

Bexley City Schools

District Equity Plan 2.0



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Equity Plan Overview

On December 7, 2021, the Bexley City Schools Board of Education passed its [Equity in Education Policy](#), providing a vision of how equity should look in the Bexley City School District.

The Equity in Education policy defines equity as “assuring that through policy, programs, and practices, each student is provided specifically-targeted resources, attention, and support required to meet differentiated social, emotional, and educational goals regardless of demographic identifiers, while working to identify and address the effects of any historical and current barriers.”

In accordance with its mission and vision of equity, the Board “commits to the achievement of educational equity for each student” and establishes the following course of action for the district:

- 1) Actively support multiple learning pathways that widen access to educational opportunities and career success in order to meet the needs of each student.
- 2) Provide each student with equitable access to instruction, curriculum, support, and other social, emotional, and educational resources that are high-quality and culturally relevant for each student.
- 3) Review and determine appropriate revisions to policies, procedures, and practices, and professional development in support of being a district that is safe, supportive, anti-racist, equitable, and inclusive.
- 4) Ensure equitable opportunities for all students to have access to co-curricular and extracurricular activities and enrichment opportunities.
- 5) Allocate resources in an equitable manner, reflective of the purposes and goals of the Board’s Equity in Education policy.
- 6) Engage students, staff, teachers, administrators, families, and other stakeholders in the ongoing work envisioned by the policy.

The Board has tasked the Superintendent to facilitate the development of an Equity Plan to make measurable progress towards meeting these goals with clear, asset-based standards, solutions, metrics, and procedures that can be reported and assessed.

Equity Plan Mission, Vision, and Purpose

Mission: The mission of the Bexley City School District Equity Plan is to directly align to the district's mission of “Learn with Curiosity, Demonstrate Kindness, and Embrace Equity while providing measurable accountability of the Equity and Inclusion goals of the district’s [Strategic Plan](#).”

Vision: The vision of the Bexley City School District Equity Plan is to create a consistent process of evaluating and championing equity in our district, which focuses on culturally responsive assessments, professional accountability, and opportunities for two-way conversations with students, staff, administrators, and the community.

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to:

- Provide a framework for staff and administrators to use in accomplishing the diversity, equity, and inclusion goals the district is dedicated to achieving, including in the areas of Culture, Teaching and Learning, and Facilities.
- Ensure the district is promoting a learning environment of inclusive excellence, cultural responsiveness, and positive well-being for all students, staff members, and families.
- Ensure that policies, structures, processes, and educational opportunities are free from bias and discrimination and affirm the rich diversity of the community.
- Establish a consistent process for reporting, identifying and responding to issues related to equity.

Relationship to the Strategic Plan

The creation of a consistent approach to Educational Equity builds on the “Five Ws” (who, what, when, where, why), and helps answer the question of how the district thinks about equity and also how the district will approach addressing issues of equity that have been identified through a structural process.

The components of the Bexley City School District Equity Plan have been embedded within the Strategic Plan and identify opportunities for determining district strengths and opportunities to connect the district’s mission, vision, values, and goals, along with a plan to achieve these goals over the next two to four years.

In addition, the Board of Education, through the Equity in Education policy, requested an equity plan that provides a yearly update that details measurable progress, which also can be done in support of the strategic plan.

Overall Approach to Equity

Bexley City Schools is committed to not only creating a process to identify and address equity issues and embed equity within the district but also providing the entire district with an approach to actually addressing issues of equity. Because equity work is robust and evolving, that means that the district needs an approach to equity that allows it to examine the past, present, and future. This entails prioritizing the following:

- Reviewing and evaluating existing policies, procedures and practices and their implementation/application.
- Being proactive and evaluating new, future, or potential policies, procedures, and practices for equity.

