

## Equity Accelerator

### Why YOUR Wellness Matters: Intersections of Mental Health, Systems Change, and Equity

**Christina Pate:**

So, let's get started. All right, so as part of the COVID Education Equity Response Collaborative, WestEd is leading a year-long equity accelerator to support the California County Offices of Education in improving the alignment of whole child and whole school efforts that really cohere around a vision of equity. And so, we use a two-tiered approach in our equity accelerator. We provide a statewide professional learning series to all 58 county offices, which is what today's event is as a part of, and then we also have an intensive Fellows Program for, currently we have eight county offices participating in that.

So, we explore lots of equity-related topics, including adult mindsets and biases that really underlie all of our education policies and practices, stakeholder agency, voice and choice in that co-design and co-leadership approach, which is what we focused on last time, and our environments and relationships. So, that includes things like culturally responsive practices, trauma-informed and healing-centered approaches, and restorative practices, which is one of our focus today. So, with that, we cover all of these broadly in our Professional Learning Series, but we really dive deep into those in the fellowship as well as that personal transformation and professional change management that has to occur in order for all of that to actualize.

All right, so, you can see here's a list of our participating county offices in the fellowship, so we just want to give you all a shout out. Thanks for being here today. Butte County, Del Norte, Placer, Sacramento, San Diego, Santa Clara, Sonoma, and Tulare. Our 16 fellows from our eight county offices are doing some really intensive work right now, both personally and collectively, and it's been an honor to be on this journey with you all. If you'd like to learn more about the fellowship, you can email us at [equityaccelerator@wested.org](mailto:equityaccelerator@wested.org). So, that's a little bit about our program.

Here's our amazing team that I had the privilege of working with every day, our equity coaches, Rachelle Rogers-Ard and Terna Tilley-Gyado. And

then from WestEd, we have Cherry Hannah, Laura Buckner, Lauren Trout, and Jenny Betz, who you will hear from later, and on behalf of our team and without further ado, I'd like to welcome our presenter for today. Our facilitator is Kelly Knoche. Pronouns are she/her. And joining her today is also Lindsey Fuller, pronouns she/her, both from The Teaching Well. Kelly Knoche is the Founder and Director of The Teaching Well, which is a multi-leveled, systemic approach to bringing wellness into school systems.

In this role, she has mentored hundreds of teachers, led trainings to thousands, and has built an organization committed to living its values of honest communication, semantic embodiment, and transparency, by building skills and focusing on educator, stress, resilience, and communication. The Teaching Well has saved school districts \$2 million in attrition related costs so far. And Kelly brings a deep love for people and a clear vision for organizations to embody their values in ways that reach their students and staff while achieving their goals. And on a personal note, as I've gotten to know Kelly over the last year, I can say, I have never seen a director really embody this work and be so aligned with, and really lead from their values like Kelly does. It's quite powerful, so you're really in for a treat today.

And Lindsey Fuller the Deputy Director. Kelly's going to speak about her role here in just a bit, but what a privilege it is to have them both guiding us today. So, I'm turning it over to Kelly.

**Kelly Knoche:**

Wow, thank you so much for that generous introduction and personal note at the end, I'm so excited to be here. My name is Kelly Knoche, I'm the Executive Director of The Teaching Well, and I'm here to be in the work with you. And over the course of this time, we're going to be exploring how our mental health and how our personal wellbeing intersects with our ability to be racial equity leaders. And I just really want to acknowledge WestEd from the front end of offering transcription, offering verbal cues and visual cues, and acknowledging pronouns as just ways that they're creating access for communities that may be marginalized in the virtual space.

I also want to introduce briefly, my team member, Lindsey Fuller. She is the Deputy Director of The Teaching Well, and she's actually just transitioning into the role. So, we're going to be doing a dance of me leading most of the session, but me lifting her voice because her lived experiences and her work at Aspire Public Schools, specifically over the last nine years, have been transformative, and I know it will move the conversation forward.

At The Teaching Well, we use agreements from the East Bay Multicultural Organization, and these are agreements that we have found work for us. And as an anti-racist practice of not recreating the wheel when the wheel is done well, I'd like for, maybe it's Laura, to drop this in the chat, and for you to look over these and choose one that you'd like to invite yourself to focus on and explore today. Now, we're new to each other, so us creating agreements within two minutes is not a good practice, but we can offer these as invitations and not expectations. And I trust if each of us focused on just one of these, we can actually hold them all together.

So, I'll give you a moment to look those over and type one in the chat that's moving you in your practice today. Thank you, Troy, for leading the way. Beautiful, Jennifer and Dominic. Thank you, Rachelle. Beautiful. We're already seeing that just by all of us choosing what's moving our experience, we're going to be able to hold the collective agreements together and notice that this is a practice and not an actuality, right? So, we're living this practice together today. I'm going to share my screen to get us started. That's not the screen I want to share, but I'm going to share the right screen in a moment. Beautiful.

Can you give me a thumbs up reaction if you can see my screen and the agenda? Awesome, Jenny, thank you. So, over the course of this time, we're going to be connecting to your body. We're going to give you time to process independently, and we're going to give you time to process in groups. We're first going to honor what's here and what it means to be a County of Education office leader, and what that's meaning in this context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the racial reckoning that we've been navigating as a country over the last year. We're then going to take a moment to explore what stress looks like and how it impacts the body and performance using the Human Function Curve.

