

Reimagining learning communities that center youth power, equity mindsets and restorative practices.

# Designing Equity - Centered Education

Summer 2021

A report based on the The Heartland Education Action Summit, a convening for equipping educators and students with Anti-Racist and Equitable Learning frameworks.

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# Introduction

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## Why the Summit?

In 2019, Creative Reaction Lab and partners City Garden Montessori and Noble Network of Charter Schools were selected to host a Regional Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Convening in the United States Midwest region. Combining Creative Reaction Lab's Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD) framework and City Garden's focus on Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist (ABAR) practices and curriculum and Noble Network of Charter Schools history of civic engagement as a grassroots educational equity hub, the Heartland Education Action Summit convening aimed to center racial equity in education as a long-term outcome. In the education sector, youth learn their histories, develop skills, and build intellectual competence. These lessons impact their decisions and actions throughout their life, and thus, their ability to sustain and grow as human beings. We are conscious that administrators and educators both have significant power to shape the perceptions we have about ourselves (beyond representation), life expectancies, and quality of

life. Nonetheless, the history of education in the United States demonstrates the source and design of racial inequities in education that continue to have present ramifications.

# The Case for Equity in Education

*Content warning: enslavement of African people, racial discrimination & violence*

Racial and ethnic inequity in education today is a result of intentional decisions that have shaped the American education system throughout history. In the Jim Crow Era starting in the 1870s, Southern whites believed literacy among enslaved Africans would lead to revolts, resulting in legislation barring Black people from learning to read and write.<sup>1</sup> In the 1800's, Indigenous youth were taken to boarding schools where they were forced to abandon their communities' language and culture for the English language and the culture of Christianity through Forced Assimilation Education<sup>1</sup>.

In the 1900's, Mexican American children in Southwestern and Midwestern states were placed in segregated classrooms or schools. Administrators used "English language deficiencies" as justification for this practice, although, in reality, many students were English speakers.<sup>1,2</sup> Furthermore busing to send Black students to suburban, predominantly white schools, often far outside of their communities, increased starting in the 1960's; thus, causing an increase in encountered racism and classism from their white peers and teachers.<sup>1,3</sup>

In the last decade, the consequences of systemic racism in education are clearly present across classrooms, curriculum, and institutions in the United States. During the 2015–16 school year, the

National Center for Education Statistics found that in the U.S. only 7% of educators were Black, Latinx educators represented only 9%, and Indigenous educators represented less than 1% of this distribution.<sup>4</sup> Despite the K–12 student population becoming more racially and ethnically diverse in recent years, the racial and ethnic demographics of our nation's educators has failed to reflect this shift.<sup>5</sup> Their study revealed that 80% of educators were white, many monolingual and middle-class and that in primary and secondary institutions with 50–89% of the student population identifying as Black, Latinx, Indigenous, and/or Asian, an overwhelming number of their educators were white (69–80%).<sup>6</sup>

Regarding curriculum implemented in learning settings, many of the historic and contemporary narratives presented in "traditional" and "non-traditional" education settings are Euro-centric, many times only mentioning or applauding the accomplishments of white individuals. Positive stories of individuals from historically-underinvested communities tend to be few and/or erased. Where are the opportunities to collectively shift education structures to support racial equity, anti-racism, social and emotional well-being, and youth leadership? How can young leaders and educators (within the classroom and community) reimagine school systems that center youth power, equity mindsets, and restorative practices?

Where are the opportunities to collectively shift education structures to support racial equity, anti-racism, social and emotional well-being, and youth leadership?

How can young leaders and educators (within the classroom and community) reimagine school systems that center youth power, equity mindsets, and restorative practices?

# Defining Practices

## Social-Emotional Learning (SEL)

Social-Emotional Learning as defined by the [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#) is “the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”

## Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist (ABAR)

Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist (ABAR) typically refers to a pedagogy about racial inequity, discrimination, racism, bias and social justice. ABAR has been implemented, notably in Montessori Schools, to prepare educators and engage youth to “work toward creating and promoting a culture of compassion, kindness, and equitability in the world,” as the American Montessori Society states. To learn more about how City Garden Montessori in St. Louis, MO has committed to and integrated ABAR practices in their work, [click here](#).

## Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD)

[Equity-Centered Community Design](#) (recognized as a Fast Company World Changing Idea Finalist) is a unique creative problem-solving process based on equity, humility-building, integrating history and healing practices, addressing power dynamics, and co-creating with the community. Design is defined in ECCD as “the intent and unintentional impact behind an outcome;” thus, anyone who has the power to affect outcomes – regardless of their age, title, interests or field – is considered a designer. The design process focuses on a community’s culture and needs so that they can gain tools to dismantle systemic oppression and create a future with equity for all.

## Why are SEL, ABAR, and ECCD important and timely?

SEL, ABAR, and ECCD center the importance of advancing toward racial equity and the social and emotional well-being of youth who hold historically underinvested identities. A central objective of the Heartland Education Action summit was for students, educators, and administrators to be prepared to implement these frameworks in learning spaces across the nation; and thus moving our nation toward racial equity in education.



# Summit Objectives

## **Gain a Shift in Mindset.**

Through this summit we wanted to promote a sustainable mindset shift to better incorporate Social Emotional Learning, Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist practices, and Equity-Centered Community Design in participants' learning communities.

## **Building Educational Toolkits for Liberation.**

Educators began building a toolkit to integrate Anti-Bias/Anti-Racist (ABAR), Social-Emotional Learning (SEL), and Equity-Centered Community Design (ECCD) frameworks into their learning spaces; cultivating creative and racially-conscious mindsets that increase both educator and youth self-awareness of identity and engagement with humility.

## **Join a Mighty Networks Community.**

Educators connected and built a network of educators through Mighty Networks to provide opportunities to continue educating and challenging each other even after the summit was over.

## **Gaining 21st Century Skills.**

Educators increased their capacity to advance 21st century learning skills (teamwork, creativity, curiosity, critical thinking, civic literacy, leadership, cultural responsiveness, and more) with their young leaders in order to support youth in becoming

[Redesigners for Justice™](#).

## **Cultivating Consciousness.**

Educators built their racial consciousness and creative problem-solving acumen to address inequities in their neighborhoods and/or their schools.

## **Opportunity to Receive a Prototyping Fund.**

Educators had an opportunity to receive a prototyping fund to implement their prototypes into their educational spaces that they developed and co-created during the summit.

# About our Attendees

The variety of roles our summit participants hold in connection to education:

**Educator**

**Music director**

**Student**

**Professor**

**ESL Teacher**

**Research analyst**

**Student educator**

**Manager**

**Faculty**

**Learning specialist**

**Administrator**

**Coach**

**Teacher**

**Education  
consultant**

**School Social  
Worker**

**Principal**

# About our Attendees

We had 81 people joining us virtually from all over the country and continent, including:

51

from the U.S. Midwest region

3

from the U.S. Rocky Mountain region

8

from the U.S. West Coast region

1

from Ontario, Canada

18

from the U.S. Northeast region

The various learning settings our summit participants engage in regularly (which are not exclusive of each other) :

6%

at Title 1 schools

44%

at high schools

26%

at community youth-serving organizations

23%

at charter schools

30%

at community colleges, technical colleges, colleges & universities

11%

at other groups, organizations, and companies

# Summit Structure

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Experts Panel

## Summit Structure

While the original convening was planned to be in-person, the summit eventually moved to a virtual format due to the circumstances of COVID-19. Because our summit was virtual, we were able to invite participants from all over the country to engage in the Heartland Summit. After registration, participants were invited to the summit's Mighty Network, an online community networking platform that allowed for educators, administrators, students, and student educators to connect before, during, and after the summit. The Mighty Network continues to be available for continued resource sharing and community-building for summit participants.

The flow of the summit agenda was based on the concepts of [Equity-Centered Community Design](#), starting with History & Healing and ending with Rapid Prototyping and Testing & Learning.

# Day 1

## Examining Self, Power and the Case for Equity in Education

The first day began with foundational concepts such as language setting and inquiry of personal bias, privilege, and unseen areas. We then explored historical and present cases for equity in education before examining our relationships to systemic and personal power.

### History and Healing

#### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- How have historical and current events + power influenced how you show up in your community and practice?
- What does being anti-racist mean?
- What messages have you received in your life about education?

We discussed the pain and trauma of having to hide your true self in order to assimilate to the school environment, and the longer term implications of experiencing this early on.

