



LEADING FOR EQUITY

A Practical Framework
for Board Discussion and Action

“Leading for Equity: A Practical Framework for Board Discussion and Action” was developed by the Arizona School Boards Association to assist school district governing boards in their work to achieve greater equity within their school systems and, in doing so, ensure personal or social circumstances such as gender, ability, ethnic origin, economic circumstance or family background of students are not obstacles to achieving their educational potential.

The framework includes five essential and interrelated areas through which school boards can lead for equity.

- Defining Equity within Your Community
- Get Familiar with Your Demographics
- Dig into Your Data and Identify Opportunities for Improvement
- Practice Cultural Awareness, Agility & Competence
- Make Sure the Student Voice Is Heard

Elements within the framework can be approached non-sequentially and are intended to provide doorways that enable boards to enter and engage in leadership for equity based on their local needs and readiness.

Each element in the framework includes key questions to consider and guide discussion (“Think About”), as well as a call to consider the role of individual board members and the full board in ensuring that greater equity is achieved.

The “Leading for Equity” framework is best used in a study or work session, digging into one element at a time, or a facilitated board retreat, during which the district leadership team can work through the full framework or several selected areas.

The Arizona School Boards Association (www.azsba.org) is a private, non-profit, non-partisan organization that cultivates excellence in locally governed school districts by providing training, leadership and essential services to public school governing boards statewide. More than 240 governing boards, representing nearly 1 million Arizona students, are members of ASBA.



Define Equity within Your Community

Equity and equality are often used interchangeably, but they're actually distinct ideas. Equality means every student and school gets the same access and opportunity to reach set goals. Equity recognizes that some students and schools need additional or different supports to help them reach the same benchmarks of success.

Think About

Does our district leadership team (board and superintendent) understand the difference between equity and equality?

Do teachers and other district staff?

Does the community?

Is equity a part of our district's vision and mission, either implicitly or explicitly?

Is financial equity being discussed at our board table?

I Can...

Example: Suggest a study session to discuss equity versus equality and how it relates to our vision and mission.

The Board Can...

Example: Request a survey of staff to determine the level of understanding of equity in education.

Get Familiar with Your Demographics

Understanding the different groups your district serves and in what proportion is foundational knowledge for equity-focused discussion and decision-making.

Think About

Our students...

- How many students live in poverty?
- How many qualify for free or reduced price lunch?
- What is the breakdown of racial and ethnic backgrounds of our students?
- How many are in special education programs?
- How many are classified as English Language Learners?
- How many are homeless?
- What are the differences in demographics by school?

Our teachers...

- What is the breakdown of racial and ethnic backgrounds of our teachers? Is it different by school?
- Does the level and teacher experience and quality differ by school?
- What is the breakdown of your teaching staff by age?

Our community...

- How different are the demographics of the over 18 population of our community from the under-18 population?
- How about between our students' parents and community members with no children in our schools?

I Can...

Example: Request data from the superintendent on the number of students living in poverty and ask to observe school-based programs in place to help ensure students' basic life needs are being met.

The Board Can...

Example: Request an annual overview about student subgroups districtwide and by school.

Dig into Your Data and Identify Opportunities for Improvement

Think about the goals you have set for your district's students and how you'll be measuring their success. Look at your current data to see how you're doing by these measures up across the board. Then begin looking at student subgroups to identify focused efforts and additional, targeted supports that will be needed to "move the needle" past your current baseline.

Think About

How are students within various subgroups doing when it comes to proficiency in reading and math?

How about by GPA and SAT and ACT scores?

What about graduation rate?

Are the students taking AP and dual-enrollment classes representative of their school and our district?

How about the students participating in extracurricular activities?

Are certain student subgroups frequently absent or tardy?

What are our district's discipline patterns by subgroups?

Do we have policies that are barriers to students' success?

I Can...

Example: Learn more about how our discipline policies are applied and research alternatives like restorative justice.

The Board Can...

Example: Have a study session to review trends by student subgroups, such as special education, ELL and/or race/ethnicity, in levels and frequency of discipline and the potential impact on student achievement.

Practice Cultural Awareness, Agility & Competence

Systems are most effective when they respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, ethnic backgrounds, religions and other diversity factors in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities, and protects and preserves the dignity of each. Public schools and districts are no exception.

Think About

Are our school environments welcoming to and respectful of students and families from all the populations we serve, including LGBTQ students?

Are our curriculum materials culturally relevant to our students?

Does our teaching staff reflect the cultures and backgrounds of the students and families we serve?

Is professional development about the cultures and backgrounds of students we serve a priority for teaching and non-teaching staff?

Are district-level community committees reflective of the diversity of our community?

Is our school board reflective of the diversity of our community?

I Can...

Example: Encourage and invite diverse members of the community to participate in district-level committees and attend board meetings.

The Board Can...

Example: Ensure culture relevancy is included in any discussion of curricular materials, including their adoption.

Make Sure the Student Voice Is Heard

Student achievement and engagement increase when students have more ownership of their school community and their own learning. Tapping their expertise and knowledge can bring relevance and authenticity to the board's and district's change and improvement efforts. Students benefit from opportunities to practice problem solving, leadership and creative thinking as part of a decision-making school and district community.

Think About

Are students partners in establishing school norms and practices?

Are students comfortable sharing their opinions in multigenerational environments?

Do students from all subgroups have leadership opportunities?

Is a diversity of student opinion not just tolerated, but sought out?

Do students have opportunities for their differences in culture and viewpoint to be cherished and appreciated, rather judged and feared?

Have we asked our students how we can serve them better?

I Can...

Example: Visit schools and attend student events, asking them about their experience and how it can be improved.

The Board Can...

Example: Set an expectation that a diversity of students is included in decision-making on substantive school and district issues.



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