

# A Data Inquiry Guide

for Exploring Equity Issues and Solutions



A Guide for  
Administrators  
and Teachers

 MAEC

Center for Education Equity

## About MAEC

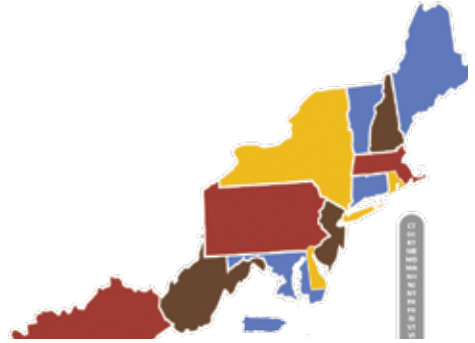
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MAEC is an education non-profit dedicated to increasing access to a high-quality education for racially, culturally, linguistically, and economically diverse learners. We work to promote excellence and equity in education to achieve social justice.

## About CEE

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MAEC established the Center for Education Equity (CEE) to address problems in public schools caused by segregation and inequities. As the Region I Equity Assistance Center, CEE works to improve and sustain the systemic capacity of public education to increase outcomes for students regardless of race, gender, religion, and national origin. CEE is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.



## Authorship

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This guide was developed through a partnership between MAEC and WestEd. Writers and developers of the materials were: Susan Villani, Susan Mundry, Velma Cobb, and Susan Henry, WestEd; and Phoebe Schlanger, Susan Shaffer, and Maria del Rosario (Charo) Basterra, MAEC.

We appreciate insightful and specific feedback on the pilot version of this guide from:

### **The Acton-Boxborough Public Schools, MA Data Inquiry Team:**

- Dawn Bentley, Assistant Superintendent for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and District Parent
- Deborah Bookis, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching & Learning
- Andrew Shen, Principal, Junior High School
- Larry Dorey, Principal, High School
- Dana Labb, Principal, Blanchard Memorial School
- Heather Haines, Mathematics Curriculum Specialist/Coach and District Parent
- Mike Balulescu, Social Studies Educator, Junior High School and Acton-Boxborough Education Association Co-President
- Brigitte Seeley, Data Specialist
- l'Esha Thomas, Counselor, High School
- Sara Mann, English Teacher, High School
- Sarah Mosher, General Education Teacher, Conant Elementary
- David Green, Social Studies/History Department Leader, High School
- Vin Wallack, General Education Teacher, McCarthy-Towne Elementary

**Marc I. Bernstein**, Supervisor IDEA Services Bucks County Intermediate Unit # 22, Doylestown, PA

**Steve Hamilton**, consultant on the needs of students who are LGBTQIA+

**Barrett Wilkinson**, MPPS, Equity Specialist, Portland Public Schools, Portland, ME

### **Disclaimer**

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MAEC is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. The contents of this guide were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government.

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# Table of Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
---------------------	----------

## Section 1

---

<b>Data Inquiry to Explore and Address Equity Issues</b>	<b>6</b>
What Is an Equitable School?	10
Why Is Data-Based Inquiry an Essential Component of Equity Work?	12
Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice Is Crucial	15

## Section 2

---

<b>The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle</b>	<b>18</b>
Skills and Dispositions for Collaborating in Data Inquiry Teams	19
Courageous Conversations	20
Equity Data Inquiry Cycle	28
Illustrating the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle	30

## Section 3

---

<b>Data Inquiry Cycle: Further Considerations</b>	<b>51</b>
Steps in Equity Data Cycle	51

## Section 4

---

<b>Case Studies</b>	<b>59</b>
Peppermill Middle School	59
Central Unified School District	77
Harbor Elementary School	92
MAEC Equity Audit Tool	108

## Section 5

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<b>References</b>	<b>142</b>
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# Introduction

## Using Data to Improve Equity

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This guide is designed to help teachers and administrators use data to continuously improve equity in schools. Educators can also use data to engage students, parents/guardians, the community, and others who want to make positive changes in schools to increase equity. The purposes of the guide are to:

- Introduce MAEC’s Equity Audit Tools as a framework for exploring and assessing educational equity;
- Introduce the concepts of culturally responsive practice and pedagogy and cultural humility as two underpinnings for equity in schools;
- Provide a step-by-step guide for supporting stakeholders to use data to identify equity concerns and solutions to increase equity;
- Introduce scenarios that describe common equity issues encountered in schools and classrooms and provide examples of solutions to address them;
- Guide educators and other stakeholders to create action plans to increase equity; and
- Increase awareness of how well schools are working for all students.

The learning objectives for using this guide are to:

- Develop a comprehensive understanding of the criteria of an equitable school and an equitable classroom;
- Learn how to use data to identify and address equity issues;
- Engage in necessary conversations about how your school or district is serving subgroups of students, including those of all races, ethnicities, gender identities/expression, sexual orientations, English Learner status, religions, and those eligible for free and reduced-price lunch (FRPL); and
- Develop action plans for increasing equity.

## Section Descriptions

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**Section 1** describes the importance of identifying a diverse Data Inquiry Team and how using data can help achieve a vision of an equitable school and an equitable classroom, beginning with the following questions:

- What is an equitable school?
- What are the criteria for an equitable school?
- Why are cultural humility and culturally responsive practice and pedagogy crucial to equity?

**Section 2** describes and illustrates an inquiry process for using data to investigate how well a school is meeting the needs of every student. It helps educators and other stakeholders uncover inequities in their school, which can be invisible until data help to reveal different perspectives about how students are being served. This section concludes with an illustration of the steps of the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle using an example of one equity issue.

**Section 3** provides guiding considerations, things to keep in mind, and potential pitfalls that may be encountered within each step of the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle. The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle includes nine steps, which are described in Section 2.

**Section 4** provides case scenarios on three additional equity topics.

**Section 5** provides selected readings.

## Language We Use in the Guide

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The language we use to describe groups of people reveals our knowledge, understandings, perceptions, beliefs, and subconscious biases. When writing this guide, we tried to use inclusive and concise language to describe subgroups. We consulted with people whose identities, roles, and lived experiences we are trying to include, as well as experts. In showing examples of data inquiry in the guide's scenarios to model the Data Inquiry Cycle, we included the types of disaggregated data that are typically collected and reported by school districts. These categories are not currently adequate to describe the full range of the populations in schools. In some ways, the existing categories mask some of the issues we are trying to address in this Guide.

We have struggled to agree on which terms to use. We recognize that there is not wide agreement and we welcome feedback. The following are the language choices we made for *A Data Inquiry Guide for Exploring Equity Issues and Solutions*.

### **Race / Ethnicity**

Race and ethnicity are different constructs and would best be treated separately. But the data available do not always report these separately. Race is a social and political construct that identifies humans by physical characteristics, namely skin color and hair texture, even though ethnicity is a construct that groups humans based on salient cultural differences, such as language and religion (Tatum, 1997). Because racial and ethnic groups frequently overlap (ethnicity is often coupled with race in statistics), ethnicity is not interchangeable with race. The U.S. Census Bureau website (2019) begins its section on race with the following statement: "The Census Bureau collects race data according to U.S. Office of Management and Budget guidelines and these data are based on self-identification. People may choose to report more than one race group. People of any race may be of any ethnic origin."

## **Poverty**

In a National Center for Education Statistics blogpost the authors acknowledge that “students [receiving] free and reduced price lunch” (FRL) are not synonymous with students experiencing poverty, yet “despite its limitations, the FRL data are frequently used by education researchers as a proxy for poverty since this count is generally available at the school level, while the poverty rate is typically not available.” (Snyder & Musu-Guillette, 2015)

We know that some parents/guardians who are eligible by income do not request FRPL for their children for a variety of reasons, so this data is not precise. Nevertheless, poverty is often a significant indicator of equity gaps, and FRPL is the metric we have chosen to identify students living in poverty.

## **Gender, Gender Identities, and Sexual Orientation**

To expand from a male/female binary classification of gender to more inclusive language, we use the acronym LGBTQIA+ to refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and additional sexualities, sexes, and genders that are not included in these letters. Most schools do not collect data using this inclusive language. We have formatted the data tables to include a column for female, male, and LGBTQIA+, noting when data on gender identity/expression and sexual orientation are not available.

## **Child-Raising Roles**

Often schools refer only to “parents” as children’s primary caregivers. However, this term is insufficient because parents are not the only people who raise children and youth. Guardians, caregivers, grandparents, and other family members are other terms that are often used. We have chosen to use Parents/Guardians to be more inclusive.

## **Minority**

As defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), the word “minority” refers to a part of a population differing from others in some characteristics and often subjected to differential treatment (e.g. the country’s ethnic minorities). According to the Connecticut State Department of Education Hiring and Selection Handbook, “While the terms ‘minority’ and ‘minorities’ are used frequently in educational policy and in other documents, when referring to race and/or ethnicity, we choose to use terms such as ‘students of color’ and ‘teachers of color’ or ‘LGBTQIA+’. If we are truly committed to comprehensive equity indicators, we must be aware of how our language either promotes or undermines these principles” (4).

## **Person First Language**

As we strive to be more aware and sensitive to our use of language, we can be more appropriate and inclusive in terms of groups of students by using person-first language. By placing the person first, the child’s race, eligibility for FRPL, or sexual orientation are aspects of the person, not the defining characteristics. For example, it is much more inclusive to refer to “a student receiving special education services” rather than “a special ed student.” We educate whole children; children are more than their membership in one particular group or their participation in specific programs (The Arc, 2019).

MAEC’s *A Data Inquiry Guide for Exploring Equity Issues and Solutions* is designed to help schools and districts provide equitable access to high quality education. The next section describes an iterative data inquiry cycle that has been used by schools and districts throughout the United States to identify and solve their equity gaps.





SECTION 1:

# **Data Inquiry to Expore and Address Equity Issues**

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# Data Inquiry to Explore and Address Equity Issues

This guide focuses on addressing equity in schools through the work of Data Inquiry Teams. Data Inquiry Teams are composed of people who are passionate about ensuring that every student has access to high-quality education. An ideal Data Inquiry Team has representatives from as many different roles and different cultural identities as possible. The diversity of the Data Inquiry Team strengthens the Team's ability to analyze data from diverse perspectives and develop goals and action plans that are culturally relevant and meaningful for all members of the school community. This Team engages in a Equity Data Inquiry Cycle that includes nine steps for analyzing and using data to take action to increase equity.

This section provides background on the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle and the importance of using data to inquire into equity issues. It defines culturally responsive practice and pedagogy and provides a self-assessment tool to use to examine how proactively your school promotes equity. As you read through this section, consider the following questions for discussion:

- What makes a school equitable?
- How equitable is our school?
- How do we know how equitable our school is?
- What is culturally responsive practice and pedagogy and how do we develop this capacity in our school?

MAEC's Equity Audit consists of three tools that help educators identify priority areas for attention by responding to questions about equitable policies and practices:

1. Criteria for an Equitable School
2. Criteria for an Equitable Classroom
3. Teacher Behaviors that Encourage Persistence

This guide is framed around these criteria. The tools are included in Section 5.

The diversity of students in today's public schools is a strength. Ensuring that all students gain the knowledge and skills to be successful is a responsibility for all educators. Meeting the needs of all students requires that schools provide students with access to high-level curriculum, skillful and responsive teachers, safe and inclusive learning communities, and additional support services they may need regardless of a student's race, ethnicity, gender identity/expression, sexual orientation, ableness, socioeconomic status, religion, English language proficiency, and other factors. Every student must have a fair and equitable opportunity to succeed. Educators must understand and meet the needs of children who live in poverty or low-income families and those who have experienced trauma.

**Table 1**

<b>Percentage distribution of public-school students enrolled in prekindergarten through 12th grade, by student subgroup: Fall 2015</b>	
Native American (listed as American Indian by NCES) /Alaska Native	1%
Asian/Pacific Islander	5%
Black	15%
Latinx	26%
White	49%
2 or more races	3%
English Learners	10%
Students receiving Special Education services	13%

National Center for Education Statistics, 2019.

While many students who are White are affected by poverty, Black, American Indian, and Latinx children come from disproportionately low-income households (Yang, Granja & Koball, 2017). Nearly one in three Native American/Alaska Native children and more than one in four Black and Latinx children were poor in 2017, compared with one in nine White children. (Children's Defense Fund, 2018). Children who are economically disadvantaged are more likely to experience trauma and have limited access to early childhood learning opportunities. They often miss school and face difficulties completing homework assignments because they lack access to the internet. Many attend schools where more than half of their peers are also poor and most of

these schools do not have adequate resources to provide the essential support needed to ensure the success of all students. Years of achievement results point to the necessity to address needs of children living in poverty in the US. For example, in 2017, at grade 4, the achievement gap in reading between students at high-poverty and low-poverty schools was 35 points, grade eight was 31 points; for both grade levels the gap was not measurably different from the corresponding achievement gaps in 2015 (NAEP, 2017).

In an online survey conducted by Harris Poll, students who are LGBTQIA+ experience higher rates of victimization as compared with their peers who are non-LGBTQIA+ (GLSEN, 2016). “Bullying puts youth at increased risk for depression, suicidal ideation, misuse of drugs and alcohol, risky sexual behavior, and can affect academics as well. For students who are LGBTQIA+ youth, that risk is even higher” (StopBullying.gov, 2017).

Ensuring that all students, with their varying needs and personal contexts, have fair and equitable access to learning across the United States is not a simple charge for school leaders and educators. Students’ circumstances and needs vary widely, and school staff need the requisite understanding of students’ circumstances and needs to be able to provide all students with the experiences and supports they need to learn and thrive. There are many disparities that need to be addressed to ensure student success; we discuss four below.

## Disparity in Discipline

Educators and administrators need to examine disciplinary practices and exclusion from school and how they affect access to instruction and achievement. Studies have highlighted notable disparities in disciplinary practices in U.S. schools, particularly for students of color, students with emotional, behavioral, and cognitive disabilities, and youth who identify as LGBTQIA+.

Consider some statistics about school suspension:

- During SY2015-2016, school administrators suspended children with disabilities at rates more than twice those of children without disabilities (8.6% compared to 4.1%, respectively) (Child Trends, 2019). Students with disabilities who are Black were suspended approximately three times as much as their White peers. “For kids with disabilities, they are getting a lot more in terms of supports and service when they are in school,” said Daniel Losen, the Director of the UCLA Civil Rights Center that led the study, “so when they are missing school because they are suspended, they lose more” (Sparks, S.D., 2018).
- During 2011-2012, students who are male were suspended nearly three times as often as students who are female, though females and males are each roughly half of the student enrollment (Office for Civil Rights, 2014). Note that data on students who are LGBTQIA+ was not collected.
- 63% of students surveyed who are LGBTQIA+ experienced school discipline (e.g. detention, suspension), compared with 46% of their non-LGBTQIA+ peers (GLSEN, 2016).

Suspending students just once doubles the chance they will drop out of school and triples the odds they will have contact with the juvenile justice system (Balfanz, Byrnes & Fox, 2013).

## Disparity in Access to Rigor

Students of color have a disproportionate lack of access to rigorous curriculum. For example, “a quarter of high schools with the highest percentage of students who are Black and students who are Latinx do not offer Algebra II; a third of these schools do not offer chemistry. Fewer than half of high school students who are Native American and Native-Alaskan have access to the full range of Math and science courses in their high school” (Office for Civil Rights, [Issue Brief 3], 2014, p.1). Groups of students may be underrepresented in higher level courses when they are offered. The College Board’s AP Report to the Nation reflected that while students who are Black comprised 14.5% of the overall graduating class, they made up only 9.2% of the students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses (AP Data, 2014).

## Disparity in Access to Effective Teachers

Students of color and other traditionally underserved students often have disproportionate lack of access to experienced and effective teachers. Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states must report on whether economically disadvantaged students and students of color are taught at disproportionate rates by teachers who are inexperienced, out-of-field, and/or ineffective. The state must also report on the progress of closing gaps in any disproportionate rates.

Concerns with equity are based on data that indicate students' access to high-level learning varies according to many factors, high among them race, socioeconomic status, and special needs. Schools and districts must develop the skills and establish the ongoing routines needed to understand their local academic and behavioral data. By doing this, they can understand how their students — as individuals and groups — may experience disparities that undercut their ability to achieve successful outcomes. This is a priority for all schools to address, as reflected in civil rights laws and the U.S. Department of Education's 2015 requirement for every state to ensure students' access to qualified educators (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

## Disparity in Feeling Safe in School

The GLSEN's National School Climate Survey (2017) included 23,001 students from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and five US territories, between the ages of 13 and 21. Results from the survey included:

- 87% of the students who are LGBTQIA+ experienced harassment or assault based on personal characteristics, including sexual orientation, gender expression, religion, race and ethnicity, and disability;
- 75% of the students who are LGBTQIA+ avoided school functions because they felt unsafe; and
- 45% of the students who are LGBTQIA+ missed school at least one day in the past month.

Students who are LGBTQIA+ did not perceive the school as a safe environment.

- 62% of the students who are LGBTQIA+ experienced discriminatory policies or practices at school.
- 55.3% of the students who are LGBTQIA+ who were victimized in school did not report the incident to school staff, most commonly because they doubted that effective intervention would occur or feared the situation could become worse if reported.
- 60.4% of the students who are LGBTQIA+ who did report an incident said that school staff did nothing in response or told the student to ignore it.

If over half the students who are LGBTQIA+ did not experience support from school staff and more than half did not even report to school staff being victimized, school staff likely did not know the extent of the equity concern for this vulnerable population.

## What Is an Equitable School?

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An equitable school provides the climate, process, and content which enable students and staff to perform at their highest level, including access to equitable resources and appropriate instructional strategies for each student. This section introduces an Equity Audit, composed of three tools to explore and assess equity in your school and classroom. The Equity Audit: Criteria for an Equitable School (MAEC, 2021) emphasizes the key role of a school's mission, environment, and partnerships in ensuring fair and equitable access to learning for all the students in their charge. MAEC identified the six overall criteria of an equitable school:

1. Has a clear mission that is committed to equitable access, processes, treatment, and outcomes for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status.
2. Provides an inclusive visual environment both digitally (online portals, materials, etc.) and in person (halls, displays, classroom exhibit pictures, etc.). This effort considers the physical environment from which teachers broadcast to make sure it is appropriate and encouraging for all students.
3. Reflects and works in collaboration with the various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, language, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disability groups within the school community.
4. Works in partnership with families, the business community, and civic and community organizations to enrich the curriculum, provide consistently high expectations for all students, and develop support and opportunities for all students.
5. Provides ongoing, embedded, and systematic professional learning (i.e., training, coaching, communities of practice) opportunities to support staff in implementing equitable learning for all students (whether in-person, hybrid, or distance learning).
6. Promotes social-emotional well-being for students and families to develop a supportive and inclusive learning community that promotes the cultural assets that they bring to their classrooms.

The Equity Audit provides a clear definition of equity in schools from which school leaders can launch a data-informed inquiry process to build a shared understanding of the ways in which the school does or does not enable all students to perform at their highest levels. In a robust inquiry process, participants are supported as they examine multiple types and layers of local data, engage in honest conversations about equity, develop and act on shared plans for addressing inequities, and modify and sustain those actions until all of the school's students demonstrate academic and personal success. The Audit outlines seven key areas: (1) school policy, (2) school organization/administration, (3) school climate/environment, (4) staff, (5) assessment/placement, (6) professional learning, and (7) standards and curriculum development. Educators can use the Equity Audit as a self-assessment tool to identify equity improvement targets.

**Table 2**

Equity Area	Sample Questions/Criteria from MAEC Equity Audit
School Policy (14 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the school/school system have a specific educational equity policy in areas related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?</li> <li>• Has the school developed an equity plan of action based on the policy, mission statement, and analysis of its current equity needs?</li> </ul>
School Organization/ Administration (14 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the data regularly collected, disaggregated, and analyzed in the following areas and by different ethnic groups?               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>___ Course level enrollment</li> <li>___ Grade point average/achievement scores</li> <li>___ Standardized test scores</li> <li>___ Student discipline, suspensions, and expulsions</li> <li>___ Bullying or harassment</li> <li>___ Participation in school activities and honors</li> <li>___ Attendance</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
School Climate/ Environment (11 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does the visual environment, including online school portals, virtual and in-person classrooms, bulletin boards, displays, hall decorations, and offices, show diverse students of varied racial, ethnic, language, gender, gender identity groups, and people with disabilities in a variety of roles?</li> </ul>
Staff (12 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is the school staff's composition representative of the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national origin, language, sexual, gender identity, gender expression, religious, sexual orientation, or disability status composition of the student body and larger school community?</li> </ul>
Assessment/ Placement (7 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are staff members trained to identify equity needs and to utilize instructional methods to meet the learning preferences of diverse students and groups in a virtual classroom environment?</li> <li>• Are multiple instruments used for student assessment, including performance measures?</li> </ul>
Professional Learning (16 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are opportunities provided for staff at all levels and in all job descriptions to obtain in-service training regarding educational equity issues and concerns relevant to specific populations?</li> <li>• Are professional learning techniques delivered authentically and in a way that is relevant to diverse groups?</li> </ul>
Standards & Curriculum Development (16 criteria)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are all students held to the same standards?</li> <li>• Are teachers encouraged to use and provide examples produced by people of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, national origins, languages, sexes, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, religions, or disability statuses as part of the curriculum?</li> </ul>

Source: Equity Audit: Criteria for an Equitable School. (MAEC, 2021).

In addition to the Criteria for Equitable Schools, there are Criteria for an Equitable Classroom and Teacher Behaviors that Encourage Student Persistence. These tools can assist schools in drilling down to daily actions in the classroom to ensure every student has a fair opportunity to learn and succeed.

To assure equitable classrooms and schools, educators need to identify and address barriers to equitable access as identified in the Equity Audit tools. Potential barriers include

- Making equity a priority;
- Finding time and resources for planning;
- Being willing to look at all aspects of education in schools and the district and have open conversations about what is discovered;
- Engaging faculty and staff in looking at unintended bias in school policies and their practices;
- Engaging students and encouraging student voice and agency in addressing equity; and
- Engaging parents/guardians and the community in the pursuit of equitable access

Forming a Data Inquiry Team is a way to enlist the commitment of people who represent the members of the school community in thinking together about equity. The district must make clear that it will ensure that every student has access to a safe and respectful environment, highly effective teachers, a relevant and appropriate curriculum, and opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. This guide provides resources throughout to inform the work of Data Inquiry Teams, as well as other teams that will do this necessary and important work.



## **Why Is Data-Based Inquiry an Essential Component of Equity Work?**

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The Center for Public Education (2016) proposes that school leaders who want to make sure their schools are equitable should first look at their data to explore the following critical questions:



**Table 3****Critical Equity Questions**

Critical Issue	What we know	What we want to know
What is our performance by school and by student group?		
Do all schools have adequate funding? Do funds flow to schools according to need?		
Do we provide high-level curriculum in all of our schools? Do our high schools offer course sequences in high-level Math from Algebra I to Calculus, and Science from Biology to Physics?		
Do we offer AP courses and is access open to all? Do we provide extra supports to struggling students and have policies in place to make sure they get the benefit of these supports?		
What are the qualifications of our teaching staff? Is teacher quality distributed equitably among schools as well as within the school building? Do all student groups have fair access to the best teachers? Are teachers well-supported? Do we reward teachers who serve the neediest students?		
How do our overall discipline rates compare to other districts? Do we suspend students more often than other districts? Are discipline rates similar for all student groups? Do we have enough school counselors and trained mentors to support students and work in partnership with families?		
Do we monitor our progress, and if so, how frequently? Do we make adjustments when needed? Are all of our students learning, engaged, and on track to graduate college- and career-ready?		

Source: Adapted from the Center for Public Education (Barth, 2016).

To confront such questions, disaggregated data must be collectively examined, discussed, and interpreted. In some cases, teams will gain new understandings by analyzing students' achievement outcomes alongside disciplinary outcomes because disciplinary incidents often arise when students and teachers are having frustrating interactions over academics. In other cases, teams will need to question and discuss the intersections and variations of data within and across racial and other categories. Gleason and Gerzon (2013) provide a useful example to consider:



While a school's demographic data may indicate that 45% of the students are Black, they may be children of middle-class, college-educated African Americans; newcomers from Haiti with some formal schooling; fourth-generation African Americans whose ancestors never knew school success; or children from Nigeria with no schooling who only speak a little-known dialect (p. 2).

If teams focus only on broad, racial groupings, they may not fully understand who their students are and why they are, or are not, succeeding. Ensuring that all students have fair access to high levels of achievement requires digging into data at multiple levels and engaging in rigorous discourse to understand and address the many factors influencing students' opportunities to learn.

