LEADING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

A foundational guide for district leaders advancing educational equity

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OREGON
DEPARTMENT OF
EDUCATION

LEADING FROM THE INSIDE OUT

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Imagine a classroom where educators affirm and believe in each student, fostering an environment where success is not just a possibility, but a shared expectation.

What would it take to make this vision a reality?

How can our district lead this important charge?

About Leading From the Inside Out

Across Oregon, educators, leaders, students, families, and community partners are deeply committed to preparing all K–12 students for success. While rooted in a collective goal of creating the conditions for all students to thrive, this shared commitment takes shape differently across our diverse communities. **What unites us, however, are urgent questions surrounding educational equity: How do we ensure our education systems provide access, high expectations, and excellence for every K–12 student in Oregon? In doing so, how can we create a process in which every student is affirmed, valued, and set up for success?**

"Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential."

National Equity Project
(2016, p.1)

While Oregon faces shared challenges, the solutions must recognize and reflect local contexts. By centering student voice, fostering collaboration, and investing in student-focused strategies, district leaders can create conditions where every student has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Oregon's K–12 classrooms are becoming increasingly diverse, representing a wide range of backgrounds, races, ethnicities, cultures, and identities. This includes significant numbers of students experiencing poverty, language barriers, houselessness, and disabilities (Figures 1, 2, and 3).
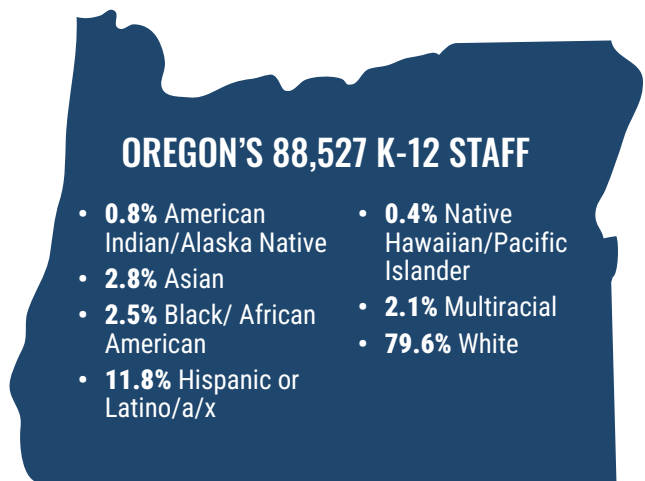
Additionally, Oregon students speak over 3,000 languages, and a growing number of students identify as LGBTQ2SIA+. To effectively support its student population, Oregon must create the conditions for all students to see themselves reflected in the educator workforce — and in curricula. By centering the voices of students from underserved communities, we can create schools where every student has the chance to not only survive, but truly thrive.

Leading From the Inside Out (LFIO) provides foundational strategies, resources, and steps for Oregon K–12 district leaders who are ready to advance their district's journey toward educational equity. It guides the transformation of policies, practices, dispositions, and mindsets to improve

outcomes for all students. This approach specifically supports focal students who are underserved or marginalized within the education system.[1]

This toolkit is not meant to be a standalone, step-by-step guide, but rather a tool for district leaders to reference as they engage in scaffolded leadership coaching, professional development, and technical support to improve the educational experience of students. The content draws upon evidence-based practices[2] from national experts and researchers, data analysis, and insights from Oregon district and state leaders' experiences with equity and racial equity.[3]

In response to district requests, LFIO provides practical tools, leveraging global and national best practices, specifically tailored to our state's educational landscape. It leverages many existing resources and practices your district may already utilize. LFIO is not an additional requirement, but a tool to help navigate the complex terrain of advancing educational equity. It offers multiple entry points to support your equity and racial equity journey, ensuring every student has the chance to reach their full academic and social potential. How districts navigate this resource will depend on their unique context, leadership readiness, and where they are in their equity journey. ▶
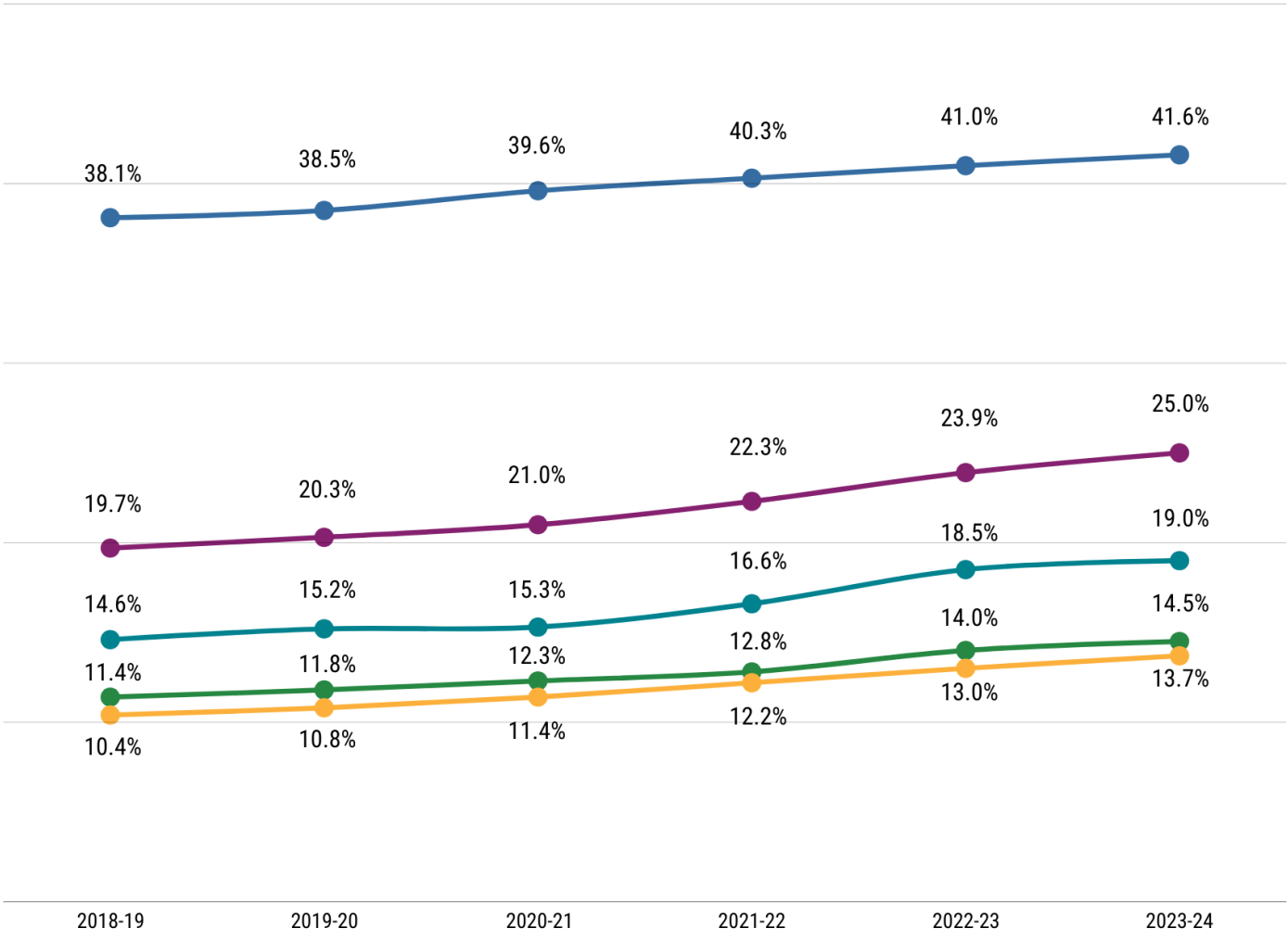
OREGON'S 552,380 STUDENTS

- **1.2%** American Indian/Alaska Native
- **4.0%** Asian
- **2.4%** Black/African American
- **25.3%** Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- **0.8%** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- **7.2%** Multiracial
- **59.0%** White
- **3.9%** Experiencing Houselessness
- **11.3%** Multilingual Learners
- **0.5%** Non-Binary
- **14.5%** Enrolled in Special Education

OREGON'S 88,527 K-12 STAFF

- **0.8%** American Indian/Alaska Native
- **2.8%** Asian
- **2.5%** Black/ African American
- **11.8%** Hispanic or Latino/a/x
- **0.4%** Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
- **2.1%** Multiracial
- **79.6%** White

Figures 1 and 2: Students and staff in Oregon's K-12 public schools, by demographic (**Oregon Department of Education, 2023b**; **Education Advancement Council et al., 2024**).

