

# Conference Model for LPLs and CoPs

Between summer 2023 and spring 2025, LAEP hosted four conferences that served as the grand majority of region’s LPL and CoP learning opportunities – Learn, Lead, Liberate in summer 2023, A Gathering of Giants in spring 2024, Equity Camp in Fall 2024, and Equity in Action in Spring 2025. Figure 1 outlines the timeline of these four conferences. While all four of these conferences were designed to deepen participants’ understandings of equity, increase networks of support, activate leaders to action, and promote leadership practices that center healing, justice and transformation, this section of the report emphasizes the three most recent conferences, briefly referencing the first.<sup>1</sup> All of our conferences were intended to bring the 21CSLA Equity Statement to life:

*Leaders for opportunity, and inclusion for students and adults, especially those who are systemically marainalized and historically underserved, so that they can thrive.*



Figure 1. Timeline of our Four Conferences



## Innovative, Inclusive Participatory Data Collection Methods Collection

To answer questions about the quality and impact of these conferences, we analyzed data from registration records, participant surveys, Art Wall renderings (collaborative visual prompt board allowed attendees to contribute affirmations, quotes, or drawings that reflected their learning or emotions during the event), audio recordings from a phone booth (participants responded to reflection prompts via private voice recording into a simulated landline phone), and video recordings from a video

booth (brief video reflections captured on-site). These participatory data collection strategies selected by the team were intentionally innovative, creative, collaboratively designed, non-traditional methods to increase response rates and create opportunities beyond a traditional survey. Our team combined traditional methods and more actively participatory ones to increase inclusion.

<sup>1</sup> Our 21CSLA evaluators were hired after the first conference and began to gather data systematically during the second conference.

Early in 2023-24, when single or series sessions were offered to Cohort 2 leaders as their CoP and LPL options, LAEP experienced very low attendance. For example, at one carefully prepared session with a distinguished speaker scheduled to facilitate, there were no attendees at all. To address this problem and the problem of leaders working in isolation, the sessions were re-envisioned as conferences that would gather leaders to learn, practice, and build community together. LAEP created this conference model with the goals listed below in mind. Additionally, the CORE team re-designed its structure to include Program Leads that could bring specialized skills and focus to specific offerings and areas of work.

- **Build a sense of community** among like-minded leaders from across the five counties through in-person opportunities to share their stories, connect in affinity groups, and experience and reflect on their learning together.
- **Reduce the sense of working in isolation** through structured networking, sessions that created cohorts within the larger cohort, and activities that brought teams together to plan their collective next steps.
- Leverage the **talent of local leaders** with roots in communities within the five counties. Educators, poets, advocates, and other experts were invited to be keynote speakers, encouraging resilience and connection among conference attendees.

## **SUMMER 2023 CONFERENCE: LEARN, LEAD, LIBERATE**

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The first convening offered in a conference format was Learn, Lead, Liberate – a two-day event held in San Bernardino. It was important for the design team to bring visionary speakers and trusted names in equity work to our leaders. As a first gathering of the Southern California region in one space, visionary thinking was essential to ground participants in shared language and shared understanding of the work of equity. While this conference was organized and facilitated by a different team from the team who led the subsequent conferences and while we did not have formal evaluation capacity, it is important to highlight this initial conference because LAEP’s work continued on the foundation built by gathering a community and centering them in visionary equity principles.

Keynote speakers at this conference were Zaretta Hammond, Jeff Duncan-Andrade, and Michael Fullan. Presentations and sessions were intended to meet the needs of leaders around rampant inequities in society and schools, politicized learning environments, movements that deny the right to exist, to hold certain identities, and to learn, the loneliness of leading, and to begin to connect leaders across the five counties in Southern California: San Bernardino, Riverside, Imperial, Orange, and San Diego.

