



# Equity Action Plan: Pursuing and Achieving Equity

## Action Steps to Build a Foundation for Equity in Your Schools

The Pennsylvania School Boards Association (2018) defines **equity** as the just and fair distribution of resources based upon each individual student's needs. Equitable resources include funding, programs, policies, initiatives and supports that target each student's unique background and school context to guarantee that all students have equal access to a high-quality education.

**Pursuing equity** requires that schools assess actions locally to overcome institutional barriers and create opportunities so that each and every child has the tools and supports necessary to achieve their highest potential. **Achieving equity** ensures that students' identities will not predetermine their success in schools.<sup>1</sup>

The Equity Action Plan was developed by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association to assist school entities to build a foundation for equity in school practice and structure.

The Action Plan includes **7 steps** which school leaders can use to pursue equity.

**Grounding each step, school leaders must include and affirm the voices of students, families and communities.** These steps can be approached non-sequentially, except for the last step.

Include and  
affirm the  
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communities

Identify and understand your district's demographics.

Analyze the data.

Define equity for your district and community.

Embed educational equity training into all levels of professional development for administration, staff and board.

Pursue and practice cultural awareness and proficiency.

Analyze policies and practices with an equity lens.

Develop an action plan and/or policy to incorporate equity into your district structure.

<sup>1</sup> See PSBA Equity Statement, 2018.



Before school entities begin the process of developing an equity policy (specifically), we suggest that school leaders dig in, work through, and incorporate the other steps into practice. For an equity policy to be effective, equity needs to be understood, acknowledged, shared and practiced consistently throughout the school community. These steps help to build capacity in the pursuit and achievement of equity.

## **Equity Action Plan: Pursuing and Achieving Equity Action Steps to Build a Foundation for Equity in Your Schools**

### **Include and affirm the voices of students, families and communities**

Student achievement is linked to the positive engagement of students and families in the education process.<sup>2</sup> Students, families and communities are considered “stakeholders and partners” and serve as essential resources.<sup>3</sup> Their input helps evaluate the effectiveness of school practices, provide context to the experiences of students, and develop necessary and innovative supports to serve the needs of students. School leaders must actively involve stakeholders specifically from communities that face barriers to engagement.

At every step of the action plan, districts should be actively engaging students and families. Their insight is valuable to incorporate equity in school practice and community engagement. Practicing inclusivity and transparency with your community develops trust among stakeholders.

### **Identify and understand your district’s demographic data**

It is important to understand the demographic makeup of the broader district community to develop an effective equity-focused approach that supports the needs of students, families and communities.

### **Analyze your data**

Practicing equity requires an analysis of data, both quantitative and qualitative, to measure the success as well as the disparities within a district’s education programs and practices. Data should measure how students perform academically, engage in school, and feel about their learning, safety and connections within school. Data also identifies existing opportunity gaps between groups of students, and between families and communities. Data also should support the process of identifying barriers that exist within the district.

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<sup>2</sup> Lee, J. & Bowen, N. (2006). Parent Involvement, Cultural Capital, and the Achievement Gap Among Elementary School Children. *American Educational Research* 43, 193-218; Belfeld, C. R. and H.M. Levin, H.M. (2007). *The Price We Pay: Economic and Social Consequences of Inadequate Education*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press; Sheldon, S. B., & Jung, S. B. (2015). *The Family Engagement Partnership Student Outcome Evaluation*. Johns Hopkins University, School of Education; Jeynes, W. H. (2012). A meta-analysis of the efficacy of different types of parental involvement programs for urban students. *Urban Education*, 47, 706-742.

<sup>3</sup> Willms, J. D., Friesen, S., Milton, P. (2009). What did you do in school today? Transforming Classrooms through social, academic, and intellectual engagement. (First National Report). Canadian Education Association; Willms, J. D. (2001). Student Engagement at School: A Sense of Belonging and Participation, Results from PISA 2000. Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development; Mitra, D. (2008). *Student Voice in School Reform*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.



### **Define equity for your district and community**

Equity and equality are not synonymous. Equality is treating all students the same, where students receive the same access to opportunities and resources. Equity recognizes that our students' experiences are different and require different supports, resources and funding to ensure that all students demonstrate academic growth and achievement. Having a clear definition of equity that is shared, understood, and practiced by members of your community sets the foundation for the comprehensive and consistent practice of equity.

### **Embed educational equity training into professional development for faculty, staff and board**

Equity training and professional development are necessary to pursue and achieve equity. School leaders must be aware of the definition of equity and its importance in providing a high-quality education for all students. Most importantly, school leaders must be aware of the tools, research and resources to practice equity. School leaders must also assess their role in perpetuating or dismantling inequity in schools and classrooms.

### **Pursue and practice cultural awareness and proficiency**

For school practices to be effective, systems must acknowledge and affirm the experiences and values of diverse cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnicities, religions and other factors<sup>4</sup>. Equity requires leaders to recognize and address their own biases and stereotypes about their students to create a positive and inclusive educational environment.

### **Analyze policies, procedures and practices with an equity lens**

Equity lens is a decision-making approach that ensures district leaders are not creating or exacerbating barriers to opportunity. Education leaders should be trained and practice an equity lens to develop more equitable policies and programs.

Opportunity gaps among students lead to divergent academic outcomes. Opportunity gaps can be attributed to barriers created by district policies, practices and procedures that create inequitable access to educational opportunities. “Nondiscriminatory” policies and practices are different from equity, both in legal application and practical implementation. Policies and practices that do not explicitly target groups of students may still disadvantage them.

For example, creating a Saturday school program to support students in math achievement does not appear to discriminate. However, students who do not have access to cars or reliable public transportation on the weekends face barriers to participate, and this could disparately impact low-income students. It is important to analyze policies and practices with an equity lens as this approach may surface previously unacknowledged barriers to opportunities and engagement.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See Arizona School Boards Association, 2017.

<sup>5</sup> See PSBA Equity Lens Approach.



## Develop an action plan and/or policy to incorporate equity into your district structure

Equity should serve as the foundation that permeates all aspects of the educational system.<sup>6</sup> Equity-focused action plans and policies can produce systemic change that benefits students. Having a clear plan of action is essential to grow knowledge, build capacity, include diverse voices, promote accountability, implement effective practices, produce partnerships and eliminate barriers to learning.

There is a distinct difference between an action plan and an equity policy. Action plans can serve as the blueprint to moving equity forward in a school or district — they provide the step-by-step elements for building the foundation and implementing equity in programs and activities. Action plans can be specific and time-sensitive, but do not hold the district legally liable. A policy is a foundational statement that charts the course of action and documents the board’s direction for the district. Policies carry the weight of local law and provide the board’s guidance for embedding equity into district identity and practices. Policies do not include specific procedures and are not time-sensitive. The success of equity-focused action plans or policies require stakeholder participation at all levels to make sure that the needs of the students are acknowledged and addressed.

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<sup>6</sup> See PSBA Equity Systems Continuum.

PSBA Equity Action Plan tool adapted and excerpted from Arizona School Boards Association “Leading for Equity: A Practical Framework for Board Discussion and Action.”