And then we'll make the connection of why, how society is built, and how our mental health, physical, and emotional health intersect with our ability to be the racial equity leaders that we want to be, and what called us to be here in this work. And we'll then have time to make connections and build that relationship together. Before we dive too much deeper, I want to add these additional agreements that are Teaching Well-specific. So, the first thing is I know that I'm talking to a room of leaders and that many of the practices I'm sharing with you today are things that you already live, and you probably have skill sets you can bring to the table.

So, be willing in that chat to drop your expertise. And we are learners, and we learn all the way through our leadership journey, so feel free to ask questions and ask for what you need from this space so that this space is something that you leave feeling nourished by and not feeling

like something that's either saturating or overwhelming, or not relevant to your experience. I also want to just name that as an organization, we believe the body is a miracle, and that we also believe that the body often has an intelligence in our leadership that we aren't able to feel. And especially in the virtual environment where we're keeping our bodies static for several hours a day, we at The Teaching Well really believe in body liberatory gifts.

So, if that means you need to turn your camera off to move to a different place in the room, if you need to eat or drink while you're taking this time, if you need to go to the bathroom, we honor your experience. Make sure you're muted or using your video in a way that allows you privacy and come back because your voice, your perspective, your listening, is going to move the conversation forward for all of us. And then the last space is being open to learning, and we use the growth comfort, the comfort and growth zone. So, we don't want us to stay in our comfort zone.

Whenever we're learning something new with a new community, we want to be in that growth zone, ready to hear something in a different way that moves our work forward. And the intention of this work is you're able to stay in your growth zone, and then we use your body to stay regulated and in that powerful learning space. And intention doesn't always equal impact, so there may be things that are shared during this training by myself or another person on the call that bring you into a more dysregulated state. That can feel like your heart racing, that could feel like you tapping your foot, or really feeling like I need a moment to get off, to take a breather.

And what we invite you to do is use an exit ramp of some sort and actually take that time for yourself. So, if you're feeling yourself getting to a place where your body is overwhelmed, we're going to offer two options today. One, that you can take that, take a moment just put me on mute, take your video off, and just go take five deep breaths and come back. Second, and I'm going to drop the participant, ask Laura to drop the participant handout. There is one, I believe it's on page three, there's a list of things that you can do when you or another team member is dysregulated, to help you stay connected to your body and connected to your vitality.

And then if you actually want another person to process with, we think that's really important, especially with the content that we're going to share with you today. So, you can do a direct message to Cherry Hannah, and Cherry will put you in a room with a coach to work one-on-one and really important additional offering of support. And then the last thing I

want to emphasize is that we're going to navigate the intersection of mental health and racial equity. And Christina said it so beautifully before, that based on our lived experiences and our racial identity in America, there is a different way that this content is going to, you're going to experience it in your body.

And so, if you're feeling like you want a leader of color-only space for your breakout rooms, please use that asterisk at the front of your name so that you can be in that space to allow yourself to express in the way that feels empowering and nourishing for you. Are there any questions? and you can come off mute or you can come off the, to type it in the chat, and we'll just hold space for those questions that come through. And thank you, Laura. You've got some mad skills in the chat. Okay. I'm gonna briefly talk before we go of why I'm here and why I'm sharing this work with you.

And at The Teaching Well, we believe in creating thriving school ecosystems from the County Office of Education down to the school site by focusing on adult wellbeing and healthy communication. We all desire to create the top of this pyramid, which is a thriving school community, where students, and teachers and district leaders embody wellness and excellence and are setting the next generation of our communities up for success. And we would say, as people, The Teaching Well is made by educators for educators, that 98% of all the training we received while we were in the classroom was how to do it. How to build fluency. How to create the content, what it should look like.

And we learned over our time as teachers that how our school, how my classroom was able to embody that was actually, there was a lot going on underneath the surface that determined whether or not my school community or the district community was successful in living that. So, you can imagine this pyramid like an icebreaker, and what The Teaching Well does is it goes underneath the surface to start at what we believe the foundation of that model is, is that each individual adult is able to understand their stress signals, understand their identity inside of society, and how that intersects with the people they serve, to be responsive to their body and their identity, and to manage their energy levels as an individual and collectively, over the course of a day, week, year in career in the work.

And that if each individual educator has the knowledge, tools, and practice to live those out, they then, the second step is their ability to communicate their needs, their boundaries, and their brilliance to other educators in their community. And when they can do both of those things, when they can balance their embodiment and be in relationship

with other people, all of that resource, all of that training that we all received as educators or that you're giving to district leaders, or are giving to students, now turns into outcomes for young people and families. And we've seen those results. And we'll share about those later, but this work on the intersection of mental health and racial equity is starting at the bottom, where we're putting together how do we respond to stress?

How does this relate to my lived identity in American society? And then how do I know that about myself, so that I actually show up for my colleagues in a way that changes the game for the students and families I serve. So, with that said, we start here. And we are, as I've said before, guided by the intelligence of the body, and I'm going to transition us to doing an activity, to connect with our bodies today. When I say, what are you feeling in your body, right now? I want to give some extra detail for you. So, when we're talking about feeling stuff in our body, we're talking about temperature, noticing places that feel hot or cold, tension, places that feel relaxed, places that feel tight.

You could also think about numbness or tingling or feeling nothing at all. Those are all sensations we can feel. You also may feel density, places that feel heavy or light. And then for some of us, we feel emotion or color in different parts of the body. And that interpretation is welcome too. The body is designed to find homeostasis and balance between itself and in its environment. And so these sensations are a way that it's actually showing you if you're in balance or not. And the only way that we get in touch with what our body's telling us is if we listen. And so, at The Teaching Well, we create 10 to 15% of the time that we work with educators and leaders and time that we work internally with ourselves to reconnect to the body so that we can become more fluent, and we can bring the brilliance of the body into the conversation.

