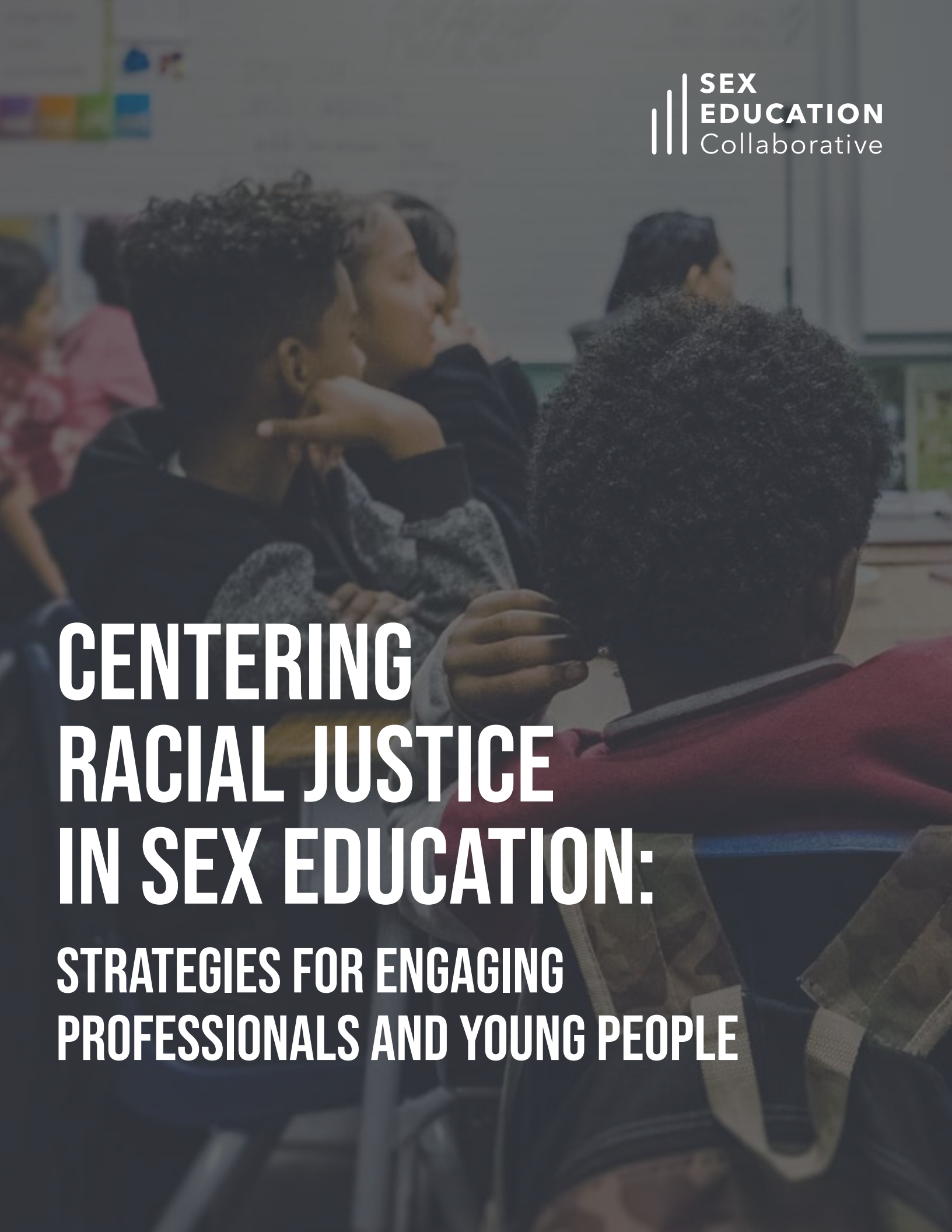
SEX EDUCATION Collaborative



CENTERING RACIAL JUSTICE IN SEX EDUCATION:

STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING PROFESSIONALS AND YOUNG PEOPLE

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FOREWORD

For some of us in this work, sex education is a job. It is the work we chose to do in the midst of a wide range of options—not all of which were actually focused on this work of educating young minds about love, sex, and relationships. But, for the people who drafted this document, sex education is not only a job but a deep, intrinsic calling that informs how we show up day to day. It is only this calling that keeps us motivated in doing this work.

We also used to be young folx of color, which is important to consider when imagining this work. We are mindful not only of the call we felt to become the people we did not see doing what we do now but of our own journey as young people sitting in classrooms taught by some of the same folks elevated in the present day.

Be clear: This is a LABOR OF LOVE.

What would it mean for us not to do this work?
Once we are done, who is going to pick up the torch?

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LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This white paper focuses on sex education practices in the United States (U.S.), which would not exist today if it weren't for the genocide and forced removal of indigenous people. On this stolen land, too much harm has been perpetrated and continues to be perpetrated against indigenous peoples in the name of sexual health. We support and affirm Indigenous sovereignty and reparations for the atrocities that have been committed.

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The Racial Justice and Equity Task Team (RJETT) is part of the Sex Education Collaborative. This paper is a product of the RJETT's external subcommittee. Members of the subcommittee at the time this paper was drafted included: Rena Dixon, Tracie Gilbert, Michelle Soto, and Stephanie DiPonio. Former members included: Jennifer Driver and Hector Campos.

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For more information, please contact the authors via the Sex Education Collaborative's website.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As many areas of public health are working to address racial justice and equity, it is important to acknowledge that the field of sex education needs to be included in this conversation. Not only do practices and delivery of sex education need to be challenged and changed to meet the needs of youth of color, but there is also a need for more research dedicated to this topic.

This practice paper serves as a guide to providing racially just practices for those working in the field of sex education. We understand that much like any other work discussing diversity and inclusion practices, this isn't about presenting a list of things that will allow organizations to simply check a box or provide a one-size-fits-all approach. Described throughout these pages is the pursuit of racial justice and equity that requires multi-layered efforts that address the needs of both youth of color and the communities in which they live. The recommendations offered in this paper transcend attempts to, for example, meet baseline requirements as a means to assert a leadership perspective in addressing racial justice and equity with your staff of color. This work is about changing the systems in which Black and Brown youth have received education that is not culturally responsive, and Black and Brown sex educators have worked in environments filled with oppressive tactics and policies. This is about creating educational and work environments that are no longer weighted in outdated and inequitable research and practices, but instead reflect and respect Black and Brown sex educators' lived experiences and expertise, help Black and Brown youth learn about sexuality and safety in a way that speaks to their lived experiences, and does so in communities and schools that celebrates their Blackness.

This practice paper describes—

- The need for racial justice and equity in the K–12 sex education space;
- Methodology of the research conducted with key informants;
- Content of racially just sex education;
- Qualities of a racially just sex educator;
- Administrative and management practices that support sex educators of color; and
- Measurement and evaluation practices to enhance sex education for youth of color.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2018, the Sex Education Collaborative (SEC) released the Professional Learning Standards for Sex Education. Once released, members of the SEC—a 22-member collaborative of national, regional, and state-based organizations that works to support a world in which all young people's right to comprehensive, high-quality sex education is recognized and fulfilled—recognized there was a gap in the quality of the sex education received by youth of color and decided to form a working group dedicated to developing racial justice and equity standards for sex education. A small amount of funding was dedicated to bringing together a dynamic group of professionals interested in working on this topic in early 2020. This group became the SEC's Racial Justice and Equity Task Team (RJETT). After days of deliberation, it was determined that the best way to serve the needs of youth of color was to gain the perspectives of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders who were conducting research and providing education to youth of color. The group decided to shift from creating a set of standards to instead creating a set of guidelines that would assist educators in creating spaces that are inclusive and center the lived and historical experiences of youth of color.

Relying on the collective experience of the members of the RJETT, it became clear that these guidelines should help educators in the field move in the direction of—

- A commitment to understanding the complexities of power;
- Being led by those most impacted;
- Knowing who the people in the room are who matter most;
- Affirming the lived experiences and the stories of the folks served;
- A more peaceful and just sex education curriculum;
- Telling a more truthful version of history; and
- Reducing harm.

The RJETT then selected a group of sex educators and researchers to participate in key informant interviews to discuss the state of sex education for youth of color. Additionally, they were asked to share how the field could be improved for teaching sex education for youth of color and creating better working environments for professional staff of color. These key informant interviews resulted in the subsequently developed guidelines for Racial Justice and Equity-Centered (RJE) Sex Education, as outlined below.

HOW SEX EDUCATION FAILS YOUTH OF COLOR

The last 30 years of sex education have been shown to have had major positive impact on the welfare of young people—particularly in the areas of child abuse and interpersonal violence (IPV) prevention and increased appreciation for gender and sexual diversity (Goldfarb and Liberman, 2020). Much of that same history, however, has gone unchecked when gauging its impact on students of color, particularly in the areas of racial justice and inequity. This oversight is most glaring in the light of history, one in which Black and Brown communities have consistently been made scapegoats in the mainstream pursuit of myopic, often inauthentic American sexual ideals.

As Masucci (2016) notes, "Most of sexual health theory in the 20th century was developed as a social hygiene agenda that was heavily influenced by larger white concerns with moral purity and fears of immigration." These concerns showed their ugliest sides through events like the Tuskegee Syphilis Study, the Guatemalan Syphilis Experiment, forced sterilization of Black and Native women and girls throughout the Southern and Southwestern U.S. (e.g., "Mississippi Appendectomies"), and the Puerto Rican birth control pill trials of the 1960's and 70's. The external effects of these atrocities—lives lost and communities irrevocably altered—are bad enough; however, it is this theory and research that has also served as the undergirding framework for many sexual health initiatives in Black and Brown communities through the present day. Lewis (2004) discusses this as a dichotomy between preventive versus eudaemonic sexual health discourse, a dynamic he argues has created a disproportionate emphasis on sexually transmitted infection (STI) and pregnancy prevention in sex health education for Black and Brown people, to the oversight of developmental or culturally relevant topics like pleasure, relational and emotional health, colorism, adultification, etc.

People of color have long been underrepresented in public health, and medical professionals go on to make recommendations for sex education based on this research (Masucci, 2016). When they are included, Black and Brown youth are more likely to receive education that is negative, shaming, and/or presumptive about what their needs are. Sex education for Black and Brown youth is usually implemented in a way that assumes they are: a) having sex,

and b) that sex is inherently dangerous, either to themselves or to peers both within and outside of their community. Lewis rightfully notes that the vast majority of Black and Brown young people do not experience adverse outcomes as a result of their sexual behavior. In addition, sex education often covers topics that youth of color do not find culturally relevant or helpful to their experience. In the professional realm, there are also significantly more White sex educators than there are educators of color, furthering these problems.

