Living into the Spirit of the Student Investment Account

Centering Focal Students and Practicing Equity

December 2021

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Overview of the SIA Resource Share

In May of 2021, the ODE Student Investment Account (SIA) team embarked on learning journeys that sought to build our team's capacity to effectively support district / school change toward the dual purposes of the SIA – increasing equitable academic achievement and supporting student mental and behavioral health. Moving from the SIA law to the planning and prioritization process that engaged communities and utilized equity lenses into the investment and implementation process, we have sought to build shared strategic and actionable knowledge alongside you that allow us all to live deeper into the spirit of the SIA by centering focal students and practicing equity.

There is no easy solution or fix to rectify the historical and on-going disparities in education. This resource share was an attempt to engage in the difficult questions of how to implement SIA investments through equitable education practice, policy, and systemic shifts – this is why it is called a change *process* that will not simply be solved by allocating money to a specific priority or by creating a new position (while still part of the process). The process requires collaboration, support and thought partnership, which ODE has sought to co-construct.

As you read through the following SIA resource shares, you will notice they are organized into two overarching sections introduced by useful frameworks: Dr. Rich Milner's "Opportunity-Centered Teaching" and ODE's Mental Health Toolkit. After each introductory framework, you will find five or six resource share messages that dive deeper into each tenet and content area of the framework. You may also see several common themes emerge as we did and that we wish to highlight here:

Shifting Adult Mindsets and Becoming Aware of Limiting Assumptions

- Affirm and recognize that those with the least opportunity to achieve are those most marginalized in our society/institutions (focal students), and we must meet students' varying levels of access to learning where they are at
- Education is a process of learning and growth, not a space of classifying, labeling and sorting; therefore, assessments demonstrate growth and knowledge, not a judgement of students' ability and worth
- A deep desire for recognition, engagement, and belonging often motivates student behavior (even resistant behavior), and the more we seek to understand the underlying cause of student behavior, the more responsive we become

Building Authentic Relationships

- Building bridges between students' cultural ways of being and frames of reference to classroom practice and content through Culturally Responsive Teaching
- Improving relationships across racial differences by examining implicit biases, dialoguing about race, understanding inequities, leaning into discomfort, and interrupting harmful habits
- Taking a strengths-based approach to student challenges through trusting relationships first in order to facilitate student self-determination and support students experiencing trauma, particularly focal students that face additional barriers in navigating society/institutions
- Affirming student agency to align academic work with their identities, communicating high expectations, showing confidence in their ability to reach expectations ("wise

criticism"), and teaching that intelligence is not fixed, but developed, and improved over time and with effort.

Respecting Student and Community Knowledge

- Partnering with parents / caregivers to better-understand each students' "thinking routines, "learning moves," and "challenge areas" and better respond to students' needs
- Valuing and seeing the fullness of diverse students by seeking to understand non-normative behavior as cultural ways of being and knowing, and adjusting interactions to respect students' frame of reference
- Engaging students in studying controversial topics to affirm their capacity to analyze and improve their communities, while facilitating their expertise in defining the problem, deciding how to address it, and taking action
- Asking students facing mental health challenges what they need to feel supported, what works for them when they are struggling, and how we can help them be successful
- Fully integrating students into district/school improvement dialogue, design, data collection, analysis, and importantly, decision making.

Eliminating Systemic Barriers

- Assessing and transforming existing barriers to student opportunity to achieve in policy, practice and curriculum to counteract inequities in our systems--like observable patterns of white student overrepresentation in advanced courses--and set every student up for success
- Mitigating emotional challenges like depression, anxiety, substance abuse and psychiatric problems through school climate improvement that engages the community in improvement decisions, promotes upstander, anti bully-victim, and discriminatory behavior, increases student prosocial and equitable capacity to interrupt racism, and demonstrates trust in student-led learning through Universal Design.
- Practice intentional, equitable decision-making throughout multi-tiered systems of support--with strengths-based identification systems, multiple sources of data showing the whole child, equity lens and decision tools that take into account disparities, and ensuring the system facilitates autonomy as opposed to creating dependency--in order to allocate supportive resources to those most in need and eliminate existing educational disparities

As we transition toward the integration of six equity-focused ODE programs and a shared communication platform, we intend to continue to build shared knowledge alongside you, while elevating local, situated wisdom through the sharing of Oregon's stories. Together, we hope to create an Oregon that meets the academic, mental, and behavioral needs, goals and aspirations of our underserved focal students, and live into the spirit of educational justice.

