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An Administrator Competency in Equity and Diversity: New Frames of Reference and Training

An Executive Summary

**Groupe de travail sur les compétences et la
formation des directions en matière
d'équité et de diversité**

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Background

The *Groupe de travail sur les compétences et la formation des directions en matière d'équité et de diversité* (hereinafter called “the Working Group” or “the Group”) brought together professors and doctoral students from eight Québec universities with administrators and other decision makers from the Commission scolaire de Montréal (CSDM), the Commission Marguerite-Bourgeoys (CSMB) and the Fédération québécoise des directions d'établissement d'enseignement (FQDE). The Working Group is one of the ad hoc committees of the Observatoire sur la formation à la diversité et l'équité (OFDE), whose objective it is to produce assessments, critical and comparative analyses, and orientation documents on the state of diversity and equity training in Québec and other provinces and countries.

The Group picked up where previous work left off. This work included research on training and competency of teaching personnel (Larochelle-Audet, Borri-Anadon and Potvin, 2016; Potvin et al., CRSH, 2012-2014; Potvin, Borri-Anadon and Larochelle-Audet, 2014; Potvin et al., 2015), and work by a Chantier 7, through which principals of preschool-primary institutions in multiethnic, multilingual and disadvantaged communities were coached in taking leadership on inclusion and equity, developing success plans aimed at all students' success, and mobilizing school teams around these goals¹ (Magnan, Armand and Kanouté, 2014-2016; Magnan, Gosselin-Gagné, Charette and Larochelle-Audet, 2018).

The Group noted **gaps in the training** of school administrators on issues relating to equity, inclusion and social justice, and a need for guidelines in this area in the ministerial frames of reference for professional competencies in school administration (MELS, 2008) and in the frames of reference developed by school boards and universities. Therefore, the Working Group undertook work in 2016 to meet **three objectives**:

1. To identify and analyze the place of social diversity, from a standpoint of equity, inclusion and social justice, in the competency frameworks of school administrators in different education systems and in Québec;²
2. To propose an administrator competency model for equity, inclusion and social justice to the ministry responsible for education and to other decision makers involved in training, coaching, supervising and assessing the practice of school administrators—particularly in school boards, universities and associations of school administrators and officials;
3. To explore leads for enhancing the training of school administrators in universities and various practical settings in order to develop their competencies in taking social diversity into account, from a standpoint of equity, inclusion and social justice.

¹ A web documentary entitled *En route vers l'équité* inspired by the research-action project is available online <http://www.verslequite.umontreal.ca/>.

² To find out more about this analysis, see Larochelle-Audet, Magnan, Potvin, and Doré (2019).

In February 2018, the Group released a report entitled **Les compétences des directions en matière d'équité et de diversité: pistes pour les cadres de référence et la formation** (Administrator Competency in Equity and Diversity: New Frames of Reference and Training; our translation) (Larochelle-Audet et al., 2018). The report called on administrators to develop a **competency model** for education that would give everyone equal opportunity to access the services, resources and public goods of Québec society and to participate in that society in full dignity. It aimed for a **shared vision** for equity, inclusion and social justice in the education system, and the consequent knowledge to act that would enable school leaders to contribute to that vision with all members of the educational community. In addition to offering new reference points to guide principals and vice principals³ in the demanding roles assigned to them, the report suggested ways to enhance the school administrator training offered in Québec, so that a truly equitable, inclusive and socially just education system could take meaningful form.



The competency model outlined below was developed after a comparative analysis of eight administrator competency frameworks in education systems within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), namely, Australia, Germany, the United Kingdom, California, Chile, British Columbia, South Korea, the United States, New Zealand, Québec and Texas⁴. The results of the analysis, the discussions between group members, and the chosen conceptual approach culminated in the creation of a model for an administrator competency for equity, inclusion and social justice in schools.

The model consists of a vision of the educational leader, a competency, and four components that operationalize the competency in different dimensions of a school administrator's work:

- 1) an honest and critical way of working;
- 2) an educational environment that encourages action in the face of inequality, injustice and exclusion;
- 3) educational and pedagogical practices and curricula that are equitable, fair, differentiated and inclusive;

³ In the document, the term “administrators” refers to both principals and vice principals.

