



MDC

The Equity Challenge – Why it Matters and What We Must Do

**Presentation to the ATD 2014 Cohort Kickoff Institute
June 17, 2014**

David Dodson

National Mobility

- The American Dream – the opportunity for children to be better off economically than their parents – is in trouble. Our country has a severe inequality problem when measured in terms of earnings and individual income.
- The problem is exacerbated by slowing mobility for people born at the bottom of the income distribution.
- If the American dream is about opportunity – and if opportunity is reflected in the belief that "where you're born shouldn't determine where you end up" – then the American Dream needs a serious tune up.

National Mobility

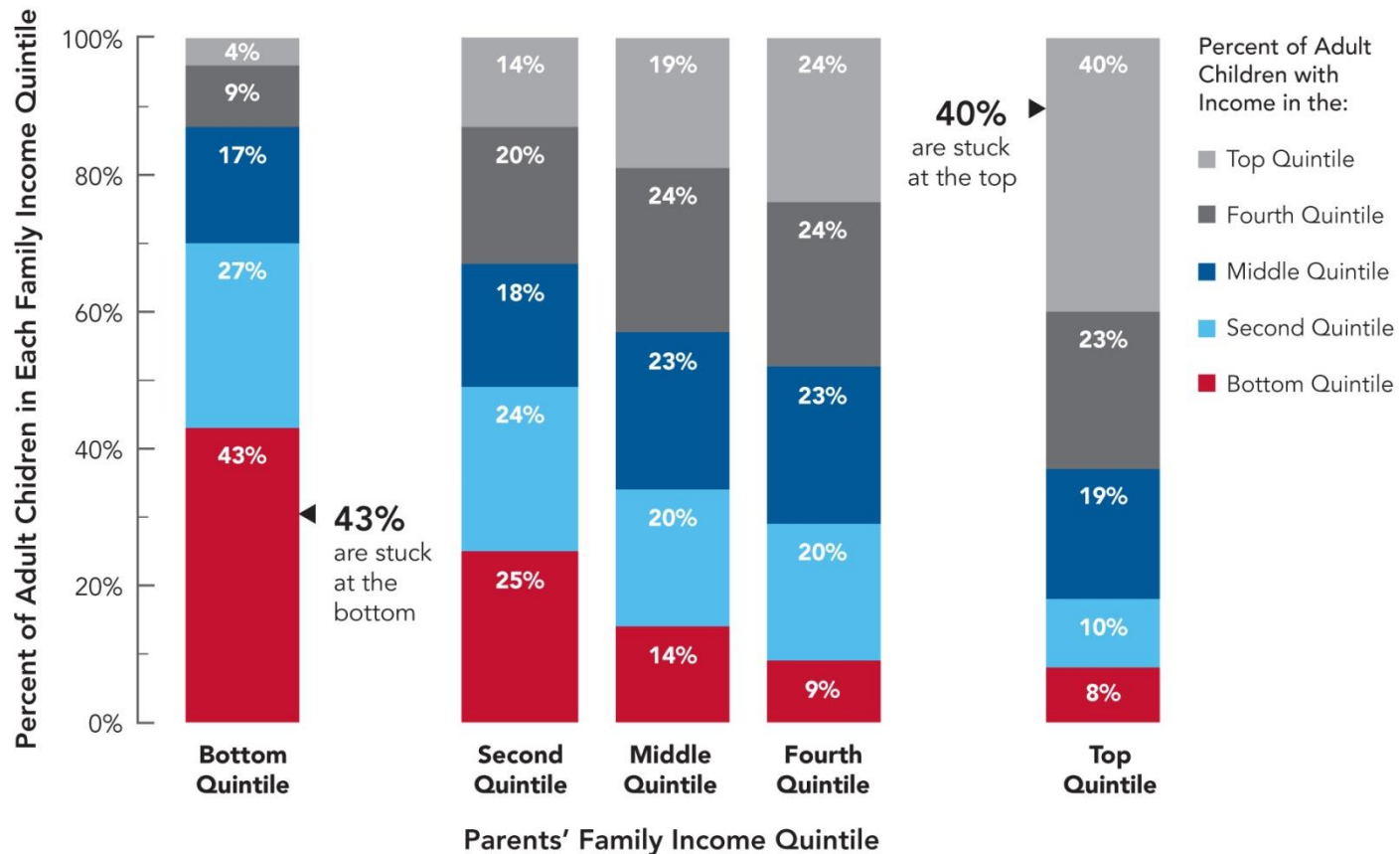
“Inequality would not be a problem if upward mobility were strong in America.”