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1 "Focal student groups" refers to: students from racial or ethnic groups that have historically experienced academic disparities; students who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, alone or in combination with other races and ethnicities, and are enrolled members of federally recognized Tribal Nations; students with disabilities; students navigating houselessness; students in foster care; economically disadvantaged students; students who identify as LGBTQ2SIA+; newly arrived students; migratory students; students navigating the justice system; emerging bilingual students; and pregnant or parenting students (**OR Admin Rules 581-014-0019, 2024**).

2 Evidence-based approaches go beyond dominant educational research, incorporating validation from community-driven, Indigenous, Tribal, culturally responsive/sustaining, non-dominant, and non-Western perspectives. Evidence-based instructional practices or interventions should equally privilege scientific evidence and evidence informed by those directly affected (**Oregon Department of Education, 2024b**).

3 The term "equity and racial equity" acknowledges how equity impacts focal groups while recognizing the specific impacts of racism. This approach highlights the importance of addressing systemic inequities across various identities while also focusing on the distinct experiences of people facing compounded barriers due to racism. It also ensures race is explicitly addressed in equity efforts.

Figure 3. Proportion of students and educators self-identified as racially or ethnically diverse by role, 2018 – 2024 (Education Advancement Council et al., 2024).[4]

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[4] The Oregon Department of Education uses the term "racially and ethnically diverse" to refer to individuals who self-identify as Asian (Not Hispanic), Black/African American (Not Hispanic), American Indian/Alaskan Native (Not Hispanic), Multi-Racial (Not Hispanic), Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic), Hispanic/Latino/a/x, or any other race, but excludes individuals who only identify as White (Not Hispanic) (**Education Advancement Council et al., 2024**).

Leader Self-Reflections

To effectively champion equity and racial equity work, district leaders should begin by assessing their **readiness to lead** through a framework of self-reflection and continuous learning. Educational equity leaders must advance the work of dismantling existing barriers and fostering student success for all. This necessitates a deep, ongoing introspection of their own identities, biases, and how these aspects manifest in their professional roles and systems. Such self-reflection enables leaders to recognize and mitigate personal, often unconscious biases that influence decision making and perpetuate barriers for focal student groups.

Everyone brings a unique perspective to their role, shaped by their background, experiences, identities, race, ethnicities, and culture. These differences can influence how leaders see the world and how others respond to their leadership. For instance, people with increased proximity to dominant cultures may have a general understanding of systemic inequities but lack the specific understanding that lived experience provides.

On the other hand, those from historically marginalized groups may have a deep understanding of these experiences but may lack access to positions of authority to build new solutions and break down barriers. A critical aspect of the reflective process is examining how individual and collective biases surface in leadership and impact the students, families, and staff served.

When we engage in foundational learning opportunities and ongoing conversations to understand our experiences and perspectives in relation to those of the communities we serve, we begin leading from the inside out (Figures 4 and 5).

"Equity leadership moves from the 'inside-out', as different from traditional leadership which tends to move top-down. How we [perceive] informs how we engage, which informs how we act."

National Equity Project
(2024, p. 2)
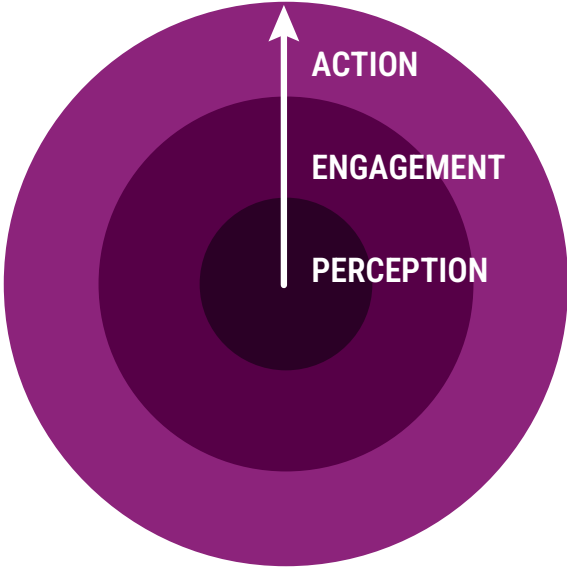
Figure 4. Based on the National Equity Project's Leading for Equity Framework, Leading from the Inside Out represents a process of reflecting on the experiences that shape our perception to engage differently with the world and then taking meaningful action (**National Equity Project, 2024**).

PERCEIVE
Understand ourselves (mirror) in relation to the terrain of our district or school community (window).

ENGAGE
Engage others to create relational meaning of our perceptions.

ACT
Design approaches to learn more about and address our context's equity needs.
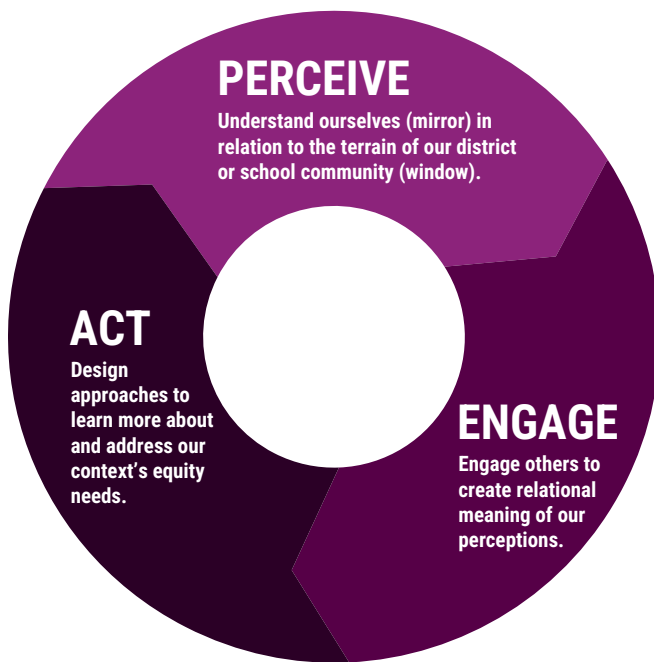
Figure 5. How the "Perceive, Engage, Act" cycle may apply to educational equity work (adapted from National Equity Project, 2024).

In other words, equity leadership begins with a deep understanding of ourselves as leaders (self). This foundation can then be expanded to consider the context in which we are operating (system). Finally, the insights gained can be applied to specific initiatives and decision-making processes (practice). This inside-out framework can help leaders create more cohesive and effective districts.

Through this critical reflection, learners see the world in ways that depart from prior assumptions. According to Mezirow (1997, as cited in Murata et al., 2024), critical reflection has two components. The first is self-reflection (internal), when learners deeply examine personal assumptions, values, and beliefs. The second component is critical inquiry (external) when learners consciously consider the ethical consequences of their actions on others. Critical reflection will then loop back to the school leader's original experiences to create new meaning (Mezirow, 1997). Through this reflective and cyclical process, we

begin to see the system differently, informing innovative design approaches that lead to improved outcomes.

This work is complex and can surface tensions between personal and professional experiences, relationships, and assumptions that may not have been fully examined before engaging in critical self-reflection. Access to expert, trusted equity coaching and professional support is crucial for success. Numerous organizations offer reflective coaching and professional learning opportunities specifically designed for district leaders and their teams.

"Racial equality requires leaders who collaborate to disrupt social norms and the contributing beliefs and behaviors. Few educators have received explicit professional development and support around racial dynamics and how to work effectively across differences. Educators need knowledge, skills, dispositions, and courage to effectively and authentically partner across differences to lead for equity, diversity and inclusion. Each of us must explore personal and professional issues around race in order to be a better partner in cross-racial equity relationships."

Center for Educational Equity Collaborative
(2023, n.p.)

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

This resource incorporates opportunities for leaders to self-reflect under the guidance of a professional with expertise in navigating equity and racial equity. Look for the light bulb icon that highlights these reflection points.

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

✓ Gather a leadership team of district and community members ready to champion this work and engage equity advocates with relevant lived experiences, such as school or district educators or staff, community members, parents, Board or District Equity Committee members, and students. Roles may vary depending on one's time and expertise. Senior leaders and Board members can play key roles in setting policy, allocating resources, and guiding district strategy.

✓ Determine human and financial professional learning resources.

✓ Engage in professional learning, coaching, or technical assistance with equity-trained leaders. The Oregon Department of Education (n.d.-c) and Coalition for Oregon School Administrators (n.d.) offer resources and guidance to support districts' equity efforts.

Equity Vision and Stance

The Oregon Department of Education defines an *equity stance* as "core values, commitments, orientations, principles, strategies, and frameworks that your district, organization, school, or team has decided are foundational to what you wish to prioritize in decision-making" (2024b, p. 111).

An equity stance informed by your district's vision for student experience provides clear direction, inspires motivation, aligns commitments, and enables informed decision-making. Uniting individuals around common goals can ensure everyone is working towards the same objective and help the organization better understand the larger picture, prioritizing tasks and allocating resources effectively.