So, with that said, I'm going to give us a tool that really helps us connect to our bodies and regulate our nervous system. I'm going to invite you to stand up, and you're welcome to turn off your video if that will create the privacy you need to feel successful. And this activity is a mix of two activities. One is called vagal toning and the second one is releasing background apps. The vagus nerve, you can see on the picture on the left, is a main cranial, it's the 10th cranial nerve that connects the brain to the heart, to the gut, and is the stress, it's one of the key nerves connected to the stress response.

So, what you'll share later, stress just means the desire to act or perform. It's not a bad term, but our ability to turn that, to regulate that nerve and to relax the body is important skill for leaders who have a lot of different

demands all the time. So, vagal toning, we're going to stand and put our feet hips width distance apart. If when, I'm going to ask you to close your eyes. So, if you feel like your balance may not be steady, you can place your hands on the table. And then when you're ready, and all of this is by invitation with your consent, I invite you to close your eyes and just take a moment to move the body in any way that feels comfortable for you.

So, that may be reaching your arms overhead, and then just focus in on your breath, allowing your body to lead the way and eventually come to a space of stillness, but not going there until the body wants to stop moving, allowing each exhale to be longer than the last. And eventually the body's going to naturally come to a standing position. And with your eyes closed, you're going to allow the body to slowly sway. You may notice your body in generally wanting to do circles or rock front and back. Maybe it rocks from side-to-side. And then I just want you to take 10 deep and even breaths here, allowing each breath to be felt as far into the body as you can.

In each exhale, to release any tension in the face. And then just noticing the sensations of the body. What do you feel in your body right now? Noticing your swing may have shifted. You may also notice your senses have heightened. Can you hear things in the room you couldn't hear before? Can you drop your shoulders down away from your ears, or my favorite, imagine relaxing your ears? And on this final breath, maybe take a long exhale. Begin to move your fingers and toes. And as we're beginning to move and reawaken the body, I want you to imagine in your mind's eye, and this is the releasing background apps.

Maybe when you were doing this you started noticing things you have to do after this training, or things you did before this training. And I want you to imagine, like your phone, that you can see these different thoughts as apps in your mind's eye. I'm sure you have a list like me. As leaders we hold so much. And then you're using your finger at like the phone, you use it on your phone, I want you to just scroll those apps away if you can let them go for the rest of the session. With each app we let go of for now, it actually increases the cell batteries life, right? So, it's giving us more opportunity to be present in this conversation.

And for our body to restore itself and feel nourished by the end of this call. Taking one more moment here and then just noticing your sensations of your body now that you've let those thoughts go for the moment. Feeling your clothes on your skin. You may now be noticing sounds outside of your room. Taking one more final breath. And when you're ready, I'm gonna invite you to open your eyes, but don't look at the computer just yet, find at least three objects around your room that

bring you joy or connect you to your purpose as a leader. Allowing the eyes to adjust without going to such a short vision window between us and the computer, and when you're ready, coming back.

So, I'd love for you to drop in the chat what you're noticing in your body now or what you noticed from that experience. And for some of us, we might've noticed common, others of us, this might not have been a common experience. All comments are welcome, and we'd love to hear what came through for you. Yeah, Lisa, that ear relaxing thing is like magic for the job. Yeah, Sheila, the need to let go of stress. Yeah, Becky, more ready to learn and engage. I hear you, Rochelle. Some of my apps didn't close. They really wanted to stay open. Thank you, Danielle. Thank you, Kelly. Yeah.

And I loved what Ellen says in the chat. She says the swaying is natural and it helped her find her balance. And that's true, right? For all of us who have had children, we know that rocking babies to sleep actually helps their nervous system rest into sleep and soothes them. And maybe some of us also love a hammock. We love a swing. This is actually one of the amazing natural gifts of the body to learn how to activate the parasympathetic nervous system or the relaxation response. And it's a natural thing that we do. And so, this sensory experience that you're having right now, I invite you to feel this through the rest of our sessions.

So, if there's a moment where the thoughts come back or content comes and it feels in, it feels like the stress has increased, I invite you to use this vagal toning to come back into the sensory experience and to take this time to be nourished over knowing, 'cause the nourishment's gonna to be the long, bring the long term gifts for us. And for some of us, after releasing background apps, Rachelle was like I didn't have any background apps that shifted. Or there were some that wouldn't leave. Write yourself a to-do list right now and take a moment to, like, take 30 seconds to, like, these won't leave.

I'm going to write them down. And I know they're on this piece of paper, and I can take a moment and just pause on thinking about them. So, if that to-do list is still with you, take a moment and make that to-do list a reality for you. All right. So, we're going to transition into our first breakout activity, and these are going to be in groups of two to three, and you're going to get a moment to answer the questions. And this is really helpful that we're present with our full selves right now, with our full sensory experience of what does it mean to be a leader at the County Office of Education in this moment? What does it look like to others?

So, people maybe that you manage or people in your life. What does it feel like for you in your body, in your relationships at home? And also, what are you noticing in your relationships with staff when it's going well and when it breaks down? These are three questions you can explore. They're all optional. If you want to dive into one, you're welcome to do that too. We are going to take a total of...35. We're going to take a total of seven minutes, which will be roughly either three minutes a person, or two minutes and 15 seconds a person.

