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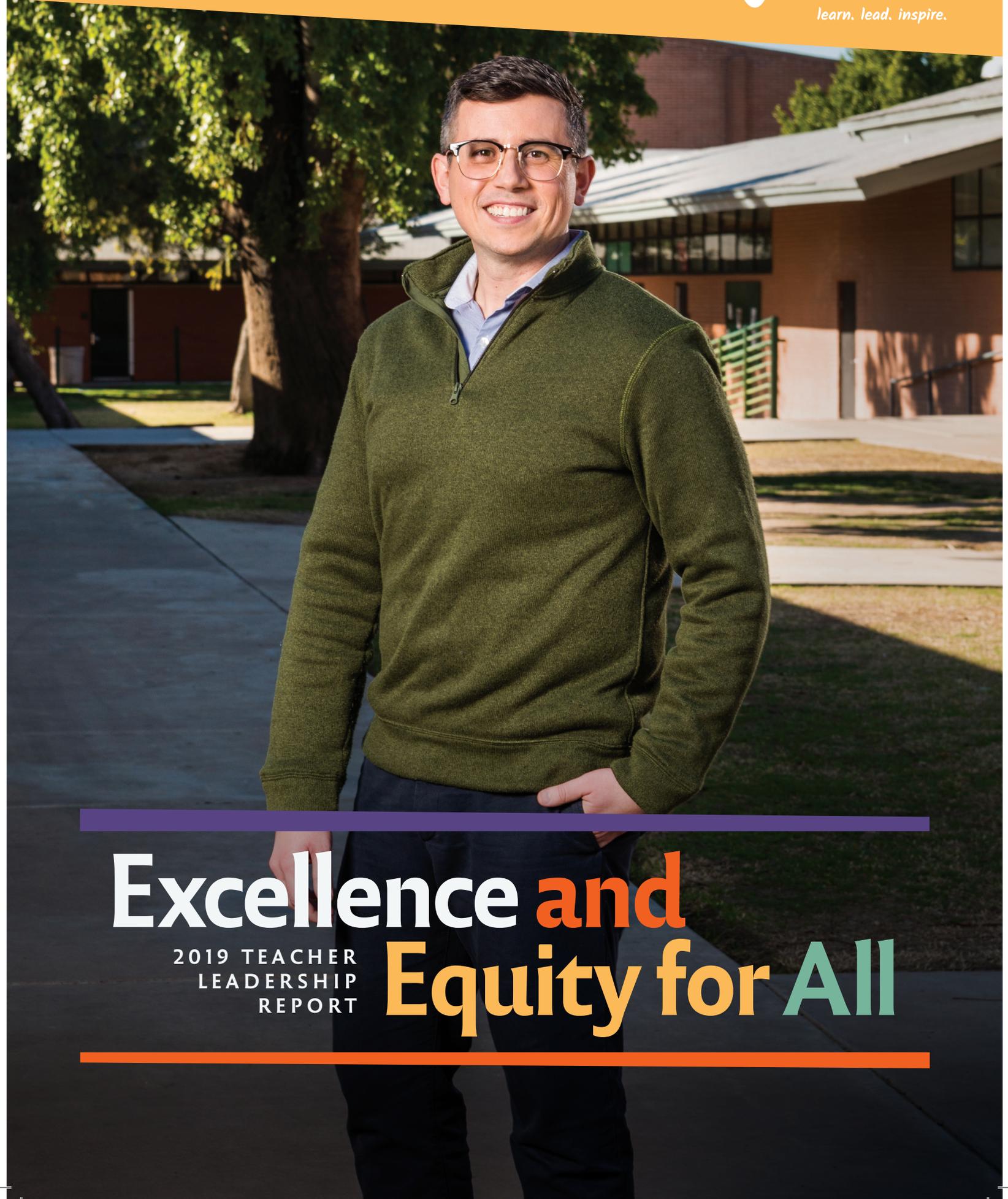
Excellence and Equity for All

2019 TEACHER
LEADERSHIP
REPORT



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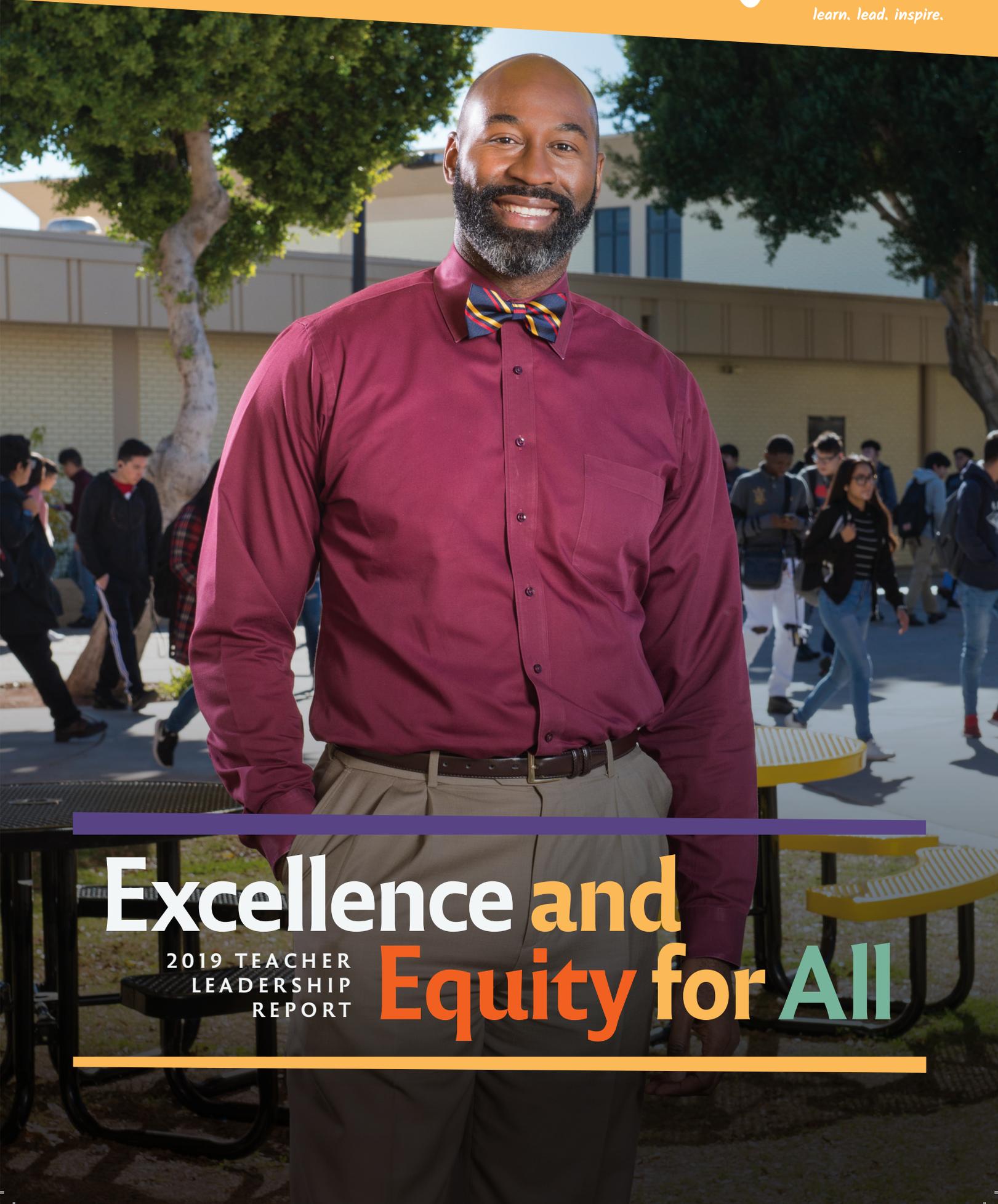
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Excellence and
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REPORT **Equity for All**



