



Equity EVERYWHERE: How School Psychologists Can Champion Equity at Every Level

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About the Centers

The Region III Equity Assistance Center is a project of the Great Lakes Equity Center, an educational research and service center located in Indiana University Indianapolis's School of Education. The Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center is funded by the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV of the Civil Rights Act to provide equity-focused technical assistance to states, districts, and public schools focused on systemic improvements to ensure educational access, participation and positive outcomes for students who have been historically marginalized based on race, sex, national origin, or religion, at the request of public schools, districts, state departments of education, and other responsible governmental agencies.



Introduction

Community members, classroom teachers, and parents/caregivers all play central, personal, and professional roles in the continuous equity efforts in schools. School psychologists and school counselors are uniquely placed to advocate for more equitable practices and policies that impact students and fellow educators alike. Centering school psychologists and school counselors allows for the focus to move from strictly student outcomes to educator support as well.



About This Tool

Equity EVERYWHERE: How School Psychologists Can Champion Equity at Every Level centers the expertise of school psychologists and school counselors in supporting school districts' equity-driven efforts. It focuses on questions related to how current and future school psychologists and counselors can have a positive impact on educational equity in a variety of settings, including core ideas and recommendations to address each question. This resource can be used to help guide self-reflection, program assessment, or plan professional development as desired.

This *Equity Tool* was developed using the content of the discussion held during a [Community Alliances for Equity Virtual Coffeehouse: Intentionally Centering School Psychologists and School Counselors in Equity Work](#). The Midwest & Plains Equity Center (MAP Center) hosted three experts in the field to answer four questions and invited participants to engage in the topics. The panel consisted of Dr. Kami M Hill, School Psychologist at Cincinnati Public Schools, Dr. Kyle Johnson, Coordinator of Psychological and Mental Health Services at Springfield City Schools, and Dr. Julie Morrison, Professor at University of Cincinnati.

This tool is divided into four topic areas, each of which correspond to a question discussed by the panel experts:

- **Question 1** Considering the diversity of marginalized identities, what are some of the new and recurring challenges and barriers that hinder effective services, advocacy, and social justice for all students and families? How can school psychology/psychologists/counselors contribute to fostering anti-racist anti-oppressive learning environments?



About This Tool (cont.)

- **Question 2** How can school psychologists and counselors ensure that educators and education practitioners' knowledge, skills, and professional practices not only embrace diversity and promote inclusivity, but also acknowledge the need for both students and educators?
- **Question 3** What does continuous learning look like for school psychologists/counselors in effectively dismantling explicit and implicit bias? How can school psychologists and counselors disrupt norms that have placed marginalized students in the unfair position of having to shoulder and take on the undue burden of work related to the racism, inequities, and bias that they experience?
- **Question 4** In what ways can we dismantle and subvert ableist narratives surrounding disability and diversity to foster safe, accessible, and equitable learning environments? How can school psychologists and school counselors lead in this area?

Following the question are the core ideas presented as well as recommendations to address the issues facing school psychologists.



Considering the Diversity of Marginalized Identities

Question 1

Considering the diversity of marginalized identities, what are some of the new and recurring challenges and barriers that hinder effective services, advocacy, and social justice for all students and families? How can school psychology/psychologists/counselors contribute to fostering anti-racist anti-oppressive learning environments?

Core Ideas

Historical and Current Emphasis:

- NASP's evolution from sensitivity to diversity towards promoting equity and social justice.
- Active engagement in addressing factors limiting equity and access.

Bias Awareness:

- School psychologists must acknowledge biases in their work and their impact on professional decisions.

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) issues practice standards for school psychologists that are updated every 10 years. In 2010, domain 8 was titled *Diversity in Development and Learning*. This domain is used to guide both the education and practice of school psychologists and it calls for demonstrating sensitivity to issues when working with different people of diverse backgrounds.

The current NASP standards model, updated in 2020 and renamed *Equitable Practices for Diverse Student Populations*, calls for school psychologists to acknowledge the impact that subtle racial, cultural, class, gender, and other biases and personal beliefs can have on their work. These biases can impact interactions, decisions and activities.



Considering the Diversity of Marginalized Identities (cont.)

Drawing awareness to the issue of bias in the standards model brings them out from the shadows and asks school psychologists to interrogate and dismantle them. The updated standards model also gives school psychologists the imperative to take action when action is needed to promote social justice and equity in educational programs.



Recommendations

Promote Equity and Social Justice:

- Engage in efforts to create safe, supportive, and inclusive environments.
- Disrupt systems that oppress school-aged children.

Active Role in Training:

- Embed equity and social justice in graduate programs.
- Ensure professional practice standards include promoting equity and acknowledging biases.



Considering the Diversity of Marginalized Identities (cont.)

