



Equity System Continuum

How equity is acknowledged, understood and incorporated into an entity's school structures has an impact on the success of equitable practices and programs on student opportunity and, therefore, achievement.

Typically, districts and other school entities have acknowledged, understood and incorporated equity into their school structure along the following continuum:

Where does your district or school entity exist on the continuum?

EQUITY SYSTEM CONTINUUM



- The first three system approaches understand equity as an emerging need and challenge. The fourth approach acknowledges equity as a necessity to eliminate barriers to opportunities for students to learn.
- The first three system approaches may include only the voices of a few. The fourth approach intentionally includes the voices of all, specifically the voices of those who have been disadvantaged, ignored or marginalized.
- The first three system approaches begin to recognize and identify the need for systemic change. The fourth approach acknowledges that the current system is not working for all children, therefore requiring systemic re-evaluation and transformation.



Approach One: Equity as a misunderstanding

In this approach, equity is not yet defined, understood, or shared by most school leaders. School leaders often confuse equity with equality or equity with nondiscrimination. There are distinct differences among these terms. **Equality** is treating all students the same and giving them the same supports. Nondiscrimination promotes equal opportunity and treatment for all students and staff based on local, state or national identifiers such as race, color, age, religion, sex, sexual orientation, national origin or handicap/disability. However, **equity** is the just and fair distribution of resources based on each student’s needs. A focus on equality alone does not address the different and often inequitable experiences and opportunities of students in classrooms and schools. Equity is often discussed in compliance to state and national laws and policies that mention equity, but equity is not yet an integral part of the entity’s conversation or practice throughout.

For example, districts or other school entities implement practices and programs focusing on compliance with nondiscrimination, and civil rights, state and federal laws, and guidance documents (i.e., IDEA, ESSA, Title I, McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act). Because of these laws, districts are starting to identify the needs of students, the barriers students face, and the academic and opportunity disparities between students.

Although compliance with nondiscrimination and government legislation prompts some conversation among administration or community groups, school directors as well as district professional and support staff may not be included in these equity-focused conversations. Adequately defining equity through an inclusive conversation among all stakeholders is the next step beyond basic nondiscrimination compliance.



Approach Two: Equity as a topic

In this approach, equity is identified as an important aspect of the school system. Educational leaders know the difference between equity and equality. Yet, equity is a distinct topic within the education system, like curriculum, teacher preparation, transportation and school discipline. Educational stakeholders may understand the importance of equity, but they approach equity as separate from other aspects of their education system. The district may explicitly state a focus on equity as it intersects with a limited range of topics or see equity as important to a limited set of students – usually centered on a particular race or socioeconomic condition.

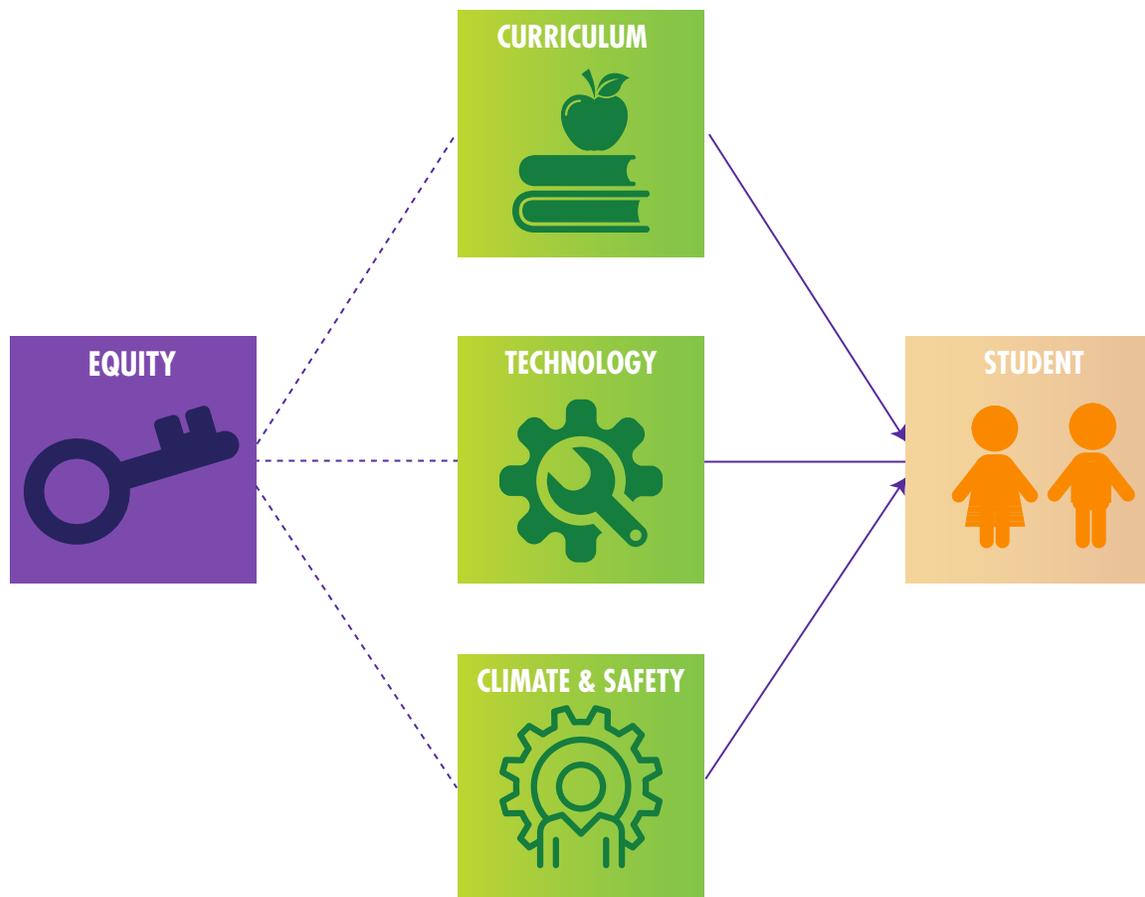
For example, districts or other school entities identify digital equity, teacher equity and inequitable funding as equity. This is an important step in moving forward on the continuum and creating an equitable system. The next step should be to recognize the impact of equity on other aspects of the education system that may not have seemed immediately apparent.



Approach Three: **Equity as a recommendation**

In this approach, equity influences several aspects of the education system but is not yet incorporated into the structure of the education system. Equity serves as a recommendation for school leaders and begins to inform decision-making and practices for those who choose to focus on equity principles, like cultural proficiency for district professional and support staff. But an equitable lens is not yet infused into the foundation of the system.

For example, districts or other school entities may develop an equity group, or hire an equity director to address inequity in school discipline practices, curriculum development or school programs. However, the appointed equity group or equity director are not empowered to make substantive changes to the education system. Equity groups and/or directors are seen as advisors rather than decision-makers. The next important step will be to empower these groups or individuals to make decisions.



Approach Four: **Equity as the foundation**

In this approach, equity is the foundation that frames every aspect of the educational system from curriculum adoption to professional development. An equity lens informs family and community engagement efforts, and is considered an important approach to school climate. The practice of equity is shared across education stakeholders. School leaders approach every decision, practice and policy with an equity lens.

For example, districts or other school entities incorporate equity into the school structure through action plans and policies that set a collective direction for district and school leaders. These policies and procedures hold decision-makers accountable for closing opportunity gaps and prioritizing equity across the system. Districts are in constant pursuit of equity. They seek to grow knowledge, build capacity, train school leaders and staff, implement best practices, include diverse voices, and produce community partners to eliminate barriers and create opportunities for students to learn.

