

## EDUCATION IN EQUITY

Category: Community

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Written by **Dr. Glenda D. Price**, President, Detroit Public Schools Foundation



At the most recent conference of the Council of Michigan Foundations, the session entitled “Equity in Education” raised as many questions as it answered. Why don’t we talk more about equity? What prevents us from educating all children? How can we replicate the successes? Where are the visionaries?

Defining equity in education should be an easy task. It is, in my view, simply the process of providing to each child the resources necessary for him or her to reach his full academic potential. Every child is unique. Each one requires particular attention to their needs. Their learning styles vary, their home situations are different, their joys and talents result in varying opportunities, and their community environments create distinct challenges. Equity in education recognizes these differences and calls upon us to put in place the resources appropriate to these varying circumstances.

It is unfortunate that we have allowed the conversation to focus on equality rather than equity. The discord surrounding affirmative action occurs as a result of our failure to focus all education on meeting individual student needs. Rather we mistakenly talk about treating everyone the same.

We argue about whether providing different resources and options is discrimination. We focus on what some believe is that we discriminate against some in order to advantage others. Until we have differential approaches, multiple funding options, and a caring society, some children will continue to be left behind. We will never educate all children until we care about every child as much as we care about our own.

What prevents us from replicating the successes that can be found in some high poverty minority communities? We know that children can and will learn when adults agree to create learning environments where there are no excuses for not learning. We see examples of the benefits that come from more time on task. It is clear that a rigorous curriculum, delivered in a caring environment, where students develop positive relationships with adults results in student achievement. Experiences outside the classroom have been proven to help make a child’s education relevant. We know what works, but we lack the political will to replicate these strategies in all schools across the nation.

Throughout our history we have had educational visionaries who have changed the conversation, challenged the status quo, and created new approaches to teaching and learning. Mary Mc- Leod Bethune, Barbara Sizemore, and Geoffrey Canada readily come to mind. Each has made a difference in their communities and did whatever it took to educate the children.

How do we find other visionaries? How do we unleash the talent in the community so that the future will meet the needs of all children? All of us have a responsibility to be part of the dialogue that will shape the educational landscape for tomorrow. We cannot leave it to others. Our young people depend on us being engaged so that we might indeed achieve equity in education.