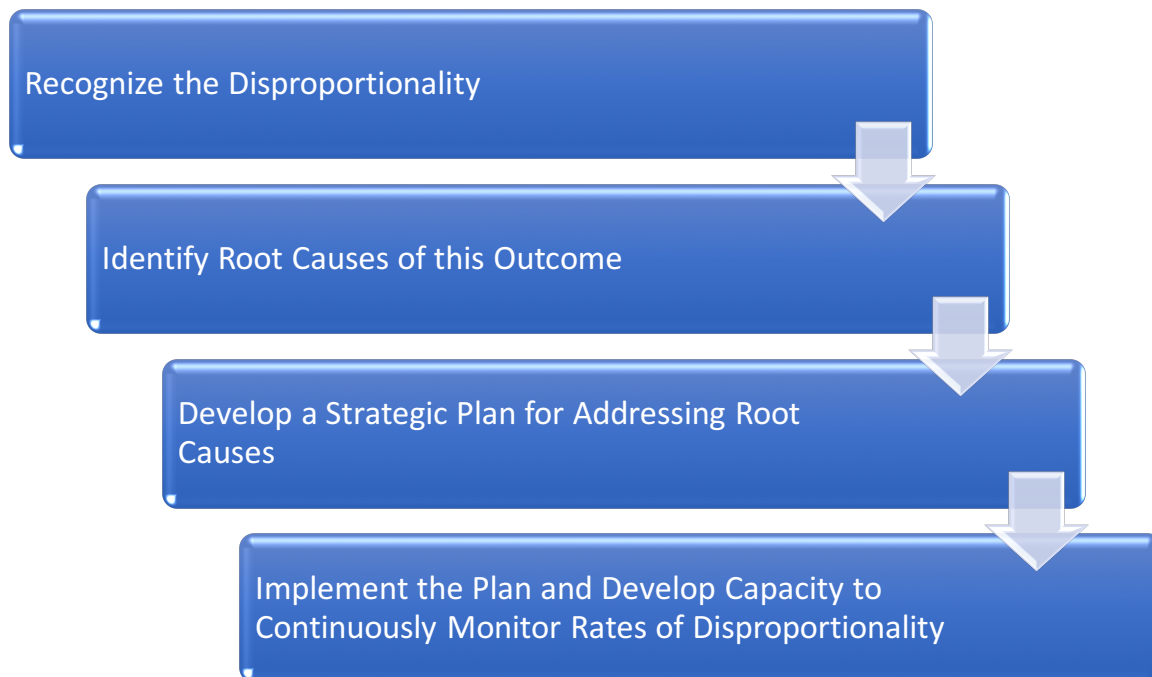


THE SCHOOL - COMMUNITY EQUITY AUDIT

Purpose: To plan strategies for interrupting racial disproportionality while exercising **Equity Consciousness**: “the belief that educators are responsible for employing non-traditional practices to ensure that all children—regardless of background—achieve at high levels” (pp. 82-83). Equity consciousness is measured on a continuum culminating in authentic equity consciousness—free from deficit thinking, colorblindness, or the savior mentality (Skrla, et al., 2009).

Objective: This guide is designed to engage you in a conversational, inquiry-based process of confronting racial disparities in your school.

Method:



How to Use this Tool

In our everyday practice, we confront opportunities to either interrupt or reproduce inequality. On one hand, we reproduce inequality by “unequally measuring human worth, intelligence and potential along static “racial” lines and accepting the distribution of racially unequal opportunities and the production of racially patterned disparities as normal” (Pollock, 2006, p. 2). On the other hand, equity advocates “reject false notions of human difference and actively treat people as equally human, worthy, intelligent and potentialized” (p. 2). School principals and teachers engage equity by making strategic, self-conscious everyday moves to counter racial inequality of opportunity. As Pollock (2006) recounts, “Moment to moment, [educators] must choose between the [impulse] to treat all people as human beings rather than “race” group members and the [impulse] to recognize people’s real experiences as race group members in order to assist them and treat them equitably” (p. 2). Enacting racial equity in our schools begins with interrupting patterns of thinking that fault students for achievement deficits. Instead, antiracism scholar Enid Lee insists all participants take accountability for changing inequitable structures (Milner, 1995), and this ownership is modeled from school leaders to teachers and beyond.