## **SPRING 2024 CONFERENCE: A GATHERING OF GIANTS**

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The second conference prioritized wellness, connection, and the application of learning. **A Gathering of Giants** was held in Spring 2024, and was attended primarily by out-of-classroom leaders (e.g., counselor, coach, TOSA), site-based leaders (e.g., principal, assistant principal), teacher leaders, and district or county leaders. Most of the respondents to our survey represented public organizations, with far fewer from charter schools, institutes of higher learning, private schools, and county offices of education. The largest groups of respondents worked with 9th-12th and TK-12th grade students and had two to five years of experience in their current position. These findings are summarized in Table 1.





The feedback received from conference participants was highly positive, with 96% rating the overall event as “very good.” The great majority of participants felt that the materials, content covered, facilitation, and the event’s location were either “good” or “very good.” An overwhelming majority of participants (96%) found the event beneficial for their everyday work. Participants shared that during the conference, they were able to connect with their problems of practice and everyday work issues through opportunities to reflect and identify strategies to address the issues they faced in their roles and work. The majority of participants felt that the event deepened their understanding of equity issues and felt “extremely confident” or “moderately confident” in applying what they learned in their work. One leader suggested, “More intentional shuffling of groups- even if it is just inviting people to seek out people outside of their current circles.”

**I really appreciated that the different sessions provided were relevant to the work I'm doing and the field I'm in. I wanted to attend more than two different sessions. I really appreciated that the hotel was so nice, and the staff ... was so amazing.”** - Gathering of Giants Attendee

## Conference Model Vision

In evolving toward a conference model to meet 21CSLA goals for leaders, LAEP was thoughtful in treating leaders as professionals who face challenging situations in their work settings, offering a comfortable setting and amenities conducive to wellness, in addition to content and interactive forums that expand their knowledge and skills related to equity-focused leadership. Keynote addresses, breakout sessions, meals, interactive exhibits, affinity group meetings, and fun activities were carefully designed to foster inclusion, belonging, and thoughtful discussion.



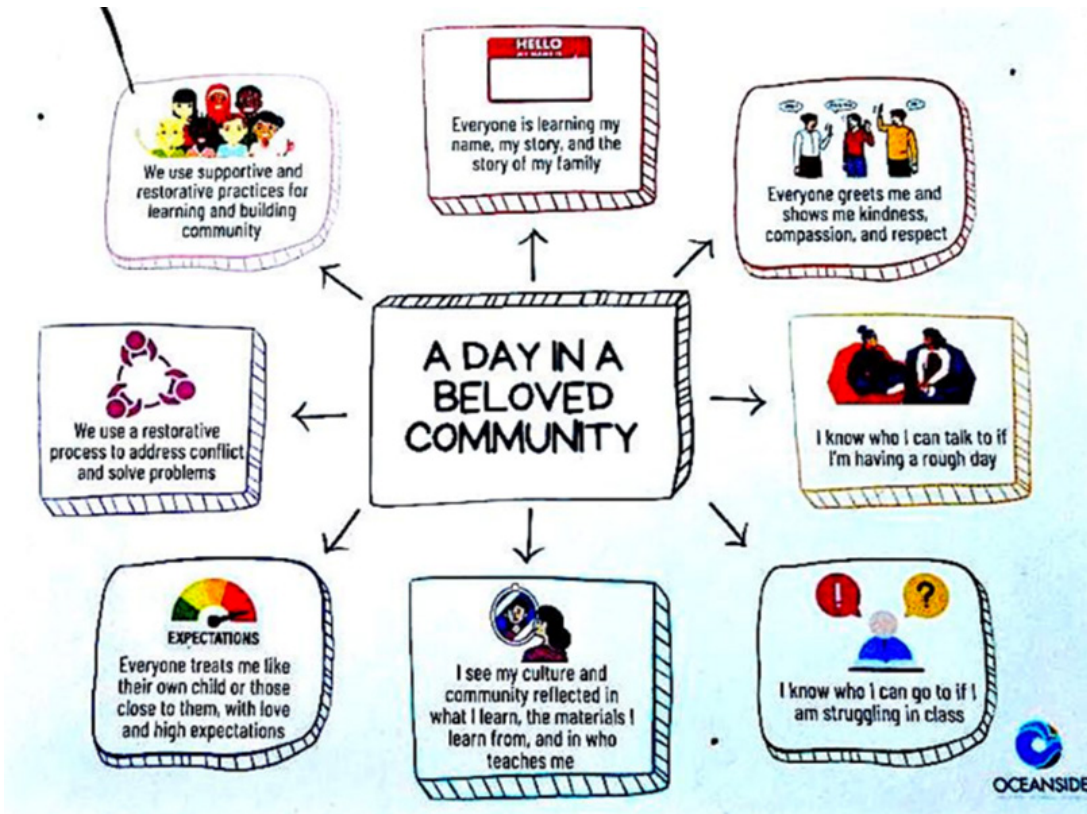
The *Social Change Ecosystem Map* is a framework that guided and inspired conference planners and served as a tool for reflecting on how LAEP's conferences uplifted important roles in social change. The map illustrates how disruptors, caregivers, first responders, storytellers, and six other roles are essential and united by common values in activating and sustaining social improvements. Each of our conferences relied on these roles. Learn, Lead, Liberate featured **Visionaries** including Jeff Duncan-Andrade, Zaretta Hammond, and Michael Fullan. A Gathering of Giants invited leaders to honor the **Guides**, on whose shoulders today's leaders stood. Equity Camp centered **Storytellers**, and Equity in Action purposely highlighted **Frontline Responders**.