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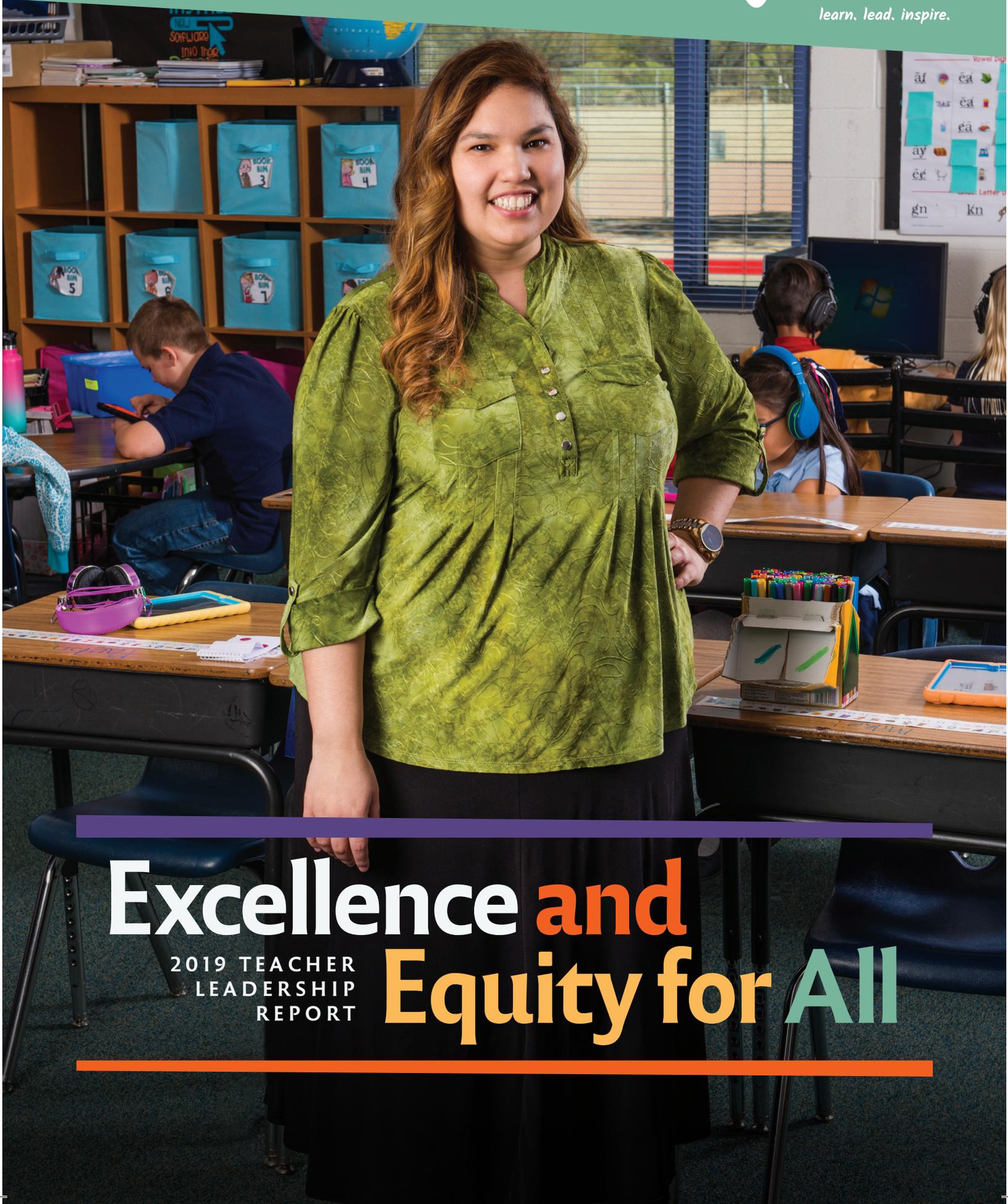
Excellence and Equity for All

2019 TEACHER
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REPORT



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Excellence and Equity for All

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LEADERSHIP
REPORT

Introduction

The Arizona K12 Center is committed to honoring teacher leadership across the professional continuum. It's a joy to showcase educators making a difference for their students as they strive for equitable conditions in their contexts and communities.