- Aditi Garg

### Acknowledging, Dismantling, & Sharing Power Constructs

#### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- What roles do our identities play in shaping our perspectives and design power?
- How do your interactions with power influence your relationships within the communities in which you participate?

How might I have the humility and self awareness to recognize when any of my identities/power/position might actually be a barrier to liberation?

- Sarah Minegar

### Defining & Assessing Topic and Community Needs

#### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- What are some inequitable practices or narratives you'd like to address in your learning community or in the education sector more broadly?

**How might I have  
the humility and self  
awareness to recognize  
when any of my  
identities/power/position  
might actually be a  
barrier to liberation?**

SARAH MINEGAR

# Day 2

## Exploring Collaboration in Community

On the second day, focus shifted toward the collective as we explored the [Redesigners for Justice™](#) movement and how to invite diverse co-creators in our work. We then heard from a panel of youth living experts about their experiences in learning settings and ideas for the future of education. We ended the day breaking into small groups and beginning to ideate and rapidly prototype approaches to address current educational inequities.

### Inviting Diverse Co-Creators

#### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- Who is part of the decision-making space? Who is missing from the decision-making space? Why?

“Top down leadership and systems that protect power are inauthentic approaches to shared decision making”

-Caitlin Munguia

### Ideating Approaches

#### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- How are we determining the viability of ideas? Is the process equitable?
- How can we shift education to center youth power, ownership, and expertise?
- How can we incentivize and hold educators accountable to co-create youth-led spaces?

### Rapid Prototyping

#### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- What questions are you looking to answer?
- How will you know your approach is successful?



# Day 3

## Co-Creating for Community Engagement + Interventions

On the third and final day, we continued rapid prototyping and began testing & learning in our small groups, with each team giving feedback to another for future iteration. After time for modifications, groups presented their prototypes to the larger group. We wrapped up the summit with probing questions for future action planning.

## Rapid Prototyping (cont.), Testing & Learning

### KEY QUESTIONS + REFLECTIONS

- How will this approach be experienced?  
By youth? By Educators/The Learning community?
- Why might it fail? What might be some unintended consequences of this prototype on historically underinvested communities?

**Top down leadership and systems that protect power are inauthentic approaches to shared decision making.**

CAITLIN MUNGUIA

# Youth Living Experts Panel

We invited Black and Latinx youth living experts to sit on a panel to share their experiences with inequity in education.



**MARIAPAZ GOMEZ**



**KIMORI POINTER**



**ANTIGONE CHAMBERS-REED**



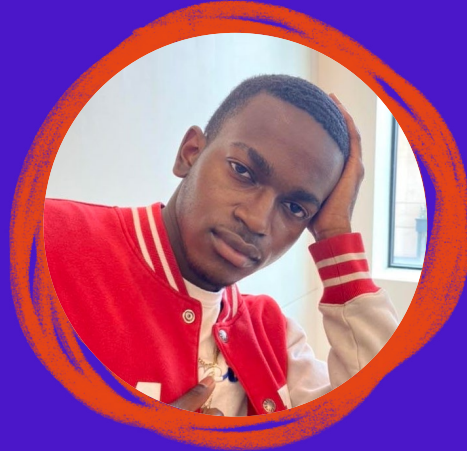
**MALIK SINGLETON**

# Youth Living Experts Panel

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**MARIAPAZ GOMEZ**



**KIMORI POINTER**



**ANTIGONE CHAMBERS-REED**



**MALIK SINGLETON**



WHAT IS THE FUTURE YOU ENVISION FOR YOURSELF AND YOUR  
COMMUNITY IN EDUCATION?

“There’s a lack of mental and emotional support for the Latinx community within schools, high schools especially, as immigrant students are transitioning from their culture of origin to the states. This is mainly because counselors, psychologists, or social workers are not bilingual or trilingual or speak in the different languages that students have grown up with. What I’ve always wanted is to provide those resources to my community and to the different historically marginalized communities.”

MARIAPAZ GOMEZ



HOW DO YOU SEE SCHOOLS BEING A PLACE OF HEALING AND SUPPORT DURING THIS PANDEMIC? HOW CAN EDUCATORS BETTER ADVOCATE FOR YOUR NEEDS?

“I want educators to understand that they are working in a machine with parents and with the people in your environment and your community...It takes a village to raise a child so for me, I would like to see educators in their advocacy working directly with the people that are directly impacting the student.”