The majority of sex educators, and definitely leaders in sex education, are White. And while we are certain that most of them have well-meaning intentions in the work that they do, we are keenly aware of how their whiteness can serve to preclude their ability to notice race at work in the sex education classroom. Additionally, due to conscious and unconscious bias, microaggressions, and white supremacist practices, BIPOC educators have been kept out of educator and leadership positions in the field of sex education. With these Guidelines, we hope to shift this paradigm by sharing understandings of racial justice and equity in sex education from experts in the field.

Our hope is that sex education can become truly inclusive and not further marginalize youth of color. Youth of color are disproportionately impacted by sexual harassment, STIs, and unintended pregnancy. We want to use sex education as an opportunity to educate young people on the structural and institutional systems and inequities that impact sexual health and how they can shift these systems. These Guidelines will define equity, describe exemplary racial justice and equity work, and offer a framework for curriculum development (e.g., grounding principles, what to include, who should be involved, how to evaluate success).

READINESS, INTENTIONS & EXPECTATIONS (HOW TO VIEW THIS REPORT)

This report represents the cumulative perspectives of sex educators who have conducted the bulk of their work with youth of color, or whose work centers on the specific lived experience of sexuality and race. This latter point is of amplified importance, given that while there are many sex educators who identify as folks of color, not all of them consider themselves as thought leaders on the matter of sex education and racial justice—nor should they be assumed or pressured into being such. While we consider this report a substantial step forward for a profession that is clearer and more inspired to do intentional work in advancing racial justice and equity, we recognize that it is not a definitive work—we invite other sexuality education professionals of color to add to its foundation, even offering more nuanced understandings, as appropriate.

There are two different groups who might find this offering useful: independent sex educators who are looking to improve the quality of what they provide in the classroom, and non-profit organizations that are looking to be more intentional in addressing racial justice and equity through the sex education and social services they provide. While these can be seen as two distinct groups, we recognize that, for many, these roles overlap, particularly for independent sex educators who are not working for an organization and smaller organizations that lack the infrastructure necessary to separate them out. We anticipate and hope this report will be the beginning of a robust, long-term conversation about how racial justice and equity in sex education can be best operationalized.

ADDITIONAL POINTS TO CONSIDER

One significant challenge presented to contemporary K–12 sex education lies in its drive to rely on changes in pre-established sexual health behaviors as a marker of success. Often, these benchmarks are established in response to epidemiological data, and not the expressed qualitative needs of those being served. While we recognize the usefulness of sex education in staving off unintended adverse experiences, we agree with the sentiment of one informant that a reliance on sexuality education based on "evidence-based" indicators dilutes the educational process, making it appear more like "training" than education. We recognize the sexual health of young people to be a chief aim of sex education, and we assert that sexual health as a lived experience encompasses far more than prevention and safety. Moreover, as the above informant also noted, we are excited about the ways that RJE-centered sex education can move the work more intentionally towards *"the roots of education, which is opening up with what's possible, not just guiding people to where we think they should land."*

To reiterate, moving toward an RJE model of K–12 sex education does not diverge entirely from gains made in recent decades to provide youth with medically accurate, culturally competent, and trauma-informed sex education and training. Instead, RJE-centered sex education helps educators and youth fully realize these concepts within a learning context of safety, trust, and comfort while presenting developmentally appropriate material that actually prepares youth for understanding the complexities of sex, gender, bodies, race, ethnicity, systemic inequities, and the enactments of power within and upon their lives.

METHODOLOGY

Data come from ten semi-structured interviews with key informant experts in the sex education field that apply a racial justice and equity lens in their sex education research, teaching, and writing. Interviewees were researchers based at universities, sex educators, nonprofit leaders, and writers; each brought years of experience in the field and a willingness to engage in candid discussions about equity, justice, white supremacy, and other systems of oppression, as well as their ideas for transformative change within the sex education field at large. Interviews lasted 60–90 minutes and were conducted virtually via Zoom. The interview guide included questions about working within the field of sex education; existing examples of individuals, groups, and/or organizations that are doing racial justice and equity work well; and what would be necessary to include and overcome barriers in K–12 curricula to advance racial justice and equity.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically using NVivo 12. Initial themes were identified, and findings were shared back with interview participants during two debriefing sessions as part of a peer debriefing process to evaluate the credibility and completeness of the analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This strategy involves sharing preliminary themes and takeaways and allowing for group discussion of the results and alternate interpretations of the data. As a group, participants were able to further discuss the findings, identify important nuances across concepts and themes, and move toward consensus across conflicting findings.

[1] Nine of the ten key informants were able to participate in the debriefing process.

WHAT IS RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUITY IN THE SEX EDUCATION CLASSROOM?

As many key informants noted, the concept of equity is often conflated with equality. The language of equality centers on notions of equal opportunity, equal access, and everybody getting the same things. Equality espouses fairness and equal treatment without any regard to history, context, or individuality. There is an often-unexpressed underlying assumption that everybody wants the same things in life and that we should distribute opportunities equally to allow everyone to reach those goals. Often, however, these assumptions are inaccurate and, in practice, maintain the status quo in a grossly unequal society. Equity, on the other hand, entails careful consideration of the ways that social hierarchies, systems of oppression, and hegemonic ideologies have created and perpetuated social conditions. As noted by the key informants:

> *"...HAVING AN EQUITY LENS IS ABOUT THINKING ABOUT SYSTEMIC RACISM, IT'S THINKING ABOUT STRUCTURAL OPPRESSION, IT'S THINKING ABOUT THE WAYS WE ALL COME TO THINGS WITH MORE OR LESS OF A THING."*

> *"...EQUITY HAS TO, IT STARTS ACTUALLY WITH HOW WE ORGANIZE OUR SOCIETY AND HOW WE ORGANIZE THE DISTRIBUTION OF RESOURCES. AND THEN THAT WILL PRODUCE EQUITABLE OUTCOMES RIGHT, THAT PRODUCES EQUITABLE TREATMENT."*

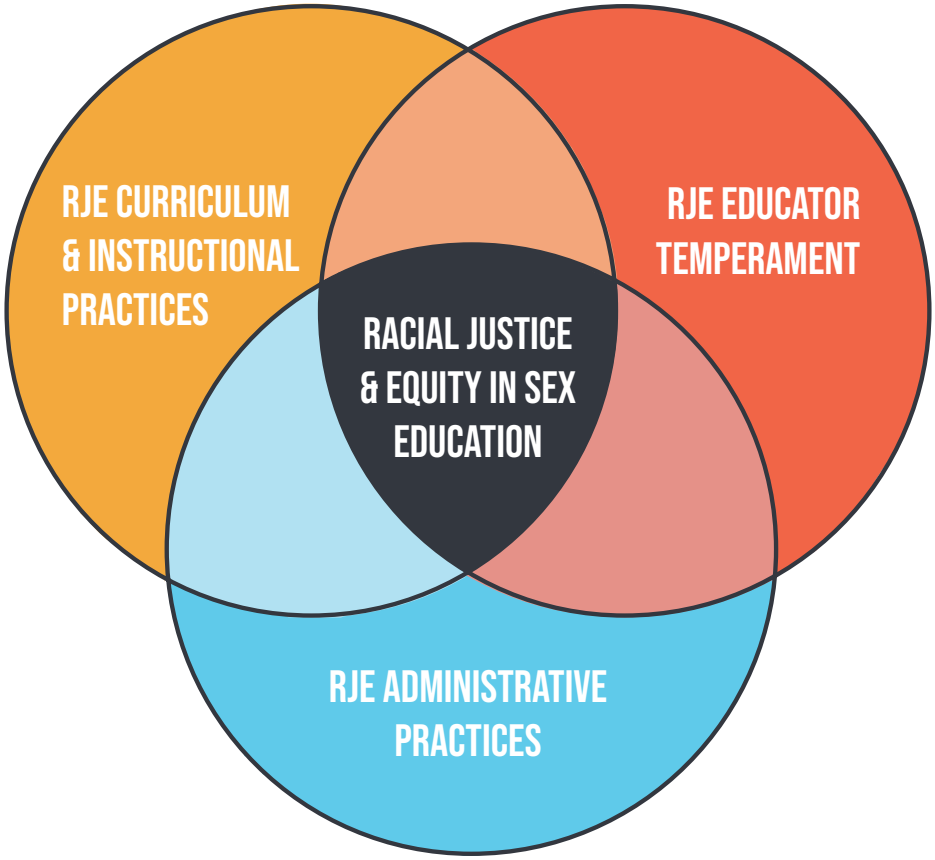
> *"...EQUITY IS MAKING SURE THAT WE'RE ADDRESSING THINGS NOT ONLY ON THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL BUT ALSO ON THE COMMUNITY LEVEL, POLICY LEVEL, STRUCTURAL LEVEL, ALL THESE DIFFERENT THINGS THAT MAY AFFECT THE STUDENTS OR THE POPULATION THAT WE'RE WORKING WITH."*

Based on interviewees' responses, equity triangulates opportunity, access, and support in ways that help individuals—particularly students and sex educators of color—identify and enact their own needs, desires, dreams, and boundaries, by harnessing their own power and potential. This triangulation process should not be seen as a residual or supplemental process, but as a fundamental strategy in how all sex education is envisioned and implemented. Additionally, and in the words of one informant, *"only the folks who are engaging in the interaction can tell you what*

felt equitable." This suggests that the voices and input of communities of color must play a more tangible, impactful role in the discussion, creation, and enactment of sex education curricula in their schools and communities—for only they are capable of gauging both their needs and the markers of success when these needs have been fulfilled.

In our conversations with key informants, racial justice and equity in the sex education classroom appeared to emerge in three distinct levels: 1) the classroom, 2) the educator, and 3) the organization. In the classroom itself, racial justice and equity-centered curricula and instructional practices can forge a more inclusive, empowered learning environment and experience. However, this classroom cannot be effectively created without ample attention paid to the educator's personal character and temperament. Moreover, without adequate support and advocacy provided at the leadership level by sex education organizations, even the best laid curricular plans, enacted by the most competent RJE-centered sex educators, will ultimately prove unsustainable.

Figure 1.



As shown in Figure 1, the three areas of RJE-centered sex education are: 1) RJE-Centered Curriculum & Instructional Practices, 2) RJE-Centered Educator Temperament, and 3) RJE Administrative Practices. We explore each in more depth below.