--Robert Reich, former U.S. Secretary of Labor



Americans Raised at Top & Bottom Are Likely to Stay There

Chances of moving up or down the family income ladder, by parents' quintile

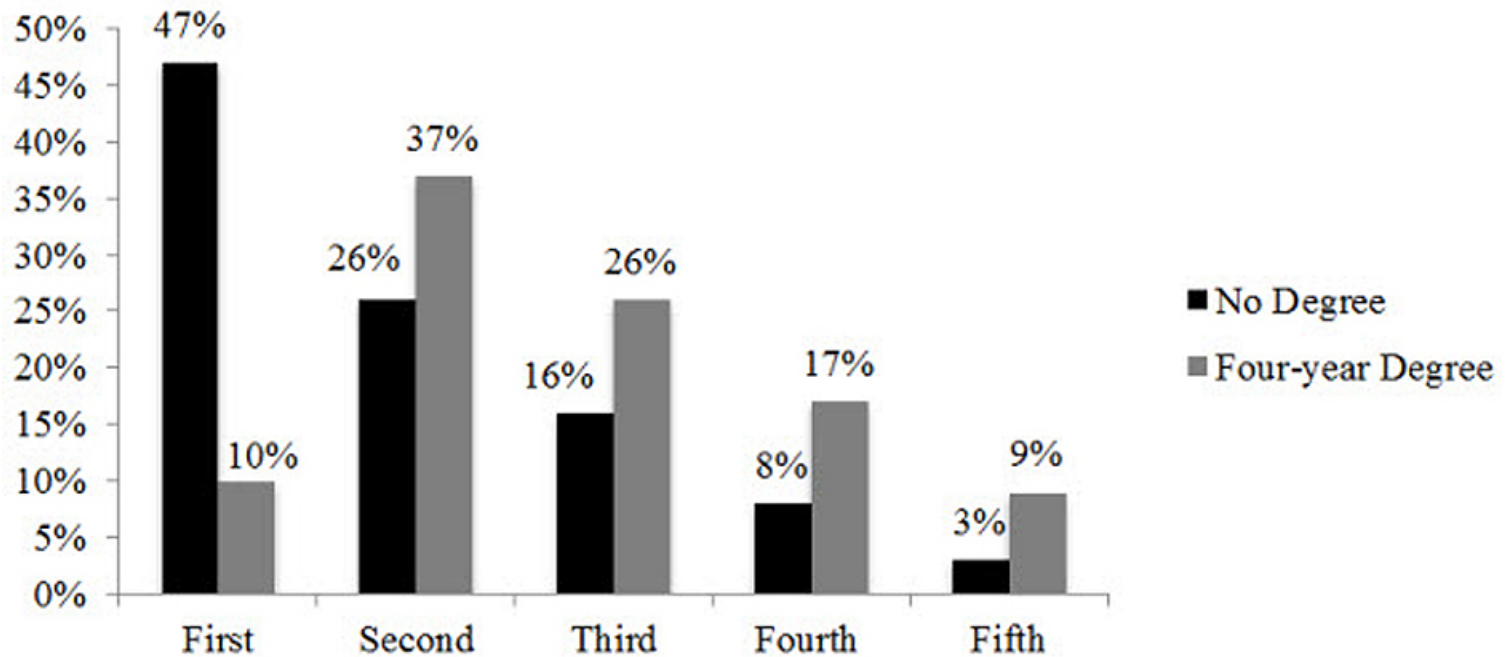


National Mobility

- Education is the predominant “engine of social mobility” in our country. But its power depends largely on COMPLETION – the earning of a postsecondary credential.
- Our system of postsecondary education does promote social mobility but only for the small segment of low-income Americans who actually finish a credential.

National Mobility

Where Children Born in Bottom Quintile Wind Up



National Mobility

- With so much at stake, what have we learned about what it takes to catalyze upward mobility for students who start out at the low end of the income distribution?
- And if mobility rests on a combination of personal drive, deliberately supportive institutional practices, and community supports, how can we make sure all of those contributory factors are operating in the lives of the students who start out farthest from the American Dream?

The Finish Line



Structural Inequities

Lack of equal opportunity for particular groups is the result of institutional and societal policies and practices that (intentionally or not) create greater advantage for some groups of people than others.

