



Guiding Principle I: Every student has the right to learn.

It is our collective responsibility as an education community to make certain each child receives a high-quality, challenging education designed to maximize potential, an education that reflects and stretches his or her abilities and interests. This belief in the right of every child to learn forms the basis of equitable teaching and learning. The five principles that follow cannot exist without this commitment guiding our work.

Every student's right to learn provides the overarching vision for Wisconsin's Guiding Principles for education. To be successful, education must be committed to serving the learning needs of students from various social, economic, cultural, linguistic, and developmental backgrounds. For all students to have a guaranteed right to learn, schooling must be equitable.

Research Summary

Focusing on Equity

The belief that each student has the right to learn despite differences in educational needs and backgrounds has important implications for ensuring an equitable education for all students. In the education research literature, the term *educational equality* refers to the notion that all students should have access to an education of similar quality—the proxy for which is frequently educational *inputs* such as funding, facilities, resources, and quality teaching and learning. In contrast, the term *educational equity* connotes the requirement that all students receive an education that allows them to achieve at a standard level or attain standard educational *outcomes* (Brighthouse & Swift, 2008). Importantly, equality in terms of educational resources or inputs may not guarantee equity in educational outcomes because not all students reach the same level of achievement with the same access to resources (Brighthouse & Swift, 2008). To serve students of varying economic, social, developmental, or linguistic backgrounds, achieving equity in education may require more resources to meet the greater educational needs of certain students (Berne & Stiefel, 1994).

The research literature offers several components that provide a framework for understanding what an equitable education for all students looks like at the classroom level. These components include a call for all students to be provided with the following:

- Access to resources and facilities
- Instruction in all areas tailored to their needs
- Curriculum that is rigorous and relevant
- Educators who are culturally sensitive and respectful
- Interactions with staff and other students that are positive and encouraging in an atmosphere of learning
- Assessment that is varied to give each student the opportunity to demonstrate learning (Education Northwest, 2011)

Access

Access to resources and facilities largely refers to various legal mandates that all children have the right to attend school and participate in all school activities. Since the landmark ruling *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* (1954), court decisions and federal regulations have mandated equality of access to all educational opportunities for students regardless of race, ethnicity, or gender (Civil Rights Act, 1964), disability (Education for All Handicapped Children Act, 1975), or language (*Lau v. Nichols*, 1974). Equity in the provision of educational resources and funding was improved with the passage of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA; 1965), which provided additional resources for economically disadvantaged students to meet their learning needs. Since Title I, research on equity in education has grown, and with the reauthorization of ESEA in the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, equity in educational outcomes for all students was emphasized in the law. Access to an equitable education is a legal right for all children, and the quality of that access in classroom instruction is a moral and ethical right.



Instruction

Instruction that is tailored to meet all students' needs goes beyond simply providing equal access to education. High-quality instruction has increasingly been defined in the literature as a key factor in student achievement. High-quality instruction includes differentiated instructional strategies, teaching to students' learning styles, and provision of instructional support for students who are educationally, socially, or linguistically challenged. Differentiated instruction involves utilizing unique instructional strategies for meeting individual student needs as well as modifying curriculum for both high- and low-performing students. Assessing and teaching to student learning styles is one form of differentiation. Research has shown the value of adapting instructional strategies to different student learning styles (Gardner, 1999) and supports the practice of classroom differentiation (Mulroy & Eddinger, 2003; Tomlinson, 2005).

Curriculum

Designing curriculum that is rigorous and relevant provides an important foundation for a high-quality learning environment by helping make standards-based content accessible to all students. A relevant, rigorous curriculum has been found to be important for all students. Although advanced and rigorous curriculum is generally viewed to be an important factor of academic success for high-achieving students, research also indicates that using challenging, interesting, and varied curriculum for students of all achievement levels improves student achievement (Daggett, 2005). Rigorous curriculum can be adapted for low-performing students in a way that challenges them and helps them meet learning standards. For example, the universal design for learning (UDL) offers strategies for making the general curriculum accessible to special education students (Rose, Hasselbring, Stahl, & Zabala, 2009). Similarly, research on lesson scaffolding emphasizes strategies for providing a rigorous content curriculum to student who are culturally or linguistically diverse or who need additional context to understand certain concepts (Gibbons, 2002).

Climate

Interactions with staff and students that are positive and focused on learning are part of an emotionally safe school climate, but the literature also supports the need for a climate of high academic expectations (Haycock, 2001). Schools with large numbers of high-poverty and racially diverse students have shown significant academic growth when teachers and staff members create an environment of high expectations for achievement (Reeves, 2010). In addition, research on school climate has asserted the need for students to feel emotionally safe and respected as well as physically safe in school (Gronna & Chin-Chance, 1999).

A positive, respectful learning environment with high expectations and curricular and instructional supports for all students offers an avenue to genuine educational equity.

Probing Questions

- What are some of the needs and challenges your school faces in moving toward a fully equitable education for all students?
- How could you provide leadership in your school to work to ensure an equitable education for all students?



Resources

A variety of resources are available for teachers and leaders on educational equity for all students. A few websites and links are highlighted below:

The School Improvement Center developed activities to help districts develop an equity framework. These resources can be found at *Actualizing Equity: The Equity Framework*: http://www.gapsc.com/EducatorPreparation/NoChildLeftBehind/Admin/Files/conference_032010/Actualizing_Equity.pdf.

The Education Equality Project developed a website with useful resources for educators. It can be found at <http://www.edequality.org>.

The Equity Center has a website with a variety of resources. The resources can be found at <http://educationnorthwest.org/project/Equity%20Program/resource/>.

The Midwest Equity Assistance Center has a website with many resources. It can be found at <http://www.meac.org/Publications.html>.

The Office for Civil Rights has a useful website for educators. It can be found at <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/index.html>.

Southern Poverty Law Center, Teaching Tolerance Program. Resources can be found at <http://www.splcenter.org/what-we-do/teaching-tolerance>.

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