Predictable, structured cycles of inquiry conducted over time are a critical complement to data use. These cycles guide, deepen, and sustain school improvement over time. School-based teams engaging in this work benefit from ongoing structured or facilitated inquiry and conversation. This will help to ensure that deeper reasoning, continuous critiques, and re-examination of assumptions, beliefs, values, and practices in relation to the data are being considered (Boudett et al., 2013; Love, 2009; Love, et al., 2008; Nelson et al., 2012). Schoolwide team inquiry practices are associated with improved student learning outcomes. Gallimore, et al. (2009) also found that schools using an inquiry-focused protocol significantly increased student achievement and that teachers who used an inquiry protocol shifted their attributions of improved student performance from external sources to their own instruction. They suggest that this was related to the Data Inquiry Teams sustaining their attention on a given issue long enough to develop and test solutions.

This guide describes a practical data-based inquiry cycle and provides resources to support teams in using this cycle to examine relevant data and sustain focus on achieving equitable access to high-level learning for all students.

## Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Practice Is Crucial

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Developing culturally responsive pedagogy and practice and committing to its necessity can greatly enhance the equity work that occurs in school-based inquiry teams (Jackson, 2011). Cultural proficiency is a mindset, or some argue a process, that shapes the assumptions, interpretations, attitudes, descriptions, and responses to issues that arise in diverse environments. It involves having an awareness of one's own cultural identity and views about differences, as well as the ability to learn, respect, and build on the varying cultural and community norms of students and their families. Developing cultural proficiency in schools can contribute to shared commitments to address disparities among diverse student populations in schools (Lindsey et al., 2009). Cultural proficiency assumes that one can learn more information about other groups and thereby be more sensitive to other groups' needs or interactions. Cultural humility, a concept that is finding its way into education from the health fields, emphasizes self-reflection and self-critique to address power imbalances where none ought to exist and the development of partnerships with people and groups who advocate for others (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Successful equity work in schools relies on sustained learning about cultural differences, as well as critical self-reflection about our own mindsets, beliefs, and commitments about others, particularly as disparities are highlighted in the school's data.

The Cultural Proficiency Continuum (Lindsey et al., 2009) is a useful framework for engaging groups in examining their cultural skills and mindsets over time. The framework provides explanations and examples to describe a continuum of responses to diversity. These range from cultural destructiveness (e.g., exclusion policies and attitudes; perception of cultural differences as impediments rather than assets) and cultural blindness (e.g., denying racial or color differences among students) to cultural competence (e.g., recognition of cultural differences; support and modeling of culturally responsive practices) and cultural proficiency (e.g., advocacy and alliances with groups other than one's own). The continuum can assist groups to develop a common language, identify ways that current cultural skills might be undercutting the groups' work, structure deeper data inquiry, and launch an examination of assumptions and hypotheses about groups of students in the school. In order for groups to do so, the school needs to be a safe and supportive environment that encourages risk-taking. Carter et al. (2014) offer some closing thoughts on the role of productive discourse in solving equity issues: "If we are to undo the racial inequities that continue to plague us, we must find constructive ways to talk about them and intervene constructively and consciously to end them" (p 2).



SECTION 2:

# The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

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# The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle is a process to examine how your school is addressing criteria for equitable schools. The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle helps educators and other stakeholders uncover inequities in their schools that they can address. Often such inequities are subtle and may be invisible until educators and other stakeholders have the opportunity to examine and discuss data to reveal different perspectives on how students are being served. This section describes how to follow the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle step by step to explore a given equity issue.

An Equity Data Inquiry Cycle is a structured and supported routine to slow things down so that an equity issue that keeps coming up can be investigated, considered, and addressed systematically. When educators assemble as a team to engage in a thoughtful equity data inquiry cycle, they seek to understand more than what is evident on the surface.

## Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.
2. Identify questions about the equity concern.
3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence the equity concern.
4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.
5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices, and also consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.
6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.
7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.
8. Celebrate successes.
9. Start the cycle again.

The Data Inquiry Team asks questions to understand what underlying assumptions or beliefs are driving actions, decisions, and policies, and then collects more data to answer those questions. The Data Inquiry Team avoids jumping to quick conclusions or launching impulsively into action. The Team looks for root causes of equity concerns by exploring why the equity concerns are happening (i.e., by using tools for root cause analysis included in this guide) to generate deeper insights about the possible causes of the equity concern. A key question Data Inquiry Teams ask is, “What do we as a school need to know and be able to do to address the equity issue?” The Data Inquiry Team is careful to only identify root causes that the school or district can act on and has the influence to change. For example, causes of discipline that result in a disproportionate number of students who are male and who are Black being suspended, that the school has control to change, may include: the school’s zero tolerance policy, the code of conduct, and teacher training in classroom management. These are “actionable” issues the school can examine to address disparities in school suspensions.

Once the Data Inquiry Team identifies a set of root causes, it investigates the research on possible interventions and best practices about how they will address the equity concern. In addition, the Team also identifies areas of strength to determine if there are ways to build on those strengths to partially address the root causes. Equity concerns are often complicated, so the Team needs to prioritize specific areas to address first. The Data Inquiry Team will establish S.M.A.R.T. goals: goals that are Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-related [more frequently called Time-bound] (Doran, 1981). Then the Data Inquiry Team develops implementation plans for each S.M.A.R.T. goal and monitors them frequently to determine whether the interventions the Team chose to implement are addressing the root cause(s) of the equity concern. The Data Inquiry Team makes necessary implementation adjustments and sustains focus on bringing about the desired changes in outcomes for students.

The Equity Data Inquiry Cycle is an iterative process, so the Data Inquiry Team keeps engaging in the cycle, either to address other root causes that it had initially identified, or to identify and address other issues.

This guide draws from two data-inquiry models, Collaborative Inquiry (Love, 2009) and Data Wise (Boudett et al., 2013). Members of a team may have different levels of experience with an Equity Data Inquiry Cycle. This guide focuses on each step in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle to help the Data Inquiry Team take time to address critical steps, enhance progress toward deeper understanding, and find solutions that will achieve results. See Section 5, Key Resources for Exploring and Addressing Equity Issues, for suggested readings and comprehensive resources to support this work.

## **Skills and Dispositions for Collaborating in Data Inquiry Teams**

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Educators in Data Inquiry Teams analyze and discuss disaggregated data to broaden and deepen their thinking. They are driven by the data to talk about issues that are sometimes difficult to discuss, such as institutional practices that are biased. Prior to engaging in data inquiry, the team needs to establish and agree to use norms for discussing data and working together effectively. Collaborating and engaging in important discussions about equity issues requires skill and courage.

# Courageous Conversations

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A skill set that is essential for Inquiry Teams is the ability to engage in courageous conversations through a safe and trusting team culture that will help promote honest conversation. Glenn Singleton (2006) developed four agreements for courageous conversations from his work with teams addressing racial achievement gaps. Conversations about race between people of different races are too often avoided because people feel uncomfortable. Singleton's agreements can help a Data Inquiry Team navigate these conversations.

## The Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations

1. **Stay engaged** means "remaining morally, emotionally, intellectually, and socially involved in the dialogue."
2. **Experience discomfort** acknowledges that discomfort is inevitable, often when people talk about race, and encourages a commitment to name the discomfort and continue discussing issues.
3. **Speak your truth** means saying your thoughts and feelings without adjusting for what you anticipate might be the reaction of others.
4. **Expect and accept non-closure** names the discomfort of uncertainty and advocates that people "hang out in uncertainty" and not rush to find solutions, especially because lasting change requires deep dialogue over time (Singleton, 2006).

In addition, Singleton created the Courageous Conversations Compass, which is a tool to guide participants through conversations by helping them know about themselves and also recognize the directions from which other people are coming. (Singleton, 2015).

## The Courageous Conversation Compass

**Purpose:** "as a personal navigational tool to guide participants through these conversations...helps us to know where we are personally as well as to recognize the direction from which other participants come" (Singleton, 2015).

*The 4 Points are:*

- **Emotional:** responding to information through feelings (when racial issues strike us at a physical level and causes sensations such as anger, sadness, joy, or embarrassment).
- **Intellectual:** response to a racial issue or information may be to personally disconnect or to search for more information or data. Our intellectual response is often verbal and based in our thinking.
- **Moral:** responding from a deep-seated belief that relates to the racial information or event. Moral views are from the "gut" and may not be verbally articulated.
- **Social:** connecting and responding to racial information through actions and behaviors (Singleton, 2006).



The Acton-Boxborough Regional School District created their Community Agreements in accordance with Singleton's Four Agreements and other agreements. The agreements they use for conversation are:

1. Speak openly, directly, and respectfully. Bring your authentic self. Be genuine with each other about ideas, challenges, and feelings. Use and receive "I" statements with respect.
2. We are all at different places in our journey with this work. No matter what, we all bring value. Give colleagues the benefit of the doubt; ask a question when feeling defensive. Examine your reactions and respond mindfully: Intent vs. impact.
3. Tend to your own balance of talking and listening. Be aware of equity of voice. Invite colleagues to share. Listen to understand and take responsibility for your own learning.
4. Expect and accept discomfort and non-closure. There is a difference between safety and comfort. This is difficult work. We may leave with more questions than answers. This is a journey, not a checklist.
5. Remain humble, present, and engaged in our work. Approach this work with humility and a willingness to make mistakes. Participate to the fullest of your ability.



## Developing a Culturally Responsive Data Inquiry Orientation

Another resource that will help data inquiry teams is from a publication by the Institute of Education Science (IES). These guiding questions employ a culturally responsive data inquiry orientation. As the publication described, this entails:

- Seeking a broad range of data sources about students as learners in schools, as humans with personal histories and as children with unique experiences and identities.
- Identifying and interrogating bias in analysis and interpretation of the information they collect and using those understandings about students to design learning experiences, choose instructional materials, and implement appropriate interventions as necessary to support student learning.

### Guiding Questions

#### *Supporting Teacher Candidates Development of Culturally Responsive Data Literacy* Developing a Culturally Responsive Data Inquiry Orientation

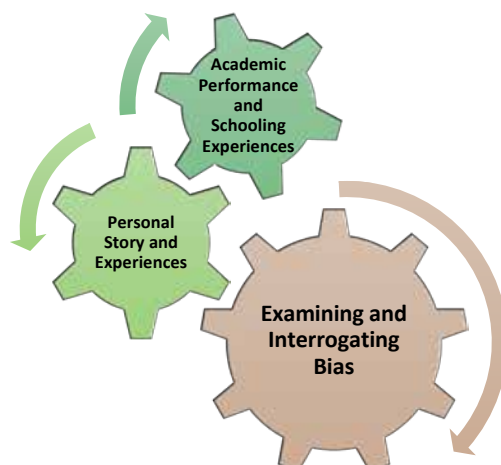
Culturally responsive data literate teachers employ a *culturally responsive data inquiry orientation*. This entails:

- Seeking a broad range of data sources about students as learners in schools, as humans with personal histories and as children with unique experiences and identities.
- Identifying and interrogating bias in analysis and interpretation of the information they collect and using those understandings about students to design learning experiences, choose instructional materials, and implement appropriate interventions as necessary to support student learning.

Helping candidates adopt and enact a culturally responsive data inquiry orientation to advance educational equity can be aided by developing their capacity to seek, explore and interrogate a variety of data across three key **Information Domains**. Two domains are clearly *student-centered* and focus on gathering data to inform an understanding of the whole child—drawing on information about their in- and out-of-school experiences and needs to inform teaching and learning. The third information domain is *teacher-centered* and makes salient that bias influences the data we seek to collect, the way we make sense of data and subsequent instructional and professional practices we pursue.

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### Information Domains Guiding Questions

#### ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES (Student-centered)

- **Academic Performance:** *What do you know about the students' academic outcomes in school?*
  - Has the student succeeded academically in the past?
  - Does the student succeed on assignments, projects and other class activities?
  - Does the student do relatively well on quizzes, tests, and standardized tests?
  - Does the student's performance on standardized tests align with your perceptions of classroom performance?
  - Is the student's performance relatively consistent?
  - Are there ebbs and flows in the student's performance?
  - What types of grades does the student typically get? Poor? Good? Excellent?
  - Does the student seem to grasp the ideas and content presented in class on the first try? Second try? Multiple tries? Does not grasp it at all?
  - Are there certain content areas in particular where the student excels?
  - Are there certain content areas in particular where the student struggles?
  - What are the student's favorite subjects? Least favorite?

#### Information Domains

##### *Academic Performance and Schooling Experiences*

Examples of these data include information about the student from formative and summative assessments, observations of student performance in classrooms and schools, documented and informal records of student interactions with peers and adults in school and student testimonies and perceptions, including experiences with bullying.

##### *Personal Story and Experiences*

Examples include information about the student's life outside of school, living conditions, access to healthcare, food, and transportation, traumatic experiences, and how they identify (i.e., sexual orientation, race, culture).

##### *Examining and Interrogating Bias*

This focus in this domain is on the teacher's continuous interrogation about their practice, how they see students and biases that influence their choices; what data to collect and how they interpret those data, as well as instructional materials and activities they implement. In this domain, the teacher is not collecting data but rather is questioning assumptions they may have as the make sense of data collected about students.

- Does the student exhibit critical thinking or problem-solving skills?
- Can the student work through a problem?
- What kind of instruction best suits the student?
- Does the student know how to use the computer responsibly?
- **Behavior: *What do you know about the students' behavior in school?***
  - Is the student respectful toward other students? Teachers? Administrators? Others?
  - Is the student respected by peers and classmates? Teachers? Administrators? Others?
  - Does the student obey school and class rules? Is the student a good classroom citizen?
  - Does the student have consistent attendance? Frequently absent or tardy?
  - Does the student come prepared to class? (i.e. brings required materials, completes homework and assignments?)
  - Does the student wait until the last moment to do assignments?
  - Is the student organized in terms of study skills?
  - Does the student participate in class? During class discussion?
    - Is the student reticent to engage verbally in class?
    - Is the student prepared to respond to the teacher's questions?
  - Does the student ask questions?
  - Does the student pay attention in class?
  - Does the student seem engaged in class?
  - Is the student able to concentrate on one topic?
    - Does the student bounce around from topic to topic, not staying focused? Easily distracted?
  - Is the student disruptive in class?
  - Does the student show an interest in learning?
  - Does the student show excitement and curiosity toward learning?
  - Does the student follow directions in class?
  - Does the student collaborate well with other students?
  - Does the student exhibit persistence?
  - Does the student readily accept feedback from the teacher?
  - How does the student handle frustration about low performance, failure, or negative feedback?
  - Is the student able to reflect on his/her own performance?
  - How does the student respond to challenging assignments?
  - Does the student show creativity?
  - Does the student do his/her work with care? Does the student make careless errors?
  - Does the student require extra help?
  - Does the student use his/her textbook?
  - What are the student's academic expectations and aspirations?
  - Does the student do any extracurricular activities? Belong to any clubs?
  - Does the student participate in sports and/or on teams?
  - Does the student participate in art and/or music activities?
- **Classification and Special Services: *Is the student classified by any special designations and/or receive any special services?***
  - Is the student identified as gifted and talented?
  - Is the student labeled as special education?
  - Does the student have a learning disability?
  - Does the student have a physical disability with an accommodation?
  - Does the student have an IEP or 504 plan?

- Is the student identified as an English language learner?
- Is the student eligible to receive free and reduced meals?

### **PERSONAL STORY AND EXPERIENCES (Student-centered)**

- **Family:** *What do you know about the students' family?*
  - Who are the legal guardians of the student? (biological parents, guardians who are relatives, guardians who are not related, foster parents, other?)
  - Does the student live with legal guardians or someone else?
  - Is the student adopted?
  - Are any of the legal guardians and/or parents, employed? Incarcerated? Deceased?
  - Are the parents divorced or divorcing? Is the process acrimonious or stable?
  - Are one or both parents in the military? Are either deployed or about to be deployed?
    - Is the student part of a Gold Star family (a military family member deceased)?
  - What is the educational attainment of the parents/guardians?
    - Completed or failed to complete high school?
    - Some college? College graduate
    - Professional degrees?
  - Are the parents involved in the students education?
  - Does the student have siblings? Older? Younger? Are there other relatives residing in same home with the student? Are there others (non-relatives) residing in the home with the student?
  - What is the language spoken in the home by parents/guardian/family members?
  
- **Living conditions:** *What do you know about the students' living conditions outside of the school?*
  - Does the student (and family) live in a stable environment?
  - Is the family receiving public assistance?
  - Does the student and family live in a homeless shelter?
    - Does the student live in a shelter to avoid familial abuse and violence?
  - Is the student (and family) socioeconomically considered to be considered to be living in poverty?
  - Does the student live in an enriched environment or a dangerous environment? (e.g., gang violence, high crime, subject to domestic violence)
  - Does the student have access to books and other educational resources at home?
  - Does the student have access to WiFi at home?
  - Is there evidence that the student does not get sufficient food at home?
  - Has the student been transient, moving from location to location?
  - Does the student have clean clothes and clothes that fit?
  - How does the student get to and from school each day? (i.e., public transportation, school bus, walk, ride from parents/guardians)
  - Has the student changed schools frequently?
  - Does the student work? If yes, to help support the family? Earn their own spending money?
  
- **Health:** *What do you know about the students' physical health?*
  - Is there evidence that the student has persistent health issues?
  - Does the student have any physical disabilities?
  - Is there evidence that the student does not get sufficient sleep?
  - Does the student have an eating disorder?
  - Does the student appear to have appropriate hygiene (washed, brushed clean teeth, brushed hair)?
  - Does the student smoke?
  - Does the student do drugs?

- Is the student pregnant? A parent?
- Is the student a cutter or shows signs of doing self-bodily harm?
- **Social and emotional:** *What do you know about the students' social and emotional health and well-being?*
  - Does the student seem happy, sad, distressed, angry, or something else?
  - Is there evidence that the student has been bullied?
  - Does the student have any emotional disabilities?
  - Does the student have any body image issues or abnormalities, such as severe obesity, excessive hair, crossed eyes, wears glasses, hearing aids, etc.?
  - Does the student have friends? Is the student part of a clique? Is the student a loner?
  - Does the student seem to have trouble engaging with other students?
  - Does the student exhibit any sources of anxiety or psychological distress?
- **Interactions with justice system:** *What do you know about the students' interactions, either formal or informal, documented or undocumented, with the justice system?*
  - Has the student experienced any serious behavioral issues that have resulted in an arrest?
- **Identity:** *What do you know about the way the student identifies himself/herself?*
  - Is English the students' first language? If not, what is the student's native language?
  - Has the student identified as LGBT?
  - Is there any reason to believe the student is struggling with gender identity issues?
  - Does the student belong to any religious group?
  - Does the student belong to any political group?

#### **EXAMINING AND INTERROGATING BIAS (Teacher-centered)**

- **Do you believe:**
  - All students can learn?
  - "One size fits all" is an effective instructional strategy?
  - Whatever you do for the students who struggle the most won't make a difference?
  - Gifted students don't need as much help as other students?
  - Boys are out of control more than girls?
  - Boys don't try as hard as girls?
  - Girls are innately worse at math than boys?
  - Asians are innately better at math and science and just plain smarter?
  - Introverted students are not smart?
  - Students with disabilities can learn?
  - A student with an IEP or 504 plan will struggle?
  - Students with limited English language proficiency cannot learn?
  - Standardized tests may not adequately reflect the knowledge and skills that some of your students have?
  - Students' home lives or community are inhibiting their academic potential?
- **Do you:**
  - Focus on only the "bubble kids", to the exclusion of students on the extremes?
  - Celebrate student achievements?
  - Take a personal interest in your students beyond their academic performance?
  - Show respect for cultural diversity? Ethnic diversity? Religious diversity?
  - Show respect for those whose political leanings differ from your own?



When a Data Inquiry Team commits to the Four Agreements of Courageous Conversations, and uses guiding questions regarding data to promote culturally responsive teaching, it is much more likely to deepen the data analysis and discussions and increase the likelihood that meaningful goals and action plans will be developed.

# Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

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4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.
5. Explore resources, research, and evidence-based practices. Consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.
6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.
7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.
8. Celebrate successes.
9. Start the cycle again.

To explain the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle, this guide describes how a fictitious school engaged in each step of the cycle. Equity issues are complex; often more than one issue is involved. The case example is intended to help educators see how each step of the cycle can help Data Inquiry Teams identify and address inequities in education settings and focus on solving one or two aspects of the equity concern. Section 4 offers three more fictitious cases that use the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle to address different aspects of equity.

## CASE STUDY:

### Newville City School District Addresses Inequities in Discipline

Newville City is a small, suburban city. Its school district has five elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school, Newville High School. The district also has one building housing their all-day kindergarten and pre-K programs for three and four-year-olds.

Newville High School had 1,756 students in grades 9–12 in SY 2016–17. Until 2000, the demographics of Newville High School’s student population and the overall city population remained unchanged. Following 2000, while the Black and Asian populations in the school remained relatively unchanged at 12.3% and 4.8%, respectively, the percent of Latinx children attending Newville High School grew and represented 53.3% of the high school population. The White student population declined to 27.6% (See Table 4).





**Table 4****Newville High School Student Population, 2016-17**

<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Percentage of the Population</b> Note: Total student population is 1,756.
<b>Gender Identities / Sexual Orientaton</b>	
Female	48%
Male	52%
LGBTQIA+	Data on gender identity/ expression and sexual orientation are not collected
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Native American/Alaskan	1%
Asian	5%
Black	12%
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0%
Latinx	53%
White	28%
2 or more	1%
<b>Free and reduced-price lunch</b>	39%
<b>Students with disabilities (IDEA/504)</b>	14%
<b>Students who are English Learners</b>	11%

Margaret Fallon, the new principal of Newville High School, attended the school as a teenager. After graduation, she moved west to attend college, married, and started raising her family in California. Last year, Dr. Fallon was hired as the new principal of her hometown high school. Dr. Fallon had fond memories of Newville and was happy to be back home. However, she admitted her first year in her new role was challenging and she understood her grace period was rapidly coming to an end. She had done her due diligence when applying for the position, but she had underestimated the challenges she would face in trying to improve the school's operations. What she found in her first year was disconcerting. Discipline issues were one of the school's biggest challenges. She reviewed data and found that Newville High School had a tradition of suspending students at a very high rate, particularly for long-term suspensions (i.e., three months to a full semester of suspension). Dr. Fallon knew that if students were not in school, they would be likely to experience many other negative consequences — including failing grades, falling behind grade level, and dropping out of school. The district's new superintendent had made reduction in the number of suspensions and expulsions in the district a central goal. Dr. Fallon was on board with this goal and eager to act. After looking at some preliminary data and talking with staff to get more input, she suggested the school engage in a data inquiry cycle to better define the equity concern and its causes and to come up with solutions. She believed such a process would provide objective information and build faculty ownership of both the equity concern and the solutions.

## Illustrating the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

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### 1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.

The Data Inquiry Team begins by considering what equity concern it wants to address. The equity concern may be identified by teachers, students, parents/guardians, administrators, or members of the community. Teachers may identify an equity concern and raise concerns with the principal, for example. Or some students might say that they do not think the school administration treats them fairly. Someone may have a hunch about what the equity concern is or have noticed that the equity concern involves or excludes a specific group of students. Regardless of the origin of the idea that there may be an equity concern, the Data Inquiry Team must clarify, "What is the equity concern? How is it presenting itself? What are the negative outcomes we want to address?" Naming the equity concern is the beginning of the data inquiry process and does not yet include making judgments or generating solutions.

Newville's Data Inquiry Team articulated the equity concern as: "Newville High School has a high rate of suspensions, especially long-term suspensions, which range from three months to a full semester. Suspended students miss a significant amount of instruction and are falling behind. Are different sub-populations of students suspended more frequently or for longer periods of time?"

#### *CONSIDER*

Notice that the equity concern is stated clearly and does not introduce a solution. This focuses the Data Inquiry Team on understanding the equity concern before prematurely identifying solutions. For example, the equity concern is not stated as "We need to implement PBIS in our schools and that will cost a lot of money."

### 2. Identify questions about the equity concern.

Next, the Data Inquiry Team raises the questions it has about the equity concern and identifies the information needed to better understand it. This is an opportunity for the Data Inquiry Team to think of as many questions

as it can, to identify which data will help it understand what is happening more deeply and, later, to inform its discovery of the root causes of the equity concern.

Data Inquiry Teams must avoid assumptions that imply answers. For example, if a Data Inquiry Team asked why parents/guardians do not teach their children to follow the school rules, it would be evident that there is an assumption that parents/guardians are not doing their job, and that is why there is an equity concern. Data Inquiry Teams need to raise questions that are within their control, like “How does the school respond when students break the rules?” or “Why don’t children follow the school rules?” rather than focusing on what parents/guardians are and are not doing.

### **The Neville Data Inquiry Team raised the following questions:**

- Why are there so many discipline referrals that lead to suspensions?
- Which infractions does the Code of Conduct say should be sanctioned by suspension?
- What is the frequency of referrals for these infractions?
- What do we notice when the referrals are disaggregated by teacher, grade level, and student subgroups (e.g., by gender identities, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, for students with disabilities, English Learners, eligibility for free/reduced lunch)?
- Are students suspended for infractions that are not included in the Code of Conduct?
- What does the Code of Conduct say about determination of the length of suspension?
- Are the infractions treated uniformly, according to the Code of Conduct, or are there differences in the application of sanctions for different groups of students?
- Which teachers are making the most referrals?
- What grade levels or classes have the most behavioral incidents?
- What is the data on first-time versus repeat suspensions?
- Is there a correlation between student suspension and academic performance?
- Is there a correlation between student suspension and dropout rates?

