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CORE TENETS

OUR VISION:
One day, all children in this nation will have the opportunity to attain an excellent education.

THE PROBLEM AS WE SEE IT:
Potential is equally distributed across lines of race and class, but opportunity is not. Today in America, the circumstances of children's births predict the opportunities they have in life. Children growing up in historically marginalized and disenfranchised communities lack access to a broad spectrum of resources and opportunities, and attend schools that are not equipped to meet their unmet needs. This disproportionately impacts children of color, who are more than two times more likely to be born into poverty, who bear an additional burden of low expectations and other biases stemming from institutional racism, and who now constitute nearly half of all children in American public schools. Our public education system, which has remained largely unchanged for 100 years, is not designed to give students agency to overcome the barriers they face to lead and shape the dynamic, global world into which they will graduate.

A THEORY OF SYSTEMIC CHANGE:
Solving this problem will take many interventions from many directions over a prolonged period of time: no single solution is sufficient to bring about an equitable and excellent education for all children. Our mission and approach draws on three lessons from enduring systems-change efforts throughout history. First, change requires sustained leadership inside and outside of the system challenging conventional wisdom and the status quo by demonstrating what’s possible. Second, change requires a broad and diverse coalition of people united around common purpose and shared values, working together to translate insights from proof points of possibility into policy and practice. Third, the effort must be shaped by those most directly impacted by the injustice, and led by those with personal proximity to the problem and its complexity.

OUR MISSION:
Teach For America finds, develops, and supports a diverse network of leaders who expand opportunity for children from classrooms, schools, and every sector and field that shapes the broader systems in which schools operate.
OUR APPROACH

✍ We find promising leaders: The questions underlying educational inequity demand the imagination and sustained focus of our nation’s most promising leaders. We recruit outstanding and diverse leaders early in their careers, who have demonstrated evidence of the values and leadership necessary to expand opportunity and access for all children inside and outside of the classroom. We ask leaders to make a lifelong commitment that begins with two years’ teaching in a public school, partnering with children and families most acutely impacted by educational inequity.

✍ We develop and cultivate the leadership skills and mindsets necessary for systems-change through classroom teaching: We develop leaders who go beyond traditional expectations to advance the academic and personal growth of their students and help to strengthen their schools. In doing so, they expand their perspectives, knowledge, and skill as educators, advocates, and systems-change leaders. Great teaching is necessary to ensure children realize their potential and have the full agency they need and deserve in life. Teaching is also a profound act of leadership, and foundational for courageous individual and collective leadership in the long fight for educational equity and excellence. In partnership with schools, families, local universities, other organizations, and businesses in the community, we provide initial training, ongoing professional development, and access to an unparalleled resource and support network.

✍ We support the individual and collective leadership, relationships, and learning of those in our network throughout their lifetime: Throughout their lives, as their careers take shape, we help alumni connect with each other and with high-impact opportunities to continue to grow and learn in pursuit of collective impact. Informed and inspired by their students, many alumni choose to teach in high-need schools and communities beyond their two-year commitments. Others lead from many sectors that shape the context and conditions in which schools operate: they are school and district leaders; policy makers; founders of advocacy organizations; social entrepreneurs; and business, philanthropic, and civic leaders working to make change.
OUR CORE VALUES

Our core values define who we are at our best and guide our work together.

**Pursue Equity:** We work to change practices, structures, and policies to realize educational equity for all children. As we do so, we actively examine our roles in perpetuating inequitable systems.

**Strengthen Community:** We assume responsibility for our collective strength by developing relationships, building diverse and inclusive coalitions, and challenging one another to be our best. We act with empathy and extend grace to ourselves and others.

**Achieve Impact:** We pursue ambitious, meaningful outcomes that lead to access and opportunity for all children. We hold ourselves to high standards, make data-informed decisions, and orient to long-term success.

**Choose Courage:** We act on our beliefs and values, especially when it's hard. We center our efforts on the aspirations of our students and their families.

**Act With Humility:** We acknowledge the limitations of our perspectives. We seek different points of view and historical context to evolve our thinking and inform our actions.

**Demonstrate Resilience:** We see every challenge as an opportunity to think expansively about solutions. When faced with obstacles, we deepen our resolve, adapt, and persist with optimism.

**Learn Continuously:** We operate with curiosity and embrace new ideas to innovate and constantly improve. We take informed risks and learn from successes, setbacks, and each other.
**DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVENESS AT THE CENTER OF OUR MISSION**

At Teach For America, we aspire to embody the commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusiveness we envision for the United States and its Indigenous Nations. Unequal access to opportunity along lines of race, class, and other aspects of identity has deep roots in American history, and institutional racism and classism contribute to inequitable access to educational opportunity in our country today. Therefore, understanding race, class, and the intersectional nature of oppression along these and other lines is critical to eliminating educational inequity and creating an education system in which all students can flourish.