Your district's vision and equity stance should be developed in partnership with community and system leaders.

While developing a vision for the future, consider the following questions:

- How does the district vision support a commitment to every student learning and thriving?

- Is a commitment to equity already clear in the district's vision, or does the district need a different or updated vision?

- Does the vision need more clarity or detail to ensure the leadership team collectively understands the connection to creating a school system where every student learns and thrives?

- How does the vision acknowledge histories and systems of oppression in relation to disparate outcomes for student groups?

Once the leadership team establishes your district's vision, develop an equity

stance that articulates the necessary values and commitments to achieve the vision. Developing this stance requires a commitment to creating, revising, or eliminating policies, systems, and practices to ensure they support the learning and growth of every student. Because educators are key to implementing changes, it's important to develop their capacity throughout the process to drive the vision forward and increase buy-in across the system.

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

✓ Work with your equity coach or professional learning partner to determine steps for developing a vision.

✓ Use the vision to develop an equity stance (see **examples** at the end of this section).

✓ Once leaders can articulate the vision and equity stance, even if the language is still evolving, begin engaging equity-minded educators as partners in leadership and capacity building.

Observing through an Equity Lens

An equity lens is a critical tool for district leaders to uncover the potential impact of decisions on various student groups. By analyzing policies, practices, and programs through this lens, we can identify unintended consequences that might disproportionately affect certain students or student groups. This proactive approach allows for more informed choices in creating equitable access and opportunity for every student, particularly those who have been historically marginalized by our systems.

Questions informed by an equity lens may include:

- *Has this decision, program, or policy engaged historically marginalized students and communities?*

- *How does this decision, program, or policy impact disparate student outcomes?*

Through exploring such questions, district leaders may uncover opportunities to strengthen their equity lens or its application.[5] By continuously refining one's equity lens, district leaders can ensure it remains a powerful and effective tool for decision making.

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

✓ Analyze and, if needed, strengthen the district equity lens or its use in decision making.

Shifting Mindsets

As leaders work to realize their visions for student success, they will encounter mindsets and dispositions that either support or hinder progress. Identifying and reframing obstructive mindsets can cultivate a truly inclusive environment where every student has the support they

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5 All Oregon districts submit an equity lens as part of their Integrated Guidance application. **Appendix D: Equity Lens and Tools** of the Oregon Department of Education's (2024b, p. 111) Integrated Guidance provides additional definitions and uses for using an equity lens and tools in decision making and planning.

need to thrive. Equity- and racial equity-minded educators are valuable partners in identifying and informing these shifts.

For example, district and school staff may place the responsibility on struggling students to adapt and catch up. A critical shift to this mindset might be that all students are capable of learning, but our policies, practices, and services might need to adapt to better meet the needs of some students. This redirects the focus to removing barriers and empowering every student to thrive. Mindset shifting is a call to more critically evaluate how leaders can adapt systems to be more responsive to student needs and assets.

The following table illustrates examples of key messaging to help reframe common arguments that may impede efforts to advance equity measures.

SHIFTING MINDSETS TO ENHANCE DISTRICT BUY-IN FOR EQUITY WORK

Shift from	Shift to
Some students just aren't able to learn.	*The current system isn't designed to meet the needs of all students. We must equip educators with the skills and capacity to ensure all students have the opportunity to learn. The system must adapt to provide the necessary support to unlock each student's potential.*
Educators are trained professionals who know their students' needs and strengths.	*Our students have a range of experiences, needs, and strengths. How can we better listen to students and their families, especially those who are struggling, to more effectively support them at school?*
We host family events, parent conferences, and other opportunities for families to be involved in the school. If they want to engage with us, it's their responsibility to take advantage of those opportunities.	*Some families may have significant barriers, such as jobs, transportation, language barriers, and childcare responsibilities, that prevent them from participating in planned family engagements. How can we broaden our family engagement strategies to reduce these barriers? Strategies we could try include home visits, meeting families in the orchards or fields, providing childcare for family events, offering events at different times of day, and involving families in decision making.*

SHIFTING MINDSETS TO ENHANCE DISTRICT BUY-IN FOR EQUITY WORK

Shift from	Shift to
Multilingual learners must first achieve grade-level English proficiency before accessing grade-level content, which is why educators must pull them out of core instruction and assign them less rigorous, cognitively demanding tasks.	*All students, including MLLs, need opportunities to participate in challenging academic work that promotes deep disciplinary knowledge and encourages higher-order thinking. Multilingual learners should receive literacy instruction alongside their monolingual peers with daily core instruction as an essential driver for literacy (Oregon Department of Education, 2023a).*
Many students experiencing disabilities aren't able to fully participate in general education classrooms.	*Our general education classrooms are not designed to support participation from students of all abilities. We can address this disparity with accessibility in mind by applying universal design to transform our classrooms and providing targeted support and instruction in line with students' IEPs.*
Shouldn't we just treat everyone equally? If everyone gets the same treatment, then everyone can achieve the same outcomes.	*Equity is different from equality. Equity acknowledges that different people have different needs based on the oppressions and privileges they experience under social, economic, institutional, and political power structures. While equality assumes the same starting point for everyone, equity accounts for differences in access to resources, opportunities, and advantages.*
We should focus our supports on this student's economic class because it's the most visible aspect of their identity.	*Everyone carries an array of intersecting, multi-dimensional identities. In some areas of our lives, we may experience privilege, while in others, we may experience oppression. Our approach to equity should consider the complexities of intersectional identities.*

SHIFTING MINDSETS TO ENHANCE DISTRICT BUY-IN FOR EQUITY WORK

Shift from	Shift to
Person X should be disciplined for making a mistake.	*Equity-centered approaches to education should be non-punitive and learning-focused. Let's aim to build understanding, tolerance, and respect among students by creating opportunities to discuss and learn from mistakes, rather than focusing on punishment (National Equity Project, n.d.).*
*I'm **against** this approach, and I don't want to be a part of it.*	*I'm **for** finding approaches that work for everyone, and I want to be part of creating solutions that move us forward.*
Focusing on marginalized students takes opportunities away from other students.	*Approaching equity through targeted universalism focuses on addressing barriers for marginalized students in ways that lift up all students, ensuring equitable opportunities for everyone. When we foster an inclusive environment where all students learn together, their achievements enhance and support one another.*
Focusing on the harms of racism unfairly punishes white people.	*Focusing on the harms of racism allows us to address inequities and build a fairer environment for all—including white students—by dismantling harmful systems. This approach unites students rather than dividing them, fostering a sense of shared responsibility and mutual growth.*
Immigrant students are behind. They struggle with English, and there are just too many learning gaps to catch them up.	*Immigrant experiences offer models of resilience, multilingualism, and a diversity of perspectives. With the right support, newly arrived students can leverage these strengths to excel academically while contributing a rich array of viewpoints, global awareness, and creative problem solving to the classroom.*

Additional reflection tools for understanding and facilitating mindset shifts include **Six Critical Paradigm Shifts for Multicultural Education (and the Questions We Should Be Asking)** (Gorski, 2003); and **The Nature of Discourse(s) in Education: Notes on "Changing the Discourse in Schools"** (Eubanks et al., 2018). ❱

Additional Resources for this Section

District Equity Stance and Equity Lens Examples

- **Lane ESD's Equity Stance** (n.d.)
- **Bend LaPine Schools' Equity Stance** (n.d.)
- **North Clackamas School District's Equity Lens** (2019)
- **David Douglas School District's Equity Policy and Mission** (n.d.)
- **Portland Public Schools' Instructional Priorities and Roadmap to Educational Equity** (n.d.)

State and National Resources and Tools

- **Anti-Racism Conversation Guide** (ODE, n.d.–a)
- **Equity Decision Tools for School Leaders** (ODE, 2021)
- **Racial Equity Impact Assessment** (Keleher, 2009)
- **Fist to Five Voting & Consensus Decision Making** (National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2010)
- **The Racial Equity Impact Assessment** (Voices for Racial Justice, 2015)

A district's strategic plan, sometimes called an equity strategic plan, is a crucial tool for driving change and creating accountability. It sets the direction for redesigning and evaluating systems and structures to better serve all students. Once district leaders have internalized the foundational elements described in the **previous section**, they are ready to begin strategic planning.

Building the Plan

Equity work can be intentionally integrated into a district strategic plan or developed as a standalone equity strategic plan. Strategic planning is a well established process that many districts already incorporate into their core work.

This section is not intended to be a blueprint for strategic planning. Instead, it offers ideas and approaches to help you highlight strengths and identify barriers to student achievement in developing your strategic plan.

