

WHAT ARE THE QUESTIONS ABOUT RACIAL EQUITY IN OUR SYSTEMS THAT COULD BE TRANSFORMATIVE, IF ANSWERED?

As state, district, school, and community leaders, it is critical to recognize the importance of making sure students of all backgrounds and abilities have an equal or equitable opportunity to succeed. Yet, historically, this goal of educational equity has been difficult to achieve. Our efforts have waxed and waned as a result of changing laws, demands, and conflicting priorities. But, achieving equity for Black students is as important now as it has ever been.

We all recognize that change is rarely easy, but it is nearly impossible without reliable and current information about student and teacher performance. Of additional importance are areas of our education systems that are or are not working for Black students, especially those who are or should be served under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

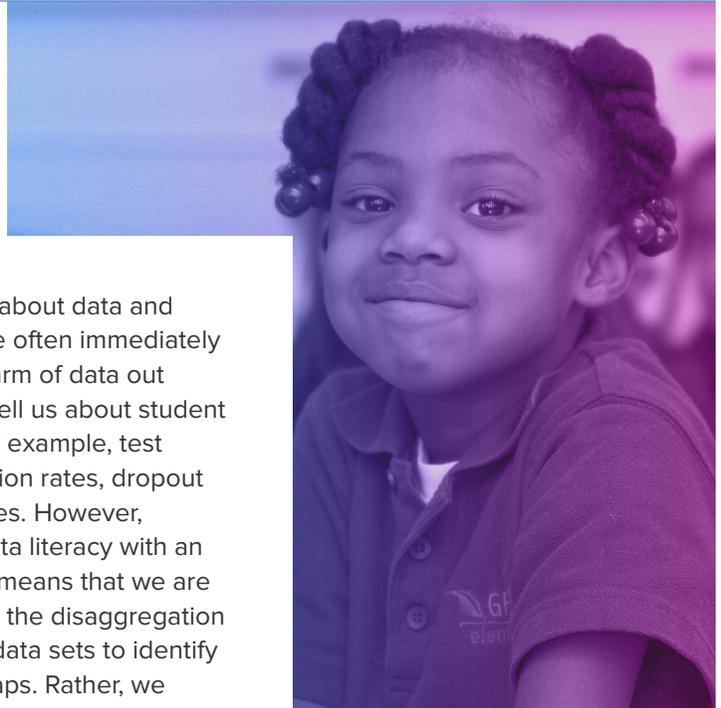
A promising way to continue our way forward is to be strategic and intentional about it, and to systematically identify and quantify the conditions for learning that contribute to group differences in outcomes and experiences. We must also use that information and data to be strategic and intentional about the resources and, equally as important, we must possess the moral fortitude to accept and address these challenges.

When we think about data and data literacy, we often immediately look to that swarm of data out there ready to tell us about student outcomes — for example, test scores, graduation rates, dropout rates, and grades. However, approaching data literacy with an equity mindset means that we are looking beyond the disaggregation of quantitative data sets to identify achievement gaps. Rather, we are examining data that is often qualitative and typically not part of our state and federal report submissions — data that is collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

In order to rethink data with an equity mindset, we approached a group of National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) Thought Leaders and asked them:

What are the questions about racial equity in our education systems that could be transformative, if answered?

After collecting their recommendations, we organized their list based on the characteristics of an equity mindset as outlined by Nadelson et al.¹ For many of the questions, we have included further information from the Thought Leaders as to why these questions are important, along with any references to research.



Advocates for Equity Needs | Disproportionality

- How do institutionalized policies, procedures, and research influence who is determined to have a disability through the sorting, classification, and placement of students? How can we challenge these cultural practices?²
- To what extent do educators have the skills, tools, and coaching support to move beyond identifying disproportionality and move to identifying actionable root causes?

For more information on our Thought Leaders, visit:

<https://ncsi.wested.org/meet-the-thought-leaders/>

Informal Leadership | Inclusive Practices

- How can we measure and improve inclusive principal leadership practices? How might those practices support a culture that is inclusive and rigorous for all students, teachers, and families?³
- Are screening, referral, and assessment practices, procedures, and tools unbiased and nondiscriminatory?

All Students Can Succeed

- When considering the achievement data in your system, are you completing an equity audit to determine who is and isn't being successful, then problem-solving around what the root cause of any deficiencies are and what next steps you can take to correct them? How can you support your districts, buildings, professional learning communities, or classrooms to make equity audits part of their regular processes?⁴
- How are you evaluating your impact on student learning?⁵ How are you evaluating your impact on any intervention you implement to improve outcomes for Black students?
- Do interventions account for students' cultural context as a part of implementation?

