Coaching for Educational Equity:
The BayCES Coaching Framework

Prepared for
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Introduction

The mission of the Bay Area Coalition for Equitable Schools (BayCES) **is to dramatically improve educational outcomes, experiences, and life options for students and families who have been historically underserved by their schools and districts.** We fulfill our mission by coaching school, district, and community leaders to take effective action to promote educational equity.[1]

Inequity in the educational system has been well documented (Eubanks & Parish, 1997; Payne, 2001; Johnston & Viadero, 2000). Schools have generally not been successful in educating students of color, poor students, and English-language learners – students often caught in a cycle of low achievement, low expectations and lack of support. While exemplary classrooms and schools that meet the needs of historically underserved students do exist, these pockets of success are not prevalent, and are often not sustainable. Moreover, relatively little attention has been paid to the conditions and opportunities that can lead to equity, including the potential role of coaching to effect change in the interrelated domains of the school, the district, and the community.

This document summarizes the BayCES coaching model, including our underlying beliefs, our vision, and the key components of our coaching practice. The BayCES coaching model is designed to identify barriers to equity, as well as create and support conditions that can lead to equity. Our model both draws on and develops best practices in coaching, instructional leadership, professional development, school design, and school-district-community partnerships.

Underlying Beliefs

BayCES coaches for educational equity share a deep personal commitment to creating a more just and humane society; in particular, they share the belief that public schools can become equitable places that serve as a vehicle for larger social transformation.[2] The key to transformation is developing the commitment and skill of leaders to create and sustain schools where every adult takes responsibility for ensuring that every student is supported to learn and thrive. In these equitable schools, achievement patterns do not correlate to race, culture, gender, language, socioeconomic status, or any other social factor.

BayCES coaches base their work on an understanding that racism, classism, sexism and language bias disempower both students and adults in school systems. Over time, these overlapping and systemic[3] forms of oppression narrow people's view of what is possible, limit adults' ability to collaborate effectively across their differences, and prevent them from taking responsibility for learning about and changing how they work with students. Such "equity traps" (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004) undermine adults' agency: their ability to take action to effect positive change in a school system on behalf of students.

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Talking explicitly about systemic oppression and its impact on teaching and learning is necessary not to lay blame, but to find better ways to educate children. Coaches for educational equity have a critical understanding of the multiple, historical causes of inequity in public education (Applied Research Center, 2001) and of the way schooling has traditionally been organized to normalize and reproduce larger patterns of social inequity (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Oakes, 1986). Understanding the systemic and institutionalized nature of inequity helps BayCES coaches identify oppression operating in school systems, and strategic entry points for intervention.

Coaches believe that educators fundamentally desire to make schools more positive and meaningful places for historically underserved students and to enable the success of every single student in their schools regardless of the challenges each student faces. By tapping into those ideals, coaches serve as catalysts for transformation, helping school, district, and community leaders mobilize adults to take action on behalf of students. BayCES coaching is based on the premise that in order to exercise this kind of transformative leadership, leaders need five things: *will, skill, knowledge, capacity* and *emotional support*. Coaches provide pressure and support for leaders to develop in these five areas and break the cycles that reproduce inequitable outcomes for students.

Coaching for educational equity requires a commitment to leadership on the part of coaches despite their lack of formal authority in schools. BayCES coaches convey confidence and willingness to take responsibility for important changes that they cannot control, and find every opportunity to lead by example. As leaders for equity, coaches maintain a neutral stance in relation to role groups and ideological positions within a school community, but are not neutral about the need to interrupt historic inequities and leverage the maximum human and material resources on behalf of students.

Vision

In addition to sharing a clear sense of the roots of inequity in education and the values that underlie BayCES' coaching approach, coaches for educational equity are working toward a clear vision of equity that has three related aspects: 1) Equity in our educational system entails removing the predictability of academic success or failure based on social, economic, or cultural factors. 2) Equity thus entails interrupting inequitable practices, eliminating biases and oppression, and creating inclusive school environments for adults and children. 3) Ultimately, equity means discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that each human being possesses. This vision of equity translates into a clear vision of success in all three domains in which coaches work: the school, the district, and the community.[4]

School Domain
Our vision of a high-achieving and equitable school has several distinct features, including:
- Instructional leadership that promotes and supports a high standard for teaching and learning.
- Equity-centered professional learning communities (Dufour & Eaker, 1998; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) where educators determine a clear instructional focus derived from

diverse data on student learning and experience, and collaborate among various role groups to make ongoing improvements in curriculum, assessment, and instruction.[5]

- Parent, family, and community partnerships that increase student support, motivation and accountability.
- Maximization of resources (time, money, expertise) to support student engagement, learning, and achievement.
- Classrooms where high student engagement and achievement is not patterned on race, class, gender, or language background.