The creation of safe, supportive, and inclusive environments happens in spaces where decisions are being made, both on the individual level in Individual Education Plan (IEP) or evaluation meetings and at the organizational level. When in those decision-making spaces it can be a delicate balance to call detrimental practices or decisions out in a way that does not cause others to immediately put up barriers. Walking this fine line helps the conversation continue, and progress can be made toward creating safe, supportive, and inclusive environments. Calling out inequitable practices is part of the job.

Another way to have an impact on the school environment is to participate in committees and programs at a district level as an advocate for equity. School psychologists can be key contributors in conversations regarding the collection and interpretation of data. Disaggregating data may uncover inequitable practices, and looking at data through different lenses will help bring equity into sharper focus.

Incorporating equity into school psychologist training helps ensure new practitioners have the knowledge and skills to create safe, supportive, and inclusive environments. One panelist found that current graduate students in the University of Cincinnati school psychology program are coming to the program with an equity-orientated mindset and passion for social justice. These students in part chose to join the graduate program because of the program's equity and social justice emphasis. Students in this program have used their equity mindset to critically examine their coursework; for example, some have called out assignments that need to be reevaluated for bias, and the university has responded by making changes and additions where necessary. These critical thinking skills go with them into practice in the school setting.



Ensuring Educators Embrace Diversity and Promote Inclusivity

Question 2

How can school psychologists and counselors ensure that educators and education practitioners' knowledge, skills, and professional practices not only embrace diversity and promote inclusivity, but also acknowledge the need for both students and educators?

Core Ideas

Modeling Behavior:

- School psychologists and counselors must model anti-racist and anti-oppressive behaviors.

Data-Driven Decisions:

- Use data to drive decisions and identify disparities.
- Disaggregate data to tell the story and find solutions.

Community Engagement:

- Engage in restorative practices to improve staff relations and community building.

School psychologists are uniquely situated to be models for anti-racist and anti-oppressive behaviors by asking probing questions when appropriate. District planning meetings and IEP planning sessions are ideal places to model equity-building behaviors. Asking the right questions can interrupt unconscious thought and behavior patterns that lead to harmful results.

Data should be used to inform decision making because it is based on measurable facts, not assumptions that can bring bias into the equation. It is important to be sure that the data is examined in a way that does not give a skewed sense of the facts. Keeping context for any data is vital; because individual schools have different cultures, the environment that produced the data, and the way it was collected, have an impact on the outcomes.



Ensuring Educators Embrace Diversity and Promote Inclusivity (cont.)

Data might show a certain result for the district as a whole, but when it is broken down by school or demographic, the story can change. This allows policies to be tailored to find solutions that are specific to the context where they will be enacted.

For example, in Springfield City Schools, there has been a focus on utilizing restorative practices and restorative circles with staff. Digging into school climate and culture as perceived by the staff has allowed the district to use restorative practices to help repair relationships that may have been harmed or broken in the difficult years during and since COVID. These practices help create a framework of working with the staff and not doing things to the staff.



Recommendations

Supportive Environment:

- Ensure educators acknowledge the need for action and healing.
- Foster safe and inclusive spaces through consultation and empathetic listening.

Professional Development:

- Offer continuous learning opportunities focused on equity and bias.
- Encourage educators to question their perspectives and practices.



Ensuring Educators Embrace Diversity and Promote Inclusivity (cont.)

Educators who do not see and understand the “why” of equity will not be invested in learning about the “how” of building equity. One way to show the “why” of equity is providing opportunities for educators to learn more about the harmful effects of inequitable practices, showing how embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity will improve outcomes for all learners. Once the “why” is understood, building a foundation for educators to learn skills and knowledge can be put to use in the classroom. Changes in thinking and awareness drive changes in behavior. Creating a safe and inclusive space for educators to speak and be heard is an effective way to build self-awareness and encourage deeper thinking.

Inviting educators to question their perspectives and practices through professional development is another way to build self-awareness. Advocating for topics like equity and bias to be included in the training calendar will bring these topics to educators who may not seek this type of training on their own. Promoting information about continuous education opportunities that dive into equity topics is another way to support educators on their equity journey.

Educators have a big impact on their learners, and not every interaction will be pleasant and helpful. When an educator has a response to classroom behavior that is harmful, it is important to be able to hear where students are coming from and deeply listen to why they reacted in that particular way. The things that influence educator behavior ultimately show up in their treatment of students. Understanding the root causes of potentially harmful behavior, and address them appropriately and equitably, can help change outcomes. Sharing practical tactics and strategies can help improve colleague behavior.



Continuous Learning to Dismantle Bias

Question 3

What does continuous learning look like for school psychologists/ counselors in effectively dismantling explicit and implicit bias? How can school psychologists and counselors disrupt norms that have placed marginalized students in the unfair position of having to shoulder and take on the undue burden of work related to the racism, inequities, and bias that they experience?

Core Ideas

Self-Advocacy and Empowerment:

- Equip students with self-advocacy skills.
- Address both explicit and implicit biases in educational settings.

