

Equity Dispatch

Classic Edition

Theme: Educational Equity

January 2012



IMPACT: *Educate, Engage, Empower—For Equity.*

“Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.” - Nelson Mandela

Introduction

To commemorate our continued growth in areas of equity, culminating towards our current mission statement “Equitable, Responsive Education for All,” the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP Center) would like to present this inaugural classic edition of *Equity Dispatch*. Debuted in January 2012 by the [Great Lakes Equity Center](#) (GLEC), many things have changed since our inaugural edition including sections, colors, and format, all grounded in the previous slogan, “Educate, Engage, Empower—For Equity.”

Educate

All students can and do achieve when given the right conditions. Many schools, however, struggle to address the academic and social needs of students who have been historically underserved in the education system for any of a number of social factors including race, gender, socio-economic class, ability, religious affiliation, gender identity, and/or linguistic diversity. Promoting educational equity involves creating and sustaining educational systems that will allow all students to benefit from quality instruction.

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Great Lakes Equity Center Equity Spotlight:



As the first Director of the Great Lakes Equity Center, Dr. Donna Hart-Tervalon brought over 35 years of experience in the field of education and proved

What is educational equity?

During our first years we defined educational equity as occurring when a school system has created policies, curricula, and a social culture that is representative of all students, such that all students have both encouragement and access to engage in high quality learning experiences. Educational equity ensures that each student, regardless of their race, gender, socio-economic class, ability, religious affiliation, gender identity, linguistic diversity, and/or any other characteristic, is supported to achieve academically and can access educational resources.

Since this initial conceptualization of education equity, we have re-grounded our definition within a social justice framework. Today, we define educational equity as when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources, are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people such that each individual has access to, can meaningfully participate, and make progress in high-quality learning experiences that empowers them towards self-determination and reduces disparities in outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities (Fraser, 2008; "Great Lakes Equity Center," 2013).

Why is educational equity important?

Equitable educational systems support student excellence in academic endeavors when their culture, language, heritage, gender/expression, and experiences are valued and used to facilitate and inform their learning and development (Gay, 2000). When students are provided access to high quality teachers, programs, and resources they are empowered to use their creativity in dynamic and tangible ways (Klinger et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009). An equitable learning environment is designed to empower students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using race, linguistic, and gender referents to actively engage them in the learning process. The right to an education that expands and elaborates the cultural capital that a student brings to school is a fundamental right of each individual student.

Unfortunately, the current state of educational systems does not always foster this kind of equitable education. For example, racially and linguistically diverse students are regularly mis-identified as having special education needs (Jackson, Thorius, & Kyser, 2016; Sullivan, 2011). These student populations are at heightened risk for over identification in special education categories such as intellectual disability, specific learning disability, and emotional disturbance (Jackson, Thorius, & Kyser, 2016; Sullivan, 2011). Likewise, historically underserved students regularly go unidentified for academically gifted programs, routinely barring them from access to some of the most rigorous curriculum (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Further compounding the issue of disproportionality in certain educational programs, students of Color, specifically Latinx and Black males, tend to receive more disciplinary referrals than White students and are punished more severely for the same offenses (Ferguson, 2005). In addition to disproportionality,

herself to be a valuable asset in the successful launch of the new Center. Prior to joining the Great Lakes Equity Center, Donna was a consultant on the special education team with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. She also served as a former Assistant Director of Special Education for the state of Wisconsin. Her combined experience in the field includes cross categorical teaching, early childhood and special education consulting, grant writing, professional development, and implementing and evaluating projects for public and private schools and preschools. Dr. Hart-Tervalon has taught undergraduate and graduate level courses and provided professional development to educators on issues of equity, diversity, cultural awareness, and culturally responsive practices. Her efforts had been focused on addressing systemic issues of racial disproportionality in education/special education, the achievement gap among diverse student populations, and eliminating race as a predicting factor of participation in special education.



In fall of 2012, Dr. Seena M. Skelton took over as Director of the Great Lakes Equity Center. Presently as the Director of Operations of the Midwest and Plains (MAP) Equity Assistance Center the region III equity

there are significant gaps in academic outcomes across student groups.

