

Policy Equity Analysis Toolkit



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Acknowledgements and Attributions

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Engaging School Communities in Critical Reflection on Policy Brief

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Critical Reflections on Policy Podcast

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Great Lakes Equity Center

Great Lakes Equity Center (Center) is one of ten regional Equity Assistance Centers funded by the United States Department of Education under Title IV of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. Located in the School of Education at Indiana University Purdue University, Indianapolis, the Center serves the public educational agencies in Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, and Wisconsin. The Center provides a wide range of technical assistance supports related to equity, civil rights, and systemic school reform, with a particular focus on issues of race, gender, and national origin.

Defining Educational Equity

Educational equity is when educational practices, policies, curricula, resources, and school cultures are **REPRESENTATIVE** of, constructed by, and responsive to all students, such that each student has **ACCESS** to, **PARTICIPATES** and **MAKE PROGRESS** in high-quality learning experiences, resulting in **POSITIVE OUTCOMES** regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities (Fraser, 2008; GLEC, 2012)

Transformative change towards educational equity is **persistent systemic change** that **disrupts** and **dismantles** historical legacies of normative **assumptions, beliefs, and practices** about individual characteristics and cultural identities that **marginalize** and **disenfranchise** people and groups of people.

Equity Toolkits

What is an Equity Toolkit?

Equity toolkits are thematic collections of individual, research-based tools that provide a framework for stakeholders within educational systems to learn more about an equity issue and then, develop and implement strategies to address that issue.

Because issues of equity are deeply rooted in local, social, cultural, historical, political, and economic contexts (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010), a particular solution for one site may not be suitable for another. Therefore, Equity Toolkits do not provide solutions or “best practice.” Rather, toolkits support the surfacing of issues of equity, as well as the assumptions and patterns of practice that contribute to those issues, and provide a research base, protocols and processes, and examples of the tools’ uses in practice to support local, ongoing efforts to address educational inequities.

What is in an Equity Toolkit?

Each Equity Toolkit includes the following sections (*hover over each icon for a brief description*):



ABOUT THIS TOOLKIT

The purpose of this toolkit is to provide a comprehensive set of resources, tools, and processes for engaging in an equity-oriented policy review and analysis. Users will engage in learning about a process for engaging in reviewing and critiquing systemic policies. Examples of what critical conversations about policy sound like are presented, as well as tools to support users in designing and implementing an equity-oriented policy review process in their local setting.

Each component in this toolkit addresses a different aspect of the policy review and analysis process. Users are encouraged to access the components in chronological order the first time through to get the most comprehensive perspective of the frameworks and processes presented.

Click the tabs to the right to navigate to each section of this toolkit. A similar navigation bar is located in the lower left corner of each page hereafter.





TOOL USE

Review: Considerations for effectively using this toolkit

This section provides a process and guidance for engaging in equity-oriented policy analysis. Specifically, this section provides considerations for:

- Assembling the policy review team (*see Educate section for more details*).
- Engaging in a review of contexts that shape the school community.
- Essential considerations, commitments, and a cycle for the policy review process.



Engaging in Equity-Oriented Policy Review¹

Assembling the Review Team

Because teaching and learning is a socially-mediated activity situated in complex environments, equity-oriented policy analysis will be most successful when the entire school community and the communities in which schools are situated are included in the process (Thorius, Maxcy, Macey, & Cox, 2014). Specifically, all stakeholder groups who actively participate in or are affected by policy interpretation, appropriation, and implementation should be included in the review process. Often times those who are struggling under the system are absent from the conversation (Macey, Thorius, & Skelton, 2012).

Including diverse stakeholders yields a number of benefits, including:

- 1) Diverse partners bring unique and broad perspectives, beliefs, assumptions, questions, and expectations about teaching and learning.
- 2) Diverse partners can offer valuable insight about what counts as data, what data are meaningful, and how data are interpreted, leading to innovative insights and new ways of knowing.
- 3) Diverse partners who are involved in interpretation, appropriation, and implementation, develop shared understandings that can lead to wider adoption and implementation of policy revisions (Skelton, 2014).