RJE-CENTERED CURRICULUM & INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

RJE-Centered Curriculum and Instructional Practices are the guiding principles, pedagogical standards, content, and established outcomes for creating RJE-centered sex education learning spaces. To begin, key informants identified five main principles of racially just and equitable sex education:

1. **ETHICS, MUTUALITY, AND CARE:** Acknowledging that we have an obligation to treat others and organize social relations, institutions, and structures according to ethical principles, mutuality, and care. As noted by one informant, "ethical treatment of each other and what that means and mutuality and care for each other…[asking the question] Who's obliged to whom and what does it look like to uphold our commitments to each other?" For example, the ethic of equity requires honest acknowledgment that consent negotiations and autonomy are complicated by how students of color are disproportionately policed in their communities and disciplined (including physical discipline) in their learning spaces. A guiding principle of care normalizes and advocates for students' increased capacity to practice self-care in asking for what they need from the significant people in their lives, including the adults who may be operating from a place of harm, via their own unchecked conscious and unconscious biases.

2. **AUTONOMY AND CHOICE:** Establishing bodily autonomy and choice as an inalienable right of every human being, regardless of age. For students of color—many, if not most, of whom exist in developmental contexts in which choice has been individually and systemically limited—establishing autonomy and choice in the classroom may prove to be as much a task of teaching students how to think and make choices for themselves as it is of validating the choices they have already or will ultimately make.

3. **EVERY BODY IS VALUABLE:** Appreciating the diversity, worthiness, respectability, and need for care of all bodies. This means not only including a diversity of bodies in discussion of normative sexual behavior and relationships but also being intentional about calling out the systems and schemas of oppression that perpetuate the false notion that certain bodies, relationships, or lived experiences are better, or even "healthier," than others. For example, an RJE-centered sex education lesson on STI exposure and infection would shift the discussion from a focus on stigma of a diagnosis to one that normalizes and validates the ways that people pursue and maintain emotionally healthy sexual intimacy.

LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANS, QUEER, INTERSEX, ASEXUAL+ (LGBTQIA+) INCLUSIVITY: Normalizing sexual orientations and gender expressions that fall outside the typical male/female gender binary and the presumption of heterosexuality that permeate school-based sex education and K–12 education settings at large. Addressing marginalization among LGBTQIA+

students of color acknowledges not only their present lived experiences but validates the rich histories of non heterosexuality and queer cultural traditions that are often overlooked in mainstream LGBTQIA+ narratives and movements.

4. **COLLABORATION AND INTERDEPENDENCE:** Working and learning together within relationships and across groups, particularly those who are most impacted by inequities in systems and institutions. This recognizes that our lives and welfare are inextricably intertwined with the lives and welfare of others, even as communities become more geographically and socially distanced. As noted by one key informant, this reflects "an inter-justice principle, but also just the reality that we can't do this alone. We need each other." From this perspective, an RJE-centered sex education curriculum shifts students' learning from one that defines sexual health as a sole function of the impact of individual choices on one's self, to one that illustrates the overlapping, ripple effects of one's sexual health experiences and choices on those of one's larger community, and vice versa.

Undergirding these basic principles, informants agreed that an RJE-centered sex education curriculum is one that is grounded in an anti-oppression framework, which acknowledges the multiple ways that systems of power can differentially impact individuals at multiple, intersecting social locations. Specifically, they noted that an RJE-centered curriculum would clearly indict racism and its derivatives as key factors in students understanding of sexuality, both from a historical and contemporary perspective—

> *"IT WOULD INCLUDE A CONVERSATION THAT DECOLONIZED THE GENDER BINARY, DISMANTLED THE GENDER BINARY. TALKED ABOUT THE HISTORICAL BASIS AND THE CREATION OF THE GENDER BINARY AND HOW IT IS A RACIALIZED, A RACIST CREATION. WOULD TALK ABOUT THINGS LIKE STOLEN LAND, GENOCIDE OF INDIGENOUS FOLKS, IT WOULD INCLUDE CONVERSATIONS ON REDLINING, ON THE TRANS-ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE, ON THE INSTITUTION OF CHATTEL SLAVERY, TALKING ABOUT PRISONS AS AN EXTENSION OF CHATTEL SLAVERY, AND HOW INSTITUTIONS OF PRISONS HAVE ONLY FURTHER IMPACTED AND TAKEN AGENCY AWAY FROM BLACK AND NON-BLACK POC THROUGH STERILIZATION AND JUST THE ACT OF BEING IMPRISONED, PERIOD."*

> *"THAT I THINK IS WHAT RACIAL EQUITY LOOKS LIKE, WHERE IT'S NOT JUST ABOUT RACE. IT'S ALSO ABOUT UNDERSTANDING THE WAYS THAT RACE IS COMPLICATED BY ECONOMICS. IT'S COMPLICATED BY GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION. IT'S COMPLICATED BY WHAT'S ACCESSIBLE TO MEET YOUR NEEDS AS A HUNGRY PERSON, AS A PERSON WHO NEEDS PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION, WHO USES IT. AND THAT'S ALL PIECES OF ACCESSIBILITY. IT'S ALSO ABOUT DISABILITY. SO FOR ME, RACIAL EQUITY IS ALSO ABOUT DISABILITY JUSTICE. IT'S ALSO ABOUT REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE. IT'S ALSO ABOUT ECONOMIC JUSTICE. IT'S NOT JUST ONE THING."*

Upon first glance, critics of an RJE-centered sex education might balk at young people's capacity to understand sexual health as an exercise in negotiating intersecting constructions of power. That said, when navigated from an age-appropriate space, we assert that young people are completely capable of understanding power dynamics and navigating these discussions. As one key informant stated—

> *"I FEEL LIKE, WHY DON'T WE HAVE THE FIRST SIX LESSONS BEING ALL ABOUT POWER AND HOW WE CAN'T ONLY SEE IT, BUT WE CAN FEEL IT AND SMELL IT...AND OFTENTIMES, WHEN I BRING THAT UP, PEOPLE LIKE, 'OH NO, TALKING ABOUT, LIKE, POWER IS HARD FOR KIDS AND IT'S LIKE 'REALLY?! YOU SHOULD ASK YOUNG PEOPLE WHAT THEY THINK ABOUT DRESS CODES AT SCHOOL...' WHAT YOU END UP [IN TRADITIONAL SEX EDUCATION SPACES] HAVING IS PEOPLE TALKING ABOUT MULTIPLE IDENTITIES AND ISMS THAT THEY EXPERIENCE, BUT THEY'RE REALLY NOT TALKING ABOUT THE POWER THAT PLAYS A ROLE IN OUR LIVES.*

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES

Beyond the foundational principles of the content included in sex education curriculum, our key informants shared useful thoughts about the ideal instructional practices that inform RJE-centered sex education learning spaces. It was established, for example, that educators need to approach sex education implementation and discussions with a sense of exploration and curiosity, encouraging students to do the same. Inherent to this approach is the expectation that RJE-centered educators also normalize sex as the natural practice that it is, refraining from language or activities intended to shame students' sexual thoughts or behaviors. Informants raised the importance of centering consent at several points during their interviews. They also spoke to the importance of giving students an opportunity to practice consent, particularly when power imbalances related to gender and/or age may impact consent negotiation. Informants mentioned the example of the case of R. Kelly, as well as other instances of predatory behavior exhibited against young people by older adults in their communities. Lastly, informants discussed safety as a key component of RJE-centered sex education instruction. They asserted the imperative that students be made to feel physically safe in their bodies while in the classroom, as well as emotionally safe to share and be vulnerable with their questions, stories, and comments, without having to be concerned that information they share may be weaponized against them later.

Another curriculum and practice topic raised several times by informants was medical accuracy in sex education. As a rule, it is important to comprehensive sex educators that the information shared is medically accurate; however, as noted by one key informant, there are contextual particularities involved in teaching medically accurate sex education content with an RJE-centered lens. To be clear, it is critical that young people learn medically accurate information about a variety of sex education topics. For example, when engaging in discussions about abortion, it is important to highlight the misinformation provided by Crisis Pregnancy Centers that is meant to confuse young people about their practices. And yet, informants noted that there are other contexts in which a lack of medically accurate information can be potentially harmful, such as when discussing established norms about the biological makeup of intersex people (i.e., referring to them as "disorders of sex development"), the range of effects of hormonal contraceptive methods on female-assigned bodies, or the decisions transgender people may make around beginning hormone therapy. Sex educators should acknowledge that medical science is not wholly infallible. While we know there are some sex education topics for which medical accuracy is a gold standard to assert, there are others for which an evaluation of undergirding values is a more important consideration.

CONTENT

Material that could be used to unpack racial justice and equity in the classroom is plentiful and stretches from the founding of modern society until present day. As such, this paper will not be prescriptive in establishing which specific elements should be included in an RJE-centered classroom but will instead speak to the range of topics that could be addressed and instructional tools used. Content and instructional tools reported by the informant pool included, but were not limited to:

- Issues affecting different communities (e.g., maternal mortality rate, disappearance and murder of Indigenous women);
- Social policy history (e.g., U.S. history of HIV/AIDS, resurgence of anti-abortion attitudes, how harmful policies came into being);
- Historical traumas related to birth control, forced sterilization, and medical mistrust;
- Music and art;
- Popular culture;
- Parent modules;
- Videos;
- Emotional awareness and regulation/management;
- Diverse representation in all materials;
- Culturally competent, modern examples;
- Pictures of people communicating about sex;

- Land acknowledgements;
- Celebrations of BIPOC history and people, particularly their involvement in larger sexuality-related movements (e.g., LGBTQ rights, HIV/AIDS);
- Pleasure;
- Stereotypes;
- Conversations that explore students' knowledge and cultural messaging about sex; and
- Differences in how key concepts are defined.

The point is not to suggest that all elements noted above should fit within a standard K–12 sex education scope and sequence, particularly given the many constraints teachers deal with at the logistical and administrative levels. We include this list, however, so that teachers recognize the vast array of instructional topics and modes available to them to reach students of color in more engaging and relevant ways. Discussing self-confidence in a middle school lesson, for example, may land more strongly with students of color if nuances about colorism and racial stereotypes are added to the conversation for students to critically reflect and give their perspectives on. Or in high school, conversations about sexual and gender diversity in media may have more salience to otherwise resistant groups if they are placed within the historical context of sexual and gender diversity around the world, and not just the more white-washed analogs of Hollywood. RJE-centered sex educators are encouraged to be intentional about building their own awareness of the sexualities and sexual cultures that can be found in communities of color, as well as hold space for them to be elevated within their learning spaces.

