The mission of the School Reform Initiative is to create transformational learning communities fiercely committed to educational equity and excellence.

SRI’s mission calls for a commitment not just to educational excellence – like many organizations – but to educational excellence and equity. SRI recognizes that educational excellence can never be achieved unless it is achieved for each and every student in our schools. The SRI mission is challenging, aspirational, and demanding. It begs two important questions: (1) What does SRI mean by “equity?” and (2) What is the connection between the work of the School Reform Initiative and educational equity?

What do we mean by “equity?”

SRI believes that educational equity is the practice of ensuring that each child is successful regardless of their external or internal, social or cultural contexts.

SRI understands that as long as race, class, sexual orientation, immigration status, gender, gender identity, ability, religion, and ethnicity continue to predict the future life chances of children in our nation, we must work with schools and school systems to identify related barriers and obstacles to opportunity and development, disrupt their negative impact, eliminate the persistent disparities, and implement new policies and practices that support significant learning outcomes for each and every student.

In many cases, the most difficult work educators take up is the conversation about equity and its implications for professional practice. While there is a range of injustices in our educational system that need to be vigorously addressed, it is often the conversation about race that proves the most challenging. Race permeates every aspect of classroom and school life, including relationships with students and their families, the curriculum, discipline policies, classroom culture, and styles of communicating. Race is a factor on the playground, in the lunchroom as well as in the classroom. The conversation about race and equity is challenging not only because of the persistent inequities in our schools, but also because the conversation surfaces deep issues of identity, privilege, history, power and the very purpose of our educational system.

SRI holds that the practice of ensuring that each child is successful regardless of their external or internal, social or cultural contexts requires racial identity work — exploring the role that race has played in shaping our own and our students’ lives. Race matters beyond the individual and group level, however: SRI holds that inequity has institutional and structural dimensions as well. We recognize that social systems — including schools, health, housing, criminal justice, and employment – produce, maintain and even exacerbate racial inequities.
What is the connection between the work of the School Reform Initiative and equity?

Ironically, educators live in an era of “calls to action,” or “groundbreaking initiatives,” particularly in schools that are “underperforming.” Rather than addressing issues of equity in deep and sustained ways, schools have become victim to “easy answers,” and “superficial improvements.” Rather than asking what we are doing (or not doing) in schools that so alienates some students that they eventually leave (or are pushed out), schools are often content with implementing “bullying prevention” programs or “positive discipline” initiatives that treat selected symptoms but never get at the root causes connected to problematic, unequal, unproductive, prejudicial conditions and relationships.

The SRI commitment to “educational excellence and equity” is not a call to action. It is a call to better action — action based on a collaborative analysis of fundamental assumptions that gives full consideration to many problem-solving alternatives and uses a wide lens to reflect on complex issues. Better action happens in schools where adults can share their practice, give and receive useful feedback, work collaboratively, and expose, explore and reshape deeply held ideas about students, teaching and learning, and the purpose of schooling. Better action happens when educators have the courage and skill to resist the easy answer and superficial solution, engage in racial identity work, and embrace the challenge of digging deeply into the uncomfortable, persistent, inequitable conditions and relationships that exist in too many schools.

SRI believes that better action happens in schools characterized by collaborative, reflective practice. Collaborative, reflective practice happens when educators regularly give and receive thoughtful feedback, focus persistently on teaching and learning, and commit to surfacing, examining and rethinking important assumptions. These practices build educators’ capacity to embrace difference, identify and question commonly shared ideas, take up different points of view, speak their own truths, and manage the anxiety of not knowing.

SRI commits to building and sustaining groups and communities that have the capacity to productively stay in even the most difficult equity-focused conversations. However, the goal of reflective dialogue is not more dialogue, but the creation of a more useful, more justified action, a better action based on a close examination and rethinking of our most closely-held beliefs. It is this persistent, courageous quest for “better action” that is at the heart of our fierce commitment to educational equity and excellence.