



RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

DATA INFORM OUR PROGRESS TOWARD EQUITY

► THE REPORTS

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The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine.

(2019). *Monitoring educational equity.*

The National Academies Press. doi.org/10.17226/25389

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Acting to dismantle structural racial inequities begins with identifying and clearly naming the challenges we face. Data play a powerful role in this process. Several recent publications synthesize data sources, research findings, and expert recommendations to inform and guide equity improvement efforts. They can make a sizable contribution to our understanding of where we are, why we need to make change, and how far we need to go to ensure access to opportunity for all students.

UNDERSTANDING INEQUITIES

One of these syntheses is a five-part *Statement of the Evidence* volume produced by the Society for Research in Child Development in September 2020. It includes two-page summaries of research on students from each of five demographic groups — American Indian and Alaska Native, Asian American, Black, Latinx, and LGBTQ+ — in the era of COVID-19. The briefs highlight longstanding inequities and the disproportionate impact of the pandemic on marginalized communities. They also summarize evidence-based practices and policies for improving equitable teaching and learning for marginalized students.

These briefs can inform professional learning about how to reach each student in the wake of the COVID-19 crisis. Taken as a set, the briefs make a case for investing in professional learning about bias reduction, understanding racial trauma and the history of underresourced communities and students, culturally responsive instruction that is based on knowledge and understanding of students' backgrounds and needs, and building engaged and interactive relationships, as well addressing social and emotional issues exacerbated by COVID-19 and improving weaknesses in remote instruction that disproportionately impact marginalized students.

In addition, each brief's discussion of the research about learning challenges among student groups can provide content for professional learning tailored to local context and needs. The specific focus of the learning could range from strengthening understanding among educators about the model minority myth that negatively impacts Asian American students' support-seeking behaviors, to the impact that recent race-related traumas and social isolation have had on Black Americans, to the fact that Latinx families report higher food insecurities than the national average.

These data could also be useful in helping educators understand their students' cultures and home lives. For example, many educators would benefit from knowing that Asian Americans experienced the largest percentage increase in unemployment rates across racial groups from February to June 2020. In addition, anti-Asian sentiments related to the association of COVID-19 with China can negatively impact students' mental health, an especially challenging reality given that Asian Americans are less likely than non-Hispanic white Americans to seek mental health support. Professional learning about recognizing mental health concerns and connecting to school-based mental health programs and community health care providers could therefore be beneficial.

Along those same lines, many educators will benefit from knowing that, as of July 2020, up

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to 40% of COVID-19 cases in New Mexico were among American Indian people, despite the fact that American Indians are only 9% of the population in that state. These findings suggest that a large percentage of American Indian students have been directly touched by COVID-19 and may have experienced trauma that impacts their social, emotional, and academic well-being. Black students may be affected by the fact that unemployment related to COVID-19 has disproportionately impacted their home lives.

The briefs highlight the need for professional learning that increases educators' understanding of how to use

this type of information about students' contexts to meet their academic and social-emotional needs, whether through in-person learning, remote learning, or connecting with other services and the larger community. For example, the brief focused on LGBTQ+ students notes the importance of educators developing respectful and affirming relationships and interactions with these (and all) students, as well as advocating for inclusive policies and practices.

It is important to note, however, that while educators should be aware of and informed by trend data, they should be careful to avoid making

assumptions or sweeping generalizations about individual students based on that data. One of the roles of professional learning for equity is to contextualize national and regional research with local data collected at the district, school, classroom, and student levels.

Another is to help educators understand how to use that knowledge in responsive ways. For instance, knowing that 84% of Latinx caregivers have jobs that do not allow them to work remotely can help educators in Latinx communities make sure they have plenty of school and community support available for students during remote learning. But educators should

never assume a student has no parental support.

Similarly, a high percentage of Latinx caregivers are English learners; that means schools should make translation services available but not assume that parents don't speak English. Students of similar backgrounds don't all live in the same contexts, but the data suggests that there are particular challenges to pay attention to in thinking about successful engagement and learning.

Examining and discussing similarities and differences among groups of students reminds us that no racial or ethnic group is a monolith. Considering how students may be experiencing points of intersectionality can impact the instructional and social-emotional supports they need.

MONITORING EQUITY

While the Society for Research in Child Development evidence briefs highlight existing data about inequities for specific marginalized groups of students, a consensus report from the American Educational Research Association and the National Academies provides a framework of indicators that educators can use to monitor equity in their own systems. *Monitoring Educational Equity* recommends ways for districts to measure both access to learning opportunities and progress toward student outcomes. The goal is to provide a comparable set of indicators that decision-makers can use to benchmark within and across systems and collaboratively measure progress.

The framework recommends 16 indicators across seven domains:

- Kindergarten readiness;
- K-12 learning and engagement;
- Educational attainment;
- Extent of racial, ethnic, and economic segregation;
- Equitable access to high-quality learning programs;
- Equitable access to high-quality curricula and instruction; and
- Equitable access to supportive school and classroom

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The framework for monitoring equity was featured in a panel discussion at the May 2021 AERA Annual Conference. The video can be found at: bit.ly/3fx5eAa.

environments.

Within these domains, specific indicators are supported and anchored in well-established and emerging research, with some indicators requiring additional study and development to be considered appropriate to a large scale.

Included are engagement in schooling, access to and performance in rigorous coursework, disciplinary policies, emotional climate in the classroom, access to mental and physical health screenings, and other indicators. For each indicator, the researchers recommend specific research measures for collecting data. They also acknowledge the need to incorporate additional local data to provide contextually relevant information and inform tailored interventions and responses.

It is important to note that these are measures of the equity of the system, not of individual students or educators. They are designed for decision-makers to examine patterns that span sites and contexts, with the researchers calling for indicators to be monitored across a system as well as for research about where alternative practices are happening effectively.

The researchers acknowledge that qualitative research such as case studies will add nuance and complexity to what we can learn from large-scale research, especially with regard to nonacademic supports.

This framework of equity indicators is exciting because it spans a range of measures that represent the complexities of inputs and decisions required to create an equitable system and because it is designed to be applicable for practitioners and policymakers

balancing rigor and usefulness. There is an accompanying guidebook to facilitate its use.

It also calls for the resources needed to help policymakers implement and use the framework. The report includes recommendations for policymakers at the federal, state, and district levels as well as for a research agenda to support additional study.

ALIGNMENT TO STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

These rich equity research resources are in alignment with the Standards for Professional Learning in several ways. The specific data about inequities impacting diverse student populations in the Society for Research in Child Development *Statement of the Evidence* briefs provides **Data** to inform professional learning design and implementation. These data briefs could also provide content for professional learning study and discussion. The centering of student outcomes and their connection to school inputs in the *Monitoring Educational Equity* framework is consistent with the **Outcomes** standard.

Looking across standards, Society for Research in Child Development, American Educational Research Association, and National Academies recognize the importance of a coherent set of goals and indicators across a system, much like the standards do for professional learning measures and goals.

In addition, the equity resources engage with the complexities of improving an entire system by focusing on shared targets for improvement, much like the resources aligned to the standards. The revised Standards for Professional Learning, to be released in 2022, will include additional information and guidance related to the conditions, drivers, and practices that lead to equity and how professional learning is a critical lever for addressing inequities across and throughout a system. ■