Leaders offered **suggestions for improvement** of future conferences including a focus on restorative practices, time for teams to plan collectively their next steps and share their learning, and topics for alternative school educators.

Among the **bright spots** identified by participants were the useful content, like the Maker Space and keynote speeches, opportunities to connect with like-minded colleagues, and the amenities that contributed to participants' wellness.

After the conference, a team of leaders for education equity from Oceanside Unified School District, who had attended together, created the postcard shown in Figure 2. The postcard centered on their learnings from the two-part Beloved Schools, Beautiful Schools keynote address. To share their learning with their school district, they distributed the postcard to every single educator in Oceanside Unified School District. While only a small fraction leaders in Oceanside Unified attended the conference, the **impact of the learning was far reaching**.

FRONT



BACK

**Everyone is learning my name, my story, and the story of my family**  
 Name = Identity. How are we creating spaces for students' full identities to show up and be welcomed, affirmed, and celebrated in our classrooms and schools?

**Everyone greets me and shows me kindness, compassion, and respect**  
 Don't be long where you don't belong.  
 Go where you are celebrated, not where you are tolerated.

**I know who I can talk to if I'm having a rough day**  
 Does every student have a person with whom they can connect? A mentor? A teacher? Coach? Adult?  
 Does each student know what resources, support, or personnel is available and how to access them?

**I know who I can go to if I am struggling in class**  
 How might we empower students and build agency in a way that helps them access resources for support?  
 Do all students know how to access support and/or help?

**I see my culture and community reflected in what I learn, the materials I learn from, and in who teaches me**  
 "When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read, or when the images they see are distorted, negative, or laughable, they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part."  
 (Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop)

**Everyone treats me like their own child or those close to them, with love and high expectations**  
 How might we strive to strike a balance between love and high expectations, holding our students accountable to being great because we already recognize their greatness?

**We use a restorative process to address conflict and solve problems**  
 In what ways can we ensure accountability for our students by helping them understand intent and impact?

**We use supportive and restorative practices for learning and building community**  
 Restorative Practices = Community Building  
 Restorative practices go well beyond discipline and can be used to build community, teach content, discuss learning, and strengthen relationships

Figure 2. Leadership learning from a Gathering of Giants impacted all educators at Oceanside Unified School District.

## A Gathering of Giants Breakout Sessions

During A Gathering of Giants leaders had an opportunity to attend up to three of the following impactful workshops. Please refer to the conference program to learn more about the event and the workshops.

