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## Leading for Equity: *Mini-Case Studies (6-8)*

**Focus:** During the bi-weekly Principals Meeting, the Alford School District presented leaders with the 2018-2019 pacing guide for the school year. Upon reviewing the pacing guide, you notice that the first quarter unit in eighth grade spends 15 instructional days memorizing and using the formulas for the volumes of cones, cylinders and spheres. Upon further inspection of the guide you notice that there are only five days dedicated to functions - specifically using functions to model relationships between quantities. When you inquire about the increased amount of time focused on volume during the first quarter of the year, and the subsequent days dedicated to solving real-world problems focused on using the volume formulas throughout the year, the Instructional Superintendent shares that on the previous year's state standardized assessment over 50% of students lacked proficiency around the skills; as a result, spending more instruction around volume formulas has been added to the second, third, and fourth grade pacing guides for all schools within the district.

**Coherence:** George is a fun, engaging seventh grade math teacher at Ronald McNair Middle School. The school serves a population where 90% of students receive free or reduced meals (FARMs) and 96% are students of color. During the October professional development session, you overhear Mr. George state the he typically spends an extra 15 minutes engaging in academic drills around addition, multiplication, and money because his students come to him with major academic deficits. Overhearing this conversation concerns you because at a 30-minute classroom observation last week you witnessed Mr. George engaging in this academic review with his students for 28 minutes during the 90-minute math block. Although his stated objective was for his students to show their understanding of adding and subtracting rational numbers, he spent the remaining time with students adding and subtracting numbers in groups of 5s and 10s on a number line. During the debrief when you inquired about his plan for meeting the objectives for the session, he stated that he has to have students practice these previous grade skills before moving into the seventh grade content because they struggle if he does not.

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**Rigor:** Mrs. Watkins is the parent of a current seventh grader, Allen, and two former students at Andrew Wilson Academy. She sends an email urgently asking for an in-person meeting with you over her concerns about her child's academic performance. During the meeting, she shares concerns about the quality of work her child has been receiving and her continued challenges with Mrs. Lally, Allen's math teacher. Mrs. Watkins stated that she felt her son was no longer growing academically and is quickly losing his interest in school. She shared that he used to love coming to school and now it is a daily battle to get him to attend. She produces samples of work, including one geometry assessment comprised solely of multiplication math drills and finding the area of squares, triangles, and rectangles and five homework packets comprised of stapled worksheets from *Teachers Pay Teachers*. When asked about her concerns with her son's academic performance and the challenges she's experiencing with Mrs. Lally, Mrs. Watkins says she feels the teacher is purposely giving her child worksheets that don't challenge him academically and lead to him getting further behind in math. Mrs. Watkins stated that Mrs. Lally has said to her on more than one occasion that she is overreacting because Allen is an A student and her concerns are unfounded. When you pulled Allen's latest benchmark assessment, you noticed that he scored at 30% proficiency level and was highlighted for Tier 2 intervention.

**Bias:** During a leadership team meeting at Cesar Chavez Academy for Advanced Studies, two instructional coaches engaged in a debate regarding the recent adoption of their humanities textbooks. When you intervened to inquire about the nature of the debate, the two coaches stated it was over a line in the textbook which stated, "The Atlantic Slave trade between the 1500s and 1900s brought millions of workers from Africa to the southern states to work on agricultural plantations." Mr. Bianchi, the eighth grade humanities teacher, took great offense to the wording in the textbook and argued that they should not be used the following year. Ms. Taylor, the middle school social studies master teacher, argued that they waited four years for a new textbook adoption and wouldn't have the funds to replace the book. She strongly believed that the books should be used despite the controversial language and that Mr. Bianchi was overreacting over word choice, further arguing that Mr. Bianchi was being too sensitive and that if the book was inappropriate to use, the textbook makers wouldn't have been able to publish it.

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**Deficit Thinking:** Theresa is a sixth grade math teacher at your school. She is in her fourth year of teaching and her first year of sixth grade math. She has 24 students in her classroom, six of whom are English Language Learners. When you enter her class for a 15-minute observation, you notice that all of the students who are English Language Learners are on the computers doing addition and subtraction drills while the remainder of the class is engaging in whole group instruction around solving algebraic expressions. As Teresa transitions the students to work in partners, you pull her aside and ask what the students on computers are working on. She responds by saying that her English Language Learners are working independently on reinforcing previous math skills because the whole group was working on introducing algebraic expressions and they would be using terms that those students would struggle to understand. Further, they would work on the algebra content with the ESOL teacher during their pull-out group in the afternoon. She states that she will teach them in a small group once the other students move into independent practice. After 10 minutes, Teresa calls the students to the kidney table where she has them solving problems such as  $X + 10 = 15$  on a worksheet. Throughout the observation, you notice that Teresa rarely uses appropriate math vocabulary with her class and only engages students 1:1 when working with them to solve the math equations.

**Resistance to Change:** During the Spring 2018 school review conducted at Excellence Charter School, it was noted that teachers were doing most of the thinking in the classroom, especially in the seventh and eighth grade math classrooms. The report provided by the reviewers identified high instances of teacher talk, lecture and whole group instruction as the primary instructional delivery style, and teachers over-prompting and providing answers before providing adequate think time as key practices that were undermining the school efforts around increasing student achievement. The organization dedicated the summer teacher professional development workshops to addressing these challenges along with hiring a dedicated middle school math coach to support the efforts. After two months of instruction, the school leadership team noticed that there was little change in the identified areas of improvement.

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