All right, y'all thank you so much for coming back and for the conversations you had, and as always, breakout rooms usually are just not enough time. So, if you were mid-conversation or you feel like you've got more to think about, feel free to type it in the chat, feel free to take notes, and to keep the journaling process going. This experience of what it means to be a County Office of Education leader is complex and not fit in the two to three minutes share with another team, another person at this time. Yeah, and I love the gratitude and thank you's that are happening in the chat right now.

So, I'm going to create space for another five minutes. So, around two to three voices to share about what came up for them in their session and what do they want to share about what it means to be a County Office leader at this moment? My request is, we're going to be doing a protocol from the Barrow Initiative, from the Be the Change Consulting Organization called the Barrow Initiative, to make sure that we're centering and lifting the voices of those most racially marginalized or at the edges of the white-centered society we live in. So, with that said, I'm going to invite, are there any black or indigenous leaders who self-identify that way who'd like to share what came up for them in there, in that space?

**Participant 1:** I can share. I do see myself as an indigenous leader. I'm enrolled with the Muskogee Creek Tribe of Oklahoma. I work in Shasta County. I didn't, we spoke a lot about relationships, but we didn't go into any cultural or racial, we just didn't go there. But I couldn't just sit here and not say that this is who I am. Thank you for that space.

**Kelly Knoche:** Yeah. Thank you for stepping into it. What else is here? And I invite racial, if, even if it didn't come up in your conversation, but it feels present now, your voice is valuable. And I'll open it up now to all educators of color, leaders of color in the space. And then knowing all our voices matter, anyone who's looking to share. And Susan, I think I saw you highlighted. Are you ready to step in?

**Participant 2:** I sure am. Thank you. And good morning to everyone and wanted to share a little bit from our breakout session. We talked about quite a bit. One of the things, one of the topics we talked about was balance and having a hard time finding balance and putting up our own parameters, because we're thinking about the to-do list, the tasks, all day, night, morning, and then how do we not put that out there because we want to get it off our to-do list, but then it becomes someone else's to-do list at 10:30 in the morning or when they wake up.

So, it was a really great collegial conversation across the state about, in our breakout room about, hmm, that's a common experience in that it takes some practice and some real intention, and it's, and we're not all perfect at it, any parts of that. So, that was part of our conversation this morning.

**Kelly Knoche:** I love that Susan, and I feel that balance. It's not your, I hear you not only balancing your personal care and managing your to-do list, but then also knowing that how you pass this to other people also has impact in how it feels in their bodies and feels in their ability to balance. And that as leaders, we're constantly navigating multiple truths and multiple people at one time, so that the whole ecosystem feels tended, and that that's a dance that we're all practicing. Yeah, and then I'm going to open it up to everyone in the group. We'll maybe take one more voice. What else does it mean to be a County Office of Education leader right now?

**Participant 3:** I just, we talked a little bit about just that idea of I feel like we're really grounded right now in that idea of servant leadership. Like, it's kind of bringing me back to that concept, and we're really here to serve in whatever capacity would be most helpful and most supportive.

**Kelly Knoche:** That's right. And I think one of the things about servant leadership or about being in a care provider system in general is that we've all been trained often by society, unconsciously or consciously, that we need to do more with less all the time, and that if we take it off our plate or we spread, we ask for the resources we need, we might not get them. And so, I really hear you balancing this commitment to servant leadership and serving the people who you serve, students and families first, and also acknowledging that we may have internalized ways of working that ask us to take on more and we overwhelm ourselves, and then we're actually unable to be the servant leader we want to be for others.

So, I'm going to share my screen one more time. And I took a moment to talk to our other, oh, I'm realizing I'm not sharing my screen and I'm just sharing it with myself, which is not super helpful, is it? Beautiful. Okay, can you guys see my screen?

- Participant 2:** Not yet.
- Kelly Knoche:** It needs to go into present mode, is that right?
- Lindsey Fuller:** It's coming to its own power. It's taking a moment. Like that, taking a moment.
- Kelly Knoche:** Like that. How's it going?
- Lindsey Fuller:** It is well.
- Kelly Knoche:** Beautiful. So, from our other clients and then from conversations with the WestEd team, this is a list of things that are not only practical, but, like, all that we're holding, right? So, we are all navigating, trying not to go back to normal because normal wasn't of service to our communities, and yet, vaccinations are here and we want to get back, students back into the classroom. And then we're navigating rebuilding psychological safety for our educators, for our students, and our families that this physical location that has always, that has, was maybe safe at some point is no longer feeling that same type of psychological safety.
- We're making one-time budget decisions with CARE funds. You may be noticing in the news the political environment at the state level about critical race theory and ethnic studies, and how your specific community is processing that. And then also navigating budgeting for next year with enrollment changing, with people having lived in maybe a virtual environment, that your students and families are advocating for something different than what they had before. And you as a district, as a County Office of Education leader are having to address that. And then let's not forget, we're all human.
- So, beyond our leadership, we may have had family members or friends be impacted by COVID or impacted by the racial reckoning that we've lived through. You may also be feeling that inside of your body and we're navigating that all together, simultaneously. And so, I just really want to acknowledge for you first that you're not alone in this desire to find balance. And this also this feeling like balances feels impossible, that you may also not be alone in your grief, in your rage, in your, in those feelings or emotions that all lie underneath why we choose to lead and that we can do this better when we all acknowledge it together.
- And so, that's a part of what we are doing in this activity. And so, I'm going to transition us to talking about how this actually lives within our bodies. So, when our bodies feel these things to act or perform for, how we navigate that. You can follow along with me on page two of the

participant handout, where it'll be exploring the Human Function Curve. And you can answer those questions at the bottom. I'm going to give some independent time for this at the end, but for the most part, this like three slides is like a two-hour training, when we leave this for leader communities.

