

Moving Into The Mainstream:



From
"Equity A Separate Concept"
To
"High Quality Includes All"

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Collaboration for Equity
Fairness in Science and Mathematics Education

As equity advocates we know how race/ethnicity, gender, and physical disability impact educational opportunities and participation. Our awareness of these issues has grown dramatically in the last twenty-five years and while we've made progress addressing these issues, with that progress has come new and different problems. Yesterday's assumptions and solutions have moved us to where we are today and given us a foundation on which to address today's issues. However, if we adhere unquestioningly to those assumptions and solutions, they can become tomorrow's problems.

Questioning our own assumptions, and the solutions based on those assumptions, has moved us away from the idea of educational equity as a separate concept to the idea that high quality education must include all. The following provides an overview of the thinking behind this change.



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From: Access and treatment at the core of accountability

To: OUTCOMES AT THE CORE OF ACCOUNTABILITY

We no longer believe it is enough to provide equal opportunity and access to mathematics and science education for all students. As important as opportunity and access are, the focus must be on outcomes. All students--independent of their race/ethnicity, gender or physical disability--must attain strong mathematics and science skills. An educational system that can not do this, is not of high quality, no matter how well some percentage of its students achieve.

We do not believe that equal treatment for all students is the path to high quality. Different children learn differently and may need different instructional strategies for each of them to be successful in mathematics and science. However, these different needs cannot be used as an excuse to track students in or out of advanced mathematics and science. Not all students will achieve at the same level, however in a high quality school, differences in achievement will not be based on race/ethnicity, gender or physical disability. If students' achievement can be predicted by their gender, race/ethnicity or physical ability, then the system is inequitable and must be changed.

From: Process as the key.

To: PROCESS AS A TOOL TO HELP UNDERSTAND OUTCOMES

When the focus of equity is on treatment, there is a resulting emphasis on process--on what is being done, on doing the "right" program, on acting the "right" way, or on using the "right" strategy. While how things are done is important, results are of greater importance. Process is not an end in itself. Rather understanding process is a way to help determine why things do and don't work and to improve results. There is no one "right" way to treat students or to teach science and mathematics. There are many different ways to effectively reach students.

From: Equity specialist responsible.

To: TEACHERS AND OTHERS RESPONSIBLE

When accountability is based on outcomes, it becomes everyone's responsibility. The equity specialist continues to play an important role, especially in the dissemination of knowledge and resources. However the responsibility for equity, for high quality, for achievement of all students does not belong to the equity specialist. It belongs to the teachers and the principal and their performance evaluation should be based on the degree to which they meet their responsibility.

From: Focus on special programs.

To: FOCUS ON THE SCHOOL AS A WHOLE.

Special programs need to become laboratories for trying out new ideas, rather than providing remediation or “enrichment” for some under served students. Instructional strategies for reaching all students with high quality content needs to be a part of every classroom, not a pull-out, after school or lunch program for a few students.

From: Consequences of failure impact on students.

To: CONSEQUENCES OF FAILURE IMPACT ON STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS.

The consequences of failure have tended to fall on students. When schools and students fail, students don't learn and, because of that lack of learning, are limited in their lives. Some believe that failure is inevitable for particular students, especially those of color or from low income backgrounds, and thus it isn't the educators' “fault”. While failure will continue to have the strongest impact on students; teachers, principals and whole schools should, and increasingly do, suffer consequences of failure through negative evaluations, pay cuts, dissolution of schools or even loss of tenure.

From: Disaggregated data as a tool for identifying problems.

To: DISAGGREGATED DATA AS A TOOL FOR IDENTIFYING PROBLEMS AND THE SUCCESS OF SOLUTIONS.

An essential component of equity efforts has been to break down participation and achievement data by race and gender. Until that information was available, the size, or even existence, of problems was not clear. For example, data reporting how African American boys or Latina girls are doing in Algebra gives us important information about both groups. It continues to be important to collect this data, to see if things changes over the years, to help us understand what is behind positive and negative changes, and to determine what strategies are reducing gender and race gaps while all students gain.

From: Without equity underrepresented groups lose.

To: WITHOUT EQUITY WE ALL LOSE.

Perhaps researcher Walter Secada¹ said it best: “Full participation in our most cherished democratic institutions, projections for civilian workforce and military needs and shifts in our country's and the world's economic systems all point to the need for everyone--not just for a few--to possess more and different mathematical and scientific literacy than is currently made available in the schools.”

¹ Secada, Walter. (1992). Race, ethnicity, social class, language and achievement in mathematics. In Douglas Grouws, (ed.) *Handbook of Research on Mathematics Teaching and Learning*. New York: Macmillan, pp 623-624.

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Yesterday Equity Meant

Today High Quality Means

Access and treatment
core
were at the core of
accountability.

Outcomes are at the
of accountability.

Process was key.

Process is a tool to help
understand outcomes.

Equity specialist was
responsible.

Teachers and others are
responsible.

Focus was on special
programs.

Focus is on the school as
a whole.

Consequences of failure
impacted on students.

Consequences of failure
impact on students,
teachers and schools.

Disaggregated data was a
tool for identifying
problems.

Disaggregated data is a
tool for identifying
problems and the success
of solutions.

Without equity under-
represented groups lose.

Without equity we all lose.