Increasing Academic Achievement and Reducing Disparities for Student Focal Groups

In this week's message, we are also introducing a new section that shares a key reading, resource, or tool our team is excited about and wishes to share with you. We are in ongoing learning about how best to support the core values and investments that the SIA centers, and will be sharing key resources that are inspiring us in upcoming messages.

Our first offering is this narrative [podcast interview](#) with Dr. Rich Milner ([video](#)) that outlines five equity tools educators can employ now to create whole and healing schools where every student matters. The SIA presents opportunities to align and connect multiple parts of the education system, and we wish to highlight some core "opportunity-centered teaching" tenets that equity-centered educators might be implementing, exploring, or curious about in districts across the state:

- **Tenet #1: *Determinants of success* -** It's important to clearly see where students have not been given opportunities to succeed and how systems can act as sorting mechanisms that pre-determine likelihoods of success in the system.
- **Tenet #2: *Locating the problem of underperformance* -** Moments where students are challenged by curriculum and content are opportunities for educators to draw on student strengths to meaningfully connect them to content through asset thinking.
- **Tenet #3: *Naming, discussing, deciding and acting with Race* -** Dr. Milner likens the absence of race out of key conversations/considerations due to educator, staff, or administration discomfort to an oncologist overlooking a critical aspect of cancer because it makes them uncomfortable. Courageous conversations are needed to respond appropriately to dynamics of race, power, and privilege.
- **Tenet #4: *Student sense of belonging* -** To facilitate a sense of fairness and belonging for each and every student, Dr. Milner advocates for educator practices that see *Student Behavior as Communication and Expressions of Cultural Identity.*
- **Tenet #5: *Content relevance* -** Dr. Milner invites educators to tailor content to relevant student questions through **Context-Centered Teaching** that help students study, understand, and build capacity to disrupt social inequities that impact their lives.

Determinants of Success

Building upon the resource we shared in the last update, we take a deeper dive into the first tenet - *Determinants of Success* - which supports one of the SIA's core values: *increasing academic achievement and reducing disparities for student focal groups.* Drawing on this Education Week blog post, we share ways in which the understanding and practice of "equal" versus "fair" student treatment can address existing barriers to student opportunities, counteract inequities in our systems, and set every student up for success.

What is the difference between treating students "fairly" and treating them "equally"?

Equal Treatment (Equality)	Fair Treatment (Equity)
• Every student receives the same exact treatment, regardless of student background and circumstances • Assumes every student has the same opportunity to achieve and starts from a level playing field • Ties academic success to a student's privilege, rewarding students with resources and putting those without resources at a disadvantage	• Each student has differing needs as a result of their background and circumstances, and therefore requires differing levels of support in order to achieve success • Recognizes that each student comes with varying levels of access as a result of unequal treatment in society and institutions that impacts student ability to fairly access learning • Meets students where they are in order to facilitate and maximize learning, ensuring all students have opportunity to flourish

Cultivating habits and practices to treat students "fairly"
Here are a few example habits and associated practices to support fair and equitable student treatment:
- Affirm and recognize that those with the least opportunity to achieve (including SIA student focal groups) are those that are most marginalized in our society/institutions and offer ways to close those opportunity gaps. *Associated practice*: Develop an assessment policy that allows students multiple opportunities to redo their work so that students understand the high expectations you hold for everyone's success (Sabrina Hope King)
- Understand that education is a process of learning and growth, not a space of classifying, labeling and sorting. *Associated practice*: Teach students about equity and equality and the difference between fair and equal so that they understand classroom decisions and practices (Holly Spinelli)
- View assessments as opportunities for students to demonstrate growth and knowledge, not as a judgement of students' ability and worth. *Associated practice:* Use inquiry-based, group learning with low-floor, high-ceiling, open-ended tasks that have multiple-entry points (Dr. Felicia Darling)