So, know that you'll have, you can have time to reflect later, but I'll be just creating, sharing knowledge, nourishing knowledge with you right now. So, the biggest gift and all of this content around stress comes from me leading a social emotional class for seventh graders. And they were doing an integrated project on whether juveniles should be tried as adults are not for felony offenses. And they've come to my class once a day. And they were navigating intersecting their math, their English, their science classes, altogether, working in groups of four. So, also working interpersonally for the first time together.

And I'd have them reflect on how they were feeling in their body, and what it was like to do this work or how they were feeling about the project. And at the end of that experience, we then did a unit stress and we reflected on our journals. And what I learned in that moment that really has changed the game for me, and this was several years ago, is that stress is, the origin term for stress is a neutral term. All it means, it's a cardiology term and it's related to the heart, and it means the desire to act or perform, that's it. The body does not distinguish between different stressors, so, a, something in your environment shifts, it can also be in your inbox and your body goes, oh, I've got to act and perform for that.

And your body sends an arousal response in the body oftentimes using the vagal nerve, and using your adrenal glands on your kidneys, using your heart to pump blood through the body, and to increase your ability to perform and to act on what you just saw. The body thrives on a balanced amount of stress and rest. So, stress is a great thing in the right amount in that balance that Susan mentioned, right? I receive it. I'm able to release it and then I can rest. And when that happens, my body is able to regulate my vitality, and I'm able to show up in my purpose.

And our body oftentimes will usually tell us how far we are in our stress cycle. And oftentimes at a computer or in this like really fast technological world, we actually kind of forget about these body signals until our bodies, like, using an emergency help line. Like, I'm calling you with strep throat, or I'm calling you with your like sore back, sore shoulder. And I, like, with arthritis, come listen to me. And one of the things we can do is we can start listening to our body earlier. And so, that's where the Human Function Curve comes in.

So, the Human Function Curve is a visual representation of how effectively the heart pumps blood through the body based on how many stress signals it receives. And I've used this metaphorically with educators and leaders for the last seven years, and students, and it resonates as heart-centered professionals. It moves our work forward. So, the X-axis is stress. So, how many signals your body is receiving of that to-do list or of the systemic microaggressions, or harming experiences that you're experiencing? So, it's not just what you have control over, but also how the society or how the ecosystem impacts your body.

The Y-axis is performance. So, your ability to show up for what matters to you. So, if you have nothing to act to perform for, we're not performing, right? So, none of us are spending time on the drone zone. I doubt any of us are spending time in the performance-improving, but then we get to this magic place between 80% to 100% of our capacity called the creative zone. And this is where we have, I've got plan A, B, C, and if a student or one of my team members that I'm supporting needs, it's like actually those three plans don't work for me, you're like, cool, let me give you a plan four.

And it feels effortless to meet the emerging needs or the emerging stressors that come with working with people. And each of those emerging stressors moves you to the right on the Human Function Curve. And when we get to our peak performance, and for me, I'll know I'm at my peak performance because I feel really good in my body, but I'm cracking my knuckles during meetings. And I'm usually talking really fast. I have a story that I can take on more stressors and I'm going to keep performing at this dotted line. Like, yeah, give it, give more, stoked. I'm here, let's do it. But physiologically, it's just not how it works.

And so, what happens is that once I pass my apex, my body will start giving me signals that I've moved into what's called the fatigue zone. And the fatigue zone means I'm still performing at that same level, at the same level I was performing in the creative zone, but it feels like it's coming at a cost. So, the cost could be that I'm more irritable with my husband. The cost could be that a team member wants option four. And like, I'll give you option four. But in my head, I'm like, I have to make option four right now? It could also be actually a physical malady. So, maybe you don't feel any of those irritations, but it could be that you start having that old shoulder pain come back.

Or you're having a hard time sleeping, or your digestive system is working on overtime. These are all signals. So, even, this is the moment when I hear any of those cues for myself. And you may want to write down one or two of those cues that are true for you, to take a moment, five, 10, 15

minutes to move left on the Human Function Curve. So, using vagal toning, like the one we used earlier. really great example. Going on a run, going out in nature, talking to a friend. When we shift here, our body in its brilliance will regulate itself and we can come back to the creative zone, and we can stay working at peak performance.

Our teams can stay working at peak performance for long periods of time. For those of us in a care provider system, in a society that undervalues care providing, oftentimes, we ignore those cues for the sake of others or for the fact that we're under-resourced. And so, we ignore those cues and then we start watching our team or ourselves fall into exhaustion and fall into burnout. And there's a huge loss for all of us because when we choose to live there unconsciously or consciously, we actually aren't getting the best out of ourselves or out of our team.

And so, it is not only liberatory to ensure that your vitality is at the center of your work, but it's critical for the brilliance of your team to be able to support and be in community with your students and families and stay at that level of peak performance. So, I'm going to offer two minutes. Ohh, I'm so good, okay. I'm going to offer two minutes for you to just do some independent reflection or to drop some questions in the chat and tell me what's coming up for you or what you're noticing in yourself. And if you feel brave and you feel like it's something that's vulnerable, maybe you write down in the chat, when I'm in the fatigue zone, I... It looks like, or when I'm at my apex it looks like...