This section includes guidance for:

- Using an **equity audit** as a stand-alone tool or as part of a larger needs assessment

- **Engaging student and family voices** of focal groups when conducting community engagement

- Setting goals and strategies using **Targeted Universalism**

- Applying **Liberatory Design** to develop strategic plans for educational equity

- **Evidence-based strategies and activities** to consider in developing the strategic plan

Your plan should also consider the development and support of system employees. Potential strategies to equip employees with necessary resources and skills include:

- Supporting the creation of employee resource groups (ERGs)

- Focusing on employee engagement and strengths

- Setting clear expectations and goals for all employees

- Creating resources and opportunities for continuous learning and development

- Establishing a culture of ongoing feedback and coaching

- Empowering employees with autonomy and the ability to make their own decisions and take ownership of their work

Equity Audits

Equity audits are instrumental in helping schools and districts assess the unique needs of their students, particularly those from vulnerable populations. These audits assess whether districts and schools adequately meet student needs, highlight areas of strength and opportunities for improvement, and guide system leaders in developing or refining equitable practices.

An equity audit can function as an independent process or be integrated into the district's ongoing needs assessment and strategic planning efforts, such as those outlined in the Integrated Guidance framework. By leveraging equity-centered decision-making tools and fostering a culture of reflective learning and

engagement, district leaders can gain new perspectives on their systems and identify actionable opportunities to enhance support for focal students groups.

Consider involving the core leadership team in the audit process. The audits often provide insight from community engagement efforts, observations, interviews, surveys, and other needs assessment data to gauge the presence and effectiveness of a school's or district's equity measures.

"In order to create an equitable, humanized system that allows young people to be healthy and whole, we must design systems and structures that center the humanity of students and educators by promoting positive relationships, collaboration, and student-centered learning. In practice, this means reviewing all systems, structures, and practices from discipline and grading policies, physical environments, and scheduling, to curricular decisions, resource allocation, and overall decision-making—from the classroom to the superintendent's office—to ensure that the experiences, voices, and humanity of students remain at the center."

Skoog-Hoffman et al.
(2022, p. 4)

Common components analyzed in an audit include:

- Leadership self-reflections and readiness assessments

- Data analysis practices and protocols

- Curricular resources

- Lesson plans

- Instructional practices and routines

- Assessment practices and results

- Climate and culture surveys

- Attendance and behavior trends

- Course enrollment

- Graduation and promotion rates

- Workforce development and diversity

Equity audits present key reflection opportunities to engage with an equity coach or technical support partner to guide, and possibly facilitate, the process. Several organizations have developed tools to assist in conducting equity audits.

Examples to demonstrate the audit process include:

- Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium's (2021) **Equity Audit Considerations**, which provides an overview of equity audits and six suggestions for conducting a successful audit.

- The COVID-19 Education Coalition Centering Equity's (2020) **Questions for Proactive and Equitable Educational Implementation rubric**, which offers a set of questions to support the assessment of a school or district's equity measures by:

» Determining sources of knowledge, experience and expertise related to a school or district's equity challenge, creating a network of diverse stakeholders that can contribute to the mapping process.

» Identifying patterns to surface and describe recurring themes in the data gathered and use these to develop a set of initial hypotheses about the challenge.

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

✓ Identify the equity audit tools and process and how they might complement or be integrated into your district needs assessment.

✓ Conduct an equity audit to discover areas of strength and opportunities for improvement in meeting the needs of your school or district's students — particularly those from vulnerable populations.

Engaging Focal Students and Their Families

Engaging focal student groups struggling within the system is critical in strategic planning. Focal students and their families are often best positioned to identify shortcomings, providing insights that reveal barriers and areas needing improvement because they often have proximity to the harm caused by those shortcomings. By listening to their experiences and empowering them to shape the process, district leaders can gain a comprehensive understanding of both strengths and weaknesses.

This engagement is in line with **Targeted Universalism**, which aims to support achievement for all students through strategies that target learning for a system's most marginalized students (**powell et al., 2019**). Targeted Universalism builds on research and evidence demonstrating that improving the system to meet the needs of focal students lifts the entire educational experience, allowing all students to thrive.

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"Research shows that students learn better when their families and local community organizations are engaged in schools. Strong family engagement is linked to increased student achievement, increased regular attendance, and higher graduation rates. In addition, community engagement can help ensure that students' social, emotional, and physical health needs are addressed, while also providing meaningful, real-world learning opportunities. Schools that engage with their communities are also better able to help students solve local problems, contribute to civic life, and respond to a changing economy."

Great Schools Partnership
(2019, p. 1)

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Including the voices of focal student groups and their families helps the district identify specific needs and challenges, which is essential for crafting targeted and effective solutions.

For instance, a student facing learning difficulties might specify which aspects of the learning environment they struggle with and suggest ways to better support them that haven't been previously considered. Asking families and students, "How do you learn best?" can yield unforeseen insights that help educators not only respond to the student's specific needs but also root out and address issues impacting students more broadly.

Incorporating focal student groups into the planning process builds trust, empowers stakeholders, and increases the likelihood of successful implementation. These students' perspectives can pinpoint innovative solutions that approaches informed by dominant perspectives might miss.

Ultimately, this collaborative effort leads to a more inclusive and effective educational system, inspiring actions that are responsive to the lived experiences of students and their families.

There's an array of tools and strategies for engaging and incorporating student and family voices—some of which may already be used in your district:

Resources for Engaging Focal Student Groups and Their Families

- **Dual Capacity–Building Framework for Family–School Partnerships, Version 2** (Mapp & Bergman, 2019)

- **Oregon Department of Education Integrated Guidance**
  - » **Community Engagement Toolkit** (2024b, p. 61)
  - » **Targeted Universalism and Snapshots of Focal Student Groups** (2024c).

- **District Equity Committee Resources**
  - » **SB 732's Supplemental Guidance** (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.–d) helps districts implement the requirements and intentions of District Equity Committees, supporting Oregon school district leaders in identifying factors that affect the success of historically marginalized students. These committees advise on educational policies, enhance community engagement, and promote equity in education.

- **The Student Educational Equity Development (SEED) Survey** (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.–i): captures student experiences related to learning opportunities, access to resources, self-efficacy, and sense of belonging to help districts pinpoint areas to better address student needs.
  - » **In Their Own Words: Analysis of Student Short Answers** (Oregon Department of Education, 2023c) analyzes open-ended student responses. Students provided windows into their experiences in school and shared what they would need to feel safe, comfortable, and supported.
  - » **SEED Survey Research Briefs** (ODE, 2023d) synthesize survey responses in relation to student outcomes.

Targeted Universalism

Targeted Universalism is a key framework to inform the advancement of educational equity. The aim is to elevate **all** learners while also closing the opportunity and achievement gaps some student groups continue to experience. Setting universal goals achieved through targeted approaches elevates the entire educational experience, allowing all students to thrive:

"Targeted universalism is a platform to operationalize programs that move all groups toward the universal policy goal as well as a way of communicating and publicly marketing such programs in an inclusive, bridging manner. It is an approach that supports the needs of particular groups, even the politically powerful or those in the majority, while reminding everyone that we are all part of the same social and civic fabric. As such, targeted universalist policies are more resistant to the critique that government programs serve special interests, whoever that might be" (**powell et al., 2019, p. 6**).

Examples of Targeted Universalism in Action

1. **The Tribal Attendance Promising Practices** (TAPP) program focuses on improving school attendance of American Indian and Alaskan Native (AI/AN) students. By partnering with Oregon districts, Tribal partners, and district leaders, ODE's Office of Indian Education addresses unique challenges of AI/AN students through school-wide improvements. Outcomes of this collaboration have led to critical insights for improving all students' educational experiences, such as:

   » Addressing the root causes of chronic absenteeism for AI/AN students often requires systemic changes that benefit all students, such as improved transportation, mental health support, school-based wraparound services, and culturally responsive curriculum.

   » Examining data collection and analysis practices has exposed failures leading to the erasure of AI/AN students in population counts, informing efforts to fully identify Native students in schools while also examining attendance patterns and supports across all student groups.

   » Building strong relationships with Tribal communities has fostered increased parent engagement, leading to improved attendance and overall school climate.

   » Prioritizing the needs of AI/AN students has created a more equitable school environment for all students, recognizing and addressing disparities in attendance and academic achievement.

   Further, **Oregon Public Broadcasting's December 2023 report** (Hernandez) on widespread attendance challenges highlights successful strategies employed by the TAPP program and Redmond School District.

