EQUITY-DRIVEN QUALITY IMPROVEMENT

A primary purpose of the Implementation Development Map (IDM) is to examine policies and practices grounded in an equity approach, including collecting and disaggregating data to better understand where and how to transform systems to improve opportunities for all children.

What We Mean by Equity

In the IDM, equity is defined as the condition that would be achieved if one's identity no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. In this light, equity is a journey, a destination, and an examination of the history that brought us to our current state, as it seeks to create communities and environments where ascribed traits (race, ethnicity, income, and language) can no longer predict the social outcomes of an individual or group (Center for Social Inclusion, 2017). Achieving equity requires addressing the imbalance of risks and advantages that have been accumulated over time.

Equity is specifically called out in the IDM tool to ensure an intentional focus on systems improvement that is accountable for every child. Creating a high-quality and equitable pre-K system requires recognizing which children, families, and early learning professionals are furthest from educational justice, identifying extant barriers, and implementing targeted strategies to remove or address barriers. A key part of equity is analyzing and understanding the narratives and processes that create and justify inequities and working proactively to dismantle them. Research demonstrates that access to high-quality early learning fosters positive long-term educational outcomes. However, state systems are inequitable and reproduce disparate outcomes that favor children from White, English speaking, and affluent backgrounds. Ongoing data collection and analysis are essential to understanding instructional practices that improve early learning outcomes for every child and support their transitions to and through the K-12 system.

How Equity is Embedded

We have ensured the IDM is focused on equity by meaningfully incorporating diverse stakeholder voices in the development process and ensuring that critical data on diverse populations are collected and used for decision-making. To center equity in using the IDM as a continuous quality improvement tool, we chose to use Targeted Universalism as a framework. "Targeted Universalism means setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals" (Powell et al., 2019, p. 4). Using the framework of Targeted Universalism, the IDM helps state teams set universal quality goals for state-level pre-K and develop targeted strategies to achieve those goals differently based on the needs of different populations (in essence engage in continuous quality improvement that targets what works, for whom, and under what circumstances). Data collection, disaggregation, and analysis are used to assess how pre-K is working for different populations, making it easier to identify groups who need more support. Using data as a basis for action planning, a state can then conduct pilots and create strategies that increase the quality of pre-K for each group specifically.

The IDM allows the user to engage in three critical activities for improving and implementing equitable pre-K policies and practices. These include stakeholder engagement, continuous quality improvement (CQI), and

integrating equity in pre-K improvement efforts across the essential Elements of the IDM. These activities and how they map onto the five steps necessary for Targeted Universalism involve:

1. Establishing a universal goal based upon a broadly shared recognition of a societal problem and collective aspirations (e.g., state pre-K stakeholders come together to establish an understanding of the current state pre-K system and establish a collective vision for high-quality).
2. Assessing general population performance relative to the universal goal.
3. Identifying groups and places that are performing differently with respect to the goal. Groups should be disaggregated by race, class, and language.
4. Assessing and understanding the structures that support or impede each group or community from achieving the universal goal. Steps 2-4 outline the CQI approach of assessing, planning, implementing, and collecting evidence to examine the success of the implementation (what worked, what didn't, and why) and using this evidence to make data-informed decisions.
5. Developing and implementing targeted strategies for each group to reach the universal goal. Committing to an equity agenda ensures that solutions and improvements are targeted for specific populations as needed.

The targeted population categories (e.g., race, ethnicity, income, and language) are designed as a guide for states to identify critical groups that are historically furthest from educational justice. It is also important for each state to focus on the children that make up their target populations when using the IDM. In some instances, the IDM focuses on specific groups to ensure that states are paying particular attention to those groups, including Dual Language Learners (DLLs) and children with developmental delays and disabilities. In such instances, the literature that undergirds the indicators points to a need for a different approach in assessing DLLs and children with developmental delays and disabilities. We have incorporated an analysis of such literature in our literature reviews.

Equally important, through comprehensive collection and analysis of data, we hope the IDM will encourage 'double-loop learning,' a theory of inquiry created by Chris Argyris in the mid-1980s which is meant to encourage people to examine their assumptions and beliefs, particularly around race and ethnicity. This requires examining one's hidden assumptions about the nature and causes of inequity in the system and understanding how these perspectives play a role in decisions about the specific data collected, how data is understood and interpreted, and the decisions made based on the data.

Equity Tools and Resources

A focus on equity must be foundational to improvement efforts at all levels of the system. If equity is not the foundation of system reform at all levels, improvement efforts risk perpetuating and exacerbating societal inequities rather than working to ameliorate them. Focus on equity must include an intentional sharing of power and decision-making in the planning and improvement process, including the nature of data collection and creating equitable goals. As you prepare to assess your system using the IDM and assemble an improvement planning team, please review the Considerations for Equity Commitments guidance to help you enter the IDM process with an intentional commitment to equity.

Equity Driven Quality Improvement

Acknowledgement

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