Shout out for the cat therapy. I have a dog that's laying down right now and he's, giving him scratches is one of the ways they move left on the Human Function Curve. And I also want to shout out Laura for what she dropped in the chat. If you go to your participants guide on page five, that's a list of 50 different ways you can move left on the Human Function Curve. Thank you, Mobby. Real talk, Rochelle. So, I think just to respond to Rochelle's comment, and I'm going to read it out loud, "I'm wondering how to effectively implement the Human Function Curve if it is not modeled or valued by other leaders within my context."

And that's a real question. When we are in a district, when we are in a school system, when we are at a school site that doesn't value or honor this concept of the Human Function Curve, it's harder for our vitality to be present. And this Human Function Curve is not totally in the locus of control. It is impacted by the ecosystems we choose to be with in. And so, what I would say is that advocating for yourself and your needs to the context that you can is in a powerful way to move left on the Human Function Curve, to advocate for systems to change is a powerful way to sustain the Human Function Curve.

And also beginning to value where the communities that you choose, that, make sure that they choose you too. And I know that's easier to say as a white female, educated female in the system, but I think that we are constantly in balance of making sure that we have what's within our locus of control so that we can find our vitality and then what is in the locus of control of the systems that we live within. And we'll talk a little bit more about that later. Awesome, Becky. Nice. Yeah, Wendy, I think it's so great when we talk about self-care, collective care systems, and the sustainable leader chart is mostly self-care ideas.

We oftentimes think of, like, what can I support with right now? And I think those are really valuable, but I've actually found that so many of us have care routines that are communal, or self-care led that are actually holding us like once a month or once a year. So, for me, I'm not much of an organizer, naturally. And so, when I was going through my own personal journey of healing, me actually organizing my closet or me organizing my budget was a vital moment of self-care. And so, we, in that chart, we're really expanding the concept of what it means to have self-care, that it doesn't just include massages and yoga, although those have their place when they feel culturally aligned to you.

So, we're going to make the transition. Know there's a lot of content, know that there's a lot here, and that if you're interested in The Teaching Well joining your community to learn more about this, we're here for it. And we'll show up for you. We are about to head next into how the Human Function Curve lives at a systemic lens. And then why as leaders in the County Office of Education should we, and must we focus on racial equity? What I want to be clear about now is we're headed into content. I'm going to probably share for, thank you, Kelly.

I'm going to share for about 10 minutes, and I'm going to be telling you guys a story on how society create or denies belonging, and then narrowing in on racial equity. I'm going to be lifting the voice of my team member, Lindsey Fuller at certain points to just add her lived experience and to help me do this work together. And I also want to name that if you are a leader of color who after this content is like I actually want to process with another leader of color, that asterisk can change at any time. And Cherry will ensure that that second breakout room after the story resonates with you.

Maybe let's all take three deep breaths to transition. So, I'm gonna invite you to close your eyes. Take a deep breath in and exhale through your mouth. One breath, exhale through the mouth. And this final breath here, inhale, and exhale through the mouth. Beautiful. Thanks, Tina. Okay, I knew I needed that breath, so I thought we'd all do it together. If

that felt good, you got some silence as well. So, I'm going to have a zoom out for a second. And when I've been on my own journey to live and embody anti-racist practices and to embody equity-focused leadership, I needed for myself over my journey to really zoom out and understand the system I lived within.

As a white able-bodied female, I really couldn't see the water I was swimming in. And so, it took me time to be able to zoom out and see how society both supported me not knowing anything, not seeing the water I swim in, and also acknowledging that society didn't hold everyone in the way that I was told when I was a young person and the way that I thought it was, because I thought everyone had my experience. So, we're going to start big. Imagine you're zooming out, like on an air balloon. We're going to talk about society. So, society is created by a certain group of people and that society benefits, whatever identities the origin creators held, and that helped them move their vision forward, and who they loved.

Society was built to support those identities because people build it in their image. That building creates sameness and belonging. And that belonging is acted upon to pass wealth, opportunities, and resources to those who fit within the center of society. You may hear this in your family. You may have heard this from other places. I see myself within you. I'm going to help you, or how can I support you? How, oh, you're having a human experience, but let me help you go through that. That's what happens for those who society was built for.

So, in American society, in the United States, the identity of our origin creators were white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, male, able-bodied, Christian, Protestant, and emotionally controlled. I'd also add a landowning here. And I say emotionally controlled 'cause I wouldn't say it's mentally healthy with the choices that they decided make against other people's bodies, but this idea to be able to contain your emotions and to separate your emotions from your intellect is, was a huge loss for us as a society, and it still lives in the center of our society.

So, because these were the identities and ways of being that the center of society, the origin creators held, they built a society to support people who lived these identities. This creates sameness and belonging, and then they use that sense of belonging to pass on wealth, opportunities, and resources to those who look like them or to those that they love. Now, for those of us who swam closer to the center of the society, we may think like, oh, society's this. And then maybe it's just a few people that are on the edges, maybe. But when we really look at it, a more accurate depiction of who is served by the American society as it is today, maybe on the right.

But then we even think about it as a global context and how globalization has impacted countries around the world, an even more accurate representation of who's served by our economy and our society, very small amount of people. And there are a lot of people and a lot of identities who are invisibilized because the people at the center of society can't see that the water they swim in, the water, the air they breathe is not the same water and not the same air that the rest of the community breaths. It disconnects us from the land, disconnects us from each other, disconnects us from our bodies.

And so, when we talk about marginalized identities, what we're talking about is those who are on, those who hold identities, and I hold an identity of a female body, that are not the origin creators' identities. This is where racism, ableism, sexism lives. This is where our, like, our dislike, or inability to handle neuro-divergence also lives. And what happens is that when these identities show up in centered, like the center of society spaces, society was not built to support them. And their otherness goes against the sense of belonging that the center of society has been trained to feel, and it creates fear.