- Developing Deeper Meaningful and Engaged Classrooms with Jordan Harrison
- Early California Laws and Policies Related to California Indians with 'ataaxum Pomkwaan
- Overcoming Negative Self-Talk for Leaders with Mark Kabban
- What Did You Just Say?! Using Compassionate Dialogue as a Protocol to Interrupt Implicit Bias and Discuss Tough Topics with Myeshia Whigham
- Fair & Square - Leveraging Text for Representation in K-12 Curriculum with Mick Rabin
- Leading for Equity with Habits of Mind Workshop with Dr. Regina McDuffie
- Balancing the Books: A Time-Out for School Leaders - Mastering the Art of Self-Care and Dodging Burnout Like a Procrastination Expert! with Sally Stevens
- Schooltalk in an Era of Attempted Restriction: Continuing Student Support Through Our Efforts to Talk About Race, Diversity, and Inequality in Schools. with Dr. Mica Pollock
- Liberatory Leadership Flowershop with Dr. Julie Jhun + Dr. Roberta Benjamin
- Equity Amplified: Leading the Inclusive Classroom Evolution with Dhalia Balmir
- Strengthening Leadership Through Research-Based Practices and Creating Transformational Change to Building your Career of Tomorrow with Dr. Brigitte Blazys
- Keep this Kid in My Class! Decision Making for Inclusivity with Dr. Orleta Nguyen
- Leading With Love for Liberation with Jose Navarro

## FALL 2024 CONFERENCE: EQUITY CAMP



Following the second conference, the LAEP team reflected on feedback from participants and their own experiences to refine their approach in developing the next conference - **Equity Camp: The Strength of Our Stories**. This second conference was offered in Fall 2024, and like the first conference, was attended by a large number of out-of-classroom leaders. Most attendees represented public organizations, and many worked with TK-12th grade students and had 2 to 5 years of experience. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Over a third of participants mentioned the variety of **opportunities to speak, collaborate and learn meaningfully** with other educational leaders as aspects of the conference that helped them feel connected. For example, one participant commented, “Equity Camp provided opportunities for dialogue and sharing in safe and supportive spaces with other educational leaders who were so eager to listen and learn. It was very validating, and I truly felt seen in my experiences.” Participants also commonly held up the conference’s **ambiance** (e.g., good music, giveaway items, felt spoiled) as an element that supported their feeling of connection. One wrote, “The location ... was AMAZING!!!! I’m happy that finances didn’t hold me back from being here. I liked the touchpoint check-in. It gave me a space and group to digest and feel everything I learned.”

## A Leader’s Journey Through 21CSLA Offerings FY 2024-2025



Nearly half of respondents mentioned that they were walking away with **tools that were immediately implementable** like storytelling, data, lists of books to read, a Liberation Library. For example, one respondent offered, “The What Did You Say? [session] started a great conversation that we can continue on our own. The data session offered a wealth of information that I will continue to revisit. The Neurodiversity session was more presentation, but this discussion could engagingly go on for days.”

## Why Stories?



**One of the most valuable things we can do to heal one another is to listen to each other’s stories.”**

- Rebecca Falls

The power of sharing stories was the impetus for LAEP’s Fall 2024 Conference. Curating a collection of several keynote stories by Southern California equity-focused leaders (see Appendix for these stories printed in their entirety), as opposed to featuring one highly paid speaker from outside the area. This was an intentional process that allowed the speakers to cultivate and refine their stories through an intentional storytelling process with a local non-profit whose mission is to help community members tell their stories better. This storytelling process resulted in humanizing and inclusive outcomes for planners, facilitators, and participants. For example, LAEP was able to spotlight home-grown genius in the Southern California region, celebrating their powerful shifts toward integrating equitable practices in schools. Additionally, relationships and networks were strengthened among like-minded story-telling facilitators, collaborators, friends, and family members.

## Equity Camp Breakout Sessions

During Equity Camp leaders had an opportunity to attend up to three of the following impactful workshops. Please refer to the [conference program](#) to learn more about the event and the workshops.