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Stories of Teacher Leadership

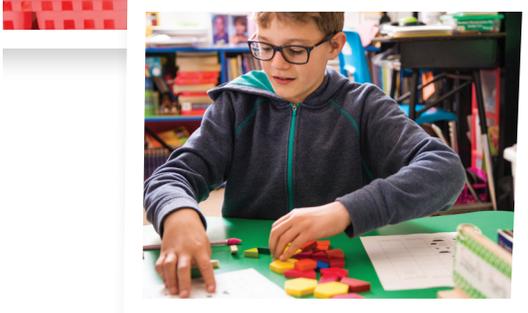
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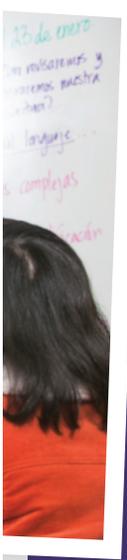
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"Equity is developing leaders who can transform our institutions by eliminating inequitable practices and cultivating unique gifts, talents, and interests of every child."



Last year, more than ever, **Arizona educators found their professional voice.** Together, teachers kept students at the forefront of their actions and in the core of their hearts. Regardless of district, school, or community, professionals **linked arms to fight for equity.** Because of brave actions by those willing to sacrifice for Arizona's future, progress was made.



If teacher leadership had a soundtrack, it would include a mix of powerful songs that keep educators marching to serve Arizona's students and families.

According to the National Equity Project (2017), achieving equity in education requires developing leaders who can transform our institutions. The role of teacher leaders is to eliminate inequitable practices and cultivate the unique gifts, talents, and interests of every child so that success and failure are no longer predictable by student identity, race, culture, economic background, or any other social factor. The Arizona K12 Center is honored to paint a picture of the vivid work and resilient dedication of six teacher leaders across the state who strive to enhance equity in their communities.

Professionals in the field are likely familiar with an image that differentiates equity from equality.

Most commonly, it's a picture of three individuals standing on boxes of differing heights, which enables each to see over the fence to observe a baseball game. Stakeholders grasp that equality is no longer the motivating factor; equity ensures students have opportunities for success, regardless of their background.

Now, it's time to push the envelope a little further. What if the scene on the other side of the partition were grander than a ballgame? Think big — a job at a Fortune 500 company, a position in the White House, or an exciting opportunity in a career that's yet to be created. Educators must make the personal commitment to level up and open students' eyes to the unthinkable. Teacher leaders must continue to make equity the norm.

Yolanda

FOCUS:

Uses flexible seating and personal relationships to impact student learning, which dissolves physical barriers and heightens opportunities for success.

For the last 13 years, Yolanda Everett has switched on the light in the same fourth-grade classroom every morning. With each flick of the light switch, the National Board candidate has found creative ways to make her classroom a more equitable space for learners.

Each morning, she wakes up with a full heart, ready to reach her quiet, unresponsive students, while also challenging the outspoken higher-level thinkers. Sure, curriculum scaffolding is involved, but she also works with her learners in a more nontraditional way. Think: stools, standing stations, pillows, cushions, tires converted into chairs, and so much more.

Everett has been committed to connecting with learners right where they are. After graduating from college, she quickly realized that textbook teaching was not going to cut it. “I remember picking up the textbooks and thinking, ‘Here we go, I got this,’ only to learn that the average classroom textbook was created

to teach the ‘average’ student. But who is the ‘average’ student?” she asks.

From that moment, the University of Arizona alumna focused on creating an equitable learning environment with various points of entry for all students who walked into her classroom. One of her most visible methods is flexible seating. Each day, students have the opportunity to choose which work environment will fuel their learning. Her room contains few traditional desks. Instead, there are a variety of places for students to stand, kneel, or sit. Everett believes giving students the ability to make self-directed choices creates accountability and a more fluid learning environment.

What sparked her interest in this method? After a decade in the classroom at the second-oldest school in

Everett

VILLAGE MEADOWS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
SIERRA VISTA UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

the Sierra Vista Unified School District, Everett says she was ready for a change. She wanted something more for herself and her students. With the administration’s blessing, the southern Arizona educator put fear and hesitation aside to make her flexible seating dream a reality.

“I had to get creative. The custodian walked me around campus to where older and unused furniture was kept. It was there I found the materials for the kneeling station, which is made up of kindergarten tables without the legs. I also found my standing desk there,” Everett explains.

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS ON EQUITY

“If Arizona educators do not put equity at the forefront, then we do a disservice to our students. Education cannot be like a cookie cutter. It’s not one-size-fits-all.”

“Other items I use were scoured from yard sales and local markets. Some I bought online and others were donated when people heard what I was trying to do.”

In an attempt to create a pliable space for her fourth graders, she knew she had to let go of certain norms.

“Too many teachers feel an unnecessary need to control.

Don’t misunderstand me; the

students know my expectations and know I will set the bar high for them, but they also understand they need to explore new ideas. They need to create and build,” Everett says.

To ease the transition from a “typical” classroom to the one she’s created for her students, the longtime teacher modeled the way. She uses a standing station for her computer, which takes up less space and rids the area of clutter, and also demonstrates her preferred working style.

“In the beginning of the year, I require every student to change seating daily for at least the first month, so they can try all the different seating arrangements and find the one that works best for them.”

Flexibility and modifying, as needed, is key.

“Students know that if they line up first thing in the morning to get their materials for the day, they get to have their first choice for seating,” she says. “It encourages students to come prepared and be ready to get to work. There are some students who get their first choice often, and it’s very important to them.”

At the end of a long day, Everett says her greatest hope is that others realize the effort she puts forth is to help students fall in love with learning something new every day.

“We need to be creative and allow our students to become the leaders in their learning.”