And then that fear unconsciously or consciously is acted upon to keep those identities in the margins and keep the center feeling safe. This is happening all the time. This is happening in every society. This is definitely happening in our society. When we talk about why we focus on racial equity and why this should be a focus for our K-12 education system, this is, Rochelle is here. She identifies racial equity as equity is the condition that would be achieved if race was not a predictor of all outcomes. And so, when we look back or when we add, when we take this lens and we take, we specifically focus in on race, the center of our society was created for white men and really maybe white women.

And for sure, white women in this context. And any other racial or ethnic identity was placed at the margins. Society was not built to benefit BIPOC bodies, it was built upon the labor or the taking of lands of people of color. And they became the face of otherness because we wanted our safety. We wanted our belonging, and I say we as a white person. And so, they're feared by society. They are more likely to be injured by the systems meant to keep society safe, specifically the education system and the prison system and the police, the structure of criminalization in our systems.

They are more likely to have their perspective or truth denied. So, we are living in multi-racial K-12 spaces, but the system that we all swim within doesn't allow us to hear the truth that is not present if it doesn't come to, if it feels different in the center of society. And because that truth's

denied, they may be shunned unconsciously. And all of this is unconscious or conscious behavior, and they may be aggressively responded to. So, I know I've had lived experiences where I get a truth that feels really different than the truth I'm living. And my experience, my first response is defensiveness or a feeling of justifying it by rules, of like, oh, I don't think this is it.

That's an example of my blindness, my whiteness, white blindness being prioritized over the holding of multiple truths. And so, because this lives on the margin, because it's a racial, it's a wound that we as a nation have not healed together, it is an indicator for every other identity and is more likely to have challenging health outcomes, life expectancy, and safety in general. So, I'm going to pause here, and I'd love to lift Lindsey's voice. And I know I didn't lift it earlier to the rest of the groups. Maybe you want to do a brief introduction of yourself, and if you want to add anything, I'd love to give you space.

**Lindsey Fuller:**

Hi all, I'm the new Deputy Director. I'm really grateful to be here with you. As I shared CLC. If you watch the webinar over with some folks, I kind of span the educational sector, and I've engaged as an educator, as a site administrator, and most recently, as a district administrator. And I'm really here because the ways of being, the ways that we have established our education system right from its origin story as Kelly's been speaking to, this education system wasn't built to serve all people. And yet as we diversify, our systems and structures perpetuate racialized outcomes and harms against both adult bodies and children's bodies.

And so, we're here really trying to shift the paradigm and think about schooling and education differently alongside you all in community. And so, this really resonates with me because as we force folks to the margin, we are less likely to achieve the outcomes we want. But Jefferson built a two-track system when he designed our education system, it was for the labored and the learned, but it really was about bringing in, raking out just a few geniuses from the rubble, from the rubbish, that's what he said. And so, we are re-centering the voices of all and we're making space for divergent perspectives.

And we are centering the voices of leaders of and from the community who know how to serve their own people. And that's the work of shifting as Dr. Bettina Love says, "From being an ally to a co-conspirator." Are you willing to leverage your own privilege to make space and allow folks of color, our LGBTQI+ brothers and sisters, and folks on the margins to have power over their own life and that self-determination? So, I'm glad, I'm really grateful to be here with you. And I'm gonna let Kelly continue with this story.

**Kelly Knoche:**

Thank you. And it really segues to like, how does this relate to us? Like, we are, this is the water we're swimming in and how does this relate to me as a leader? Because even me, I'm like, I'm here, I'm here for equity. I'm here for racial justice. And yet, sometimes I don't actually live my values. Or a system I put in place doesn't actually create space for people I wasn't thinking about because of my ignorance. And so, I want to talk about how this intersects with our stress and how it actually is the connection that you ensuring that you're living balance and that you're embodying balance for your team and leaders is the difference of making any anti-racist pivot or being the equity and justice leader that you want to be.

So, we talked about the Human Function Curve. And we talked about the magic of what it would look like for you and your whole team to perform at peak performance. And when we talk about creating a new society and acknowledging the deep pain body of the historical legacy we hold, we got to be at peak performance. We all swam and breathed and lived in these waters our whole life, and so it takes our best vital self to be able to change the way that we were taught to live and we were taught to think. Now, we are in an education system that can feel under resourced.

We may have internalized stories that as care providers we need to take on more with less. And so, if we are all performing in the exhaustion or ill-health zone, we oftentimes are embodying the unconscious beliefs that got us here. So, when urgency and stress overwhelm us in leadership, naturally, as humans raised in our society, we are more likely to isolate and control. And I'm specifically talking about leadership, because as educators of color or leaders of color, you may isolate and control the create safety for yourself, and that's not what I'm talking about.

What I'm talking about is, like, I have work to do, and I'm going to do it by myself, and I'm going to do it to people. We are more likely to act upon our implicit biases 'cause our brain can't hold complexity or new truth because we're at that exhaustion place. So, when we're in exhaustion, we are more likely to unconsciously perpetuate systems of harm. We are also more likely to build solutions for communities rather than to or with, bring in systems misaligned to our values. Or maybe more, most importantly, not be able to integrate feedback that we're receiving from the community when it's a different perspective than the one we lived in and the one we hold.

