



## Framing the Conversation: Equity Indicators in School Improvement

February 4, 2022

### Session Summary

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**Facilitators:** Donna Elam, National Comprehensive Center, Project Co-Lead  
Carol Keirstead, National Comprehensive Center, Project Co-Lead  
Chris Dwyer, National Comprehensive Center, Senior Advisor

**Presenters:** Dr. Sean Reardon, Professor, Poverty/Inequality in Education/sociology, Stanford  
Christopher Edley, Chair, National Academy of Sciences Commission on Equity

### Session Highlights

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- » Equity work begins with re-framing the way we think about educational equity by looking at four major shifts:
  - instead of focusing on improving “failing or low performing schools,” the focus should be on the educational system as a whole. That is, if there is no equity in the outcomes of students, then the educational system is not providing equitable opportunities.
  - The second shift is from focusing attention on average outcomes to disparities in outcomes.
  - The third shift focuses on attending to opportunities rather than outcomes. While differences in outcomes, such as graduation rates, may indicate inequities, a shift in focus would ask whether the educational system is providing differential learning opportunities that are producing improved outcomes.
  - Lastly, the fourth shift is moving away from static measures of outcomes to measures of growth, development, and learning. This re-framing suggests the need to monitor systemic educational equity of opportunities to learn.
- » The National Academy of Sciences (NAS) Committee’s definition of equity distinguishes between equity and equality, and between inequity and discrimination. A system of educational equity implies a call to action if disparities are unacceptable to the relevant community. Such an approach would examine whether the system is doing a good job at fitting the resources to the actual needs of students. This definition of equity looks at the broader context in which students live and asks whether there is an adequate effort to mitigate the effects of structural disadvantages that disproportionately affect student groups.
- » There are two types of indicators: those that measure disparities in student outcomes and those that assess disparities in access to educational resources and opportunities. In the early childhood domain, the indicators of outcomes are academic readiness and self-regulation and attention skills. The opportunity indicators are about access and participation to high-quality pre-K programs. Among indicators related to K-12 education, there is a range of measures that are readily available (performance on standardized assessments, on-time graduation, access and enrollment in rigorous coursework); measures that research indicates are important, but where there is not enough political or academic consensus on how to measure these variables (curricular breadth, access to

high-quality supports, nonacademic supports); and indicators that are “in-between;” that is, there is some consensus on how to measure these variables, but more research is needed.

- » This core group of indicators was selected by the Committee with the expectation that different educational agencies could select constructs or add indicators tailored to each local system’s needs.

### Questions and Answers

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- » **The overall framework of indicators is broad and deep. How would you help focus a team that wants to use the indicators to encourage persistently low-performing districts to begin to think differently about their practices? What are a few indicators to begin looking at disparities?**

Start by looking at the issues that are most salient in your district. Then look at which data elements are already available and see where there might be overlap. Another approach is to look at existing data collection systems and identify data that fall within the overall equity indicator framework. It is important to emphasize the need to get public and political support by ensuring that political and community actors are engaged in participating in the tailoring of the indicators they identify as most critical.

For low performing schools, the district might want to better understand when they begin to see the disparities in outcomes. If the disparities begin in Kindergarten, the district might want to focus on providing equal opportunities early on in the students’ lives (family support services, childcare) and equal opportunities in elementary school grades. If disparities worsen while students are in school, and particularly in some grade levels, then the focus needs to be on the K-12 educational system and not in early childhood.

- » **If we are examining whether adults are doing their best to mitigate circumstances that make learning a challenge, are we putting unequal expectations on adults serving communities with high rates of poverty (vs. those serving affluent communities)?**

“Adults” refers to the district and the system level actors. The question is whether those in positions of authority are making decisions to ensure that resources and opportunities are provided to students equitably. People leading school systems should be advocates for getting family and child-serving agencies to feel that they share the success of students. In an ideal world, there is a mechanism for ensuring collective accountability to make sure social services are working together to address food insecurity, mental health, etc. To move the needle in the lowest performing schools, education leaders need to get “other adults” to the table.

- » **The report alludes to the need for action by the federal government. What level of support has there been from the federal government for developing an equity indicator system?**

There is interest in the NAS report in the current administration. However, the Committee is aware of the upsides and downsides to federal government involvement in these types of initiatives. When the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed, there was the impression that the former Secretary of State Arne Duncan was the “owner” leading the charge and that created some problems. In reality, the standards were created by groups of state leaders working together with the Council of Chief State School Officers and governors. That approach could be the right model for how an equity indicator system would come together.

» **Rather than focusing on high-quality teaching, why not focus on high quality diverse teachers?**

The indicators focus on high-quality teaching, not high-quality teachers. This highlights the importance of teaching and learning dynamics that happen in the classroom. If we focused on the teachers, we would be labelling individuals as good or bad teachers. Rather, what makes for good teaching depends on the characteristics of the students. Effective teaching will look different for different groups of students, so there needs to be a match between the teaching skills, background, and the students' needs. This is where the argument for having a more diverse teaching force comes from. Diversity of the teaching force is one component of effective teaching. The report also suggests two specific constructs involving effective teaching. The first one is group differences and exposure to novice, experienced, and certified teachers; and the second one is racial/ethnic diversity of the teaching force.

### Shared Resources

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- » [National Academy of Sciences' Consensus Study Report: Monitoring Educational Equity](#)
- » [Also add summary doc](#)