Equity Lens

Through the use of an Equity Lens, achievement of educational equity for each student will be supported as follows:

- A. Collaborating with families and communities, including non-dominant communities, to centrally engage them in the educational process and school improvement for equity. In doing so this creates a wider access to educational opportunities and career success for each student. It is expected that:
 - a. Leadership develops and maintains meaningful and ongoing relationships with families and communities through regular, two way, culturally responsive communications.
 - b. Leadership has evidence of teacher, staff, student, family, and community capacity to embed “funds of knowledge” and other resources in instruction.
 - c. Leadership has evidence of policies and practices that result in greater awareness and valuing of the diverse values, practices, and resources in the school community.
- B. Supervising for improvement of equitable instruction through the use of culturally responsive teaching and learning, heterogeneous grouping, cooperative learning, drawing on community funds of knowledge, English learner instructional strategies, or anything else designed to increase educational equity in our schools. It is expected that:
 - a. Leadership builds teacher and staff capacity to utilize equitable instruction (e.g. restorative practices, culturally responsive teaching, differentiated instruction, individual learning plans, drawing on community knowledge, emerging bilingual instructional strategies), as well as data supported methodology
 - b. Equitable instruction and equitable student access to content are deeply embedded organizational practices. This includes the use of the [BCSD Equity Evaluation Tool](#). This evaluation tool is designed to be used with resources being considered for inclusion in the K-12 Curriculum.
 - c. Leadership facilitates ongoing opportunities and professional development for educator collaboration to engage in collective learning and improvement for equity.
- C. Equitable allocation of school resources, distribution of financial, material, time, and human resources to support teaching and learning for each student. It is expected that:
 - a. Leadership collaborates with staff, students, families, and community members to equitably allocate resources, including to support teaching and learning for students who have not been well-served.
 - b. Leadership has evidence of equitable resource allocation and improved teaching and learning for each student.

- D. Fostering an equitable school culture that recognizes that student capacity is not limited by race, ethnicity, poverty, language, or other characteristics. The leadership team builds authentic relationships across the school community and deepens belonging and voice for students, families, and staff who have been traditionally marginalized. It is expected that:
- a. Leadership establishes sustainable collaboration efforts with teachers, staff, students, families, and community members that lead to trusting relationships, positive engagement, voice, and meaningful participation for non-dominant groups.

Targeted Universalism (TU) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

In addition to adopting an equity lens, it is necessary to incorporate an equity framework that avoids perpetuating “in-groups” and “out-groups” in the school community. Traditional equity work focuses on either targeted solutions or universal responses as strategies to resolve inequitable processes or policies. Universal responses create a “one size fits all” that may inadequately help those most in need. Targeted responses are often viewed as unfairly helping one group over another, leading to hostility and resentment.

An alternative approach that has the potential to bridge the benefits between universal and targeted responses, and will serve as the framework for this equity plan is referred to as “Targeted Universalism”. Targeted Universalism means setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. (Powell, Menendian, Ake 2019)

With a Targeted Universalism framework, a universal goal is established for the collective need of all groups. The strategies developed to achieve the goal are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal. Targeted Universalism is goal oriented, and the processes are directed in service of the explicit, universal goal. TU is a platform to operationalize supports, programs, resources that move all groups toward the universal goal, while doing so in an inclusive manner.

Targeted Universal Strategies are designed to enable everyone to enjoy the realization of a policy goal. It is outcome-oriented. It seeks a range of implementation strategies that are tailored to address both the structures that impede different groups and populations and to affirmatively develop structures that promote the desired outcome for different populations. The strategies are targeted, but the goal is always universal. It is strategic in that a shared goal of interest to all groups can diffuse

potential discursive attacks, singling out particular groups and weakening the broader policy. TU's emphasis on a shared goal raises the expectations of all groups and does not set the goal based upon what more privileged groups may already have.