Equity in Action

- Aims to know students on a variety of levels.
- Applies for grants to enhance her classroom environment.
- Showcases what it looks like to put student needs above her own, thereby ridding the quest for personal control and shifting onus to students.
- Creates a classroom where flexible seating removes barriers.

1 As you reflect on Yolanda’s story, what inequities were addressed?

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2 What advocacy steps do you want to take to improve equity in your community?

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3 Which stakeholders should you engage in order to meet students where they are?

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James



FOCUS:

Sponsors an after-school club, which promotes independent reading, while providing a strong model of best practices for high school freshmen.

James King isn't your average high school English teacher — or one whom students forget. Rather, the University of Central Florida alumnus is a mentor and confidant for teenagers at Sunnyslope High School as the founder of an after-school book club for freshmen.

King didn't start out as a teacher. He spent years in the hospitality industry with the Walt Disney Company in Florida before making his way to education. Although he played a key role “where dreams come true,” he felt called to change careers because of inequities he saw in the workplace. The decision was further validated during the four years he served as a K-12 substitute teacher and as a volunteer with Junior Achievement.

“Before I began as a classroom teacher, I worked as a manager in the hospitality field. There, I saw the results of disparity in education. People who had poor education experiences were unable to retain training

and often found themselves violating company policies. They had a difficult time staying employed,” he explains. “I became a teacher to focus on leveling the field and preparing as many different people as possible to be successful in the workforce.”

Now, after two years as a full-time teacher at the same school where he earned his high school diploma, the Phoenix native processes the impact he's made on over 300 students by bringing a book club idea to life — better grades, a confidence boost, and higher personal expectations. Through these efforts, he's deepened relationships and enabled learners to see their potential.

“The club's focus is to assist freshmen in completing reading assignments for their ELA classes. We hope the assistance helps them pass classes and

King

SUNNYSLOPE
HIGH SCHOOL
GLENDALE UNION
HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT

demonstrates that taking time to commit to something, like completing a novel, feels good,” he says. “Kids raise and set their own bar as they move into sophomore year.”

While the benefit to students is essential, King can’t help but hope the achievement makes an impact on his colleagues, too. He admits that pushing past self- and peer-doubt was a feat in the after-school program coming to fruition. But a peek into last year’s experience would show students sitting and lying on the floor to read because they ran out of desks. Forty students and three novels later, the inaugural year was one for the books.

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS ON EQUITY

“I have many threshold tests and assessments. Meaning, if we take it and students fail, they will take it again, again, and again, until they pass. It simply is not an option to get a failing grade and keep moving. This guarantees each student has all skills they are expected to have by the end of the course.”

“We hope the success of the club shows that if you construct a meaningful way to help students, and send out the invite, you may be surprised at how many students take you up on the offer,” he says.

As a graduate of the school, and one familiar with its scenery, King keeps equity and an earnest desire to make a difference at the heart of his work. He plans to continue putting in the time and effort to help students develop the tools necessary for academic and workforce success.

To that end, King is working to rebuild the Sunnyslope High School speech and debate team, of which he was once president and with which he won four state championships. As a coach, he

develops students’ communication and critical-thinking skills so they can better find their voices.

“In a perfect world, no one at the school would feel left out. Everyone would feel like they gained knowledge and skills every semester,” he says. “Students must be given opportunities to gain clarity on confusing topics. We cannot shut the door on equity.”

Immediate results are hardly the underlying purpose of King’s efforts. What’s more important is the potential to enhance student knowledge, skills, and dispositions through academic clubs.

Equity in Action

- **Acknowledges** the real-life dichotomy between those with strong and weak educational experiences.
- **Persists**, in the midst of obstacles, to provide high-quality opportunities to students to combat inequitable circumstances.
- **Dedicates** after-school hours to augment learner success.
- **Motivates** educators — both new and tenured — to strategically create new systems for student development.

1 As you reflect on James’ story, what inequities were addressed?

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2 What advocacy steps do you want to take to improve equity in your community?

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3 Which stakeholders should you engage in order to meet students where they are?

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Sara



FOCUS:
Uses digital citizenship and educational technology to springboard students toward limitless opportunities.

“It’s the moment right before you know that something needs to be done to move your class, your school, or your district into a direction of change,” says second-grade teacher Sara Mora. As she reflects on what it means to be a teacher leader in the 21st century, the Sahuarita Unified School District employee urges her peers to recall a moment when they felt determined to act — she believes this is a leadership calling.

The technology guru has been teaching for nearly a decade in southern Arizona, where she uses her expertise in an area that often stifles teachers’ ability to move students toward educational greatness.

When it comes to the ever-changing tech arena, Mora’s energy is contagious. Whether it’s Google Classroom, movie-making, video-editing, or instruction on digital citizenship, the University of Arizona alumna says she feels her passion aflame when she’s teaching students and fellow educators about technology integration.

Part of her craft is inspired by working in the same district where she grew up. After graduating college, Mora taught for three years in Nogales and is now in her sixth year at Anza Trail School. A down-to-earth woman of Puerto Rican descent, she says the last decade of problem-solving within education has kept her intrigued.

“Every day, we, as educators, fit puzzle pieces together. How do I take my expertise of pedagogy and content and present it in a way that will engage students?” she asks. “That’s a puzzle.”

The same goes for sharing knowledge of technology so it can boost teachers’ classrooms.

“I spend my whole day problem-solving to help people around me. All it takes is completing the entire Sudoku to see how addicting it is,” Mora laughs.

Mora

ANZATRIL
SCHOOL
SAHUARITA
UNIFIED SCHOOL
DISTRICT

In today's society, technology is imperative. Using tech tools and acquiring new skills can help move learners from vastly different backgrounds toward parallel opportunities. When educators find creative ways to make learning fun, such as through technology, they're not only delivering content, but also extending possibilities for success.

In any classroom, students are typically at varying levels of comprehension and achievement. A visitor to Mora's classroom would likely see students working on different tasks, each tailored to suit individual needs.

"At the beginning of the year, I take time to talk about how 'fair' is not 'equal.' Each student in my class will get what they need," she explains. "They also know

they are valued in my class because building relationships is very important to me.