Locating the Problem of Underperformance

In our team's ongoing learning journey about Dr. Rich Milner's tenets for opportunity-centered teaching, we wanted to look more closely at tenet #2: *locating the problem of underperformance*. In a recent office training, Dr. Eric Toshalis cautioned us not to locate student resistance, disengagement, and underperformance in the shortcomings of students themselves, but rather in the classrooms and schools that are not meeting core developmental, relational and learning needs. We wanted to share this article from Zaretta Hammond that speaks to how Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) can help meet these needs:

- **What is CRT really?** Hammond outlines common misconceptions about CRT that seek to distill it into a set of practices related to culture like incorporating students' countries of origin or cultural artifacts into lessons or comprehensively learning students' cultural norms. Instead, she explains CRT as a "cultural orientation" in which educators form relationships and build bridges between students' cultural ways of being and frames of reference to classroom practice and content.
- **Practicing CRT to facilitate student learning** CRT allows for deeper cognitive engagement opportunities by identifying core ways that students can create usable knowledge: *"Train yourself to recognize the cultural learning tools students bring to school. Too often we miss them. For example, when diverse students come from oral traditions, the most common cultural tools for processing information utilize the brain's memory systems – music, repetition, metaphor, recitation, physical manipulation of content, and story."*
- **Improving student learning through community engagement** As we continue engaging communities in our SIA work, CRT is an opportunity to partner with parents and caregivers to better-understand each students' "thinking routines, "learning moves," and "challenge areas" and better respond to students' needs.

Since a core purpose of the SIA is to increase academic achievement and reduce disparities for students from racial or ethnic groups, we fully support and encourage districts to find ways to fund CRT work through SIA funds.

Naming, Discussing, Deciding and Acting with Race

Increasing academic achievement for historically and currently underserved racial or ethnic student groups is explicitly named in the law governing the Student Investment Account. The opportunity-centered teaching Tenet #3 -- Naming, discussing, deciding and acting with Race -- from our initial resource share reminds us that educating is more than a deep understanding of your content area; it is intimately tied to reaching students across racial differences. Oregon's context, with 89.2% White teachers and 38.5% racially/ethnically diverse students, highlights the importance of building White educator racial literacy in order to close persistent and predictable racial achievement gaps.
To that end, we share this comprehensive overview of promising practices that facilitate White educators' understanding of racial dynamics, allowing them to shift practice and policy to improve relationships across racial differences and increase academic achievement:

- **Starting with oneself** - White educators can begin their journey by acknowledging that they have absorbed racial biases through cultural systems and messages that impact their relationships with diverse students. By examining these implicit biases (the Implicit Association Test is a useful personal awareness tool), they can develop the tools needed to interrupt harmful habits.
- **Discomfort signals progress** - White educators ought to worry less about the appearance of lacking racial understanding and instead lean into discomfort as a "roadmap" to uncover implicit bias' impact on our beliefs, practice and decision-making that uphold inequities, just as this White teacher of Black students did by vulnerably sharing her racial autobiography.
- **Creating context for vulnerability** - White educators can create brave spaces by developing common agreements to stay engaged, speak one's truth, experience discomfort, and expect and accept non-closure, along with working definitions for terms like micro aggressions, privilege, intrapersonal, interpersonal, institutionalized and structural racism.
- **From discussion to action** - The article shares an example of shifts that have occurred in Broward County Public Schools (Florida) as a result of dialogue about race: suspensions and student arrests have significantly decreased while access for students of color in Advanced Placement classes and gifted and talented programs has increased.