⁴ The analysis in itself was intended to study the ways—concepts, viewpoints, general place, etc.—in which the frames of reference addressed social diversity. For more information on the methodological approach and the results obtained, see the Group's report.

- 4) a culture inclusive of the multiple perspectives and contributions of people from minoritized groups.

This document summarizes the principal sections of the report, [available online](#) on the website of the Observatoire pour la diversité et l'équité. A toolbox designed for pre-service and in-service administrators and for people working in the various related sectors (ministry, universities, school boards, professional associations, etc.) is also [available online](#).

The conceptual approach

The Working Group took a systemic and structural conceptual approach to its work, so this report does not target one group in particular, instead focusing on **inequality and exclusion in terms of recognizing and distributing educational resources to socially minoritized groups**. This standpoint takes its form through three concepts— equity, inclusion and social justice—with concurrent goals to act in the face of inequality and exclusion in education.

Diversity, social categories and minoritized groups

Human diversity may be defined in the educational context as the expression of a variety of learner profiles in which numerous characteristics, preferences and needs are combined (Prud'homme, 2007). These characteristics are uniquely interwoven in each person's life. Human diversity is not a problem—nor is it an asset—it is simply a fact: it is there, in all its forms. Within a given context, however, human diversity can be framed as a “problem” because of the negative social construction of characteristics, preferences, experiences and needs that is shaped by that context —time, place, social and political issues, authority relationships, etc.—in order to legitimize the processes of excluding, exploiting and inferiorizing certain groups of people. **In other words, the problem is not human diversity, but what society and humanity do with it (Delphy, 2013)**. The concepts of **social diversity** and **social differences** are further constructed through practices, policies and ideologies that impose and maintain the established order of rankings, privileges and unequal distribution of power, prestige and goods in a society (Juteau, 2003, 2015).

The concept of diversity has a generally positive connotation that encourages its use in different spheres of social life. From a critical point of view, the concept nevertheless functions as a euphemism (Ahmed, 2009; Ahmed and Swan, 2006; Ricci, 2015). It draws attention to success stories, for example, “best practices,” avoiding areas of contention and disturbing situations, such as inequality, domination and discrimination, and minimizing social movements for personal rights and freedoms.

To limit the depoliticization of these social issues, the members of the Group emphasized the concept of the **minoritized group** (Guillaumin, 2002) in their work. Distinct from diversity constructions, this concept highlights the social hierarchization of individual and collective identities for purposes of domination (Potvin and Pilote, 2016). In a way that is always historicized and contextualized, certain identities are constructed as being the norm and others as being on society's margins. Physical and sociocultural markers of real or imagined diversity—colour, language, sex, socioeconomic condition, learning difficulties, etc.—are used to construct social categories by which individuals and groups are excluded and inferiorized in terms of power. In part, this construction of **social categories** stems from a “biologization of social thought” (Guillaumin, 2002, p. 14), which hides the differential relationships of power and social division between groups under a belief in their “natural” differences. These social categories do not therefore exist “in themselves,” but are constructed in societies to legitimize an unequal distribution of material and symbolic resources between groups. Though it sets up a tension between “minority” and “majority,” the concept of minoritized group does not refer to a numeric superiority (Gélinas Proulx and Shields, 2016;

Shields, 2012). A group may be minoritized, made “other” or oppressed even if it is composed of a large number of individuals.

The processes of minoritization are (re)constructed according to the context and power relationships at play, but also where the different social categories and systems of oppression—sexism, racism, linguicism, homophobia, ableism and transphobia—intersect (Collins, 2009; Collins and Bilge, 2016). As Nancy Fraser summarizes (1998), “oppression does not operate in a silo. It must be addressed as a global dynamic within which axes of injustice indiscriminately cut across gender, ethnicity, class and sexual [orientation]⁵” (pp. 17-18; our translation). For example, in the school environment, **this crosscutting of social categories and systems of oppression** is visible in the overrepresentation of students from racialized groups—especially immigrants—in special education classes, and among students who have been subject to disciplinary measures (Borri-Anadon, 2014, 2016; Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, 2011). This work proposes an intersectional reading of the experiences and obstacles encountered by students.

