

**Graustein Memorial Fund**  
**Our Theory of Change & Action 8.3.17**

This document seeks to outline our current understanding of the mission and to explain our emerging theory of change. As we transition from our last two decades of philanthropy into our new mission, we recognize that we need to both change the organization and how we focus on external structures and environments which we seek to engage and affect. We understand that both changes will emerge from learning from and partnering with those most affected by these structures and environments.

1. The Mission:

The mission of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund *is to achieve equity in education by working with those affected and inspiring all to end racism and poverty.*

We understand this mission is part of the larger work of bringing about justice and equity to the United States. We focus on education as both a process and tool for personal and social transformation, in addition to being a central institution in U.S. society. We work with those most affected to center the experiences and wisdom of communities of color and those living in or near poverty as indispensable to designing the solutions needed. We seek to inspire all to end racism and poverty, two of the most significant root causes of inequity in the United States. We focus our work in Connecticut as our home state and a state of stark inequity. Adoption of this mission asserts a need for the staff and trustees of the William Caspar Graustein Memorial Fund to do our work with sensitivity to the challenges and contradictions of promoting equity while being responsible for the deployment of vast resources and influence as a philanthropic organization.

As much as we know about the under resourcing of communities affected by racism and poverty, we are not looking to fund schools, districts, services and programs as much as we are promoting the social commitment to these needs. Philanthropic resources will never be enough to provide equitable or even adequate education infrastructure. A strong vision and commitment to the need for education as a support for every child must address the deficiencies of the educational system which is imposed on communities that have been denied adequate resources through systemic oppression and divested of the social, economic and political power to provide for themselves.

At this point in the development of our theory of change, we have gone as far as we can internally. Our next step is to fully engage communities in identifying the goals, strategies, and

benchmarks of success for this work. We also understand that this process needs to move significantly beyond a traditional listening or input session. We need to develop ways of partnering with and supporting the autonomy of communities divested of their power to direct their lives and communities so that we are not replicating the power dynamics we are seeking to transform.

## 2. Equity in Education:

- **Equity in education means** that we are using an equity lens to understand and transform the institutions and process of education in order to restore full agency and self-determination to communities affected by racism and/or poverty and to heal and repair the damage done by structural racial and economic oppression.
- **Equity in education means** that all students from birth – inclusive of their racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, linguistic, and other identities – are prepared to achieve academic and social-emotional success in school and matriculate fully prepared to live financially secure lives of their choosing.
- **Equity in education means** there are no gaps in opportunity or achievement and that students are treated as whole multi-dimensional people.
- **Equity in education means** that parents and communities of color or low income communities are equipped and supported in engaging in the decisions and processes required for the success of their children.
- **Equity in education means** that public education ceases to work as an institution perpetuating white supremacy and maintaining our current race and class inequities and divisions.

## 3. Steps for Change:

Most difficult to project is **what will be disruptive enough to produce significant change which is lasting and fundamentally different from the reality or systems which sustain that reality.**

Most systems exist to perpetuate a specific status quo and changing the system requires work that engages individuals in self-examination and communities in restructuring or building new systems which serve their interests effectively. Systems will only change when the individuals affected by them have the ability to shift their focus from fulfilling their immediate needs for survival and coping to developing a long-term vision for reclaiming the agency and empowerment that was taken from communities marginalized by racism and/or poverty. This

shift requires that those most affected understand and accept the viability of the process of structural change and their own power to play the roles required to bring those changes into fruition.

The specific goals, strategies, and benchmarks of success we use will be developed with those most affected by racism and/or poverty. We will address equity in education at the family, classroom, school, community, district, and state level. We will work with students, youth, parents, teachers, administrators, community members, and state officials. Our initial strategic approaches are:

- Build assets within children’s homes, schools, neighborhoods, and society to reverse the effects of structural racism and/or poverty**
- Invest in a small number of highly distressed neighborhoods as the center of our work against poverty and/or racism**
- Support people most affected, including students, youth, parents, teachers, educators, and caregivers, to navigate and change the barriers they see**
- Promote greater awareness and understanding of the disparities resulting from structural racism, the effects of poverty and the intersection of the two**
- Encourage healing in our society by supporting dialogue, action, policies and practices that advance racial and economic equity**

While our focus is on the work that will **change the way that education is designed and structured to support marginalized communities in achieving their goals and eliminating the barriers of racism and poverty**, we will support many approaches including, **but not limited to:**

- Community Organizing
- Leadership Development
- Community Building
- Community Development
- Policy Research and Advocacy
- Curriculum Development
- School and District Restructuring
- Pre/In-Service Professional Development
- Community Training & Education
- Emergency Response Grants & Meeting Space

In order for our resources to be engaged, these approaches should strive to **disrupt the way that education has developed** and we will prioritize approaches which are creative and capable of providing **new solutions and methods for providing the educational avenues and resources needed for success**. More importantly, these approaches should **strengthen community will and capacity to overcome racism and poverty in our broader society**. Let us listen to the voices of community in addition to the hopes and dreams for the best future possible for our children.