Student Sense of Belonging

*Why do historical and persistent academic disparities exist
for the student focal groups named in the SIA?*

In our ongoing learning journey with Dr. Eric Toshalis, we are developing capacity about Tenet #4 - *Student sense of belonging* - by building our awareness of the multiple ways school expectations for students tend to mirror dominant cultural norms (middle class, white, able-bodied, English fluent, etc.). As a result, students from the dominant culture experience a greater sense of belonging, affirmation, and encouragement in their academic efforts. Meanwhile, students who don't represent the dominant culture (student focal groups) suffer disadvantages due to the conformity demanded by dominant cultural norms.

Toshalis argues that deepening educator understanding of students' diverse identities motivating behavior is vital to ensuring students bring their whole selves to learning, and is a key contribution to increasing student focal group academic achievement. This video illustrates important work educators at North Salem High School are doing to value and see the fullness of their Pacific Islander students, and adjust their interactions to respect non-normative ways of being and knowing. An example from the video of culturally-specific student behavior subject to normative educator misinterpretations that disadvantage student learning is found below:

Student Behavior: Being quiet or having a passive demeanor.	Student Values: Student has been taught to be quiet in the presence of an adult and in formal settings like the classroom and often do not make choices independently from their family.	Interpretation: Educator believes that the student seems disinterested.	Impact: Often the quiet student becomes invisible and educators don't engage them in social aspects of learning.

Toshalis offers some promising practices:

- *Authentic Connection & Responsiveness:* Seek to recognize that a deep desire for recognition, engagement, and belonging often motivates behavior (even resistance).
- *Student Voice, Choice, and Rigor:* Facilitate student agency to align academic work with their identities by offering assignment options and develop risk-taking opportunities that welcome mistakes and affirm the social aspects of learning.

Content Relevance

Students notice and ask questions about what is going on in the world. Youth, in particular, ask profound questions about fairness. And when given the opportunity to change or improve their communities, student passions are ignited across grade levels. Yet, our classrooms often ignore these student questions as they may appear incompatible with pre-established curricula, or may even be deemed controversial. Here, we dive deeper into Tenet #5 - *Content relevance* - by sharing a podcast that highlights the academic, psychological, and societal value created by engaging students in controversial topics:

- **Academic Value**: Students study issues that carry multiple perspectives or do not have clear, definitive solutions. Therefore, it is necessary to research, identify evidence, evaluate its credibility, craft arguments, and share beyond the classroom. These tasks engage students in deeper learning experiences as illustrated by youth that sought to decrease dropouts by collecting, coding and statistically analyzing their own research, effectively preparing them for life beyond high school.
- **Psychological Value**: Controversial issues often involve experiences that are central to the identities and daily lives of student focal groups. Engaging these topics increases student voice by facilitating their expertise in defining the problem, deciding how to address it, and taking action. The resulting sense of self-efficacy and purpose in learning is a powerful tool to prevent disengagement, and is effective at all grade levels as illustrated by these elementary students' community improvement efforts.
- **Societal Value:** In addition to cognitive abilities, the modern workplace and society demands self-reflection, interpersonal, problem-solving, and leadership skills that can be effectively developed through controversial issues. By mirroring problems and discussions across differences encountered in work and civic life, students build the will and skill to develop critical thinking around complex topics while approaching them from a cross-disciplinary lens.

Strong evidence exists that content relevance can support SIA aims to narrow historical disparities and increase academic achievement. SIA grantees are encouraged to strive to make content relevant.

Meeting Students' Mental or Behavioral Health Needs

This past year challenged many Oregon students and school staff to the limits with traumatic loss or illness from COVID-19, wildfires, and chronic stressors such as job loss, unstable housing, or access to food. It also illuminated long standing inequities in which focal communities have disproportionately suffered loss while simultaneously battling racism. With students returning to the classroom this fall, we are at a crucial juncture to address one of the two stated purposes of the SIA - mental and behavioral health.

We are excited to share the ODE's [Mental Health Toolkit](). This toolkit aids districts in developing comprehensive practices by recognizing everyone struggles with emotional challenges throughout life and conceptualizing mental health as "wellness promotion." The toolkit expands common crisis intervention-only approaches and challenges tendencies to diagnose, label, categorize, and define students through strengths-based school culture and climate. In doing so, it opens up the possibility for *all* adults - not just mental health professionals - to support student well-being and restore optimal functioning integral to learning.