Equity, inclusion and social justice

Inspired by the need to take action against the processes and practices by which groups and individuals are minoritized in schools, the efforts of the Working Group aim to **transform educational institutions rather than the people who attend them**. The members of the Group reject deficit-based frameworks that explain educational and social inequalities by a person’s individual characteristics, where they grew up, their lack of potential or their presumed inability to develop certain skills (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; AuCoin and Vienneau, 2015; Borri-Anadon, 2016). Instead, the Working Group emphasizes critical frameworks that question **the way the education system works** in order to understand how certain structural practices and processes compromise the rights and self-actualization of people from minoritized groups, including learners, their families and school personnel (Dei et al., 2000; Potvin, 2015; Shields, 2012). These practices and processes (re)produce social inequalities and impede any project aiming at democracy and social justice. Consequently, the members of the Group adopt a **systemic perspective of the concepts of equity, inclusion and social justice in education**, calling for practices such as transformative leadership (Shields, 2010), leadership for social justice (Archambault and Harnois, 2010) and other styles of leadership conducive to educational inclusion⁶ (Thibodeau et al., 2016). This literature maintains that principals and vice principals occupy an essential position as leaders to call out the dynamics that marginalize certain people and communities.

Equity goes beyond the concept of formal equality or meritocratic equal opportunity, which understands a person’s gifts, talents or abilities to define the level of success attained by an individual in the education system. Equity diverges from equality of treatment, where all students receive identical treatment. Instead, equity establishes differentiated treatment to mitigate the effects of educational practices and processes that put students at a disadvantage because of their social status (Conseil supérieur de

⁵ We prefer to use the expression “sexual orientation” rather than “sexual preference” used in this translation of the article by the philosopher Nancy Fraser.

⁶ To find out more about these types of leadership, see the Group’s report.

l'éducation, 2016; Magnan and Vidal, 2015). Equity in education seeks to correct the inequalities unjustly affecting certain students in order to achieve true equality.

The inclusive approach also seeks true equality, of results, knowledge and educational success (Potvin, 2013). Long associated with integrating students with special needs in schools, inclusion now encompasses the situations of all students underrepresented and marginalized in the education system (Borri-Anadon, Potvin and Larochelle-Audet, 2015). In addition to ensuring the right to education, the teaching-learning processes from an inclusive standpoint must enable each student to receive an education that takes their social identities into account and is adapted to their experiences, personal characteristics and particular needs (AuCoin and Vienneau, 2015; Rousseau, 2015). This conception of inclusion calls for a transformation of school structures, departing from school integration initiatives that seek to merely prepare learners with special needs—or any other difference or identity negatively constructed in society—to live and work within existing normalized structures. Inclusion seeks to transform institutions, particularly educational institutions, to enable all individuals to contribute, in and with their differences (Potvin, 2013). Dei et al. (2000) consider inclusive education to be a transformative social project, one that involves the redistribution of power and a legitimization of different points of view to create an educational climate in which young people can challenge and resist the structural forces that reproduce oppression and social inequality.

The goals of inclusive education largely coincide with those of **social justice**, which is based “on the belief that each individual and group within a given society has a right to equal opportunity, civil liberties, and full participation in the social, educational, economic, institutional, and moral freedoms and responsibilities of that society” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2014, p. 90). Redistribution and recognition are two ideas that are inseparable from the concept of social justice. While redistribution seeks a balance in the distribution of available goods and resources, recognition calls for respect of the personal and collective differences characterizing individuals in their relationships with others (Fraser, 1998). This principle supports a conception of society “where integrating the dominant cultural norms of the majority no longer constitutes a prerequisite for egalitarian treatment; a world where minorities can live and have their differences accepted fully and without compromise” (Fraser, 1998, p. 9; our translation).