LEARNING AND EXPERIENTIAL OUTCOMES

In follow-up meetings to the initial interviews, key informants were asked what they perceived to be the specific intention of sex education that is driven by racial and reproductive justice. Specifically, we asked what these educators believed students should be able to know, do, and/or feel as a result of being in an RJE-centered classroom. Their responses fell into two different categories: 1) Learning Outcomes and 2) Experiential Outcomes. Learning Outcomes refer to the typical knowledge, skills, and attitudes outcomes (a.k.a., KSA-style) students are expected to walk away with in traditional learning models. Experiential Outcomes, on the other hand, refer to the affective and cognitive processes students experience while engaged in the learning itself.

There were four distinct Learning Outcomes that came from the follow-up discussions:

1. **INCREASED CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS:** Informants reported their wish that students walk away from sex education with clear knowledge about how systems of oppression directly impact the ways they see sexuality and their sexual selves and others, both historically and in contemporary form. Sonya Renee Taylor is most attributed to describing what is

normally taught as a "hierarchy of bodies," in which thin, cisgender, white, heterosexual non-disabled bodies are deemed the gold standard for all lived experience, including but not limited to sexual practice, expression, and desirability. RJE-centered sex education increases students' capacity to name this system in action, providing them with the ability to identify and do the work to divest from systems-related barriers in their sexual development.

2. **INCREASED CAPACITY FOR SELF-REFLECTION:** Informants noted their desire to increase students' capacity to acknowledge and discuss their own thoughts and feelings about sexual concepts and phenomena, as well as themselves as sexual beings. RJE-centered sex education gives students concrete practice in determining how the concepts and skills they are learning resonate with their own lives and understandings of reality, thereby linking to more agentic choices around their sexuality and sexual health.

3. **INCREASED ETHICAL COMPETENCE:** Divesting from systems of oppression requires a clear awareness of right and wrong that causes harm to both the self and others. Particularly within relationships, an RJE-centered approach increases students' ability to clearly see dimensions of right and wrong with regard to one's behaviors, critically examine and empathize with the effects of said dimensions on others, and to ultimately act in pursuit of consistent ethical right action.

4. **INCREASED SELF-MASTERY:** Some models of sex education implementation, often referred to as "training" models, tend to teach rote behaviors and skills of sex education without properly accounting for how students integrate the learning into their own natural habits, practices, and contexts. An RJE-centered sex education encourages the development of students' ability to be in tune with their bodies and minds and their respective needs, moving from a place of agency and intention versus reactivity or blind compliance.

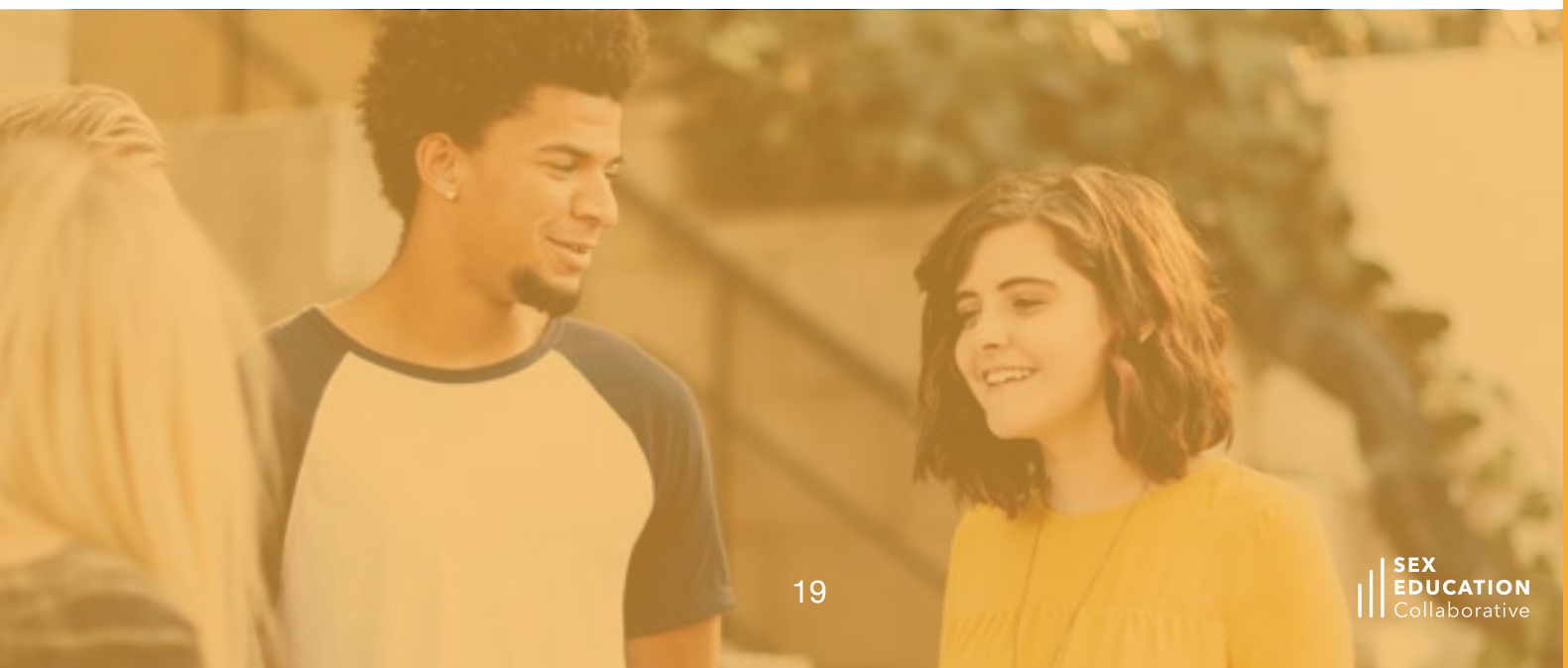
On the other hand, two distinct Experiential Outcomes emerged as follows:

1. **INCREASED SENSE OF PHYSICAL SAFETY:** If we assert that RJE-centered sex educators must work to make students feel physically safe in their learning spaces, it follows that students' reported feelings of safety be a logical experiential outcome of those efforts. This sense of physical safety may include, but is not limited to: learning in spaces that are clean, well-ventilated, and free from violence; engaging in lessons where they are made to feel free to make real-time choices about how they will participate in activities without penalty (e.g., closing their eyes for visualization exercises, touching others or allowing others to touch them, exerting physical effort for extended amounts of time); engaging in discussion where non-violent resolution of conflict—both literally and figuratively—is normalized, modeled, and encouraged (e.g., scenario or role-play exercises); and learning in settings where there is no risk of undue physical discipline by teachers or other school administrative/support staff.

2. **INCREASED SENSE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY:** In many ways, a students' sense of physical safety is inextricable from what they experience psychologically, which is why both are elevated here. Informants reported perceiving students of color to be experiencing psychological safety when they: can identify and resonate with educators from their own communities; report feeling adequately represented in the learning materials (e.g., worksheets, videos, conversational topics); feel their experiences, perspectives, questions, and choices are listened to without judgment; can speak about subjects in class using the language and terms that most comfortable for them; and feel no sense of worry about potential repercussions for non-compliance with any parts of the in-class learning process. As one respondent noted, psychological safety emerges in an environment where students feel "at ease" to be their most authentic selves, who they are and who they are becoming.

An important point about safety is that it is not a static creation and can evolve and shift at several points throughout the day and learning process. One informant best noted this with the following—

> *"...JUST BECAUSE YOU SAY IT'S A SAFER SPACE DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT'S A SAFER SPACE ALWAYS—A SAFER SPACE IS ALWAYS BEING RECREATED...IF I WORK WITH A CLASS OF 28 STUDENTS, I CAN ONLY CREATE THE SPACE THAT IS AS SAFE AS POSSIBLE WITH THE INFORMATION THAT I HAVE ON THAT DAY. THAT'S GOING TO CHANGE SEVEN DAYS FROM NOW, BECAUSE WE LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH OTHER. THEY LEARN MORE ABOUT EACH OTHER TO SHOW UP DIFFERENTLY, SO LIKE...IT'S ALL ABOUT RECREATING AND NOT SEEING IT AS WORK OR SEEING IT AS, THERE'S A DESTINATION. I WORK WITH THEM FOR 30 DAYS, [I MIGHT'VE] RECREATED THAT SPACE AT LEAST 30 TIMES—IT COULD BE 60, COULD BE 70 BECAUSE MAYBE SOMETHING HAPPENED RIGHT BEFORE LUNCH AND WE GOTTA, LIKE, COME BACK, RE-EXAMINE AND ADDRESS SOME STUFF. BUT I THINK THAT THAT IS A STEP—LIKE, TO ACKNOWLEDGE THAT INTENTION IS NOT A REALITY AND THAT SAFE SPACES ARE NOT A DECLARATION, THEY'RE ONGOING WORK."*



RJE-CENTERED EDUCATOR TEMPERAMENT

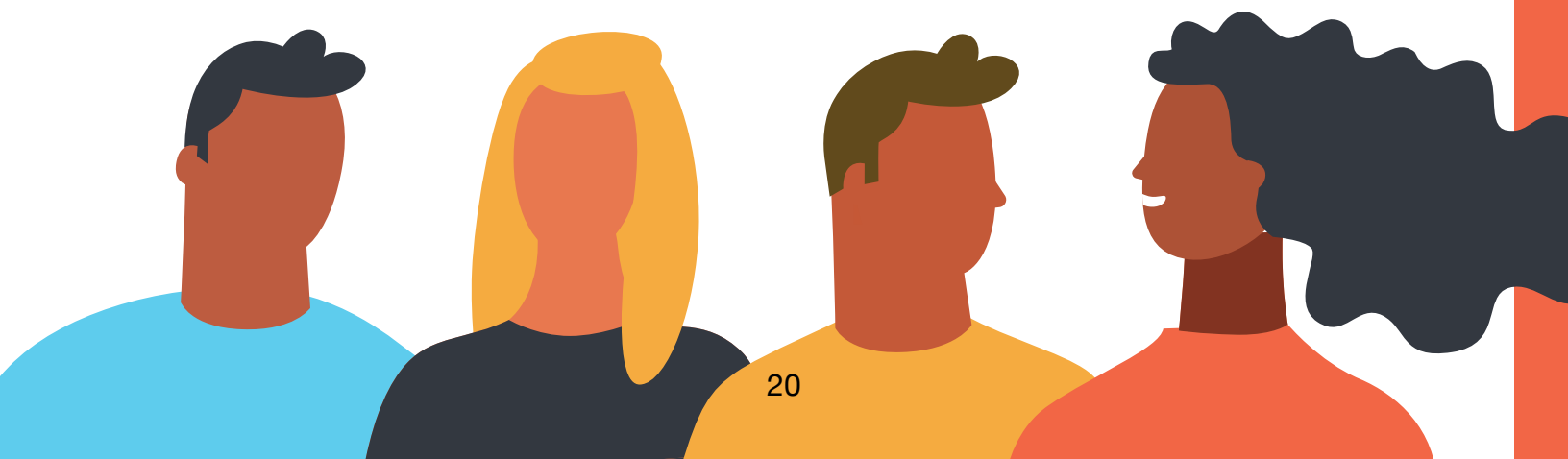
Relevant, critical curriculum and instruction is a core of quality RJE-centered sex education. That said, sex educators also have the ability to impact how sex education is delivered and how it resonates with audiences. As one key informant remarked—