### *CONSIDER*

Notice that there are many questions. When a Data Inquiry Team takes time to expand its thinking about what it does not know about an equity concern, it is able to identify additional data that will help it analyze the equity concern more thoroughly. By expanding the scope of questions, a Data Inquiry Team has more to consider and then prioritize for its immediate work.

## **3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence an equity concern.**

At this step in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle, the Data Inquiry Team needs to prioritize some questions to start its inquiry. It may decide to address some of the other questions in future Data Inquiry Cycles. Once the Data Inquiry Team prioritizes its questions, it asks: “What data will help answer the questions raised and what are the sources of the data?”

The Data Inquiry Team may consult multiple sources of academic and behavioral data, including data from the school, district, state, or federal Office for Civil Rights (OCR). Sometimes a Data Inquiry Team identifies a need for data that has not been collected and the Team will need a process for gathering the data.

**In Newville, the Data Inquiry Team prioritized the following questions:**

- What infractions does the Code of Conduct say should be sanctioned by suspension and what were the infractions at Newville High School that led to suspension?
- Is the percentage of referrals different for groups of students when they are disaggregated by gender identities, sexual orientations, race/ethnicity, or students with disabilities, eligibility for FRPL?
- Are the infractions treated uniformly, according to the Code of Conduct, or are there differences in the application of sanctions for different groups of students?
- Is there a correlation between student suspension and academic performance?

**Based on the questions the Data Inquiry Team identified, it decided to use the following data sources:**

- Newville High School Code of Conduct,
- Newville High School student suspension data disaggregated by race/ethnicity—Table 5,
- Newville High School student suspension data, disaggregated by by disabilities and by race/ethnicity—Table 6,
- Newville High School data on the infractions that led to suspension—Table 7, and
- Newville High School student retention data—Table 8.

Data about schools and students is collected at the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSER).

A member of the Data Inquiry Team asked if Newville’s suspensions increased over the past several years. The Data Inquiry Team agreed to obtain data from multiple years to answer that question.

*CONSIDER*

Sometimes the process of asking questions and finding data to answer the questions repeats several times. For simplicity in illustrating the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle, one set of questions and data sets are offered in the Newville example.

**4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.**

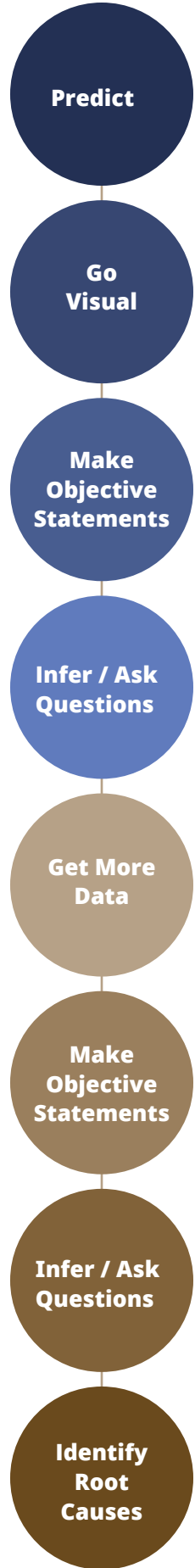
Step four involves using a protocol called Data-Driven Dialogue (Love et al., 2008). Once the Data Inquiry Team has collected accurate data to address its questions, it can now make predictions about the data, present the data to the Team in clearly labeled and organized data displays, and engage in dialogue to understand the data.

People need to set aside their assumptions to let the data (not their assumptions) inform their dialogue about the identified equity concern.

*Data-Driven Dialogue Process Steps*

The following are the steps of the Data-Driven Dialogue process. (Adapted from Love et al., 2008). It is important that each step is done completely, before embarking on the next one:

- A. Predict what the data will reveal.
- B. Visually represent the data.
- C. Make objective statements about the data.
- D. Make inferences and ask questions about the data. Get additional data to answer the questions, if needed. If more data is obtained, repeat steps C and D.
- E. Do a root cause analysis of one or more of the inferences



*A. Predict what the data will reveal.*

Data Inquiry Team members make predictions about the data to share their thinking with each other before looking at the actual data. By hearing each other's predictions, Team members gain insight into one another's prior knowledge, experiences, and their assumptions and biases. Making predictions is also a way to involve people who may have difficulty engaging with data. When members of the Data Inquiry Team make predictions, they are usually eager to see if their predictions are correct. If some predictions are not correct, Team members are more apt to be engaged in finding out why.

**The Newville Data Inquiry Team's predictions included:**

- Students who are Black and Latinx are suspended a lot more than students who are Asian or White.
- Students are most often suspended for fighting.
- Students that are suspended have higher retention rates.
- There will not be a difference in the percentage of student suspensions for students with or without disabilities.

*B. Visually represent the data.*

Creating data displays that are clear, accurately presented, and easy and inviting for the Data Inquiry Team to engage with is essential so that the Team does not have to digest pages of dense tables, cluttered visuals, or mislabeled or unlabeled graphics. Sometimes the leader or a few Team members will make the data displays in advance. Sometimes a Team will make pie charts or bar graphs if they think it will be more helpful. By engaging the Data Inquiry Team in this process, the members get time to make meaning of the data and begin to identify what is most important to them.

The Newville Data Inquiry Team made charts of the data that were easy to understand. The Data Inquiry Team stood together and viewed each chart that was projected on the screen.

**Table 5****Newville High School Suspension Data Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-17**

Race / Ethnicity	Percentage of School Enrollment	Percentage of Out-of-School Suspensions
Native American/Alaskan	0%	1%
Asian	5%	0%
Black	12%	39%
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0%	0%
Latinx	53%	45%
White	28%	12%
2 or more	2%	1%

**Table 6****Newville High School Suspension Data Disaggregated by Disabilities and by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-17**

Race / Ethnicity	Percentage of School Enrollment	Percentage of Total Number of Students with Disabilities by Race/Ethnicity Who Had Out-Of-School Suspensions
Native American/Alaskan	0%	0%
Asian	5%	0%
Black	12%	32%
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0%	0%
Latinx	53%	38%
White	28%	27%
2 or more	2%	3%

**Table 7****Newville High School Top Infractions Leading to Suspensions, 2016-17**

Infractions Leading to Suspensions (In Ascending Order)	74% of the Infractions that Led to Suspensions	
Defiance	21%	
Disruptive	12%	
Fights	12%	
Tardiness	11%	
Truancy	8%	
Weapons	5%	
Illegal substance	3%	

**Table 8****Newville High School Retention Data, Disaggregated by Race/Ethnicity, 2016-17**

Race / Ethnicity	Percentage Of School Enrollment	Percentage of the Total Number of Retained Students
Native American/Alaskan	0%	1%
Asian	5%	0%
Black	12%	35%
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0%	0%
Latinx	53%	42%
White	28%	16%
2 or more	2%	7%

### *C. Make objective statements about the data.*

The Data Inquiry Team makes objective statements about the data, statements that everyone would agree are shown by the data. The Team's statements highlight something in the data, without venturing further to include ideas or opinions about the data.

#### **The Newville Data Inquiry Team made the following statements about the High School data:**

- The suspension data, disaggregated by race/ethnicity, shows that students who are Black were suspended at a rate more than triple their enrollment.
- Students who identified as belonging to two or more racial/ethnic groups were suspended four times their enrollment percentage.
- The percentage of students with disabilities who are White and who had out of school suspensions was approximately one third the percentage of all students who are White and enrolled in the school.
- The percentage of students with disabilities who are Black and who had out-of-school suspensions was nearly three times more than the percentage of all students who are Black and enrolled in the school.
- The behavioral categories of disruption, fighting, and tardiness were infractions that led to suspensions at roughly the same incident rate. Defiance was the top reason for suspension, at nearly double the rate of disruption, fighting, and tardiness.
- Students who are White were retained at a percentage approximately 2/3 of their school enrollment, and the percentage of students who are Black who were retained was almost triple their total school enrollment.
- The Code of Conduct was last revised more than ten years ago.
- The Code of Conduct includes "3 strikes" sanctions. (Examples: late 3 times equals 1 detention, 3 detentions equal 1 in-school suspension, 3 in-school suspensions equals 1 3-day out-of-school suspension, 3 3-day out-of-school suspensions equals 1 10-day suspension, etc.)

### *D. Make inferences and ask questions about the data.*

In this part of Data-Driven Dialogue, the Data Inquiry Team thinks about what inferences it can draw from the data. Inferences are different than objective statements; inferences are educated guesses or possible explanations about the data. It is important that this step happens only after all the objective statements have been offered in the previous step. Data Inquiry Team members refer to specific data when they make an inference.

Table 9. An Example of Observations and Inferences About Demographic Data that the Data Inquiry Team Used as a Model



**Table 9**

## **An Example of Observations and Inferences About Demographic Data that the Data Inquiry Team Used as a Model**

<b>Observations of Demographic Data</b>	<b>Inferences/Questions</b>
Our English Learner population has increased from 10% in 2000 to 45% in 2016.	Wow! We are so much more diverse than I thought. I wonder if our instructional program is geared to all of these students?
Our mobility rate increased 10 percent in the last year.	Why are so many students leaving our school? Are they choosing to go to other schools in the district?
Forty-five percent of our teachers have less than three years' of experience.	What are we doing to help these new teachers? Do we have a mentoring program?
This year our free-and-reduced lunch rate went down by 10%.	I wonder if this is accurate. Are we getting all students who are eligible to sign up?
Eighty percent of our student body are students who are Black. Five percent of our teacher population is teachers who are Black.	What is the impact of this mismatch on our students?
Forty percent of our Mathematics teachers are certified in Mathematics.	Is there a relationship between teachers' certification and student performance?

The Data Inquiry Team may decide to obtain different sources of data to strengthen the credibility and validity of the inferences it forms. When multiple data sources are used to inform the same issue or question, it is called “triangulating the data,” and it helps a team to confirm its emerging understandings. If there are discrepancies between two or more sources of data, the Data Inquiry Team should ask further questions to understand why and avoid drawing ungrounded or premature conclusions.

The Newville Data Inquiry Team made the following inferences:

- Based on data about suspension and race, there might be different applications of the Code of Conduct with students of different races.
- Based on data about retention and race, the high rate of Black student suspension may lead to the higher rate of Black student retention.

The Data Inquiry Team was curious about the data regarding retention and students with and without disabilities and wondered if there is a correlation between certain disabilities and students being suspended. They requested more data. When they received the data, they repeated what they did with the first data set. They made predictions of what they expected to see in the data and made objective statements of what data indicated, and then made inferences and asked questions based on their observations of the data. In the following example illustrating the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle, this second cycle of data analysis is not included.

### *E. Do a root cause analysis of one or more of the inferences.*

The Data Inquiry Team engages in a root cause analysis by using a protocol called “The Five Whys.” This protocol uses repetition of the question “Why?” to probe deeply into the causes of the equity concern identified. Asking “why” five times generates many possible answers to each question. Groups often repeat this process multiple times, sometimes with the same first question, and sometimes to solicit multiple answers to follow-up questions. Remember that a more robust root cause analysis will likely yield identification of a multitude of factors contributing to the equity concern. For simplicity in understanding this step, the Newville example below has one or two answers to each “why” question.

For other ways to do root cause analysis, see the resources at the end of this section.

The Newville Data Inquiry Team decided to use the Five Whys protocol to identify possible root causes for students who are Black being suspended at a rate triple their enrollment percentage. The Data Inquiry Team asked why five times, as follows:

- **Why were students who are Black suspended at a rate more than triple their enrollment percentage?**  
Maybe because the behaviors of students who are Black were perceived as defiant and disruptive a disproportionate amount of time and teachers thought they were following the Code of Conduct.
- **Why would students who are Black be assessed as defiant and disruptive disproportionately compared with other students and referred to the office?**  
Maybe because some teachers notice infractions by students who are Black more quickly than they notice infractions by other students.
- **Why would some teachers notice infractions by students who are Black more quickly?**  
Maybe some teachers feel threatened by certain behaviors of some of the students who are Black and want them to be suspended.

- **Why would some teachers feel threatened by certain behaviors of some of the students who are Black?**  
Maybe some teachers have an unconscious stereotype about students who are Black being more aggressive.  
Maybe some teachers have not developed relationships with as many of their students who are Black.
- **Why would some teachers not have developed as many relationships with their students who are Black?**  
Maybe because some teachers tend to develop more relationships with students of their own race, and most of the teachers in the school are White.  
Maybe because some teachers refer students to the office immediately without hearing all sides of the story.  
Maybe because there is not a process for trying to discuss and resolve issues or strengthening relationships among students and between students and faculty.

After completing the root cause analysis, the Data Inquiry Team considers what it learned from generating the possible causes of the equity concern identified in the data. The hope is that the root cause analysis provides additional insight into action that may be needed to address an identified issue. Next, the Data Inquiry Team decides which root cause they want to address first through their S.M.A.R.T. goals. Often teams prioritize action based on what seems most important to begin with or which may be the highest leverage areas that have the biggest payoff to solve, expecting to return to some of the other root causes at a future time.

### *CONSIDER*

It is beneficial to solicit multiple responses to each question. Then the Data Inquiry Team can make decisions about which answers they think are most relevant to their context or will lead them to even greater understanding and ability to address the root cause.

## **5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices, and also consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.**

Once teams have identified priorities based on the root cause(s) they identified, they need to explore resources, research, and evidence-based practices. They also need to identify any areas of strength in their school or community that could be helpful in addressing the root causes. After teams are better educated about possibilities, they can create S.M.A.R.T. goals to address the root cause(s) they prioritized.

### **S.M.A.R.T. goals are an effective way to move forward for several reasons:**

- Goals need to be specific and strategic to yield outcomes that address the equity concern. If the goal is not clear, it will not be addressed, or it will be addressed differently by different people.
- Goals must be measurable, in specific terms, to make the outcome clear and for people to know if the goal was accomplished. Saying people learned or gained understanding does not provide much information; how do you know what they learned or if they gained understanding? What does that mean? Saying something improved leads one to ask, what change occurred and how do we know it changed?
- Goals need to be attainable. Many good ideas are thwarted because the goals are so large that they are never attained, and people become disheartened or lose interest. It is preferable to have an

attainable goal that can be celebrated when achieved, and then another goal can pick up from where the first goal left off.

- When goals are relevant and results-focused, people are much more likely to work on them, partially because they are motivated by results and because the work is relevant to their context and the equity concern they are trying to solve.
- Goals need to be time-bound and tracked so that the goals can be addressed, and the results can indicate when the goal is achieved. Having a series of goals that are each of a shorter duration is a motivator, because successes can be celebrated along the way. Timed and tracked goals are also more likely to keep people involved because the outcomes can be realized and are within reach.

The Newville Data Inquiry Team explored research and tools to inform their thinking and found the following research particularly helpful:

- Exclusionary discipline practices are related to negative outcomes for students, and are disproportionately applied to particular groups of students, such as racial/ethnic minorities (O’Conner et al., 2014).
- A meta-analysis examining over 30 studies reported that suspensions were significantly associated with lower achievement and higher likelihoods of dropping out (Noltemeyer et al., 2015).

The Data Inquiry Team found the following resources about school discipline and restorative practices particularly helpful:

- Addressing the Root Causes of Disparities in School Discipline: An Educator’s Action Planning Guide (Osher et al., 2015). Retrieved from <https://safesupportivelearning.ed.gov/sites/default/files/ActionPlanningGuide508.pdf>
- USED School Discipline Guidance Package. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/school-discipline/index.html>
- The Task Force used the Center for Education Equity resource “Getting Started with Restorative Practices” developed by MAEC and WestEd (2021).
- The Office of Special Education Programs Technical Assistance Center. Retrieved on September 25, 2017 from <https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osers/osep/index.html>

The Newville Data Inquiry Team decided to address two of the root causes identified by the Five Whys protocol:

- Some teachers may tend to develop relationships with students of their own race, and most of the teachers in our school are White.
- There is not a process for trying to discuss and resolve issues or strengthening relationships among students and between students and faculty.

## CONSIDER

There are many issues a team might wish to address after seeking to find root causes through the Five Whys protocol. For purposes of clarity about the next step of setting S.M.A.R.T. goals, in our example, we share two of the many paths the group could have followed. Groups need to remember that the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle is an iterative process and they will be more likely to be successful in addressing equity concerns if they prioritize one or two root causes and then return to those or other root causes when they begin the cycle again.

The Newville Data Inquiry Team concluded that:

The High School needs to move toward creating a positive school environment that is safe, supportive, and conducive to excellent teaching and learning and away from punitive, inequitable, and exclusionary discipline practices in the vast majority of situations. The Data Inquiry Team recommends building a positive school climate that will prevent some of the misbehaviors and developing new approaches within the school to deal with misbehaviors in ways that would keep students in school while also promoting deeper understanding and remedies for misbehaviors.

The Data Inquiry Team thought about areas of strength in their school that might inform their thinking about S.M.A.R.T. goals. They identified two areas to investigate to see if they would help achieve S.M.A.R.T. Goal 1:

1. In the past, small groups of teachers have gathered to talk about school climate issues. Who were those people, and might one or two of them be strong contributors in a multi-constituent team that could be formed?
2. Faith groups in town have been vocal about the severity in discipline of children of color. In those meetings or statements that were released to the press, was there a voice or two that emerged as seeking to find ways to solve the problem by working with the school?

Accordingly, the Newville Data Inquiry Team created the following S.M.A.R.T. goals:

- S.M.A.R.T. Goal 1: A Task Force on School Climate will be formed to create a new Code of Conduct for the High School with an emphasis on maximizing students' instructional time in classrooms and on restorative practices, that will be submitted to the Superintendent and then to the Board of Education by the Superintendent by June 15, 2018.
- S.M.A.R.T. Goal 2: The Data Inquiry Team will work to create a staged plan for professional learning on the New Code of Conduct and restorative practices for administrators and teachers, to begin in September 2018: Because this goal would be implanted the following school year, the Data Inquiry Team, did not want to set dates for each of the items below until they got feedback from the Assistant Superintendent and the Task Force Chair based on S.M.A.R.T. Goal 1.

## 6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.

The Data Inquiry Team creates an action plan to operationalize the good thinking reflected in the S.M.A.R.T. goals. Clarity about who will do what and by when helps keep group members and others they enlist on track.

The Newville Data Inquiry Team developed Action Plans for each S.M.A.R.T. goal. Below are the Action Plans for S.M.A.R.T. Goals 1 and 2.

### S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1

A Task Force on School Climate will be formed to create a new Code of Conduct for the High School, with an emphasis on maximizing students' instructional time in classrooms and using restorative practices that will be approved by the Superintendent and then the Board of Education June 30, 2018.

**Table 10****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1**

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Form the Task Force on School Climate	Director of Pupil Personnel or High School Principal	September 7, 2017	<p>Membership roster of multi-constituent Task Force on School Climate</p> <p>Consideration of specific teachers and community members who have shown interest in school climate issues and a wish to collaborate results in several of them being approached to be members of the Task Force</p>	A multi-constituent Task Force
Consultation with Assistant Superintendent	Task Force Chair	Throughout process	Revised notes, agenda, etc.	Assistant Superintendent approves next step, each step of the way
Research	Task Force chair or designee and the Assistant Superintendent or designee	September 21, 2017	Research on school climate, restorative practices, and Codes of Conduct with a restorative lens	Task Force members review research compiled by the Data Inquiry Team and seek additional research as needed.

**Table 11****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1**

Activity	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
New Code is conceptualized	October 5, 2017	First draft of Purposes First draft of section outline	Task Force agrees on “non-negotiables” and a draft purpose and outline of sections, including vision, intent, and use of document
Input from Shareholders	October 26, 2017	Notes from meetings Focus group report	Community and faith leaders have been enlisted to promote attendance at meetings and focus groups are conducted to increase the likelihood that input gathered is representative of many shareholders, including students, teachers, staff, parents/guardians, and community members
Revisions as needed of section outlines	November 17, 2017	Revised section outlines	Task Force has discussed input and revised outline
First draft of sections	January 5, 2018	Drafted sections of the New Code of Conduct	Task Force writers have written their drafts and they have been distributed to Task Force members, making sure that feedback is received by the student members of the Task Force
Revised drafts of the New Code of Conduct	January 19, 2018	Revised drafted sections	Task Force writers have revised their sections based on Task Force feedback
Feedback from building administration	February 2, 2018	Feedback notes	Meeting held to hear reactions
Feedback from teachers, staff, and parents/guardians about selected drafts	February 23, 2018	Feedback notes	Meetings held to collect feedback on the draft revisions of the Code of Conduct

**Table 12****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1**

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Sections revised	Task Force Chair	March 16, 2018	Revised sections	Task Force discusses feedback and gives charges to writers
Revised drafts reviewed by Task Force	Task Force Chair	April 20, 2018	Revised sections	Task Force discusses revised sections and makes edits
Final draft prepared for Superintendent	Task Force Chair	May 4, 2018	Final draft of the Toolkit for Administrators	All edits included in final draft
Superintendent reviews Toolkit	Superintendent	May 18, 2018	Edits from Superintendent	Superintendent reviews final draft, and makes suggestions or approves
Final approval by Superintendent	Task Force Chair	June 1, 2018	Revised New Code of Conduct prepared	Superintendent accepts final revisions
Acceptance/ Approval by the School Board	Superintendent	June 8, 2018	Finalized New Code of Conduct	Superintendent brings the New Code of Conduct to the School Board



## S.M.A.R.T. Goal #2

By October 2018, at least 85% of all administrators and teachers are aware of and understand the new Code of Conduct, as measured by their self-assessment of their ability to use the new Code of Conduct, and by May 2019, 85% of administrators and teachers participating in the pilot of the New Code of Conduct have used restorative practices and shared evidence in study groups.

In anticipation of this S.M.A.R.T. Goal, high school administrators requested a toolkit on restorative practices because some of them say that they do not know enough about restorative practices to replace suspension with these practices and to lead the teachers to implement restorative practices in their classrooms. Accordingly, the following timeline includes the request for the toolkit before the beginning of professional learning.



**Table 13****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #2**

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Professional learning for school administrators and principal-led professional development for teachers and staff	PD provider	September 2018	Plans for principal-led professional learning for teachers, including agenda, facilitator notes, etc.	Professional development session for school administrators and planning for principal-led professional learning for teachers and for staff
Weekly Community-Building Circles with students in the Advisories	Subject area teachers	September 2018-May 2019		Students will participate in Community-Building Circles and demonstrate more caring for each other (e.g., helping deescalate conflict, helping each other with classwork, making supportive comments)
Ongoing consultation with the Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction and Task Force Chair	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction and Task Force Chair	September 2018-May 2019	Evaluations of faculty meetings and staff meetings	Monthly discussions about implementation of the new Code of Conduct and the use of restorative practices
Professional learning for teachers, by department	Department chairs and supervisors	September 2018-May 2019	List of prompts used in Community-Building Circles	Departmental professional learning, teachers' self-assessments of learning after PD, teachers conduct Community-Building Circles at least once a week
Track toolkit utilization	Principals and Teachers	September 2018-May 2019		List of restorative practices most used (circles, etc.), teacher reflections about implementation challenges, summary of additional supports requested

**Table 14**

## S.M.A.R.T. Goal #2

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Year 2	Principals	June 30, 2018	Plan for going deeper with restorative practices in 2019-2020	Task Force assessment of Pilot and planning for next year

### 7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.

The Data Inquiry Team needs to continually review progress and determine if the S.M.A.R.T. goals are being achieved.

#### **The Newville Data Inquiry Team did the following progress review of S.M.A.R.T. Goal 1 at each date in the timeline of the action plan:**

- The High School newsletter announced the formation of the Data Inquiry Team and the process that it would be using to collect input and do its work throughout the school year.
- The Assistant Superintendent had a standing agenda item in her meetings with the High School Principal to discuss the progress of the Task Force and any challenges that were arising.
- The Assistant Superintendent reviewed the research collected by the Data Inquiry Team prior to writing the S.M.A.R.T. goals, and the research gathered by the Task Force to make sure that it is evidence-based and considered best practices.

The Data Inquiry Team knew that their work was a start to addressing the equity concern they initially stated: “Newville High School has a high rate of suspensions, especially long-term suspensions, which range from three months to a full semester. Suspended students miss a significant amount of instruction and are falling behind. Are different sub-populations of students suspended more frequently or for longer periods of time?”

They knew that their S.M.A.R.T. goals around a New Code of Conduct and the implementation of restorative practices were just the beginning. It would take a lot of hard work and time for restorative practices to become part of the high school culture, and for long-term suspensions not to be the method of discipline used in the vast majority of cases.