The competency model

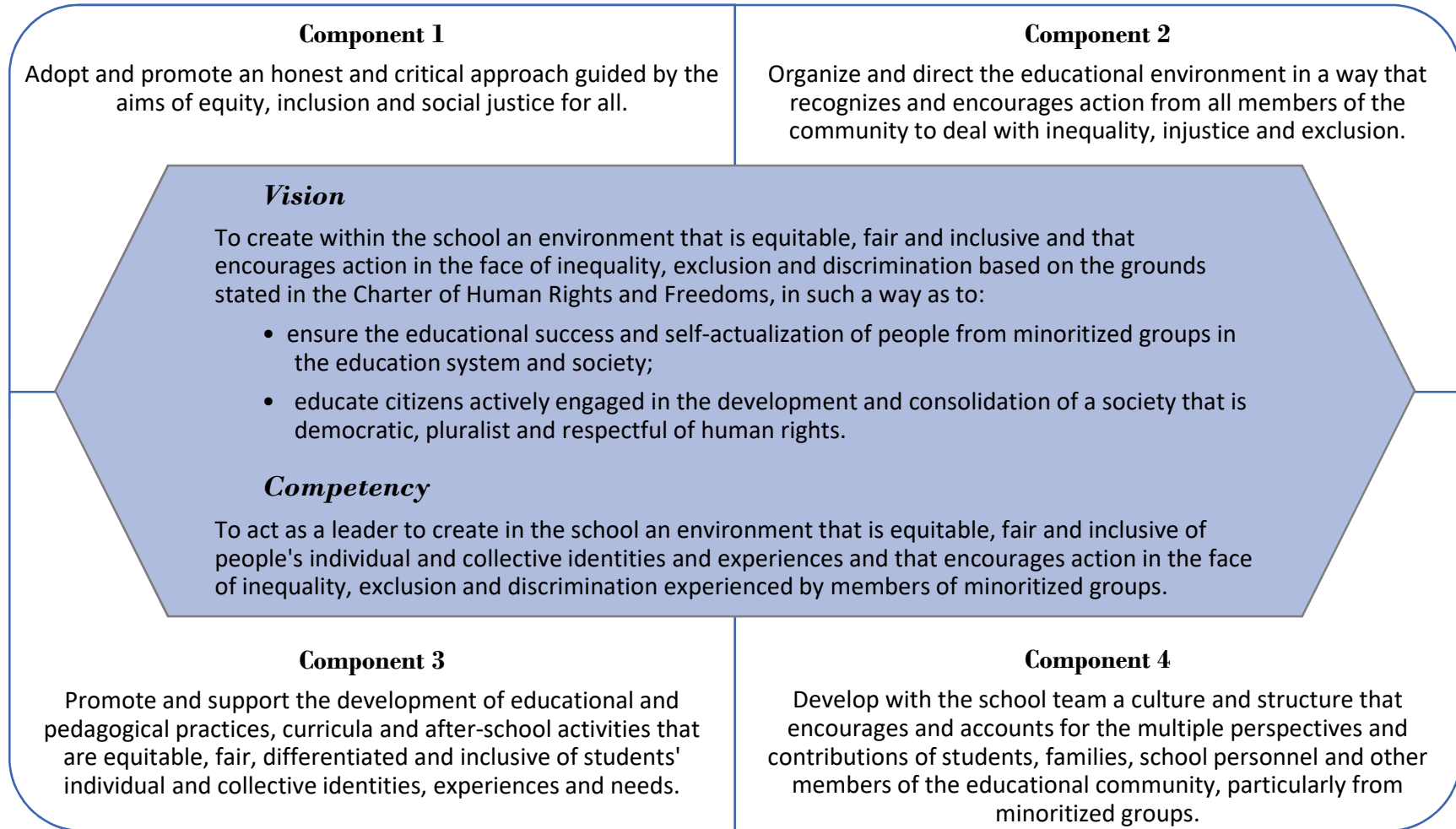
The model developed by the Working Group consists of a vision, a competency and four components. As illustrated in Figure 1, the vision and the competency are the core of the model. A competency is the knowledge to act, founded on the effective mobilization and combination of a set of resources, both internal and external, for use within related situations and in view of a goal (Legendre, 2008; Tardif, 2006). Though they necessarily call upon individual action, competencies also have a collective dimension. They presuppose a shared responsibility between the competent person and other people in the context, along with an organizational mechanism conducive (or not) to the deployment of competencies (Legendre, 2008). No competency exists in the abstract, having “meaning only in relation to the action, the goal pursued by this action, and the context in which it is found” (Legendre, 2008, p. 34; our translation).