Realizing educational equity and excellence will take a broad and diverse coalition of people—of diverse races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, genders, sexual orientations, abilities, political views, and other aspects of identity and spheres of influence—united around a common purpose and shared values. We know that the change effort must be shaped by those of us who are most directly impacted by educational inequity. We also know that progress is only possible if each of us works effectively across lines of difference—with students, parents, partners, and each other—and if each of us understands and leverages the assets we bring to this work based on our identities and life experiences.

This understanding guides our strategy as we pursue our mission, and impacts how we allocate resources to recruit, select, train, support, retain, and engage corps members, alumni, and staff. In all we do, we act on the following beliefs.

- **Diversity is crucial for successful change efforts and is one of Teach For America’s greatest strengths.**
- **The full potential of our diverse network will be reached only when we are an inclusive community.**
- **The predictability of success or failure for our students or individuals in our organization should not correlate with any social, cultural or other identity-based factors.**

**In striving to grow as individuals who lead with a commitment to diversity, equity and inclusiveness, we focus on:**

1. **Understanding of self and self in relation to others.** We examine our world view and experiences to understand how they’re influenced by power, privilege, oppression, and biases. As we deepen our understanding of self in relation to others, we seek out diverse perspectives and experiences to challenge our assumptions and expand our perspectives.

2. **Understanding and interrupting systemic racism, classism, and other forms of oppression.** We understand that our society and education system have been shaped by multiple forms of oppression, in particular racism and classism. We understand the role and impact of unconscious bias in establishing low expectations for children’s capabilities, and we also see this play out in the workplace. Therefore, we commit to work together to envision and implement new ways of operating that disrupt these systems and practices.

3. **Working toward equity.** We leverage this understanding to surface and interrupt inequitable practices in our schools as well as within our organization. In classrooms, we are committed to ensuring all students have the necessary resources, supports, and academic preparation they need to ensure full agency in their lives. In our organization, we’re committed to allocating our resources and setting organizational policies, systems, and practices to reduce and eliminate gaps in experience and outcomes by demographic group.

4. **Building inclusive coalitions.** We recruit and retain a corps and staff that reflects the inclusive coalition we need representing our nation. Simultaneously, we ensure those of us who have faced educational inequity shape our direction. We intentionally build authentic relationships across lines of difference; facilitate honest and productive conflict among diverse groups; create structures, policies, and processes that enable this effort; and value the diversity of ideas and perspectives required in this effort.
UNDERSTANDING AND ACTING ON OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSIVENESS

DIVERSITY
What It Means: All the ways in which people differ, and all the characteristics that make one individual or group distinct from another; all-inclusive recognition that everyone and every group is valued.

Belief in Action: We recruit and retain a corps and staff that both reflect the inclusive coalition we need representing our nation and, at the same time, we ensure those of us who have faced educational inequity are shaping our direction.

EQUITY
What It Means: Removing the predictability of success or failure that is correlated with any social or cultural factor used to marginalize or oppress individuals or groups; interrupting inequitable practices rooted in historic injustices and discrimination; eliminating biases and structural barriers to access and opportunities; and making the necessary adjustments to ensure an equitable outcome.

Belief in Action: Our students and their success reinforce our unshakable belief that all children can succeed regardless of their racial or economic background. As corps members, alumni, and staff members, we work to build an organization, movement, and world where all people can thrive. We act with courage to interrupt and examine our own roles in perpetuating systems that keep us from realizing opportunity for all children.

INCLUSIVENESS
What It Means: Valuing the perspectives and contributions of all people and ensuring a safe, affirming, and responsive environment; actively, intentionally, and always engaging with diversity in our organization; enabling different people to lead and succeed in self-determined and authentic ways.

Belief in Action: We intentionally build authentic relationships across all lines of difference, enable multiple pathways to success, and build a culture that celebrates unique contributions and unites people around shared values and common purpose. This leads us to create classrooms and an organization where each student, corps member, alum, and staff member can contribute fully, learn from one another, be valued, and be their best.

We Constantly Ask Ourselves:
> Who is teaching in our classrooms? Who is on our staff? Who are the leaders in our movement?
> How many of us have directly faced educational inequity?
> Does the composition of our TFA community reflect the diversity of our country and communities?
> Does our composition assure the diversity of identities, experiences, perspectives, skills, and spheres of influence required to effect systems change?

We Constantly Ask Ourselves:
> What barriers exist that keep the students we teach from flourishing? Likewise, what barriers exist that keep our corps members, alumni, and staff members from flourishing?
> Which of our own behaviors and decisions perpetuate institutional racism, classism, and the many other forms of oppression that exist in the classroom and workplace?
> What are the experiences and outcomes across our students, corps members, staff, and alumni? Do they vary across demographics?
> What do we have to do to ensure that all students, corps members, alumni, and staff members have what they need to realize their full potential?

We Constantly Ask Ourselves:
> How are individuals and groups experiencing multiple, intersecting forms of oppression simultaneously?
> Who remains powerless and excluded? Why?
> How does my background and experience influence and impact others?
> What can I learn from those who are different?
> How do I work in allyship?
> How can we make our classrooms a place where each student is valued, affirmed, empowered, and able to do their best work? Likewise, how can we do this for our organization?