A model of Targeted Universalism that the district currently employs is Universal Design of Learning (UDL). UDL is an opportunity for all students to access, build on, and internalize general-education curriculum by reducing individual barriers to instruction. In practice, UDL is an example of Targeted Universalism because it focuses on the needs of a specific group for the benefit of all. Because of the natural variability among learners, classroom instruction that assumes all students learn in the same way simply is not effective. There is no such thing as a "one-size-fits-all" lesson. And yet, it is also not practical for educators to create an individualized lesson for every student, every day. By using UDL, educators can address this challenge by proactively designing learning experiences that are flexible enough to reach all learners. Rather than trying to determine if the student is ready for instruction, educators who use UDL ask if the instruction is ready for all students.

One of the tenets of UDL is that barriers live in designs, not in students. This is a mindset shift for many educators. When a learner is not progressing, it is common to ask what it is about the student that is holding them back. The educator's job then becomes one of "fixing" the student. In contrast, when they identify barriers in the design of the learning experience, educators have the power to change them. These barriers can exist in any of the four primary instructional components:

- Goals: the description of what students will understand, know, or be able to do as a result of the learning experience
- Assessments: the method used for measuring student learning
- Methods: the manner in which the content is taught
- Materials: the media, tools, and resources used for teaching content

Process for Identifying and Addressing Issues Related to Equity¹

Bexley City School District is committed to creating a clear process for identifying and addressing issues related to equity that relies on a collaborative approach. The process should provide the opportunity to:

- Identify an equity issue and determine immediate and long term needs.
 - Consider if the response to this need would be proactive or reactive.

- If the response would be reactive, begin considering ways to be proactive in the future with respect to issues in the future.
- Identify who should be involved in the discussion.
 - Have district and building administrators been informed, and what does their involvement look like?
 - How are staff, students, guardians, and community members involved in the discussion?
 - Are all populations and groups considered in the discussion?
 - Are the people who are or would be impacted involved in the discussion?
- Define what involvement looks like for everyone involved.
- Identify when (or at what point) people should be involved in a situation.
- Establish what proper communication looks like throughout the process.
 - An established timeline should be consistent, equitable, and within a reasonable amount of time.
 - This includes initial communication related to the issue as well as “closing the loop” and following up to ensure that everyone is informed about solutions and moving forward.
- Determine what facts, data, and outcome the district needs.
 - Consider what facts and data already exist.
 - What resources do we have/need to be created?
- Complete a review of the process
 - Was everyone included?
 - What should be done if everyone who was needed in the discussion wasn't included?

Individual/Specific Issue or Concern That Relates to Equity

As a district, when there is an individual issue (or an issue that is perceived to impact one individual or specific place, item, or entity) that relates to equity, we will focus on the following:

- Identification and acknowledgement of the issue/harm
- Determine what the issue is and how are parties heard?
- Confirm the issue with others and the parties involved.
- Consider if what appeared to be a standalone or specific issue is actually part of a systemic or longstanding issue.
- If it is determined that this standalone issue is actually part of a systemic issue, then you should also use the approach to equity for systemic issues.

Addressing the issue/harm

- How has/will the team go about addressing the issue, and how will the team communicate it to others?
- Has the team addressed the issue in a timely and direct manner?
- Are all parties participating in the process to acknowledge and address the issue/harm?
- Rectifying and repairing the harm, especially through restorative practices that require high levels of support and high levels of accountability.
- What do all parties want and need? Is it possible for these parties to get these things?
- What does rectification and repair look like? Have all parties involved helped determine what repair looks like?
- Who is impacted positively and negatively by the decisions being made?
- Did this harm do damage to the community? If so, how do we restore it?
- What does it mean to have an inclusive, welcoming community?
- What needs to be done to make the community more inclusive and welcoming?

What do we owe to each other?

- What is the process for checking in on each other?