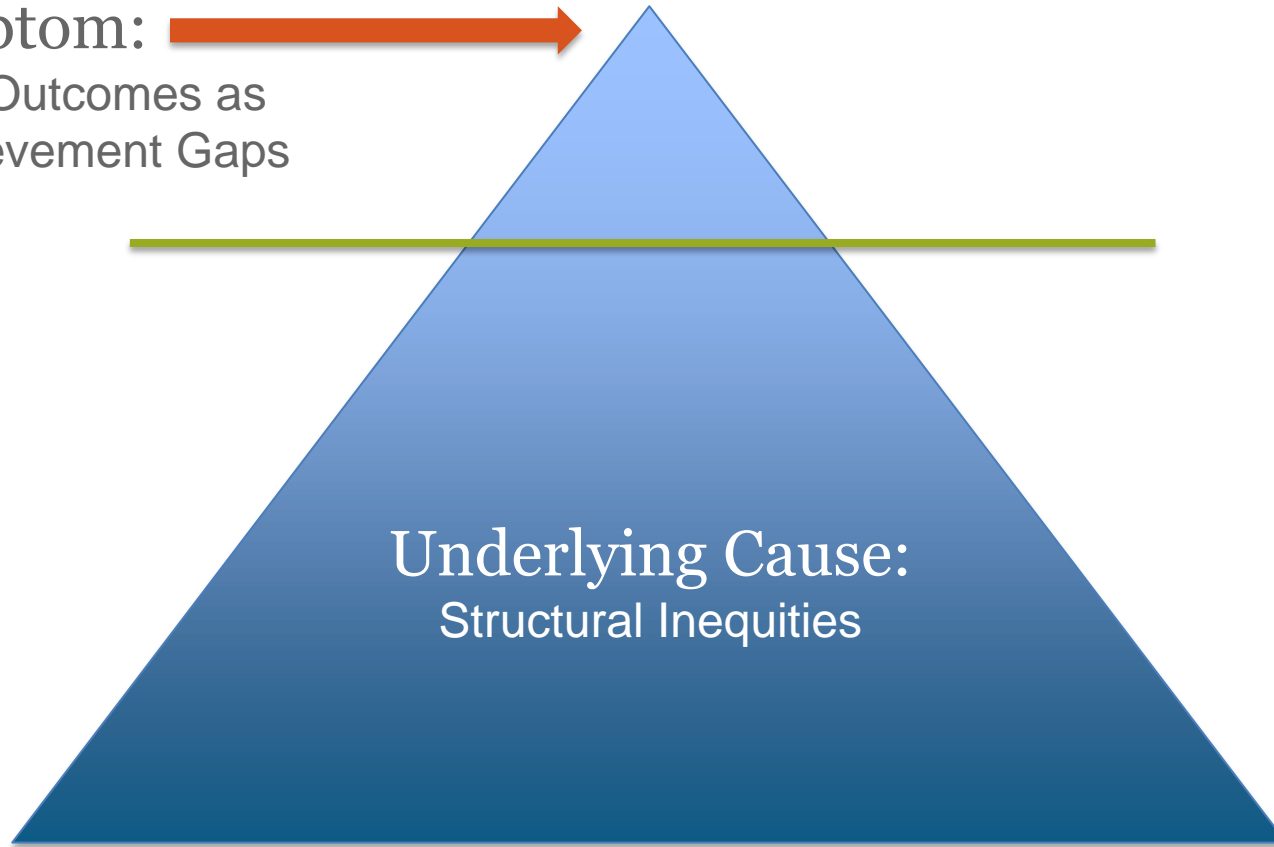


Presenting Symptom - Underlying Cause

Presenting

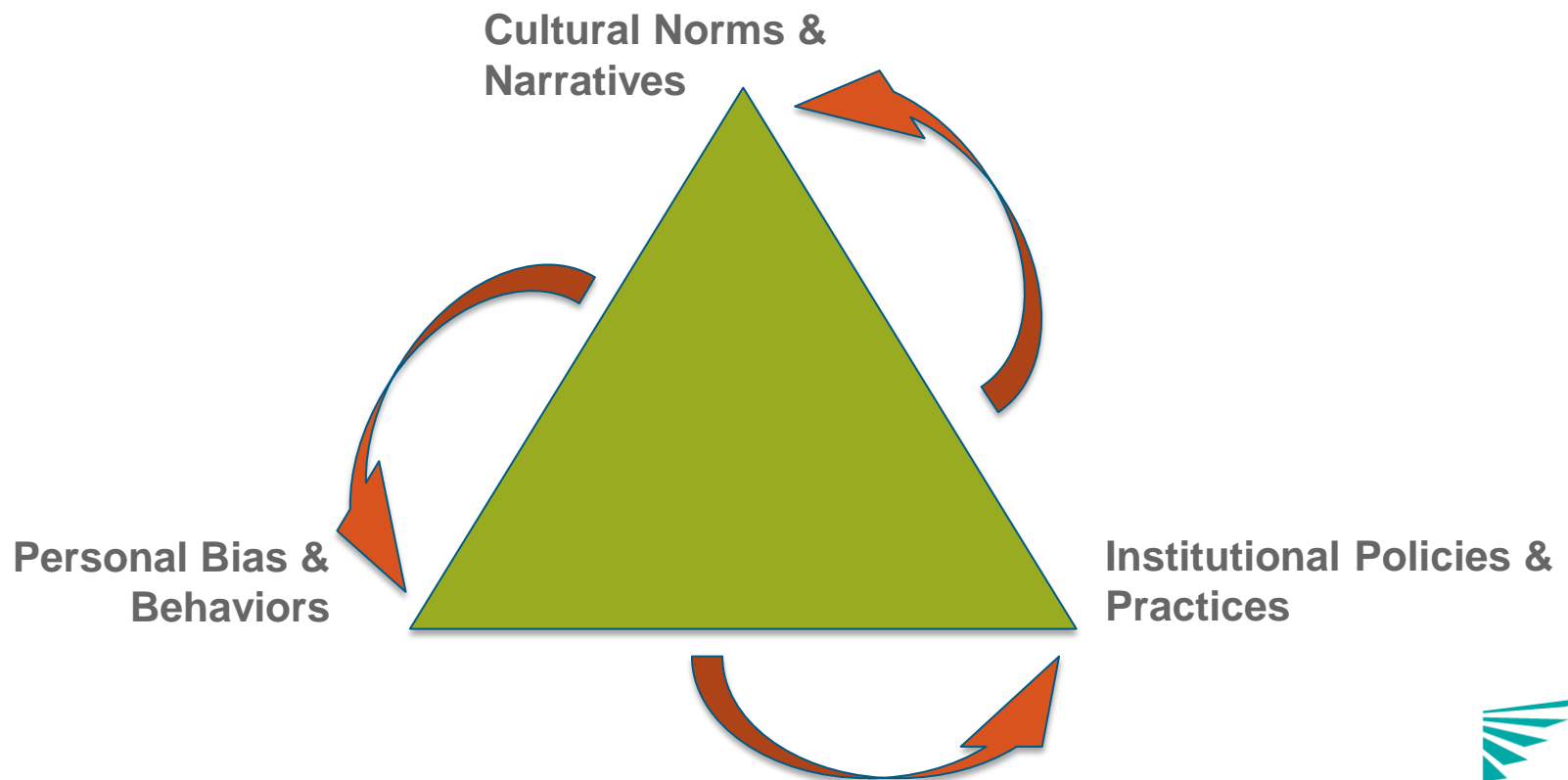
Symptom: 

Inequitable Outcomes as
Seen in Achievement Gaps



Why do Structural Inequities Exist and Why are They so Hard to Remove?

The “Iron Triangle” of Attitudes, Images, and Policy:



Structural Inequities

Most structural inequities originate outside the college, but they *affect* large numbers of students, and we often see their impact in disaggregated student success data.



What does “Practicing Equity” Involve?

- North Star commitment to reducing achievement gaps
- Practicing “fairness” with rigor: giving students what they need according to their situation
- Maintaining a culture of evidence

Equity ≠ Equality

- Practicing equity does not mean treating all students the same
- The Emergency Room
- Fairness = “treating like things alike”
- We are so “hard wired” to value equality in the US that the concept of equity as fairness may actually appear unfair.

Equity is at the heart of student success because different students have different needs for resources and support.