### 8. Celebrate successes.

The Data Inquiry Team celebrates successes, which are made more likely because the goals are attainable, timed, and tracked. It is possible that their expectations are off-track or emerging data suggest that revisions need to be made to their S.M.A.R.T. goals or action plan. The Data Inquiry Team needs to decide if it will continue to meet and will address these needed revisions.

## The Newville Data Inquiry Team celebrated success in the following ways:

- The Chair and the Assistant Superintendent scheduled meetings that corresponded with the dates in the Action Plan timeframe.
- The Assistant Superintendent sent periodic memos to the Task Force members, congratulating them on reaching their targets.
- The Assistant Superintendent sent memos to the Superintendent, describing the Task Force's progress.
- The Superintendent or the Assistant Superintendent were present at the beginning of the community meetings or focus groups, naming the importance of the meeting and appreciation for their involvement.
- The Task Force Chair checked in with writers of the draft sections of the Code of Conduct and emphasized the contribution they were making to the school.
- The Assistant Superintendent attended the January meeting of the Task Force and celebrated the completion of the drafts of the sections of the Code.
- Task Force Chair recognized to the High School Principal the administrative assistant responsible for scheduling the meetings with administrators, staff, and parents/guardians in February.
- The Superintendent wrote to the Task Force members in appreciation for their work in completing the New Code of Conduct that was approved by the School Board.
- Department Chairs spoke with every class about the evidence of their community-building, as shared by teachers or observed by Chairs.
- Principal wrote about the positive impact of Community Building Circles and Restorative Practices quarterly in the Principal's Column of the PTA newsletter, including quotes from students, teachers, support staff, and administrators.

## 9. Start the cycle again.

In this step, the Data Inquiry Team continues the cycle by examining data to determine what progress has been made on the S.M.A.R.T. goals and identifying the next level of work to ensure every student has equitable access to a high-quality education.

In Newville, based on analysis by the High School Administrators and the Assistant Superintendent of the High School suspension data each month, and the implementation of restorative practices in the classrooms of the teachers in the pilots, the Assistant Superintendent and the High School Principal concluded that they needed to train additional High School staff on the Code of Conduct and restorative practices in the coming year. The Assistant Superintendent charged the building principal with collecting and analyzing their school's suspension data each month and collecting office referral data, by teacher, with the date and reason for each referral.

The Data Inquiry Team wanted to explore whether there was a connection between academic performance and student misbehavior. It was eager to begin the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle again and generated the following questions:

- Is there a correlation between a student's rate of misbehavior and a student's progress in meeting academic expectations?
- Do teachers who differentiate instruction have lower rates of referrals for disciplinary action?
- What academic supports or interventions are available and used by all students at risk of failing and being retained?

The Data Inquiry Team felt that it had learned so much in the first year and had many more ideas about ways to proceed. It knew the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle was what helped to uncover equity concerns and root causes, and the Data Inquiry Team was committed to continue the steps in the cycle to better understand how to address equity and improve outcomes for all students.

Section 3, Data Inquiry Cycle: Further Considerations, provides an opportunity for teams to select an equity issue and work through the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle. It offers suggestions to enhance a group’s ability to follow the steps in the cycle.

SECTION 3:

# **Data Inquiry Cycle: Further Considerations**

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# Data Inquiry Cycle: Further Considerations

This section of the Data Inquiry Guide is designed to support Data Inquiry Teams to begin using the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle to explore equity in your school or district. Each step of the Equity Data Inquiry Process has:

- Guiding considerations,
- Potential pitfalls, and
- Points to keep in mind

As you engage in data inquiry for the first time it is natural to feel somewhat uncomfortable initially. Stick with it. You will find that the more you use this process, the more insights you will gain into what is and is not working in your school. By providing tools to help you dig deeply into the conditions in the school that may produce inequities, you may broaden your thinking about what can be done to increase equity and success for all students.

## Steps in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

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1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.
2. Identify questions about the equity concern.
3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence the equity concern.
4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.
5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices, and also consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.
6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.
7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.
8. Celebrate successes.
9. Start the cycle again.

## 1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.

### Guiding considerations:

- Clearly state the equity concern.
- What are you concerned about?
- What anecdotal, quantitative, and/or qualitative evidence brought this concern to light?
- What data sources can you access to better understand the equity concern?

### Potential pitfalls:

As you and your team begin to engage in the data inquiry process it is important that you constantly question why one group of students may be more successful than another. This requires that you engage in a critical examination of the intersections that exist between the educational equity concern you have identified and your school and/or district's educational policies, procedures, and practices. Is there a difference between what is "on the books" (policy); a particular way people are expected to do something (procedure); and what is actually done (practices)?

### Keep in mind:

Often, an educational issue adversely affects subgroups within subgroups. As the data inquiry process proceeds forward, it may be useful to look for data trends that might indicate an intersectional need. For example, it might initially seem that students who are Muslim are being bullied. As inquiry goes deeper, it becomes clear that the bullying is of students who are Muslim and who are gay.

## 2. Identify questions about the equity concern.

### Guiding considerations:

After you have stated your educational equity concern, turn it into a question that can be answered. It may be useful to clearly define the following elements in this phase of the data inquiry process:

- Who is most affected by the equity concern? (List each student subgroup).
- What policies, procedures, and practices converge around the educational equity concern that you identified?
- Are human and financial resources allocated differently within or across schools or programs?

### Potential pitfalls:

Educational equity concerns stem from a variety of sources. During this phase of the data inquiry process it is important to think about how the school and/or district context may be related to the educational equity concern. For example, sometimes changes in demographics are given as reasons why educational equity concerns exist and why they are difficult to solve. Communities need to make sure they are not scapegoating a specific population, but rather looking at practices or other things within the school's control that could better support all students to meet learning goals.

### Keep in mind:

As you go through the data inquiry process, constantly question what explicit and/or implicit beliefs or biases may be held among staff or in the community about the students who are affected by the educational equity concern and if the beliefs are contributing in some way to the equity concern.



### 3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence the equity concern.

#### **Guiding considerations:**

In order to answer the questions that you and your team posed, you must identify both qualitative and quantitative data that can provide useful information to help understand, and eventually address, the educational equity concern. The data points you seek must be disaggregated to understand how the educational equity concern impacts different groups of students.

For example, you and your team may want to examine data points that consider the following categories: grade level, ethnicity, race, gender identities, sexual orientation, IEP classification, English Learner (EL) status, and FRPL status.

In addition, it may be useful to generate several open-ended questions that allow you to qualitatively explore the educational equity concern. For example, you may consider holding focus groups to solicit diverse perspectives about the educational equity concern. Soliciting the perspectives of students who are affected by the educational equity concern can provide invaluable insights, as can those of their parents/guardians.

It may also be useful to clearly outline the data-gathering plan you and/or your team generate. This plan should include timelines for each phase of the data collection and analysis process.

#### **Potential Pitfalls:**

Your data systems and structures may not be collecting information you seek or be set up to provide disaggregated data reports on the educational equity concern that you are trying to understand and address. Think about how you and your team can build the needed infrastructure to fully understand the complexities of your educational equity concern. If needed, be open to using qualitative data and/or investing in new data systems that collect and report on important information.

#### **Keep in mind:**

As you and your team proceed through the data inquiry process, keep in mind the complexity of gathering data, making sure that any surveys you use are well-designed, inference-free, and ask just one question at a time. Many districts have people with expertise in data collection and these staff members could be very helpful as you identify your data needs.

### 4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.

#### **Guiding considerations:**

In this step the Data Inquiry Team will engage in protocols that some team members may not be familiar with yet. It is important to schedule at least the first two data inquiry meetings within a relatively short period of time, and make sure that all members of the Data Inquiry Team participate in both. In this way, the whole Team is more likely to remember the work done in the first meeting and be able to continue learning without a lot of backtracking.

#### **Potential Pitfalls:**

Data inquiry and dialogue take time. It is common for teams to combine the steps in the Data Dialogue because they are rushing to find a solution. Though it might be tempting to try to solve the equity concern quickly, it is more useful to help teammates stick to the steps and get the full value of the process by taking the time to do each step thoughtfully. You can also help them see that changes may be needed: if the school continues to do the same things it has been doing, it is likely the school will continue to get the same results.

**Keep in mind:**

As you analyze your data and later develop S.M.A.R.T. goals, try to determine who your educational system prioritizes. For example, who do you, your team, and/or your staff regularly communicate with and interact with about the educational equity concern? Are certain perspectives and/or voices honored more often and supported by existing policies and practices? What does this mean for how the educational equity concern can be addressed?

In addition, as you and your team analyze the data, think systematically about the educational equity concern and question who, or what systems, are responsible for creating and sustaining the inequity. In order to do this, it can be useful to participate in a hypothetical inquiry process that examines how two students—one who is not directly affected by the equity concern and one who is—experience the different programs, interventions, assumptions, and expectations, that surround the equity concern. The Data Inquiry Team could identify where there are points of convergence and divergence between the two students' experiences and use what they learned from the activity to inform S.M.A.R.T. goals.

## 5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices, and also consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.

**Guiding considerations:**

In addition to the sources you typically use to get information, the following are federally-funded centers that provide resources:

- The Center for Education Equity at MAEC is a recognized resource for promoting excellence and equity in education to achieve social justice. <https://maec.org>
- Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service in the regional educational laboratories (REL) that provides references and brief responses in the form of citations on information to education questions. <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/askarel>
- Regional Comprehensive Centers are often able to provide consultation and professional learning for districts around data inquiry and other aspects of equity, which are among their many areas of experience.

**Potential pitfalls:**

Often, the educational equity concerns you and/or your team have identified stem from educational inequities that are systemic and related to many intersecting factors. It may be useful for you and your team to address how resources can be more strategically focused on supporting all learners.

For example, a school might be focusing on the achievement gap between students who are White and Asian and students who are Black and Latinx and decide to offer afterschool tutorial programs. However, there may be systemic barriers to students participating that need to be addressed first, such as:

- There are no late buses available to take students home.
- Participating in the tutorials may preclude students from getting to an afterschool childcare program arranged by their parents/guardians who work outside the home.

**Keep in mind:**

Educators should reflect on the beliefs and assumptions operating within the school system and how these may influence allocation resources. Upon further examination, it may become evident that there is inequitable distribution of resources with some groups of students getting more than their share of resources from the system, while other high-need students may not be getting the resources they need.

## 6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.

### Guiding considerations:

In order to fully understand how effective your S.M.A.R.T. goals are in addressing the educational equity concern, you and your team should meet periodically to analyze new data and discuss progress on meeting the stated goal. You and your team can ask some of the following questions:

- Do we have mid-course data? What changes do we see in the data? Are results improving, remaining static, or decreasing?
- What shifts/modifications/changes in educational policies, procedures, and practices have occurred in our district and/or school that are related to the educational equity concern?
- Is there anything we need to do to improve the implementation of the plan?
- Are we experiencing what is called an “implementation dip”? This occurs when a new practice or innovation is implemented and initially appears to have a worse effect because the teachers are still learning to use the new practice and not fully implementing it yet. After investigating whether the practice is being implemented correctly and adequate supports are in place, it may be advisable to monitor closely until implementation is robust and the improvements in result are evident (Fullan, 2011).

In addition to tracking progress on the S.M.A.R.T. goals, you and your team should question how emerging data on results relate to the educational policies, practices, and practitioner beliefs that converge around the original educational equity concern. These realizations will be important to consider as one Data Inquiry Cycle is completed and another will begin.

### Potential Pitfalls:

Change takes time. The Data Inquiry Team should continue to use data to monitor progress. Identify what short- and mid-term outcomes are expected. If these are not attained, it may be necessary to rethink whether the goal was realistic and/or to identify how long it may take for the changes to produce results. Often there may be an incomplete implementation of the plan that is detracting from attaining the goal.

Observing how interventions and resources are being used to address the educational equity concern may contribute to being able to determine if the goal was S.M.A.R.T.

### Keep in mind:

If the school is not getting the results it wants from the plan, the Data Inquiry Team can gather data on the barriers to implementation. For example, do the staff have the capacity to conduct the interventions and/or programs that were put in place to address the educational equity concern? What help do they need? Do the faculty hold beliefs and assumptions about students’ abilities and capacities that are asset-based and support ensuring that all students are successful?

In addition, it is important to question whether or not resources have been provided and strategically aligned to implement the new practices.

## 7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.

### Guiding considerations:

It is important to periodically assess the implementation of the action plans for the S.M.A.R.T. goals, using the forms of measurement identified in the goals. It is also necessary to keep in mind the initial equity concern that was stated, since the S.M.A.R.T. goals are steps toward addressing that equity concern. During this

process the Data Inquiry Team should identify which subgroups may be underperforming and in what content areas. The Data Inquiry Team could consider answering the following questions:

What does the data tell us about the implementation of each S.M.A.R.T. goal?

- Are there mid-course adjustments that need to be made, are there changes needed, or is all on track to meet the goal?
- When the goals are assessed at the end of the time period, what objective statements can be made about progress and results? What questions does the Data Inquiry Team have?
- What changes in practices, protocols, and procedures have been made as a result of your work on the initial equity concern?
- Has the initial equity concern been addressed? What is the evidence?
- What is needed next?

**Potential pitfalls:**

Know that a lack of progress, or evidence of change in one area, does not mean that the goal was not appropriate. Identifying what has worked to address the goal and what needs to be adjusted can keep the school on track to meet the goal.

Be mindful of what you may not be seeing or addressing. You and/or your team can consider answering the following questions: Are certain programs or interventions more successful with one group of students over another? Why or how is a program or intervention providing more protective factors for one group rather than all?

**Keep in mind:**

Change takes time. While the urgency of the equity concern remains, make sure to plan the best ways to realize the larger goal. Use the information gathered from this phase in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle to strategically (re)align resources to address the equity concern.

## 8. Celebrate Successes.

**Guiding considerations:**

Periodically throughout the implementation of the plan, the Data Inquiry Team should examine data to revisit results for subgroups of students to identify and celebrate successes. You and your team could periodically consider answering the following questions:

- Where are we seeing improvements? For which subgroups?
- What do you think has contributed to these positive outcomes?
- What changes to practice (resources, interventions, professional learnings, etc.) facilitated the positive changes?
- What changes in procedures, protocols, and practices have occurred as a result of our work on the educational equity concern?

**Potential pitfalls:**

Be realistic about the likelihood of achieving success on addressing the original equity concern. The S.M.A.R.T. goals are initial steps. They are time-bound so that they will more likely be achieved. It often takes several sets of S.M.A.R.T. goals to realize the overall change required on the initial equity concern.

**Keep in mind:**

Communicate and celebrate your wins. Specifically naming a success, especially a small one, shines the light on excellent work or insightful thinking done by an individual, team, or others. Recognizing people in simple ways is powerful and important to the recipient and reinforces staff to keep doing what is working well.

## 9. Start the cycle again.

### Guiding considerations:

Revisit the original educational equity concern with the original Data Inquiry Team and/or any new team members who took part in the data inquiry process. Assess whether or not the question is still relevant as stated, or if it needs to be refined. Outline places for improvement and/or new lines of inquiry. The Data Inquiry Team may consider answering the following questions:

- Who, or what, are the new groups of people or data points that need to be added to the data inquiry process?
- Whose voices or perspectives are missing who are either negatively or positively impacted by the equity concern?
- What still needs to be addressed?

### Potential pitfalls:

As you and your team have gone through this process you may have realized that your school and/or district does not have the data systems you and your team need to comprehensively monitor the educational equity concern. If this is the case, you and your team may want to reflect on the following questions:

- Does our district or school system have adequate data collection and reporting systems?
- Are staff fluent in using and interpreting many kinds of data?
- If not, how can these data system gaps be addressed before the next round of data inquiry occurs?

### Keep in mind:

Critically reflect upon whose voices and/or data points are missing from the data inquiry process. Examine why these voices and data points are missing and analyze how to include them in the future to contribute to addressing the original educational equity concern.



SECTION 4:

# Case Studies

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# Case Studies

## CASE STUDY:

### **Peppermill Middle School Working to Create a Positive School Climate**

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Westhaven Regional School District serves three surrounding suburbs that are the hub of Peppermill Pharmaceutical Industries and serve as communities for commuters to several urban areas. Westhaven has six schools: four elementary, one middle school, and one high school.

Many Westhaven parents/guardians were born in the area and continue to live and raise their families there. Though Peppermill Industries employs many of the longtime residents in the area, many employees are transferred to the area to work at Peppermill, usually for five-year engagements. Many of these employees are largely from Southeast Asian countries and identify as Muslim. In addition, a decade ago a housing development for military families was built in one of the feeder suburbs and expansion of that development is expected in the next decade. The housing development also serves a small but increasing number of families from the surrounding urban areas who are moving in to get a better education for their children.

Performance on the state's English and Mathematics achievement tests has dropped significantly in the past five years. To support students to be better test takers, the district has increased test preparation time. Peppermill Middle School has also begun a complementary professional learning initiative in culturally responsive pedagogy to respond to the changing demographics of the school.

**Table 15****Peppermill School Student Enrollment 2016-17**

<b>Total Number of Students = 854</b>	<b>Percentage of the Population</b>	<b>Number of students</b>
Gender Identities / Sexual Orientaton		
Female	53%	453
Male	47%	401
LGBTQIA+		Data on gender identity/ expression and sexual orientation are not collected
Race/Ethnicity		
Native American/Alaskan	0%	0
Asian	25%	214
Black	8%	68
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0%	0
Latinx	12%	102
White	55%	470
Students with disabilities (IDEA)	19%	162
Students with disabilities (504 only)	6%	51
Students who are English Learners	12%	102%



Gary Martin has been the principal at Peppermill Middle School for eight years. Although he was raised in one of the surrounding urban areas, he has lived in one of the Westhaven feeder suburbs for more than 10 years. When school started in September 2016, he heard some unsettling comments that prompted him to wonder about issues of cultural insensitivity and bias. Mr. Martin felt that the comments represented deficit-based beliefs about some student populations in the school, which he thought might be negatively affecting their academic performance.

Principal Martin, who had prided himself on creating a positive school environment, wondered if the negative comments were isolated or if they were representative of the overall climate of the school. While he knew that he must continue to address issues as they came up, he decided that a more systematic approach for looking at school climate and student achievement patterns was needed.

In January 2017, Mr. Martin invited a group of administrators, teachers, non-licensed personnel, and parents/guardians to participate in a Data Inquiry Team. During their first meeting, the Data Inquiry Team acknowledged that student voices are also important and agreed that they would look for ways to bring students into the Data Inquiry Team's work once they had gotten started.

Mr. Martin asked each team member to complete the MAEC Criteria for an Equitable School-Equity Audit (MAEC, 2021) to provide perspectives of the school through different lenses.

In addition, Mr. Martin set personal goals for his work with the Data Inquiry Team, including:

- Igniting the Data Inquiry Team's passion for and connectedness to the school's equity goals;
- Fostering the Data Inquiry Team's commitment to individual and institutional practices that serve all children; and
- Persisting in working towards an equitable school over the long term.

The following sections describe the work the Data Inquiry Team did as they moved through each step in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle.

## Unpacking the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

At the first meeting of the new Data Inquiry Team, Mr. Martin named Lydia Strong, the Mathematics teacher on the Team, as its Chair. The Data Inquiry Team discussed the Data Inquiry Cycle it would be using and worked through steps 1-3.

### *1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.*

As Peppermill Middle School's student body has become more diverse, its State test scores have fallen. Some think there is a connection between decreasing scores and a culturally insensitive climate among teachers and students.

### *2. Identify questions about the equity concern.*

To learn more about school culture, the Data Inquiry Team posed the following questions:

- Why have test scores declined in the middle school?
- Are the recent demographic shifts related to declining test scores?
- Do all students have equitable access to rigorous and advanced courses?
- How does student achievement vary by race/ethnicity, gender identities, religion, and other variables?

- Are there biases, assumptions, and/or stereotypes about culturally and linguistically diverse students that are negatively affecting their achievement?
- Do culturally and linguistically diverse students participate in extra-curricular activities?
- Do the administrators and teachers have awareness, knowledge, and understanding of culturally responsive pedagogy?

### *3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence the equity concern.*

The Data Inquiry Team identified the following sources of data it needed to explore the identified equity concern: disaggregated data on student enrollment in specific programs, disaggregated student performance data on state assessments, disaggregated data on student participation in extra-curricular activities and events at the school, and school climate data. The Data Inquiry Team requested three years of data for each identified source, but that information was not readily available, so the Team accepted the data from 2016-17 and requested it for the two previous years.

### *4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.*

The Data Inquiry Team engaged in the Data-Driven Dialogue process in order to make observations and inferences about the data, which then informed their S.M.A.R.T. goals.

(See facilitator guide for using this process at: [http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/data\\_driven\\_dialogue.pdf](http://schoolreforminitiative.org/doc/data_driven_dialogue.pdf))

#### **A. Predict what the data will reveal.**

Team members said:

- Teachers and staff have biases, assumptions, and stereotypes about culturally, ethnically, and linguistically diverse students in Peppermill Middle School.
- Students who are White have higher test scores than culturally and linguistically diverse students in Peppermill Middle School.
- Staff biases, assumptions, and stereotypes are reflected in instructional approaches (visual displays, student directions, classroom libraries, and teacher-student interactions).
- Students of Color have reported anecdotes of cultural bias and lack of understanding from peers and staff.
- Students who are English Learners are disproportionately represented in Special Education classes.
- Spanish-speaking students and students who are Black are performing at lower levels than other student subgroups at our school.
- Students who are Black and Latinx are underrepresented in advanced classes.
- Fewer students who are English Learners and are Students of Color participate in extra-curricular school activities and events.

**B. Visually represent the data.**

Mr. Martin worked with Ms. Strong to create data displays and they projected each data set on a screen.

**Table 16**

**Peppermill Middle School  
Percentage of Five Student Subgroups (Grades 6-8) in Program in 2016-17 Position College Prep between Advanced College Prep and Career/Technical**

<b>Class Level</b>	<b>White N=470</b>	<b>Asian N=171</b>	<b>Black N=68</b>	<b>Latinx N=102</b>	<b>FRPL</b>	<b>M N=401</b>	<b>F N=453</b>	<b>LGBTQIA+</b> Data on gender identity/ expression and sexual orientation are not collected
Advanced College Prep	45%	41%	5%	9%	4%	47%	53%	
Career/ Technical Education (CTE)	13%	7%	43%	37%	41%	61%	39%	
College Prep	41%	28%	16%	15%	11%	41%	59%	
Receiving Special Education	18%	9%	47%	26%	30%	69%	31%	
Students who are English Learners (ELs)	12%	17%	9%	62%	27%	49%	51%	

**Table 17**

**Peppermill Middle School  
 Percentage of Five Student Subgroups (Grades 6-8) in Program in 2016-17 Position College Prep between Advanced College Prep and Career/Technical**

<b>ELA</b>	<b>% Level 1 Below Expectation</b>	<b>% Level 2 Approaching Expectation</b>	<b>% Level 3 Met Expectation</b>	<b>% Level 4 Exceeded Expectation</b>
Asian	8%	40%	31%	21%
Black	36%	41%	16%	7%
Latinx	33%	40%	19%	8%
White	6%	33%	38%	23%
FRPL	38%	26%	28%	8%
Students who are English Learners	71%	22%	7%	0%
Disability	55%	26%	13%	6%
Female	21%	36%	29%	13%
Male	32%	35%	26%	7%
LGBTQIA+	Data on gender identity/expression and sexual orientation are not collected			

**Table 18**

## Peppermill Middle School Disaggregated Student Performance on State Assessments for Grade 8 Students in 2016-17

<b>MATH</b>	<b>% Level 1</b> Below Expectation	<b>% Level 2</b> Approaching Expectation	<b>% Level 3</b> Met Expectation	<b>% Level 4</b> Exceeded Expectation
Asian	13%	27%	31%	29%
Black	44%	38%	11%	7%
Latinx	41%	43%	10%	6%
White	12%	32%	33%	23%
FRPL	44%	41%	10%	5%
Students who are English Learners	67%	29%	4%	0%
Disability	31%	38%	17%	14%
Female	28%	32%	21%	19%
Male	34%	33%	19%	14%
LGBTQIA+	Data on gender identity/expression and sexual orientation are not collected			

**Table 19**

**Participation of Grades 6-8 Students in Non-Curricular Activities and Events at the School**

Class Levels	Total Roster	Asian	Black	Latinx	White	FRPL	F	M	LGBTQIA+* Data on gender identity/ expression and sexual orientation are not collected
Student Council	8**	3	0	1	4	0	6	2	
		38%	0%	13%	49%	0%	75%	25%	
Interscholastic Athletics	186	27	37	49	73	36	63	123	
		15%	20%	26%	39%	19%	34%	66%	
Cheerleading	33	3	2	7	21	0	33	0	
		9%	6%	21%	64%	0%	100%	0%	
Band	69	15	10	12	32	7	30	39	
		22%	15%	17%	46%	10%	43%	57%	
Spring Talent Show	91	10	19	21	41	13	52	39	
		11%	21%	23%	45%	14%	57%	43%	
Science Fair	81	38	7	5	31	11	34	47	
		47%	9%	6%	38%	14%	42%	58%	
Art Festival	88	24	17	16	31	17	49	39	
		27%	19%	18%	36%	19%	56%	44%	

\*\*2 students/grades 6, 7, & 8, and 2 at-large

At the meeting, members discussed the absence of data about the participation of students who are English Learners and students with disabilities in extracurricular activities and school events. School climate data was not available, and members of the Data Inquiry Team made note of the need for a school climate survey to be done in the future. At the meeting, they wrote down things they had heard that reflected biases, beliefs, or assumptions that staff, students, and/or parent(s)/guardian(s) had about specific groups in the school community.