So, I just want us to sit with this before I create space. And what I'd love for you to do is I'd love for you to just to drop in the chat. Have you seen this in yourself, or have you seen this in other people? And I know it may

be brave to say that, but once again, we're not alone. Thank you, Ellen, Sheila, because this is all of us changing the game. And we all were set up for a game that is harmful, and we don't want to be there anymore. So, in this moment of, like, us really getting to the bottom of what's possible when we don't care for ourselves and we don't care for our community, and our leaders, we now have the opportunity to build from what's here.

And what's here is the fact that society expands when love is present and when vitality is present. And love might not be the word for you. You might think courage. You might think visioning. You might think re-imagining because as Rochelle said to me earlier this week, we are trying to create a chorus of direction that hasn't been here. 'Cause if it was had been here, we'd be doing it different. So, whatever that word is for you, and you might write this word down on a post-it note or write it on your computer right now, that allows you to expand your ability to hold multiple truths, to build support where it's been missing, to bridge the gaps between othering and belonging, and that when those things happen, when love is present, you're able to act upon listening to unheard stories and really receiving them.

You're able to acknowledge and integrate feedback when you haven't, when unconsciously or consciously support wasn't offered. And you're able to create space for new brilliance to emerge. And this is an important part, especially for us who are white identified leaders, is that this isn't about knowing the answer or getting it right. For those of us that are closer to the center of society, we may not, and most likely don't have the answer for how this is supposed to go. We do have the opportunity to open the table and to show, to create a chair, to create a..., to create a amphitheater of voices for that brilliance to emerge from our whole community and not just those who have fit in that very small center, and that by bringing different voices to the table, by expanding love, we're going to allow the new way to emerge.

And we will be doing our part to shift this story. Loving imagination and inspire. And I hope that's right. So, I know that I want to take deep breath after I read this slide. It gives me something to be with, to be with myself as I'm going through my journey and allows me to be working through mistakes and allows me to know that I don't have to have the answer to be moving forward, the journey that we all need to go on as a society, to hold all of us. I'm going to give you time to share with your group. I know that there's a lot to process, so I hope that you use that time in a way that moved your thinking forward. And I'd love for us to follow the Barrow Initiative again from the Be the Change Consulting Organization.

They're amazing, check them out, by opening the floor first for those who've been most marginalized by genocide and slavery in our society, by lifting black and indigenous leader voices first.

**Participant 4:** Do you mind repeating... Is it to talk about or to share what we talked about, or is there a specific question?

**Kelly Knoche:** Yeah, yeah. Whatever feels true that you'd like to share. I'd love to, we'd love to listen.

**Participant 4:** We talked about how these workshops are so valuable and needed and necessary, but it feels like the folks who are hearing are around the folks who get it, and the folks who need to hear it are not. At least the action doesn't feel like they're in these spaces and places. And sometimes, it just starts to feel exhausting for those of us who are here and who are pushing through barriers and kicking down doors. We're trying our best, but a leader and a check-signer are two different things in an organization.

So, you can be a leader in an organization, but if you're not making decisions at the most executive level, then sometimes the audio and video don't quite match. Sometimes your actions don't quite align with your equity stance or your equity commitments because they're not trickling down to those of us maybe at the lower rungs of the organization.

**Kelly Knoche:** Felicia, that's beautiful and real. Thank you. I'd like to open it for all leaders of color to hold space and either add to what Felicia shared or to share your additional perspectives.

**Participant 5:** If I could, hi everyone. One of the things that's coming up for me is how do we ensure that this work doesn't just lay with the people who are tasked with doing it, who have the title, or who have been tapped to be the facilitators and the leaders. That DEI anti-racist work is the work of everyone in education. It's all of our jobs all of the time. And we all have a responsibility to develop our lens and advocate for that, and notice and interrupt every single meeting we're in, every decision that gets made, every policy that comes up. 'Cause I think there's a tendency at times for it to feel a little bit like parading around the DEI leaders to prove that the organization is moving forward, that we really believe this, but it can't just be those who have been tapped as the facilitators of this work. So, that's something that I'm thinking about.

**Kelly Knoche:** That's real. And I think this really connects to what Felicia said too of just what is it going to take for this to live within our systems? And there's

this mix of like, and especially for people of color, you've just been on this journey, breaking down barriers, and kicking down doors to allow the system to be where it is today. And yet we still have so far to go for it to not just be performative, and at The Teaching Well, we talk about creating a systemic model of wellness and identity support that has one-on-one support, full staff trainings like this, and then research or, like, systems change, where leaders who are the check-signers of the organizations we serve are responsible for making systems changes that increase the vitality, authenticity, and connection of those who lead within it.

And I think that we make a commitment that whoever is signing the check, the organization of us as a client, that they're willing to participate. That this isn't for other people, they're not like, oh, I'm giving this wellness, or I'm giving this DEI work to my teachers or to my staff because they need it. It's like, no, no, no, if you are signing the check, you need it. 'Cause we all need it. And you're going to participate and not just you as a person, but that you're responsible for systemically changing the ecosystem so that more people can be welcomed into your space. And if you aren't in for that, then we're not the right partner for you.

And I know as a consultant, we can opt into that. So, I'm understanding that privilege, but that's how I'm honoring time, we're at 11:31, so I'm going to pass it back. First of all, I just want to thank you all for joining us today. The feedback forms and the survey and this has moved my thinking forward. Lindsey and I'll stay on until 11:45. If there's anyone who wants to stay and ask questions one-on-one and that part won't be recorded, but this recording will be here, and you, please share it with your colleagues, with your friends, with your family. We really appreciate you.