Promising Practices in Creating an Equity Framework

Maxine T. Roberts and John Squires

Emerging practices in both K-12 and higher education hold great promise in the establishment of equity frameworks. The use of finely disaggregated data, the effort to track additional student groups, and related work, all help to establish policies and tools to monitor the impact of reform efforts to address inequities.

Several states provide examples of programs and initiatives that feature aspects of the equity framework outlined in the first paper in this series. This brief delves into specific state examples, including **Massachusetts**, where the department of higher education crafted an equity framework to address inequities for Black and Latino students, who are often placed into developmental education; and **Washington**, where a school district used disaggregated data in a meaningful way to provide services for its students.

These complete data representations provide insight within an educational system, while allowing for the tracking of outcomes to ensure effectiveness.

First, it is helpful to learn from several states and systems that have begun using finely disaggregated data to identify educational outcomes by student subgroups.

Illinois reports data on college enrollment and completion by both race and gender, creating subgroups (e.g., Latino females) of the traditional student groups defined strictly by race/ethnicity or gender. Public Act 096-1249, passed in 2012, permits such entities as the state board, community college board and the board of higher education to collect data from multiple entities and then to disclose these data to the longitudinal data system.

Part 3 of 3

This brief is the third installment in a three-part series on how the use of an equity framework can support success for students who are underserved in educational settings.

The series can be helpful for policymakers who are committed to identifying the barriers that impede success for students who are underserved in their state and working with their constituents to advance improved educational outcomes for these learners.

A Note on Terminology

This brief uses terms established by the federal government to describe racial and ethnic categories. Researchers have raised questions about some of these terms — like Hispanic or Latino — that may not accurately reflect the ethnic or gender composition of the groups they aim to describe.

The brief adheres to the federal language employed in legislation and used in programs. In doing so, however, it does not endorse that language. In cases where featured programs or legislation use the words, "Hispanic" or "Latino" authors adhere to the use of this language.

Massachusetts used finely disaggregated data to determine that the subgroup of students were negatively impacted in its postsecondary system, which appears as a case study later in this paper. Leaders from the department of higher education used a vision statement from the board of higher education's strategic framework to guide their work. In the document, authors explicitly identify students who are the focus of their efforts: "[T]o ensure that public higher education opens doors of opportunity and fulfilment for traditionally underserved populations, we elect to make our top statewide policy and performance priority — Significantly raise the enrollment, attainment and long-term success outcomes among underrepresented student populations. We intend this equity lens priority to guide campus and system performance measurement and promote initiatives and policies that collectively expand success for residents and for our economy and society."

Additionally, the success of strategies to improve the education system depends on efforts to track and report on more student groups. Some states have already expanded the number of groups that are included in the data collection and reporting process through programs that are designed to serve specific student groups.

The Education and Training Voucher program, created by H.R.2873, provides vouchers for education and training opportunities for youth in foster care or foster care alumni. States with these programs provide grants up to $5,000 for students who are adopted after age 16 or age out of foster care. In states such as **Michigan**, applicants must meet the Youth in Transition eligibility requirements to qualify for funding.

This example shows that expanding data tracking can provide a broader exploration of student groups being served within a specific system, whether K-12 or higher education.

Once states are finely disaggregating data and tracking it broadly, they can publicly share it in interactive dashboards to improve transparency and action.

A recent report showed that many states have interactive report cards showing disaggregated data; however, states do not always disaggregate data in the ways the federal government requires under the Every Student Succeeds Act. One practice enacted by some states is the use of interactive dashboards, not just for K-12 data, but for postsecondary data as well. These interactive dashboards allow users to access and manipulate data, thereby increasing transparency regarding educational outcomes.

In **Washington**, Highline Public Schools responded to its community stakeholders' requests for data disaggregated by race/ethnicity and provided these data on a regular basis, increasing accountability to the region's citizens and parents. Members of a workgroup initiated these efforts in this school district; the case study is featured later in this paper. The **Tennessee** Board of Regents has created a set of interactive Data Dashboards that allow users to obtain finely disaggregated data for every institution within the system. Similar dashboards have been created by the **California** School Dashboard and System of Support, **Kentucky** Council on Postsecondary Education, the Midwest Higher Education Compact and **Colorado** Rises. The University of **Maryland**, Baltimore County has also created a dashboard that allows users to view finely disaggregated data by race/ethnicity, gender and field of study.

Examples of Differentiated Supports

Disaggregating data and expanding categories of students are first steps to creating differentiated supports, which are designed to benefit specific groups of students.

In this report, three types of differentiated supports are listed: policy supports, academic programs and cohort programs. This list is not exhaustive but representative of the broad range of services that can serve specific groups of students. Each of these strategies is one piece of a puzzle and should be implemented with additional strategies that complement it. Specific supports will vary among institutions as they respond to the information they glean from discussions with representatives of the various student groups.