**ANTIGONE CHAMBERS-REED**



WHY IS REPRESENTATION IMPORTANT TO YOU AND WHAT CHALLENGES HAVE YOU FACED IN YOUR EDUCATIONAL JOURNEY?

“I didn’t see like Black males in communications and that’s one thing, a challenge that I faced, because I felt as if I was not gonna get opportunities because of my race and where I was from...I feel like it takes me to be in the room to knock down doors for other Black males, Black males in journalism.”

**MALIK SINGLETON**



HOW DO YOU SEE SCHOOLS BEING A PLACE OF HEALING AND SUPPORT DURING THIS PANDEMIC? HOW CAN EDUCATORS BETTER ADVOCATE FOR YOUR NEEDS?

“I’ve seen people go from straight A’s to all F’s because of something that they’re going through. It’s not like the teacher’s weren’t there for them, it’s just that they didn’t understand and it’s hard for you to understand if you’re not going through it as well...You can’t change that but it’s something that you have to listen to and cope with all that stuff and help them and guide them through it.”

**KIMORI POINTER**



# Prototypes for Redesigning Education

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Reveal and Heal

“We know that students are saying that there aren’t a lot of educators and professionals that look like them. A simple solution could be to hire BIPOC people but we know that isn’t enough. We are proposing a peer mentoring program that connects students with professionals that represent the same underrepresented groups”

- Dax Craig

“We would like to facilitate stories from their own communities... Students would be able to share stories of triumph and joy and co-create them with the community and share them with others”

- Maddie Deegan Davenport

# Course Ideas

Classes that Malik, Mariapaz, Antigone, and Kimori (our Youth Living Expert Panel) proposed:

Black history taught by a Black teacher

How to have difficult conversations

Feeling & Healing

Financial literacy

Dealing with mental health, anxiety and trauma

# Radical Reverse Mentors

## FEATURED PROTOTYPE

**Reverse mentors; college administrators are accountable to a board of student advisors, drawn from historically underrepresented students.**

### Concept

During a two-month prototype period, administrators and students meet to co-design, establish community agreements during the first week and meetings will continue once a week. At the end of each month, there will be an opportunity to share learnings with each other and the school community and implement feedback into school policy. Success includes administrators feeling genuine accountability to the student population, students (especially historically underrepresented) feeling heard/better represented, and policy beginning to better reflect student priorities.

### Team Members

Leah Hartmann, Emily Brookhart, Cassie Bingham

### Why it Might Fail

Some possibilities of failure/unintended consequences include administrators who haven't fully bought into the program may tokenize students and not take their feedback seriously and recruiting students who are not representative and in parity of full student experience.

### Questions to Consider

- What real, tangible outcome would the community need to see?
- Is this board of student advisors desirable to both students and administrators?
- How to support students' power in this space, for youth to own that space?

# Flip the Discipline Script



## FEATURED PROTOTYPE

**Flip the Discipline Script; celebrate and highlight students facing disciplinary actions.**

### Concept

Listening to students who most frequently receive disciplinary violations and what they think about current policies, practices in a playful, trustful setting. Asking what their experience is like as valuable members of the school community, and engaging their parents & caregivers so that together, we can co-design what a better system of justice entails. Food, swag, and childcare will be paid for while individuals share and give feedback, and create an equitable plan for each student and equality plan for all students.

### Team Members

Emily Wrobel, Brian Jennings,  
Jess Brown, Rachel Siegel

### Why it Might Fail

Some potential points of failure or unintended consequences are not acting on the suggestions and thus being performative, students feeling singled out or misrepresented, and stigma of leaving for the group.

### Questions to Consider

- How do we contact parents for a survey during COVID?
- How do we identify spaces/communities where these students feel love, belonging, truly themselves?
- How do we build trust for BIPOC in environments where educators don't look like them?

# Reveal and Heal

## FEATURED PROTOTYPE

Highlight stories of healing in school communications, and reveal and acknowledge harm done.

### Concept

Revealing & Healing is a youth powered group working to publish content surrounding existing healing or revealing harm happening within the school space. For the first prototype plan: Reveal & Heal Team creates content templates and brainstorms publication platform ideas. There will then be advertisements and seeking public submissions through anonymous (by choice) form and teachers should model vulnerability first before asking students to submit. Reveal & Heal Team then reviews submissions & processes “content” and the student group shares the stories on the chosen platform.