District Domain

Our vision of a high-achieving and equitable school district is one that is clearly focused on teaching and learning so that leaders can make decisions and allocate resources based on improving teaching, learning, and equity. Such a district has:

- A culture of collaboration and shared responsibility for student learning and achievement.
- Support for central-office and school-site leaders to become reflective leaders for equity and high achievement, and support for developing professional learning communities among teachers, principals and central office leaders.
- Parent and community partnerships, with continuous inquiry into school effectiveness so that schools can be (re)designed to meet the needs of students, families and communities.
- Policies, structures, and practices that maximize resources so schools have the support and information they need, and redistribute power in service of equity.

An equitable district articulates standards for student achievement and equity, provides schools with resources to work toward these standards, and involves families and community in a process of mutual accountability.

Community Domain

Our vision includes an empowered community that holds schools accountable for student success and supports schools and school systems in working toward that goal. Such an empowered community is reflected in:

- Parent awareness of their educational choices within the system, ability to support student learning, and mechanisms that support their input into school decision-making.
- Alignment of school practices with student and family cultures.
- Community resources (money, volunteers, material resources) support student learning.
- Community leaders increasingly engage in long-term collaboration for school success.

BayCES coaches work with community leaders within and outside of the school (e.g. parents on a school site council, volunteer groups, leaders of businesses and community-based organizations) in order to support partnerships on behalf of student and community success.

These three domains are interconnected: effective school, district, and community partnerships are essential for sustained progress toward equity. However, both institutional and individual relationships among the three domains are often poor or nonexistent due to neglect and the long-term effects of systemic oppression. BayCES coaches work in all three domains to establish and support connections among them.

BayCES Coaching Practice

Central to the BayCES coaching framework are Five Critical Coaching Lenses and a Coaching Cycle that together guide coaches' work with leaders in schools, districts, and communities.

Five Coaching Lenses

BayCES coaches continually observe, assess and determine their actions by analyzing current conditions through five critical lenses. The metaphor of the lens (Bolman and Deal, 1997) reminds us that evidence can be viewed from various perspectives to construct different interpretations and courses of action. Coaches develop knowledge of the theoretical frameworks behind each lens as well as the habit of applying these lenses to analyze their coaching context to identify high-leverage entry points and develop a theory of action. Each lens, explained in Figure 1, highlights some aspects of a situation while necessarily obscuring others.

Figure 1

The Five BayCES Coaching Lenses

Systemic oppression: The historic, systematic mistreatment of individuals based on race, class, gender, language, culture, and sexual orientation occurs in all social systems, including the educational system. Systemic oppression impacts all social interactions in schools. Understanding the societal context is necessary to interrupt it and create more democratic processes and systems within and outside of schools.

Inquiry: Posing questions, collecting data and finding answers (evidenced-based decision-making) can address seemingly intractable problems.

Developmental learning: Problems of change are problems of learning, and each person and each institution enters the learning trajectory from a different starting point.

Systems thinking: Everything we observe is the result of a complex set of interactions aligned precisely to get the results we see. We must understand these complex interactions in order to intervene effectively.

Change management: Conditions and strategies must be intentionally manipulated to change systems and generate different results.

While each lens is important in and of itself, two of them – the lens of systemic oppression and the lens of developmental learning – warrant particular mention because of a critical paradox they present to coaches for educational equity.

The lens of systemic oppression is the most fundamental lens BayCES coaches use in their work; without it, even the best planned change effort will reproduce inequities. Coaches continually assess and analyze coaching contexts using this lens, which brings a sense of urgency to their work. As advocates for students, coaches are committed to making dramatic changes in the experience and achievement of underserved students in schools and districts where time is pressed and mandates and pressures are high.