In upcoming messages, we will delve deeper into each of the toolkits' content areas:

1. **Leading from Strength to Promote Mental Health:** An integrated prevention and intervention framework connecting: 1) trauma informed care; 2) social emotional learning; 3) racial equity; and 4) asset-focused, evidence-based multi-tiered systems of support.
2. **Addressing Traumatic Stress:** The signs and symptoms of trauma vary in how and when they show up for each individual. While preferences for support and care are as diverse as those experiencing trauma, safe, trusting relationships remain consistent and fundamental to healing.
3. **Elevating Student Voice**: A sense of powerlessness, hopelessness and invisibility are among the greatest contributors to stress. Therefore, student voice, choice, and meaningful engagement are among the most powerful tools to promote mental health.
4. **Centering Racial Equity and Anti-racism**: Labeling, grouping, and sorting students without regard to cultural context places barriers to opportunity and increases racial stressors. To address this harm, we must examine our implicit biases.
5. **Promoting Inclusive School Environments**: Inequitable learning experiences perpetuate harm and require examination and adjustment of school policy and procedures.
6. **Delivering Multi-tiered Systems of Support**: A system that ensures every student receives appropriate support through equitable resource allocation - from universal student resiliency to resource-planning and regular student check-ins to crisis intervention.

Leading from Strength to Promote Mental Health

The ODE Mental Health Toolkit shared in the last SIA update works from this theory of action: If we create the conditions for authentic school community relationships with as-needed tiered support, then students will develop resilience to adversity needed not only to survive, but thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Here, we focus on those *conditions* by delving into this strength-based practice guide highlighted as a key resource in the Toolkit's content area "Leading from Strength to Promote Mental Health."

Contrary to a traditional problem-focused mental health management system that identifies what students lack in their behavior (which results in student dependencies), a strengths-based approach is a *process* that centers on harnessing the power of relationships to unleash each and every student's potential for self-determination. Key principles for building a strengths-based school culture include:
- **Each and every student wants to learn and has the potential for success**, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, language, ability, etc.
- **Authentic relationships bring forth challenges** through active listening, validating feelings, recognizing strengths, and demonstrating that each student matters
- **See student challenges as opportunities** to explore their understandings, encourage perspective-taking on their strengths and capacities, and develop their own sense of values, hope and optimism
- **Harness student uniqueness, dignity, and goals** when allocating supportive resources to promote resiliency

Promising practices:
- **Ensure all hands are on deck**: Time and opportunities are available for all educators and community partners to engage in cooperative decision making about strengths based practices
- **Frame language to invite respect, curiosity and connection**: Ask questions that attempt to authentically understand the student, foster collaboration amongst peers, recognize student improvement
- **Utilize mentoring in your support system for students experiencing challenges**: These role modeling relationships tap into students' intrinsic motivations and help them to view adversity as impermanent and not indicative of their potential

Addressing Traumatic Stress

At least one million children in the U.S. have experienced some form of trauma, constituting a much higher rate than comparable countries with universal health care, livable wage, paid parental leave, and high-quality child care systems. This context thrusts U.S. schools onto the frontlines of mental health care with the SIA aptly recognizing this vital student and community health need in its design and allowable use areas (Improving Student Health & Safety, Ongoing Community Engagement, Well Rounded Education, Reducing Class Size, and Increased Instructional Time).

Everyday student behaviors (anger, fatigue, irritability, alienation, panic, etc.) can be signs of trauma. So how do we know when trauma is the underlying issue of student behavior? By first creating the conditions for the underlying issues to emerge through relationship building, we will be better able to respond and support students' needs once trauma is shared. And creating these conditions supports all students by bringing a *Trauma Informed Lens* that establishes environments of healing, care, and connection to needed assistance.

