Building Equity Through MICIP

A Toolkit to Support Continuous Improvement Leaders, Facilitators, and Team Members

September 2022

Contents

There are a variety of definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. The Michigan Department of Education's working definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion are simply these:

- Diversity means differences or variety; there could be differences or variety of students, teachers, families, or programs.

- Inclusion means welcoming others. It also means individuals feeling like they belong rather than being marginalized or disregarded.

- Equity means fairness and access; we recognize that barriers exist and work to ensure that students and adults have fair opportunities and access to education and resources.

When applying a continuous improvement lens, a diversity of individuals results in a diversity of programs, policies, practices, and opportunities. When policies, practices, and opportunities are designed for those with the most barriers to succeed through a process of innovation and improvement, education will be more equitable.

The work of the Great Lakes and Plains Equity Center has influenced the application of equity to the educational setting. The Center refers to equity as follows: When educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people so that each individual has access to, meaningfully participates in, and has positive outcomes from high-quality learning experiences, regardless of individual characteristics and group memberships. (Fraser, 2008; Great Lakes Equity Center, 2012)

Finally, the National Equity Project has stated the definition very succinctly: Educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop their full academic and social potential.

Equality	Equity	Justice

Image source: MobilizeGreen.org

The assumption is that **everyone benefits from the same supports**. This is equal treatment.

Everyone get the supports they need (this is the concept of "affirmative action"), thus producing equity.

All 3 can see the game without supports or accommodations because **the cause(s) of the inequity was addressed**. The systemic barrier has been removed.

Various graphics have been used to represent the distinction between equality and equity. This graphic demonstrates an environment where barriers are removed and fewer supports are necessary for equitable opportunities. However, we are not just striving for equity; we are also striving for justice, where everyone not only gets the supports they need to access opportunities, but where the cause of the inequitable opportunities is addressed so that supports become no longer necessary.

> *"Diversity is being asked to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance. Equity is giving everyone the supports they need to be able to dance. Justice is removing the barriers to dance." Miscellaneous Authors*

The authors of *Street Data* talk about the necessity of reorienting ourselves to working toward equity, or ensuring equally high outcomes for all, by

- Allocating resources (tools, time, money, people, support) to ensure every child gets what they need to succeed to thrive socially, emotionally, and intellectually.
- Cultivating the unique gifts, talents, and interests that every person possesses. (*Street Data*, p. 29)

The National Equity Project identifies internal actions that contribute to addressing equity.

- Assess the culture of your district/organization
- Conduct an equity audit of your system – activate and center student voice; engage your parents, families, and community
- Develop a strategic plan
- Eliminate unfair policies, practices, and procedures
- Hold your staff accountable
- Prioritize the well-being of your students and staff

When engaging in the equity conversation, it is important to remember that this is a process that takes time and requires courage. It is not a topic for a single meeting or even for a single year. It requires ongoing commitment by the organizational leadership and skills for those who are leading the work. It requires both personal and organizational work. It requires an ongoing organizational commitment to transformation and change for those who are leading and enacting the work. This requires both personal and high-quality professional learning over time. It also requires taking a systems view to ensure that policies, practices, and programs are fair.

Applying an Equity Lens to the Continuous Improvement Process

The questions that follow are meant to be part of a reflection process in which a district continuous improvement team would engage as part of applying an equity lens to building and implementing a continuous improvement plan. They also represent questions around which a building team would engage as it is implementing the plans assigned to them. They are meant to be integrated into continuous improvement work, not stand-alone conversations. They have been broken down into the various components of MICIP. In each case, it is critical that team members not only consider the questions but that they also consider the evidence or lack of evidence that causes them to answer the questions in certain ways. The questions are not exhaustive but are meant to start the conversation.

Vision, Mission, and Beliefs

In MICIP, vision, mission, and beliefs are defined as follows:

- Vision – Who do you choose to be? Where are you going?
- Mission – What will you choose to do? What will you do to get there?
- Beliefs – What will guide your actions?

The following questions apply to both the organization itself as well as to the individuals who work for it.

1. What is the "why" of the organization? To what extent is fairness and access part of that why? Is the why well-articulated so that all in the organization can understand and apply it to decisions that effect the culture? What are the shared values and beliefs around ensuring fairness and access in the daily work? What is the sense of urgency and the recognition of the need for fairness now?

2. To what extent have staff members examined their own belief systems about other adults, about children and each child's ability to learn, about their work as educators, the organization, and those whom they serve (adults, children, the community)?

3. To what extent is the system/are adults committed to prioritize relationships with both other adults and with students, to know all children well, including what they bring to the learning situation - what assets they bring, what their challenges are, what supports they need to live up to their potential – including their cultural and societal identities and the impact on the process of learning? To what extent do organizational practices embrace welcoming and belonging for its members?

