

Title: Equity Inquiry Protocol

Attribution: Developed by Des Floyd at the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE)

Description: Participants will work in teams to engage in a series of questions to support strategic pre-planning efforts in schools and districts and to identify potential causes of inequity leading to underperformance.

Instructions: This protocol is guided by a set of community agreements upon which all participants must adhere to in order to make the most effective use of this structured activity. The norms are followed by a series of questions to help participants identify and prioritize the barriers to higher performance in schools and districts. Participants work in small teams of no more than 6-8 members and the focus of the activity should be agreed upon **prior to** engaging in the protocol.

Approximate duration of time: 2 to 2.5 hours

Community Agreements/Norms

- ❖ Share the air
- ❖ Honor time limits
- ❖ Stay low on ‘the ladder’
- ❖ Expect and accept non-closure
- ❖ Respect diversity of expression, perspectives, and ways of making meaning

Please identify the stakeholder planning team

Student	Teacher	Parent/Guardian	Administrator	Community/Business	Other

Focus of the Inquiry Activity: _____

Relevant data gathered prior to the session?: Yes or No

Questions to Guide the Pre-Planning Process

Understanding the Problem (Describe, Analyze) – 30 – 35 minutes

1. How would you describe your student body?
2. How would you describe your overall student body using data? How would you describe your subgroups using data? What disparities (if any) exist in outcomes between subgroups and the district's average in this area? What disparities (if any) exist in outcomes between subgroups and the state's average in this area?
3. If you were to prioritize the group(s) with the most sizeable gaps or differences, which group(s) are most deserving of immediate attention?
4. How would you describe their learning experiences (e.g. levels of engagement, levels of instruction (high/low), and levels of tasks or experiences with a rigorous curriculum)?



Preparing for the Problem (Anticipating Challenges, Utilizing Assets) – 30 – 35 minutes

5. What home and/or community-based challenges do the groups bring with them to school (e.g. high poverty, traumatic experiences)? What home and/or community-based assets do the groups bring with them to school (e.g. team-oriented, inventive, and resourceful)?
6. What school-based challenges are the groups likely to face (e.g. access to rigorous content, high teacher/principal turnover rates)?
7. What school-based assets can these groups draw upon (e.g. high teacher retention, strong family/community partnerships, or the school's art program)?
8. Which home and/or community-based challenge, if successfully addressed, is likely to influence outcomes in this focus area?
9. Which assets from school, home, or community can we draw upon to influence outcomes in this focus area?

Planning for the Problem (Activating the Planning Process) – 30 – 35 minutes

10. Which school-based challenge, if successfully addressed, is likely to influence outcomes in this focus area? Which assets from school, home, or community can we draw upon to influence outcomes for youth in this focus area?
11. What challenge influencing academic achievement outcomes must be addressed immediately? What evidence is there that this challenge is important to stakeholders outside of this stakeholder planning team?
12. What contribution can each stakeholder on the planning team make to influence outcomes for the group(s) in question?

Reflecting on Results – 10 – 15 minutes

-  Now, engage in a group reflection of the experience. Possible questions for reflection include,
How would you describe your overall experience / What theme(s) emerged during the discussion? / What areas of challenge remain?
-  It is important to note that an essential component of this exercise takes place when the stakeholder planning team reflects on results after completing a short (monthly, quarterly) cycle. Possible questions for reflection include,
What did we learn from what happened? / What did we learn from what did NOT happen? / What role did we play in affecting the results?

Equity Inquiry Activity

DIRECTIONS

1. Identify/list the stakeholder engagement group
2. Review the protocol
3. Determine a general focus for the practice activity and what data the group will need in advance of the session
4. Set community agreements/norms (see below)
5. Determine individual roles and responsibilities for members of the group
 - Facilitator
 - Time keeper
 - Note-taker
6. Engage in the protocol (follow the steps in the *Equity Inquiry Protocol*)
7. Reflect on the activity

Community Agreements

- ❖ Share the air – share the airtime as opposed to dominating the conversation and allow for equity in the amount of talk-time in groups.
- ❖ Honor time limits – start and stop on time so as not to disrupt the overall flow of the activity.
- ❖ Stay low on ‘the ladder’ – the *ladder of inference* describes a thinking process whereby individuals, without realizing it, rush from facts to action often drawing conclusions without much factual evidence. Remaining low on the ladder involves sitting longer on the descriptive/factual rung of the ladder before drawing conclusions and acting on the data.
- ❖ Expect and accept non-closure – expect that this exercise and others like it may require more time than we have to complete it. In the event that we are not able to complete the exercise in the time allotted, be able to *sit with this* fact despite feelings that things are incomplete or unfinished.
- ❖ Respect diversity of expression, perspectives, and ways of making meaning – people bring with them a wide range of knowledge, experiences, and ways of operating. Respect different ways of understanding and reflecting on knowledge, both old and new, and make room for such diversity as you work with others.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Equity Inquiry Protocol

The following is a set of frequently asked questions to provide additional clarity as well as support more effective practice using the activity to improve turnaround planning efforts.

