

# Equity Stance

## THE SKIN WE ARE IN

Accelerate Institute operates from a moral imperative to ensure that underserved and marginalized communities are given equitable access to a high standard of education. During our nearly 30 years, our services have been delivered largely in partnership with African American and Latinx communities. While we are proud of this work, we recognize and call out our desire to expand our supports to a broader range of communities and cite particular interest in building pathways within the Native and Asian American communities respectively. To better reflect our mission of strengthening equity in education, Accelerate Institute acts to broaden our organization's internal understanding and practices relating to racial difference. We believe that in focusing first on developing tools to discuss racial strife, in historical and present context, we might strengthen our ability to discuss equity along other lines of difference. While we are currently making strides to expand the composition of our staff, we acknowledge that our organization is not largely diverse along the lines of all identity markers. We are proud to have achieved strides in gender equality as a women-led organization and use this accomplishment to fuel our strides in building on other areas of equity. Powerful tenets of our team include reflection and self-accountability. We are constant learners, strategic, innovative, and entrepreneurial. Our team includes staff who bring a wide variety of expertise to the organization, from leadership in marketing to school management, education policy, and civic leadership development. We are former teachers, principals, and public-school students; we are current volunteers, board members, and parents. Most of our team is long-standing, and our core energy as an organization is familial.

## THE IMPACT OF OUR CONTEXT, AND OUR DEVELOPMENT AS AN ORGANIZATION

Our origins as an organization are rooted in Chicago and its history as a racially and economically segregated city. Chicago's struggle to confront these issues have galvanized its civic, philanthropic, nonprofit, and academic communities. Our founder is a native Chicagoan who has sought to align with these efforts. As a white male of privilege, his exposure to under resourced communities prompted interests in law enforcement and education as a stronger response to issues of equity within the city. Through experience in teaching, in-depth research of high performing schools, and effective corporate leadership theory, our leadership established the teacher certification program, ICTC (Inner-City Teaching Corps), a single site public charter school (Alain Locke Charter School), and Accelerate Institute, which targets schoolwide change and growth through systems development and change management. Our organization made the shift in 2011 from teacher to school leadership development. Principals and their leadership team members set the vision and values for the school community; they also create and maintain schoolwide systems and determine who the adults in the building will be, all of which directly impacts students' academic experiences. Overall, great leaders create the movement within schools that catalyze change. Most of our partnering school leaders are leaders of color. In our development we have sought to understand how to partner in stronger ways with our leaders of color as they tackle issues of equity on behalf of students in their respective school spaces. Deeper programmatic reflection in the last five years and consideration for our own potential deficits in cultural awareness, have prompted us to question our coaching philosophy of "no excuses." This reflection, based on experience, research, and partner feedback, has caused us to find ways to infuse more empathy and understanding, alongside rigor, into our guidance regarding school system supports.



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## HOW WE ARE SEEN

We acknowledge that we operate in a system of education that was designed to perpetuate stratification by race and class and that our lack of knowledge in these areas have at times led to perpetuating inequity for students. With this realization, we have continuously sought to be responsive to feedback from our stakeholders and to each other to refine our practices and the speed with which we pivot. As an example of this spirit, in the last two years we have launched two new, more affordable, and accessible programs: (1) Leadership Academy with multiple tracks to support individual school leaders as well as full school leadership teams and (2) Accelerate Online. These programs were developed in response to varying development needs. Our work targets leadership development for school principals and leadership team members. Our trainings and long-term school advisory supports are intended to help shift school leader mindsets and to break down systems that are not working so that they can be rebuilt in a way that serves all students. We support our partners to effectively uplift the distinct voices of parents, students, and the communities where we work. Some members of the education community have viewed us as a small organization with limited reach, but our footprint of support extends to more than 20 cities and nearly 300 school leaders across the U.S. This exposure is something we value as the diversity of circumstances we encounter in these communities informs the continuous refinement of our programming. Our reputation is of an organization willing to roll up its proverbial sleeves and get in the trenches with our partners. The scope of our work with school-based leadership is unique and grounded in theory that is transformative and data-driven. We are respected for our research-informed approach to support, and we are seen as true partners and sounding boards.

## OUR STANCE

Based on our organizational identity - the skin we are in - and our collective experiences, Accelerate Institute is committed to ensuring schools have the leadership and systems knowledge they need to support academic excellence for students. We believe the catalyst for creating more equitable schools lies at the intersection of leadership and systems. We acknowledge the systems and structures in place in our country can only be fundamentally changed through policies and shifts in economic investments. We believe the work of our organization and others in this space is important to ensure that inequities are not being perpetuated through the education system and hope that we are able to influence policy. We understand inequities can be found across all levels of our educational system: from the national and state level, down to districts and individual schools. Our belief is that everything that happens during a school day should be done through an equity lens, requiring schools to shift from changing student behavior and mindsets toward changing systems and adult mindsets. We are committed to leading from an understanding that transformation happens from the inside out. Before we ask others to engage in transformational experiences, we must first have engaged in that experience. We recognize that we cannot deliver on the change we wish to see in the education system if we do not engage in this transformation ourselves as an organization.

Accelerate Institute supports schools that see BIPOC communities as assets rather than a rationale to lower expectations. When we think about all the systemic factors negatively affecting our students and their communities and therefore the unique challenges our leaders face in leading their schools (housing, food



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insecurity, education, police violence, mental health, addiction, career access, etc.), the underlying theme that weaves its way through all of these is race. We intentionally isolate race, because ignoring institutional and systemic racism remains the greatest force preventing schools and districts from serving all their community members well. In this way we will truly put students first as our organization's core values state.

Accelerate Institute seeks opportunities to co-construct new ways of doing and being. Our commitment as we take part in these opportunities is to learn from inevitable failures, measure, and leap forward with better approaches that benefit our partners, the students they support, and the greater community we all belong to. As individuals who support this commitment, we will consistently act to grow and learn as individuals in our understanding and commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. We will move to earn the trust of our fellow team members and partners and create space for the dissonance that breeds reflection and change in the work we do. We have conviction in our belief in education as the lever for change and push for rigor through the lens of empathy and equity. We align with school communities, districts, organizations, and institutions that honor and courageously uplift similar values in both their beliefs and practices. When our convictions and/or values are challenged, Accelerate Institute is committed to calling our colleagues into a generative dialogue that will support the success of our least-served students. We fight for education communities that liberate and heal.