### Team Members

Leticia Rose, Kimori Pointer,  
Samantha Siros, Sara Gryboski

### Why it Might Fail

Some potential failure or unintended consequences include students not taking the content seriously, submissions may be limited by various access points, and therefore the content may miss marks on inclusivity, and generational comfort with technology as a limiting factor.

### Questions to Consider

- How to pass this down year by year?
- How do we incentivize participation from stakeholders?

# Impact & Reflections

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# Summit Impact

## Evaluating Summit Components

Participants felt that small group discussion was the most valuable virtual component of the summit, followed by slideshow presentation and then chatbox & individual reflection. Our summit attendees voluntarily mentioned the youth panel as particularly impactful. Creative Reaction Lab staff observed particular enthusiasm around language setting as a foundational first step in any project or shared experience.

Based on both participant and staff feedback, future opportunities for growth include an asynchronous portion of the summit released beforehand with tutorials for platforms and slidedeck materials readily available in one place. We would also continue Glows and Grows to incorporate participant feedback and potentially extend an open form throughout the summit so that individuals have more opportunities to share feedback. Furthermore, exploration of a mixture of weekday and weekend engagement would be valuable for both staff and participants.

## Impact on Participants

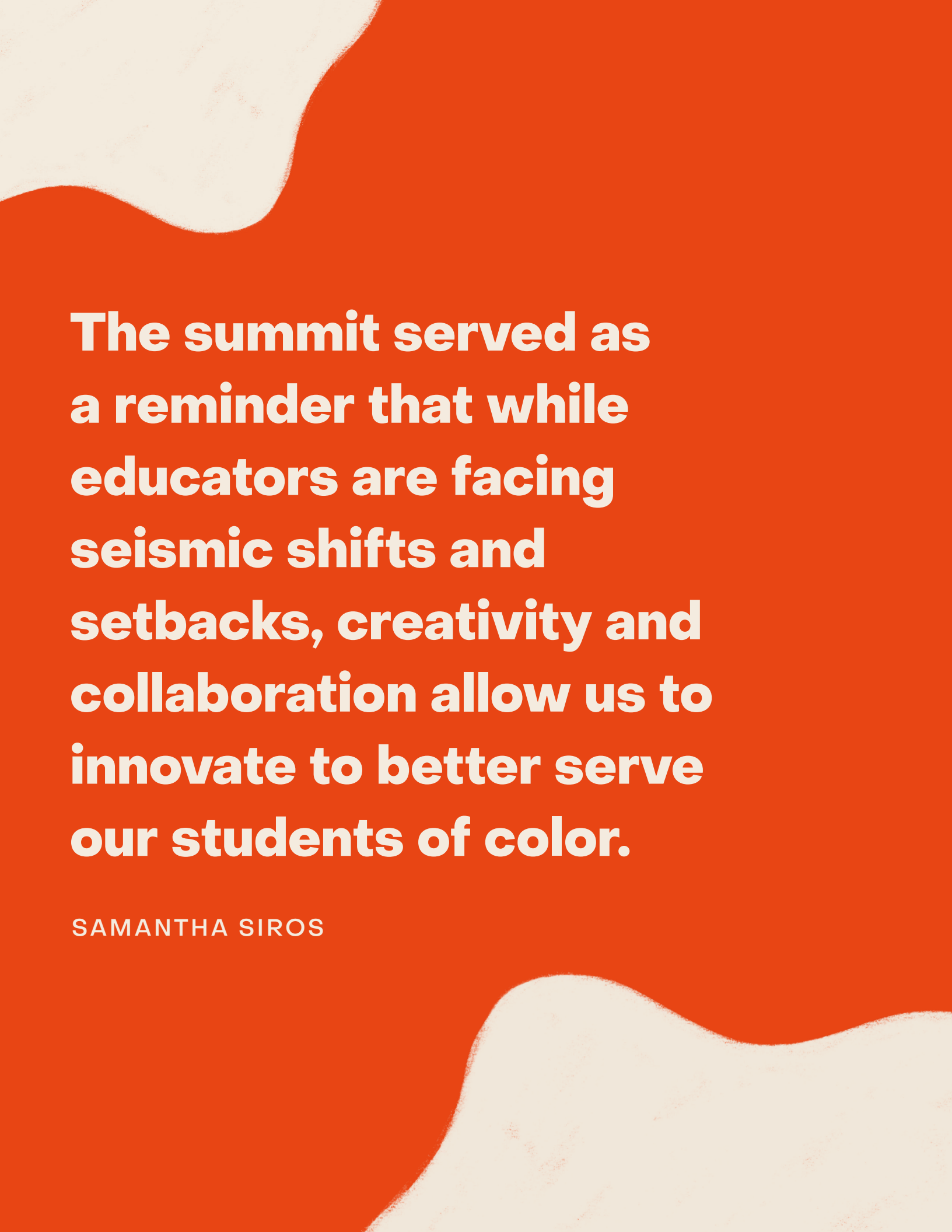
To understand the summit's impact, we employed evaluative tools such as a post-summit survey and staff observational notes. On a scale of 1-100, survey respondents (16% of registrants) said they would be likely to recommend the Heartland Education Action Summit to a friend