There are several variables that lead to the disparities in student educational outcomes. Generally, these factors can be grouped into three primary arenas: peoples' dispositions and competencies, educators' everyday practices, and district and school policies.

Educational scholars such as Gloria Ladson-Billings (2009) suggest that different teacher and student demographics often lead to misinterpretations of student behavior and performance because many teachers lack authentic experiences with the values, norms, and belief/knowledge systems of their students. Unexamined and often unconscious biases, resulting from the absence of cultural responsiveness, often lead to teacher misunderstandings about student behavior and aptitude and affects decisions regarding an equitable inclusion of diversity in curriculum and everyday classroom practices.

The lack of racial diversity in faculty and administration seen in many school systems also contributes the disparities in student outcomes. Although sometimes unintentional, policies that are created and enacted in schools institutionalize racially biased practices (Lynn & Adams, 2002). A diverse staff brings different perspectives and is more likely to recognize the impact of a particular policy on historically underserved student groups.

Staff diversity is also important for cultivating a learning community where all students feel a sense of belonging. Students from diverse backgrounds are less likely to feel connected to a school environment that does not represent the achievements in knowledge that have developed within their own cultural communities (Banks, 2010). All students should have access to support from educators who share similar understandings about their lived experiences. Students in systems with limited representation of racially diverse educators unequivocally have less access to the kind of support available to their White peers.

Achieving educational equity may seem like a daunting endeavor. However it is important to keep in mind that accomplishing educational equity is not an event but a process. As such, the work of educational equity requires schools and districts to make thoughtful, incremental steps towards an outcome of equity. It is also important to connect with others who share a vision of equity. There are many resources available to assist administrators and teachers in equity-driven work. Building networks, engaging in professional learning, and seeking out resources are all effective and necessary strategies for creating and sustaining equitable learning communities.

Working towards educational equity is a journey that includes these essential steps:

1. Increasing self-awareness of one's own cultural and personal identities.

assistance center, Dr. Skelton works in collaboration with the Center's executive director Dr. Kathleen King Thorius to plan, direct, and manage projects and services offered to state and local education agencies throughout the Center's thirteen-state region. Dr. Skelton brings twenty-two years of extensive training in principles of learning, teaching, and assessment, and broad professional experience working in the areas of school improvement and educational equity. As a Black woman with a dis/ability, and with professional experiences as an educational consultant for a special educational regional resource center, project lead for three state-wide special and general education reform initiatives, co-director of professional learning and technical assistance at the Equity Alliance at ASU, and former school psychologist, she brings into her scholarship and praxis the intersectional experiences of her own K-12 educational history, and her history as a practitioner, which enable a particular perspective and a personal awareness of the intended and unintended consequences of being a student of color with a dis/ability. Dr. Skelton has worked extensively with educators engaged in professional learning around such issues as disproportionality, cultural responsiveness, response to intervention, early intervening, and positive behavior support.

2. Exploring issues of power and privilege as they relate to race, culture, and difference.
3. Engaging in ongoing conversations with colleagues about the role culture has in teaching and learning.
4. Participating in professional learning to gain knowledge in areas such as intercultural communication, culturally responsive teaching, and leadership practices to support equity.
5. Pursuing social justice in all school practices by actively addressing institutional bias.

Home school connection

Working toward educational equity not only entails reflecting on our own dispositions, classroom practices and school policies; it involves reaching beyond the school building to engage all families and community members in the educational process. While families differ in composition and culture, they all share a common desire to promote the well-being of their children. Educators for equity use this shared goal to build cooperative relationships grounded in mutual respect.

Engaging all families is not always easy. Some family members may be hesitant to engage with school officials because of their negative schooling experiences in their past, while others may need additional supports – such as translation services, transportation, or alternative meeting times in order to build successful partnership with teachers and school staff.