Systemic Issue or Concern that Relates to Equity

As a district, when there is a systemic issue that relates to equity, the district will focus on the following framework, which will help identify clear-cut solutions as well as issues, barriers, and gaps that require additional context, data, research, and actionable steps to determine the most equitable solution:

When evaluating a policy, practice, plan, or measure to determine if it is equitable, consider the following questions:

- Who does/did this policy or practice center or normalize?
- How could centering/normalizing some populations lead to gaps?
- How has our understanding of gaps led to stereotyping and deficit thinking?
- Who are the beneficiaries? Who is impacted negatively?
- Who was not considered, included, or prioritized historically and currently?
- What barriers exist or were created?
- What kind of environment has this policy, practice, or plan created?
- How does a lack of equity in the past inform this policy or practice now?
- Have any repairs been put into place to address the barriers that exist, and what is the tangible positive or negative impact that has occurred or might occur because of this policy, procedure, or practice?

- What issues did you recognize that needed to be addressed?
- What changes have been made, and what was the impact of those changes?
- Were the changes made systemic or individual?
- Did the changes focus on transformation or assimilation (asking populations to fit the norms of others)?
- Has the building, district, or the Board of Education decided to change/put this policy, procedure, or practice in place with the specific intent of producing, maintaining, or sustaining equity, and are decisions guided by some level of proof and/or evidence?
 - What does equity look like, and how do you show clear intent to produce equity?
 - How will you collect data/provide proof? This is important because if you find that you are not producing the outcomes you're looking for, then intent alone is not sufficient. You must also identify impact.
 - This emphasizes a proactive approach rather than a reactive approach that requires everyone involved to explicitly show and prioritize how putting a policy, practice, or plan in place will produce equity.
 - For both old and new policies, procedures, and practices, it involves looking at intentionality and clear indications that they are/were put in place with fairness in mind.
 - If one is unable to concretely address how the policy, practice, or plan aims to produce and sustain equitable outcomes, then it is not acceptable to implement.

Restorative Practices

Addressing issues of equity requires a proactive approach that creates a culture of belonging throughout the school community through the use of strategies that builds trust, embraces equity, demonstrates kindness, and encourages students to learn with curiosity. The field of restorative practices offers a communication strategy for implementing schoolwide cultural change while at the same time engaging all of the stakeholders in the school community. It is not a one-size fits all approach for change, however everyone in the school building can utilize restorative practices to build relationships with students and create a safe and accepting school climate. Implementation of restorative circles, impromptu conversations, and restorative conferences serves to build positive relationships between students, teachers, and administrators. A sense of teamwork develops and people are more inclined to resolve problems through cooperation.

Restorative practices are a proactive approach that builds students' capacity to self-regulate, make decisions, and self-govern. It provides a pathway for bringing equitable discipline that reduces exclusion, improves the school climate, and fosters a relationally driven school community. When educators foster a safe learning space, develop healthy growth-producing relationships with students, maintain their credibility, and build student agency, amazing things happen.

The core of restorative practices centers on a restorative culture. It begins with the wisdom and the humility to acknowledge that we have found ourselves as victim and offender at various times throughout our life. It is commonly accepted that young people are learning about the social world, not just the physical and biological worlds we teach our students. Educators model for students how to walk with grace through the world, we create classroom structures that foster a sense of belonging and we use language that builds students' sense of agency so they can pursue their goals and aspirations. As we foster a culture of belonging it becomes necessary to help students identify their emotions, acknowledge the impact, and solve problems in order to improve their relationships with others. A restorative culture informs the language we use to build agency and identity and it serves to attend to the ways we build teacher credibility, set high expectations, and foster positive relationships with each member of the school community.

Strategic Plan Equity and Inclusion Goals

The framework and use of restorative practices of the Equity Plan will serve to support staff and administrators in the successful implementation of the diversity, equity, and inclusion elements of the strategic plan goals of Culture, Teaching and Learning, and Facilities. Those elements are as follows:

Culture

Goal 1:

- Ensure that the experience of school fosters physical, mental, and emotional well-being while supporting BCSD's mission toward curiosity, kindness and equity.
 - Optimize the usage of time, schedules, and calendars to promote the physical and mental health of students, faculty, and staff
 - Ensure equity of opportunity for all students, regardless of background, identity, or ability to pursue their academic and extracurricular interests.