Culturally Responsive | Educator Recruitment, Development, and Support

- Are school staff prepared to work with students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds? Do school staff understand and value each individual child's and each group's unique cultural values and needs?⁶
- Are educators familiar with the beliefs, values, cultural practices, discourse styles, and other features of students' lives that may have an impact on participation and success, and are they prepared to use this information in designing instruction?⁷
- To what extent do our educator demographics match our student demographics, and if they do not match, what are the (a) short-term strategies to bring adults into our schools to fill this gap and (b) long-term recruitment and retention strategies?
- In what ways must inclusive education be defined in order to address past inequities and impact future opportunities for Black, Brown, and Indigenous youth with disabilities and their families?⁸

Informal Leadership | Meaningful Family, Student and Stakeholder Engagement

- How might the intersections of students', families', educators', TA providers', and researchers' identities and affiliations contribute to more inclusive and strategic alliances against exclusion and development of more equitable and just educational contexts?
- In what ways are educator preparation providers, local education agencies, minoritized families, and community stakeholders partnering to set shared goals and identify appropriate metrics?⁹
- What barriers do our families of Black students experience in meaningful participation?¹⁰
- How are you incorporating student voice data into your discussions around racism?
- How are you supporting the districts in your state or buildings in your district to collect and consider student voice?¹¹
- Is our school culture responsive and welcoming to students and families from culturally/linguistically diverse groups?
- Do culturally responsive practices inform our outreach to the community, including to families and community partners?

This list is not intended to be directive or exhaustive. We invite you to be a part of our crowdsourcing by submitting the questions that you are asking and answering in order to improve conditions for learning for Black students in your states, districts, communities, and schools.

Send your questions to: ncsi@wested.org

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Endnotes

- 1 Louis S. Nadelson, Rachelle Miller, Helen Hu, Na Mi Bang, and Brandy Walthall. World Journal of Education Vol. 9, No. 5, 2019. Retrieved from ERIC 2/2/21. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1232260.pdf>.
- 2 As Varenne and McDermott say, students do not become disabled on their own. School cultural context, educator beliefs, and a number of other factors influence who is considered disabled and the impact of such disablement.
- 3 The building-level principal is critical to creating and sustaining an appropriate culture that advances each student.
- 4 We frequently look at data, but we do not always look for trends in who is and isn't learning. My assumption is that the smaller the scale is (state level to the classroom), the less this happens. Completing an equity audit at the state level gives a macro view of the issues, but those issues need to be resolved in buildings and classrooms. Are the buildings and PLCs making it part of their progress monitoring to review who is and isn't learning? They need to overcome deficit thinking for all students and continually problem-solve when any groups are not making progress. They need to consider both achievement and progress. Too many only focus on achievement when progress is critical.
- 5 Professor John Hattie has created the Visible Learning™ database to determine what works best in education by comparing the results of over 1,600 meta-analyses from more than 96,000 studies on over 300 million students. He found that 96–97 percent of everything we do in education causes improvement. We can't be satisfied with not knowing if what we are implementing is working. We also can't be satisfied just with causing improvement. We need to know that what we are implementing is working and that it's working well enough to enable us to reach our goals. <https://www.visiblelearningmetax.com/>
- 6 Nancy O'Hara, Tom Munk, Kristin Reedy, and Cesar D'Agord. Success Gaps Toolkit Rubric. Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: How to Address Success Gaps, Rubric. IDEA Data Center, 2016. Retrieved 2/2/21. <https://ideadata.org/resources/resource/133/equity-inclusion-and-opportunity-addressing-success-gaps-indicators-of>
- 7 O'Hara et al.
- 8 There are so many different understandings of inclusive education, many of which are in name only and which on the surface many account for access without redistributing opportunities in relation to accumulated educational debt (Ladson-Billings) at the intersection of race and disability (Thorius & Tan).
- 9 Educator preparation programs often partner with LEAs in transactional ways, but including families/communities should shift the focus in important ways.
- 10 It's important to go beyond tracking attendance and engagement and instead be proactive about creating a welcoming environment for families, also acknowledging historical and ongoing trauma instead of blaming.
- 11 Regardless of what the adults involved in education do, none of it matters more than how students think and feel as well as the SEL and academic progress they make. Achievement data are often present, but student voice data on how the students think and feel are not.

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