Quite literally, interrupting looks like stopping at the onset of potential deficit thinking, withholding judgment, engaging the challenge as an opportunity to learn, and making thoughtful choices that are solution focused and result in equitable outcomes. It is helpful here to point out the judger vs. learner path we choose moment by moment. Always consider which questions you ask yourself and others when you are faced with a perceived challenge: judger questions are reactive and automatic, leading to defensiveness, win-lose relating, and a view of limited possibilities; learner questions are flexible and adaptive, leading to questioning assumptions, win-win relating, and a view of plentiful possibilities (Adams, 2013). Consider as an example the shift from “achievement gap” to “education debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006) or “opportunity gaps” (Irvine, 2010). Achievement gap discourse tends to situate the students as the problem and renders educators helpless against the perils of so-called inherent and inferior cultural deficits—i.e., believing students of color do not value education or disadvantaged students generally do not have the abilities necessary to succeed in class. In this way, we dehistoricize racial disparities and “discount the presence of systemic inequalities” (Fergus, 2017). When confronted with abysmal test scores, it’s tempting to react by making judgments and assumptions about what’s wrong with students. But by activating equity consciousness, you digress and recognize students are not to blame for the historical and existing patterns of discrimination that traditionally lock them out of opportunities. Also, you do have the ability to reflect and explore possibilities. As Baldanza (2017) points out, “We need to reframe the question we ask when students fail from *Why are students failing?* to *How are the learning experiences we are providing failing our students?*.” In his discussion of student engagement, Schlechty (2011) offers, “By reframing the question we can tap into the collective potential of teachers and leaders to focus on the learning experiences we provide to students to improve their performance” (Baldanza, 2017).

Disrupting deficit thinking and strategizing through the lens of potential represent equity in motion. Skrla, et al. (2009) feel so adamant about the impact of critical awareness on everyday equity practices, they insist: “if in every school in a system there were teachers in every classroom with well-developed equity consciousness and well-developed teaching skill, the gap would be eliminated within that school system” (p. 82).

THE SCHOOL - COMMUNITY EQUITY AUDIT TOOL

School:
Principal:
Participants:
Date:

What is the School-Community Equity Audit?

- ❖ an instrument, strategy, process, and approach to guide educational leaders in supporting equitable school–community outcomes
- ❖ an approach that educational leaders and community stakeholders can flexibly apply to develop context specific strategies to pressing school–community concerns
- ❖ an opportunity to create space for collective decision-making, gathering and grappling with the meaning of data, and mutual planning for change

Process versus Snapshot

- The school-community equity audit can provide guidance for how to critically understand and act in solidarity with one’s school community, particularly underserved communities of color (Auerbach, 2010).
- Not intended to undermine a sense of urgency, these audits should be viewed as an approach to address adaptive and systemic problems that require time, trust, experimentation, iteration, and commitment to shift from deficit to asset-based perspectives about students, families, and communities.

Procedures:

- 1) Prep: Create a committee of relevant stakeholders, achieving proportional representation
- 2) After conducting a data inventory, engage in a Data Equity Walk with your committee; identify key themes across your findings.
- 3) With committee, identify the salient concern by posing a question for exploration.
- 4) With committee, identify root causes of this concern.
 - a. use data from multiple sources to determine a hypothesized problem of practice that underlies the learner-centered problem.
- 5) With committee, develop a strategic action plan for addressing root causes.
- 6) With committee, assess the plan for equity evidence.
- 7) With committee, implement the plan and develop capacity to continuously monitor progress.

<p style="text-align: center;">Step One.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Create a committee of relevant stakeholders, achieving proportional representation</p>
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Directions: Consider each stakeholder (and even offer others); provide a rationale for why you will/will not proceed with each stakeholder.