Examining Context

When engaging in equity-oriented policy analysis, it is essential to surface the socio-cultural structures that shape the way “problems” are defined, as well as how “solutions” are selected and implemented. Specifically, this process includes examining:

- The values, norms, routines, traditions, and cultural practices in school communities, i.e., school cultures (Welner, 2001).

- How resources, including people, time, funds, etc., are allocated and why (Welner, 2001).
- Beliefs and attitudes about people, including bias, stereotypes, and prejudices (Welner, 2001).
- Power imbalances and how those imbalances influence access to problem definition, the search for and implementation of solutions (Artiles, 2011).

Commitments and Considerations

The following commitments and considerations are useful guideposts for engaging in equity-oriented policy analysis. Review teams should:

- Define, center, and ensure a commitment to educational equity.
- Engage in critical reflection of policy *as practice* as well as written policy (Sutton & Levinson, 2001).
- Develop and enact policy instruments designed to *change practice*.
- Identify and provide guidance and support for effective practices.
- Create and implement accountability efforts (McIntosh, 2014).

¹ Content in this section derived from the *Engaging School Communities in Critical Reflection on Policy Brief* (Macey, Thorius, & Skelton, 2012).

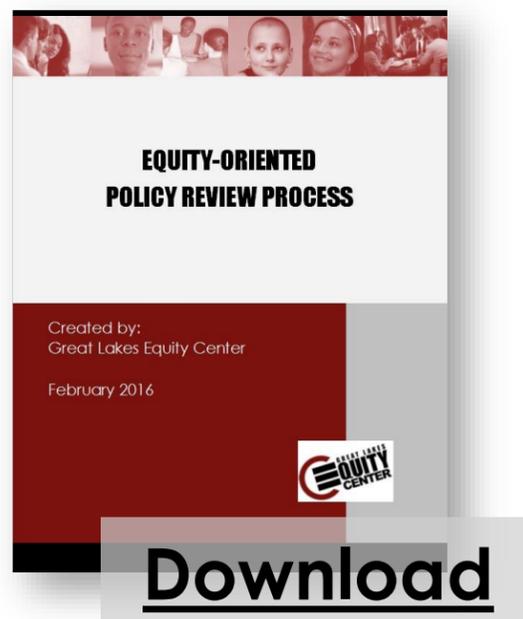


Engaging in Equity-Oriented Policy Review¹

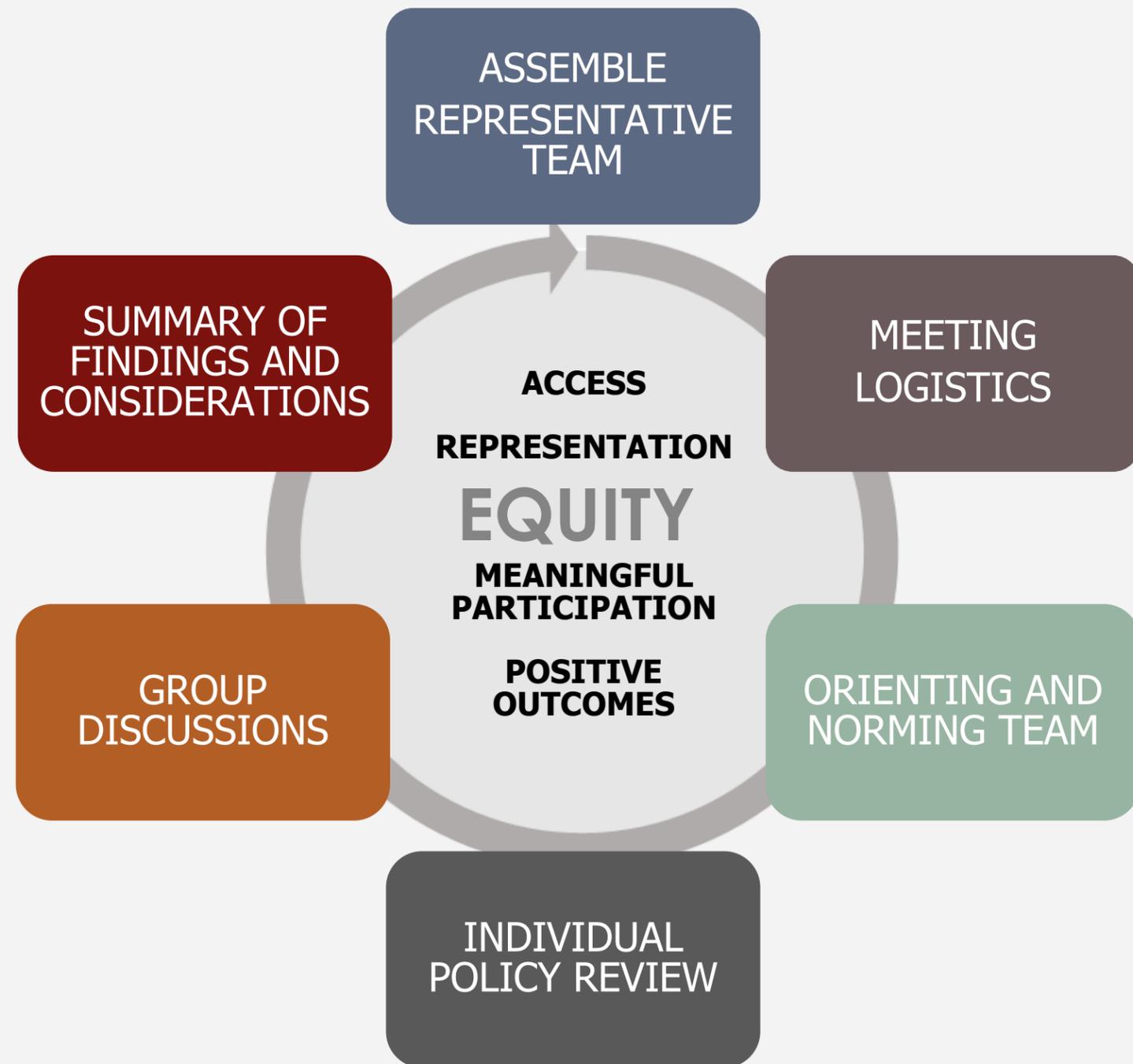
Equity-Oriented Policy Review Process