Building relationships has the power to spur healing from trauma:
- **"Start every day with a clean slate:"** Not every student has adults that they can trust in their lives. Create the opportunity for students to feel safe enough to trust adults by providing logical, calm, and neutral responses to situations.
- **"There's got to be a reason:"** When everyday student behaviors emerge, transform them from "disciplinary" situations to opportunities to better understand what is occurring--or even not working--for students. For example, a student pacing around the classroom could have a heightened concern for safety as a result of trauma, or the underlying issue of a student withdrawing from teachers and peers could feel unseen and unheard.

Being responsive when students share trauma:
- **Affirm Students' Emotional Truth:** Focusing on a student's *emotional* experience, as opposed to the details of what occurred, allows the student to begin the healing process
- **Practice Self Care:** Emotionally ground *yourself* through personal healing practices that allow you to sufficiently support students
- **Know Your Role and Capacity:** Ask the student what they need to feel supported, what works for them when they are struggling, and how you can help them be successful. If a student's needs exceed your capacity, with student and family permission, enlist the next tier of support (social workers, psychologists).

Elevating Student Voice

All students have psychological needs--needs of belonging, competency, and agency--that impact learning and motivation. Elevating student voice is a key strategy for proactively supporting psychological needs as it demonstrates to students that their perspectives matter. Traditional methods for elevating student voice, however, have tended to engage only a few students (leadership, school council, honor roll, etc.) -- often those students for whom the education system already serves and whose psychological needs are already being met.

Therefore, for student voice strategies to be effective mental health promotion tools, they must reach focal student groups whose voices have historically been silenced and for whom the education system has underserved. Such a strategy allows focal group students to transform the sense of powerlessness, hopelessness and invisibility they experience--in and outside of school--into control over an aspect of their lives, resulting in a sense of agency with profound mental health impacts.

This Student Voice Report outlines some key considerations for *equitably* engaging student voice:
- **Transform "open invitation" approaches into direct, proactive recruitment methods** that seek out diverse candidates and reach new voices:
  - For participation on student governing bodies or councils, journalism, student-led conferences, youth-led participatory action research, and personalized learning
- **Ensure diverse student voting power (not simply advisory power) on student governing boards** like school, district or state boards
- **Involve diverse students in the design of student voice elicitation methods** like student surveys, and include them in analyzing disaggregated data by student groups
- **Facilitate diverse perspectives on issues of student importance in school media platforms** (newspapers, YouTube channels, etc.) by granting autonomy for student content selection, editing decisions, and content release
- **Create opportunities for diverse youth-led participatory action research** where youth develop a research question about an equity issue, plan data collection, collect and analyze data, and present findings and recommendations to a decision-making body

Centering Racial Equity and Anti-Racism

Racism experienced inside and outside of school is a major source of stress affecting the mental health and well-being of student focal groups. Beverly Daniel Tatum explains how these impacts become more deeply-felt and experienced as students move into middle and high schools where messages about who belongs, who academic success is "for," and what it means to be a member of their race, ethnicity, and culture become more pronounced.

Particularly in racially mixed high schools where observable patterns of White student over-representation in advanced courses occur, Black, Indigenous and adolescents of color often conclude that academic achievement is a White domain. When faced with exclusion, obstacles to opportunity, and devaluing messages due simply to who they are, focal students may academically disengage while employing coping mechanisms to buffer detrimental psychological impacts. Tatum argues that these coping mechanisms are aligned to healthy identity development and that, when effectively harnessed, can both promote focal student mental health while also effectively engaging them in academic achievement:

System and Support Interventions to Promote Psychological Safety and Academic Engagement
- Assess the culture of academic opportunity, policy, practice and curriculum to identify messages that reinforce the notion that academic excellence is largely a White domain
- Once identified, transform policy and practice to ensure multicultural representation in successes and achievements
- Build the critical consciousness of students to analyze stereotypical and oppressive representations of people of color, females, gender non-conforming, etc. to buffer and counteract messages of social inferiority
- Provide avenues for focal student psychological safety (affinity groups, mentorships, etc.)
- Build capacity for focal students to develop an identity that demonstrates and models success for all within their racial, ethnic, and cultural group
- Counteract stereotype threat--fear that underperformance will confirm racial stereotypes which interferes with the ability to demonstrate true competency--by communicating high expectations, showing confidence in their ability to reach expectations ("wise criticism") and teaching that intelligence is not fixed, but developed, and improved over time and with effort