State Policy Supports

State legislation can be considered as an important part of providing differentiated supports.

In **California**, A.B. 705 reduced barriers to college-level coursework for students who are identified as needing developmental education. This legislation benefits students who are racially minoritized and those from low-income households who are disproportionately placed in developmental courses.

Colorado has achieved improved participation rates for Asian, Black and Hispanic student groups in dual enrollment courses after implementing a set of statewide policies. The legislative policy that is a precursor to this work details aspects of concurrent enrollment, its value and the rationale for enacting the legislation.

Large-Scale Efforts in States

Several states' higher education systems have employed components of an equity framework.

Arizona has created a Minority Educational Policy Analysis Center that is devoted to ensuring that any formal barriers to student success are identified and addressed through policy work, research and public discourse with marginalized student groups. As a result, the Arizona Commission for Postsecondary Education has partnered with Latino and Tribal communities to develop goals and actionable items to narrow outcome differences for these student groups.

California has initiated conversations with community stakeholders and created the Report for Improving Black and African American Student Outcomes. The report identifies specific barriers to success for African American students, including financial aid and feelings of isolation on campus, and seeks to improve access to and completion of educational and career opportunities by providing financial aid information, meaningful support, targeted outreach and strategic communications. The Black and African American Advisory Panel led the effort to create town halls, focus groups, and college fairs to obtain feedback from Black students and their families about challenges with enrolling in California community colleges and their recommendations to improve the process.

Wyoming's community colleges have created a strategic plan for postsecondary attainment, focusing on closing outcome differences for students categorized as first-generation, racially minoritized, adults and students from low-income backgrounds. The state's Educational Attainment Executive Council and Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education Attainment Task Force Collaborative — composed of state and local officials and leaders in business, industry and education — comprises the teams that created the foundations of the laws and policies for this plan.

Academic Programs

Academic programs can make a substantial impact in the lives of students; this has been demonstrated repeatedly when institutions try to engage in alternative methods of delivery and/or learning. The City University of New York's Accelerated Study in Associate Programs is one example of this type of program in **New York** that serves students who have been placed in developmental education courses. The program targets students who come from backgrounds categorized as low-income who are placed in developmental education. It provides them with various supports to assist their progress in college.

Other developmental education reform efforts in the United States, such as corequisite remediation, have the potential to benefit students who are racially minoritized and from low-income backgrounds, who are disproportionately placed in developmental programs. Following the successful implementation of the Accelerated Study in Associate Programs, Congress passed the Community College Student Success Act. This bill provides funding for community colleges that create and implement programs to improve students' rates of graduation or transfer to a four-year institution.

Advancement Via Individual Determination supports schools to create student-centered teaching approaches by providing professional development for educators and holistic support via engagement with community stakeholders. **Virginia** passed Va. Code Ann. § 22.1-209.1:3 allowing local school boards to use funds appropriated by the general assembly to establish such programs.

Cohort Programs

Cohort programs, designed for students with specific characteristics, are one of the most common and effective ways to implement differentiated supports for student groups, especially on a local level.

The University of **Idaho**'s College Assistance Migrant Program has been successful in helping migrant workers or their children navigate and succeed in higher education by providing them with support and mentoring. Federal funding allocated by Section 418A(d)(20 U.S.C.A. § 1070d-2), which provides special grants for students related to migrant and seasonal farm workers — supports this initiative.

In **Massachusetts**, the 100 Males to College is an initiative focused on expanding college enrollment for males in high school, primarily Black and Latino students. The federal College Access Challenge Grant serves as the funding source for this initiative. This grant — authorized under Section 781 of the Higher Education Act of 1965 — gives priority to students and families living at or below poverty.

Similarly, the Men of Southwest **Tennessee** program at Southwest Community College aims to improve outcomes of Black males in college. The U.S. Department of Education's Predominantly Black Institutions initiative — which gives preference and assistance to first-year Black male students — funds this program.

A Closer Look: Case Studies

Massachusetts

Narrowing the Focus in a Postsecondary Setting

For more than a decade, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education has focused on improving its outcomes in several areas, including students' college participation and attainment rates, workforce development and learning outcomes assessments. Addressing these areas was a valuable strategy; however, disparate outcomes among student groups persisted because of a lack of attention to key focus areas.

In response to this ongoing issue, in 2016, the department released a report focusing on outcome differences between racial ethnic groups, as well as a new focus on three areas: (1) improving college access and affordability; (2) closing outcome gaps; and (3) raising college completion rates. The report highlights outcomes differences among student groups, as evident in state data. By accounting for race and socioeconomic status, the data demonstrated that students who are white and from low-income households have a higher chance of graduating at a public institution in Massachusetts than students who are Black or Latino and from higher income brackets. The realities addressed in the report and a review of these data emphasized the need for the department to address racial equity specifically in its postsecondary system.