In this sense, the competency developed by the Working Group is preceded by a **vision** that must guide school leaders in their day-to-day work to rally the personnel around its objectives (McShane and Benabou, 2008). This vision is a structuring element in a school administrator’s leadership. To ensure the overall consistency of the process, the proposed vision draws on the Group’s two **aims** to take social diversity into account from a standpoint of equity, inclusion and social justice:

1. to ensure the educational success and self-actualization of people from minoritized groups in the education system and in society;
2. to educate citizens actively engaged in the development and consolidation of a society that is democratic, pluralist and respectful of human rights.

The competency of the school leader is expressed through four **components** that relate to different dimensions of a school administrator’s work.

Figure 1: Model of administrator competency for equity, inclusion and social justice in schools



Adapted from *Les compétences des directions en matière d'équité et de diversité : pistes pour les cadres de référence et la formation*, Larochelle-Audet et al., 2018.

Vision and competency

Québec society's public education system is founded on **the right to education** for all, enshrined most notably in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Declaration of the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1948, 1989), the Canadian and Québec Charters of Rights and Freedoms (CQLR c. C-12) and the Education Act (CQLR c. I-13.3). The right to education is closely connected to the **right to equality and the principle of social justice** that, from the 1960s on, guided the democratization of the Québec education system. Implementing the right to truly equal education is a collective responsibility. It assigns to the state the obligation to create an education system with a mission to instruct, socialize and qualify all students, in a way that ensures their self-actualization and educational success, their social and professional integration, and the social and cultural development of the community (CQLR c. I-13.3, art. 36). There is no reason why certain individuals or communities should be deprived of a high-quality education.

Making the aims of inclusion, equity and social justice workable in the education system is nevertheless fraught with pitfalls (Conseil supérieur de l'éducation, 2010, 2016, 2017). Certain practices and educational rules, although seemingly neutral, can compromise these rights and principles. **Certain practices, decisions and educational rules can produce differential and non-equitable treatment that particularly affects people in minoritized groups** whose experiences, histories and situations are seldom reflected in the education system structure (Dei et al., 2000; Potvin and Pilote, 2016). This is the case, for instance, with certain standardized testing, screening and ranking practices; the organization of school streams and transitions (Borri-Anadon, 2014, 2016; Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse, 2011; Dhume-Sonzogni, 2014; Magnan and Vidal, 2015) and the selection of school personnel (Ryan, Pollock and Antonelli, 2009; Larochelle-Audet, 2019). These practices gnaw away at the engagement and investment of a part of the education system's population by limiting recognition and fully equal exercise of the rights and freedoms of students and other members of the educational community through "distinction, exclusion or preference based on race⁷, colour, sex, gender identity or expression, pregnancy, sexual orientation, civil status, age except as provided by law, religion, political convictions, language, ethnic or national origin, social condition, a handicap or the use of any means to palliate a handicap" (CQLR c. C-12, art. 10).