At the same time, coaches apply the lens of developmental learning to help them determine a strategic point of entry and coaching interventions that are appropriate for their client. School leaders often have differing degrees of experience and comfort working for systemic change toward equity, and their schools and districts are at differing stages of development. Critical to the application of this lens is identifying the client's "zone of proximal development" (Vygotsky 1987), or "ZPD," a level of performance just beyond what the leader could do on his or her own. In order to build a client's leadership capacity, the coach provides scaffolding (structured support) to the client to reflect and learn new ways of leading within his or her ZPD – not implementing changes *for* the client, but supporting change *through* the client.
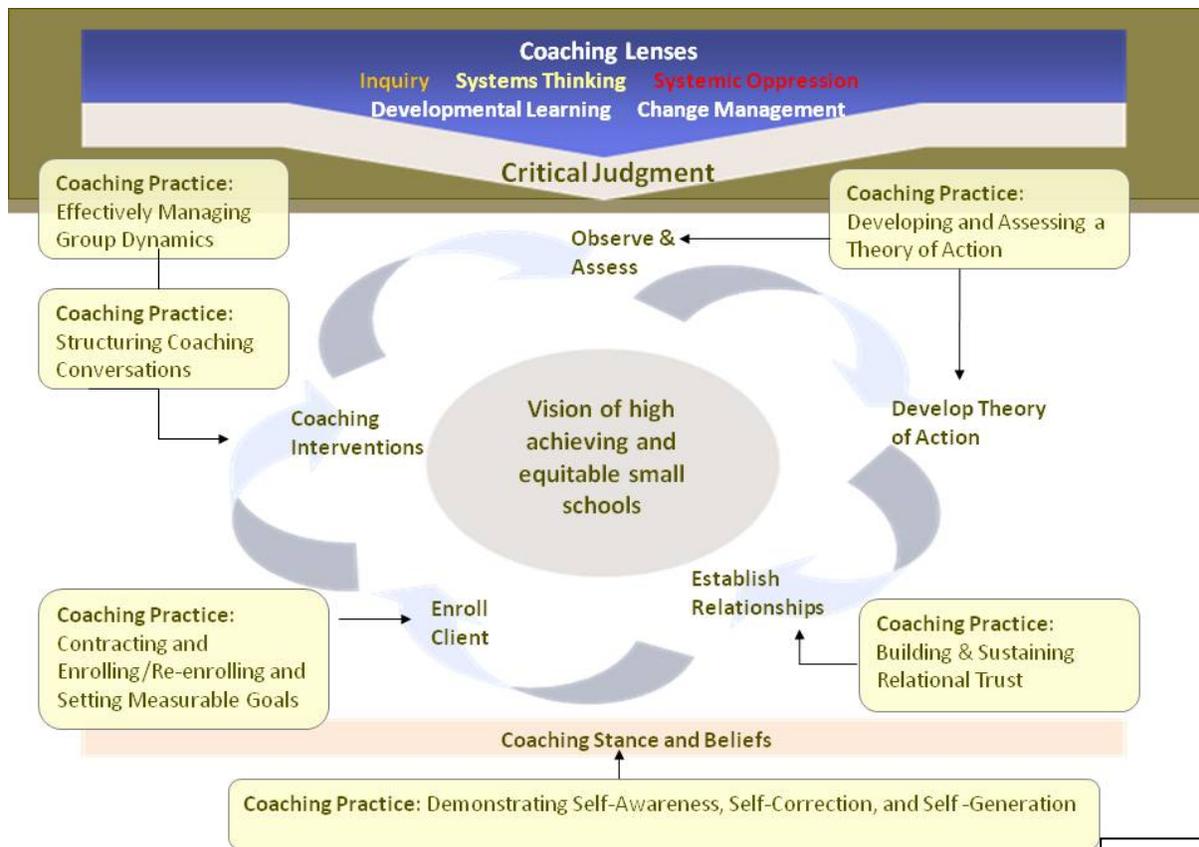
Together, these two lenses present a critical paradox in the practice of coaching for educational equity. Coaches must maintain a sense of urgency while simultaneously facilitating the often slow process of developmental learning. Working within a leader's ZPD means finding the patience to "meet leaders where they are" in the face of situations in need of urgent change. Managing this paradox and the emotions it elicits (which may include frustration, anger, or despair) requires a nuanced set of analytical, relational and self-reflective skills – in short, a well developed sense of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1994) as well as the ability to take a strategic, outcome-focused view of the coaching process. The use of these two lenses produces the insight that conflict is necessary for change and can be successfully managed to raise expectations and efficacy.