Goal 3:

- Foster a community culture where each student can realize success and feel a sense of belonging.
 - Integrate social-emotional learning standards into culture and curriculum, clarify anti-bullying and safety measures, and support behaviors, practices, and policies that align with district vision and values.
 - Celebrate and live a broader definition of success that encompasses the diversity of talents, interests, and backgrounds, reflected in BCSD's local community and global possibilities.

Teaching and Learning

Goal 1:

- Ensure that equitable, culturally responsive, research-based instructional practices inform all aspects of teaching and learning for all students.
 - Build capacity for culturally responsive, accessible, and inclusive teaching and learning practices and continually evaluate learning outcomes.
 - Ensure strong core instruction and interventions are matched to student needs across all grades and all subjects.

Goal 3:

- Ensure all students have access to a variety of authentic and meaningful experiential learning opportunities.
 - Develop an inclusive and authentic experiential learning program along with relevant and effective assessments that measure learning in a

- variety of ways.
- Expand developmentally appropriate connections and explorations programs and ensure all students have access.

Facilities

Goal 3:

- Create welcoming spaces that promote safety and belonging for all.
 - Assess space planning and usage across the district through a lens of accessibility, equity, safety, belonging, and joy.

Summary/Moving Forward

The Bexley City Schools Strategic Plan serves to clearly articulate the district’s mission, vision, values and goals. The Equity Plan serves to provide a framework by which administrators, staff, teachers, students, and the school community can establish various strategies to accomplish the objectives of the Equity in Education policy. Through the effective use of an equity lens, a targeted universal framework, and a culture of restorative practices, it is desired that the students, staff, teachers, and administrators of the school community will flourish in an inclusive, equitable manner.

Moving forward, the Bexley City Schools Equity Plan will serve as an annual document that articulates a clear process, targeted approaches/examinations, and clear methods for communication, transparency, and accountability. Each year, the district will examine structural and systemic methods and ensure that they are being embedded in the work that is done throughout the district. And the district will use the equity process and framework to examine policies, plans, and procedures proactively.

The Leader of School Community Engagement will also review and revise the equity process, framework, and overall equity plan periodically and as needed. Input from stakeholders is welcomed and professional development that continues the advancement of equity will be informed by this input.

Working Definitions

- **Adequacy/Adequate Education:** The principle that all students should receive “an adequate education” whatever it takes to provide it (Brighthouse & Swift, 2008). As an example of what the difference means in practice, consider a district that has a policy of one reading specialist per elementary school. Everyone would agree that this is an equal distribution. However, School A has 15 students who are reading below grade level whereas School B has 250 below grade level readers. Equal

distribution is therefore not providing adequate services to the children in School B because the needs in that school are obviously much greater.

- **Agency:** Agency is your sense of what you can do and what you think you can do. It is your power to affect your future. Agency takes your desires, makes plans, and carries out the actions necessary to obtain them. Agency is the sense of control that you feel in your life, your capacity to influence your own thoughts and behavior, and having faith in your ability to handle a wide range of tasks and situations. Your sense of agency helps you to be psychologically stable, yet flexible in the face of conflict or change. Agency is your very own power, your ability, to affect the future. While people have the ability to influence themselves, they are also very capable in influencing others to affect change. Today's society is undergoing drastic social, informational, and technological changes, and these "revolutionary advances in technology and globalization are transforming the nature, reach, speed, and the loci of human influence.

Agency is the power we have to pilot our lives in the direction we want to go. To use our agency, we have to become familiar with its four helpers, or aspects.

