

EQUITABLE DECISION-MAKING

A Three-hour Training for Experienced SBDM Members

SESSION OVERVIEW

This school-based decision making council member training session is designed to help experienced council members understand how equitable decision-making impacts student achievement. SBDM council members will engage in a variety of activities and discussions that will further illustrate the importance of committing to equitable practices.

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

The school council's mission is to improve student achievement (KRS 160.345(2)(c)). Each school council must create an environment in its school that will result in students achieving at high levels. All policies and decisions by the school council must contribute to the achievement of the school's mission.



Kentucky Department of
EDUCATION

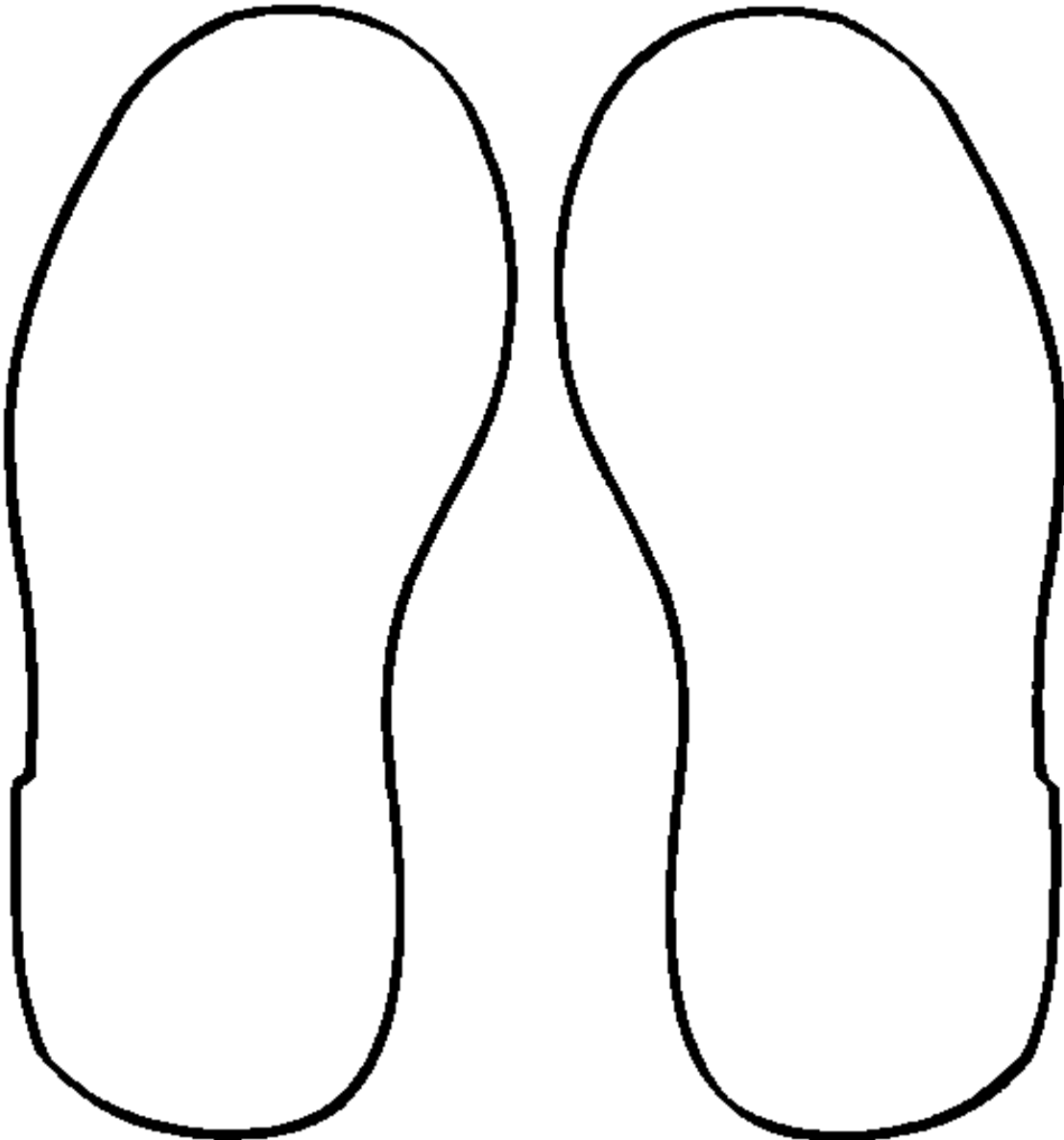
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Decision Making through an Equity Lens

In education, equality refers to applying the same expectations and norms to unequal groups while equity means giving the needed resources to each individual group. While listening to the TedTalk “Solving the Achievement Gap Through Equity, Not Equality¹,” list several examples, definitions, scenarios, et cetera that the speaker shares to further distinguish equality from equity. Be sure to list your examples in the correct corresponding shoe.

