

## THE FUNDAMENTALS OF EDUCATIONAL EQUITY



Welcome to Equity Digest! This newsletter is for education stakeholders (e.g. community members, caregivers) who have an interest in supporting educational equity in their school communities. What is educational equity? Educational equity can be defined as beliefs, actions, and policies that enable all students to have access to and participate in quality learning environments and experience successful outcomes. Each Equity Digest explains the concepts and findings of the latest academic research surrounding a particular equity-focused topic. The intent of this periodical is to relay equity concepts and supporting research, “digesting” key findings so you can draw informed conclusions. The Digest also offers ways that you can advance equitable practices in your school community. Enjoy!

### Get Informed

#### The Pursuit Of Educational Equity Is Essential For The Success Of All Students

Within the [March issue of the Equity Digest](#), the MAP Center re-issued the first Equity Dispatch debuted in January 2012. The Equity Dispatch provides a place to begin for education stakeholders as we review the fundamentals of educational equity and why it is so important in ensuring the success of all students. In addition, we explore the history of this regional Equity Assistance Center (EAC) and provide a few of our resources to assist you in beginning your equity journey.

The fundamental belief driving the pursuit of educational equity is that all students can succeed under the right conditions. When discussing **historically underserved** students, we are talking about those students who have been underserved by their schools—and the overall public educational system—due to a variety of social factors. These **social factors** can include one or more of the following identifiers: race, gender, gender identity, class, ability, religious affiliation, sexual orientation, and native language.

## What Is Educational Equity?

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 To Know And Understand As A Stakeholder?

Equitable educational systems **support student excellence!** An equitable learning environment creates conditions to realize students' potential **intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically.** Equitable educational systems support student excellence in academic pursuits **centering the whole child**—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, **and** their learning environments **reflect their whole selves**, they are empowered to use their creativity in dynamic and tangible ways (Klinger et al., 2005; Ladson-Billings, 2009).

The right to an education that expands and elaborates upon what 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 (Jackson, Thorius, & Kyser, 2016; Sullivan, 2011). Likewise, historically underserved students regularly **go unidentified for academically gifted programs**, routinely excluding them from access to some of the most rigorous curriculum (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Worsening 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, 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: **educators' dispositions, competencies, everyday practices, and lack of educator racial diversity.**

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.

The lack of racial diversity in faculty and administration seen in many school systems also contributes the disparities in student outcomes. 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.

## Towards Educational Equity For stakeholders: Brief Guidance

Achieving educational equity may seem like a daunting quest. It is important to keep in mind that accomplishing **educational equity is not an event but a process.** The work of educational equity requires stakeholders to make thoughtful, paced 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 stakeholders. 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.
2. Exploring issues of power and privilege as they relate to race, culture, and difference.
3. Engaging in ongoing conversations with family, friends, and school community about the role culture has in teaching and learning.



4. Participating in learnings 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 community practices by actively addressing institutional bias.

### **Home-School/Stakeholder Connection**

Working toward educational equity requires engaging with **the entire school community**-- all families, community members, educators, faith-based organizations, etc should be involved in the educational process. While each stakeholder group differs in composition and culture, they all share a common desire to promote **the well-being of their children**. Stakeholders for equity use this shared goal to build cooperative relationships grounded in mutual respect.

## **Why You Should Care**

### **The History of Your Regional Equity Assistance Center**

#### **History of GLEC**

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 Sương Thị Nguyễn, undertook the development of a project to house one of the nation's 10 Equity Assistance Centers (EAC) in Indiana University, Purdue University 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.

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.



#### **Summary of MAP Center**

Transitioning from the Region V to Region III Equity Assistance Center (EAC) on October 1, 2016, the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP Center) was established as the largest project at the Great Lakes Equity Center (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.

The MAP 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 can also be initiated by teachers, principals, parents/caregivers, community leaders, and state and district administrators.

The MAP Center provides direct service at no cost to educational systems in its 13-state region. However, many publications, tools, and resources are universally available on the MAP Center's website. Forwarding a mission to provide technical assistance and professional development to schools and districts dedicated to providing equitable educational environments, the MAP 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 and sustaining practices are just a few of the topics the MAP Center can help school systems address. The MAP is an excellent resource for administrators, practitioners and community members who want to find tools, information, and a community of likeminded

## **Moving Forward**

### **Resources To Support In Your Journey**

#### **Equity by Design Brief**

Promoting Racial And Socioeconomic Integration In Public Schools - The purpose of this Equity by Design is to provide an overview of the benefits and potential factors for school districts and stakeholders to consider when developing programs to increase diversity, socio-economic and racial, in their schools.

#### **Equity Dispatch**

Ensuring All Students Succeed, Equity At The School Level - This Equity Dispatch welcomes subscribers to the MAP Center and introduces readers to the characteristics and benefits of equity-focused technical assistance.



## **Equity Digest**

Authentic Social Justice Advocacy is a Lifestyle of Critical Action - In this issue of Equity Digest, we explore the components of authentic social justice advocacy and discuss what it means to take critical action toward equity within the school community. You will discover that social justice advocacy is a lifestyle, comprised of challenging the status quo, having difficult conversations with family, friends, and peers, and living the hard work of social justice advocacy every day.

## **Equity Tool**

An Equity Toolkit For Inclusive Schools: Centering Youth Voice In School Change - This Equity Tool can be used as an opportunity collaboratively to problem solve, identify priorities, and formulate action plans. The tool maintains focus of three principles regarding student voice: youth offer valuable perspectives and capacities that can advance this work in innovative ways, adult-centered notions may not address the equity issues impacting youths' educational experiences, and that opportunities to develop civic engagement have historically been scarce for historically marginalized youth.

## **Summary**

Through this newsletter, you've learned about educational equity, why it's important, and how to effectively support your school community in moving towards equitable learning environments. Now get out there, actively participate in your school community, and see how your development affects your students. Because that's truly why equity-oriented development matters. Please read the March Equity Dispatch Newsletter for more information.

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## **Meet the Authors**

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## **About the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center**

The mission of the Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is to ensure equity in student access to and participation in high quality, research-based education by expanding states' and school systems' capacity to provide robust, effective opportunities to learn for all students, regardless of and responsive to race, sex, and national origin, and to reduce disparities in educational outcomes among and between groups. The Equity by Design briefs series is intended to provide vital background information and action steps to support educators and other equity advocates as they work to create positive educational environments for all children. For more information, visit <http://www.greatlakesequity.org>.

## **Disclaimer**

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