### *Teachers*

- “Some students new to this community are not prepared to do schoolwork.”
- “I believe the teachers here hold students to high standards, but now with these new students we are being required to adjust and fit what we do with students and we are not asking students to adjust and fit into what we do.”
- “Some families do not seem to be invested in the community.”
- “I know that some of these children dress a certain way because of their religion, but by doing so they just draw attention to themselves. It would be better for them if they blended in more.”

### *Students*

- “I sit with my friends at lunch and study hall. Other kids make fun of the food we bring for lunch and don’t want us to sit with them.”
- “I would not feel comfortable participating in many of the school’s extracurricular activities.”
- “Teachers have a hard time confronting students on stuff. They pretend they do not hear what kids call us or they try to play it down.”
- “When it comes to classwork, teachers are either you get it, or you don’t. They are willing to help some students, but only so far.”

### *Parent(s)/guardian(s)*

- “Teachers talk to me as if I’m a child and act like they know my child better than me.”
- “I am uncomfortable going to meetings because I’m made to feel I do not belong there.”
- “Afterschool clubs and activities are for certain students.”
- “Folks try to be politically correct but to be honest, they are disrespectful to some students and families.”

## **C. Make objective statements about the data.**

Ms. Strong invited the participants to individually study the data in silence and write their observations. Then they were given 10-15 minutes to make statements about each data display while another Team member charted their responses. Their observations were:

- 16% of students who are Black and 15% of students who are Latinx are enrolled in College Prep coursework;
- Students who are Black and Latinx are under-represented in Advanced College Prep and the College Prep classes and over-represented in CTE and Special Education classes;
- 23% of students who are Black and 27% of students who are Latinx met or exceeded proficiency levels on ELA assessments;
- 36% of students receiving FRPL, 7% of students who are English Learners, and 19% of students receiving Special Education services met or exceeded proficiency levels on ELA assessments;
- 18% of students who are Black, 16% of students who are Latinx, 15% of students receiving FRPL, 4% of students who are English Learners, and 31% of students receiving Special Education services met or exceeded proficiency levels in mathematics; and
- A higher percentage of female students than their enrollment percentage participated in cheerleading, student council, the Spring Talent Show, and Arts Festival and a lower percentage of them than their enrollment percentage participated in interscholastic athletics, band, and the Science Fair.

## **D. Make inferences about the data and ask questions.**

Ms. Strong said, “Based on the data we have, what do you infer? What do you believe the data show and why? What additional data might we need to confirm these beliefs?”

The Data Inquiry Team generated the following inferences:

- Based on their enrollment in Advanced College Prep or College Prep, students who are Black and Latinx do not have equitable access to rigorous course offerings;
- The low representation of particular student groups in non-curricular activities might be because they feel uncomfortable with students who have made it clear they do not want them around;
- Educators may have misunderstandings about the capacity of some subgroups of students to learn; therefore, the educators do not provide high quality interventions or educational resources when needed;
- Some educators do not have strong background knowledge or connections with the diverse student body and do not mentor those students to have higher academic aspirations; and
- Based on what two parents/guardians said about being talked to as a child or made to feel that they do not belong, maybe parent(s)/guardian(s) reinforce their children's reluctance to get involved in school activities because they fear rejection.

### **E. Do a root cause analysis of one or more of the inferences.**

The Data Inquiry Team decided to work on understanding why there are disparities in academic achievement between subgroups of students, in terms of their English language proficiency, race, ethnicity, and/or eligibility for FRPL.

The Data Inquiry Team asked "Why" five times:

- **Why are there racial and gender differences in achievement and enrollment in rigorous courses?**  
Maybe students are inadequately prepared to engage in and succeed in rigorous coursework.
- **Why might some student subgroups be under prepared for rigorous course work?**  
Maybe students have not had the opportunity to take the proper sequencing of courses needed to eventually enroll in rigorous course tracks.
- **Why are all subgroups of students not enrolled in the coursework sequences that lead to higher academic achievement?**  
Maybe educators and school counselors are unaware that they have biases, assumptions, and/or stereotypes that affect how they counsel, mentor, and teach diverse students.
- **Why are some teachers and administrators unaware of their biases and stereotypes?**  
Maybe because teachers and administrators do not get feedback about what the likely impact of their behavior is on students' academic outcomes. (Many people are unaware of their biases and stereotypes. We often do not know what we do not know.)
- **Why would student academic outcomes be negatively affected by teacher perceptions?**  
Maybe students do not believe that their teachers think they can do hard work. Maybe what is asked of students does not connect with their own life experiences or culture.

Based on their responses to the Five Whys, the Data Inquiry Team focused on the root causes of the inequitable school climate and where the school needed to address its cultural insensitivity.



*5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices. Consider areas of strength in the school/district that will inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.*

The Data Inquiry Team decided that it was important to explore additional resources that are related to understanding the current climate and readiness of staff to become more culturally responsive.

The Data Inquiry Team identified four sources that explicitly informed their thinking about how to approach the educational equity concern they are trying to solve. They sought to understand what it would mean for teachers and administrators to deepen their knowledge about culturally responsive pedagogy and discuss it within the context of their own practices.

**Source 1:** *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain: Promoting Authentic Engagement and Rigor Among Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students* (Hammond, 2014).

The Data Inquiry Team discussed the possibility of having all administrators and teachers rotate through an eight-week PLC using Hammond's 2014 book as the focus. Each PLC session would last about 90 minutes.

The Data Inquiry Team discussed how the PLC could build awareness of how culture leverages learning. A Team member mentioned a website that described how culture dictates what makes students feel socially and emotionally ready for learning. It said that participants could look at the institutional, individual, and instructional dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy and learn how to design instruction that is culturally responsive to enhance information processing.

Research indicates that teachers frequently are underprepared with the skills, knowledge, belief systems, and confidence needed to engage in meaningful partnerships with their students' parents/guardians.

**Source 2:** *Teaching the Teachers: Preparing Educators to Engage Families for Student Achievement* (Casper et al., 2011).

The Data Inquiry Team discussed the need to foster greater parents/guardians engagement, improve teacher/parent communications, and create a shared partnership for student success. The Data Inquiry Team decided to focus on finding a family engagement program that emphasizes academic engagement because effective parent teacher relationships:

- Increase skills and knowledge on the part of teachers, parents/guardians and students;
- Transform the mindset of parent-teacher collaboration;
- Honor and respect the contributions of parents/guardians and teachers;
- Reflect on long-held beliefs, values, and need for change; and
- Develop a sense of self-efficacy among the stakeholders.

**Source 3:** *The Comprehensive School Climate Inventory* (NSCC, n.d.)

The Data Inquiry Team thought that the Comprehensive School Climate Inventory (CSCI) developed by the National School Climate Center (NSCC) is a comprehensive and important tool. The tool measures 13 dimensions of climate in five areas (safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, social media, and institutional environment). Augmenting CSCI, the Shared Leadership Across Contexts (NSCC, n.d.) outlines a cyclical and continuous improvement process for preparation, evaluation, action planning, implementation, and re-evaluation of the school climate.

**Source 4:** Resources for improving climate change.

The U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (2009) recommends school climate reform as a scientifically sound strategy that promotes healthy relationships, school connectedness, and dropout prevention. Rumberger et al. (2017) include school climate as a strategy for dropout prevention. And, the U.S. Department of Education recommends school climate reform as an evidence-based strategy to prevent violence. In fact, the U.S. Department of Education has invested in school climate improvement efforts as a fundamentally important school reform strategy (2016).

**The Data Inquiry Team identified the following materials to support the PLC development:**

- *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools.* (Singleton & Linton, 2006)
- *Department of Education Releases Resources on Improving School Climate.* (March 31, 2016), <https://www.ed.gov/news/press-releases/department-education-releases-resources-improving-school-climate>
- *The 5 Habits of Effective PLCs,* (Easton, December 2015), <https://learningforward.org/journal/december-2015-vol-36-no-6/the-5-habits-of-effective-plcs/>
- *Preventing Dropout in Secondary Schools.* (Rumberger et al., 2017), [https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc\\_dropout\\_092617.pdf](https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/Docs/PracticeGuide/wwc_dropout_092617.pdf)
- *School Connectedness: Strategies for Increasing Protective Factors Among Youth.* (CDC, 2009), <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/protective/pdf/connectedness.pdf>
- *Shared Leadership Across Contexts.* (NSCC, n.d.) <https://www.schoolclimate.org/about/our-approach>
- *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups.* Third Edition, (Garmston & Wellman, 2016)

These resources provide strategies and protocols for having collaborative discussions and dialogue.

**Write one or more S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.**

Based on the research the Data Inquiry Team reviewed, they developed three S.M.A.R.T. goals:

**S.M.A.R.T. Goal 1:** Conduct a school climate survey of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians to better understand the school's environment by December 30, 2017 and conduct a post survey by June 15, 2018. The minimum response rate for students and staff will be 85% and for parents/guardians it will be 60%. The post test will show at least a 10% improvement in climate measures.

**S.M.A.R.T. Goal 2:** By May 30, 2018, 80% of parents/guardians of students across grades 6-8, who reflect the racial ethnic make-up of the student body, will have at least one telephone or in-person conference with their child's ELA teacher each semester to discuss academic goals and outcomes. There will be special outreach to engage parents/guardians of students who are experiencing adverse academic outcomes more frequently. Parents/guardians and ELA teachers will each complete a reflection sheet after each interaction, and copies, with names redacted, will be given to the principal.

**S.M.A.R.T. Goal 3:** All administrators and teachers will participate in 15 hours of professional learning about culturally responsive practices between September 2017 and May 2018 and demonstrate increased cultural sensitivity in a pre- and post-Likert scale evaluation. There will be at least a 10% increase in students' enrollment in rigorous coursework in 2018 and an additional increase of 10% in 2019.

*6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.*

The Equity Committee developed action plans for each S.M.A.R.T. goal, knowing that they would get better at writing S.M.A.R.T. goals as they practiced more.



**Table 20****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1**

Conduct a school climate survey of administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians to better understand the school's environment by December 30, 2017 and conduct a post-survey by June 15, 2018. The minimum response rate for students and staff will be 85% and for parents/guardians it will be 60%. The post test will show at least a 10% improvement in climate measures.

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Preparation for survey	Guidance Supervisor with NSCC	June 2017	Survey Implementation Plan	Identify multiple ways for students and parent/guardian to take the survey:  students' homeroom/counseling office; school staff portals; administrator and teacher only portals; parent/guardian portals; designated community-based organizations
Communication about Survey	Parent/guardian with the Parent Coordinator, school staff with the Principal, students with the Guidance Supervisor	August-September 2017	Survey summary, cable/radio spots, parents/guardians meetings, Principal's leadership meetings, subject area meetings, community events	Number of people attending sessions, inquiry calls and website clicks  Informal feedback and formal self-report check-in sheets used at information sessions
Survey	NCSC	September 2017	Comprehensive School Climate Inventory administered	Minimally, achieve an 85% survey response rate for students and staff and a 60% response rate for parents/guardians. Be transparent about setting the response rate so high for parents/guardians because it is crucial to have representative points of view from different parents/guardians populations. Show at least a 10% improvement in climate measures.

**Table 21****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #2**

Academic Parent-Teacher Teams Developing Home and School Partnerships Focused on Student Learning and Achievement (<https://aptt.wested.org/>)

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Readiness	Instructional coach	July 2017	APTT school orientation scheduled	APTT Readiness survey completed
Communications & Outreach	Instructional coach with parent coordinator	July - August 2017	APTT brochure	Verbal commitments of parents/guardians to participate and recruitment to ensure parents/guardians who are Asian, Black, Latinx, and White are all represented
Training	APTT facilitator	August 2017	Letters sent to parents/guardians	ELA teachers trained in APTT process
Team Meeting 1	ELA teachers	September 2017	Introductory meeting with parents/guardians	Common language about student learning goals and supports are known and used by ELA teachers
Teacher Planning Support	APTT facilitator	September 2017	Review APTT Readiness Survey	Supports for ELA teachers
APTT Classroom Observation	Principal, instructional coach, and an APTT facilitator	September - October 2017	Finalize Implementation Plan	ELA teachers
Individual Sessions	Teachers	October - November 2017	ELA teachers have a common language about student learning goals and supports	Common language about student learning goals and activities for improvement/enrichment
Teacher Planning Support	APTT facilitator	October - November 2017	Summary of what is working and identifying the challenges and needs	Supports for ELA teachers

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
APTT Classroom Observation	Principal, instructional coach, and an APTT facilitator	October - November 2017	Feedback to ELA teachers	ELA teachers
Team Meeting 2	Grade-level teachers	December 2017 - January 2018	ELA teachers with parents/guardians	Common language about student learning goals
Teacher Planning Support	APTT facilitator	December 2017 - January 2018	What is working and what are the challenges	Supports for ELA teachers
Team Meeting 3	ELA teachers	March - April 2018	ELA teachers with parents/guardians	Common language of student learning goals
APTT Classroom Observation	Principal, instructional coach, and an APTT facilitator	March - April 2018	Feedback to ELA teachers	ELA teachers
Leadership Team Debrief	Principal	May 2018	Team planning	Identify lessons learned and challenges experienced
Family Focus Group	Principal	June 2018	Parents/guardians tell what worked and identified the challenges	Identify lessons learned and challenges experienced

**Table 22****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #3**

All administrators and teachers will participate in 15 hours of professional learning about culturally responsive practices between September 2017 and May 2018 and demonstrate increased cultural sensitivity in a pre- and post-Likert scale evaluation. There will be at least a 10% increase in students' enrollment in rigorous coursework in 2018 and an additional increase of 10% in 2019.

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Planning	Instructional coach	September 2017 - May 2018	Identify 8-week cycles	ELA teachers
Common tools for each PLC: Team Building exercises, Deep Listening exercises, and some suggested PLC organizational structures		Administrators and teachers sign-up for 1 of 4 sessions	ELA teachers with parents/guardians	Common language about student learning goals
Communications	Technology coordinator	September 2017 - May 2018	PLC Google doc set-up	Use of Google docs
PLC content	PLC group	September 2017- May 2018	Sessions on culturally responsive practices. Teachers are expected to try the practices they learn between PLC meetings.	Reflection template given for teachers to use after each PLC and they post at least one statement per week on the Google doc
Reflections	PLC group	End of 8-week cycle	Individual self-assessment and group discussion of what worked and what did not, suggested topics for next cycle of PLCs	Lessons learned; continued participation; use of equity understandings and skills in other PLCs faculty meetings

## *7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.*

Completion of the CSCI was very useful in understanding the school climate, school connectedness, and student engagement. The organization of the inventory around 13 dimensions of climate in five areas (safety, teaching and learning, interpersonal relationships, social media, and institutional environment) across various perspectives: e.g., administrators, teachers, students, and parents/guardians), provided a baseline from which to measure the school's climate going forward. The inventory also contextualized the schooling experiences of students and their parents/guardians beyond quantitative measures like test scores. The Data Inquiry Team tentatively decided to repeat the inventory in June of the following school year. This would allow sufficient time to follow-up on issues that surfaced. Implementing the APTT engagement parent model was successful in fostering parent/teacher collaboration, clearly articulating expected learning objectives, and sharing concrete activities and tools to support student learning at school and home. Teachers and parents/guardians reported that conversations during teacher/parent/guardian conferences had greater focus and that students seemed to have a greater grasp of the material. The Data Inquiry Team decided to implement another cycle of APTT with Math grade-level teachers.

Student enrollment in more rigorous courses was tracked. There were 8-11% increases in underrepresented student subgroups electing more rigorous courses in May 2018.

Data showed that PLCs worked well overall though a few of the staff were inconsistent in attendance (about 10%) and some staff members self-reported little to no increased learning from the PLC series (about 6%) on PLC evaluation forms. In addition, the PLCs provided an ongoing time for staff to focus on culturally responsive pedagogy, practice between sessions, reflect, and learn from each other. This was indicated on the PLC evaluation forms through a Likert scale.

When the Data Inquiry Team did the root cause analysis, it concluded that the policies and practices operating in the school were not culturally competent. The school made some improvement in the school climate, and the Data Inquiry Team knew that it had a lot more work to do to achieve a culturally competent school staff. In addition, the Data Inquiry Team decided that more was needed to expand awareness of equity/culturally competent practices and policies beyond faculty to others.

## *8. Celebrate successes.*

The Data Inquiry Team organized a School Appreciation Festival for the entire Peppermill Middle School community as a way of celebrating the end of the year and everyone's involvement in the climate inventory, APTT, and the PLCs. Local restaurants donated food and agencies in the community offered a variety of activities for younger children so that parents/guardians and family members could attend sessions planned for adults.

## *9. Start the cycle again.*

Principal Martin supported the Data Inquiry Team to convene for two more days after the close of school year to begin another cycle of the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle. The Data Inquiry Team reviewed data that measured the success of the S.M.A.R.T. goals, as well as other data they determined necessary to decide whether to continue the work in the upcoming year. The Data Inquiry Team discussed adding more people to the Team to ensure the inclusion of more voices and decided to add a student representative from each grade level. As the Data Inquiry Team engaged in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle, they more fully appreciated the impact it had on the quality of their work, and they recommitted to continuing on the Team and creating S.M.A.R.T. goals for the upcoming school year. The Data Inquiry Team discussed the possibility of using data on discipline (referral & sanctions); in- and out-of-school suspensions; and expulsions as other measures of school climate and decided to discuss them when the Data Inquiry Team met again.



## CASE STUDY:

# Central Unified School District Working to Support Students of Diverse Gender Identities and/or Sexual Orientations

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Central Unified School District is a large suburban school district located near the outer ring of a major metropolitan center. The school system has eight elementary schools, four middle schools, and two high schools. There are also several private and community-based pre-kindergarten facilities that feed into the eight elementary schools.

The community has seen an increase in racial and economic diversity in the past 15 years. Most of the district's middle and high schools reflect the increased diversity; however, the elementary schools in the district are less diverse. For example: two elementary schools have mostly students who are White enrolled; three elementary schools are racially mixed; one school has mostly students who are Black enrolled; and two schools have mostly students who are Black and Latinx enrolled.

Over the past 15 years, the population of students who are White has declined from 80% to 55%; the population of students who are Black has remained relatively stable at 20%; and the population of students who are Latinx grew from less than 1% of the student body to 25%. Below is the enrollment data for Central Unified School District.

**Table 23****Enrollment in Central Unified School District 2016-17**

<b>Total Number of Students: 10,790</b>	<b>% of Total Population</b>
Gender Identities / Sexual Orientaton	
Female	52%
Male	47%
LGBTQIA+	Data on gender identity/expression and sexual orientation are not collected
Race/Ethnicity	
Native American/Alaskan	0%
Asian	<1%
Black	20%
Hawaiian, Pacific Islander	0%
Latinx	25%
White	55%
2 or more	<1%
FRPL	56%
Students with disabilities (IEPS)	14%
Students with disabilities (504 only)	2%
Students who are English Learners	11%

Victoria Worthington, the district superintendent, put the phone down and finished dressing to go to work. School ended two weeks ago and she was just settling into what she thought would be a routine summer. However, this was the second call this week from the family of a child with a gender identity different from what was assigned at birth, who would be attending school in the fall. The first call was from a family stating that when their child returned to school in the fall, he wanted to be called Max and referred to using male pronouns. The mother explained that the family would be supporting Max's gender identity/expression in dress and appearance over the summer. This morning's call was from a family entering the district with a ninth grader. The parent explained to Ms. Worthington that their child Carly had begun transitioning in eighth grade. The move to Ms. Worthington's district was meant to offer Carly a fresh start beginning high school.

Ms. Worthington wanted the district to be ready to support both students and their parents/guardians. She thought of the district's mission statement:

We develop our children's greatest abilities and make possible the discovery and pursuit of their dreams which, when fulfilled, will benefit us all. We provide a comprehensive and innovative approach to education and graduate successful, curious, lifelong learners who confidently confront the great challenges of their time.

Fortunately, during the past academic year, Ms. Worthington had met with the district's Title IX Coordinator, Betty Harris, to work with a committee to develop the district's Guidelines for supporting all students' gender identities and sexual orientations and being vigilant about bullying or harassment.

After nine months of thoughtful work by this committee, the Central Unified School Board passed the committee's proposed Guidelines on the topic in April 2017. Ms. Worthington knew from her experience that the Guidelines were only a tool. The Title IX Coordinator had the foresight to include the following statement in a memo she sent to everyone in the district: "These Guidelines do not anticipate every situation that might occur with respect to students who are LGBTQIA+, and the needs of each student must be assessed on a case-by-case basis. In all cases, the goal is to ensure the safety, comfort, and healthy development of the students who are LGBTQIA+ while maximizing the students' social integration and minimizing stigmatization."

Ms. Worthington now realized that, with these two phone calls, the Guidelines would need to be put into practice immediately. Furthermore, some means had to be established to understand and evaluate how the Guidelines were being applied and how students who are LGBTQIA+ were being affected by them.

She decided that the Data Inquiry Team might be helpful to better understand how the Guidelines were being applied to practice and how students who are LGBTQIA+ were affected, or not, by the Guidelines. She wondered about using an Equity Data Inquiry Cycle, but there was no historical data to examine and little time for dissemination of the Guidelines and any staff training.

She thought that perhaps the Data Inquiry Team could start by collecting data on school climate and its impact on students who are LGBTQIA+, for whom there may be some data. The Data Inquiry Team would need to determine what data it needed and how to obtain it.

The issue Ms. Worthington identified to the Data Inquiry Team was: How do students who are LGBTQIA+ experience school and are the district's Guidelines affecting their school experience?

## Unpacking the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle.

The Data Inquiry Team discussed the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle and began with steps 1-3 in their first meeting.

### *1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.*

Central Unified School District staff are developing a greater awareness of the experiences of students who are LGBTQIA+ attending school in the district. However, the staff are unaware of how this group of students are faring, if they are adequately supported, and if school policies and practices will be adequately supportive of all the students.

### *2. Identify questions about the equity concern.*

To learn more about the experiences of students who are LGBTQIA+, the Data Inquiry Team posed the following questions:

- Are students who are LGBTQIA+ harassed by other students? If so, how are they harassed, by whom, and how frequently?
- Have there been reports of bullying or harassment of students who are LGBTQIA+ to school staff and administrators, and if there have, what was done?
- Do students who are LGBTQIA+ and their parents/guardians believe district policies convey expectations for a safe and inclusive environment?
- What school activities and practices utilize or operationalize gender-defined roles?
- Are extra-curricular activities welcoming to all students, regardless of gender identity/expression and/or sexual orientation?
- In what ways can the district support a safe and inclusive environment for students who are LGBTQIA+ and their parents/guardians?
- Have faculty expressed uncertainty or concern about the new Guidelines from the district?

### *3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence the equity concern.*

The Data Inquiry Team identified the following sources to investigate their equity issue: (1) discipline referrals for bullying, harassment, name-calling of students who are LGBTQIA+, and disciplinary actions taken; (2) observation data from classroom Walk Throughs; (3) review of school artifacts (school flyers, books, library materials, policies, curriculum, yearbook, etc.); and (4) Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN) interview data obtained from a local community chapter.

### *4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.*

The Equity team engaged in the Data-Driven Dialogue process to predict, observe, and make inferences from the data.

#### **A. Predict what the data will reveal.**

The individuals on the Data Inquiry Team made the following predictions about what data would show:

- Some students who are LGBTQIA+ are bullied a lot and do not feel safe at school.
- There is a lot of bullying and harassment in the cafeteria and on school grounds and nobody does anything about it.
- Course offerings and extracurricular activities support and reinforce stereotypical gender roles, such as recruiting boys for the STEM team, the Robotics team, and the Model UN, and girls for cheerleading.
- Students who become very upset about continued misuse of pronouns by peers and teachers are disciplined for speaking out.
- Teachers do not do anything when students make inappropriate comments such as, "That is so gay," in the classroom.

#### **B. Visually represent the data.**

Three teachers on the Data Inquiry Team who had created data displays in the past agreed to create to create data displays for the Team.