1. **Intentionality.** You must make a proactive commitment to take action to change your life or your environment. You are not letting others around you force your actions – you are choosing to act and take control.
2. **Forethought.** Forethought helps you to visualize the future and set goals for yourself. It allows you to motivate yourself and to guide your actions in anticipation of future events.
3. **Self-reactiveness.** You have the ability to act on your plans and monitor your progress, plus make a course correction if you stray. Self-reactiveness means that once you have intention and a plan, you cannot sit back and wait for the results to appear but you must be deliberate in acting towards reaching your goals.
4. **Self-reflection.** Allows you to think about and evaluate your motives, your values and your life goals. Self-reflection lets you address any conflicts in your motivations and choose to act in favor of one over the other.

Together with its four helpers, Agency allows you to choose the direction that your life will take, help you to influence others to affect changes in your life, and work with others to change lives locally and globally.

Student Agency relates to the student having an active role in their learning through voice, and often a choice, in the process. Project and problem-based learning provide opportunities to increase student agency through activities that are interesting and relevant to the learner. When the student has agency, the student is making, creating, doing, sharing, collaborating, and publishing in ways that are meaningful to them.

- **Culture:** The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning. As understood in sociology, a subculture is a set of people with a distinct set of behavior and beliefs that differentiate them from a larger culture as a whole of which they are a part of. The subculture may be distinctive because of the age of its members, or by their race, ethnicity, class and/or gender, and the qualities that determine a subculture as distinct may be aesthetic, religious, political, and sexual or a combination of these factors.

- **Cultural proficiency:** Cultural Proficiency in education is the level of knowledge-based skills and understanding that are required to successfully teach and interact with students and to work effectively with colleagues from a variety of cultures by holding all forms of cultural difference in high esteem; a continuing self-assessment of one's values, beliefs and biases grounded in cultural humility; an ongoing vigilance toward the dynamics of diversity, difference and power; and the expansion of knowledge of cultural practices that recognize cultural bridges as going both ways. Culturally proficient services require that both the individual and the institution be culturally proficient.
 - Five essential elements contribute to an institution's ability to become more culturally proficient which include:
 - i. Valuing diversity.
 - ii. Having the capacity for cultural self-assessment.
 - iii. Managing the dynamics of difference
 - iv. Having institutionalized cultural knowledge.
 - v. Having developed adaptations to service/curriculum delivery reflecting an understanding of cultural diversity.
 - These five elements should be manifested at every level of an organization including policy making, administration, and practice. (Cross, etal. 1989)

- **Culturally Relevant Pedagogy:** A theoretical model that focuses on multiple aspects of student achievement and supports students to uphold their cultural identities. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy also calls for students to develop critical perspectives that challenge societal inequalities.
 - Gloria Ladson-Billings proposed three main components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy: (a) a focus on student learning and academic success, (b) developing students' cultural competence to assist students in developing positive ethnic and social identities, and (c) supporting students' critical consciousness or their ability to recognize and critique societal inequalities. All three components need to be utilized.

- ***Culturally Responsive Teaching:*** Culturally responsive teaching means using students’ customs, characteristics, experience, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction.
 - The term was coined by researcher Geneva Gay in 2000, who wrote that “when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference for students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly.”
 - Gay’s research shows five essential components of culturally responsive teaching:
 - A strong knowledge base about cultural diversity. Teachers should understand different racial and ethnic groups’ cultural values, traditions, and contributions to society, and incorporate that knowledge into their instruction.
 - Culturally relevant curricula. Teachers should include multiple perspectives in their instruction and make sure the images displayed in classrooms—such as on bulletin boards represent a wide range of diversity. Teachers should also contextualize issues within race, class, ethnicity, and gender.
 - High expectations for all students. Teachers should help students achieve academic success while still validating their cultural identities.
 - An appreciation for different communication styles. Teachers should understand different communication styles and modify classroom interactions accordingly. For example, many communities of color have an active, participatory style of communication. A teacher who doesn’t understand this cultural context might think a student is being rude and tell the student to be quiet. The student may then shut down.
 - The use of multicultural instructional examples. Teachers should connect students’ prior knowledge and cultural experiences with new knowledge. (Gay 2000)

- ***Eastland Career Center/Fairfield Career Center School to College Programs***
 Eastland-Fairfield Career Centers have over 35 career and technical programs covering practically every career field that will prepare high school students for college and the workforce. Best of all -- these programs are available to students tuition-free. Along with college-preparatory academics, students also have the opportunity to earn free college credit, experience, and credentials to give them a head start on their next step into adulthood.