Equality



Equity

¹Ott, Lindsey. “Solving the Achievement Gap Through Equity, Not Equality.” 5 Dec. 2017, https://youtu.be/nOQbu_3M0_Q.

During the speech, the speaker offered a shoe analogy to help her audience distinguish equality from equity. In most instances, receiving shoes is a welcomed gift; however, there are times when receiving a pair that is too large or too small could serve as a hindrance or nuisance to someone. Equality – within her shoe analogy – would result in every person receiving a pair of size 10 shoes. Equity would result in each person receiving a pair of shoes that fit.

When we liken the analogy to education and on behalf of students, it forces us to become more conscious in the decisions made – both inside and outside of the classroom. Equity allows administrators, teachers, and even school-based decision making (SBDM) council members a lens with which to give the needed supports and support structures for each student in a manner *that fits* and is just and fair.

Directions: Read the excerpt from “[Why Understanding Equity and Equality in Schools Can Help You Create an Inclusive Classroom²](#)” and while reading, place an exclamation point (!) near any statement that resonates with you. Be prepared to share your thoughts aloud with the group.

When it comes to equity vs. equality in education, the terms are often used interchangeably. But understanding the distinction between the two is essential for resolving issues faced by disadvantaged students in the classroom. While working toward equity and equality can both do good, equity should be an educator’s end goal. The reason lies in the difference between being fair vs. equal.

Equality is more commonly associated with social issues, perhaps because more people know what it means. In a nutshell, its definition is as it sounds – the state of being equal. When a group focuses on equality, everyone has the same rights, opportunities and resources. Equality is beneficial, but it often doesn’t address specific needs. Giving each student a take-home laptop, for example, would not address students who don’t have internet in their homes. Even if a school is equal, some students may still struggle.

Equity, on the other hand, provides people with resources that fit their circumstances. The World Health Organization definition of social equity is “the absence of avoidable or remediable differences among groups of people.” Schools that prioritize equity versus equality are more in tune to their students’ needs and provide resources to overcome their specific challenges.

“The route to achieving equity will not be accomplished through treating everyone equally,” says the Race Matters Institute. “It will be achieved by treating everyone equitably, or justly according to their circumstances.” Equity is more thoughtful and, while it’s harder work, it is better at resolving disadvantages. While equality is an admirable goal, try shifting your school’s focus to equity for a more effective outcome.

² “Why Understanding Equity vs Equality in Schools Can Help You Create an Inclusive Classroom.” *Waterford.org*, 2 May 2019, <https://www.waterford.org/education/equity-vs-equality-in-education/>.

Why Equity Matters to SBDM Councils

In 1990, the Kentucky General Assembly passed HB 940, which is best known as the Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA). This piece of legislation changed the face of education in Kentucky. One drastic change that came along with KERA was KRS 160.345, which is the statute that outlined school-based decision making councils.

School councils promote shared leadership among those who work closely with students. Membership of each council includes parents, teachers, and an administrator of the school. The council has the responsibility to **set school policy** and **make decisions** outlined in statute, which should provide an environment to **enhance student achievement**. The policies should assist in meeting the goals established in KRS 158.645 and KRS 158.6451.

SBDM councils are tasked with a variety of responsibilities related to student achievement:

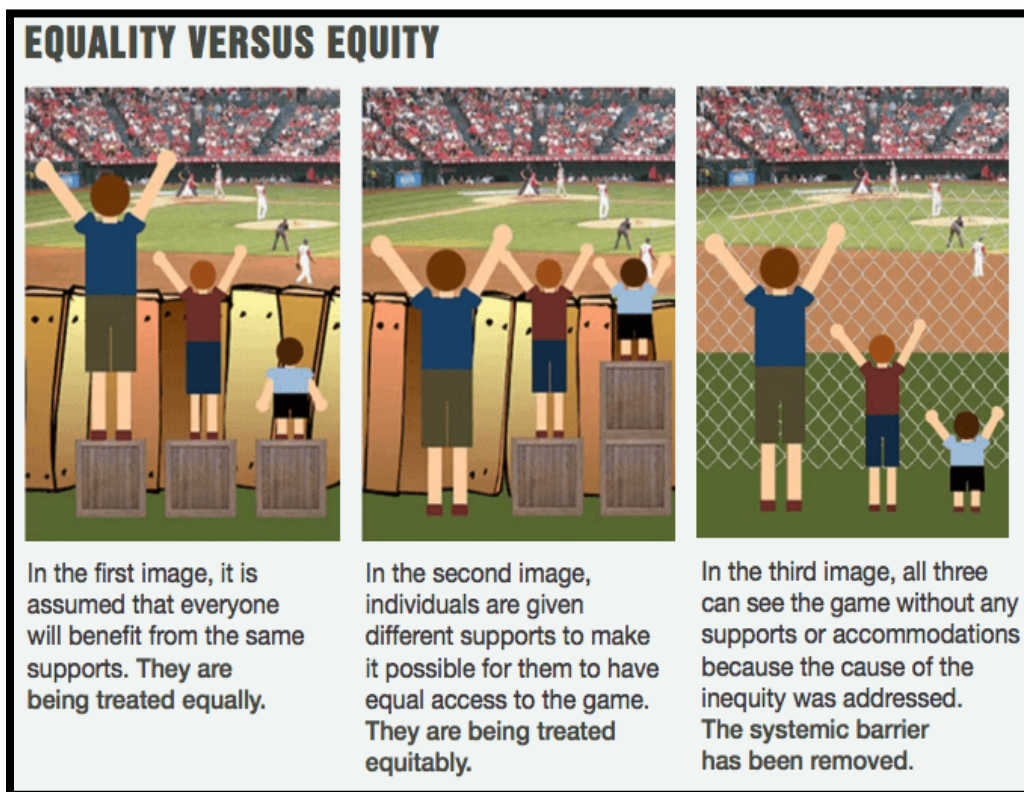
1. Policy development, including, but not limited to the following: writing program, technology, discipline, school schedule, extracurricular and wellness
2. Consulting on selection of the school's principal
3. Collaborating with other shareholders to develop the Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP)
4. Adopting a budget aligned to instructional needs
5. Determining the emergency plan and professional development plan
6. Setting targets to close the achievement gap
7. Annually reviewing school assessment data
8. Consulting with the school's library media specialist on needs of the media center
9. Consulting on both certified and classified vacancies
10. Determining the number of positions for each job classification

Equity matters to SBDM councils, because equitable decision-making ensures conscious decision-making and that each child is given what he or she needs to achieve academically. When writing policies or making council decisions from an equitable lens, councils are concerning themselves with cultivating the best conditions for all students to learn at very high levels. Equity requires strategic thinking.



Talk It Out: As an experienced council member, you are well-versed in the decision-making process. When arriving at a decision, what processes were used by the council(s) with which you served? What contributing factors helped your council arrive at a meaningful decision?

Picture This: Equality Versus Equity



Courtesy of Courtesy Advancing Equity and Inclusion: A Guide for Municipalities, by City for All Women Initiative (CAWI), Ottawa

The image above illustrates a visual depiction of equality and equity. Equality, as demonstrated in the first frame, shows each person receiving the same support. It's *fair*.

Equity is depicted in the second frame. We see the same situation, but each person has been given the necessary supports – if any – to make the view possible. It's *just*.

The third and final frame reminds us that sometimes it isn't the added support that makes the difference; rather, it's a reconsideration of the system that created the injustices or barriers all along that requires some rethinking.

Talk It Out: After studying this visual depiction closely, what new perspective do you have regarding equity and equality?

Perceived Benefits of Focusing on Equity³

Equity is a matter of principle. When stakeholders invest time in looking at the larger educational ecosystem, instances of inequity begin to reveal themselves. With the continuous peeling of the layers, stakeholders get a clearer picture of what is just (equitable) and not simply equal to help them make sound decisions in ensuring students succeed.

So, what happens when schools address the equity ecosystem?

1. As a matter of principle, they are also addressing poverty and racial injustices.
2. A student's access to wraparound educational school services is increased.
3. Academic barriers are removed.
4. Data not only takes a front seat, but it becomes the driver of all decision-making.
5. Schools are consciously agreeing to a moral and ethical approach to learning.
6. Children are given a head start leading to better economic and social outcomes for them.