The graphic to the right summarizes the key phases of the equity-oriented policy review process presented in this toolkit. The policy review process is an ongoing, iterative process informed by data and multiple perspectives. Users should keep in mind that this graphic is a simple representation of a complex process influenced by participants in the learning community, the larger community in which schools are located, and local, state, and federal legal and policy contexts.

The process should stimulate strategic planning and action cycles rooted in the findings. The graphic summarizes only the policy analysis process, equity-oriented strategic and action planning are beyond the scope of this toolkit. Please contact the Center directly with requests for support related to designing and implementing equity-oriented strategic and action plans.



Equity-Oriented Policy Review Process



¹ Content in this section derived from the *Engaging School Communities in Critical Reflection on Policy Brief* (Macey, Thorius, & Skelton, 2012).



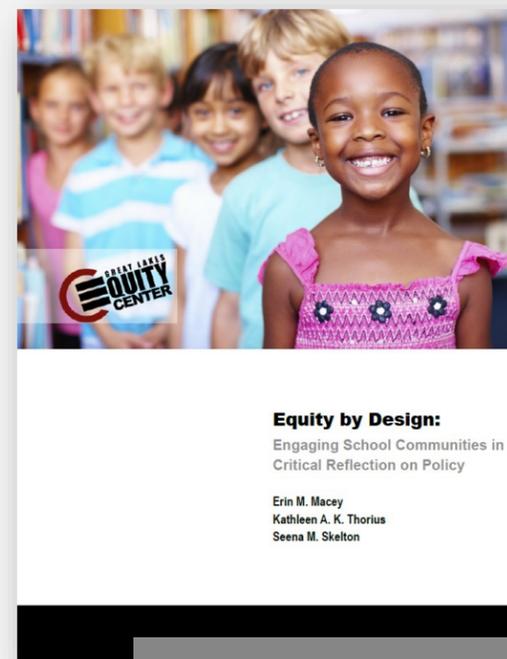


EDUCATE

READ: *Engaging School Communities in Critical Reflections on Policy* Brief

This section presents a brief from the Center's *Equity by Design* series. The brief offers considerations for designing a process for engaging in careful review and reflection on policies, both as written and as practice, including recommendations for:

- Assembling inclusive critical review teams;
- How those teams might conduct their critical reflection work; and
- An overview of features of equity-focused policies.