1. When is the best time to establish a specific focus for the activity?

While it may seem best to establish a clear focus at the onset of the activity, determining a specific focus can narrow the scope of the pre-planning too early in the process. If your team begins with a narrow focus, it can prevent the stakeholder planning team from exploring other potential root causes and solutions. Instead of selecting a targeted or specific focus, select a broad focus for the activity (e.g. discipline, curriculum, student achievement, subgroups) and allow the inquiry to serve as your guide. A specific focus should be determined at the conclusion of the pre-planning exercise but before turnaround planning.

2. Is it necessary to have a representative from each listed stakeholder group present in order for the pre-planning activity to be effective?

It is not necessary to have a representative from each group. That said, if representation is lacking or the stakeholder planning group is extremely small, then the stakeholder planning group cannot benefit from the diversity of perspectives that will be needed to engage in thoughtful discussions in response to questions outlined in the activity.

3. Can we create our own set of norms or community agreements?

Absolutely. I would encourage you to add-to the norms rather than generate an entirely new set of community agreements to guide the work. The existing set have been found to be extremely useful especially the first time a stakeholder planning group is participating in this activity.

4. How much time should we spend in each category of questions (understanding the problem, preparing for the problem, planning for the problem, reflecting on results)?

It is suggested that the stakeholder team practice the exercise at least once before engaging in the exercise to use the information to inform turnaround planning. A half hour is more than enough time to gain practice. As the team becomes familiar with the protocol, devote more time to each section to ensure thoughtfulness and depth in responding to each question. The whole-group facilitator should set the time limits prior to the start of the exercise.

5. What if someone finds fault with way we describe the students?

This is why it is important to try-on the exercise first. As you practice, the whole-group facilitator can remind participants that assumptions may surface and statements may be made that warrant deeper discussions in the future. Participants can also be reminded that the protocol is designed to tease-out assumptions, beliefs, and underlying values that may not be known by all members of the stakeholder planning team. The exercise gives participants a chance to learn how to address such issues as they arise and to do so in a manner that is transparent as it will become clearer that everyone has some room to grow.

6. What if we cannot come up with any assets or what if we cannot make any connections between the assets and improved outcomes for students?

If your stakeholder group is diverse and includes members from various different groups (students, teachers, parents, business/community partners) then it is more likely that assets will surface. In the event you find yourselves struggling, name that as a challenge. That is, that students have assets that you are unaware of and that there is a great deal of room to grow in the area of asset-mapping. Also, it is not critical that you can make a direct connection between assets and your intended outcomes in real time. It is more important that you begin thinking of ways to ‘make room’ for students’ assets in school. The students will help make the connection over time and as you continue to revisit your actual turnaround plan, the connections between assets and outcomes will become clearer.

7. How often should we engage in this pre-planning activity, especially considering we will work on the turnaround plan throughout the year?

The protocol is intended to support short cycles of inquiry to be revisited throughout the year. In my experience, it works best as a quarterly exercise. Teams seem to get more out of engaging in a cycle that deepens over time, giving them time to reflect and act on their findings throughout the year rather than start entirely new cycles each quarter. Use the information that you learn from the cycles of inquiry and incorporate what you learn into your turnaround plan. This exercise is designed to not only assist you in turnaround planning but it will also support you in understanding your specific school context and responding to the immediate needs of your student body and staff instructional needs.

8. Will we become more culturally proficient the more we practice the equity inquiry protocol?

Cultural proficiency and *cultural responsiveness* are often used interchangeably. However, I view them quite differently. Cultural proficiency implies that one can ‘arrive’, so to speak, as one learns to become culturally competent in understanding cultural diversity and what makes people different (e.g. perspectives, language, ethnicity, socio-economic status). The idea is that we get better over time at understanding these differences. Cultural responsiveness, on the other hand, assumes an openness to adapt to the cultural needs with whom we work while also promoting a greater understanding of what makes people different (e.g. perspectives, language, ethnicity, socio-economic status). For example, a culturally competent teacher may understand that the instructional needs of English language learners who are not proficient in their first language may be different from the needs of English language learners who are proficient in their first language. A culturally responsive teacher will use this information to make adjustments in their daily instructional routines for every child in their classroom for whom this applies. This pre-planning protocol supports teams in becoming more culturally responsive by asking and answering questions to help teams learn their students and respond to their students’ specific needs, whatever they may be.

9. Where can I reach you if I have additional questions about the protocol, equity/racial equity, or turnaround planning?

If you have additional questions, comments, or would simply like to learn more about the evidence-base to support equitable inquiry in turnaround, you may contact me via email at drdesfloyd@gmail.com.

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