MICIP Mindset

Continuous Improvement   **Whole Child**   **Systems Thinking**

Equity   Equity   Equity

Equity

Opportunities, Environments, and Supports

MICIP
MICHIGAN INTEGRATED CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS

In MICIP, mindset refers to equity, continuous improvement, Whole Child, and systems thinking. While on one hand, equity is one of four mindsets and has its own characteristics, it is also the lens through which we look at the other three. A critical role of each piece of the mindset is to suggest whose voices need to be part of the conversation and which data needs to be considered.

Equity

The Michigan Department of Education definition of equity has been referenced above. Questions such as those below emanate from that definition.

1. To what extent does the organization recognize that barriers exist and to what extent is it committed to removing them?

2. To what extent are people with different identities valued, leveraged, and welcomed into the organization?

3. To what extent do we listen to the voices of those who are impacted by our policies and practices, especially those who are traditionally under-represented?

4. Do all students and adults receive access to opportunities, welcoming environments, and supports to foster belonging through fair distribution of resources?

Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is defined as moving from classrooms and schools as independent entities to recognizing the role that district-organized and supported systems play in student success, including systems that have more direct impact on student learning (e.g., curriculum, instruction, assessment, data, student support, technology) as well as those that support education more generally (e.g., leadership, communication, human resources, finance, transportation, food service). It also refers to the extent that those system components are interdependent and aligned and working together to bring desired results.

1. Whose interests are being served well by our organization and systems and whose are not? How do we know?

2. What are the systems barriers (policies, practices, opportunities, structures) preventing identified groups from being able to access, be represented in, meaningfully participate in, and achieve positive outcomes from quality instruction and learning opportunities?

3. To what extent does the continuous improvement team have the knowledge and skills to use an equity lens to examine the system?

4. To what extent does the entire staff reflect the identities of our student body and community?

5. To what extent do staff gifts and abilities align with the needs of the students?

6. To what extent does each student have access to strong leadership?

Whole Child

The Whole Child is defined as moving from a singular focus on academic needs to recognizing the importance of also addressing the physical, social, emotional, and behavioral needs of both students and adults with the support of the community.

1. To what extent do we understand whole child needs, both through collecting "hard data" as well as collecting perception data by truly hearing the voices of the students and adults?

2. How can we leverage the components of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model to ensure fair opportunities and welcoming environments for all learners?

3. To what extent do we provide a physically and emotionally safe and positive school climate for all students?

4. To what extent do we differentiate supports through the equitable distribution of resources, including in all areas of the Whole Child?

5. To what extent do we define school behavior with our community? What are our methods of teaching school behavior? How do we reteach and recognize school behavior in an affirming way? To what extent do we help students and adults see their behavior as part of community and the need to restore relationships when behavior brings harm to the community or environment?

6. To what extent do we remove barriers so that students have equitable access to participate in extra-curricular opportunities related to all areas of the Whole Child?

7. To what extent does the school community foster relationships with students, families, and their communities?

Continuous Improvement

Continuous improvement in MICIP is defined as moving from one annual cycle to on-going cycles of improvement planned and implemented by a district-wide community of improvement.
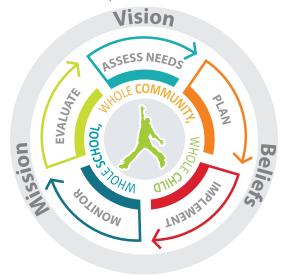
1. To what extent is our continuous improvement team representative of the population that it serves? To what extent can continuous improvement team members use an equity lens to understand and participate in the continuous improvement process?

2. To what extent are we truly a team that values and is committed to the success of each individual or are we a collection of individuals and schools advancing our own interest?

3. To what extent do we support continuous improvement for:

   • our students, giving them the supports they need to learn in ways that will enable them to succeed?
   • adults, supporting them with what they need to grow in their craft?

   "Our approaches to data collection are just as important as any insight, understanding, or actions that emerge. Listening deeply and responsively will help us build relational capital and trust and shift the culture as we gather data." Street Data, 71

MICIP Continuous Improvement Cycle

Assess Needs

1. How might re-framing continuous improvement inquiry from a focus on perceiving students as the "problem" to a focus on locating system barriers at the classroom, school, district, and state levels affect the type of data might educators collect and how data are collected?

2. Who is choosing the data we collect/explore? Are all represented in the process of choosing the data?

3. To what extent are we measuring the opportunity gap (inputs) in addition to achievement gap (outputs) as well as the

relationship between them?

4. Do we collect and analyze data regarding both students' needs and students' assets? Do we know enough about students who may be different from us to be able to recognize their assets? To what extent do we know how to leverage assets to address challenges/growth edges?

5. To what extent are we willing to reflect on our way of knowing for root causes? How do we assure our assumptions are not limiting what we choose as causes? Do we look at root causes with team members who themselves experienced barriers in schooling?

6. To what extent does our data process allow us to know our individual students deeply and authentically, in addition to looking at groups/averages?

7. What data will help measure access/lack of access in systems, outcomes, and resources, both human and financial? Do we have the right tools to access/collect such data?

8. To what extent does our data dialogue process encourage us to analyze and interpret data with fairness?

9. How will we assess how students, parents and the community perceive their own needs and assets? How will we gather perception data from those impacted by our educational practices?