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ENGAGE

LISTEN: *Critical Reflections on Policy* Podcast

This section provides a podcast that presents an example of how to engage in critical dialogue about policy. Listen in as a team examines their district's zero tolerance discipline policy using the following four critical questions:

- What is the intent behind this policy?
- What social constructions does this policy embrace?
- Who benefits and who does not?
- What actions will redress the inequities we see in our policy?





EMPOWER

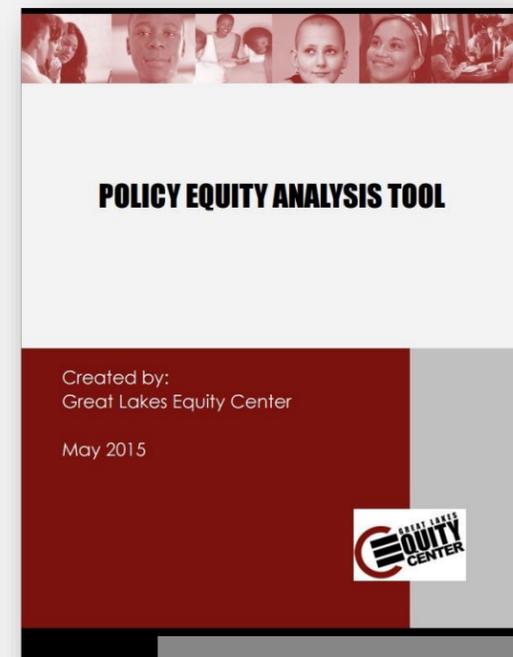
USE: *Policy Equity Analysis Tool (PEAT)*



The *Policy Equity Analysis Tool (PEAT)* was designed to guide stakeholders in considering equity implications of various aspects of reviewed policies. More specifically, the PEAT invites users to consider the extent to which a policy satisfies the following six policy dimensions: legal, research-base, context, efficiency, educative efficacy, and accountability.

For considerations on how to effectively use this tool, go to Tool Use.

If you prefer, you can also jump right to the tool by clicking the thumbnail.



[Download](#)



Key Terms and Concepts

Access – All members of the educational community should have entrance into, involvement with, and full participation of resources, conversations, initiatives, and choices which are attentive to heritage and community practices (Paris, 2012).

Critical Consciousness – An active state of seeking to identify the beliefs and language that obscure systemic inequities (Radd & Macey, 2013).

Critical Reflection – To engage in critical reflection is to question the logic and/or assumptions underlying particular ideas, arguments, or social constructions. In the context of schools, this type of reflection often leads individuals to question and act on policies that create or maintain unequal power relations among specific groups (Burbules & Berk, 1999; Freire, 1998).

Educational Equity – When educational practices, policies, curricula, resources, and school cultures are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all students, such that each student has access to, participates and make progress in high-quality learning experiences, resulting in positive outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities (GLEC, 2012).

Meaningful Participation – Agency and voice are afforded to all members of a community, by intentionally centering members who have been historically on the margins including, but not limited to people living in under-resourced communities, people with dis/abilities, as well as racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse individuals.

Policy as Practice – The interpretive and decision-making processes that take place daily in schools and classrooms and result in sets of standards or patterns at a particular site (Sutton & Levinson, 2001).

Policy-as-Written – Documents or other formal texts through which policymakers communicate their intent (Macey, Thorius, & Skelton, 2012).

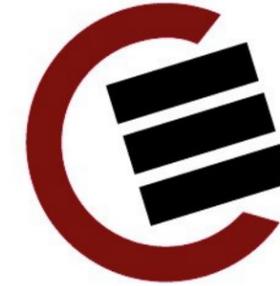
Representation – Providing and having adequate presence of all when decision and choice making as to examine the patterns of underlying beliefs, practices, policies, structures and norms that may marginalize specific groups and limit opportunity (Mulligan & Kozleski, 2009).

Zero Tolerance – A policy that mandates predetermined, typically harsh consequences or punishments for a wide degree of rule violations (NASP, 2001).

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About the Great Lakes Equity Center

The mission of the Great Lakes Equity 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

Great Lakes Equity Center is committed to the sharing of information regarding issues of equity in education. The contents of this toolkit 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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