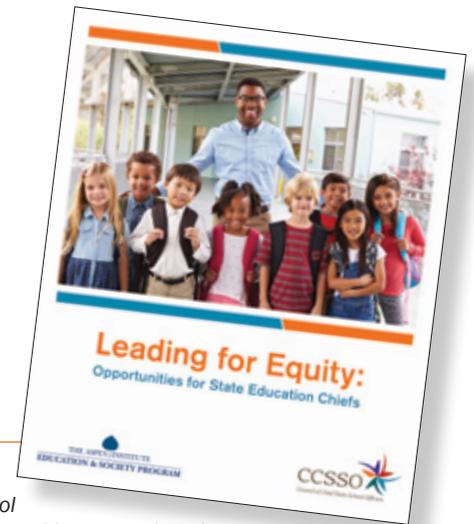


Leading for Equity

Practices to promote equity in our communities and schools



Editor's note: The following article is excerpted from "Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs," published in February 2017 by the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and the Aspen Institute Education & Society Program. The paper was informed by state education chiefs, district leaders, equity advocates, researchers, and teachers. It caps State Superintendent Tony Evers' term as CCSSO board president, during which he engaged the nation's chiefs around the pressing need for action on equity.

In an equitable education system, personal and social identifiers such as gender, race, ethnicity, language, disability, family background, and/or income are not obstacles to accessing educational opportunities. The circumstances children are born into do not predict their access to the resources and educational rigor necessary for success. Within such a system, all individuals attain sufficient knowledge and skills to pursue the college and career path of their choice and become active and contributing members of their communities.

Both inputs and outcomes must be considered when evaluating equity in education. Inputs such as distribution of funding, access to high-quality teachers, rigorous coursework, support services, supportive school climates, and extracurricular opportunities all play a role in contributing to educational equity.

Outcomes such as achievement and attainment rates, graduation rates, suspension rates, access to social capital, post-secondary enrollment and completion, and access to well-paying careers are all measures of equity. Equity does not mean creating equal conditions for all students, but rather targeting resources based on individual students' needs and circumstances, which includes providing differentiated funding and supports and

respecting students' voice and agency.

Targeting supports in this way is intended to remove barriers and create the same opportunities for low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities that their more advantaged peers experience.

Although federal, state, and local educational systems play an important role in monitoring, promoting, and ensuring equity in education, individuals and communities must also have agency to authentically inform and influence public education to create and maintain true equity.

■ Prioritize Equity

Make the case that equity benefits everyone in society. If education is treated as a zero-sum game in which some need to lose to provide greater opportunity for others, it will be difficult to create buy-in and maintain momentum for change. The benefits of greater equity in education extend to all; when inequity persists, it costs everyone in terms of lost opportunities for economic development, greater dependence on government supports, and fewer Americans ready to serve our country as leaders across sectors and in the military.

Proactively initiate and lead conver-

sations about equity. This may include publicly examining data on current performance and trends (including preschool, K-12, postsecondary achievement and attainment rates, and workforce participation), as well as opportunity gaps and disparities in funding and resource allocation. A diverse group of stakeholders, including policymakers, educators, district leaders, community leaders, parents, and students should be engaged in this process.

■ Start from Within

Lead conversations on the impact of poverty on education and advocate for the resources students and families need. With one in five children living below the federal poverty line and communities across the country dealing with entrenched intergenerational poverty, state education chiefs and their leadership teams must be prepared to discuss the effects of hunger, homelessness, housing insecurity, and/or lack of access to quality healthcare on the students they serve and the importance of providing these children with rich educational experiences regardless of their background.

■ Measure What Matters

Set ambitious and achievable interim and long-term goals for English learners and ensure they are making

adequate progress achieving English language proficiency. Clearly define the meaning of English language proficiency and ensure accountability systems include the measures needed to track progress toward and intervene when schools are off-track. Integrate English language learning into broader curriculum and instruction, professional learning, teacher preparation, and recruitments efforts.

Collect data and report on school climate. ESSA's (Every Student Succeeds Act) accountability provisions include a new indicator for school quality or student success, such as chronic absenteeism, student engagement, postsecondary readiness, or school climate and safety.

■ **Start Early: Invest in the Youngest Learners**

Prioritize trainings and resources on cultural and linguistic services for the early grades. In some communities, the pre-K population is far more diverse — culturally and linguistically — than the K-12 student population; certain communities are experiencing rapid levels of growth amongst their youngest learners and thus need more resources targeted to those students.