10. When making decisions using data, do we ask who will benefit from the decisions and who will not, and plan supports to mitigate the gap? Do we include those most likely to face barriers in the decision process?

To further explore this area, consider consulting the Data System Integrity Tool for Equity-Focused Decisions from the Great Lakes Equity Center.

Data System Integrity Tool for Equity-Focused Decisions

The purpose of this guidance document is to support teams in determining the extent to which equity-centered metrics useful for strategic planning and continuous improvement activities are identified and leveraged.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS	ACCESS	REPRESENTATION	MEANINGFUL PARTICIPATION	POSITIVE OUTCOMES
Are there inequities in student access, representation, participation,& positive outcomes?	Early learning Programs	PreK Programs Enrollment	Student attendance in higher track courses and/or CTE programs	Academic Performance
What do we know already?	Program Placement	Teacher/Student Demographic Comparison	Student participation in co-curricular/extra curricular or enrichment activities	Behavior
How do we know it? What types of data help us to know what we know?	Effective Educators	Students' enrollment in higher level/advanced courses	Interests and perspectives expressed by youth and adults reflected in school and district policy decisions	Attendance
What do we need to know more about?	Teacher Attendance	Variety of co-curricular and extra-curricular offers representing the specific interests of student groups		Graduation, diploma type & School Push Out Rates
Can we leverage existing data structures or systems to collect, analyze and share these data? If so, which ones?	Quality curricular resources/ Technology	Non-stereotypical & authentic representation of minoritized groups in curricular content across course subjects in fiction and non-fiction material	Student engagement in classroom instruction	Perception of School Climate and Culture
	Safe, clean, functioning & inviting school environments			Grade Passing Rate/Credit Hours Attainment
How can we obtain or create needed data structures or systems to fill in our data gaps?	Timely, effective academic, socio-emotional & behavior supports	Presence of youth and adults in decision-making and leadership structures/opportunities		Post-secondary employment and/or college/university/ career training enrollment

*Disaggregate data by student group or bind data by school student demographics. Disproportional representation may indicate systemic inequities.

Recommended citation: Skelton, S. M., & Gorman, T. (2021). *Data system integrity tool for equity-focused decisions.* Midwest & Plains Equity Assistance Center.

1 | P a g e

A PROJECT OF

Skelton, S. M., & Gorman, T. (2021). Data System Integrity Tool for Equity-Focused Decisions. [Graph]

Plan

1. What changes will we make to policies, practices, structures, opportunities and/or new understanding and knowledge to transform our system so that barriers to equitable implementation and outcomes are addressed?

2. What strategies will we put in place to ensure equity/address inequities at the system level?

3. How will we gather input from various populations regarding their perceptions of how best to address their needs? Are members of groups who have been historically or are currently marginalized included in planning?

4. What strategies will we put in place to ensure each student has access to engaging, standards-aligned, culturally responsive curriculum and instruction, with resources that reflect the diversity of the student body?

5. What does the research/evidence say about the impact on various populations of the strategies we are considering? What does it say about the flexibility to adjust the strategies to address the needs of the target population without negatively impacting outcomes?

6. How will we ensure that each student has equal access to coursework that will set them up for post-secondary success?

7. How will we ensure that all students receive high quality tier one direct instruction and those that truly need it receive tier two and tier three instruction? How will we ensure that student groups are not disproportionately represented in tiers two and three?

8. How will we ensure that we have high expectations for all students and that all students have high-quality deep learning experiences?

9. To what extent is professional learning in support of access for all students delivered, coached, and sustained?

10. What data will we use to monitor and evaluate strategies to ensure equity in systems and in outcomes and to prevent unintended negative consequences from disproportionately affecting certain student groups?

11. How will we ensure sufficient and fair distribution of resources and supports - including human, financial, material, and technological – for both students and adults?

12. How will we leverage community resources to increase opportunities to build on assets and meet the needs of all students and families?

13. How will we communicate to all stakeholders to ensure fair access to information, services, and resources?

Implement, Monitor, Evaluate

1. Are we implementing strategies as planned? Have problematic policies, practices, and structures changed to support equitable outcomes? Are all students benefiting from the effects of the implemented strategies/changes?

2. What is our data telling us about access within systems and indicators/outcomes?

3. Are we collecting perception data from those impacted by our educational practices? How do we ensure that the voices of those most difficult to hear due to barriers to engage or the message shared are listened to?

4. What must be adjusted based on our data? How will we ensure that adjustments will not have unintended negative consequences for certain student groups?

A set of resources to support this work can be found on the MICIP website under Resources/Resources from the Field/Equity. Inclusion in the list does not imply endorsement by MDE.

References

Safir, S., and Dugan, J. (2021). *Street Data: A Next-Generation Model for Equity, Pedagogy, and School Transformation* (First ed.). Corwin.

Skelton, S., & Gorman, T. (2022). *Data System Integrity Tool for Equity-Focused Decisions*. [Graph].