> *"[CURRICULA], I DON'T KNOW HOW INTERSECTIONAL THEY ARE. I THINK WHAT MAKES THEM INTERSECTIONAL ARE THE FACILITATORS WHO LEAD THEM. AND A LOT OF TIMES IN MY EXPERIENCE ARE FACILITATORS WHO ARE COMMITTED TO THAT WORK. AND AGAIN, THAT HAPPENS BY CHANCE. IF IT WAS A DIFFERENT FACILITATOR WITH THE SAME CURRICULUM ASKING THE SAME QUESTIONS AND IF THEY ARE NOT COMMITTED TO THAT KIND OF INTERSECTIONALITY OR MAKING THOSE DIRECT CONNECTIONS TO SEX ED AND RACE, THE CONVERSATION WOULD BE COMPLETELY DIFFERENT."*

Another key informant breaks this point down even more directly—

> *"ALL CURRICULUM OR SO MUCH CURRICULUM IS GROUNDED IN GREAT PRINCIPLES WHEN YOU LOOK AT IT. AND THEN IT'S JUST NOT PUT INTO PRACTICE. SO, WE SAY EVERYBODY MATTERS AND THEN WE GIVE A TEACHER A PROMPT THAT SAYS, "SOME BODIES ARE THIS WAY AND SOME BODIES ARE THAT WAY," WHICH IMMEDIATELY SAYS IF YOUR BODY ISN'T THIS WAY, YOUR BODY DOESN'T MATTER. SO, FOR ME, THERE'S THE PRINCIPLES, BUT THERE'S THE ACTUAL LIVING/ENACTING THE PRINCIPLES IN THE ACTUAL CURRICULUM AND HAVING THE PERSON, THE PRACTITIONER, THE EDUCATOR, ACTUALLY DOING IT. BECAUSE THAT'S THE OTHER THING...YOU CAN HAVE A GREAT CURRICULUM AND IF YOU HAVE A LOUSY EDUCATOR OR JUST AN EDUCATOR WHO CAN'T HOLD VERY MUCH, WE'RE NOT GOING TO GET THERE. WE'RE NOT REALLY DOING WORK TOWARDS RACIAL JUSTICE IN THE CLASSROOM."*

As established, there is a stark difference between grounding a curriculum in principles and ensuring that those principles are put into practice. An RJE-centered sex education curriculum will be most impactful when the facilitator embodies the principles established, rather than simply teaching them. When asked for clarity, key informants highlighted the following internal and external qualities of RJE-centered sex educators.

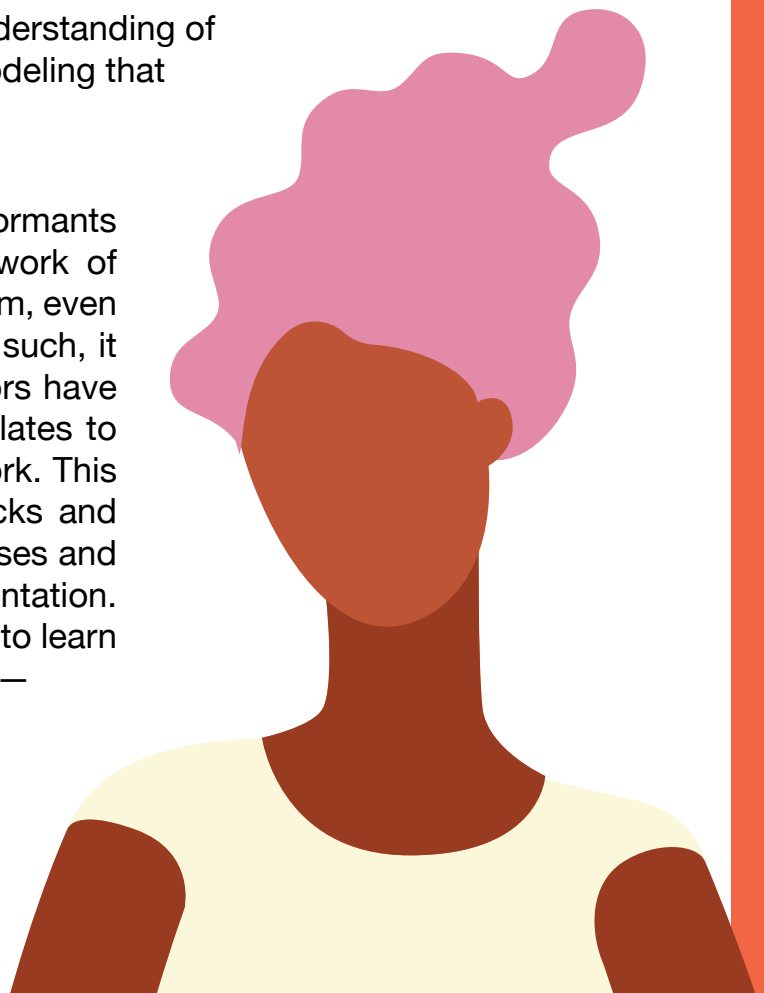


INTERNAL

POLITICIZED UNDERSTANDING OF ONE'S OWN AND OTHERS' IDENTITIES: To effectively engage students in nuanced discussions of power, it is imperative that RJE-centered sex educators have a clear awareness of their own identities and their respective roots in privilege and oppression. From there, it is expected that RJE-centered sex educators do the continuous work to become aware of and responsive to the emergent dynamics that their social locations may create within their learning spaces (e.g., being a White educator in a classroom solely made up of students of color, being a cisgender-heterosexual educator of color in a classroom with LGBTQIA+ students of color), such that they minimize the effects of unchecked biases on the learning process.

EXCEPTIONAL EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE: Sex is a subject that engages both the body and mind, including one's emotions. We also recognize that the sexual development of young people is a topic that can be discomforting for even the most progressive of sex educators—particularly those who educate students of color. Key informants noted that RJE-centered sex educators are individuals who are highly in tune with their emotional selves and can model empathy and compassion as they engage students in discussions about their sexual attitudes and behavior. We recognize this is an ongoing process and that no educator is "fully there" when it comes to embracing potential shortcomings in this regard. As such, it is expected that RJE-centered sex educators regularly work to recognize areas of personal discomfort that come up for them while teaching and refrain from allowing those moments to affect how they hold space for student learning. They should also use these occurrences as opportunities to grow in their understanding of sexual diversity and empathy for others, also modeling that same behavior for their students.

EXCEPTIONAL SELF-REFLECTION AND AWARENESS: Key informants recognized the difficulty, at times, to do the work of centering racial justice and equity in the classroom, even while aspiring for it as an instructional ideal. As such, it was established that RJE-centered sex educators have the temperament of persistent curiosity as it relates to their own willingness and capacity to do this work. This curiosity includes engaging in routine self-checks and asking oneself tough questions about where biases and reluctance may lie in their sex education implementation. Much of it also involves cultivating opportunities to learn from students, remaining open to their feedback—and, in some cases even, reproach—about how sex education can be done better.



EXTERNAL

ACTIVELY CULTIVATE INCREASED INCLUSIVITY AND ACCESSIBILITY: Pursuit of racial justice and equity within sex education is impossible without having a previously established intention to cultivate and normalize diversity of all kinds, including but not limited to race. An RJE-centered educator possesses the lens with which to recognize when there are experiences or perspectives that have been left out of the learning process and the intrinsic motivation to make sure those perspectives are included, regardless of whether or not students who represent those experiences are known or perceived to be physically present in the classroom. For example, this could look like using gender-expansive language when discussing body parts assumed to be "masculine" or "feminine" or discussing topics that may be assumed to only be for students of certain sexual orientations, such as the use of PrEP/PEP or flavored condoms or dental dams for oral sex. Inclusivity also involves making sure that teaching materials are easily legible by students of varying abilities, and providing accommodations as needed (e.g., closed captioning in virtual spaces, larger sans-serif fonts on slides, modifications for exercises that involve extensive body movement).

PERPETUAL RESPONSIVENESS AND FLEXIBILITY TO SHIFTS IN THE ENVIRONMENT AND STUDENT EXPERIENCES (DYNAMIC VS. STATIC): In many ways, teaching is an art in which the best of the best can successfully adapt to unexpected circumstances in both their learning spaces and among students. As this relates to racial justice and equity, a successful RJE-centered sex educator is one who can be sensitive to the realities of the learning environment, recognizing that even the best laid instructional plans may need to shift according to students' immediate needs. A key informant raised an important example of this in the case of a classroom in which students were mourning the unexpected loss of a classmate due to gun violence the night before; a truly RJE-centered sex educator is one who can be sensitive enough to students' needs and refrain from bulldozing past experiences in the present moment.

