

What is educational equity?

Here is a simple but powerful definition:

Regardless of individual characteristics, identities, and circumstances, each and every student accesses and meaningfully participates in high-quality learning experiences that empower self-determination and reduce outcome disparities.

Modification of Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center, 2013

In this definition...

- Equity is considered to be a **condition** that educators and education systems strive to meet
- The condition of equity is not fully realized in most school districts, so the definition is usually thought of as an **intended outcome**.
- School districts are required by federal law to disaggregate student data and strive to close gaps between student groups.
- As the governing bodies of school districts, school boards have a legal obligation within their governance role to ensure this responsibility is undertaken.

As any parent of more than one child can attest, different children have different needs. Equity is about that simple and instinctive understanding that **each student needs different supports**, and that the same student may need extra support in one area but not in another, or at one point in time but not another time.

What do our communities need to know about educational equity, and how do we have productive conversations with them?

The concept of educational equity is not new. All school districts seek educational equity in a variety of ways and have for decades.

Federal, state and local funding has long sought to level the playing field so all students have what they need to be successful. For example, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965 to provide federal support for low-income students.

The term “educational equity” is closely associated with the “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB) legislation that was led by former President George W. Bush and signed into law in 2002. This watershed moment in U.S. education policy established clear requirements for school districts to not only disaggregate student achievement data by race, income and other student characteristics, but also to close achievement gaps where they exist. Many districts have revisited and renewed their local efforts to close these gaps as required by the 2015 passage of Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which further advanced the intent of NCLB.

At a state level, pupil transportation funds provide the means for districts to bus students to eliminate transportation barriers for students and families. Locally, your school district levy is used to fund programs that are important to your community, such as expanded music or agriculture programs, specialized staffing or Pre-K programs, among many other options that help your students thrive.

Here are just a few examples of programs, laws and/or funding that support educational equity in Washington state public school districts:

Program • Law • Funding FEDERAL/STATE/LOCAL	Designed to support	Objective
Title I funding FEDERAL	Students from low-income households	Supplement (not supplant) state and local funding to ensure students from low-income families succeed academically
IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act) FEDERAL/LOCAL	Students with disabilities	Support the needs of students with disabilities between the ages of 3 and 21
McKinney-Vento STATE/FEDERAL	Students experiencing homelessness	Ensure that children and youth experiencing homelessness are able to attend and fully participate in school
Student Discipline Data STATE	Students experiencing school disciplinary measures	Collect and disaggregate data by race, student characteristics, and program types to uncover and disproportionate discipline rates
Bilingual & Transitional Bilingual Programs - Title III, Part A STATE/FEDERAL	English-language learners	Improve and enhance the education of English language learners (ELLs) and immigrant students by helping them attain English proficiency
Advanced Placement (AP) College in the High School (CIHS) International Baccalaureate (IB) STATE/LOCAL	Highly-capable/academically advanced students	Accelerate learning and provide advanced opportunities for students identified as Highly Capable.
Small High Funding Formula Small School Construction Grants STATE	Small school districts	Provide extra resources to support small and non-high school districts in providing comprehensive programs, services and facilities
Free and reduced-price meals FEDERAL	Students from low-income households	Ensure students receive meals at school regardless of ability to pay
Pupil Transportation STATE/LOCAL	All students	Provide free and safe transport for all students to and from school and school activities
Language Access STATE/LOCAL	All students	Ensure that families can fully engage in their child's education by receiving communications from schools in the language spoken at home
Children of Military Families STATE	Students from active duty and reserve military families	Support military youth in schools and communities before, during, and after the deployment of a parent or loved one
Career & Technical Education (CTE) STATE	All students, including those who are not college-bound	Provide students with hands-on education and training to create job and leadership skills and career goals right out of high school
List examples from your school district		