- Critical Consciousness. Embodiment. Leadership with Abdoul-Rehman Issa
- Systems Coherence: A Deep Dive Into Science of Relationships and Networks with Dr. Alan Daly
- When Leadership Meets Science & Ancestral Practice: Navigating the Pushback to Decolonizing Education Initiatives with Dr. Mark. N. Kabban
- Unpacking Bias: Empowering Educators and School Leaders for Inclusive School Systems with Jordan Harrison
- Decolonizing Equity in Schools with Cereescia Sandoval
- Leveraging Student Voice Data to Lead for Equity with Kimberly Tsai Cawkwell
- Equity Stances for Liberatory Leadership with Nikki Hinostro
- Rhetoric to Reality: Neurodiversity-Affirming Practices in Today's Schools with Justin H. Dove
- Centering Students, Centering Equity in an Era of Loss, Recovery, and Discovery with Maruth Figueroa and David Ruitter
- What did you Just Say?! Using Compassionate Dialogue to Interrupt Implicit Bias and Tackle Tough Topics with Myeshia Williams and Dr. Jordy Sparks

## SPRING 2025 CONFERENCE: EQUITY IN ACTION

**Equity in Action** was the fourth in the series of intentionally designed conferences for Cohort 2 participants. Responding to the challenging socio-educational climate in early 2025, this conference was designed to build community through elements like panel conversations and uplifting as many diverse perspectives as possible. Characteristics of leaders who attended this conference were similar to prior conferences, with the exception that the largest group were teacher leaders. Another significant difference was that attendance from San Bernardino County increased from about 5% at prior conferences to 15% at Equity in Action. These findings are summarized in Table 1.

Almost half of attendees shared that what helped them feel prepared to **integrate equity into their work** were the new knowledge, resources, tools, strategies and action steps that they gained during the conference. One respondent shared ...

### Phone Voicemail Message

**Prompt:** Leave a voicemail to your future self about your learning intentions for your conference experience!



**What I learned here is to chart the course, be present for students, continue to do the work in fidelity. To remember why we do the work, and that liberation comes in the spaces we create in our classrooms. And I feel so fortunate that I get to provide those spaces for students. So, thank you for the reminders."**



**Reflection and Self-Awareness:** *The conference provided valuable space to reflect on my own leadership, biases, and areas for growth. This helped me think more critically about how I approach equity in my work. Practical Strategies and Tools:* *I gained concrete strategies to integrate equity more intentionally, from improving family engagement to aligning student support services with a Community Schools mindset. These tools will help me take actionable steps. Collaboration and Shared Learning:* *Engaging in candid conversations with others who are also committed to equity reinforced that this work isn't done alone. Learning from different perspectives and best practices gave me ideas to bring back to my team and implement collaboratively."*

Leaders also shared reflections about whether the conference affirmed or shifted their **understanding of equity**, with almost a third commenting that the conference affirmed their understanding. One participant offered, "Confirmed that the work is righteous and arduous. Being supported by allies provides strength to fight."

Participants were asked what specific behaviors or actions they would adopt as a result of this conference to advance equity, and the largest group commented that they would **reflect critically on personal and professional beliefs** and commit to long-term growth. They were also asked what they had changed in their practice since the prior conference, Equity Camp, and almost a quarter responded that they had **shifted their equity lens** (e.g., "Met people who shifted my thinking;"), and another near quarter responded that they had taken **more brave and empowered action** (e.g., "Joined the district's equity team.")

Participants were also asked to share aspects of the conference that helped them feel that their **health and wellbeing were prioritized**, about half named hospitality-related amenities like kind staff and luxurious space. For example, one leader commented, "The beautiful location. Nature. Wonderful amenities." "The hotel accommodations and the ease of registry. I felt so valued and so supported. Treated like my voice and my presence mattered no matter my age, years of service or even education. I felt included in the work and my contribution mattered." Another offered, "The location ... and materials were all vital supports, they helped me be present for learning and growth."