Knowing my students allows me to know what kinds of choices they will prefer."

But she isn't stopping there. Because she and her family have a background in videography, Mora created an after-school broadcasting club for middle school students. Not only is she able to pass on her passion for filmmaking, but she also creates experiences for students who otherwise would not have them.

"It's incredible to see how quickly students can learn when they are motivated," she says. "This year, it's

particularly special because some of my former second graders are now in the broadcasting club. It's amazing to see how much they have grown and matured."

As someone who began her undergraduate career thinking she'd end up a doctor, she loves to see student interests flourish. The kids who spend their after-school time with her for broadcasting choose to be there, likely because of the technological tools they acquired years ago from their second-grade teacher. Mora's impact will keep growing as she continues to tactfully use technology as a passion-fueled leader in the field.

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS ON EQUITY

"Technology is a tool, and students need to be taught how to use the tool effectively and ethically. Often, teachers think that because their students are digital natives, they will know how to use technology appropriately in a school setting. It is our duty as teachers to educate students and parents before embarking on technology in the classroom."

Equity in Action

- Facilitates professional learning opportunities about technology for district employees.
- Reflects on the circumstances of those in the Sahuarita community and finds ways to bring external opportunities within.
- Differentiates content based on skill level, which promotes independent thought and problem-solving for students.
- Participates in professional development and applies for grant opportunities for the purpose of gaining new skills and informing others.

1 As you reflect on Sara's story, what inequities were addressed?

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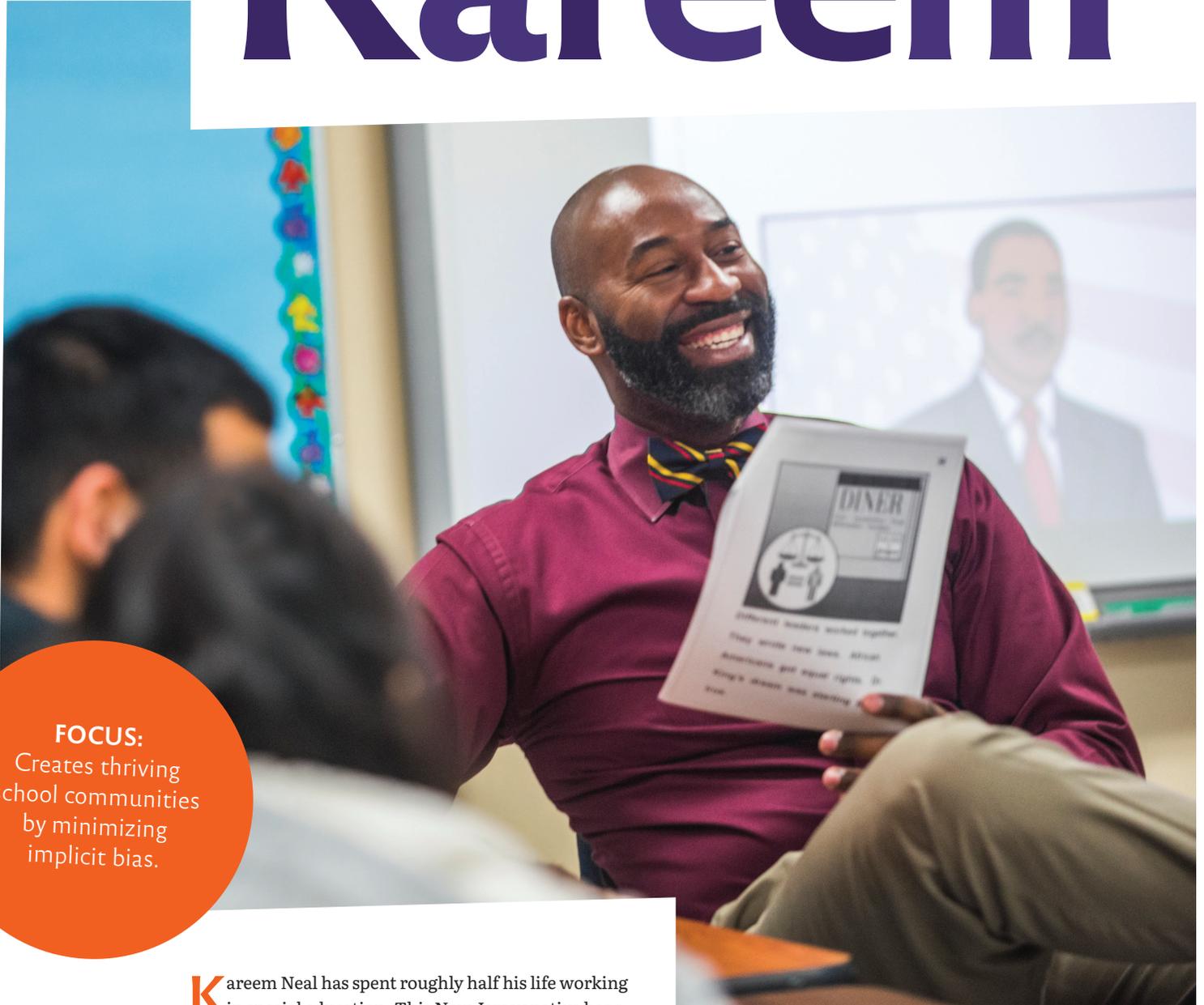
2 What advocacy steps do you want to take to improve equity in your community?

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3 Which stakeholders should you engage in order to meet students where they are?

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Kareem



FOCUS:
Creates thriving school communities by minimizing implicit bias.

Kareem Neal has spent roughly half his life working in special education. This New Jersey native has a passion for education that is highly contagious.

The 2019 Arizona Teacher of the Year leads a self-contained special education classroom with 12 students who qualify for services under the categories of autism, mild intellectual disability (MIID), and moderate intellectual disability (MOID). While some might be intimidated by the range of obstacles involved with this sort of learning environment, Neal is inspired.