The attention to racial equity prompted the department to address an area in higher education that most affects racially minoritized students: developmental education. A review of data on developmental education disaggregated by Pell eligibility status, gender and racial/ethnic groups revealed that, compared with white students, Black and Latino students in Massachusetts were placed into these courses at higher rates — by 20 percentage points. This reality prompted the department's focus on outcomes for Black and Latino students. In addition, a mandate by the board of higher education prompted the department to create a racial equity framework that examines finely disaggregated data and engages representatives from student groups in meaningful conversations to address disparate educational outcomes.

While the developmental education reform in Massachusetts incorporates the use of structures that are available to all students regardless of race and ethnicity, such as multiple measures, the implementation of math pathways and the corequisite course model, the department recognized the need to identify and address outcomes specifically for racially minoritized students. Additionally, leaders focused attention on the barriers that can affect these students' placement and success in college-level, credit-bearing courses. With the support of the Lumina Foundation, the department is undertaking several efforts, including a policy and program audit that will remove existing policies, such as those for developmental education, that exacerbate racial inequity. The purpose of the three-year audit is to redesign the department's policy scheme to build a culturally sustainable public postsecondary system where racially minoritized students can thrive. This motion from the board of higher education authorized the department to sign a memorandum of agreement with the Lumina Foundation.

The department has created racial equity principles that undergird its work, as well as equity metrics to measure higher education completion rates and degree attainment for the state's Black and Latino students. To further its work, the department has also created the Professional Developmental Institute on Racial Equity in Pedagogy and Practice. Funded through discretionary grants, this institute is offered to faculty on the department's Developmental Education Advisory Board. Internal department data reveal that the agency's efforts have improved college-level course completion for white, Black and Latino students, but disparities persist. The department's work has also revealed the need for attention to the progress and outcomes of other groups that have been racially minoritized in their system, such as Asian, Asian American and Indigenous students.

Finally, based on the analysis of finely disaggregated data, the Massachusetts Department of Higher Education has focused its Equity Agenda on Black and Latino males, two subgroups identified as having disparate outcomes for educational attainment. The 100 Males to College program was developed in response to data that show the systemic and institutional failure to support Black and Latino male students. While the initiative is cohort based, providing peer-to-peer support, it integrates an early college approach, college and career advising, and partnerships between high schools, community colleges and universities. While the program is state supported, its implementation is at the local level, and it has shown great promise. For example, in Springfield, over 400 students have participated and made a 100% graduation rate and a 95% college entrance rate, with the remaining 5% entering the military or workforce directly. Once spread statewide, this program has the potential to significantly boost college entrance and success rates for Black and Latino males in the state.

The Results of Data Disaggregation in a K-12 District

A case study from the National Center for Educational Statistics of the Highline Public School District in **Washington** shows how data that are finely disaggregated can be used to improve the services offered to students and improve their academic outcomes. The district, which serves close to 19,000 K-12 students in 42 schools, created an equity plan in 2010. After it introduced the equity plan, the district began receiving requests from local community-based organizations to identify the academic performance of students from racial ethnic subgroups in the district. This prompted district leaders to finely disaggregate their student data. To assist with the process, the district collaborated with Washington's state education agency to collect this information via student enrollment data. Notice the level to which racial/ethnic categories are identified.
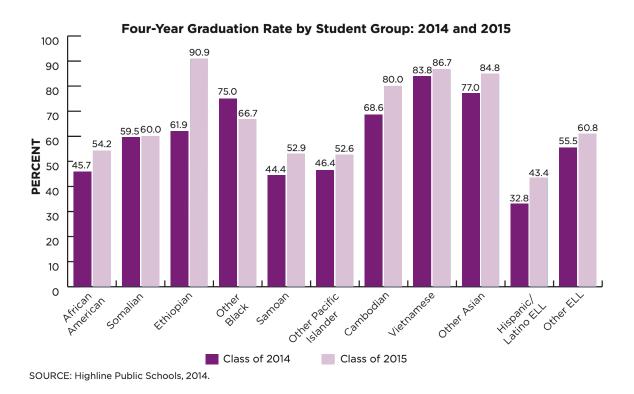
Data Collection Form at Highline Public School

Highline Public Schools' Racial/Ethnic Question

Student Ethnicity
Highline Public Schools is collecting more detailed information about the background of our students. The school district will use this information to report on the educational progress of groups of students, but never individual students.
The information you provide below is confidential.

Part One: Is your child of Hispanic or Latino origin? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Not Hispanic/Latino ☐ Cuban ☐ Dominican	☐ Spaniard ☐ Puerto Rican	☐ Mexican/Mexican-American/Chicano	☐ Central American ☐ South American	☐ Latin American ☐ Other Hispanic/Latino

Part Two: What race(s) do you consider your child? (Check all that apply.)