Two Truths: From the list of the six perceived benefits of equity, choose two that you wholeheartedly agree with and circle the statements. In the blank space below, list how these would transform your school or continue to transform your school.

³ National Conference of State Legislatures. "Equity in Early Education: The Strategies." 17 February 2018. <https://www.waterford.org/education/equity-early-education-strategies/>. 7 January 2019.

School Policies vs. Council Decisions

One council responsibility is the writing of policies, which determines how the school operates on a day-to-day basis and should be written in a manner that enable students to achieve. Policies should be written and considered carefully as they are legally binding. Policies should not be written in a manner that impedes students' opportunities or written in haste and with one particular incident in mind without carefully considering the resounding effects such words may have on the academic livelihood of the students in the building or any future students.

Policy Considerations

- Policies should be more than compliance driven and should be focused on a commitment to improving student achievement.
- Policies should **not** be written to address a specific situation that should be handled on a more personal basis.
- Policies should be proactive – **not** reactive!
- Policies should not be written in a manner that set staff up to be in violation of the requirements of the policy.



Talk It Out: As an experienced council member, how were policies written, reviewed and/or revised? Was this a passive or active process that involved the entire council or a committee or did the chair write policies for the school? How did you ensure the policies were fair? Was there a strategic process?

Sample Policy Evaluation

Activity: List the sample policy assigned to your table in column one. This policy includes actions or processes that could be deemed as inequitable. Read through the policy carefully and in the chart below (column two), record the parts of the policy that are inequitable and what could be changed to make them equitable.

Policy	Why is the policy inequitable? What must be adjusted to make it equitable?

Actively Engage: While other teams present, list their sample policy in column one. In column two, record the parts of the policy that they determined to be inequitable and what they believe could be changed to make the policy equitable.

Policy	Why is the policy inequitable? What must be adjusted to make it equitable?

Equity Evaluation

Directions: Read each of the council decisions in column one and determine whether each council decision represents an equitable action or decision. If is equitable, what makes it so? If not, what makes it inequitable?

COUNCIL DECISIONS	EQUITY ANALYSIS
<p>When the council was made aware of its allotted professional development funds, the council agreed to use all the funds on math professional development. The math scores at the school are above average. All three teachers on the council are math teachers at Wildcat High School.</p>	
<p>As the SBDM council at Cardinal Middle School began reviewing its budget and while consulting with the superintendent on Section 6 funds, the council was made aware that there was a request made by the special education teachers for additional technology in their department. The current technology is outdated and not working properly. Students use the technology daily to help them read, learn to write and hone their listening skills in their classrooms. The council granted the department’s request.</p>	
<p>At a special meeting, the council approved a policy in which high school students would not be allowed to attend prom if they had five unexcused absences – regardless of the circumstance.</p>	
<p>During a regular SBDM council meeting, a parent was allowed time to voice a concern during public comment. The parent expressed the desire for the council to modify its discipline policy to include a consequence for any student not speaking in English in the hallway. Due to a surplus of jobs, the community’s English learner population has recently grown. The council altered the policy to include this caveat.</p>	
<p>The council recently decided to add to the list of extracurricular programs offered at the school an advocacy program geared toward mental health. The community is experiencing an increase in poverty, drug abuse and crime, so they are hoping this program helps those students whose families have fallen victim to any of the above.</p>	

Quotable Quotes

Directions: During this activity the facilitator will project three quotes related to equity. Once you have read the quote, select your gradient of agreement: *strongly agree*, *agree*, *disagree* or *strongly disagree*. Once you have made your selection, locate the corner of the room where the option you have chosen is posted and stand there. Please be prepared to defend your selection.

The Metaphor of a Lens

Directions: The excerpt below from “The Lens of Systemic Oppression: Applying a Racial Equity Frame⁴” outlines a short metaphor on what it is like to move beyond the mechanical view of the world when one dares to change his or her perspective. Carefully read the excerpt from the National Equity Project and answer the three questions that follow.

We make dozens of decisions each day that impact those we serve.

As leaders for equity, our primary concern is to interrupt those rules that serve either implicitly or explicitly to perpetuate opportunity gaps for vulnerable students. To



become agents of change who make strategic and courageous decisions, we must learn to run a set of filters, or lenses, that shift our vantage point and uncover what the naked eye cannot see.

The metaphor of a lens describes the possibility of seeing our contexts in

new and revealing ways. If *seeing* leads to believing and *believing* ultimately shapes our actions, then we must expand our ways of seeing to transform troubling outcomes for young people.