“Each morning, I show up for my classroom community,” Neal says. “My students, paraprofessionals, and I have become a family. I cherish all of my time with them.”

Within education, equity is critical, but it’s arguably even more so when interacting with learners who have special needs.

“Students in my room have access to the curriculum in a way that suits their individual needs. For example,

Neal

MARYVALE
HIGH
SCHOOL
PHOENIX UNION
HIGH SCHOOL
DISTRICT

one of my students is bed-ridden, yet she is very engaged and does really well following the lessons,” he says. “Students enjoy the learning process because they feel it is customized for them. It’s a room where students feel valued, connected, and celebrated for their uniqueness.”

After about a decade in the field, Neal got involved with a social justice and diversity club at Maryvale High School called Panthertown. Interestingly, it was his first experience with the general student population.

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS ON EQUITY

“Creating stronger communities that focus on the needs of all students is our best hope to change the overall performance of schools in Arizona. More importantly, we must help students strive to be lifelong learners who enjoy the education process.”

“In listening to members of the club, I realized they were all greatly in need of people to fight for them and their communities. It was a natural transition for me, as I started looking at the role equity plays in education,” he explains. “Implicit bias is present in all of us. We should implement strategies to recognize this and prevent it from harming classrooms and school communities.”

Neal works to build relationships and strengthen

his community as a Restorative Justice regional trainer for the Phoenix Union High School District. He’s determined to diminish discipline inequities and behavioral issues by addressing teacher-student relationships. As a black male educator, he feels wholeheartedly committed to the work he believes helps learners come to school to do what they’re called to do: learn.

The reality is that individuals are born with particular needs and tendencies. Rather than shying away from differences or brushing them aside, teachers must deliberately look through the lens of equity. Educators must commit to taking students from a place where they simply survive to a place where they thrive.

Equity in Action

- Works to dispel stereotypes about special education and race.
- Showcases the importance of self-contained special education where students feel loved and cherished.
- Creates relationships with parents to better understand students’ needs.
- Writes curriculum to inspire and improve others’ professional practices.

1 As you reflect on Kareem’s story, what inequities were addressed?

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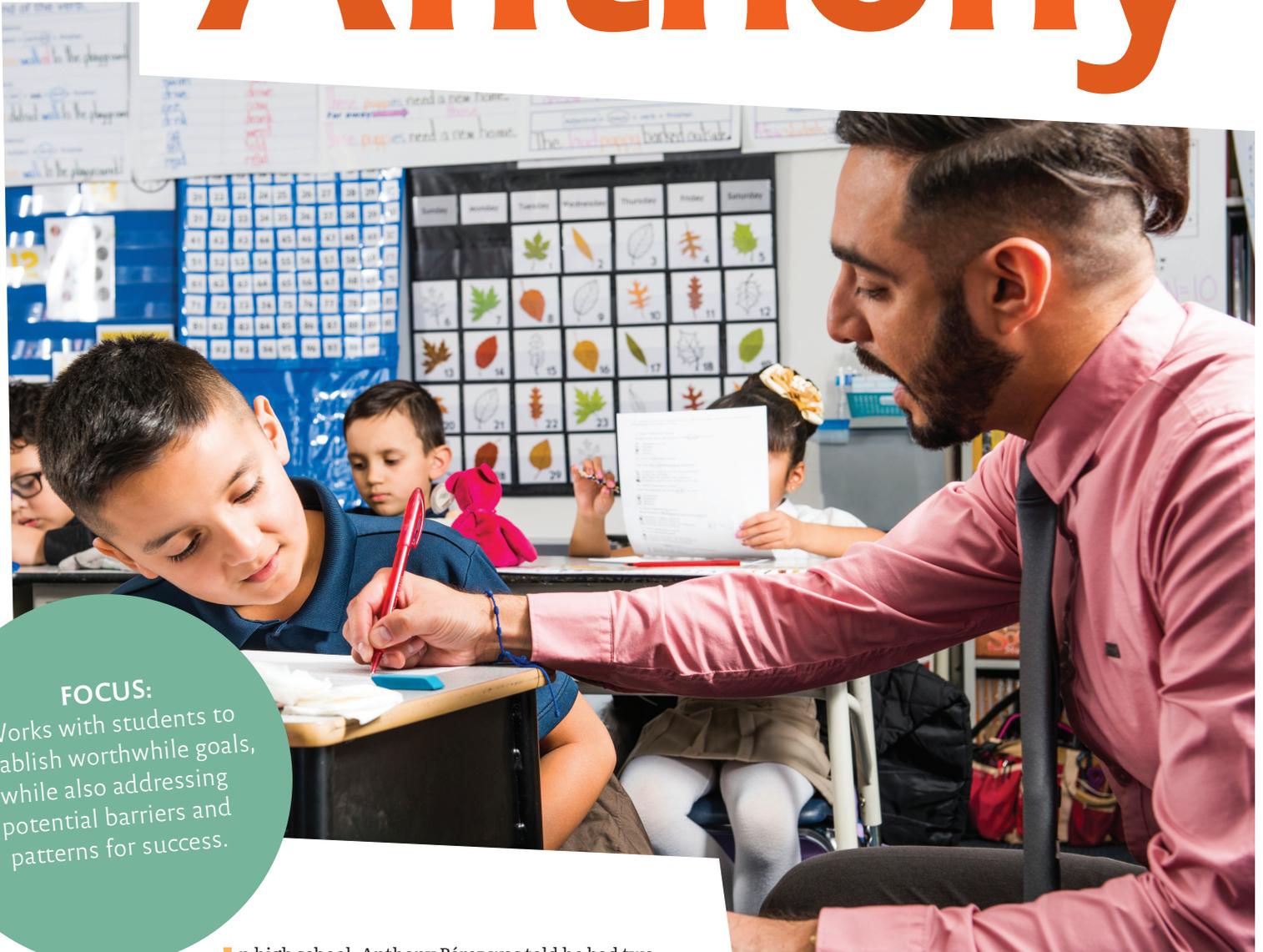
2 What advocacy steps do you want to take to improve equity in your community?