Modify suspension or expulsion policies for children in early childhood education programs and primary grades. Analyze data on

trends in suspension and expulsion rates by race, income, and age and train early childhood educators on developmentally appropriate behavioral interventions to ensure educators can manage their classrooms without resorting to exclusionary discipline practices. School discipline policies should account for student time spent outside of the classroom and seek to reintegrate students as quickly as possible. Develop educators' expertise on social-emotional development in the early grades, and emphasize how investments in this area could help reduce teachers' dependence on exclusionary discipline practices for young children.

■ **Monitor Equitable Implementation of Standards and Assessments**

Monitor district course offerings and screening practices to determine whether low-income students and students of color are being provided a college- and career-ready course of study. Compelling evidence establishes that all students accelerate and deepen their learning through advanced courses, such as gifted and talented tracks, Advanced Placement® (AP), International Baccalaureate®, early college high school courses, college prep courses, and dual enrollment in postsecondary courses. Yet fears that these courses will be too hard for certain students

beget persistent gate-keeping practices (*e.g.*, GPA prerequisites, teacher recommendations). When rigorous courses are offered, monitor fidelity of implementation and provide resources and support as needed. Provide guidance around universal screening practices that can better identify low-income students and students of color who are often underrepresented in advanced courses or gifted and talented tracks.

Remove financial barriers to college- and career-readiness. This may include subsidizing AP course or test fees, offering universal and free PSAT, ACT, and/or SAT administrations, and/or providing support materials such as graphing calculators, test prep, or keyboarding skills for students taking computer-based assessments.

■ **Focus on School Culture, Climate, and Social-Emotional Development**

Create a common framework and vocabulary for addressing students' social and emotional development and academic mindsets, and establish outcomes, measures, and benchmarks for schools to pursue. Research continues to mount that non-academic factors have profound impact on student learning, including students' sense of belonging; an atmosphere that encourages intellectual risk-taking and active student engagement; and

STATE SUPERINTENDENT EVERS PERSPECTIVE

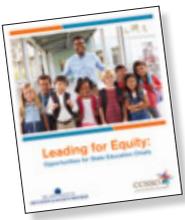
As past president of the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), State Superintendent Tony Evers played an important role in the development of the report excerpted in this article.

"Across the nation, kids of color, kids with disabilities, those learning English, and those from economic disadvantage face challenges that their peers do not. And unfortunately, some of those challenges are a result of policies and practices we have influence or control over. As leaders of state education agencies, we have a moral imperative to help remove any barriers

that stand in the way of a student's success."

"I am confident that the resources we have developed will help education leaders achieve that goal. I am proud of the work my fellow state chiefs have poured into this issue and would like to thank both CCSSO and the Aspen Institute Education & Program for their assistance. My hope is that we can capitalize on the momentum we have built to close opportunity gaps for all kids." ■





students' beliefs about the relevance of schools and the efficacy of their efforts.

Invest in principals' ability to lead schools that support the whole child. Principals set the tone and have the greatest influence over the culture of a school, including whether all groups of students feel safe and valued. Connect principals with high-quality professional learning opportunities focused on building schools and supporting teachers to make social-emotional development a priority.

Integrate analysis of teachers' ability to teach social-emotional competencies into licensure requirements and teaching frameworks. Research suggests teachers have a differential impact on students' attendance, engagement, and behavior. Connect with effective coaches and professional development providers to ensure teachers can equip students with

strong social-emotional competencies. Teacher evaluators should know how to coach teachers to improve all of the different facets of their practice, including how to support students' social-emotional development.

Revise exclusionary discipline policies and explore alternative strategies. Revisit zero tolerance policies, considering both the intended purpose of disciplinary practices like suspensions and expulsions for keeping schools safe and orderly as well as the devastating effects these policies can have on student outcomes. Explore alternative behavior management strategies such as positive behavioral supports, including restorative justice efforts. This support can be targeted to schools with the greatest need as identified by analyses of school discipline data. Schools should adopt disciplinary policies that create safe schools without jeopardizing students' life chances.

Conclusion

Many schools are already addressing inequitable outcomes and opportunities for students. However, to truly build a system that eliminates systemic and historical barriers to students' success, there is much more work to be done.

Human progress is neither automatic nor inevitable... Every step towards the goal of justice requires sacrifice, suffering and struggle; the tireless exertions and passionate concern of dedicated individuals... This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.

— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. ■

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