**Table 24****The local GLSEN Chapter****2015-2016 Survey of Students Ages 13-17 Who Identify as LGBTQIA+, from Central Unified and Three Other School Districts + N=132**

Question	Number of Students Who said Yes	Percentage of Students Who said Yes	Number of students Who said No	Percentage of Students Who said No
Have you been verbally abused while you were in school?	78	59%	54	41%
Have you been physically harassed or assaulted?	52	39%	80	61%
Have you been disciplined for public display of affection for things that straight students are not?	39	30%	93	70%
Have you missed a day of school in the past month because you felt unsafe?	42	32%	90	68%
Have you avoided a school function or activity because you felt unsafe?	91	69%	41	31%

**Table 25****The local GLSEN Chapter 2015-2016****Survey of Students Ages 13-17 who Identify as LGBTQIA+, from Central Unified and Three Other School Districts + N=132**

Question	Number of students who said “yes”	Percentage of students who said “yes”	Number of students who said “no”	Percentage of students who said “no”
Have you ever been asked or expected to use a bathroom or locker room that made you feel uncomfortable based on your gender identity?	7	77%	5	55%
Have you been denied use of your preferred name or pronoun?	6	66%	6	66%
Have there ever been instances where you were made to feel uncomfortable in the attire you chose to wear during classes or school activities?	3	33%	9	99%

Observations and review of materials at the elementary schools included:

- A kindergarten student said, “She pushed me because I said she is a girl and she said that she is a boy. She wants to be the father in our play, but she can’t because she is a girl.”
- A second-grade student told his teacher that the boys won’t play with him at recess because he is a faggot, and then asked the teacher what a faggot is.
- A fifth-grade teacher told a student she could not go to the father-daughter dance because she does not have a father. The student told the teacher that one of her mothers would come with her and the teacher said that was not allowed.
- Classroom or school libraries do not have books representing different family structures.

Observations and review of materials at the middle and high schools included:

- In the hallways, many students called other students “faggots” and teachers in hearing proximity did not respond to any of them.
- A student who is a transgender male was pushed into a girls’ restroom and students laughed and said, “Yeah, that’s where you belong.”
- The school and classroom libraries do not have books with characters who are LGBTQIA+.

### **C. Make objective statements about the data.**

The Data Inquiry Team met in a large conference room. They posted additional data on chart paper and on two Smartboards. They asked each other to engage in a gallery walk in order to process the data. Each individual was given a set of sticky notes on which they were asked to provide the following responses to the data:

- What do you notice (objective data)?
- What might an outsider observe about Central Unified School District after reading this data?

After each person posted their observations, the staff did a gallery walk with a partner and recorded (on larger sticky notes) numerous objective statements from the data displays they reviewed. When the activity finished, they engaged in a large group discussion to generate a synthesized chart of objective statements about the data.

- The percentage of respondents to the survey who responded yes about the following was:
  - o 59% have been verbally abused.
  - o 39% have been physically harassed or assaulted.
  - o 32% missed at least one day of school the previous month and 69% avoid school activities and functions because they do not feel safe in school.
- More than half of the youth who responded had been forced to use bathrooms that do not match their gender identity/expression.
- Teachers responded to verbal harassment less than a third of the time that it happened in their presence, as observed during classroom Walk Throughs.
- Thirty percent of respondents have been disciplined for displaying affection to a student of the same gender in ways that straight students have not been.
- There are relatively few books in classroom or the school library that represent different family structures or non-traditional gender roles.

### **D. Make inferences about the data and ask questions.**

The Data Inquiry Team used the objective statements from the previous step to generate the following inferences:

- The GLSEN chapter has members from our middle and high schools, so their data may be representative of students in our district.

- LGBTQIA+ students do not feel safe in school because they are often teased or bullied, and adults do not respond to abuse they witness.
- Staff appear unaware of how they reinforce and enact gender stereotypes and expectations.
- Implicit bias may be the cause for the way some faculty and staff treat and/or respond to students.

### **E. Do a root cause analysis of one or more of the inferences.**

The Data Inquiry Team decided to work on understanding why students who are LGBTQIA+ feel unsafe in their district. The committee asked “why” five times:

- **Why might some of our students who are LGBTQIA+ feel unsafe in our district?**  
Maybe because some students are verbally and physically abusive to them and staff do not do anything about it.
- **Why might staff not do anything about verbal abuse or physical harassment?**  
Some adults may not notice these occurrences because they are accustomed to the language and actions of abuse against LGBTQIA+ people in society.
- **Why might some staff not realize the effects of discriminatory behavior and want to address it?**  
Maybe some staff feel uncomfortable with people who are LGBTQIA+ and do not know how to address them.
- **Why might some staff feel uncomfortable with gender-expansiveness and not know how to address it?**  
Maybe because some staff have not taken action to be informed.
- **Why might staff not take opportunities to be informed?**  
Maybe because they do not want to deal with another form of discrimination and the fall-out from other teachers, parents/guardians, or the community.

*5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices and consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.*

The Data Inquiry Team decided that it would be important to explore and discuss additional resources that are related to staff learning and climate. One Data Inquiry Team member shared that young LGBTQIA+ people facing significant rejection are more than eight times more likely to attempt suicide than their non-LGBTQIA+ peers as noted in the following article abstract: Family rejection as a predictor of negative health outcomes in White and Latino lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults (Ryan et al., 2009).

The group found three sources that explicitly informed their thinking about how to be sure that students who are LGBTQIA+ at Central Unified School District are adequately supported by staff, their peers, and their parents/guardians.

**Source 1:** 2017 National School Climate Survey: The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Youth in Our Nation’s Schools (Kosciw, et al., 2018).

#### **The methodology used in the survey is as follows:**

The 2017 National School Climate Survey was conducted online from April through August 2017. To obtain a representative national sample of youth, we conducted outreach through national, regional, and local



organizations that provide services to or advocate on behalf of LGBTQ youth, and advertised and promoted on social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Tumblr. To ensure representation of transgender youth, youth of color, and youth in rural communities, they made special efforts to notify groups and organizations that work predominantly with these populations.

The final sample consisted of a total of 23,001 students between the ages of 13 and 21. Students were from all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and 5 U.S. territories. About two-thirds of the sample (67.5%) was White, a third (34.1%) was cisgender female, and 4 in 10 identified as gay or lesbian (41.6%). The average age of students in the sample was 15.6 years and they were in grades 6 to 12, with the largest numbers in grades 9, 10, and 11 (Kosciw et al. 2018, p. xviii).

The report stated that in 2017, they did not see the same progress in reducing levels of victimization experienced by youth who are LGBTQIA+, or increased access to some key school supports they know improve mental health and educational outcomes for LGBTQ youth, as they had seen in recent years (Kosciw, et al. 2018, p. xxiv).

**Source 2:** No Name Calling Week (GLSEN, n.d.).

The Data Inquiry Team was intrigued by the “No Name Calling Week” resources. No Name Calling Week is a GLSEN activity that focuses on kindness and creates an opportunity to challenge people to use language in a way that builds up each individual within a school community and provides a way of drawing attention to the damage of negative, derogatory, and hurtful language.

**Source 3:** Gender Inclusive Schools Framework (Gender Spectrum, 2019).

Gender Inclusive Schools Framework begins:

“When someone with the authority of a teacher describes the world and you’re not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing.” --Adrienne Rich

Gender Inclusive schools...

- Recognize that gender impacts all students.
- Interrupt binary notions of gender.
- Acknowledge and account for gender diversity.
- Question limited portrayals of gender.
- Support students’ self-reflection.
- Teach empathy and respect.

Gender Inclusive schools ask, “How are we accounting for the unique gender of every student?” (Gender Spectrum, 2019, p. 1).

The rest of Gender Inclusive Schools Framework details four discrete entry points, or approaches: Internal, Interpersonal, Instructional, and Institutional. The specific ideas and language modeled gave the Data Inquiry Team members many ideas to consider for future S.M.A.R.T. goals and action plans.

**Source 4:** Trans Student Education Resources (2019).

The Trans Student Education Resources (2019) website begins with the following self-description and their mission statement: “Trans Student Educational Resources is a youth-led organization dedicated to transforming the educational environment for trans and gender nonconforming students through advocacy and empowerment. In addition to our focus on creating a more trans-friendly education system, our mission is to educate the public and teach trans activists how to be effective organizers. We believe that justice for trans

and gender nonconforming youth is contingent on an intersectional framework of activism. Ending oppression is a long-term process that can only be achieved through collaborative action.”

The Data Inquiry Team also learned in their meetings with the local GLSEN chapter that family support is essential because of the extreme vulnerability of students who are LGBTQIA+ to being teased, harassed, assaulted, excluded, and ignored in terms of requests for recognition of their gender identity/expression.

The Data Inquiry Team realized that it would need to gather its own data in the future and that for now it would be assuming that the data it obtained was relevant to a percentage of the district’s LGBTQIA+ student population.

### *6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.*

Based on the research the Data Inquiry Team reviewed, the group developed three S.M.A.R.T. goals.

**S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 1:** Staff, students, and parents/guardians will understand the Guidelines for Supporting Youth Who Are LGBTQIA+ in the following ways:

**S.M.A.R.T. GOAL 1a:** By October 30, 2017, all district staff will have participated in professional learning on the Guidelines for Supporting Students who are LGBTQIA+ and how the Guidelines apply to academic and non-academic activities. Staff will write and submit to their school principals two ways they will inform students of the Guidelines and three ways they will implement them in their own practice.



**Table 26****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1a**

<b>Activity</b>	<b>Lead</b>	<b>Timeframe</b>	<b>Outputs</b>	<b>Benchmarks</b>
Preparation	Ms. Harris	June 2017	Professional learning plan	Training schedule for each school
Communication	Ms. Worthington	June - July 2017	Share approved Guidelines document, cover letter regarding training	District leadership meeting; school leadership meetings
Professional Learning Preparation	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	July 2017	Letters sent to parents/guardians	Developmentally appropriate examples and scenarios to include in training
Professional Learning I	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	July – October 2017	Conduct professional learning sessions in each school	School level conversations (leadership & department meetings) regarding Guidelines; staff develop action plans for their individual work
Evaluation	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	October 2017	PD Evaluations 85% response rate of 'useful' and 'very useful,' 100% response rate by teachers about how they will inform students and implement the Guidelines in their own practice	Formal and informal feedback on PD sessions; submission by teachers to two ways they will inform students on the guidelines and three ways they will implement them in their own practice
Debrief	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	October 2017	Identification of most and least successful training components, identification of areas needing more training and support	Areas of the Guidelines needing greater clarity; areas of Guidelines needing; additional learning or support
Follow-up	Teachers	October 2017	Follow-up plan incorporating information obtained from the evaluations	Suggested next steps for each school; revised Data Inquiry Team action plans

**Table 27****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1b**

All students will learn about the district Guidelines and prohibitions against verbal abuse during No Name Calling Week events which will occur in every school by November 15, 2017. Name calling will be reduced by 50% by May 30, 2018, as measured by school climate surveys administered in October 2017 and May 2018.

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Event briefing	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	September 2017	Event briefing in each school	School leadership conversations
Student recruitment	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	September 2017	At least 5-10 students in each school committed to chairing the event enlisting leaders from school clubs and groups to participate	Invitation to all school clubs/groups to join and endorse No Name Calling Week event
Event planning and Event protocols and flow	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	September - October 2017	Schedule of school No Name Calling Week Event outline and activities template	Identify pre- and post-event activities; identify developmentally appropriate activities
No Name Calling Week Events	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	November 15, 2017	School No Name Calling Week Events	School level conversations (leadership & department meetings) regarding Guidelines; staff develop action plans for their individual work
Event evaluation	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	November 2017	Student, family, and school personnel evaluations	Formal and informal feedback regarding the Events

**Table 28****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1c**

Parents/guardians will learn about supporting the wellbeing of students who are LGBTQIA+ at ongoing and repeated sessions, which will begin no later than January 30, 2018 in each school. Sessions will be attended by at least 5% of the parents/guardians. Participants will include three things they learned in each of the session evaluations.

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Planning	Ms. Harris & Data Inquiry Team	September 2017	Event briefing in each school	School leadership conversations
Communication & Outreach	Central district parent coordinator with GLSEN chapter representative	August – September 2017	Outreach plan target of at least 10 participants for each session	Printed flyers and announcements; distribution of flyers and announcements at local community organizations, activities & events; local radio and cable spots
Outreach	Central district parent coordinator with GLSEN chapter	September 2017	Target of at least 10 participants for each session	Announcements; distribution of flyers and announcements at local community organizations, activities & events; local radio and cable spots
Workshop Preparation	Central district parent coordinator with GLSEN chapter	September 2017	Workshop outline and workshop template	School level conversations (leadership and department meetings) regarding Guidelines; staff develop action plans for their individual work
Workshop Session	Central district parent coordinator with GLSEN chapter	1st - October 2017 2nd - February 2018 3rd - April 2018	Provide workshop	Training focus: 1st – Understanding issues and definitions; 2nd – Rights: Discrimination and Harassment; 3rd – Names & Pronouns
Series Debrief	Central district parent coordinator with GLSEN chapter	April 2018	Summary of workshop series evaluations: 1st – 7 participants 2nd – 17 participants 3rd – 13 participants	Formal and informal observations
No Name Calling Week Event follow-up	Central district parent coordinator with GLSEN chapter	May 2018	Preliminary plan for next year	Explore the inclusion of other community partners

## S.M.A.R.T. Goal #2

A School Climate Task Force will be created to select and oversee the administration of a School Climate Survey with special focus on students who are LGBTQIA+. The district will determine the dates of survey administration, which will be close to the end of October and the end of November 2017.

### *Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.*

Overall, Ms. Worthington, Ms. Harris, and the other members of the Data Inquiry Team were encouraged by the data from the 2017-18 S.M.A.R.T. Goal Evaluations.

The professional learning for the teachers took place before October 15, and evaluations included that:

- 64% of staff said the session was relevant,
- 73% of the staff said the session was high quality,
- 69% of the staff said the session was useful, and
- Principals throughout the district collected statements from 79-86% of their staff about ways they would implement what they learned.

Anecdotally, Ms. Harris suggested that additional training was needed because many staff were still not comfortable with the issues of youth who are LGBTQIA+. Students often came to her to deal with related issues rather than addressing the main issue itself. For example, at this year's prom two boys wore heels with their tuxedos and staff chaperones sought out Ms. Harris when parent chaperones questioned them. Ms. Harris had to remind these teachers of the Guidelines. Her concern was that too often teachers relied on her to respond rather than addressing issues themselves. She felt that if teachers would respond directly in the moment, the issue occurring could be resolved. Ms. Harris stated that a positive school climate was the work of the entire staff, not only administrators or people in specific roles like hers or the Data Inquiry Team members.

The evaluations of the No Name Calling event indicated:

- Students at the high school approached the principal about starting a Gay Straight Alliance (GSA) chapter.
- Students were actively exploring next steps with GLSEN and soliciting teachers to be the chapter advisors.
- All schools committed to participating in No Name Calling Week school events next year.

The parents/guardians session evaluations indicated:

- The parents/guardians workshop series was successful. Participation in the first series of workshops fell short of the targeted goal of five percent participation; the second set met the goal. All school parents/guardians centers now have information and resources on the topic and three middle school parents/guardians expressed interest in becoming more active. Ms. Harris was encouraged as she talked with them about ways to build on the momentum of the workshops.
- A School Climate Task Force was established to assume responsibility for any initiatives that would be planned for the next school year.
- The Data Inquiry Team realized that while it had implemented the action plans for the S.M.A.R.T. Goals, the results were largely about participant satisfaction with staff professional learning or parents/guardians workshops or the completion of an event.
- The Data Inquiry Team knew that it had not achieved an "understanding of why students who are LGBTQIA+ feel unsafe in their district," which was identified as the original equity concern. The Data Inquiry Team decided to give that responsibility to the newly established School Climate Task Force.

Information gathering and building awareness were a start. The Data Inquiry Team and the School Climate Task Force realized they would need to do a lot more to understand and address actual or perceived safety issues for students who are LGBTQIA+.

## 8. Celebrate successes.

Ms. Worthington, Ms. Harris, and members of the Data Inquiry Team did not document nor celebrate their successes. Perhaps it was because the Data Inquiry Team was discouraged because they had not reached their S.M.A.R.T. goal. The Data Inquiry Team thought about the future but neglected to recognize and build on their small successes. For example, the No Name Calling Week was implemented and there is a commitment for it to occur next year. The potential downside of not celebrating even the small successes is that the people who worked on making the improvements may feel their efforts were not valued and may be demoralized. It may be more difficult to enlist their involvement in the future.

## 9. Start the cycle again.

Ms. Worthington, Ms. Harris, and members of the Data Inquiry Team decided to continue working on how students who are LGBTQIA+ could feel safe and have positive experiences in academic and extracurricular school activities. The Data Inquiry Team knew that they would be predicting and reviewing the data that was collected for S.M.A.R.T. Goals 1a, b, and c, and for S.M.A.R.T. Goal 2. Ms. Worthington, Ms. Harris, and the Data Inquiry Team requested that the local GLSEN chapter invite or select two GLSEN student members and one adult member to join the Data Inquiry Team for 2018-2019. The local GLSEN chapter was considered successful and the Data Inquiry Team had high hopes for what it would learn from them.

While Ms. Worthington and Ms. Harris had discussed many possibilities for the future, including the creation of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in each school so that further discussions regarding LGBTQIA+ issues could be discussed, they knew that it was essential to repeat the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle and make decisions that were based on data and evidence.



## CASE STUDY:

# Harbor Elementary School Working to Meet the Needs of Students who are English Learners

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Harbor Elementary School is a kindergarten through grade 5 school located in a working-class suburb just outside of a large city. It is rich in cultural and linguistic diversity. The school has the highest percentage of racially and linguistically-diverse students in the district. About 20 years ago the school had a large Haitian population and it was known for its high academic achievement. In the past 10 years the population has shifted. The school has seen an influx of families from Central America with children who primarily speak Spanish. While the school had very strong Creole language supports two decades ago, it has struggled to build equally as strong supports for the large number of Spanish speaking students who now attend the school. During the past 10 years the school has seen a decline in achievement in Math and English based on state test scores. Last year the school was cited by the state for not meeting growth targets for students who are English Learners (ELs).

**Table 29**

## Harbor Elementary School

Total Number of Students = 487	% of Total Population
Students eligible for free and reduced-priced lunch	36%
Students with disabilities (IEPs only)	17%
Students with disabilities (504 plans only)	5%
Students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)	32%

The students who are English Learners who are new to the United States, and students who are English Learners and who have been enrolled in U.S. schools for more than six years, are not progressing toward English proficiency and are struggling academically due to their limited English skills. The school also enrolls students with limited or interrupted formal education (SLIFE). SLIFE are usually new to the U.S. school system and have had interrupted, limited, or no schooling opportunities in their native country and may have also experienced trauma. They have limited backgrounds in reading and writing in their native language(s) and are below grade level in native literacy and numeracy skills. The school has one ESL instructional coach on staff and four ESL teachers who use a variety of push-in and pull-out methods to provide language support to the students who are English Learners in the school.

Jaime Perez has been working in Harbor Elementary School for 10 years. He started as a teacher, became an assistant principal, and eventually became principal of the school two years ago. Ever since he was appointed as the principal, he has worked hard to ensure that teachers and families are connected. In his first year in the role, he hired a significant number of Spanish-speaking staff and school aides so that his teachers could effectively communicate with parents/guardians. He felt good about this initiative, but he also felt he needed to do more to properly serve the large number of students who are English Learners in their school.

Harbor Elementary School's data revealed that students who are English Learners were not exiting English Learner status at the rate the state expected, which prompted Mr. Perez to seek out professional learning opportunities that would help him find ways to address the students' lack of progress. For instance, before the 2017-2018 school year started, Mr. Perez attended a school leadership conference where he learned about different strategies and techniques to support students who are English Learners. In particular, he became aware of many other programs and strategies that other educators were using to help address achievement gaps between the increasing number of EL and English-proficient students in schools. He also met several



bilingual and ESL educators who shared their stories about how they accelerated EL student achievement in their schools.

The conference motivated Mr. Perez to take a more proactive approach towards meeting the needs of students who are English Learners in Harbor Elementary School. When the 2017-2018 school year started, he made it clear to the staff that he was making a broad commitment to equity for all students and he planned to develop a Data Inquiry Team to explore whether the school's policies, procedures, and practices were adequately supporting students who are English Learners.

In early September Mr. Perez requested that all school staff complete the Criteria for an Equitable School (MAEC, 2021). Mr. Perez told staff that the audit would launch a staff process of developing a common language and understanding of what makes an equitable school. The audit also became the impetus for Mr. Perez and his newly formed Data Inquiry Team to engage in an Equity Data Inquiry Cycle. The Data Inquiry Team consisted of Mr. Perez, the ESL instructional coach, an ESL teacher, a Special Education teacher, and a teacher from each grade level.

## Unpacking the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle

The Data Inquiry Team began with the first three steps in the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle to address the low achievement of students who are English Learners:

### *1. Identify the equity concern regarding student experiences and/or outcomes.*

Harbor Elementary School has been unable to accelerate the learning of the EL population. According to the data collected, students who are English Learners have not met annual growth targets and are not making adequate gains in either ELA or Mathematics to become proficient.

### *2. Identify questions about the equity concern.*

To learn more about EL underachievement, the Data Inquiry Team posed the following questions:

- Why are students who are learning English not achieving?
- Are culturally responsive practices being used, and if so are they associated with successful outcomes for students who are English Learners?
- What is the nature of the instruction of students who are learning English? How are teachers using the WIDA English Language Development Standards to inform their instruction?

### *3. Identify multiple sources of data to answer the questions and learn how school conditions may influence the equity concern.*

To answer their questions, Data Inquiry Team identified and examined three sources of data:

- EL summary data from staff responses to the MAEC Equity Audit - in particular the indicators relevant to EL instruction;
- Data on English language development by grade level for 2014-15 & 2015-16; and
- Fifth grade ELA and Math student performance data for students who are English Learners in 2016-2017.

### *4. Use the Data-Driven Dialogue process to generate the priority issues.*

The Data Inquiry Team engaged in the Data-Driven Dialogue process as follows to make observations and inferences about the data.

**a. Predict what the data will reveal.**

- There are not enough programmatic supports in the school to adequately support students who are English Learners.
- Teachers do not feel like they have been given time to plan together in order to incorporate into their instruction the necessary strategies to develop students' English language skills.
- At least 50% of students who are English Learners at grades K-2 are at the Starting (1) or Emerging (2) development levels.
- At least 50% of students who are English Learners at grade 4 and 5 are at the Emerging (2) and Developing (3) levels.
- Students who are English Learners have below average achievement in English Language Arts.
- Students who are English Learners are not exiting English Learner status at the rate the state expects.
- Students who are English Learners are stalling in their progress at development levels 3 (Developing) and 4 (Expanding).

**b. Visually represent the data.**

Mr. Perez convened the Data Inquiry Team for two hours during a professional learning day so that it could begin the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle. He reiterated that by having a teacher from each grade level on the Data Inquiry Team, it would be possible to have an informed discussion of the data among team members, as well as increased skills at understanding data that could be shared with grade level colleagues. Mr. Perez decided that the Data Inquiry Team should take the time to make the data visual rather than the co-leaders or a subgroup preparing it because he was interested in capacity building for all Team members.

**Table 30**

**Harbor Elementary School Professional Staff Summary of MAEC Equity Audit**



Are critical educational issues addressed in ways that do not stereotype or stigmatize particular groups			
Do staff members receive training in cross-cultural communication and group processes to increase their effectiveness in working with diverse populations?			
Is content training offered to provide staff with curricular information and knowledge of multicultural print, non-print, and human resources available?			
Are in-service opportunities offered to encourage dialogues between policymakers, administrators, teachers, support staff, and families, as well as business and community leaders, to develop comprehensive strategies for addressing equity issues?			
Are opportunities provided for staff at all levels and in all job descriptions to obtain in-service training regarding educational equity issues and concerns relevant to specific populations?			
Are relevant equity issues infused throughout all professional learning activities?			
In order to ensure flexible, heterogeneous, and integrated grouping within classes, are teachers exposed to a variety of instructional approaches to meet differing learning preferences and foster both competitive and cooperative skills?			
Are assessment procedures available which accommodate English Learners and students with disabilities?			
Is all assessment data analyzed according to individual student progress as well as disaggregated patterns and outcomes by race, gender, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, and geographic location?			
Are multiple instruments used for student assessment including performance measures?			
Are special efforts made to achieve classroom integration when students self-segregate in the classroom?			

**Table 31**

### Students who are English Learners' Language Development, 2014-2015 school year

Grade	Starting	Emerging	Developing	Expanding	Bridging
5th	10%	20%	10%	40%	20%
4th	13%	22%	20%	34%	11%
3rd	9%	35%	14%	30%	12%
2nd	8%	14%	13%	40%	25%
1st	8%	13%	20%	44%	15%
K	19%	10%	12%	54%	5%

**Table 32**

### Students who are English Learners' Language Development, 2015-2016 school year

Grade	Starting	Emerging	Developing	Expanding	Bridging
5th	10%	15%	29%	35%	11%
4th	3%	23%	26%	39%	9%
3rd	6%	22%	28%	30%	14%
2nd	6%	20%	29%	35%	10%
1st	8%	18%	37%	34%	3%
K	10%	16%	16%	49%	9%

**Table 33**

### Students who are English Learners - Fifth Grade ELA Student Performance Data, 2015-2016 school year

Students who are English Learners who achieved at each ELA level

% Level 1	% Level 2	% Level 3	% Level 4
Below Expectation	Approaching Expectation	Meets Expectation	Exceeded Expectation
70%	27%	3%	0%

### **c. Make objective statements about the data.**

Mr. Perez asked the instructional coach, Ms. Cohen, to co-lead the session, and she asked the participants to spend 10 minutes individually recording what they noticed. Then Ms. Cohen recorded their comments on chart paper as they shared what they wrote. She did not let the Data Inquiry Team engage in a collective dialogue until all members were invited to share their thoughts about each of the data displays.