The BayCES Coaching Cycle

The BayCES Coaching Cycle serves as a guide for our coaching practice. The cycle revolves around our vision of high-achieving and equitable schools, which includes goals for leadership, teaching, school design, school districts, and community engagement. The cycle is organized into five phases, each of which is informed by the five critical lenses. Although the stages of the BayCES Coaching Cycle are loosely sequential, they are also continually ongoing and overlapping. The Coaching Cycle represents our inquiry-based approach to coaching: coaching interventions lead to further reflection, questioning, assessment, and continuous improvement. While coaching practice is not linear or strictly sequential, paying careful attention to each phase and the skills that undergird it increases our effectiveness as coaches for educational equity.[8]

From the outset of the coaching cycle, coaches engage in strategic thinking, a skill that is fundamental to effective coaching. Throughout the cycle, coaches develop and refine an analysis of the current reality in relation to their vision of equity, and work to determine the most strategic set of actions necessary to accelerate change. Coaches bring the same set of beliefs and practices to their coaching of school, district and community leaders, adapting their particular coaching interventions to each context and client.

As the cycle begins, coaches *observe and assess* current conditions formally using assessment tools and interviews to gather data from students, staff and community members as well as through informal observations and interactions. In this phase, coaches rely heavily on the lens of systemic oppression, including an awareness of their own personal racial, gender, and cultural consciousness.

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Coaching Lenses

Inquiry   Systems Thinking   Systemic Oppression
Developmental Learning   Change Management

Critical Judgment

Coaching Practice:
Effectively Managing
Group Dynamics

Coaching Practice:
Structuring Coaching
Conversations

Coaching
Interventions

Coaching Practice:
Contracting and
Enrolling/Re-enrolling and
Setting Measurable Goals

Enroll
Client

Observe &
Assess

Coaching Practice:
Developing and Assessing a
Theory of Action

Develop Theory
of Action

Vision of high
achieving and
equitable small
schools

Establish
Relationships

Coaching Practice:
Building & Sustaining
Relational Trust

Coaching Stance and Beliefs

Coaching Practice: Demonstrating Self-Awareness, Self-Correction, and Self-Generation

BayCES Coaching Model Mapped to BayCES Coaching Cycle

Figure 2

Using this information, coaches develop a *theory of action* (planned interventions and their intended impacts) about how to interrupt inequities and move toward the vision of a high-achieving and equitable school. While developing their theory of action, coaches also begin to develop measurable goals (Schmoker, 1999). The goals and the expected results are articulated clearly and publicly, taking into consideration both the micro (classroom, school) and macro (district, community) levels. Goal-setting is a collaborative process between coach and clients; this collaboration increases commitment and accountability and ensures that changes in practice are informed by multiple perspectives. Coaches are supported in developing strategic thinking and theories of action by BayCES professional development, which draws on Action Science (Argyris, 1985), an approach that requires coaches to observe themselves and their tacit theories to uncover blindspots, reveal hidden assumptions, and take more considered action.

Coaches must *establish relationships* with leaders in the school, district and community; leaders who will take responsibility for interrupting inequities and creating conditions that maximize adult and student learning. Paying explicit attention to the ways leadership has historically excluded particular groups (e.g., people of color, women, and youth), coaches identify leaders (both formal and informal, across role groups) and immediately work to build rapport by drawing on their skills in relational competence (e.g. Garmston and Costa, 2002), cultural competence (e.g. Ladson-Billings, 1994; Delpit, 1996; Banks, 1995; Irvine, 2003), and emotional intelligence (e.g. Goleman, 1994). Coaches establish mutually respectful relationships with

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leaders to coach them to look critically at themselves and to make significant changes to how they lead and work, often an emotional and painful process.

Next, coaches *enroll the client* (Murphy, 1995) by gaining explicit permission to coach, clearly articulating intermediary goals, anticipating possible obstacles and ways to address them, and clarifying the expectations of the roles and responsibilities of the coach and client. Working with clients, coaches develop a written work-plan based on the characteristics and needs of the school community. The work-plan articulates the coaching cycle, including equity and achievement goals, for an individual school or district. The plan expresses the coaching strategies and school and district commitments that will be necessary to achieve the goals, as well as the data that will be collected to monitor progress.