/ acquaintance with an average of 95.7 out of 100. Youth respondents (individuals 26 years old and under) felt most confident in their ability to shift their behavior without defensiveness based on individual bias, unseen areas, and privileges, explaining to people how power dynamics have impacted racial inequities in their learning communities, and their ability to address racial, ethnic, and health inequities in their learning com

## Lessons Learned From Hosting a Virtual Summit

A virtual platform allowed for participants all over the United States, youth panelists, and even one person from Canada to tune in synchronously and work together whereas costs of travel, food, and housing would be significant barriers to participating in an in-person gathering. As a staff, we experienced challenges in reaching every small breakout group via Zoom without overextending staff capacity. While an in-person summit format would allow for easy 'floating' between groups, the virtual format made it more difficult to move between groups and give feedback. One of the benefits of an in-person gathering is the time to connect informally outside the summit space. While we had a mix and mingle session at the end of day 2, the event was optional and not well attended. Potential reasons include zoom fatigue after multiple days of zoom and that the summit extended into the weekend. For more information on summit impact results, click [here](#).





**The summit served as a reminder that while educators are facing seismic shifts and setbacks, creativity and collaboration allow us to innovate to better serve our students of color.**

SAMANTHA SIROS

# Takeaways

## What did we find out, what would we change for the future, what does this mean for the future of education?

As the National Equity Project states, “Any system produces what it was designed to produce.” During this summit, we brainstormed and tested ideas that specifically address a particular source of inequity in education. Whether it be the concepts of standardized testing, curriculum, discipline, or advisory, we observed that each piece of the inequitable system must be redesigned in order to truly center the power and healing of historically underinvested youth. We discussed challenges of bureaucracy within institutional education and confronted the risk of doing this work and challenging inequitable systems that benefit those that hold historically centered power. We also reflected on our own potential biases, unseen areas, and harm that we have inflicted in the past and may cause in the future as we are prototyping our ideas to redesign education toward equity. As Sarah, a summit participant posed: “How might I have the humility and self awareness to recognize when any of my identities/power/position might actually be a barrier to liberation?”


Almost every prototype featured one of the most pertinent concepts of this summit: power shifting. To shift power can mean to recognize one’s own power to transfer and release control of it in order

for another to leverage it on their own terms. By shifting power from educators, administrators, and teachers to historically underinvested youth, we open ourselves to deep listening, action and accountability toward racial and ethnic equity. Some questions we asked at for action planning for

How will you shift decision-making power to youth in your learning community? What support do you need?

What could you begin testing next week? How? What resources do you need to support prototyping and testing?

What opportunities do you see to intertwine ABAR (Anti-bias, Anti-racist) and SEL (Social-Emotional Learning) practices in your learning community?



**We have the power to re-imagine and re-design education as we know it. However, we need to work together. The things with the best design are co-created by experts of all kinds.**

HELEN REILLY

**Within the education sector, we learn histories, skills, and a variety of competencies. However, typically these have been framed through the lens of white supremacy. Everyone should question who has constructed the narratives that inform our perspectives on our history, other individuals, and social norms - and then challenge them from within and outside the system.**

**ANTIONETTE D. CARROLL**

# Credits & Acknowledgements

## Youth Living Expert Panel

Mariapaz Gomez  
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Kimori Pointer

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# Notes

## Design

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