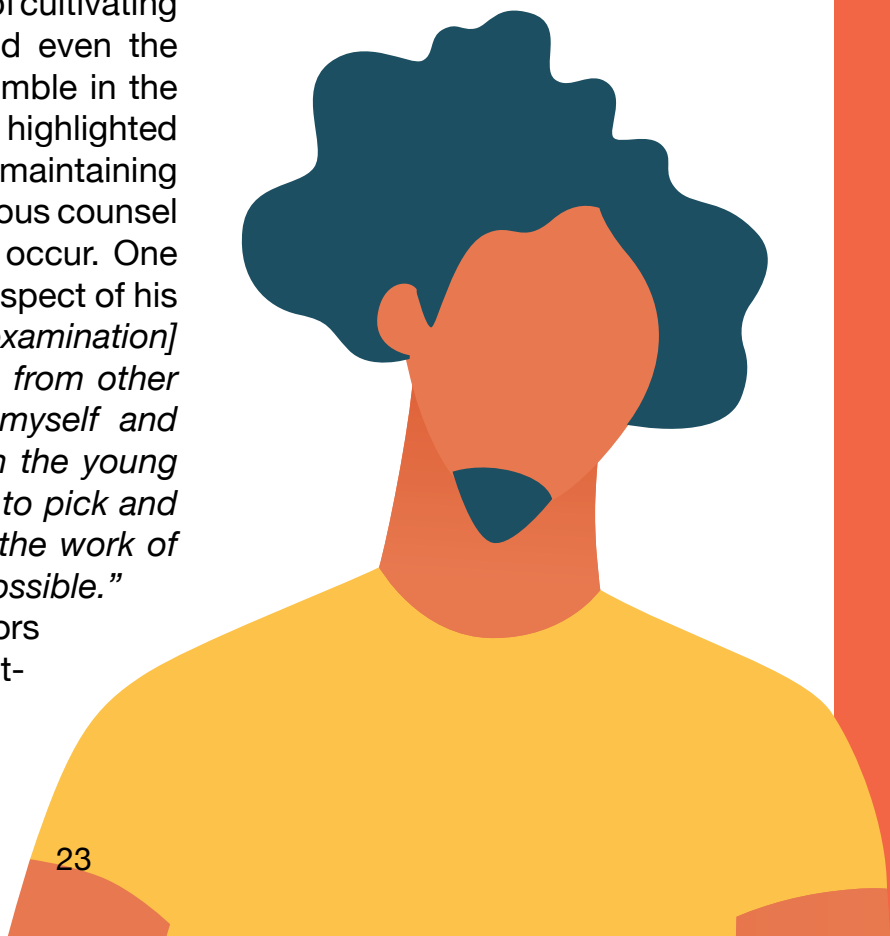
WILLINGNESS TO EMBRACE WHERE STUDENTS ARE IN THEIR LEARNING AND EXPERIENCE: As has already been established in this paper, establishing safety for students in sex education requires cultivating learning spaces where students can feel free to be vulnerable with their thoughts and perspectives, regardless of how well those may or may not match up with best practices in sexual health. A significant part of that cultivation includes being willing to not only acknowledge but willfully hold space for wherever students may be in their learning journeys. Students should be challenged to grow in their learning and understanding; however, this guideline suggests that RJE-centered sex educators recognize that progress is subjective and determined by a number of different factors, including the learner's initial entry point to the classroom. Holding space for even incremental advancements in learning can lay groundwork for more substantial gains that are made later, even perhaps after formal class sessions have concluded.

ABILITY TO TALK ABOUT RACE: It should go without saying that RJE-centered sex educators are willing to discuss race in their learning spaces, even if they are not automatically comfortable doing so. Particularly for White educators, informants note that it is

imperative that RJE-centered educators feel emboldened to name the ways that racialization emerges as an intersecting experience with the topics that are being discussed in the classroom and that, as one respondent put it, they "not be freaked out by just simply doing it." RJE-centered educators of color who exact courage in naming race's role in sexuality and sexual health may serve to give students of color the language and clarity they need to validate the dynamics with which they struggle in interpersonal relationships as well as in sexual health systems. Meanwhile, White RJE-centered educators who do the same may serve to effectively model how constructive conversations about race can be initiated by White students both in and outside of the classroom.

[FOR WHITE EDUCATORS] PURSUES ACTIVE PARTNERSHIP WITH EDUCATORS/TRAINERS OF COLOR FOR LEARNING AND COACHING: It is important to acknowledge that sex educators of all races remain ignorant about the full range of ways that race not only intersects with young people's sexual health experiences but also emerges in classroom dynamics. An unpopular, yet added truth raised by several key informants is that many White sex educators, in particular, still lack the necessary skills to: a) see how race operates in a given situation; and b) successfully work with students of color on an interpersonal level. It is this that they respond to when asserting that White sex educators need guidance in cultivating their RJE-centered instructional capacity—guidance that can only be gained by receiving training from qualified Black and Brown RJE-centered educators. Given the overwhelming numbers of White people who make up the sex education profession, it is quite likely that a young person's only access to sex education at the K–12 level will come from a White educator; as one respondent noted, it is critical then that White RJE-centered educators be as diligent as possible in accessing the adequate resources and training to develop this muscle.

ACTIVE USE OF A PEER-ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM: The work of cultivating racial justice and equity is not easy, and even the best RJE-centered sex educator may stumble in the process. For this reason, our informants highlighted the importance of educators pursuing and maintaining a circle of colleagues to provide conscientious counsel and accountability when those stumbles occur. One informant elevated this point as a critical aspect of his own journey, *"Externally, like, I do [self-examination] a lot right?...But it took a lot of coaching from other people...to ask those questions about myself and then be able to ask those questions from the young people I work with, but not as an excuse to pick and tear myself apart, but like, this is part of the work of envisioning a new world, a world that is possible."* It is critical that RJE-centered sex educators exercise the humility to recognize the limitations of relying solely on one's own judgment in assessing the effectiveness of their efforts.



RJE ADMINISTRATIVE PRACTICES

In discussions of the sex education field writ large, interview participants described numerous ways in which working conditions within the field itself are inequitable across racial and ethnic lines. BIPOC educators are often left out of curriculum development, subjected to tokenism, and not respected as authorities and experts within the field. When asked about the most pressing challenges to social and racial equity within the field, participants shared—

> *"WE NEED A MAJOR CORRECTION OF WHO'S IN THE FRONT OF THE ROOM, WHO'S GETTING LISTENED TO, AND WHO'S GETTING PAID. AND WE NEED THAT FOR DECADES AND DECADES AND DECADES AND THEN WE CAN GET TO SOMETHING ELSE."*

> *"THE STRUCTURAL ASPECT OF GETTING MORE PEOPLE DOING THIS WORK. WELL, IT'S NOT MORE PEOPLE DOING THIS WORK BECAUSE BIPOC FOLKS HAVE BEEN DOING THIS WORK FOREVER. GETTING THEM IN FRONT OF LARGER AND LARGER GROUPS."*

> *"...[W]ORKING TOWARDS RACIAL AND SOCIAL EQUITY WOULD MEAN TO ME IS THAT YOU SEE BLACK SEX EDUCATORS ON THE MAIN STAGES OF THE SEX ED WORLD...LIKE ANY OTHER FIELD, PEOPLE IN THE SEX ED WORLD ARE ABLE TO MOVE MORE SWIFTLY IF THEY ARE CONVENTIONALLY ATTRACTIVE IF THEY ARE LIGHT-SKINNED IF THEY ARE THIN, ABLE-BODIED, CISGENDER, EVEN HETERO. LIKE, IF THEY'RE MAKING THEIR WORK CENTERED AROUND HETEROSEXUAL IDENTITIES, THEN THEY WILL LIKELY THRIVE AND HAVE LARGE PLATFORMS. BUT EQUITY WOULD LOOK LIKE AN ACTUAL INTERRUPTION TO THAT AND SEX EDUCATORS WHO ARE CENTERED BECAUSE OF THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF VARIOUS IDENTITIES AND THE FACT THAT THEY CAN ACTUALLY REACH IDENTITIES THAT ARE RARELY EVER TALKED ABOUT OR CONSIDERED WHEN IT COMES TO PLEASURE AND CONVERSATIONS AROUND SEX. [SIC]"*

One respondent shared at length about their experiences being approached to revise and improve curricula that fell short in important ways, like effectively balancing inclusivity with cultural competency, as a consequence of not engaging Black and Brown communities and experts in the early development process—

> *... A LOT OF THE PEOPLE WHO WROTE THAT CURRICULUM WERE OLDER WHITE PEOPLE IN OUR FIELD AND OLDER WHITE PEOPLE THAT I KNOW WHO LIKE ME AND WE HAVE A GOOD RELATIONSHIP WITH...THIS IS A GREAT EXAMPLE OF WELL-MEANING WHITE PEOPLE WHO DO THIS WORK AND JUST CAUSE MORE HARM BECAUSE THEY DON'T HAVE A LENS OF, 'OH, MAYBE I SHOULD ASK SOMEBODY WHO IS IN THE ART WORLD OR WHO LISTENS AND VALUES HIP HOP AND ASK THEM ABOUT THIS STUFF. SO THAT'S WHAT I MEAN BY PEOPLE DON'T HAVE A LENS THAT STRONG IN UNDERSTANDING THE MULTIPLE WAYS THAT HARM CAN OCCUR AND THAT WE EXPERIENCE IT. AND SO, IT'S NOT JUST LIKE EDITING THAT BUT IT'S ALSO WHAT IS THE HARM THAT COMES TO ME WHEN I HAVE TO RECEIVE THOSE KINDS OF COMMENTS FROM PEOPLE.*

This same participant described the ways this workload becomes heavier, requiring them to "clean up" harm and do extra work to care for themselves, like scheduling extra sessions with a therapist, getting a massage, or ordering food delivery. A need for financial support for this recovery and self-care was expressed. Organizations must take responsibility for this care as a part of a staff person of color's compensation for teaching sex education—