The Data Inquiry Team made the following statements about the data from the Equity Audit:

- 100% of teachers think that professional learning is not delivered in ways that model techniques and authentic perspectives which are relevant to the diverse groups in the school community.
- 66% of teachers report that they are not trained in cross-cultural communication and group processes to increase their effectiveness in working with diverse populations.
- More than 33% of teachers say that they are not trained to identify equity needs and to utilize instructional methods to meet the learning preferences of diverse students and groups.
- 33% of teachers say that they do not know what instruments are used for assessment of students who are English Learners, including performance measures.
- 100% of teachers say they do not know if there are assessment procedures which accommodate students who are English Learners and students with disabilities.

During the review of English language development data and Fifth Grade ELA Performance Data for students who are English Learners, the Data Inquiry Team made the following objective statements:

- In 2015-2016, the number of students who are English Learners at the Bridging level was lower than the Developing level in all the grades.
- In 2014-15, at least 20% of the fifth grade and second grade students were at the Bridging level; in 2015-16, no grade level had higher than 14% of the students in the Bridging level and three grade levels had less than 10% in the Bridging level.
- 3% of fifth grade students who are English Learners in 2015-16 met growth targets for ELA and none exceeded the targets.

### **d. Make inferences about the data and ask questions.**

The Data Inquiry Team generated the following inferences:

- In 2015-2016, the percentage of students at the Bridging Level is at least half of the percentage of students at the Expanding Level.
- If only 3% of fifth grade students who are English Learners met expectations for ELA and none exceeded expectations, it might mean that their teachers do not know how to help students who are not progressing.
- Staff professional learning has not focused on meeting the needs of diverse learners and it may not be a priority in the district.
- Some teachers may not think that EL achievement is their responsibility and may not know as much about students who are English Learners as they do about their other students.

### **e. Do a root cause analysis of one or more of the inferences.**

The Data Inquiry Team decided to work on understanding why students who are English Learners were not advancing towards language proficiency and exiting from EL status.

The Data Inquiry Team asked “why” five times:

- **Why are our English Learner students language acquisition skills progressing on track until the Developing levels and then stalling, preventing exit from EL status?**

Maybe because teachers do not know enough about how to respond when students’ language acquisition is not progressing through the language proficiency levels.

- **Why would teachers not know how to respond when students’ language acquisition is not progressing?**

Maybe because teachers have not learned through their teacher preparation programs or district professional learning how to respond to the needs of students who are English Learners.

- **Why do teachers not have a wider repertoire of instructional strategies to support students who are English Learners?**

Maybe some teachers think that addressing the needs of students who are English Learners is someone else’s responsibility.

- **Why would teachers think students who are English Learners’ learning and achievement is not their responsibility?**

Maybe because the school and district leadership have not made it clear that all teachers are responsible for all of their students’ learning and achievement, nor has the leadership provided professional learning for content/classroom teachers that will enable teachers to meet the needs of students who are English Learners.

- **Why has the school and district leadership not made it clear that teachers are responsible for every one of their student’s learning?**

Maybe the changing demographics snuck up on people and they did not have a plan for how to equip teachers to know their students and teach them effectively.

The Data Inquiry Team decided that their top priority was for leadership to clarify teachers’ responsibility to their students who are English Learners, and to provide professional learning on how to meet their needs.

*5. Explore resources, research, evidence-based practices and consider areas of strength in the school/district to inform the creation of S.M.A.R.T. goals to address one or more of the root causes.*

From the data reviewed, the Data Inquiry Team concluded that classroom teachers and some of the ESL teachers need further support to empower them to use robust strategies for academic language development and culturally responsive teaching. The Data Inquiry Team decided that it would be important to explore additional resources that are related to these topics.

The group found three sources that explicitly informed their thinking about how to approach these priorities.

**Source 1:** Developing a Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Approach to Responsive to Instruction and Intervention (RtI2) for English Language Learners (University of Wisconsin System, 2013).

Specifically, the section on “Gathering Data Along Seven Integral Factors: Examining the Sociocultural Context for ELs’ Performance in School” (pp. 25-26).

**Table 34**

## Sample Protocol - Gathering Data Along Seven Integral Factors: Examining the Sociocultural Context for ELs' Performance in School

Integral Factors	Examples of Data
Learning Environment Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect information on the number of teachers who provide services to ELs as well as information on their degrees, certifications (e.g., ESL), endorsements, and/or experience</li> <li>• Gather information about the kinds of program models and program designs offered for ELs in the school or district</li> <li>• Collect information on professional learning opportunities offered to all educators of ELs (e.g., topics, frequency, types, and modalities)</li> <li>• Reflect on teacher self-assessment checklists (with elements of culturally and linguistically responsive instructional practices and materials)</li> </ul>
Academic Achievement and Instructional Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather longitudinal information on students' academic performance based on classroom observations, grades, notes from teacher/student conferences, credits earned, standardized test scores, etc.</li> <li>• Gather information on high school completion rates of former elementary and middle school students</li> <li>• Collect information on students' attendance patterns</li> <li>• Collect and examine performance-based tasks with rubrics across the content areas (common assessments)</li> <li>• Students complete performance-based tasks (with low linguistic demands and accompanying visual supports) and examine outcomes over time (complement to standardized test scores)</li> </ul>
Oral Language and Literacy Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Record oral language samples over time across content areas (e.g. retellings of narratives or explanations of events, digital storytelling, interviews, video filmmaking, oral presentations, impromptu classroom conversations)</li> <li>• Analyze recordings or transcriptions of students' oral language over time using the WIDA Speaking Rubric</li> <li>• Ask students to periodically read back the texts from their orally dictated stories and other narratives (note the nature of miscues, fluency, and comprehension of these re-readings)</li> <li>• Complete running records and miscue analysis for each student on the reading of their own transcribed retellings or based on a text that is at students' language proficiency level</li> <li>• Examine writing samples over time using the WIDA Writing Rubrics</li> <li>• Examine W-APT scores to identify students' initial English language proficiency levels upon entering the district</li> <li>• Examine MODEL scores for students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing periodically throughout the year</li> <li>• Conduct study groups with team members to gather information about the students' home languages including grammatical structures and potential areas of transfer to English</li> </ul>



<p>Personal and Family Factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather general demographic information about the families in a school's community</li> <li>• Complete a linguistic inventory of all the languages represented in a school</li> <li>• Interview families and students in culturally and linguistically responsive ways to gather information about their interests, goals, funds of knowledge, expertise, and strengths that can be incorporated into curricular units of study, enriching multicultural learning environments, and school improvement plans</li> <li>• Inquire about how much time students have to work on homework assignments and whether they have space to complete their work at home</li> </ul>
<p>Physical and Psychological Factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct well-being surveys (e.g., depression, anxiety, trauma) school-wide of all students</li> <li>• Conduct school climate surveys of students and their families to identify what aspects of the school climate support a positive learning and working environment and what aspects are in need of improvement</li> <li>• Conduct school climate surveys of all school staff to assess staff perceptions about learning and teaching conditions</li> <li>• Conduct dental, vision, hearing and other general health screenings of all students periodically and throughout the school year</li> <li>• Administer acculturation self-assessments to students</li> </ul>
<p>Previous Schooling Factors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Gather records from the schools that students have previously attended in another country and within the U.S.</li> <li>• Conduct interviews with students and families about previous schooling, apprenticeships, and life experiences</li> <li>• Research the school systems of students' countries of origin and previous school districts attended in the U.S.</li> </ul>
<p>Cross-Cultural Factors</p> <p>(Note: cross-cultural considerations must be taken into account within all of the above integral factors)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Interview students and families with regard to their expectations, values, and beliefs towards the educational experience as well as any strengths, knowledge, and expertise they possess</li> <li>• Consider student, parent, and staff expectations in decision-making processes</li> <li>• Survey staff about their knowledge of students' home languages, English proficiency levels, and countries of origin</li> <li>• Ensure appropriate use of interpreters, translators, and cultural brokers as a vehicle for communication and collaboration with students and their families</li> <li>• Survey students and families to gather information on their preferred times and places for school-related meetings</li> <li>• Coordinate transportation for students and families for school-based activities and meetings</li> </ul>

Screening data should be collected in students' home languages and English, to the greatest extent possible.

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The Data Inquiry Team realized that knowing more about the circumstances, strengths, and conditions of students who are English Learners would help teachers to understand how to better meet students' needs. Teachers need to be able to understand and use multiple forms of data (e.g., data on attendance, student demographics, behavioral referrals, school surveys, classroom artifacts, and observations, as well as student performance data) to make decisions that will accelerate the academic achievement of students who are English Learners.

The RtI2 resource was helpful in understanding the range of data that would be useful in shaping instruction and intervention strategies.

**Source 2:** English Language Learners and the New Standards: Developing Language, Content Knowledge, and Analytical Practices in the Classroom (Heritage et al., 2015).

In it, the authors:

- Clarify the skills and knowledge teachers need to integrate content knowledge and language development;
- Show how teachers can integrate formative assessments in ongoing teaching and learning;
- Discuss key leverage points and stress points in using interim and summative assessments with students who are English Learners; and
- Provide classroom vignettes illustrating key practices.

**Source 3:** Promoting the Educational Success of Children and Youth Learning English: Promising Futures, (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2017).

See Chapter 8: Promising and Effective Practices for English Learners in Grades Pre-K to 12. [www.nap.edu/read/24677/chapter/10](http://www.nap.edu/read/24677/chapter/10)

### **Promising and Effective Practices for English Learners in Grades Pre-K-5**

Practice 1: Provide Explicit Instruction in Literacy Components

Practice 2: Develop Academic Language During Content Area Instruction

Practice 3: Provide Visual and Verbal Supports to Make Core Content Comprehensible

Practice 4: Encourage Peer-Assisted Learning Opportunities

Practice 5: Capitalize on Students' Home Language, Knowledge, and Cultural Assets

Practice 6: Screen for Language and Literacy Challenges and Monitor Progress

Practice 7: Provide Small Group Support in Literacy and English Development for English Learners Who Need Additional Support

In reading through the resources, the Data Inquiry Team realized that school staff needed to better understand how to address the needs of students who are English Learners in content area classrooms. The Data Inquiry Team thought that teaching students who are English Learners in Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) would help develop the students' content knowledge, language proficiency, and academic skills at the same time. The Data Inquiry Team decided that it wanted to engage general education teachers in a collaborative planning process that would help teachers work together to adapt and modify lessons targeting SEI practices for students who are English Learners at different English language proficiency levels. Though the SEI model looked promising, the Data Inquiry Team also realized that sheltered instruction alone is not the endpoint; it links content and language acquisition in conjunction with a comprehensive approach to support students who are English Learners.

### The common features of sheltered instruction are:

- A focus on content and language objectives;
  - Making content comprehensible for students by:
    - o Connecting students' background and prior knowledge to content area concepts;
    - o Explicitly teaching content vocabulary, academic language, and language structures of the content area;
    - o Presenting cognitively demanding information and tasks in context-embedded ways (e.g. graphic organizers, visual representations);
    - o Using cooperative learning to facilitate content understanding and promote language development through use; and
    - o The use of alternative assessments to accurately determine what students know about a content area regardless of their English proficiency level.
- <http://www.cal.org/siop/pdfs/briefs/using-sheltered-instruction-to-support-english-learners.pdf>

**Source 4:** The Data Inquiry Team wanted to use the Sheltered English Instruction Trainer of Trainers workshops manual (Herbert & Bond, 2013) developed by the New Jersey Department of Education's Office of Supplemental Education and the former Region II Touro College Equity Assistance Center, to help their colleagues learn how to support students who are English Learners.

The Data Inquiry Team discussed developing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that deepen knowledge within the context of educational practice. It found out that a PLC serves as a form of "staff development that improves the learning of all students because it organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district." (Ballantyne et al. 2008).

The Data Inquiry Team discussed the possibility of developing PLCs that will meet once a week for 90 minutes. The Data Inquiry Team thought that Yvette Jackson's book *The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools* (2011) could be used as a central catalyst for an ongoing conversation on culturally responsive pedagogy in the PLCs. Jackson discusses how culture leverages student learning and why teachers' understanding of their own culture can provide critical insight into how that lens shapes their practice.

The Data Inquiry Team spent a considerable amount of time discussing the following passage as it embarked on their research:

"...Defining what we associate with our own culture (what has influenced who we are) and...how our own culture impacts what we do; and why we see the world as we do. These reflections help us recognize that we all have a frame of reference through which we perceive the world, and it affects how we respond to all experiences we encounter. When we understand the impact our cultural frame of reference has on our own behavior, we better appreciate and can respond to the influence our students' frames of reference have on their learning and their motivation." (Jackson, 2011, p. 46)

The team decided that it wanted to use Jackson's book to foster a discussion about the interconnectedness of culture, language, and cognition. It also identified the following material to help guide how PLCs function:

- The Five Habits of Effective PLCs (Easton, 2015). <https://learningforward.org/journal/december-2015-vol-36-no-6/the-5-habits-of-effective-plcs/>

The Data Inquiry Team developed two S.M.A.R.T. goals to address the root cause.

**S.M.A.R.T. Goal 1:** By June 2018, 100% of ESL and classroom teachers who work with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students who are English Learners will receive professional learning in the use of protocols and collaborative practices that help teachers implement research-based instructional strategies that better support instruction and intervention for students who are English Learners.

**S.M.A.R.T. Goal 2:** By June 2018, 100% of ESL teacher and 65% of classroom teachers will participate in a PLC on culturally responsive teaching and 100% of the participants will establish clear goals and processes for using resources to enhance the learning of students who are English Learners.

### *6. Create a plan and engage in a cycle of improvement as the plan is implemented.*

The Data Inquiry Team developed action plans for each S.M.A.R.T. goal, knowing that it would get better at writing S.M.A.R.T. goals as it practiced more.

**Table 35****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #1**

By June 2018, 100% of ESL and classroom teachers who work with 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade students who are English Learners will receive professional learning in the use of protocols and collaborative practices that help teachers implement research-based instructional strategies that better support instruction and intervention for students who are English Learners.

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Identify ESL and classroom teachers from each grade level to serve as trainers/teacher leaders	Principal and the instructional coach	July – August 2017	12 teacher-leaders identified	Recruit ESL teachers Identify two classroom teachers from each grade level, 3rd, 4th, and 5th
Professional learning for identified trainers	Principal and the instructional coach	September - October 2017	12 teacher-leaders identified	Train selected district trainers
Plan professional learning for 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade classroom and ESL teachers	Principal and the instructional coach	November 2017	School professional learning plan	School professional learning incorporates professional learning plan
Provide sessions on protocols and collaborative planning tools incorporating sheltered instructional practices	Teacher-leaders/trainers	December 2017 – May 2018	Sessions of sheltered instructional practices	School professional learning incorporates professional learning plan
Session evaluations	Teacher-leaders	December 2017 – May 2018	Evaluation instrument	Evaluations of the professional learning

**Table 36****S.M.A.R.T. Goal #2**

By June 2018, 100% of ESL and 65% classroom teachers will participate in a PLC (professional learning community) on culturally responsive teaching and 100% of the participants will establish clear goals and processes for using resources to enhance EL learning.

Activity	Lead	Timeframe	Outputs	Benchmarks
Planning	Instructional ESL coach	October 2017 – May 2018	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify 8-week cycles</li> <li>Common tools for each PLC:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Team Building exercises</li> <li>Deep Listening exercise</li> <li>Participants' suggestions for PLC norms</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teachers sign up for 1 of 4 cycles</li> <li>All ESL teachers are asked to participate</li> <li>65% of the teachers are targeted to sign-up</li> </ul>
Communications	Technology coordinator	September 2017 – May 2018	PLC Google doc set-up for PLC group discussions	Use of Google Docs
PLC organization	PLC group	September 2017 – May 2018	Suggested book flow template	Quick individual assessment at Week 4
Reflections	PLC group	End of 8-week cycle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Individual self-assessment &amp; group discussion of what worked &amp; what did not</li> <li>Suggested topics for next cycle of PLCs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lessons learned</li> <li>Teachers set goals for applying what they learned in their classrooms</li> <li>Teachers arrange to visit colleagues' classrooms to observe new practices</li> <li>Continued participation</li> <li>Use of equity understandings and skills in other PLCs, faculty meetings</li> </ul>
Repeat cycle	Each PLC group goes through and 8-week cycle	September 2017 – May 2018	Suggestions for next PLC focus	Continued equity focus

## *7. Review progress on addressing the S.M.A.R.T. goals and solving the original equity concern.*

The school met the target of 100% of ESL teachers and 65% staff participation in a PLC on culturally responsive teaching, using Yvette Jackson's book *The Pedagogy of Confidence: Inspiring High Intellectual Performance in Urban Schools* (2011). Feedback from the PLC groups included that 90% of respondents said that the material was "useful" or "very useful" and 96% said the PLC gave them "specific strategies they could use." 79% of the PLC participants shared their goals and how they used PLC provided resources to enhance EL learning.

Building awareness and skill through professional learning opportunities is a good beginning. It is often where schools start. When the Data Inquiry Team reviewed the notes from its Data Dialogue, it saw that their "top priority was for leadership to clarify teachers' responsibility to their students who are English Learners, and to provide professional learning opportunities on how to effectively meet the learning needs of their students who are English Learners." The professional learning has begun and been well received. Now the first part of the priority, clarifying teachers' responsibilities to their students who are English Learners, needs to be addressed by administrators.

The original equity concern was that "students who are English Learners were not advancing towards language proficiency and exiting from English Learner status." The Data Inquiry Team knew that it needed to continue to address this equity concern.

## *8. Celebrate successes.*

Mr. Perez celebrated that there were now 12 trainers or teacher-leaders in the building who are supporting all teachers to learn the strategies they need to be more effective with students who are English Learners.

A high percentage of the staff who participated in the PLC for inspiring high intellectual performance began using what they learned with their students.

Mr. Perez decided to send the Data Inquiry Team to the conference he attended the previous summer so that the Team could present its work on improving the academic outcomes of students who are English Learners in Harbor Elementary School at the conference.

## *9. Start the cycle again.*

The Data Inquiry Team met in late June to reflect on the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle and wondered about the impact of the professional learning on teacher practice. Were teachers effectively using protocols to collaboratively plan lessons that incorporate more research-based instruction and interventions for students who are English Learners? What affect was this having on student achievement? The Data Inquiry Team also was curious about the goals and processes for using resources to enhance the learning of students who are English Learners that were discussed in the PLCs on culturally responsive teaching. To find out, the Data Inquiry Team decided that it would start the Equity Data Inquiry Cycle again.

# Equity Audit



## What is an equity audit?

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An equity audit is a study of the fairness of an institution's policies, programs, and practices. Such audits represent a significant investment in resources, both human and material. Thus, it is worthwhile to anticipate potential challenges and develop a plan for addressing them. The goal is that the process will move as smoothly as possible, and the results will help inform the next steps. The tool presented here is designed to facilitate equity audits in educational settings. This tool helps to critically examine policies, programs, and practices that directly or indirectly impact students or staff relative to their race, ethnicity, gender, national origin (English Learners), language, disability, age, sexual orientation, sexual identity, religion, or other socioculturally significant factors. A regular organizational audit may have an equity component, but that is not its specific purpose.

## What is MAEC's Equity Audit Tool?

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MAEC, Inc. developed the three Equity Audit tools found in this document to offer districts, schools, and teachers a way to begin conducting an equity audit. These tools were designed to:

1. Help educators develop a more concrete understanding of what it means to practice equity, and
2. Reflect on whether current school policies, procedures and practices are equitable.

This tool can be used for individual or small group reflection, or it can be used as part of a large-scale process for advancing equity.

MAEC's Equity Audit consists of three questionnaires for school leaders, educators, and staff to assess if their schools and classrooms are equitable across various criteria. The three questionnaires are: *Criteria for an Equitable School* (composed of 101 questions), *Criteria for an Equitable Classroom* (composed of 36 questions), and *Teacher Behaviors that Encourage Student Persistence* (composed of 59 questions). These tools examine practices, policies, and procedures at each level to determine if the school community is creating a positive, equitable learning environment that allows students and staff to perform at their highest levels. The questionnaires are meant to provide a birds-eye view of various aspects of equity and highlight many systemic barriers to equity that might exist. The MAEC team developed the questionnaires relying on extensive experience in the field of educational equity and a review of relevant literature.

### What is an Equity Audit? An Analogy.

**Service:** providing shoes.

**Equality:** everyone gets a pair of shoes.

**Equity:** everyone gets shoes that fit.

**Equity Audit:** determining

- (1) who "everyone" is,
- (2) what constitutes "shoes," and
- (3) creating decision-making processes for how "fit" is identified and evaluated.



## What is different about the 2021 version?

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MAEC significantly revised the tool based on feedback from practitioners and researchers. The updated audit accounts for the new realities many schools face with COVID-19, including virtual learning. *Questions that relate to COVID-19 can be found in a maroon color throughout the document.* This tool can be used as a reflection tool in a comprehensive equity audit process. For more guidance on conducting an equity audit, please refer to MAEC's *An Equity Audit: Is It In Your Future*. MAEC also revised the scale for rating each item from a two-point scale to a four-point scale to account for the different stages at which institutions may find themselves on their equity journey. Expanding the scale allows for a more thorough look at where each entity is in regards to equitable policies, practices, and procedures.

## How to implement MAEC's Equity Audit tool

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The district/school will develop a process for answering the questions on the Equity Audit tool. One person should not complete this process: it should involve all key stakeholders and include diverse voices. Representatives from the following groups should be included: administrators, faculty, staff, students, parents, and community members. One valuable way to fill out the document is by establishing an equity committee and discussing each question so that the committee reaches a consensus on how to rate the question. Another is to conduct the audit as a survey among key stakeholders and to use the average score per question.

An important reminder is that the Equity Audit is a tool that provides a starting point in evaluating your institution's current state concerning equity. It provides a snapshot of your district/school's state at one point in time. By no means is it exhaustive and does not include all potential systemic barriers to equity or focuses on all groups that might not be receiving required supports. Once you receive the initial data from this tool, it might be necessary to investigate your system further to better understand different constituents' individual experiences with additional data collections.

For guidance on next steps after completing an equity audit, please [contact MAEC](#).

# Criteria for an Equitable School

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An equitable school provides the climate, process, and content which enable students and staff to perform at their highest level. An equitable school ensures successful academic outcomes by providing resources according to need and appropriate instructional strategies for each student. The equitable school:

1. Has a clear mission that is committed to equitable access, processes, treatment, and outcomes for all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status.
2. Provides an inclusive visual environment both digitally (online portals, materials, etc.) and in person (halls, displays, classroom exhibit pictures, etc.). This effort considers the physical environment from which teachers broadcast to make sure it is appropriate and encouraging for all students.
3. Reflects and works in collaboration with the various racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, language, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, and disability groups within the school community.
4. Works in partnership with families, the business community, and civic and community organizations to enrich the curriculum, provide consistently high expectations for all students, and develop support and opportunities for all students.
5. Provides ongoing, embedded, and systematic professional learning (i.e., training, coaching, communities of practice) opportunities to support staff in implementing equitable learning for all students (whether in-person, hybrid, or distance learning).
6. Promotes social-emotional well-being for students and families to develop a supportive and inclusive learning community that promotes the cultural assets that they bring to their classrooms.

*Note: Maroon text indicates questions that have been added or edited to respond to the impact of COVID-19.*

Below is an explanation of the scale used to rate each item.

1. **Latent (0 Points)** - This rating corresponds to the district/school currently not doing anything, or having no system in place as it relates to the question.
2. **Emergent (1 Point)** - This rating corresponds to the district/school having some systems in place, but the systems are not explicit or strong. The district might still be working towards establishing policies and norms related to the topic of the question.
3. **Established (2 Points)** - This rating corresponds to a district/school having established explicit systems in place. In many cases, to be rated as established, the district/school has to have created documentation regarding the question's topic.
4. **Advanced (3 Points)** - This rating corresponds to a district going above simply establishing explicit systems. This rating is reserved for items where a policy, process or norm is centered on equity. A district/school scoring "advanced" is focused on creating an environment that acknowledges and addresses equity complexities.