- **Funds of Knowledge:** Funds of knowledge is defined as historically-accumulated and culturally-developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual functioning and well-being. Households accumulate multiple bodies of knowledge, ideas, and skills in order to maintain the household and individual well-being. Funds of identity are when people actively use their funds of knowledge to define themselves. The term funds of identity is used to refer to the historically accumulated, culturally developed, and socially distributed resources that are essential for a person’s self-definition, self-expression, and self-understanding. Identity is made up of cultural factors such as socio demographic conditions, social institutions, artifacts, significant others, practices, and activities. Consequently, understanding identity requires an understanding of the funds of practices, beliefs, knowledge, and ideas that people make use of in their daily lives.
- **Multi-Tiered System of Support:** (MTSS) is a framework that helps educators provide academic and behavioral strategies for students with various needs. MTSS grew out of the integration of two other intervention-based frameworks: Response to Intervention (RTI) and PBIS. As part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) updated by Congress in 2004, the Response to Intervention model of assessment originally sought to identify students who would benefit from more intensive supports. From these beginnings as a tool to help improve educational outcomes for students in special education, MTSS has grown to encompass all students at every level.

Instead of the “waiting for failure” assessment model of pre-IDEA days, MTSS takes a proactive approach to identifying students with academic or behavioral needs. Early assessment and intervention for these students can help them catch up with their peers sooner. The key components of MTSS include:

- Universal screening of all students early in the school year
- Tiers of interventions that can be amplified in response to levels of need
- Ongoing data collection and continual assessment
- Schoolwide approach to expectations and supports
- Parent involvement

The integrated instruction model of MTSS uses collected data to assess student needs and provide them with interventions in appropriate tiers.

MTSS creates a positive environment for all students which in turn impacts school climate. [Positive school climate](#) is the leading indicator for such outcomes as increased academic achievement, increased [teacher retention](#), and [reduced discipline referrals](#). The interventions and supports found in MTSS help in relationship building, which is a key factor in [student success](#). Additionally, a supportive school environment allows each student to work through their

challenges and catch up with their peers. Defined tiers of intervention for both academic and behavioral challenges enables educators to address student needs, both as a group and individually.

It's important to note that MTSS tiers may look quite different from school to school. MTSS focuses on the overall needs of individual students, and what may be a Tier 2 intervention in one school might be a Tier 1 in another. It is up to each school to develop an MTSS framework that addresses challenges specific to that school community.

- **Signature Learning Experiences:** Standards-based reforms of the last 25 years stressed grade-level proficiency in basic skills. Recognizing that success in life requires more than basic literacy and numeracy, many schools are defining and adopting broader measures of student success and building personalized learning supports to help students achieve them. These supports include transparent systems to track progress across academic and non-academic competencies, more opportunities for choice and voice, real-world, applied learning experiences, and intentionally designed structures and schedules to nurture deep relationships. In particular, many schools are exploring the shift to competency, including more authentic demonstrations of learning and student progress based on demonstrated mastery rather than seat time.

One of the risks in shifting to a competency approach is racing through experiences at a shallow depth of knowledge with few application opportunities. One solution is requiring a bundle of signature learning experiences to bolster a list of competencies in a mastery-based system, which reduces pacing issues and ensures deeper learning. Signature experiences and signature building blocks can promote model efficacy, prioritize important outcomes for students and serve to differentiate schools and networks.