☐ Latino White ☐ Latino Black ☐ Other Latino ☐ African American ☐ Eritrean ☐ Ethiopian ☐ Somalian ☐ Other African ☐ White	☐ Asian Indian ☐ Cambodian ☐ Chinese ☐ Filipino ☐ Hmong ☐ Indonesian ☐ Japanese ☐ Korean ☐ Laotian ☐ Malaysian ☐ Pakistani ☐ Singaporean ☐ Taiwanese ☐ Thai ☐ Vietnamese ☐ Other Asian	☐ Native Hawaiian ☐ Fijan ☐ Guamanian or Chamorro ☐ Mariana Islander ☐ Melanesian ☐ Micronesian ☐ Samoan ☐ Tongan ☐ Other Pacific Islander	☐ Alaska Native ☐ Chehalis ☐ Colville ☐ Cowlitz ☐ Hoh ☐ Jamestown ☐ Kalispel ☐ Lower Elwha ☐ Lummi ☐ Makah ☐ Muckleshoot ☐ Nisqually ☐ Nooksack ☐ Port Gamble Klallam ☐ Puyallup	☐ Quileute ☐ Quinault ☐ Samish ☐ Sauk-Suiattle ☐ Shoalwater ☐ Skokomish ☐ Snoqualmie ☐ Spokane ☐ Squaxin Island ☐ Stillaguamish ☐ Suquamish ☐ Swinomish ☐ Tulalip ☐ Yakama ☐ Other WA Indian ☐ Other American Indian

Do grandparent(s) or parent(s) have Native American tribal affiliation?   ☐ Yes   ☐ No

SOURCE: Highline Public Schools, 2014.

Using this information, the district identified the groups of students who were successful and those who needed more support. This level of disaggregation also allowed for using these data in four areas:

1. Expanding the types of services available to students who immigrated to the United States.
2. Disseminating data about student performance (e.g., grades, graduation rates, etc.) by racial/ ethnic group. (See the example below.)
3. Identifying community-based organizations that can best support students' needs.
4. Meeting the district's strategic planning goals.

Graduation Data From Highline School District

Four-Year Graduation Rate by Student Group: 2014 and 2015

Student Group	Class of 2014	Class of 2015
African American	45.7	54.2
Somalian	59.5	60.0
Ethiopian	61.9	90.9
Other Black	75.0	66.7
Samoan	44.4	52.9
Other Pacific Islander	46.4	52.6
Cambodian	68.6	80.0
Vietnamese	83.8	86.7
Other Asian	77.0	84.8
Hispanic/Latino ELL	32.8	43.4
Other ELL	55.5	60.8

SOURCE: Highline Public Schools, 2014.

This initiative is an example of a system being responsive to the needs of student groups and working with community organizations to address educational outcomes for all student groups. By using disaggregated data, Highline Public School District was able to identify groups with disparate outcomes and then implement a series of differentiated supports and make improvements. By combining the intentional use of data with specific supports for underserved student groups, the district is positioned to sustain its efforts to better serve its citizenry.

Final Thoughts

States like Massachusetts and Washington have successfully used aspects of an equity framework to address the needs of student groups that have traditionally been underserved in education settings. By finely disaggregating data and designing differentiated supports to benefit subgroups of students who disappear in aggregate data, such states can illuminate and address systemic challenges that too often go unaddressed. Success in using the equity framework depends on resources to act on disparities and on cooperation among state-level decision makers, system-level administrators, and the K-12 and higher education institutions that are charged with implementing differentiated supports. Given the call for racial and social justice in a time of increasing economic uncertainty, designing and implementing an equity framework can improve a state's social, cultural and economic conditions and enrich the life prospects of its residents.

This brief is the third installment in a three-part series. Don't miss Part 1 and Part 2.

About the Authors

Maxine T. Roberts

As director of Strong Start to Finish, Maxine works with state leaders, researchers and technical assistance partners to address inequities in developmental education for racially-minoritized students, students from lower-income communities and adults. Prior to joining Education Commission of the States, Maxine directed after-school and college-preparatory programs, worked with community college faculty to improve their course outcomes in developmental education, and studied the factors that foster success for students of color in community college developmental math courses. Contact Maxine at mroberts@strongstart.org.

John Squires

John Squires is the executive director of advancement and planning at Cleveland State Community College in Cleveland, Tennessee. Previously, he served as the director of college and career readiness at the Southern Regional Education Board, working with states to increase student preparedness in literacy and mathematics. John has coauthored papers for New Directions in Institutional Research and IES What Works Clearinghouse, and his work has been recognized by the American Association of Community Colleges.