2. **Ruby Bridges Elementary in Washington** also exemplifies targeted universalism by designing its entire learning environment around the needs of students with disabilities, ensuring that all students benefit. By focusing on supports traditionally provided through IEPs or 504 plans, such as flexible learning spaces and communication tools, the school **creates a more inclusive environment for everyone** (Peetz, 2024). This approach aligns with Carter's (2022) **10 dimensions of belonging**, which foster acceptance, support, and love for students with disabilities. In practice, students of all abilities benefit from this targeted approach, which enhances their academic performance and social skills, creating a culture of belonging for all.

3. **West Linn Wilsonville School District** in Oregon implements a similar approach for inclusive learning. The district is "committed to ensuring that each child [...] becomes part of a learning community for the greatest thinkers and most thoughtful people for the world. We know that creating the conditions for this work to happen is complex and multilayered" (n.d., n.p.). Their special education department focuses on continued growth of high–leverage strategies for student success in improving instructional practices, creating inclusive cultures, and empowering student voice (Figure 6).
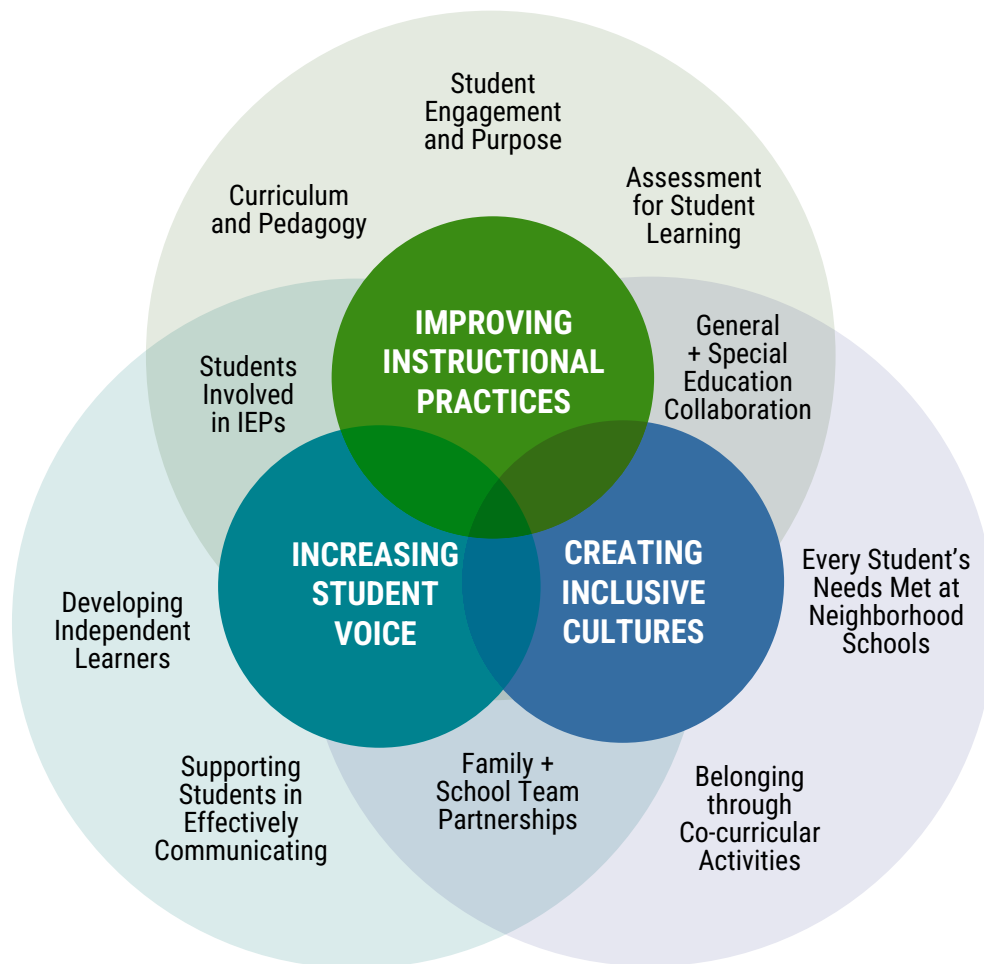
Figure 6. West Linn Wilsonville School District's intersecting Special Education focus areas are mutually reinforcing, creating a culture of belonging for all students.

Liberatory Design: An Approach for Educational Equity Planning

Liberatory Design is a planning process developed to address persistent educational barriers for focal student groups. Decisions impacting students are often made without their input. Liberatory Design flips this script by actively engaging students, families, and educators from marginalized backgrounds in decision-making.

By capturing a wider range of voices, a district can gain a more complete picture of students' needs and challenges. This tapestry of perspectives informs a wealth of innovative ideas, leading to more inclusive and effective solutions, such as rethinking curriculum, redesigning wellness services, creating culturally relevant learning experiences, building trusting relationships, or identifying other support systems that empower marginalized students in school.

The collaborative nature of Liberatory Design exposes educators and administrators to the experiences of marginalized students and their families, fostering empathy and a shared understanding among stakeholders. Looking at a school or district with fresh eyes surfaces previously unexplored solutions to advancing a learning environment where every student has the opportunity to succeed. Liberatory Design is not a requirement but an evidence-based approach worth considering for strategic planning work.

A LOOK AT LIBERATORY DESIGN

The educational approaches that shaped the status quo are insufficient to address the unprecedented challenges we now face in education. Too often, well intentioned equity and design efforts fail to improve outcomes — and can even produce unintended consequences. The lack of measurable progress can create frustration, hopelessness and cynicism.

Liberatory Design was built for these times.

Liberatory Design is a creative problem-solving approach that centers the voices and experiences of marginalized communities, creating solutions that empower and uplift those most impacted.

Why Liberatory Design?

Liberatory Design builds on best practices from fields like design thinking, complexity theory, political organizing, equity, restorative justice and more.

The power of Liberatory Design lies in its ability to help us navigate complex systems, recognize how power and oppression shapes education systems, ground decision-making in core values, challenge the status quo through self-reflection, and adapt meaningfully in a fast-changing environment (Figure 7).

When it comes to concepts as complex as equity, the way forward is led by noticing, experimenting, learning, reflecting, and iterating. Liberatory Design is structured to build equity leadership capacity and create real change within the communities where we live and work. The process itself, as well as the outcomes, build towards greater collective liberation (Anaissie et al., 2021).
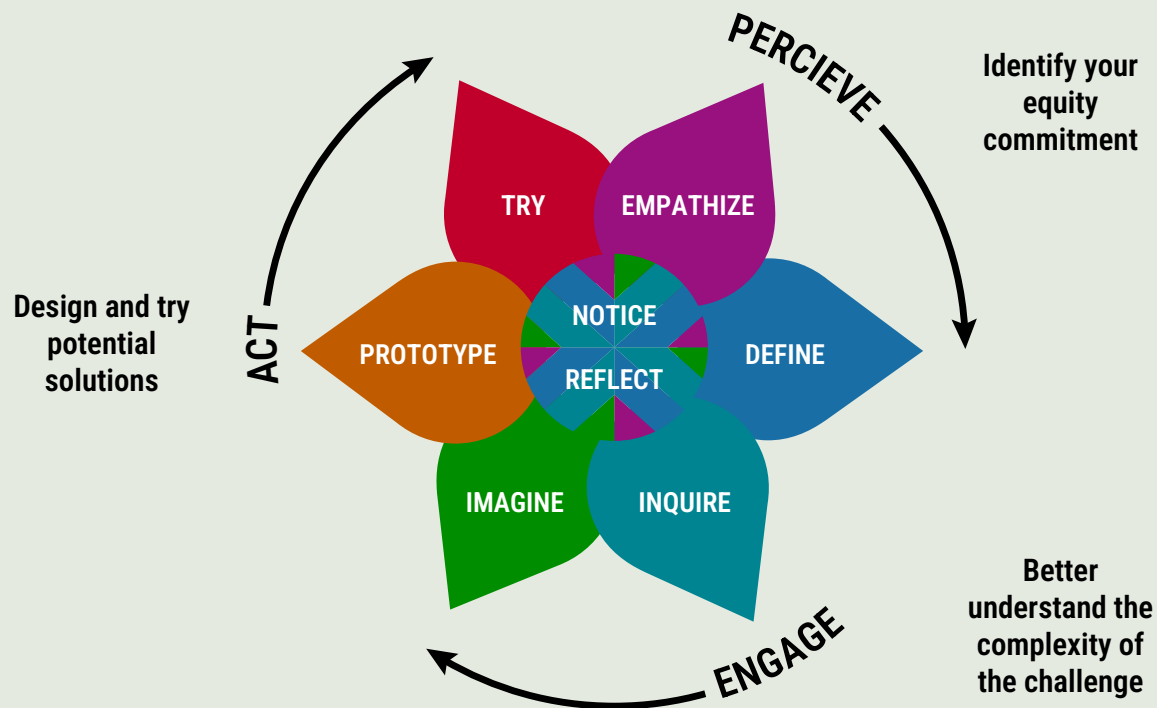
Figure 7. This model, adapted from **Anaissie et al. (2021)** under a **Creative Commons BY–NC–SA 3.0 license**, integrates the **National Equity Project's** (2021b) "Perceive, Engage, Act" approach referenced in the **Getting Started** section of this resource with Liberatory Design: *Perceive*—perceive and understand the territory you're navigating; *Engage*—engage others to make meaning of your current situation; *Act*—take action to address your equity challenge and learn from that action.