Systems-Level Approach:

- Recognize and address systemic issues contributing to inequities.
- Understand the role of implicit bias and structural racism.

Giving students from preschool level and up the tools to recognize and identify emotions, use appropriate language, and speak up for themselves is a way for schools to equip students with the skills necessary to self-advocate. While it would be ideal for the adults who interact with students to have had enough training and awareness that this burden could be lifted from the students, that journey is still in progress.

The education space has grown in understanding the impacts that oppression and prejudice have on students as a direct source of stress for minoritized students. The quote from Edward Deming that “every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets” illustrates the need for systemic change. If large proportions of students do not find success within the system, it is a system-level failure that needs to be addressed.



Continuous Learning to Dismantle Bias (cont.)

Recommendations

Training and Advocacy:

- Advocate for continuous professional development on structural issues.
- School psychologists should lead in creating awareness and promoting equity-oriented practices.

Inclusive Evaluations:

- Conduct culturally responsive evaluations.
- Advocate for better support systems and resources for diverse learners.

The [NASP](#) has published position papers on racism, inclusion, diversity, equity, implicit bias, and structural racism. These papers advocate for school psychologists to educate themselves on these topics and speak out when necessary. With the unique positioning of school psychologists to use their expertise in data-driven decision making, it is important for them to be strong advocates for diverse learners, including educators who participate in professional development.

When using or creating evaluation tools, school psychologists should use their critical thinking to examine the evaluation tool, recommending the use of more culturally responsive methods where appropriate. This could include adapting current tools, or finding or creating new ones. Advocating for diverse learners to have better support systems and resources is part of the process of bringing equity to every corner of education.



Dismantling Ableist Narratives

Question 4

In what ways can we dismantle and subvert ableist narratives surrounding disability and diversity to foster safe, accessible, and equitable learning environments? How can school psychologists and school counselors lead in this area?

Core Ideas

Deficit Narratives:

- Address and subvert ableist narratives surrounding disability and diversity.

Safe and Equitable Environments:

- Foster accessible and inclusive learning environments.

Deficit narratives arise from a mindset that students, and the cultures or circumstances they experience, are responsible for the lack of academic success. The counternarrative is that educational systems are not designed to promote the academic or social success of diverse students. Definitions of success can even fall prey to the implicit biases of educators and administrators.

Removing the blame from the learners and their cultures leads to an examination of the learning environment, placing the onus on the system to adapt and grow. Lifting up inclusive and accessible learning environments can help give educators a positive example to work toward. Exclusively hearing where change and growth needs to happen can become disheartening. Letting educators know when they are getting it right can help strengthen equitable practices.



Dismantling Ableist Narratives (cont.)

Recommendations

Representation and Voice:

- Ensure meaningful representation of diverse voices in decision-making.
- Lead initiatives to challenge and change ableist narratives.

Community Involvement:

- Engage and collaborate with communities to understand their needs.
- Promote a culture of inclusivity and equity in all educational practices.

One way to change policies that have a data-proven, detrimental effect on historically minoritized students is to include those communities when updating or creating new policies. Diverse perspectives, such as students and parents who embody minoritized identities, should be invited to the table when decision-making is happening whenever possible. Beyond policy creation, school psychologists have the responsibility to encourage educators to examine their practices and increase inclusivity and equity, as discussed earlier.

When challenging ableist narratives, data can be your most effective tool. Showing the undesirable outcomes through data can provide leverage to include potentially new perspectives in decision-making. Having the influence and position to bring the community together for restorative circles, feedback opportunities, parent organizations, etc. will help create a culture of inclusivity and equity in a wide range of educational practices.



Key Terms

Data-Based Decision Making: A process of continuously collecting, analyzing, and using multiple forms of data to guide educational decisions; set goals for systems, settings/groups, and individuals; and evaluate effects of efforts.

Deficit Narratives: A critical component of the white racial frame and attributes disparate outcomes to the racialized groups themselves rather than the policies and actions that create conditions that produce these disparities (Russell et al., 2022).

Implicit Bias: The attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control (Blair, 2002 and Rudman, 2004a, as cited in Staats & Patton, 2013).

Marginalized Identity: An identity that causes or has historically caused a person of such an identity to be disproportionately subject to discrimination, harassment or other negative treatment as a result of an identity (Law Insider, n.d.).



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The panel consisted of Dr. Kami M Hill, School Psychologist at Cincinnati Public Schools, Dr. Kyle Johnson, Coordinator of Psychological and Mental Health Services at Springfield City Schools, and Dr. Julie Morrison, Professor at University of Cincinnati.



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To learn more about us, please visit the [Great Lakes Equity Center](#) website. To engage with the recording of the *Community Alliances for Equity Virtual Coffee House: Intentionally Centering School Psychologists and School Counselors in Equity Work*, [please click here](#).



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