For the rights and founding principles of the Québec school to be respected, it is necessary to **make the educational institution an environment that is inclusive, equitable, fair and free from discrimination**. This is an essential condition in the educational success and self-actualization of all students and in the creation of a society that guarantees that goods and resources are distributed equitably, and that people participate in that society with full dignity. Action by administrators is a powerful lever for implementing these changes (Archambault and Garon, 2013; Archambault and Richer, 2014; Quantz, Rogers and Dantley, 1991). Among the different

⁷ Scientifically speaking, there is only one human species. However, racist ideology still strongly affects the lives of people from racialized groups, i.e., those socially constructed as being inferior because of real or imagined sociocultural or physical differences (Guillaumin, 2002).

styles of leadership, some are more likely to contribute to educational and societal standards of equity, inclusion and social justice. These are characterized by a vision of a school culture that is respectful of social diversity and where social justice and equity occupy a central place; attitudes are marked by transparency and honesty; and there is a meaningful commitment to the transformation of the school, its classes and even the surrounding community, so that everyone with a stake in the school is working toward the same vision (Thibodeau et al., 2016). Research on inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2006, 2007, 2012) and transformative leadership (Shields, 2010, 2012) also supports the importance of having a **historical and sociopolitical understanding of inequality**, rather than one associated with the individual characteristics of students and their families, as well as with a horizontal distribution of decision-making power (shared leadership) among the different actors of the educational community, particularly students.

The vision and the competency of a school leader for equity, inclusion and social justice manifests through a number of dimensions of a school administrator's work and in aspects of leadership in an educational context, as illustrated by the four components below.

<i>Vision:</i>	<i>To create within the school an environment that is equitable, fair and inclusive and that encourages action in the face of inequality, exclusion and discrimination based on the different grounds stated in the Charter of Human Rights and Freedoms, in such a way as to:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><i>• ensure the educational success and self-actualization of people from minoritized groups in the education system and in society;</i><i>• educate citizens actively engaged in the development and consolidation of a society that is democratic, pluralist and respectful of human rights.</i>
<i>Competency:</i>	<i>To act as a leader to create in the school an environment that is equitable, fair and inclusive of people's individual and collective identities and experiences and that encourages action in the face of inequality, exclusion and discrimination experienced by members of minoritized groups.</i>

Component 1: An honest and critical approach

If creating a high-quality educational system accessible to all children is a collective responsibility, respecting and implementing the fundamental rights and principles governing Québec schools is the day-to-day duty of school personnel (CQLR c. I-13.3). An administrator's knowledge to act on behalf of equity, inclusion and social justice requires and puts into play a wide range of knowledge, know-how and soft skills (Gélinas Proulx, 2014). Partly cultivated and enriched in a training context, working this way is a conscious and permanent responsibility at both individual and collective levels. Beyond professional standards, which vary from one job class to the next, an honest and critical approach calls for **an active commitment from every person** to focus on the aims and actions of equity, inclusion and social justice in the educational system. It also forces a **recognition of one's strengths and challenges and the characteristics and situations of one's environment**. This ethical posture is the starting point for a **constant self-questioning**, of one's practices and relationship with others in the school context, but also of the **way the school operates from day to day** (policies, rules, decisions, etc.) (Shapiro, Stefkovich and Gutierrez, 2014); in other words, caring for oneself, for others and for the school (Ricœur, 1990). A critical posture also involves **having a historical and sociopolitical understanding of inequality, identifying and challenging privilege, deconstructing prejudices and stereotypes, initiating changes that shake up the status quo and implementing resistance** (Gélinas-Proulx and Shields, 2016; Ryan, 2012; Shapiro et al., 2014; Shields, 2012). As school leaders, administrators create a model for specific approaches and share it with their **teams**, using an honest and critical approach to support equity, inclusion and social justice in the school (St-Vincent, 2017).

Adopt and promote an honest and critical approach guided by the goals of equity, inclusion and social justice for all.