Stakeholder	YES	NO	Rationale
Principal			
Assistant Principal			
Social Worker			
Guidance Counselor			
Teacher			
Support Staff			
Student			
Parent			
Community Member			
Central Office Leader			
Union Rep			

Consider and Discuss:

- ✓ Is there racial/gender/age balance?
- ✓ How are we meaningfully and authentically including stakeholders, specifically those of color, who are most affected by this work?
- ✓ How are we meaningfully and authentically including stakeholders, specifically those of color, who are traditionally marginalized from decision making?

<p style="text-align: center;">Step Two. Conduct a Data Equity Walk.</p>
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1. As preparation for the Data Equity Walk, collect racialized data and prepare in a format that is friendly for the committee to review:
 - a. Student Demographics
 - b. Staff and Teacher Demographics
 - c. Student Achievement
 - d. Student Discipline
 - e. Educational Programs and Student Services
 - f. *Parent-Community Involvement
 - g. *Student Perceptions (the lived experiences of your most vulnerable students)
 - h. *Staff Perceptions (the manifestation of cultural competence among the adults)
 - i. *School Culture & Climate

*Because these data points may require observational or qualitative (interview or survey) data, these items must be scheduled and/or discussed during the Data Equity Walk.
2. As a committee, engage in a Data Equity Walk
 - a. Prep: Post the data on walls around the room as in a Gallery Walk set-up.
 - b. With committee, take 20 minutes to walk around the room and observe each data chart. As you take this first walk around the room, use post-its to write down and post your reactions to the data you see. Consider the guiding questions posted around the room as you react to the data.
 - i. What are your general reactions to the data? What questions do these data raise for you?
 - ii. What's the story behind the data? How does this connect to your personal experience?
 - iii. What further information would be helpful?
 - c. With committee, begin to analyze data, generate clarifying questions to focus the inquiry, and identify data needed to dig deeper into the issue and learner-centered problems.

Step Three.
Collaboratively identify the salient challenge.

Directions: Use this worksheet to engage in a conversational process of inquiry when confronting a challenge that interferes with racial equity.

1. What's happening? What is the evidence based racial disparity? If there are multiple, name the most salient disparity. What data supports this? Consider all forms.	
2. Reflect on your biases. What are some assumptions you or others might be making about this challenge? i.e., Deficit Thinking i.e., Colorblindness i.e., Poverty Disciplining i.e., Savior Mentality	
3. What is the equitable outcome you want? (the absence of disproportionality, where every learner has the greatest opportunity to learn.)	
4. What do you need to understand more deeply about this challenge?	
5. What new shifts in thinking are required to combat these biases?	
6. What student and staff assets/funds of knowledge can you build upon?	

<p style="text-align: center;">Step Four. Conduct a Root Cause Analysis</p>

1. Generate possible causes and explanations by identifying the contributing factors. Dig deeper into “what’s happening” to discover WHY it’s happening.
2. Discuss and chart the contributing factors we know: “What has been going on at various points of time that have increased the likelihood the disparity would occur?”
 - a. Note: it is important to get the perspective of people personally involved in the event when identifying the contributing factors at each step.
3. Reflect on the charting and attempt to answer: What are the systemic ‘root’ causes of this challenge disparity?
 - a. You can use the following list of potential issues to help your team consider all potential sources of disparities revealed in your data. Some of these root causes may occur to your team, and others may not. By asking whether each item listed here may be a possible source of disparity, you are ensuring a more comprehensive examination of underlying issues needing attention when you develop an action plan. Do the disparity patterns you see potentially have their basis in any of the following issues?
 - i. Longitudinal issues
 1. The factors that contribute to disparities often start early in a student’s education. Disparities may be the culmination of a series of routine decisions that, when considered in isolation, appear sensible.
 - ii. Climate, conditions for learning, and learning environment issues
 1. Students at risk for academic and behavioral problems may be assigned to classes taught by less experienced teachers.
 2. Students of color and students with emotional and behavioral challenges may experience fewer opportunities to engage in class (e.g., being called on less frequently) than their peers.
 3. Students at risk for academic and behavioral problems or students of color may not feel emotionally and physically safe, connected, supported, challenged, engaged, and socially capable to succeed academically compared with their peers.
 - iii. Capacity issues
 1. Teachers, staff, and schools may have limited capacity (because of a lack of skills, systems, or administrative support) to respond to student needs.
 2. Schools and teachers may not have all the tools, training, or support necessary to effectively engage the families of vulnerable students because of language barriers, lack of cultural competency, or other related reasons.
 3. Schools may lack the systems and resources to address the barriers to student learning.
 4. Teachers may have limited capacity (because of a lack of training or administrative support) to manage classroom behaviors without relying on punishment and exclusionary discipline.
 - iv. Intervention issues
 1. When students of color demonstrate a need, they may receive less supportive and more restrictive interventions than their peers.