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3 Which stakeholders should you engage in order to meet students where they are?

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Anthony



FOCUS:

Works with students to establish worthwhile goals, while also addressing potential barriers and patterns for success.

In high school, Anthony Pérez was told he had two options — community college or the military. Conversations about scholarships and four-year universities were nearly nonexistent. Inequitable circumstances affected the choices presented to him; now, he's working to make sure the same thing doesn't happen to his students.

As a Latino male going through the education system, Pérez says he experienced plenty of injustice. He did well in school, but he and his family weren't given a roadmap for postsecondary success. If not for outstanding educators along the way, Pérez would not be who he is today.

“Sergeant First Class John Williams through Junior ROTC made a huge impact on my life. He saw potential in me that I didn't see in myself,” he explains. “It was very evident that he was a no-nonsense person and excuses were unacceptable. Regardless of barriers, he expected me to succeed.”

Now, as a second-grade teacher to English-language learners (ELL) at a Title I school, he is nearing 10 years in the education field. Pérez works at Sunset Elementary, where 100% of the students receive free breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Teaching where he grew

Pérez, NBCT

SUNSET
ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL
CARTWRIGHT
SCHOOL DISTRICT

up, the Phoenix native combines a strong work ethic and a healthy dose of resilience to cater to the population, using compassion as his compass.

“When it comes to my students, I am equipping them with the skills needed to be prepared for the next grade level and beyond. Without a strong foundation, the options they have are limited. As the days go by, I see my students growing into new people, which fuels my fire,” says Pérez, who is also a member of the Maricopa County Superintendent Teacher Advisory Team.

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS ON EQUITY

“Society needs to be aware that it takes a village to raise a child. It will take all of us supporting public education in order to provide quality education and equal access for all students, regardless of ZIP code, gender, the color of one’s skin, or the language one speaks.”

Fortunately, he knows equity shouldn’t only be measured in terms of economics and opportunities, but also through resources and advocacy. As he feels his way through uncharted territory, he pursues opportunities to elevate the profession by speaking at conferences, mentoring preservice teachers, and achieving National Board Certification.

“With the National Board process, specifically, I became aware of how different and unique each of my students are and what I need to do to ensure they have equal access

to achieve the goals they set. Becoming a board-certified teacher pushed me outside my comfort zone and ensured my practice is student-centered,” he says.

According to Pérez, in a perfectly equitable world, the four-hour block for ELL classrooms wouldn’t be an option; public education would be adequately funded so schools could be fully staffed; teachers wouldn’t leave the profession; and all educators could receive high-quality professional development. Ultimately, teachers’ tool belts would be filled with exactly what they need to put their best foot forward and get the job done. Until this is the reality, Pérez will continue to advocate for equitable teaching and learning conditions.

Equity in Action

- Reflects on past inequities to fuel intentional decision-making.
- Seeks professional learning opportunities, such as National Board Certification, to boost his means to offer students a high-caliber education.
- Acknowledges barriers and counteracts them with proactive initiatives.
- Advocates for the profession, whenever possible, while teaching in a low-income district.

1 As you reflect on Anthony’s story, what inequities were addressed?

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2 What advocacy steps do you want to take to improve equity in your community?

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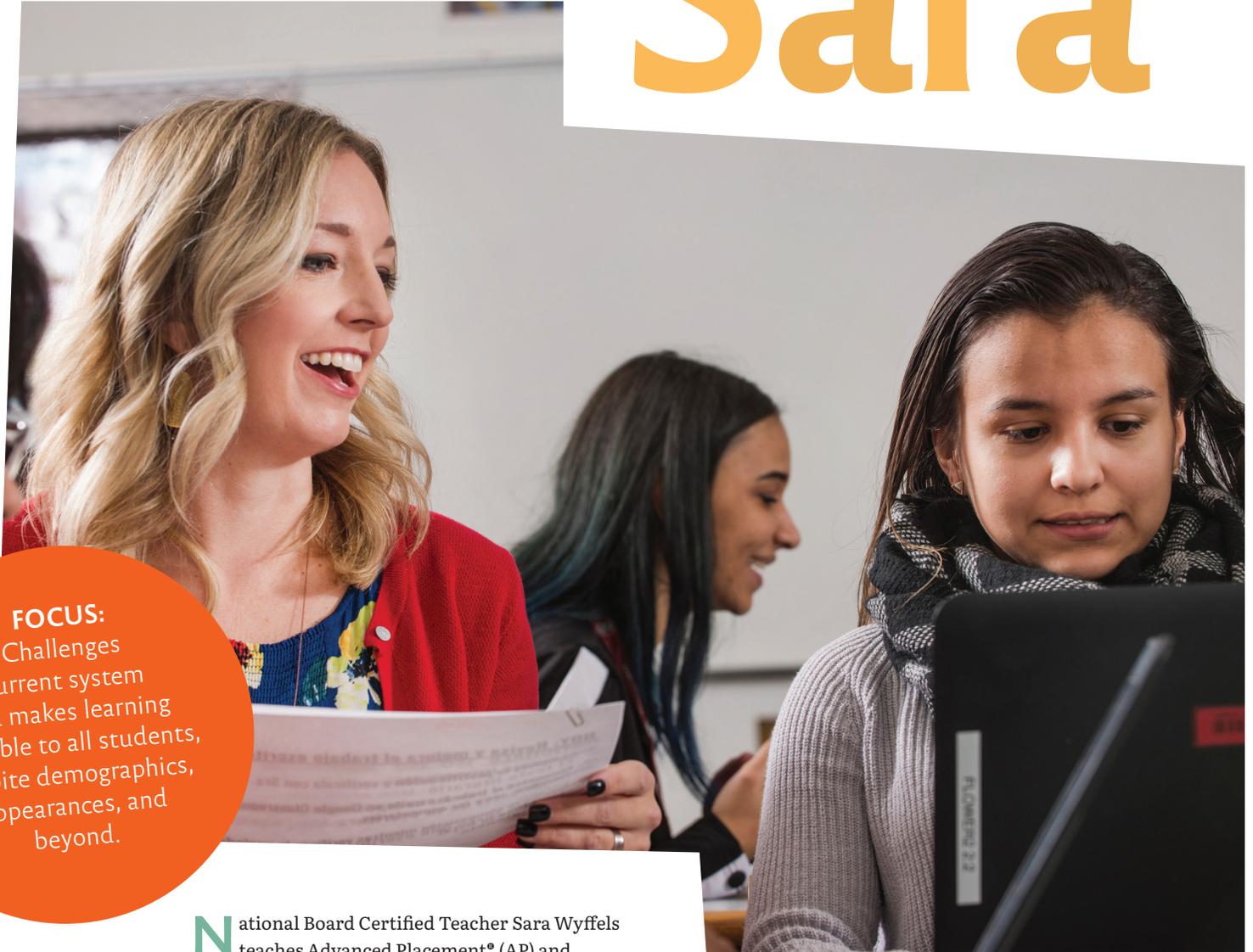
3 Which stakeholders should you engage in order to meet students where they are?