No single lens can tell the whole story, but using a strong filter allows us to stand on the balcony and observe the dance floor below (in this case the school or organization) with its complex set of relationships, rules and moves. From this aerial viewpoint, we can think critically about our decisions and increase the predictability that our actions will lead to more equitable outcomes.

⁴ National Equity Project. “The Lens of Systemic Oppression: Applying a Racial Equity Frame.” 2019. <https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression>

1. What are the specific disparities/inequities you seek to eliminate at your school? What barriers stand in the way of achieving more equitable outcomes?
2. What will an equitable outcome look like? How will you know you have made progress? When do you expect to see results? What is your time frame?
3. How can you build alliances with stakeholders to move forward equitable practices?

Assessment of Your School's Equitable Culture⁵

Now that we know what equity is and why it is an important area of focus, it is crucial that school shareholders look for areas to improve in their respective schools. Read each statement and indicate your level of agreement regarding what you notice in the school where your child/children or your students attend.

⁵ Adapted from the National Institute of School Leadership's *Assessment of Your School's Moral and Equitable Culture*.

4 – Strongly Agree, 3 – Moderately Agree, 2 – Moderately Disagree, 1 – Strongly Disagree

IN THIS SCHOOL	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT
There is a clear vision for the school that incorporates equitable purposes.	4—3—2—1
Teachers share beliefs and values about what the central mission of this school should be.	4—3—2—1
An equitable perspective guides decisions and actions of the school leadership.	4—3—2—1
There is a commitment to creating a just, fair, caring and safe learning environment.	4—3—2—1
The right to equitable educational opportunity is provided by all to all students in this school.	4—3—2—1
We make tough decisions that favor what is best for the students.	4—3—2—1
There is a schoolwide sense of community.	4—3—2—1
Students feel safe.	4—3—2—1
Teachers really care about all their students.	4—3—2—1
All students are valued as contributing members of a caring community.	4—3—2—1
We make an effort to reach out to the community in an equitable manner.	4—3—2—1
We foster students' respect for self and others.	4—3—2—1
We celebrate achievement.	4—3—2—1

4 – Strongly Agree, 3 – Moderately Agree, 2 – Moderately Disagree, 1 – Strongly Disagree

IN THIS SCHOOL	LEVEL OF AGREEMENT
Students really care about each other.	4–3–2–1
We have achieved agreement about personal obligations and expectations of others in a manner that fosters equity.	4–3–2–1
We have high expectations for all students and provide them with equitable access to higher-order pedagogies and engaging curricula.	4–3–2–1
Teachers in the school trust and respect each other.	4–3–2–1
We have teachers who work hard to build trusting relationships with families.	4–3–2–1
We avoid “institutionalizing” negative peer groups and homogeneous groupings that have the potential to reinforce negative behavior.	4–3–2–1
We recognize that our teaching philosophies and practices are driven to some degree by our belief systems, so we strive to become equitable educators who work to get the best from all students.	4–3–2–1
There is a schoolwide approach to discipline that reflects just, fair, and caring values.	4–3–2–1
Our approach to discipline combines high levels of behavioral expectations with high levels of support.	4–3–2–1
Teachers consistently enforce rules for students, even for students who are not in their classes.	4–3–2–1
Teachers feel responsible for helping students develop self-control.	4–3–2–1
We consistently engage students in higher-order thinking.	4–3–2–1
We develop students’ commitment and capacities for active citizenship.	4–3–2–1
We weave programs that actively teach problem solving and equitable group interaction into classroom management and school norms.	4–3–2–1
We have a coordinated approach to student social and emotional well-being within the school.	4–3–2–1
We provide a range of broadly based programs focusing on primary prevention.	4–3–2–1
We provide early intervention services for students at risk.	4–3–2–1
Students feel responsible to help each other do their best.	4–3–2–1

Think It Through: Review the areas that you have given the lowest scores. Please narrow your focus to three if you have more than three. What can you do as a council member to help improve this/these at your school?

Final Reflection: Walking the Talk

The adage “walking the talk” compels you to take the first step in truly living what you profess by mouth. How do you intend to *walk the talk* and ensure your decision-making is guided by equity during your term? Elaborate on the shoe outline below. In your reflection, include ideas on how equitable decision-making will guide you during budgeting, staffing, professional development, consultation, principal selection (where applicable), policy amendments, et cetera.

