

15 Questions Your District Needs to Ask to Address Equity

1. What is our definition of equity?

This question is important for aligning your district around a shared definition of equity. Does your district define equity as making sure that students have everything they need to thrive? Tailoring resources and opportunities to each student's individual needs? Providing all students with high-quality instruction and opportunities? Before you can start taking action, you need to have a big-picture vision and definition for what equity means to your specific community.

2. What are our measurable goals around equity and inclusion?

This question anchors on an important truth: What gets measured matters. As you develop a framework for addressing equity, you must also find ways to measure, quantify, and report on this important work. Especially when working to dismantle systems that have been in place for years (and sometimes decades), it's important to have clear goals and benchmarks -- even small ones -- along the way.

3. How are our students thinking and feeling about equity and inclusion at school?

Students are an excellent, but often untapped, source of information on how your district is doing to create an equitable and respectful learning environment. Don't leave student voice out of the picture. Today, there are many low-lift and powerful ways to gather student feedback on equity and inclusion at school.

You might explore questions like: How diverse, integrated, and fair do students consider their schools? How often do students report discussing issues of race, ethnicity, and culture in school? How much do students feel like they belong? Survey your students at least twice a year for consistent benchmarking, and make sure that you're hearing from all students -- anonymously -- so that you don't overlook a particular student group's feelings.

4. How might some groups of students be experiencing school climate differently than others?

Analyze your school climate survey data to understand how different student groups perceive school climate. For instance, let's say you've gathered feedback on students' feelings of safety and belonging at school.

Disaggregate the results by demographics -- such as by race/ethnicity, Free

and Reduced Price Lunch (FRPL) status, and English Language Learner (ELL) status -- to see how specific student groups reflected on their experiences of safety and belonging compared to district or school averages. This could shed light on experience gaps that need to be addressed.

5. What academic achievement gaps might exist between groups of students?

Measure your district's progress against national and state achievement trends. What do your district's graduation and dropout rates look like across race/ethnicity, socioeconomic, and gender lines? Are some cohorts of students more "at risk" or "critical" for math and ELA performance, based on state assessment data, than other student groups? While this data can be unsettling to see, it can spur dialogue about school- and district-level policies that may be giving some students greater access to resources than other students.

6. What groups of students may be over- or underrepresented in advanced course enrollment or gifted and talented programs?

Related to the question above, this question can help you dig deeper on academic disparities. Look into whether some student populations are enrolled in advanced or honors courses, or gifted and talented programs, at a higher or lower rate than others. If you see discrepancies, this could be a sign that some students are not receiving [the same level of access, resources, or opportunities](#) as other students when it comes to advanced instruction and programming.

7. What groups of students may be over- or underrepresented in our disciplinary and behavioral data?

This question will help you find out if disciplinary action -- such as office referrals, suspensions, and expulsions -- is applied equitably across all demographic groups. We know that [disproportionate rates of suspension for students of color](#) persist on the state and national levels. Does what you're seeing mirror national trends, or is something else true in your community? This data is a good starting point for important conversations about educator beliefs, mindsets, and policies.

8. What gaps might exist in the social-emotional development of different groups of students?

Unpack your social-emotional learning (SEL) data to see if there are gender and race differences in how students rate their social and emotional competencies. Research from Washoe County School District (NV), for example, finds that Washoe's male students are more likely to rate their emotion management higher than females, and that English Language Learner (ELL) students tend to rate their SEL skills lower than non-ELL students. Washoe partners with their students to explore these differences and brainstorm ways to close SEL gaps.

9. How might teacher perceptions of students' SEL differ from what students are saying?

This question may uncover teacher biases and assumptions that could be harming groups of students. When teachers reflect on their students' SEL competencies, compare the data to students' self-reflection data.

Discrepancies could suggest that there's a need for adult capacity building -- not only around the implementation of SEL programming, but also around teacher mindsets.

10. How might our attendance and chronic absenteeism rates differ by student group?

Kids can't learn unless they show up for school. Are there groups of students that attend school less than others? What do your chronic absenteeism rates look like across demographics? Keep in mind that there could be many factors contributing to attendance disparities. You may want to cross-reference your findings with SEL data and school climate data to start to understand root causes.

11. What are our retention rates for teachers of color?

Research shows that teachers of color boost academic achievement for students of color, including improved reading and math test scores, better graduation rates, and increases in aspirations to attend college. That's why the retention rate for teachers of color is an important metric to track. If your retention rate is lower than expected, this is great feedback that your district needs to allocate resources toward improving teaching conditions.

12. How ready and equipped do teachers and staff feel to address issues of diversity?

Adult mindsets can make or break your district's equity work. How equipped do teachers and staff members feel to interact with students from different cultural backgrounds? When sensitive issues of diversity arise in class, do teachers have strategies to address the situation?

Collect teacher and staff perception data to understand adult readiness in this area. The data can point to a need for professional development focused on equity. Perhaps staff wants to learn how to implement culturally responsive teaching, or perhaps there's a need for more materials and resources on designing an equitable classroom.

13. How do families of different races, ethnicities, or cultures perceive our school climate?

This question will prompt you to listen to your families. How are different groups of families thinking and feeling about their school experiences? Do some parents and families view school as less welcoming and safe than others?

Tune into this feedback data to understand how your district can build better family-school relationships. Here's an example: In Wake County School

System (NC), one elementary school noticed a trend that families of Hispanic students felt the least engaged compared to other families. In response to this data, school leaders made the next parent-teacher night more accessible to Hispanic families.

14. What factors may be preventing parents from different races, ethnicities, or cultures from helping their children learn?

Investigate the factors that may make it challenging for families to engage fully in their children's education. Do some families lack confidence when it comes to supporting their children's learning at home? Do communication barriers exist between families and school staff? Do families have transportation challenges in attending school events? By gathering this information from families, your district can pinpoint and address [barriers to engagement](#) that some groups of families are experiencing.

15. Do we have a system that helps us connect -- and act on -- inequities across all domains?

This last question brings it all together. You have an abundance of data across academics, behavior, attendance, school climate, SEL, teacher perceptions, and family engagement. These data points are useful on their own, but they're much more powerful together. The magic happens when district leaders, school leaders, and educators can easily triangulate data across multiple domains to unpack inequities and think coherently about strategies for promoting equity and inclusion.