## Equity In Action Breakout Sessions

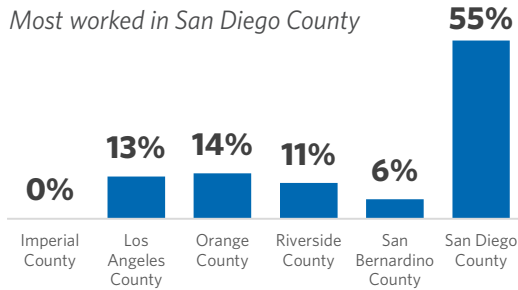
During Equity in Action leaders had an opportunity to attend up to three of the following impactful workshops. Please refer to the [conference program](#) to learn more about the event and the workshops.

- Critical Moments in Action: Protecting Neurodiverse Students & All Students from Discriminatory Disciplinary Action with Dr. H Orletta Nguyen
- Steadfast Leadership from the Inside Out: Uncovering Our Hidden Resistance to Collective Change with Dr. Mark Kabban
- The Culture Connection: Rethinking Student Behavior and Attendance through a Culturally Responsive Lens with Dr. Ingrid Twyman
- Loco Parentis: Serving, Supporting & Standing with Our Undocumented Students with Jose Luis Navarro
- Beyond School Walls: Engaging with Community to Move Toward Equity with Dhalia Balmir
- Commonalities & Differences: A Bullying Prevention Module About Celebrating and Embracing Differences cofacilitated by Mick Rabin and middle school Ally Action student leaders
- Reimagining Schools as Communities of Care with Dr. Rania Saeb
- LGBTQ plus Race, Ethnicity, Culture, Class: An Intersectional Conversation with Dr. Lan Nguyen

Table 1. Demographic and survey findings from the three conferences in Years 1 and 2.

### A Gathering of Giants

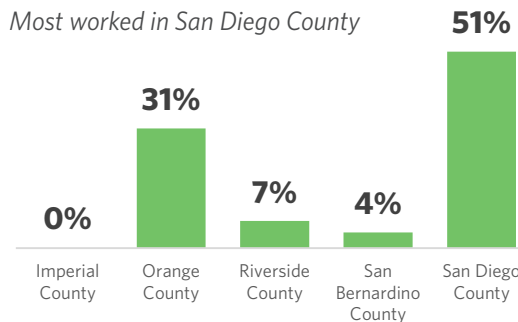
March 2024, San Diego, CA  
 182 participants  
 39% survey response  
 Most were from San Diego County.



41% White, 32% Latino, 19% Black, 10% Asian  
 32% Out-of-Classroom Leader  
 72% Public organizations  
 27% TK-12th grade focus  
 42% 2 to 5 years' experience  
 96% felt event was "very good"  
 96% found the event useful for their everyday work  
 Participants felt that the event deepened their understanding of equity issues and felt extremely or moderately confident in applying what they learned in their work.  
 Participants chose from among 11 breakout sessions and gave a range of ideas for how they would use their learning in their setting.

### Equity Camp: The Strength of Our Stories

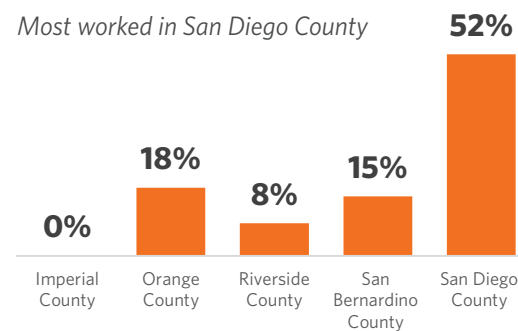
November 2024, San Diego, CA  
 158 participants  
 41% survey response



40% White, 31% Latino, 7% Black, 4% Asian, 4% Filipino  
 27% Out-of-Classroom Leader  
 61% Public organizations  
 35% TK-12th grade focus  
 26% had 2 to 5 years' experience  
 92% agreed that Equity Camp provided purposeful spaces to connect with other leaders.  
 95% felt heard by other education leaders.  
 Participants valued opportunities to speak, collaborate, and meet like-minded others.