2. The school may not help students or staff to develop their social and emotional skills in a way that enables them to monitor and manage their own behavior.
 3. Students may be inappropriately identified as having special education needs.
- v. Explicit and Implicit Bias issues
1. Individuals make perceptual errors assessing what they observe from students based on a limited understanding of contributing factors and prematurely arrive at a biased conclusion.
 2. Individuals express judgments and behave based on subconscious attitudes toward other people, things, or groups.
- vi. Policy issues
1. Personnel normalize decisions based on implicit bias, leading to unanticipated impacts on students.

Step Five.
Collaboratively develop a strategic action plan for addressing root causes.

Action Planning Template

What are some potential strategies for achieving the equitable outcome you want?

Consider the key levers for systemic change:

- ✓ Change in Beliefs ✓ Change in Policy ✓ Change in Practice
 ✓ Change in Programming ✓ Change in Resources

Action Plan			
Measurable Desired End State (Goal):			
Strategy 1:			
Person(s) Responsible	Action Steps	Timeline	Inputs/Resources
Strategy 2:			
Person(s) Responsible	Action Steps	Timeline	Inputs/Resources
Strategy 3:			
Person(s) Responsible	Action Steps	Timeline	Inputs/Resources

Step Six.
Collaboratively assess the plan for equity evidence.

Directions: In an equity-focused system, all partners at all levels align around core beliefs, transformative values, collaborative relationships, goals, and actions that move toward the increased achievement of all students and the elimination of racial disparities. Use this Equity Focused Decision Making template to ensure your action plan is equity-evident.

PEOPLE	POWER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How does this plan, policy, program, practice, or decision directly address the needs of students of color? • Who does this plan, policy, program, practice, or decision intend to serve, and who is actually served? • Who are the racial/ethnic groups positively and negatively affected by this plan, policy, program, practice or decision? And what are the potential impacts on these groups? • How are people differently situated in terms of the barriers they experience? • Are people traumatized/re-traumatized by this decision? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who holds power and who is accountable? • Does this plan, policy, program, practice or decision ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences? How? • What are the benefits and burdens that communities experience with this issue/decision? • How is the current issue, plan, policy, program, or practice shifting power dynamics to better integrate voices and priorities of communities of color? • Does this plan, policy, program, practice, or decision support the empowerment of students, families, communities, or employees of color?
PROCESS	PATTERNS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How are we meaningfully and authentically including or excluding stakeholders, specifically those of color, who are affected by this decision? • What policies, processes, practices, and social relationships contribute to the exclusion of communities of color most affected by inequities? • Are there empowering processes at every human touchpoint? • How does the process implemented reflect the use of the Courageous Conversations About Race six conditions? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is this plan, policy, program, practice, or decision repeating factors that have perpetuated inequities in the past? • Is this decision aligned to our understanding of equity NOT equality? • Is this plan, policy, program, practice, or decision intended to be race neutral or race conscious? • What manifestations of institutionalized racism does this plan, policy, program, practice or decision challenge?