Additional Tools and Resources

- **Introduction to Liberatory Design** (National Equity Project, 2021b)

- **Liberatory Design: Mindsets and Modes to Design for Equity** (Anaissie et al., 2021)

Core Strategies for Educational Equity

As the leadership team progresses through the district's needs assessment and strategic planning, the team will identify the goals, strategies, and activities most responsive to their local context.

This section outlines a set of core, interrelated strategies and activities that can serve as building blocks for fostering equity and racial equity. These strategies include creating shared language for navigating complex equity topics, implementing consistent policies and practices, developing a workforce dedicated to educational equity, and building collective action through partnerships.

While not exhaustive, this set of core strategies and activities provides a starting point to inform deeper work done in partnership with leadership coaching, professional development, and technical support.

Narratives, Policies, and Practices: Cultivate shared commitments, tools, policies, and practices that center equity and racial equity throughout school and district operations. These strategies build on the work in the Getting Started section.

- Develop and deepen your district or school's shared educational equity stance.

- Develop and apply a menu of shared tools, such as your educational equity vision, lens, stance, and definitions.

- Define and implement an ongoing process to review and adapt internal policies and procedures informed by the district's equity lens and stance.

- Identify and develop strategies specific to focal community groups. The Oregon Department of Education (2024b) co-developed its Student Success Plans with the communities they represent and contain information to inform district planning. Community-specific plans include African American/Black Student Success, Immigrant/Refugee Student Success, Latino/a/x & Indigenous Student Success, LGBTQ2SIA+ Student Success, and Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander Student Success.

- Systematize a process for identifying and developing equitable resource allocation.

- Implement data-informed practices and protocols that (1) make visible community-driven needs, challenges, and strengths; (2) ensure data are representative of community; and (3) approach data collection and analysis with community self-determination as a priority. (See definition of *data justice* in the Glossary.)

- Build collaborative structures, professional development, and accountability for equity and racial equity into leadership team processes and ongoing learning.

Employee Experience: District policies and practices that support the hiring, retention, and success of a diverse staff create a culture of belonging.

- *Recruiting, Hiring, and Onboarding*

  » Consider broadening hiring pipelines and approaches to engage communities of color.

  » Set tangible and measurable goals around staffing and leadership that reflects the identities and experiences of the communities your district serves.

  » Engage each hiring manager or hiring committee member in training specifically addressing implicit bias in hiring processes.

  » Develop processes and training across and within offices that foster equity, inclusion, and belonging in recruiting, hiring, onboarding, and exiting.

  » Support the onboarding and acclimation of new hires to boost retention and enhance the belonging and performance of underrepresented staff.

  » Engage in equity-related training specific to programmatic areas such as recruitment and employee and labor relations.

- *Employee Engagement, Retention, and Pathways*

  » Support employee development to ensure engagement, retention, and career growth of a diverse and anti-discriminatory workforce.

» Work with Human Resources to develop and share guidelines and best practices on equitable and anti-discriminatory employee performance evaluation, coaching, and feedback.

» Adapt data collection and analysis tools to reflect inclusion and belonging in response to district's equity goals and strategies.

Change, Collaboration, and Innovation: Leverage district resources, skills, and structures for internal innovation and improvement to ensure educational equity for all.

- *Communications and Reporting:* Provide engaging and consistent internal communications and reporting on organizational (culture + process) improvements, innovations, and equity and racial equity.

  » Develop key messages and internal communications strategies that communicate the alignment between equity measures and the needs of the community, students, and staff. Align language, knowledge, and priorities informed by this communication plan across the community.

  » Provide clear and consistent messaging from executive leaders on the importance and progress of educational equity efforts. More detail is provided in the **Communication Section**.

  » Elevate the voices and experiences of focal students, educators, and community members across communications.

  » Engage in narrative-based strategies to identify and address narratives that reinforce the status quo and develop new narratives that reinforce a culture of educational equity, change, and innovation.

Curriculum and Instruction: Implement and enhance rigorous, culturally and linguistically responsive instruction to ensure high-quality teaching and learning for every student.

- Establish a clear vision for educational equity, instructional coherence, and the core elements of high-quality, responsive instruction through an instructional framework.

- Ensure educators have pathways, professional learning opportunities, and resources for high-quality, differentiated, and responsive instruction for every student.

- Integrate transformative social and emotional learning with academic strategies to engage students and improve attendance to enhance academic success for both students and educators.

- Support educators in using formative assessment to monitor student progress and adjust instructional practices in response to students' strengths and needs.

- Identify instructional materials that provide positive and affirming representation of students' diverse backgrounds so students can both see themselves in the curriculum and learn about identities different from their own.

Partnerships, Tribal Consultation, and Relationships: Continually expand your school or district's capacity for and commitment to diverse and inclusive student, family, and community partnerships, including Tribal consultation in service of educational equity and Tribal sovereignty.

- **Tribal Consultation** (*if applicable*)[6]: Seek opportunities to develop and deepen equitable partnership, collaboration, and relationships with the federally recognized Tribal government.

  » In partnership with the Tribal governments, evaluate the efficacy of current internal ODE practices and identify internal roadblocks to implementing increasingly effective and productive consultation and collaboration with Tribes.

  » Improve equitable collaboration with federally recognized Tribal governments in Oregon.

- *Community Partnerships:* Create structures and expectations for meaningful collaboration with families, education leaders, communities, and students impacted by your school or district's decisions.

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6 Oregon LEAs that receive more than $40,000 in Title VI funding or serve a student population that is 50% or greater American Indian/Alaska Native are required to engage in Tribal consultation (**Oregon Department of Education, 2024a**).

Additional Strategy Development Resources

- *Policy Development and Analysis*

  » **The Equity Policy Toolkit for School Boards** (Race Forward, 2023)

- *Tribal Consultation*

  » **A Toolkit for Tribal Consultation** (Oregon Department of Education, 2024d)

  » **The Heart and Spirit of Tribal Consultation Video Series** (Region 16 Comprehensive Center, 2024)

- *Community Engagement*

  » **Safe and Welcoming Meetings to Bridge Divides** (Partnership for the Future of Learning, 2022) provides a guide for school board members to develop policies that promote inclusive and sustained student engagement in public meetings.

  » **Engaging Equity: Equitable Mindsets, Practices, and Systems** (Oregon Department of Education, 2024a) includes a series of learning modules for schools and districts.

  » **District Equity Committee (DEC) Guidance** (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.-d) includes conditions for success for DECs.

  » **Pathway to Educational Equity** (Voices for Racial Justice, 2016): a progress-monitoring tool for addressing racial disparities in schools.

  » **Technical Assistance, Professional Learning and Coaching Opportunities and Resources** (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.-c) includes resources for community engagement, data analysis, financial stewardship, health and well-being and more.

Additional Strategy Development Resources, continued

- *Curriculum Instruction*
    - » **Actions to Support High-Impact Instructional Strategies** (Benson et al., 2022)
    - » **Tribal History/Shared History** (Oregon Department of Education, n.d.–l)
    - » **Tribal History/Shared History: Exemplary Practices** (Region 16 Comprehensive Center, 2024)
    - » **Massachusetts Spotlight Schools: High-poverty schools that are raising the bar** (Saslow et al., 2024)

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

- ✓ Decide whether the district will create a standalone equity strategic plan or integrate key strategies and activities into the existing district strategic plan.

- ✓ Evaluate and prioritize resources needed to develop and implement the equity plan or strategies.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Implementing a solution is just the beginning. To ensure ongoing effectiveness, districts must monitor and adapt equity measures in response to changing circumstances and emerging information. Establish clear indicators to track progress and outcomes that include community feedback, implementing a robust accountability process to inform necessary adjustments.

As districts more deeply examine organizational structures and systems, they may increasingly run into complex and nuanced challenges. An equity coach or support professional can provide essential guidance in navigating these complexities, responding to new learning, and ensuring solutions continue to align with the district's vision and goals. ❯

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

- ✓ Develop indicators and a progress monitoring system to track the implementation of the equity plan, inform continuous improvement, and ensure accountability.

- ✓ Engage the equity coach or support professional to evaluate learning, refine indicators, and respond to complex or nuanced challenges that arise.