### Equity in Action

March 2025, Huntington Beach, CA  
 243 participants  
 70% survey response



37% White, 24% Latino, 14% Black, 5% Asian, 4% Filipino  
 34% Teacher Leader  
 80% Public organizations  
 29% TK-12th grade focus  
 95% agreed that experiences at the conference supported their overall health and wellbeing.  
 99% stated they will continue to participate in 21CSLA offerings.  
 The largest group of leaders attended The Culture Connection breakout session on student behavior and attendance, with 75% expressing they were very or extremely confident applying their learning.

## KEY FINDINGS ABOUT CONFERENCE MODEL

LAEP adopted a conference model for engaging 21CSLA Cohort 2 leaders in professional development that would accomplish the following specific learning goals:

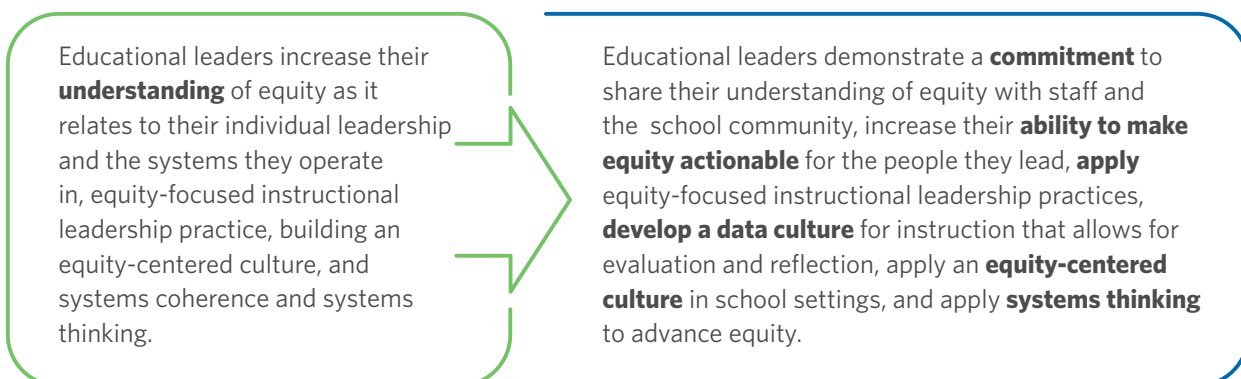


Figure 3. Goals of the Conferences for Educational Leaders

Across three conferences carried out in Years 1 and 2, participants tended to be out-of-classroom leaders and teacher leaders, represent public organizations, serve TK-12th grade students, with about 2 to 5 years of experience in education. The conferences were attended by representatives from all counties in LAEP’s region except for Imperial County. About half of attendees worked in San Diego County. Attendance increased from 182 to 243 participants from the first to the third conference.

Feedback from across the three conferences was mostly very positive, with participants consistently reporting they were satisfied with the quality of the resources, location, collaboration with like-minded peers, support from staff, and sense of connectedness. They also expressed that the knowledge, skills, tools, practices, and networking that they took away were useful in preparing them to apply new approaches to their equity-focused leadership and wellness. Figure 4 highlights percentages of attendees who agreed or strongly agreed that the conferences increased their understanding of equity, provided them with tools and skills to use for their health and wellbeing and to advance equity in their work, and that they felt confident and prepared to apply these tools and skills.