Engage

Get to know the Region V Great Lakes Equity Center*

**This section presents as a historical recount of the roots and inception of the Great Lakes Equity Center (GLEC), established in 2011 as the Region V Equity Assistance Center (formerly Desegregation Assistance) funded by the U.S. Department of Education. Today, GLEC is the umbrella organization, whose restructuring to include projects like the MAP Center, serve as an organizational hub for research, technical assistance, and educational resource development projects. For more information, please visit our website.*

On October 1st of 2011 the Great Lakes Equity Center at IUPUI opened as the Region V Equity Assistance Center. With a combined 30+ years of experience and work in the area of educational equity technical assistance, Principal Investigator, Dr. Kathleen King Thorius, and Co-Principal Investigators, Dr. Brendan Maxcy and Dr. Thu Strong Thi Nguyễn, undertook the development of a project to house one of the nation's 10 Equity Assistance Centers (EAC) in Indiana University, Purdue University

Upcoming MAP Center Events:

April 2, 2019

Cadre I EquiLearn Focus Session

Critical Consciousness: Moving Beyond Critical Reflection to Critical Action

April 23, 2019

Girls STEM Institute: Transforming Lives Through a Holistic Approach
May 16, 2019

Magnet Schools in the 21st Century: Viable Integration strategies or Sites of Segregation?

September 16-17, 2019

Equity Leaders Institute Moving Beyond Critical Reflection to Critical Action: Policy and School Governance

Under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the U.S. Department of Education awards funding to 10 Equity Assistance Centers (EACs) across the nation to help schools and communities ensure that equitable education opportunities are available and accessible for all children. As the Region V EAC, the Great Lakes Equity Center provides technical assistance and professional learning opportunities, upon request, in the areas of race, gender, and national origin to public school districts and other responsible governmental agencies to promote equitable education opportunities. Although services are provided to state or local education agencies, requests for support from the Great Lakes Equity Center may be initiated by teachers, principals, parents, community leaders, and state and district administrators.

The Great Lakes Equity Center provides direct service at no cost to educational systems in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. However, many publications, tools and resources are universally available on the Center's website. Forwarding a mission to provide technical assistance and professional development to schools and districts dedicated to providing equitable educational environments, the Great Lakes Equity Center delivers on-demand, context-driven technical assistance and high quality professional development on specific issues of equity that a school or district may be facing. Preventing bullying and harassment through creating safe and inclusive schools, culturally responsive teaching and the common core standards, culturally responsive positive behavior supports and culturally responsive RtI are just a few of the topics the Great Lakes Equity Center can help school systems address. The Great Lakes Equity Center is an excellent resource for administrators, practitioners and community members who want to find tools, information, and a community of like-minded educators engaged in equity-driven work.

Today's Region III Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center

Transitioning from the Region V to Region III EAC in 2017, the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP Center) was established as the largest project at GLEC. The MAP Center provides free technical assistance to local and state education agencies, related to the desegregation areas of race, sex, national origin, and religion desegregation. The MAP Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education, sanctioned under the 1964 Civil Rights Act, and serves a 13-state region covering IN, OH, MI, IL, WI, MN, IA, MO, ND, SD, NE, KS, OK, representing over 7,000 school districts, and over 11 million public school students.

Something to Watch!



Teacher Perspectives and Teacher Participation in School Reform for Educational Equity

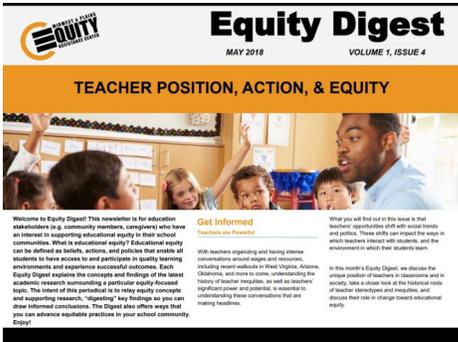
In this June 2018 [vodcast](#), four expert practitioners reflect on their experiences with being included in or excluded from school reform and share recommendations and experiences related to school reform for equity.

Something to Read!



Ensuring All Students Succeed, Equity at the School Level

This March 2017 [Equity Dispatch](#) welcomes subscribers to the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP Center). This newsletter introduces readers to the characteristics and benefits of equity-focused technical assistance. It also provides a broad overview of the MAP Center and the center services.



Teacher Position, Action, & Equity

In this May 2018 Equity Digest, we discuss the unique position of teachers in classrooms and in society, take a closer look at the historical roots of teacher stereotypes and inequities, and discuss their role in change toward educational equity.

Meet the Authors

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