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Sara



FOCUS:
Challenges current system and makes learning available to all students, despite demographics, appearances, and beyond.

National Board Certified Teacher Sara Wyffels teaches Advanced Placement® (AP) and International Baccalaureate® (IB) Spanish at Chandler High School. Although she grew up in a culturally diverse suburb of Seattle, Washington, she's spent the last year and a half refining her beliefs about equity.

"I have come to understand how my upbringing in a diverse community does not equate to being equity-minded," she admits. "Now, I am equity-minded." This realization has fueled her goal to include all high school students, despite circumstances, in AP and IB coursework before graduation.

To start with, the mother of two boys is seeking to unpack the purpose behind district requirements. For example, high school students are not required to

complete world language coursework to graduate, but four-year universities require a minimum of two years in a foreign language. Wyffels believes that students in their sophomore or junior year might not be prepared to decide their academic future, but should be put on a path that leads to greater opportunities.

"I think there are students who do not have enough access to information, who are unsure if they even want to apply to college. I am not saying that every single senior in high school should or will go to a four-year university, but we are doing them a disservice by setting up the system in a way that would make it

Wyffels, NBCT

difficult for them to attend such an institution right after high school,” Wyffels explains. “Our system should be adjusted so as not to put the student in a corner or into a pinch if they are unsure.”

Although it will take time to reframe the district structures, the Spanish teacher has made strides enhancing access to the IB program at her school. The result? The

ADVICE TO EDUCATORS ON EQUITY

“As a person who speaks a second language, the most important lesson I’ve learned is that all humans, despite color, country, or language, essentially want the same things. We want to be safe and healthy. We want the ability to be ourselves and to live a life where we can work hard, learn, and give our children opportunities.”

number of students in IB programs has increased tremendously in the last three years. As more students elect to take rigorous classes, Wyffels’ classroom has become increasingly full, but she strives to maintain the environment that keeps language-learning enjoyable.

Given Wyffels’ professional responsibilities, it’s clear she has a lot on her plate. What inspires her to put in a tremendous amount of work without guaranteed successes?

“I am hoping to invigorate, inspire, and motivate other educators at my site, so all students can find and use their voices,” she says. “I want my own children to view the world

through a lens of equity, and to have the confidence to speak openly about equity, inclusion, and the importance of working to understand others’ experiences as much as we possibly can.”

To work toward this dream, Wyffels joined a district-wide team that participates in professional learning externally and brings it back to their site. Together with six other teacher leaders from Chandler High School, she facilitates equity-focused development for the 150 campus employees. Currently, the group is using a book-study model to take strides toward a more equitable community.

What educators can’t forget is that the students in their classrooms are the leaders of tomorrow. When teachers lead the way and showcase equity in their own actions, the entire climate of a school, district, and state can change. Wyffels is paving the way.

Equity in Action

- Addresses student mindset as a hindrance for success.
- Works with teachers to reframe their mindsets and attitudes in a way that will showcase equity and inclusion.
- Establishes goals as a member of her district’s equity team to address student access.
- Strategically creates structures and supports that give students agency to achieve their goals.

1 As you reflect on Sara’s story, what inequities were addressed?

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2 What advocacy steps do you want to take to improve equity in your community?

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3 Which stakeholders should you engage in order to meet students where they are?

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“Our tales of heroes and conquerors have created legends and defiled the work. The problem with legends is that they are told in ways that exclude us. Progress is not the work of the gods or of a chosen elite. It is our work.”

— Cornelius Minor

The Arizona K12 Center is grateful for the featured teacher leaders who so willingly shared their stories of equity. Countless hours were given and many hands were involved in this multifaceted project. To everyone who worked alongside us, thank you for your commitment to the teaching profession.

We hope these six accounts of enthusiasm, courage, selflessness, and perseverance surrounding equity in education awaken teacher leaders across the state, nation, and globe. Each step toward equitable conditions brings us closer to high-quality teaching and learning for all.

We applaud your drive to analyze circumstances through the lens of equity in order to benefit your students, colleagues, and the community. As leaders in the field, you are propelling teacher leadership forward, which enhances the future of Arizona and the standard of the profession.

Arizona teacher leaders, we salute you.

FEATURED TEACHER LEADERS

Yolanda Everett

Village Meadows
Elementary School
Sierra Vista Unified
School District

James King

Sunnyslope High School
Glendale Union High
School District

Sara Mora

Anza Trail School
Sahuarita Unified
School District

Kareem Neal

Maryvale High School
Phoenix Union High
School District

Anthony Pérez, NBCT

Sunset Elementary School
Cartwright School District

Sara Wyffels, NBCT

Chandler High School
Chandler Unified
School District

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#AZTEACHERLEADER

**“We do not teach
for what is.
We teach for
what can be.”**

— Cornelius Minor



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NAU
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