Promoting Inclusive School Environments

In our last SIA "Resources We're Excited About" section, we shared strategies for harnessing student focal group coping mechanisms against racism in and outside of school to improve student mental health and academic engagement. This time, we take a deeper look at school policy and practice to promote inclusive, positive school climates that communicate to focal students a sense of safety and belonging; increase students' ability to manage challenges; and are responsive to students' personal and socio-emotional needs. Doing so mitigates emotional challenges like depression, anxiety, substance abuse and psychiatric problems.

We share a review of the body of research on school climate from which we highlight inclusivity related to race and marginalized identities. When school policy and practice does not listen to and respond to the needs of the school community, the likelihood of replicating societal inequities inside schools increases significantly. For example, studies demonstrate that disproportionate levels of disciplinary action occur toward students of color when compared with white students; increasing bullying and violence tends to victimize marginalized identities (race, culture, gender, sex, disability, socioeconomic) and demand conformity to dominant identity norms; and the existence of adult bias places significant barriers to authentic, responsive adult-student relationships. When these inequitable practices remain unexamined, unchallenged and unchanged, focal students experience unsupportive schools and suffer significant mental health consequences.

Engaging, Proactive, Responsive, Relational Practices that increase students' sense of supportive and inclusive school climates promote emotional well-being while simultaneously increasing academic outcomes:

- **Engage the community in planning school climate improvement initiatives** in order to develop programs that effectively address the diverse needs of your school community, prioritizing relational trust in the process

- **Promote positive intergroup interactions through upstander behavior** that prepares all members of a school community to speak out against bully-victim and discriminatory behavior, particularly during the elementary grades when children tend to make prosocial, ethical judgments about peers

- **Build adult-student relational trust by implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL)** which demonstrates through content and process an educator's authentic trust in students' ability to understand and select how they best learn, individually and socially

- **Implement evidence-based, equity-focused SEL programs** that increase student self and social awareness, self-management and relationship skills, and responsible decision making, while empowering students to value all identities and interrupt racism

Delivering Multi-Tiered Systems of Support

Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is a popular approach to support student academic, mental and behavioral health through 1) universal and preventative practices for all students; 2) additional resources to students with an identified need; and 3) intensive supports to those with a significant mental health or academic concern. MTSS is designed as a system to promote equitable outcomes. However, its effectiveness at increasing academic achievement or social-emotional success for focal student groups is greatly determined by the intentionality of equitable practices and decision-making throughout and across each phase of the model to ensure that those most in need of supports receive them.

Intentional equitable practices are foundational to MTSS for all students and should create inclusive and welcoming school environments, culturally affirming and responsive practices, and universal design for learning across the curriculum. By first connecting all students to the school community and to learning, student barriers and intervention needs become clearer, which allows the system greater capacity to dedicate time and resources to those students most in need of intervention.

While a well-practiced universal core model will result in more accurate determinations for supplemental interventions, there is still a risk of bias entering into the decision-making process, as evidenced by a study that found White student over-representation and Black student under-representation in the final selection of students ultimately receiving intervention.

Equitable Decision Making and Progress Monitoring Strategies

- ***Define students needing support through a strengths-based lens:*** preferred or first language(s), previous experiences in school and/or opportunities to learn, attendance patterns, engagement, student strengths in other aspects of schooling
- ***Utilize multiple sources of data that illustrate a comprehensive picture of the student:*** reliable and valid screening, progress monitoring measures balanced with other sources of data such as student and family input
- ***Weigh the potential benefits and negative impacts of intervention:*** the Oregon Equity Lens, Decision Tree, or your own Equity Lens help take into account historical and ongoing disparities that impact focal students

Create clear and manageable student progress monitoring and evaluation plans: define what success will look like, when to increase intensity or alter an intervention, and how to transition a student away from an intervention