## School Policy

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Does the school/school system have a specific educational equity policy in areas related to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?				
2. Does the educational equity policy clearly explain the procedures for reporting complaints, investigating complaints, and appeals?				
3. Is the educational equity policy monitored for consistent and complete implementation as well as amended if necessary?				
4. Does the educational equity policy regarding racial equity address the harmful impacts of racial stress and trauma?				
5. Does the educational equity policy identify the roles of teachers, staff, and administrators' in mitigating race-based disparities?				
6. Does the school have a clear mission statement regarding educational equity?				
7. Are updates to policies and procedures publicized to staff, students, and families in an accessible manner and on a timely and continuous basis?				
8. Has the school developed an equity plan of action based on the policy, mission statement, and analysis of its current equity needs?				
9. Did all relevant stakeholder groups (staff, families, students, and community members) participate in the development of the mission statement and equity plan?				

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
10. Does the school have a policy regarding accommodations for students with disabilities and English Learners?				
11. Are there policies and procedures to assure that no student is denied participation in extracurricular or co-curricular activities (as health and safety guidelines permit) because of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, disability status, or transportation limitations?				
12. Does the school have a clear and equitable attendance policy that takes into consideration, and does not penalize students, for barriers (e.g., technological issues, families' schedules, etc.) they might face during COVID-19?				
13. Does the school have a policy regarding using names students identify as their preferred name and personal pronouns?				
14. Does the school have a policy regarding bathroom and locker room use by transgender students?				

## Assessing Community Needs

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Does the school/school system have a plan for family engagement that encourages and provides avenues for the involvement of all school staff and all families, and sustains community partnerships?				
2. Does the school have clear processes and structures for school staff to meet student needs by providing additional targeted or intensive supports as necessary?				
3. Does the school encourage the engagement of all families and community members in school planning, support, and governance ((e.g., through forming a school advisory committee, conducting a survey, organizing focus groups, etc.), whether in-person, hybrid, or distance learning?				
4. Are families and community members involved in school planning, support, and governance representative of the school community by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, language, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, and disability status?				
5. Does the school use multiple methods of communication, including translation, to engage with families regarding their priorities, feedback, and concerns regarding distance learning?				
6. Does the school ensure that families have access to information, virtually and in person, in a language they can understand?				
7. Are current needs of the school community frequently assessed regarding COVID-19 (e.g., food, transportation, housing, physical health, social-emotional well-being, etc.)?				
8. Has the school surveyed families' technological needs?				

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
9. Has the school enacted an actionable and timely plan to ensure that all families have access to technology and stable internet, and know how to navigate technology and key software the school may be using?				
10. Does the school monitor attendance to help identify potential barriers students might experience in accessing their education (whether in-person, hybrid, or distance learning)?				
11. Does the school reach out to families of students to address potential barriers that students may experience in accessing their educational learning (whether in-person, hybrid, or distance learning)?				

## School Organization/Administration

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Do school administrators have the knowledge and skills to be able to identify equity issues?				
2. Are school administrators trained to provide leadership in developing creative strategies to achieve excellence and equity among all staff and students?				
3. Are there personnel or an advisory committee that coordinates school improvement and assures equity compliance in all phases of school management?				
4. Have interpreters and translators been identified for the varied languages present in the school community to facilitate two-way communication between families and school staff?				
5. Is enrollment monitored in special education, vocational education, gifted education, and advanced courses for the disproportionate representation of language, gender, racial, or ethnic groups?				
6. Is enrollment, including special education, vocational education, gifted education programs, and advanced courses, composed of students who proportionately reflect the diversity within the overall student population?				
7. Is guidance and counseling provided to encourage all students to take higher-level courses, particularly in the critical filter areas of Honors, STEM, AP, and IB courses?				

Criteria/Questions		Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
8.	Is data regularly collected, disaggregated, and analyzed in the following areas and by different racial, ethnic, and language groups? (Indicate "latent," "emergent," "established," or "advanced" for all that apply)				
8a.	Course level enrollment				
8b.	Grade point average/achievement scores				
8c.	Standardized test scores				
8d.	Student discipline, suspensions, and expulsions				
8e.	Bullying or harassment				
8f.	Participation in school activities and honors				
8g.	Attendance				
9.	Have the following been modified as needed as a result of the data from question 8 combined with anecdotal and other information?				
9a.	Policies				
9b.	Programs				
9c.	Curriculum Strategies				
9d.	Instructional Strategies				
10.	Does the school prioritize hiring psychologists, counselors, social workers, and nurses to support the social-emotional well-being of students and staff?				
11.	Does the school utilize restorative approaches to support the social-emotional well-being of students and staff?				



Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
12. Are consequences for violating school procedures taught and reinforced to students using evidence-based strategies (e.g., restorative practices, culturally responsive PBIS, etc.)?				
13. Does the district provide a user-friendly, accesible location (e.g., an online learning portal) for students and families to retrieve virtual learning materials?				
14. Does the school provide access to learning materials (e.g., textbooks, reading materials, etc.) in order for students to complete learning assignments?				

## School Climate/Environment

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Does the visual environment, including online school portals, virtual and in-person classrooms, bulletin boards, displays, hall decorations, and offices, show diverse students of varied racial, ethnic, language, gender, gender identity groups, and people with disabilities in a variety of roles?				
2. Does the interaction of school staff with each other, students, families, and community members convey a respect for people regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, disability status, age, or religion?				
3. Are values of equity, fairness, and inclusion modeled by all school staff?				
4. Is the code of student conduct applied fairly and equitably to all students?				
5. Are acceptable standards for students' behavior (both in person and online), language, and dress non-discriminatory?				
6. Do school assemblies, special programs, and speakers reflect the diverse nature of the school and larger community?				
7. Are the people involved in planning school events and programs (athletic, arts, service-learning or volunteer, PTA/PTO, etc.) representative of the school community by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				

Criteria/Questions		Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
8.	Do all segments of the school community participate in and are encouraged to attend school events (including service-learning or volunteer opportunities, PTA/PTO, etc.)?				
9.	Are school emblems, mascots, team names, and other symbols free from racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national origin, language, sexual, gender identity, gender expression, religious, sexual orientation, or disability bias?				
10.	Does the virtual and in-person library/media center have recent visual, print, and non-print materials that accurately provide information about diverse student groups in traditional and non-traditional roles?				
11.	Are materials, notices, and other school communication available in multiple languages, and accessible to individuals with disabilities as required?				

## Staff

Criteria/Questions		Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1.	Do staff set expectations, teach, and reinforce positive behavior; support students to get back on track; and hold all students to consistent standards of behavior?				
2.	Are consequences for student actions, such as discipline infractions and praise, distributed equitably in the classroom?				
3.	Is there an equitable distribution of highly qualified teachers across classrooms?				
4.	Are highly qualified teachers representative of the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national origin, language, sexual, gender or gender identity, religious, sexual orientation, or disability status composition of the student body?				
5.	Is the school staff's composition representative of the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national origin, language, sexual, gender identity, gender expression, religious, sexual orientation, or disability status composition of the student body and larger school community?				
6.	Are staff members of different races, ethnicities, languages, national origins, sexes, gender identities, gender expressions, sexual orientations, and/or with different disabilities distributed equitably across the various job classifications from administration to non-certified positions?				
7.	Are all staff members responsive to the varied needs of demographic groups and communities in the school?				
8.	Do staff members communicate on a regular basis with other staff members from culturally diverse backgrounds?				

Criteria/Questions		Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
9.	Do staff members engage in healthy, productive, and respectful professional interactions with other staff members from culturally diverse backgrounds?				
10.	Are members of the instructional staff able to utilize personalized instructional methods for in-person or distance learning to meet diverse student needs and learning preferences?				
11.	When staff members are assessed, are competencies in educational equity an integral part of their performance?				
12.	Do staff at different paid or volunteer job levels feel that a culture of respect exists within the school?				

## Assessment/Placement

Criteria/Questions		Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1.	Does the school/school system have a policy regarding culturally responsive assessments and grading during COVID-19?				
2.	Do teachers collaborate with families regarding the expectations of distance learning and student academic progress and achievement?				
3.	Are multiple instruments used for student assessment, including performance measures?				
4.	Are students given access to resources, facilities, and academic placement dependent on individual talent, skill, and interest?				
5.	Are English Learners properly identified, assessed, and placed?				
6.	Are assessment procedures and accommodations available for English Learners and students with disabilities?				
7.	Are all assessment data analyzed according to individual student progress as well as disaggregated patterns and outcomes by the following?				
	7a. Race				
	7b. Ethnicity				
	7c. Socioeconomic status				
	7d. Gender				
	7e. Disability				
	7f. Language				

## Professional Learning

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. In order to ensure flexible, heterogeneous, and integrated grouping within classes, are teachers trained in a variety of instructional approaches to meet differing learning preferences and foster both competitive and cooperative skills?				
2. Are staff members trained to identify equity needs and to utilize instructional methods to meet the learning preferences of diverse students and groups in a virtual classroom environment?				
3. Are equity issues in professional learning activities relevant to current events and community needs?				
4. Have all staff members received in-service training regarding strategies for countering bias?				
5. Have all staff received training on culturally responsive practices to support English Learners?				
6. Have all staff received training on how to adjust the way they talk to provide opportunities for English Learners to acquire academic language (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency or CALP) and social language (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills or BICS) (e.g., speaking clearly, having a slower rate of speech, using simple sentence structures, repeating/paraphrasing as necessary, etc.)				
7. Have all staff received trauma-informed training to support student success and well-being using restorative practices?				
8. Are opportunities provided for staff at all levels and in all job descriptions to obtain in-service training regarding educational equity issues and concerns relevant to specific populations?				

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
9. Are in-service opportunities offered to encourage dialogues between policymakers, administrators, teachers, support staff, and families, as well as business and community leaders, to develop comprehensive strategies for addressing equity issues?				
10. During professional learning events, are translators and interpreters available for participants from different language or disability groups?				
11. Is content training offered to provide staff with curricular information and knowledge that positively affirms and values cultural differences to enhance educational equity?				
12. Do staff members receive training in culturally responsive communication and practices to increase their effectiveness in working with diverse populations?				
13. Are critical educational issues addressed in ways that do not stereotype or stigmatize particular groups?				
14. Are presenters and facilitators of in-service training programs representative of the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national origin, language, sexual, gender identity, gender expression, religious, sexual orientation, or disability status groups of the student body and larger school community?				
15. Are professional learning techniques delivered authentically and in a way that is relevant to diverse groups?				
16. Are staff equipped with the skills, knowledge, and expertise to develop partnerships with families that are built on trust and respect and enhance students' learning and well-being?				



## Standards and Curriculum Development

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Are all teachers involved in improving the curriculum through continuous and systematized feedback and revision, so that all students can learn and achieve at high levels?				
2. Are all families and students encouraged to provide feedback on educational programs, both planning and instructional?				
3. Are all students held to the same standards?				
4. Do all virtual education materials provided by the school meet the criteria set by the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0?				
5. Is digital content accessible on a wide variety of devices that are available to students and their families?				
6. Does the curriculum utilize accessible digital and print materials that represent diverse groups?				
7. Do teachers leverage in-person and virtual classroom lessons to increase awareness and counter the past effects of bias and discrimination?				
8. Do recommended textbooks and other instructional materials reflect, as much as possible, the experiences and perspectives of diversity among racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, national origin, language, sexual, gender identity and expression, religious, sexual orientation, or disability status groups?				

Criteria/Questions		Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
9.	Are the teachers' classroom activities and examples culturally responsive according to race, ethnicity, national origin, language, sex, gender identity and expression, religion, and disability?				
10.	Does the curriculum infuse culturally responsive information into instructional approaches?				
11.	Does the curriculum prepare students for a diverse society and workplace?				
12.	Are people with disabilities shown in the curriculum actively interacting with both people with and without disabilities?				
13.	Is language used that does not stereotype people or groups?				
14.	Is person-first language used (e.g., "individuals with mental health conditions" rather than "mentally ill individuals") to recognize the innate and equal value of individuals before ascribing other identities or descriptors?				
15.	Does the curriculum suggest ways to examine the perspectives and contributions of people of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, national origins, languages, sexes, gender identities and expressions, religions, sexual orientations, or disability statuses in every subject area, especially in mathematics, science, social studies, history, and English?				
16.	Are teachers encouraged to use and provide examples produced by people of different races, ethnicities, socioeconomic statuses, national origins, languages, sexes, gender identities and expressions, sexual orientations, religions, or disability statuses as part of the curriculum?				

Source: Elements of Equity: Criteria for Equitable Schools Developed by Jill Moss Greenberg and Susan Shaffer, Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc., 1991, 2016, 2020, 2021

# Criteria for an Equitable Classroom

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An equitable classroom reflects the overall school environment and is characterized by:

1. An inclusive climate and visual environment;
2. Culturally responsive pedagogy, instruction, curricula, and materials;
3. A wide variety of instructional strategies to meet differing learning styles, second language acquisition, and backgrounds;
4. Utilization of student and family funds of knowledge and outside resources to provide diverse tools, strategies, and role models;
5. Encouraging student ownership in learning by incorporating student voice, choice, and feedback with classroom assignments and activities;
6. Availability of extracurricular activities to enrich the curricula and provide culturally-rich experiences, as health and safety guidelines permit;
7. Building and sustaining partnerships with all families and communities, including racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse families and communities, that are linked to student learning and involve varied aspects of the educational program; and
8. Recognition of multiple intelligences and student strengths through academic opportunities, honors, leadership roles, and creative options.

*Note: Maroon text indicates questions that have been added or edited to respond to the impact of COVID-19.*

Below is an explanation of the scale used to rate each item.

1. **Latent (0 Points)** - This rating corresponds to teachers in a classroom setting currently not doing anything, or having no system in place as it relates to the question.
2. **Emergent (1 Point)** - This rating corresponds to teachers in a classroom setting having some systems in place, but the systems are not explicit or strong. The district might still be working towards establishing policies and norms related to the topic of the question.
3. **Established (2 Points)** - This rating corresponds to teachers in a classroom setting having established explicit systems in place. In many cases, to be rated as established, the district/school has to have created documentation regarding the question's topic.
4. **Advanced (3 Points)** - This rating corresponds to teachers in a classroom setting going above simply establishing explicit systems. This rating is reserved for items where a policy, process or norm is centered on equity. A district/school scoring "advanced" is focused on creating an environment that acknowledges and addresses equity complexities.

## Academic Placement/Tracking and Grouping

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Does the teacher use flexible and heterogeneous grouping to provide enrichment and leverage higher-order thinking skills for all students in different subjects and activities?				
2. Are students reassessed regularly for appropriate academic placement and content?				
3. Does the teacher assign projects and other structured group activities to integrate all students regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				
4. Are special efforts made to achieve classroom integration when students self-segregate in the classroom (including teams for contests, groups for instruction, and other forms of classroom organization)?				
5. Are educational decisions based upon student profiles that include family, student, and teacher recommendations, as well as classroom assessments, interest inventories, and performance measures?				
6. Does the teacher share student data on academic performance, unpack school standards, and collaborate on various educational goals (including language development, IEP, and 504 plans) with families and students?				
7. Does the teacher provide regular and meaningful opportunities for all students and their families to discuss and collaborate on student social-emotional well-being?				
8. Does the teacher request interpreters or translators when interacting with students' family members who require such services?				

## Student Leadership and Recognition

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Does the teacher structure classroom activities in order to promote the development and exercise of leadership skills among all students, including racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students?				
2. Does the teacher encourage all families and other community members of diverse backgrounds to act as role models and help students to develop their abilities and obtain needed resources?				
3. Does the teacher facilitate diverse student representation in curricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular activities?				
4. Does the teacher nurture student self-esteem through the study of student backgrounds, languages, and cultures?				
5. Are there established areas of recognition and processes for honoring students' contributions, growth, achievements, and services?				
6. Are there opportunities to enable racially, culturally, and linguistically diverse students to develop leadership skills in problem-solving and intergroup communication?				

## Classroom Environment

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Are expectations for students equitable regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				
2. Are all classroom procedures, practices, and norms, including calling on students and grouping students, integrated and equitable?				
3. Are the instructional materials culturally inclusive and unbiased regarding race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				
4. Are classroom tasks distributed equitably regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				
5. Do educational materials depict students' diversity in a variety of roles regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity or expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				
6. Is there an effort made to use unbiased verbal and nonverbal language in the classroom?				
7. Does the teacher develop an invitational environment where commonalities are appreciated and differences are understood and valued?				

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
8. Does the teacher invite families to share their expertise and incorporate students' and families' funds of knowledge into in-person and distance learning?				
9. Does the teacher collaborate with families to ensure continuity of learning throughout the school day during distance learning?				
10. Does the teacher collaborate with families and community partners to align strategies for supporting students' social-emotional well-being?				

## Instructional Strategies

Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
1. Does the teacher differentiate instruction based on student needs (e.g., English language proficiency level, learning preferences, etc.)?				
2. Does the teacher set consistent expectations and classroom norms, and use logical consequences for student behavior that encourage self-regulation?				
3. Does the teacher praise students for the intellectual quality of their work, regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status from a set of criteria that is known and understood by the students?				
4. Does the teacher promote cooperation and integration of students through activities which help students to work together more effectively?				
5. Does the teacher provide students with choices and accompanying criteria to show their learning in various ways and take ownership over their learning?				
6. Does the teacher use research-based instructional strategies, such as differentiation, project and place-based learning, English language learning strategies and supports, and other teaching methods to support the diverse learning needs of students?				
7. Do students, especially English Learners and students with disabilities, have access to classroom accommodations to facilitate their learning?				



Criteria/Questions	Latent (0)	Emergent (1)	Established (2)	Advanced (3)
8. Does the teacher develop appropriately challenging lessons and instructional supports to meet the needs of English Learners at their language proficiency level and balancing the four domains of language (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) to ensure they are accessing content and developing English proficiency through in-person and distance learning?				
9. Do English Learners have multiple opportunities to practice oral language by building content knowledge and using vocabulary that is linked to a specific theme and/or real-world experience?				
10. Does the teacher communicate high expectations and respect for all students including equitable praise, questioning, wait time, and feedback?				
11. Does the teacher include equitable opportunities for participation in classroom discussion?				
12. Does the teacher analyze their own interactions with students to determine any differential patterns, and take actions to counteract and balance differences?				

## Teacher Behaviors

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In this self-reflective tool, teachers will respond to checklists to: (1) measure their strengths in encouraging students' persistence in learning and (2) mark areas for self-improvement. To accurately respond, teachers should begin each question below with "Does the teacher...," checking the appropriate column on the right with their answer.

*Note: Maroon text indicates questions that have been added or edited to respond to the impact of COVID-19.*

Below is an explanation of the scale used to rate each item.

- **Never (0 Points)** - This rating corresponds to practices/activities that a teacher never uses or does.
- **Rarely (1 Point)** - This rating corresponds to practices/activities that a teacher seldom uses or does. These practices are not the usual way the teacher behaves.
- **Usually (2 Points)** - This rating corresponds to practices/activities that a teacher does more often than not.
- **Always (3 Points)** - This rating corresponds to teacher practices/activities that a teacher does on a regular basis. A teacher scoring "always" is focused on to creating an environment that acknowledges and addresses equity complexities.

## Instructional Strategies

Criteria/Questions		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
1.	Ask challenging and engaging questions to develop higher-order and critical thinking skills?				
2.	Communicate high academic expectations to all students, with a primary focus on student growth, learning, and social-emotional well-being?				
3.	Communicate requirements for successful completion of assignments clearly and definitively, in a way that all children can understand?				
4.	Adjust vocabulary and rate of speech used by teachers to provide opportunities for English Learners to acquire academic language (Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency or CALP) and social language (Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills or BICS) (e.g., speaking clearly, having a slower rate of speech, using simple sentence structures, repeating/paraphrasing as necessary, etc.)				
5.	Facilitate access to classroom modifications and accommodations to facilitate the learning for students with disabilities?				
6.	Facilitate access to classroom modifications to facilitate the learning for English Learners?				
7.	Develop appropriately challenging lessons and instructional supports to meet the needs of English Learners at their language proficiency level and balancing the four domains of language (reading, listening, writing, and speaking) to ensure they are accessing content and developing English proficiency through in-person and distance learning?				
8.	Encourage all students to explore new ideas and approaches to problem-solving?				

Criteria/Questions		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
9.	Encourage student self-assessment and evaluation to identify strengths and opportunities for growth?				
10.	Use research-based instructional strategies to support the diverse learning needs of students?				
11.	Analyze the impact of research-based instructional strategies on students' learning and make appropriate adjustments in strategies?				
12.	Monitor student progress to assess appropriate interventions?				
13.	Encourage students to set realistic time frames for completing assignments?				
14.	Help students identify milestones in reaching their goals?				
15.	Celebrate student milestones?				
16.	Utilize student mistakes as an opportunity for learning and growth?				
17.	Provide students with choices and accompanying criteria to show their learning in various ways and take ownership over their learning?				
18.	Provide opportunities for all students to access a variety of learning strategies (visual, tactile, kinesthetic, auditory, etc.)				
19.	Use flexible and heterogeneous grouping to provide enrichment and leverage higher-order thinking skills for all students in differing subjects and activities?				
20.	Assign projects and other structured group activities to integrate all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				

Criteria/Questions	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
21. Share student data on academic performance, unpack school standards, and collaborate on various educational goals (including language development, IEP, and 504 plans) with families and students?				
22. Provide regular and meaningful opportunities for all students and their families to discuss and collaborate on student social-emotional well-being?				
23. Request interpreters or translators when interacting with students' family members who require such services?				

## Curriculum Strategies

Criteria/Questions		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
1.	Develop high-quality lessons, assignments, and instructional supports appropriate to students' learning needs, including the needs of English Learners and students with disabilities?				
2.	Develop an invitational environment where commonalities are appreciated, and differences are understood and valued?				
3.	Invite families to share their expertise and incorporate students' and families' funds of knowledge into in-person and distance learning?				
4.	Provide opportunities for students to relate their experiences to the curriculum?				
5.	Identify current events as learning opportunities?				
6.	Leverage in-person and/or virtual classroom lessons to increase awareness and counter the historical effects of bias and discrimination?				
7.	Provide a variety of choices in curriculum content and activities?				
8.	Identify the long-term applications and uses of the knowledge and skills which students could acquire from working through challenging activities and coursework?				
9.	Embed opportunities for practice of social-emotional skills and competencies within the curriculum?				
10.	Provide challenging work with appropriate scaffolding and support so that all students achieve at high levels?				
11.	Use culturally responsive pedagogy, practice, and instructional materials that reflect diversity?				
12.	Encourage students to consider which points of view in lessons and assignments are focused on and which are left out?				

## Classroom Management Techniques

Criteria/Questions		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
1.	Involve students in establishing consistent expectations and classroom norms (whether in-person, hybrid, or virtual)?				
2.	Involve students in developing culturally responsive discipline rules and explain them clearly to all students?				
3.	Promote cooperative and collaborative behavior by encouraging students' participation in in-person and virtual classroom management decisions?				
4.	Assign in-person and virtual classroom management responsibilities among all students to promote the development and exercise of leadership and problem-solving skills?				
5.	Include equitable opportunities for participation in in-person and virtual classroom discussion?				
6.	Analyze their own interactions with students to determine any differential patterns, and take actions to counteract and balance differences?				
7.	Demonstrate flexibility, fairness, and compassion in situations which lead to conflict and potential in-person and virtual classroom disruption?				
8.	Make efforts to address disruptive student behaviors privately in order to support individual growth and positive behavior?				
9.	Encourage and praise students' work and contributions equitably and consistently, regardless of the student's race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, national origin, English Learner status, sex, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, religion, or disability status?				

## Interpersonal Practice

Criteria/Questions		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
1.	Assess student social-emotional needs regularly in order to make appropriate supports available and to foster strong relationships?				
2.	Facilitate diverse student involvement in curricular, extracurricular, and co-curricular activities?				
3.	Share problems and persistence techniques?				
4.	Encourage cooperation between students?				
5.	Learn and use names that students identify as their preferred names and personal pronouns?				
6.	Work to develop a non-academic, personal connection with each student?				
7.	Admit own learning role by acknowledging information shared by students?				
8.	Make referrals to others (Student Assistance Program Team, school nurse, guidance counselor, etc.) to provide additional supports for students, as needed?				



## Teacher Behaviors That Encourage Student Persistence

Criteria/Questions		Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Usually (3)	Always (4)
1.	Respect students' thoughts, feelings, insecurities, and concerns?				
2.	Establish a supportive relationship that helps students know they are liked and expected to succeed?				
3.	Share positive messages and concerns with all students' families in a way that all families can understand?				
4.	Build effective partnerships with students' families to support student learning and well-being?				
5.	Provide avenues for families and other community members of diverse backgrounds to advocate for their students and help students to develop their abilities and obtain needed resources?				
6.	Collaborate with families to ensure continuity of learning during distance learning?				
7.	Model language used in creating an inclusive classroom?				

Excerpted from Bessie C. Howard's Learning to Persist, Persisting to Learn, published by the Mid-Atlantic Center, adapted 2016, 2020, 2021.

SECTION 5:

# References

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