Communication is foundational to actualizing a vision for educational equity. Alongside community engagement, effective communication fosters transparency, builds trust, and encourages community buy-in for equity initiatives.

District leaders must be equipped to clearly communicate the *why* ("Why is this important for equity and the community?") and *how* ("How does this work connect to the community?") to foster investment and sustainability in this work (**Skoog-Hoffman et al., 2022**).

A robust plan for communicating with internal and external audiences is essential to clearly and consistently convey the *why* and *how* messages. The plan should include culturally and linguistically responsive communication methods to ensure inclusivity and accessibility for all community members.

Oregon's communities and individuals within them hold varying perspectives on equity and racial equity. While some engage in open dialogue and prioritize equitable practices, others may be hesitant or even resistant to begin the conversation. Community members may hold vastly different, and sometimes misinformed, understandings of equity.

District leadership teams have unique insights into the communities to inform an effective communication strategy and help prepare for potential resistance and divisiveness. ❯

"All around the U.S. and in [Oregon], conversations are happening around equity and racial equity in practice in schools. Being responsive and setting clear expectations for what students will experience in the classroom can be beneficial to relationships in the school community.

It's crucial that students, educators, and staff feel supported in their work towards equity and racial equity through tensions that may arise. Above all, the goal is to bridge divides and ensure that every student feels welcome and a sense of belonging at school so they can reach their full potential."

Coalition for Oregon School Administrators
(Kotting, n.d., p. 1)

SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES

The following key messages provide examples for framing equity-centered discussions, focusing on student-centered goals that districts can tailor to align with their equity vision and stance.

- **Every student thrives.** This simple but powerful statement emphasizes that all students deserve the opportunity to succeed, regardless of background.

- **Every student feels valued and supported.** This statement highlights the importance of fostering a safe and inclusive environment where every student feels empowered to learn.

- **Every student has access to the resources and opportunities they need to reach their full potential.** This statement emphasizes equity in educational resources and removing barriers to success.

Examples from Other Resources

National Equity Project (2021a)

- Every student deserves a quality school that is fair and inclusive. Our school district and community are strongly committed to eliminating barriers to every student having what they need, when they need it.

- We seek to create a school system that gives all students the opportunity to develop their academic skills, social-emotional wellness and intelligence, and a sense of agency and civic responsibility.

- We have a moral imperative to not look away from the impacts of harmful structures, policies and practices that limit opportunity for our school community. Every child and family in our district is deserving of learning conditions that foster intellectual curiosity and social and emotional well-being.

- We will continue to work to eliminate the predictability of success that is currently correlated with race, gender identity, sexual orientation, wealth, zip code, immigration status, etc.

Science of Learning and Development Alliance (2020)

- Every child, no matter their background, has the potential to succeed in school and life.

Coalition for Oregon School Administrators (Kotting, n.d.)

- Above all, our goal is to bridge divides and ensure that every student feels welcome and a sense of belonging at school so they can reach their full potential.

- Talking about a multitude of races and cultures isn't about blame; it's about understanding each other.

- When students see themselves represented in curricula, whatever the subject matter, they're more engaged, they feel a sense of belonging, and they're more able to learn.

- We all want to live in communities where we know we can depend on each other, no matter what we look like or where we come from.

SAMPLE KEY MESSAGES, CONT.

- Our work is designed to benefit the specific students in our district who haven't been included in the past.

- Being at school should mean being a part of the community while working together to build on our strengths and bridge divides.

Mississippi Department of Education (n.d.)

- *Using Data as an Entry Point*

  » Our data show persistent gaps in student performance, compelling us to identify students underserved by our system. What barriers are they encountering, and how do we know? What actions can we take to ensure all students have the opportunity to succeed? Where are we seeing improvements? How might we replicate the successes?

- *Focusing on Performance instead of Demographics[7]*

  » The Mississippi Literacy Act focused on performance — most crucially the 25 percent of students performing at the lowest levels in each school. "Not only did this approach avoid stigmatizing individual students or specific students, teachers or schools […] it created a culture of advancement and accountability in every school regardless of location or demographics" (**Hubler, 2022, n.p.**).

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[7] While this approach focused on "performance" rather than "race, income, or geography," the Oregon Department of Education recognizes the interconnected nature of students' experiences and structures of inequity, which results in disparate outcomes across demographic categories.

Additional Resources for this Section

- **Equity Messaging Guidance for Districts** (National Equity Project, 2021a)

  » This guide is designed to "support districts in communication and engagement related to diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. [NEP] recognizes the increased scrutiny and potential controversy [of equity work] and [offers this guide to help leaders] be clear, transparent, and unapologetic in the commitment to creating equitable, just, and thriving schools for **all** of the young people in [the] district" (n.p.).

- **Communicating about Racial Equity in a Charged Environment** (Kotting, n.d.)

  » A toolkit to prepare districts for challenging conversations about racial equity.

As your district moves through the planning and implementation for educational equity, ensuring the safety and well-being of all members within the school community is paramount. Schools are not just places of learning—they are environments that can create, exacerbate, or heal emotional and psychological wounds.

A trauma-informed lens helps leaders recognize how past experiences, especially those rooted in inequity and systemic oppression, shape students' and staff's sense of safety, engagement, and value. Prioritizing healing fosters resilience, while meaningful engagement promotes a sense of belonging. This, in turn, creates a foundation where physical and emotional safety can flourish, creating an environment in which every individual feels supported, respected, and free from harm. Without addressing historical traumas, traditional safety measures fall short, compromising the long-term well-being of the community.

Physical and Emotional Safety

School district leaders play a crucial role in creating an environment that clearly establishes and rigorously maintains physical safety measures. Ensuring the safety of the learning community requires proactive planning and implementing robust safety protocols to address potential risks, from natural disasters to incidents of violence.

Acknowledging the fraught history between law enforcement and marginalized communities, leaders must thoughtfully engage with local law enforcement, emergency services, and public health officials to develop, review, and update comprehensive safety plans. It is crucial for districts to consider ways to collaborate that mitigate communities' harmful experiences.[8] Schools should also conduct regular safety drills and provide training for staff and students to ensure they are prepared to respond effectively and with a shared understanding of protocols in an emergency while prioritizing the safety and trust of all community members.

Discussing equity and privilege may make members of dominant groups uncomfortable, which is often a natural response to challenging deeply held beliefs. However, it's critical to distinguish between discomfort and genuine threats to safety. If people, especially those from marginalized groups, feel unsafe, those concerns must be addressed immediately. In contrast, supporting community members in gradually working through the discomfort associated with challenging inequities can lead to positive, long-term change.

Physical safety is only one aspect of a comprehensive safety plan. Emotional safety is equally critical for community members to feel secure and supported. However, achieving true emotional safety requires going beyond reactive measures to develop a proactive approach. Anticipating and addressing potential sources of emotional harm before they manifest cultivates trust, belonging, and well-being.

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8 To learn more about these histories, see *The New Jim Crow: Mass Policing in the Age of Colorblindness* and **accompanying study guides** (Alexander, 2010).

For example, implementing social-emotional learning programs early on to teach students how to manage emotions and resolve conflicts can prevent bullying or harassment from escalating. Offering regular mental health check-ins for staff and students can catch signs of burnout or emotional distress before they lead to larger issues.

Additionally, creating safe spaces where marginalized students can connect and find support ingrains inclusivity and respect in the school culture. Proactivity builds a foundation of resilience, reducing the need for reactive crisis management and fostering long-term learning and developmental success.

Emotional Safety

An emotionally safe environment supports belonging and well-being, essential conditions for learning. Leadership plays a crucial role in establishing these conditions. Leaders, whether in organizations or classrooms, shape the norms, expectations, culture, and climate through their interactions and the policies, procedures, and protocols that guide the everyday experiences of students and staff (**Bogan, 2023**).[9]

Leaders must prioritize creating a school culture that promotes respect, inclusivity, and emotional support through policies that address bullying, harassment, and discrimination and resources such as counseling services and mental health programs. Training staff to recognize and respond to signs of emotional distress is vital to maintain a supportive environment.

Finally, anticipating and planning for pushback is an important part of maintaining safety and well-being in schools. Leaders must be prepared to address resistance from various stakeholders, including parents, community members, and even staff—particularly when implementing new equity initiatives and protocols.

Transparent communication and community engagement are key strategies in managing pushback. Leaders should provide clear explanations of the safety measures and the rationale behind them while actively listening to and addressing concerns. By fostering an open dialogue and building trust, school leaders can create a more supportive and cooperative environment that enhances the overall safety and well-being of the school community.

