-affirming community for students in which every young person is known well and supported
   o Explore and affirm students' personal, cultural, racial, and academic identities and support the pursuit of their agency, passions, and interests
   o Adopt curriculum and content that centers representative histories (de-centers Whiteness and celebrates rich histories and contributions of Black, Brown, and Indigenous people) and includes narratives and perspectives that challenge stereotypes, disrupt existing systems of oppression and racial hierarchy, and explore models of White allyship
   o Engage students in critical thinking, investigating, analyzing, discussing, writing, and leadership using rigorous and culturally relevant curricula that are rooted in justice
   o Adopt "discipline" policies that are restorative, empathic, student-centered, developmental, and that mitigate the harmful impact on students of surveillance and policing (by police or other actors) and of exclusion from their school community

2. **REDESIGN SYSTEMS & STRUCTURES TO CREATE CONDITIONS FOR HUMAN THRIVING:** Redesign schoolwide systems, structures, & resources to prioritize relationships, collaboration & learning
   o Support the alignment of all school efforts, structures, resources, and people around a clear, schoolwide vision of equitable learning and development and a shared understanding of why and how this vision drives everyone's work
   o Identify and remove barriers to equitable learning and development, and eliminate policies and practices that undermine equity or student and staff well-being
   o Employ structures and resources to create meaningful learning communities that foster personalization and enduring developmental relationships between and among adults and students
   o Ensure time for teacher teams to meet and engage in data-based action/reflection cycles, collaborate with school and community partners, and engage in on-going personal and professional learning and development

3. **CENTER & SHARE POWER WITH BIPOC YOUTH:** Prioritize listening to, understanding and being responsive to the experiences of underserved students, particularly Black, Indigenous, and students of color, to ensure they have real voice, agency, and choice in education transformation
   o Co-design and test adaptations and new learning experiences with BIPOC and other underserved students
   o Cultivate and support the leadership and agency of BIPOC and other underserved students, and ensure they have a formal role in decision-making in school governance and in district and state policymaking

4. **CENTER & SHARE POWER WITH BIPOC FAMILIES, CAREGIVERS & COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS:** Partner authentically with BOPOC and other underserved families and caregivers and build deep partnerships with community organizations and local government agencies to ensure aligned opportunities and supports for all youth and families
   o Build mutually trusting relationships with and engage in ongoing learning from and with the families and caregivers of BIPOC and other underserved students to ensure that policies and practices are equitable and supportive of all students
   o Prioritize the well-being of BIPOC families and communities in all policy and resource allocation decisions
   o Provide training, time, and resources (and shared data) for ongoing staff and policymaker engagement with the families and caregivers of BIPOC and other underserved students

5. **INVEST IN & COLLABORATE WITH EDUCATORS & STAFF:** Set the conditions for adults to be healthy, whole, and prepared to engage in student-centered and anti-racist teaching, to collectively reflect and act on data, and to engage in collaborative inquiry and co-design
   - Leverage the wisdom and perspectives of teachers, school staff, and other youth development professionals, especially BIPOC educators, in school transformation efforts, including policy decisions at the school, district, and state levels
   - Provide time, resources, and support for teachers to engage in both personal and professional development to teach, learn from, and honor the intellect and resilience of BIPOC students, families, and communities
   - Increase the hiring and retention of BIPOC educators through improved incentives and teaching conditions and the development of robust local and non-traditional BIPOC educator pipelines
   - Ensure that educators and staff, particularly BIPOC educators, are engaged in state- and district-level decision-making on curricula, assessments, and professional learning, including design and delivery

6. **REVIEW & RESPOND TO DATA ON EXPERIENCE, LEARNING & WELL-BEING:** Establish student-centered data collection and response systems to routinely gather, disaggregate, and analyze data on students' feedback on their learning experiences, needs, and interests; data on student learning; and data from families & caregivers; and use these data to adjust practice, policy, and learning environments
   - Use measures and tools that inform adults about the learning experiences, well-being, and outcomes of young people (e.g., PERTS Copilot-Elevate, CRE Wellness Indicators, UChicago Impact-Cultivate)
   - Use measures and tools to better understand and respond to the experiences and well-being of families/caregivers and of school staff
   - Establish structures and processes (such as inquiry teams, student success teams, care teams) that cultivate a culture of collaborative inquiry and shared learning, consistently use disaggregated data, and reflect in regular learning cycles to inform instructional practice, policy, and learning conditions that foster student well-being and academic success (e.g., NCS Freshman Success Team, BARR Model, Comer Model)

7. **LEVERAGE POLICY & ALLOCATE RESOURCES FOR EQUITY & WELL-BEING:** Adapt district & state policies that prioritize well-being and advance equity
   - Regularly review (such as through policy equity audits) and ensure that policies and resource allocations prioritize BIPOC student safety, belonging, agency, well-being, holistic development, and academic success
   - Ensure that state and district policies and resources support, and do not create barriers to, establishing the conditions necessary to actualize these essential actions for creating equitable learning environments.
   - Prioritize leading transformative change in key policy areas including educator diversity, resource equity, anti-racist curriculum, and discipline.