Component 2: An educational environment that encourages action in the face of inequality, injustice and exclusion

Educational success and the development of student potential require an **educational environment that is conducive to student learning and self-actualization**. All forms of inequality, injustice, discrimination, non-recognition and exclusion compromise the mission of the Québec school and its fundamental principles, whether they affect **the students or any other member of the educational community**. Action from all members of the educational community is essential to recognize and counteract these situations and to then replace them with equitable, fair and inclusive practices. Particular attention must be paid to **identifying educational practices, decisions and rules that at first seem neutral and equitable, but have a prejudicial effect on minoritized groups** (Borri-Anadon, 2014, 2016; Commission des droits de la personne et de la jeunesse, 2011; Dhume-Sonzogni, 2014; Magnan and Vidal, 2015). The use of study data and results, and the production of new data to make decisions and run a school may contribute to this situation (Archambault and Dumais, 2012, 2017). As school leaders, administrators can organize and direct the educational environment in a way that **makes necessary action possible** to counteract inequality, discrimination and exclusion, direct or indirect, within the school and beyond.

Organize and direct the educational environment in a way that recognizes and encourages action from all members of the community to deal with inequality, injustice and exclusion.

Component 3: Educational and pedagogical practices and curricula that are equitable, fair, differentiated and inclusive

To encourage educational success and the development of student potential and citizenship, certain changes can be made to curricula and educational practices to **enable all persons to contribute, in and with their differences** (Potvin, 2013). It is not students' characteristics or differences that impede their self-actualization, but the way these characteristics are constructed, reified and taken into account in society and at school (Ainscow and Miles, 2008; AuCoin and Vienneau, 2015; Borri-Anadon, 2016). Inclusive education is not about "changing" students or their behaviour; it instead invites **the school to adapt to difference and modify its practices to better meet the needs of all learners**. Inclusive education is based on maintaining high expectations from each student throughout their educational pathways and transitions while accounting for their identities, experiences, characteristics and needs, individually and collectively (Dei et al., 2000; Rousseau, 2015). This conception of inclusion differs from school integration initiatives, instead emphasizing **schools and classes where all types of learners can be found and where self-actualization is achieved through the expression of differences** (AuCoin and Vienneau, 2015; Rousseau, 2015). As school leaders, administrators can guide the day-to-day choices and development of pedagogical practices used in their schools so that they are equitable, fair, differentiated and inclusive for all students (CQLR c. I-13.3, art. 96.12 and 96.21).

Promote and support the development of educational and pedagogical practices, curricula and after-school activities that are equitable, fair, differentiated and inclusive of students' individual and collective identities, experiences and needs.

Component 4: A culture inclusive of the multiple perspectives and contributions of people from minoritized groups

Beyond the mechanisms of democratic representation provided by the Education Act and other legal frameworks, concrete actions are necessary to **encourage people from minoritized groups to participate and make themselves heard in society** (Ryan, 2006, 2012). And although these people can be in the numeric majority in a school, their experiences, histories and situations may find little or no reflection in the educational culture, organization or institution itself (Kincheloe and McLaren, 2007; Ladson-Billings and Tate, 2006). To mitigate the power deficits encountered in schools, it is necessary to recognize, respect and consider people in all their differences, but also to **make schools into places for persons from minoritized groups, and more specifically to reshape decision-making spaces that impact school life** (Dei et al., 2000). An inclusive school also values partnerships with the community (Bouchamma, 2009). As school leaders, administrators can **work with the school team to develop a culture and structure that is inclusive of the multiple perspectives and contributions of people from minoritized groups who make up the educational community**, particularly students, parents and other family members⁸, teachers and other members of the school team.

Develop with the school team a culture and structure that encourages and accounts for the multiple perspectives and contributions of students, families, school personnel and other members of the educational community, particularly from minoritized groups.

⁸ The concept of family goes beyond its traditional designation. It encompasses all members of a family who have the power to make decisions over a child's education, even when they are not the parents or designated legal guardians (Kanouté, Gosselin-Gagné, Guennouni Hassani, Girard and Leanza, 2016). They may, for example, be grandparents, uncles, aunts or other caretakers. "School-family collaboration" therefore covers more than the exclusive relationship with the students' parents.

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* A new edition of these chapters will be available soon, with the republication of *La diversité ethnoculturelle, religieuse et linguistique en éducation au Québec. Théorie et pratique* (Fidès Éducation) directed by Maryse Potvin, Marie-Odile Magnan, Julie Larochelle-Audet and Jean-Luc Ratel.