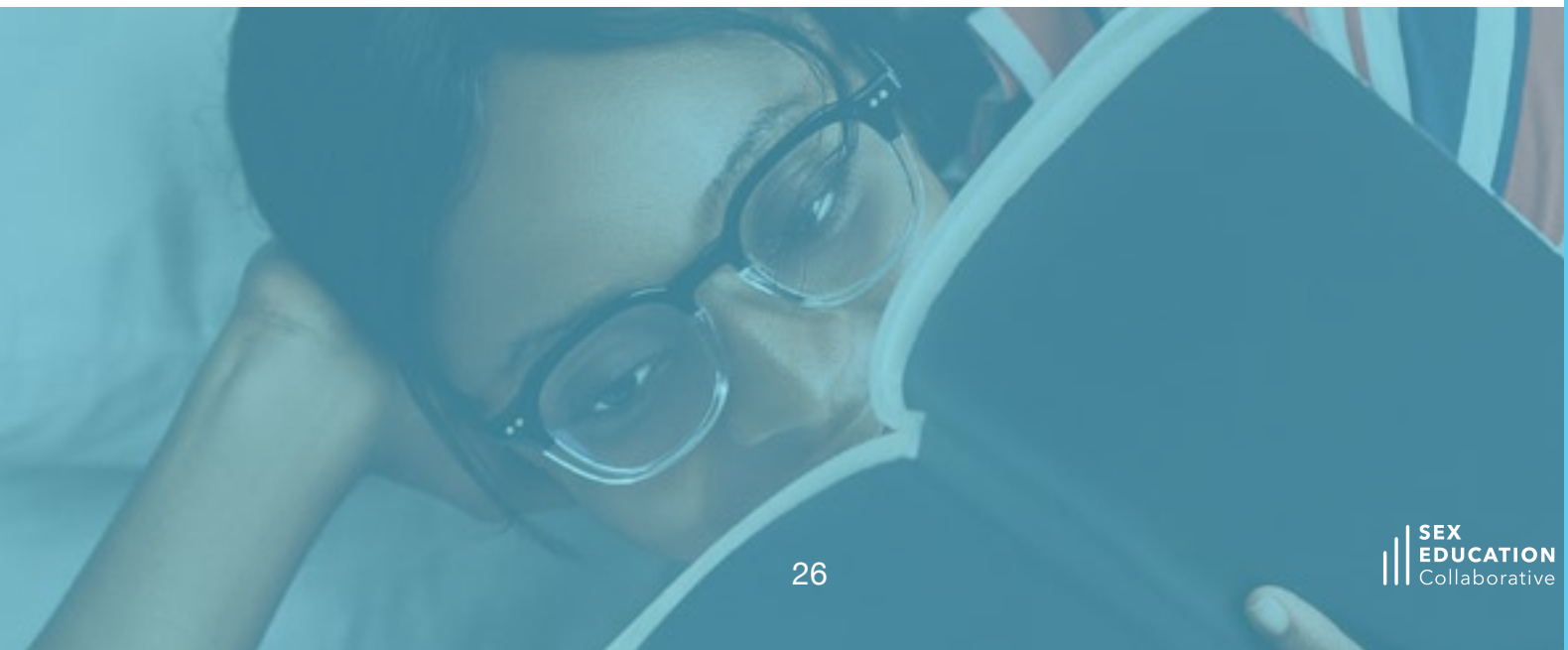
> *YOU KNOW, JUST THINKING ABOUT THE WAYS I HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF MYSELF TO DO THIS WORK IS ALSO SOMETHING THAT ISN'T CONSIDERED AND THAT'S ALSO THE RACIAL EQUITY. HOW ARE WE TAKING CARE OF OUR NON-WHITE FACILITATORS WHO HAVE TO INCORPORATE THIS AS THEIR JOB AND WHO EXPERIENCED THIS KIND OF VIOLENCE, THIS KIND OF MICROAGGRESSION?*

Informants made clear that Black and Brown sex educators and scholars should be leaders in this work. This would require fundamental shifts in the ways in which opportunities are distributed—and hoarded—across the field. Funders and prominent organizations within the field must also expand their willingness to be flexible to new ways of thinking. Similarly, organizations must wrestle with their own internal assumptions about how they define expertise (i.e., devaluing lived experience) and funders must answer the call to eliminate the wage gap that exists between sex educators of color and non-BIPOC sex educators.

Interview participants also made clear that the process of creating a sex education curriculum that advances racial justice and equity should be informed by a group of people that represent a diverse array of marginalized identities, including, but not limited to: people with different racial and ethnic backgrounds; members of the LGBTQIA+ community, particularly trans and queer people; people with differing abilities; and people across a wide range of ages, from teens to elders. Other stakeholders that should be offered a place at the table include policymakers, funders providing support for research and implementation, members of the medical and public health community who develop and create programs and provide support services, and therapists providing counseling to individuals. The word cloud depicted in Figure 2 provides recommendations for additional stakeholders who should be involved in creating a more racially just and equitable sex education curriculum.

Figure 2.

Although informants saw greater diversity and inclusion in curriculum development as an important corrective for the field and a necessity for supporting an evolving shift toward racial justice and equity in sex education, it was only a starting point. Sex education educators across the board, as well as funders and policymakers, must begin to interrogate the ways in which evidence-based curricula are hindering progress toward better supporting youth from marginalized communities.



RECOMMENDATIONS: KNOWING WHEN YOU'VE ACHIEVED RACIAL JUSTICE & EQUITY IN SEX EDUCATION

Key informants noted challenges in how typical evaluations of sex education curricula are conducted. These challenges serve as examples of what not to do in evaluating a justice-oriented sex education curriculum that centers racial justice and equity using an anti-oppression framework. For example, one participant noted the challenge with the evaluation of a school-based curriculum that instructed facilitators to visually record students' racial identity instead of asking students to self-identify. In another example, the informant noted the challenges with evaluating sex education programs in general, questioning the emphasis on knowledge gained for a short period of time versus impacting long-term behavior.

Taking these challenges into consideration, strategies for curriculum development and evaluation should be tailored to ensure that what counts as success shifts from the traditional prevention narrative of pregnancy and STI prevention to an evaluation plan that addresses feedback from the community, facilitators, and youth participants. Content evaluation should be discussed alongside curriculum development strategy and be developed in conjunction with overall stated objectives and outcomes of a curriculum. The evaluation should include self-awareness, self-esteem, and processing how students feel about race, as well as a focus on process measures, rather than long-term outcomes, and a greater reliance on qualitative, rather than quantitative, methods.

Listening sessions are one recommended tool to gain feedback from program participants and educators to gauge overall feelings from participants about the session and whether participants' needs are being met, beyond what a facilitator may have assumed were the needs of the target audience or community. This is also an opportunity to incorporate youth and educators in program development and evaluation.

Curricula and program evaluation methods do not need to be overly complicated and can start with creative ways of collecting information (e.g., draw pictures as beginning, midpoint, end). There should also be flexibility in documentation/evaluation methods to accommodate students' preferences for engagement (e.g., oral, drawn, written). Another important aspect to consider is how to center data collection around experiences of youth with intersecting identities.

While assessment of the overall program is important, there is also a need for the use of evaluation tools that infer support needed for sex educators. Educator evaluation should be included in the overall program evaluation to determine the effectiveness of delivery as well as the readiness of the facilitator to implement sex education that centers youth of color. Evaluations of facilitators should include habits, temperament, and characteristics. The following tools can be utilized for assessing individual staff and organizations, respectively.

- **SEXUAL ATTITUDES REASSESSMENT (SAR):** A process-oriented seminar that uses lectures, media, experiential methods, activities, and small group discussions. The objective of a SAR is to give participants the opportunity to explore their attitudes, values, feelings, and beliefs about sexual attitudes, behaviors, and identities and how these impact their professional interactions.

- **SEC ORGANIZATIONAL ASSESSMENT:** A tool to assist in identifying gaps and opportunities in strengthening your organization's commitment to racial justice and equity. This tool is intended to highlight areas where additional action is needed; the assessment itself cannot move your organization further on its journey of racial justice and equity but can guide you in what actions can be taken by your organization. (See Appendix.)

There should also be an assessment for educators that includes normative beliefs about Black and Brown people rooted in damaging stereotypes. Our key informants named the following as requirements to be included in an assessment of anyone providing comprehensive sex education:

- Politicized understanding of one's own and others' identities;
- Exceptional emotional intelligence;
- Exceptional self-reflection and awareness, especially regarding personal biases, personal capacity, and interest;
- Perpetual responsiveness and flexibility to shifts in the environment and student experiences (dynamic vs. static);
- Willingness to embrace where students are in their learning and experience;
- Active cultivation of inclusivity and increased accessibility;
- [For White educators] Pursuit of active partnership with educators/trainers of color for learning and coaching;
- Ability to talk about race; and
- Active use of an accountability system.

While these were mentioned in the section on the necessary temperament for RJE-centered educators, the list is worth repeating. These same concepts should be included in assessment and evaluation for overall program success. Organizations should utilize these assessment topics to seek ongoing training and professional development opportunities for staff.

The SEC Training Hub (www.SexEducationCollaborative.org/offerings) brings together trusted national, regional, and state-based sex education professional training, technical assistance, and policy support for K–12 schools in one place. The Training Hub makes it easy for you to search for professional development trainings by topic, location, or grade level. All trainings map to the Professional Learning Standards for Sex Education (PLSSE), which were created by the SEC. These Standards were designed to help improve educators' ability to effectively teach about family life and sexuality with their K–12 students and were informed by the National Sex Education Standards (NSES, Second Edition), which have been endorsed by the SEC.

CONCLUSION

We perceive the sex education field to be sitting at a critical decision point—the call for RJE-centered K–12 sex education has been articulated for several years now, though much of the necessary progress to make it commonplace remains to be realized. Through this paper, we have attempted to close this gap by suggesting how to operationalize the ideal of racial justice and equity on multiple levels, in good faith that doing so will spark the momentum necessary for fully carrying this vision forward. Given much of what we have seen in the shifting political climate of the past few years, combined equally with the recent challenges levied by COVID-19 against the traditional K–12 infrastructure itself, we concede that we are no longer at the place where we anticipate all educators and sex education organizations to have the capacity to do this type of work. We additionally consider the reflection of at least one respondent, who stated the following—

> *"I DON'T BELIEVE WE'RE REACHING A CRITICAL MASS OF IMPLEMENTING THIS WORK IN THE COMMUNITY, BECAUSE OF THE PEOPLE WHO ARE FACILITATING IT. AND THE ORGANIZATIONS THAT ARE LEADING IT, I JUST DON'T THINK THAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN. I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE [TRADITIONAL SEX EDUCATION PROVIDERS] TEACHING THE SAME WHITE KIDS THAT THEY'VE SOUGHT/TAUGHT FOR GENERATIONS, ON THEIR FORM OF WHITE FEMINISM AND THE SAME BLACK KIDS THAT ARE GOING TO GET COMES FROM THEM..."*

> *"I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO SEE THE SAME BLACK ORGANIZATIONS WHO ARE...ATTEMPTING TO BE A CONTRACTOR GET A PIECE OF A GRANT TO DO THE BEST THEY CAN, FOR ONE GENERATION BUT NOT BE SUPPORTED AND FUNDED IN THE WAYS THAT THEY NEED TO BE AND YOU'RE GOING TO CONTINUE TO SEE PEOPLE KIND OF DIVEST AND NOT FEEL LIKE THAT SPACE IS FOR THEM AND IT COMES BACK TO LEADERSHIP."*

With this perspective in mind, we call on the entire field of sex education to take a genuine look at itself, including its strengths and potential limitations in its capacity to do this work. We close with the claim stated plainly: We have reached the limit of results that our present efforts as a field can yield. We assert that further progress requires the willingness to have what may be tough conversations about what can—and cannot or will not—be accomplished through current organizational structures. And while we do not fault those whose efforts are stymied by the practical restraints of politics and limited resources, we encourage organizations to avoid the threat of promises unfulfilled by facing these challenges head-on, and making brave, sober choices in kind. As needed, we encourage organizations to partner with key informants and other established leaders of color in our profession to determine the best and boldest ways forward that are not only sustainable but authentic and intentional. And finally, in the instance that the choice is made to avoid the work ahead, our only request is that space be made for those who are equipped and willing, if for no other reason than to fulfill the needs of young people. As summed up by one key informant, *"Yes, yes programming, yes fidelity, yes funders, but leaders you got to be ready to lose your job because of your values."*