Finally, coaches engage in a variety of *coaching interventions* – strategies identified as high-leverage based on their theories of action. Coaches employ a wide range of processes, such as: developing agendas; goal-setting and strategic planning; facilitating meetings (including critical friends groups); team-building; backwards-mapping from outcomes; leading data-based inquiry; visioning; networking and resourcing; managing emotional distress; and developing curricula. These processes are tailored to support work in several broad areas:
- *Building the capacity of instructional leaders* to monitor, model, and coach good pedagogical practices and support teacher development.
- *Establishing and facilitating equity-centered professional learning communities* using regular cycles of data-based inquiry to improve and develop collaboration skills and habits of reflective practice including goal-setting and monitoring of progress.
- *Supporting schools and districts to partner with families and communities,* providing broader support for students, and building stronger student motivation.
- *Focusing on school (re)design* so that resources and structures support teaching and learning, including teacher collaboration, expectations, and shared responsibility.
- *Building the cultural competence of school leaders and teachers* to help them better meet the social and academic needs of students from cultures different from their own.

In each of these areas of intervention, coaches pay particular attention to developing leadership for equity: the process of building the will, skill, knowledge, capacity and emotional support of leaders as they transform who they are and how they support others in the school to take responsibility for nurturing and inspiring every student (Becerra & Weissglass, 2004).

The Importance of Critical Judgment: Learning in the Coach Collaborative

While the Coaching Cycle guides our coaching practice and provides us with a shared language and conception of coaching, it is not a template or a script that coaches follow. Throughout the coaching cycle, each coach's use of critical judgment is one of the more powerful and necessary features of the BayCES model of coaching for educational equity. We emphasize the importance of individual coaches' critical judgment because change ultimately rests on individual decisions and choices (Gladwell, 2005).

These critical decisions include the hundreds of minute-to-minute decisions classroom teachers make every day, a leader's decision to speak up and invite dialogue about a formerly

"undiscussable" inequity at a school, or a coach's decision on the best course of action to build leadership capacity and accelerate change toward equity. As coaches, we acknowledge that we will never know everything about any situation, but we must continually exercise judgment based on what we *do* know, take action with integrity and then reflect on and learn from the consequences of our actions.

BayCES therefore places great importance on its Coach Collaborative, our ongoing professional development program for coaches, as a forum to help coaches develop their critical judgment. The Coach Collaborative strives to model a multicultural, equity-centered professional learning community based on reflective practice, collaborative data-based inquiry, and collective problem-solving. In the coach collaborative, coaches receive consultation and feedback on their theories of action, collaboratively assess the impact of coaching interventions, and monitor progress toward the goals articulated in coaching workplans. In addition, coaches build content knowledge and learn and practice coaching skills. In all of these areas, coaches are expected to be self-directed learners who take responsibility for their own learning and the development of their individual critical judgment.

As an integral part of coaching leaders in schools, districts and communities, BayCES coaches develop *themselves* as leaders, working "from the inside out" to understand how they have been affected by systemic oppression, both in their personal lives and as leaders and coaches. The Coach Collaborative incorporates explicit dialogue about personal experiences of oppression and racism; promotes alliance-building across race, class and gender; and focuses on each coach's personal role as a leader for equity.

Because coaching relationships often cross differences of race, class, and gender, the Coach Collaborative is essential. Learning together, struggling explicitly and personally with issues of power and difference, builds understanding and skill. The Coach Collaborative aims to prepare each coach to exercise their individual critical judgment as they work with leaders throughout the Coaching Cycle, in order to take effective action for educational equity.

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Endnotes

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[1] For research on coaching and its role and impact in systemic educational reform, see Brown et al (2005), or Nuefield & Roper (2003).

[2] By *transformation* we mean a fundamental change in the way power and resources are distributed in society, so that success and failure do not correlate to race, gender, culture, language background, or any other socio-cultural factor, and so that everyone may develop their unique gifts and talents.

[3] By *systemic* we mean that these patterned forms of oppression are not unique to schools, but are historically embedded in economic, social, and cultural systems including schools.

[4] BayCES' vision of successful schools and districts draws on the work of many educators and theorists, including Linda Darling Hammond, James Banks, Nancy Mohr, Kathleen Cotton, Deborah Meier, and Charles Payne. For more information about how each of these has informed our work, see the attached bibliography.

[5] By *professional learning communities* we mean groups of adults in a school who—as part of their ongoing professional development—regularly collaborate across roles to learn about their students, to find ways to develop supportive relationships with each other and with students, and to improve instructional practices. For more on how cycles of data-based inquiry can move schools toward equity, see Olson (1997).

[8] To help clarify and make concrete our vision of success, BayCES has developed a number of tools, including a Demonstration School Rubric, a School Benchmark Tool, an ECPLC Assessment Tool, a Parent, Family, Community Partnership Assessment Tool and a variety of Classroom Observation Tools used by coaches for educational equity.

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