Safety Measures

Specific safety measures districts may implement, including and beyond typical safety considerations, include:

Cross-Sector Collaboration and Community Engagement

- Foster partnerships with local law enforcement, public health officials, and community organizations to develop comprehensive safety plans that are informed by diverse perspectives, expertise, and historical relationships to local authorities.

- Use data to identify trends and areas for school safety improvements, ensuring measures are both effective and inclusive of all students.

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9 This resource uses the term "emotional safety" in lieu of Bogan's "psychological safety" to avoid negative associations from the psychological field's history of pathologizing non-dominant identities.

» The Oregon Department of Education's (2024b, p. 64) **Community Engagement Toolkit** includes helpful tools and frameworks for leading engagement with families and communities.

Bullying and Harassment Prevention

- Establish and enforce **comprehensive bullying prevention programs** that include clear policies, reporting mechanisms, and support for affected students (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). These programs should specifically address the bullying and harassment faced by marginalized groups, including LGBTQ2SIA+ students and students of color, with clear policies and support systems.

- Implement proactive tools and training programs to help school districts prevent, address, and respond to harassment, intimidation, and threats of violence, focusing on resources for superintendents, school board members, and staff.

- Provide trauma-informed cybersecurity training for staff and students, focusing on the importance of protecting personal data and recognizing the impacts of digital privacy and online harassment on the school community.

Equity-Centered Safety Policies

- Develop and implement safety and anti-discrimination policies that specifically address the protection of public employees and

leaders whose racial and gender identities may be targeted. These policies should be aligned with federal and state law, including the **Every Student Belongs** rule.

» The Oregon Department of Education (n.d.-e, -f) has provided toolkits and other resources on its **Every Student Belongs** and **Supporting Gender Expansive Students** sites.

» See also Race Forward's (n.d.) **HEAL Together Equity Policy Toolkit for School Boards**.

Mental Health Support Services

- Provide accessible and culturally responsive and sustaining mental health support services, including counselors and psychologists, to address the emotional and psychological needs of students and staff.

» See the Oregon Department of Education's (2020) **Mental Health Toolkit** for more information. ❯

Opportunities for Coaching and Collaboration

✓ Develop a community engagement plan to ensure input on safety measures from all communities within your district.

✓ Evaluate the extent to which your district's health and safety plan incorporates diverse perspectives, histories, and experiences with law enforcement and other local authorities.

Additional Resources for this Section

- The Oregon Department of Education's (n.d.–e) **Every Student Belongs site** offers extensive resources for bias incident policy development, communication, and responses.

- ODE's (n.d.) **Health Standards** address topics such as wellness; safety; social, emotional, and mental health; healthy relationships; and violence and abuse prevention.

- Eugene School District 4J's (n.d.) **Staff Resources for Preventing & Responding to Bias Incidents** includes extensive topic-specific and bias-response resources for educators.

CLOSING

Leading From the Inside Out (LFIO) provides key steps to guide district leaders as they advance efforts to create a future where every student thrives. Recognizing that leading for educational equity is an ongoing and complex process, this resource serves as a foundational guide.

While not exhaustive, it highlights key strategies, tools, and steps to help district leaders navigate their unique challenges and initiate meaningful change.

It also underscores the importance of accessing expertise for equity coaching, professional learning, and technical support throughout the process.

By utilizing LFIO, district leaders can create or deepen their blueprint to:

- Engage in self-reflection
- Develop a shared vision and stance
- Plan for educational equity
- Empower focal student and family voices
- Enhance safety and well-being
- Integrate core equity strategies

By embracing educational equity, Oregon districts can create a future where every student feels valued, supported, and empowered to reach their full potential. »

Glossary

Belonging

- *Fitting in vs belonging*: The pressure to "fit in" is one of the greatest barriers to belonging. Fitting in is about becoming who you need to be in order to be accepted. Belonging, on the other hand, doesn't require us to change who we are; it requires us to be who we are and believe that we are worthy of acceptance (**Brown**, 2023).

- *School belonging* "describes students' feelings of being accepted, appreciated, and included in their school community. Students with a strong, positive sense of belonging identify with and are connected to not only their school, but the individuals in that school community. An ever-growing body of literature demonstrates that students' school belonging is linked with higher academic achievement, motivation, and engagement" (**Equal Opportunity Schools**, 2024, p. 7).

Community voice: Uplifting community voice requires directly involving the community served in co-constructing the project design, implementation, evaluation, and providing strategic guidance in final decision-making.

Data justice: Data justice is an approach that seeks to correct harmful data collection and dissemination practices that have historically marginalized and rendered certain communities invisible.

Data justice aims to capture community-centered and community-driven forms of knowledge and lived experiences to counter the systemic erasure and harm resulting from oppressive data practices.

Data justice is driven by the belief that data should:

1. Visibilize community-driven needs, challenges, and strengths;

2. Represent the full community; and

3. Treat data in ways that promote community self-determination.

(Definition adapted from the **Coalition of Communities of Color**, n.d.)

Disaggregated data: "Data that has been divided into detailed categories such as, but not limited to, geographic region, race, ethnicity, English fluency, disabilities, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. It can reveal inequalities and gaps between different categories that aggregated data cannot. The accuracy and quality of these data is also dependent on data collection, analysis and decision-making practices that may be biased toward the values of the dominant, White-centered education system, and therefore require critical reflection on whether focal group issues are truly emerging through the disaggregated data and how intersecting categories compound various issues and dynamics" (**Oregon Department of Education**, 2024b, p. 160).

Educational equity: "Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop to their full academic and social potential.

Working towards equity in schools involves:

- Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system;

- Removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social or cultural factor;

- Interrupting inequitable practices, examining biases, and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children; and

- Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents and interests that every human possesses" (**National Equity Project**, 2016, p. 1).

Equity lens: "An active tool that supports core values, commitments, orientations, and questions to become operationalizable. An equity lens must support navigating choices in the here and now. It helps translate theory into practice, focuses on assets rather than deficits, and avoids making decisions that could marginalize or harm students, staff, families, and communities.

An equity lens could also include:

- *Facilitation Tools or Protocols*: Possible protocols (such as a consultancy protocol) to use the equity lens in a facilitated space or discussion.

- *Decision-Making Tools or Protocols*: Possible tools (such as the ODE decision tools or consensus tools like Fist to Five) that help guide decision-making based on the questions and framework in the equity lens" (**Oregon Department of Education**, 2024b, p. 111).

Equity stance: "Core values, commitments, orientations, principles, strategies, and frameworks that your

district, organization, school, or team has decided are foundational to what you wish to prioritize in decision-making" (**Oregon Department of Education**, 2024b, p. 111).

Evidence-based: "Forms of validation that do not just stem from dominant educational research but include community-driven, Indigenous, Tribal, culturally-responsive/sustaining/specific, non-dominant and non-Western ways of knowing, being, and researching. Instructional practices, activities, strategies, or interventions that are "evidence-based" should not just privilege scientific evidence, but also be driven by evidence stemming from the perspectives of those affected by those practices, activities, strategies, or interventions" (**Oregon Department of Education**, 2024b, pp. 160–161).

Focal students: "Students from racial or ethnic groups that have historically experienced academic disparities; students who identify as American Indian/Alaska Native, alone or in combination with other races and ethnicities, and are enrolled members of federally-recognized Tribal Nations; students with disabilities; students who are navigating houselessness; students in foster care; economically disadvantaged students; students who may identify as LGBTQ2SIA+; students recently arrived; migratory students; students navigating the justice system; emerging bilingual students; and students who are currently pregnant and/or parenting" (**Oregon Department of Education**, 2024b, p. 167).

Partnership: "A group of organizations, Tribes, districts, or individuals who agree to work together with a common interest and shared vision. In a partnership, there is a high level of trust and two-way communication, and differences in power and privilege are addressed. Roles and responsibilities on all sides

are well-defined and developed with shared authority in decision making. There might be shared space and staff, with expectations and agreements in writing" (**Oregon Department of Education**, 2024b, p. 161).

Targeted Universalism: A framework for :

…setting universal goals pursued by targeted processes to achieve those goals. Within a targeted universalism framework, universal goals are established for all groups concerned. The strategies developed to achieve those goals are targeted, based upon how different groups are situated within structures, culture, and across geographies to obtain the universal goal. Targeted universalism is goal-oriented, and the processes are directed in service of the explicit, universal goal.

Targeted universalism is a platform to operationalize programs that move all groups toward the universal policy goal as well as a way of communicating and publicly marketing such programs in an inclusive, bridging manner. It is an approach that supports the needs of particular groups, even the politically powerful or those in the majority, while reminding everyone that we are all part of the same social and civic fabric. As such, targeted universalist policies are more resistant to the critique that government programs serve special interests, whoever that might be (**powell et al.**, 2019, p. 5–6).

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