- **Social Capital:** Social capital is defined as the connections among individuals (Putnam, 2001), and the trust, mutual understanding, shared values and behaviors that bind us together and make cooperative action possible (Cohen & Prusak, 2001).
- **Social Emotional Learning:** Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.
 - SEL advances educational equity and excellence through authentic school-family-community partnerships to establish learning environments

and experiences that feature trusting and collaborative relationships, rigorous and meaningful curriculum and instruction, and ongoing evaluation. SEL can help address various forms of inequity and empower young people and adults to co-create thriving schools and contribute to safe, healthy, and just communities.

- For many, this framework is known as the “CASEL wheel.” At the center are the five core social and emotional competencies—broad, interrelated areas that support learning and development. Circling them are four key settings where students live and grow. School-family-community partnerships coordinate SEL practices and establish equitable learning environments across all of these contexts.

Assessment

Culturally Responsive Assessment:

- Be mindful of the student population(s) being served and involve students in the process of assessing learning;
- Use appropriate student-focused and cultural language in learning outcomes statements to ensure students understand what is expected of them
- Develop and/or use assessment tools and multiple sources of evidence that are culturally responsive to current students.
- Intentional improvement of student learning through disaggregated data-driven change that examines structures, demonstrations of learning, and supports which may privilege some students’ learning while marginalizing others.

Socially Just Assessment:

Socially just assessment includes the elements [in Culturally Responsive Assessment] and refocuses them within a framework that analyzes the interplay between culture, bias, power, and oppression in the assessment process. Socially just assessment calls for the acknowledgement that assessment takes place within various departmental and institutional cultures which impact the processes we follow.

Critical Assessment:

- Disregarding the objectivity myth and accepting that assessment is inherently subjective and guided by the biases and experiences of those conducting assessment
- Varying the types of evidence used to assess learning outcomes to not privilege specific ways of knowing or preferred ways to demonstrate knowledge
- Including the voices of students, including those who belong to minoritized populations or those whose voices can often be left unheard, throughout the assessment process.

- Using assessment to advance the pursuit of equity across previously identified institutional parameters that demonstrate disparate outcomes across student populations.

Equity Minded Assessments: Equity-minded assessment refers to ways we ensure assessment processes and practices are appropriate for all students and that we ultimately do no harm in the process. While it can be challenging to consider the vast differences and needs of our student populations in our practices, our task as educational providers is to strive to help every student succeed. Equitable assessment calls for those who lead and participate in assessment activities to pay attention and be conscious of how assessment can either feed into cycles that perpetuate inequities or can serve to bring more equity into education.

What “ensuring that our assessments are appropriate for all students” means is that equitable assessment should work to ensure that learning outcomes, and how we assess those outcomes, are done in ways which do not privilege certain students over others; that data-informed changes are not benefiting one student group over others; and that assessment efforts are not conducted with only one dominant perspective or voice leading the process. Once we are aware of inequity in learning or assessment, we should strive to address it instead of ignoring it; or worse, blaming students.

Finally, equity needs to be embedded within and throughout the entirety of any assessment effort. In other words, doing equity work is not something we can step in and out of. It is a mentality and approach that remains central so that we do not lose sight of it, that others are able to follow by example, and we are always being critical, reflective, and questioning processes, biases, assumptions, within ourselves, others, and the processes followed. This equity-mindedness needs to actively permeate the entire assessment process, and the practice of assessment professionals. To do equity-minded assessment we need to:

1. Check biases and ask reflective questions throughout the assessment process to address assumptions and positions of privilege.
2. Use multiple sources of evidence appropriate for the students being assessed and assessment effort.
3. Include student perspectives and take action based on perspectives.
4. Increase transparency in assessment results and actions.
5. Ensure collected data can be meaningfully disaggregated and interrogated.
6. Make evidence-based changes that address issues of equity that are context-specific.

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