

# Learning Bites: Engaging in Continuous Improvement



## Building Equity

*"Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance. Equity is giving everyone the supports they need to be able to dance. Justice is removing the barriers to dance."*

Miscellaneous Authors

There are a variety of definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Michigan Department of Education's working definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion are simply these:

- Diversity means differences or variety; this could be differences or variety of students, teachers, families, or programs.
- Inclusion means welcoming others. It also means individuals feeling like they belong rather than being marginalized or disregarded.

- Equity means fairness and access; we recognize that barriers exist and work to ensure that students and adults have fair opportunities and access to education and resources.

When applying a continuous improvement lens, a diversity of individuals results in a diversity of programs, policies, practices, and opportunities. When policies, practices, and opportunities are designed for those with the most barriers to succeed through a process of innovation and improvement, education will be more equitable.

The work of the Great Lakes and Plains Equity Center has influenced the application of equity to the educational setting. The Center refers to equity as follows: When educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people so

### Equality



Image source: [MobilizeGreen.org](http://MobilizeGreen.org)

The assumption is that **everyone benefits from the same supports**. This is equal treatment.

### Equity



**Everyone get the supports they need** (this is the concept of "affirmative action"), thus producing equity.

### Justice



All 3 can see the game without supports or accommodations because **the cause(s) of the inequity was addressed**. The systemic barrier has been removed.

that each individual has access to, meaningfully participates in, and has positive outcomes from high-quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group memberships. (Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center, 2012)

Finally, the National Equity Project has stated the definition very succinctly: Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop their full academic and social potential.

Various graphics have been used to represent the distinction between equality and equity. The graphic above demonstrates an environment where barriers are removed and fewer supports are necessary for equitable opportunities. However, we are not just striving for equity; we are also striving for justice, where everyone not only gets the supports they need to access opportunities, but where the cause of the inequitable opportunities is addressed so that supports become no longer necessary.

The authors of *Street Data* talk about the necessity of reorienting ourselves to working toward equity, or ensuring equally high outcomes for all, by

- Allocating resources (tools, time, money, people, support) to ensure every child gets what they need to succeed to thrive socially, emotionally, and intellectually.
- Cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that every person possesses. (*Street Data*, p. 29)

The National Equity Project identifies internal actions that contribute to addressing equity.

- Assess the culture of your district/organization
- Conduct an equity audit of your system - activate and center student voice; engage your parents, families, and community
- Develop a strategic plan
- Eliminate unfair policies, practices, and procedures
- Hold your staff accountable
- Prioritize the well-being of your students and staff

When engaging in the equity conversation, it is important to remember that this is a process that takes time and requires courage. It is not a topic for a single meeting or even for a single year. It requires ongoing commitment by the

organizational leadership and skills for those who are leading the work. It requires both personal and organizational work. It requires an ongoing organizational commitment to transformation and change for those who are leading and enacting the work. This requires both personal and high-quality professional learning over time. It also requires taking a systems view to ensure that policies, practices, and programs are fair.

For more information and for resources, consult the Building Equity Through MICIP toolkit.

## References

- Safir, S., and Dugan, J. (2021). *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* (First ed.). Corwin.
- Skelton, S., & Gorman, T. (2022). [\*Data System Integrity Tool for Equity-Focused Decisions\*](#). [Graph].