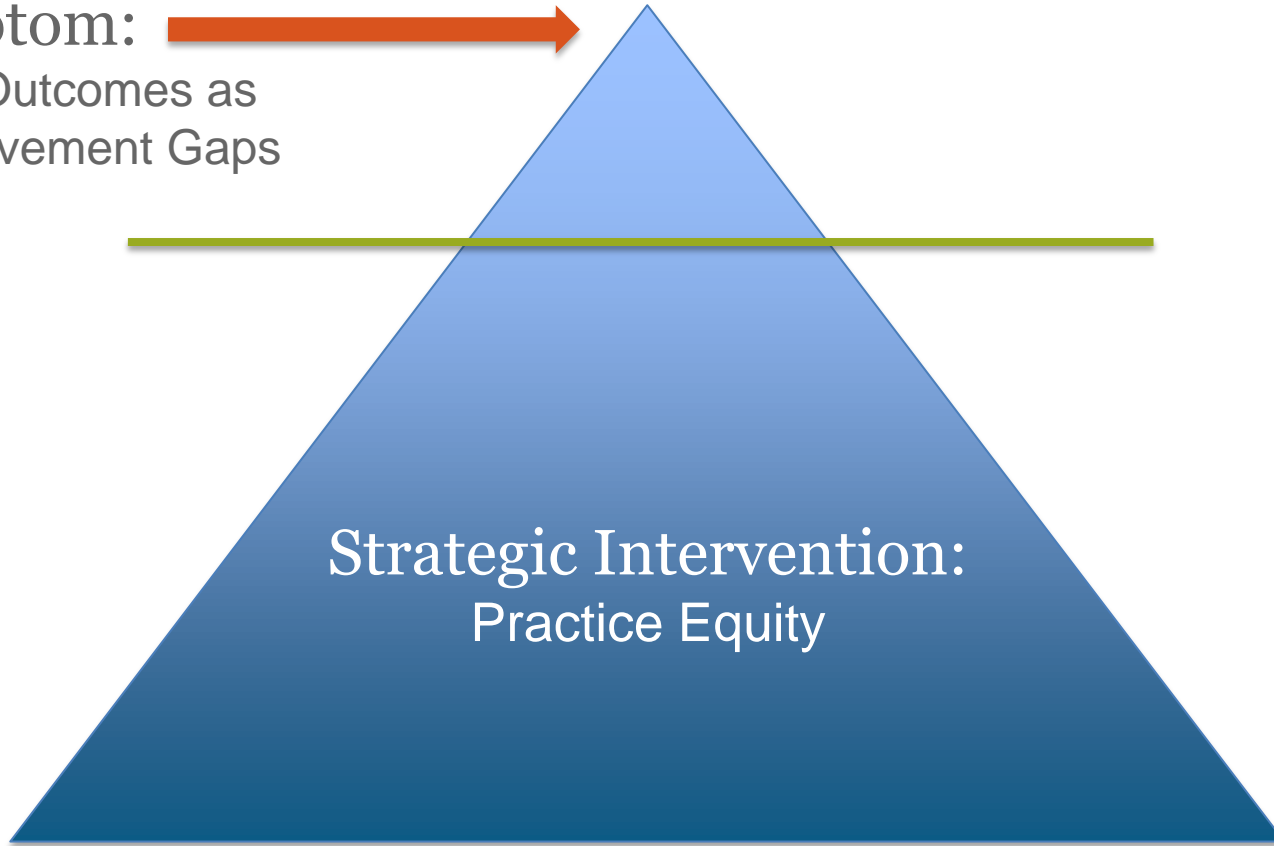


What Can Colleges Do?

Presenting
Symptom:



Inequitable Outcomes as
Seen in Achievement Gaps



Strategic Intervention:
Practice Equity

What Does This Mean for ATD Colleges?

Colleges cannot change national values and cultural beliefs on their own, and they cannot fix all the structural inequities inherent in society and their local communities.

They *can* ...



- Closely examine their own policies and practices and change any that create barriers for particular groups of students.
- Exert their influence to bring about change in community systems—including the public schools—where structural inequities reside.
- Implement policies, practices, and programs that help compensate for inequities that are beyond the college’s control and that place particular groups of students at a disadvantage.

Board and Presidential Commitment

Begin by making equity a core priority for the governance and leadership of the college.

- Reflected in strategic plan
- Topic for data-based discussion at trustee meetings
- Core measure of institutional performance

Closely Examine Institutional Policies and Practices for Unintended Consequences

- Look “underneath” data that show gaps in achievement; disaggregate and ask “why?” Examine policies and practices that might unintentionally place some students at a disadvantage, creating a “tilted” playing field. (Data, analysis, student voices.)
- Examine policies and practices originating externally to the college that may influence student success patterns (transportation policies, practices of feeder schools, employer policies, etc...)

Hold “Courageous,” Evidence-Driven Conversations

- No fault/”facts are friendly” dialogues based on data
- Examine data through a Structural Inequity lens
- Remember the power and persistence of the Iron Triangle

Implement and Scale-Up Research-Based Strategies

- “More to Most”



Keep Equity as the North Star

- Data-driven dialogue
- Professional development
- Institutional success criteria



MDC

307 West Main Street
Durham, NC 27701-3215

Phone: 919.381.5802

Fax: 919.381.5805

www.mdcinc.org