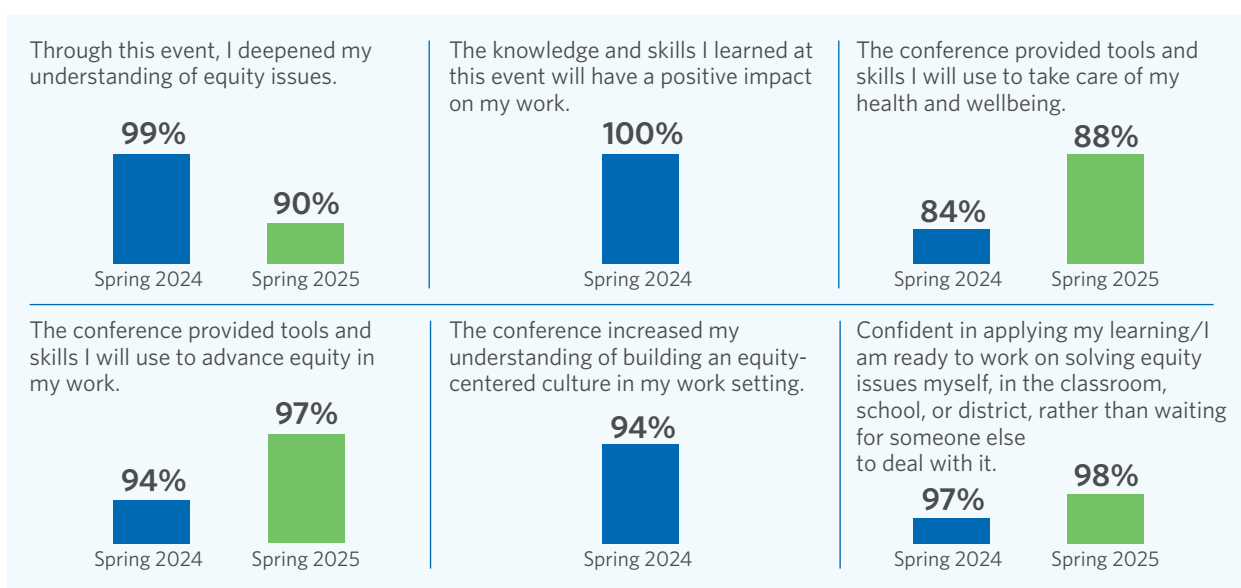


Figure 4. Very high proportions of participants felt the conferences prepared them for equity work.

Participants consistently shared that they benefitted from the conferences tangibly as well as emotionally and mentally. Evidence of leaders' growth toward the conference goals of building understandings and abilities to effect systems changes included the following findings:

- 1. Most participants were highly satisfied** with the materials, content, facilitation, and conference location: Specifically, leaders appreciated the useful content, like the Maker Space and keynote speeches, opportunities to connect with like-minded colleagues in meaningful ways, and the amenities that contributed to participants' wellness.
- 2.** About half of attendees at one conference shared that what helped them feel prepared to **integrate equity into their work** were the new knowledge, resources, tools, strategies and action steps that they gained during the conference.
- 3.** As a result of their participation, leaders shared that they had **started to shift to using an equity lens** and taken **more brave and empowered action**. They also mentioned that they would continue to **reflect critically on personal and professional beliefs** and commit to **long-term growth**.



**The learning and knowledge I'm walking away with have solidified my beliefs in this work and has given me some renewed hope of the future of our youth."**

- Equity Camp Attendee

Very few participants were unsatisfied with some aspects of the conferences, and some offered their thoughtful recommendations for improving future conferences:

- 1. Offer extended training and materials.** Leaders suggested making all sessions available to all participants because time did not allow for participating in all breakout sessions. Similarly, they felt taking home presentation slides and other resources would be helpful. (e.g., "So much information in each session I would love to have had more time in each workshop or at least a link to each of the session slide decks.")
- 2. Allow for more collective team processing.** Participants commented that there was a lot of content to process and plan with, and they wished there was more opportunity to do this with their work site teams.
- 3. Improve accommodations for neurodivergent learners and focus more on special needs of students.** Leaders recommended focusing more carefully on the needs of students with disabilities. Another voiced the need for compliance with legal requirements related to accessibility like captions.
- 4. Continue to provide physical supports for wellness.** For example, one comment was about the breakout session rooms being too small, another participant missed the massage chairs that were offered previously.



**To truly be inclusive and work together as a beautiful group, I believe we are missing those voices (of neurodivergence) at the table. I mean, I get to thinking about "What about our family members who are BIPOC and have disabilities?" I am sharing it here, because that is a skill I have learned through these conferences is really try to seek and understand. How can we seek to understand if we don't have people speaking on their experiences?"**

- Equity in Action Attendee