When developing action plans, also consider questions such as:

- ☒ What safeguards are needed to prevent the root causes from happening again?
- ☒ What contributing factors might trigger the root causes to reoccur? How can we prevent this from happening?
- ☒ How could we change the way we do things to make sure that the root causes never happen?

Step Seven (and on...)
Engage in a Cycle of Continuous Improvement

Measurable equity and continuous improvement

Schools that build staff capacity and continuously evaluate and then improve a school's policies and practices are more likely to ensure fairness and equity and promote achievement for all students.

Examine the impact of policies and practices on students, especially students of color, students with disabilities, English learners (EL), students who are LGBTQ, students at risk for dropping out of school, those experiencing trauma and social exclusion, or those involved in behavior incidents, to identify any unintended disparities and consequences

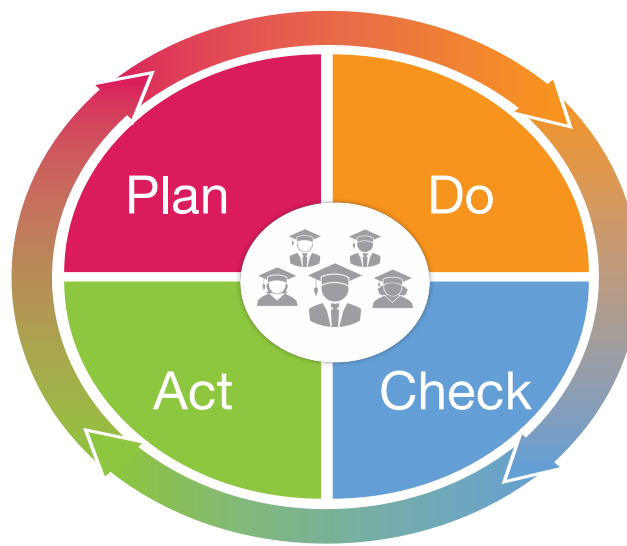
Regularly collect quantitative and qualitative data about inputs and outcomes.

Establish procedures for the regular review and analysis of data to detect possible patterns that should be further investigated

Engage the community in the entire review, analysis, and planning process, with an emphasis on being as transparent as possible while respecting privacy rights as findings are disseminated publicly

Implement, Monitor, Evaluate, and Regularly Review the actions plans that result from ongoing data analysis and policy review.

Continuous Improvement Model (CIM)



The Equity Challenge

Equity Traps

Equity Trap	Description	Traits
Deficit Thinking (Fergus, 2017)	An ideology used to explain academic performance and at times cognitive abilities as result of deficiencies within a cultural group. It additionally minimizes the influence of systemic patterns on abilities and behaviors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Blames cultural group for ability or behavior • Does not acknowledge systemic problems • Creates and/or supports a stereotype of a cultural group
Colorblindness (Fergus, 2017)	A belief that promotes the idea that the best way to remove racism is to omit race, gender, and other social identities as a descriptor. Instead, it involves treating individuals as individuals and not considering their social identities and focuses on discussing and framing the commonalities between individuals. The default identity in this ideology is Whiteness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omits social identities that differ from White, male, and/or heterosexual • Insists on utilization of commonalities versus differences language • Claims to not see color • Strives to treat all students the same
Poverty Disciplining (Fergus, 2017)	A belief that considers changing the behavioral and psychological dispositions of low-income individuals as paramount to fixing their low-income condition. In other words, deficit thinking bias is focused on a set of beliefs about ability, while poverty disciplining bias is focused on changing the behavior and thinking of low-income individuals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insists on changing behavior and psychological dispositions • Views discipline as promoting “good citizenship” behaviors • Associates failure to assimilate with low mobility within U.S. society
Savior Mentality (Castro, 2012; Freire, 197)	An ideology characterized by compassion toward the suffering of the oppressed resulting in the need to isolate that suffering and to aid it, hence saving children from their suffering.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Views students as victims of their environments • Believes one alone can rescue children from their impoverished state • Creates a dynamic where students are dependent • Protects students from struggle that will grow them; lowers the expectation