GLOSSARY/DEFINITIONS

ANTI-BLACKNESS	resistant or antagonistic to Black people or their values or objectives
BIPOC	refers to Black, Indigenous, (and) People of Color; this acronym intends to bring awareness to the differential impacts of Colonialism on Black, Indigenous, and other people of color
BODILY AUTONOMY	right to governance over our own bodies; specifically for women, nonbinary, and trans people, this means making decisions about one's physical self and the freedom to take up space in the world
COLLECTIVE LIBERATION	recognizing that all of our struggles are intimately connected and that we must work together to create the kind of world we know is possible; belief that every person is worthy of dignity and respect and that within systems of oppression
CULTURAL COMPETENCY/ HUMILITY	a lifelong commitment to self-evaluation and critique, redressing power imbalances, and developing mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf of individuals and a defined population
DIVESTMENT	a concerted economic boycott to pressure a government, industry, or company towards a change in policy
EQUALITY	ensuring that every individual has an equal opportunity to make the most of their lives and talents without discrimination
EQUITY	providing access, resources, and power (to all) depending (congruent with) on specific needs, abilities, or previous experiences of marginalization
ETHNICITY	refers to the identification of a group based on a perceived cultural distinctiveness that makes the group into a "people;" this distinctiveness is believed to be expressed in language, music, values, art, styles, literature, family life, religion, ritual, food, naming, public life, and material culture

GATEKEEPING

the activity of controlling, and usually limiting, general access to something

INTERSECTIONALITY

the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (e.g., racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups [Merriam Webster]; the theory that various forms of discrimination centered on race, gender, class, disability, sexuality, and other forms of identity, do not work independently but interact to produce particularized forms of social oppression [Oxford]

LIBERATION

the act of setting someone free from imprisonment, slavery, or oppression; release [Oxford languages]

MARGINALIZATION

the systematic disempowerment of a person or community by denying access to necessary resources, enforcing prejudice through society's institutions, and/or not allowing for that individual or community's voice, history, and perspective to be heard

OPPRESSION

when an agent group, whether knowingly or unknowingly, abuses a target group; a pervasive system rooted historically and maintained through individual and institutional/systematic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice, resulting in a condition of privilege for the agent group at the expense of the target group

POWER

access to resources that enhance one's chances of getting what one needs in order to lead a comfortable, productive, and safe life

PRIVILEGE

unearned access to resources (social power) that are only readily available to some people because of their social group membership; an advantage or immunity granted to or enjoyed by one societal group above and beyond the common advantage of all other groups; often invisible to those who have it

RACE

a misleading and deceptively appealing classification of human beings created by White people originally from Europe which assigns human worth and social status using the White racial identity as the archetype of humanity for the purpose of creating and maintaining privilege, power, and systems of oppression

RACISM

involves one group having the power to carry out systematic discrimination through the institutional policies and practices of the society and by shaping the cultural beliefs and values that support those racist policies and practices; the combination of individual prejudice and individual discrimination, on one hand, and institutional policies and practices, on the other, resulting in the unjustified negative treatment and subordination of members of racial or ethnic groups that have experienced a history of discrimination. Prejudice, discrimination, and racism do not require intention

RACIAL JUSTICE

the systematic fair treatment of people of all races which includes: the redressing of inequitable policies, practices, attitudes, actions; and proactive reinforcement of policies, practices, attitudes, and actions that provide access, opportunities, treatment, impacts, and outcomes for all

RESPECTABILITY POLITICS

a set of beliefs holding that conformity to prescribed mainstream standards of appearance and behavior will protect a person who is part of a marginalized group, especially a Black person, from prejudices and systemic injustices

STRUCTURAL RACISM

involves the normalization and legitimization of an array of dynamics—historical, cultural, institutional, and interpersonal—that routinely and systematically advantage whites at the expense of Black, Latinx, Asian, Pacific Islander, Native American, Arab, and other people based on a racial-based hierarchy of human value

SOCIAL JUSTICE

the pursuit and fulfillment of equity with regard to economic, political, and social rights and opportunities, regardless of race, sex, gender, gender identity, socioeconomic status, sexual identity, ability, or other characteristics (physical and other identities) or social categories

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

negative stereotypes regarding a person or group of people; these biases influence individuals' thoughts and actions without their conscious knowledge. We all have unconscious biases

WHITE SUPREMACY

a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent, for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power, and privilege

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APPENDIX

SEC RACIAL JUSTICE AND EQUITY TASK TEAM ORGANIZATION ASSESSMENT

Adapted from a tool created by the Western States Center by the SEC RJETT in 2021

WHAT IT IS

This tool is intended to assist in assessing the degree of each organization's engagement with racial justice and equity.

WHAT IT CAN DO

This tool can assist you to identify gaps and opportunities in strengthening your organization's commitment to racial justice and equity. This tool is intended to highlight areas where additional action is needed; the assessment itself cannot move your organization further on its journey of racial justice and equity but can guide you in what actions can be taken by your organization.

HOW IT WORKS

STEP 1: Each person on the team fills out the assessment individually or Break into groups to collectively answer the questions.

Each question is ranked either:

- **DARK RED LIGHT**: organization has not gone there and would welcome support on where to start the work
- **RED LIGHT**: organization has not gone there
- **YELLOW LIGHT**: organization has started conversations about this or taken some first steps
- **GREEN LIGHT**: organization is fully on board and has completed this action
- **BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT**: organization is fully on board and has completed this action and could offer support to other members on how to address this action

STEP 2: Reflect on the following questions as a team (whatever this means to you!) on the following questions.

- In which areas does the organization need to do more work?
- Are there areas that the organization needs to begin with?
- What steps come first?

Use the results to help identify organizational and collective priorities for change.

MISSION / VALUES	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your organization have a mission statement that incorporates racial justice and equity?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization have an internal and/or externally facing values statement regarding racial justice and equity?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does the mission, vision, and/or strategic plan of your organization reflect the stated needs and desires of BIPOC communities?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
POWER / GOVERNANCE	**DARK RED LIGHT**	**RED LIGHT**	**YELLOW LIGHT**	**GREEN LIGHT**	**BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT**	**I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE**
Does your organization have courageous leadership that is consistent around applying a racial justice and equity lens and understanding of power and privilege? (Courageous leadership is defined as people who are able to navigate uncomfortable situations, are willing to make difficult decisions, and are committed to keeping their commitment to racial justice and equity even when things get hard.)	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization have BIPOC folks as senior leadership and director-level staff?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization have BIPOC folks as board members?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Are benchmarks around racial justice and equity incorporated into the annual evaluation of the Executive Director?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization have an internal structure or position dedicated to achieving workforce diversity?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

HUMAN RESOURCE POLICIES / PROCEDURES	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your organization hire to address racial and ethnic inequities, prioritizing the hiring of employees who represent communities of BIPOC folks?						
Does your organization provide annual training on Federal laws pertaining to anti-discrimination policies that explicitly prohibit micro- aggressions, implicit bias, harassment of BIPOC members of the organization?						
Do policies related to family leave, caretaking/ dependent care, parental leave, benefits, etc. support all family formations, including those beyond "traditional, nuclear" families?						
Does your organization use affirmative hiring and recruitment practices to encourage diversity during the hiring processes?						
Does your organization have bench-marks around leadership and retention of BIPOC folks?						
Does your organization follow equitable and fair guidelines and best practices for salary, bonuses, and benefits?						
Does your organization's grievance policy allow for staff to provide anonymous feedback/ grievances about their supervisors/agency policies, etc.?						
Does your organization offer training on skill building to recognize, interrupt, address, and avoid racial and ethnic inequities, implicit bias, and microaggressions?						

	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your organization have a written policy or formal practice regarding the collection of racial, ethnic, and linguistic makeup of your board, workforce, etc.?						
PEOPLE & CULTURE	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your staff and board reflect the full spectrum of BIPOC communities within the region?						
Does your organization have personal relationships that are accountable to BIPOC individuals and organizations within the field?						
Does your organization recognize, support, and promote the leadership of BIPOC leaders and organizations within the field?						
Are racial justice and equity training and capacity building opportunities made available to your stakeholders? (e.g,. staff, board, youth activists, community)						
Has your organization actively worked to change the culture when BIPOC folks are expected to assimilate because white culture is treated as the norm?						
Are conversations about promoting racial justice and equity and combating white dominance encouraged and expected at all levels of your organization?						
INVESTMENTS	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your organization raise specific funding for its racial justice work?						

	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your organization make creative use of categorized funds that support programs/policies vital to or disproportionately needed by BIPOC?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization have a Minority, Women & Emerging Small Business (MWESB) policy when considering contractors, consultants, and corporate strategies?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
PROGRAM / PROGRAM DELIVERY	**DARK RED LIGHT**	**RED LIGHT**	**YELLOW LIGHT**	**GREEN LIGHT**	**BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT**	**I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE**
Does your organization explicitly and actively seek to prioritize, address and center racial justice and equity and challenge and dismantle white supremacy across all programs, initiatives, and publications and with the groups you work with?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization center BIPOC folks within the community, including their voices, perspectives, and needs within regular programming and planning?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization advocate for the inclusion of racial justice and equity issues when working in coalitions?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization prioritize the participation of internal and external BIPOC- led groups?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization provide training, technical assistance, and materials in the first language of participants?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Is racial justice and equity a guiding principle during program development and quality assurance processes?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭

	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Are programs currently being implemented in a way that implicitly or explicitly combats white dominant cultural norms and promotes the holistic health and wellbeing of BIPOC program participants and communities?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
EVALUATION	DARK RED LIGHT	RED LIGHT	YELLOW LIGHT	GREEN LIGHT	BRIGHT GREEN LIGHT	I DON'T KNOW / UNSURE
Does your organization meet regularly with leaders from BIPOC communities specifically to discuss how your organization is addressing racial justice and equity within your organization's programs and services?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization have a written racial justice equity plan with clear actions, timelines, people responsible for each action, indicators of progress and processes for monitoring and evaluation?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭
Does your organization collect data on service-user or constituent satisfaction regarding racial justice and equity within your programs?	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭	⬭