

Educational Equity and the Oregon Small Schools Initiative

Addressing the causes and consequences of the persistent academic achievement gap has been one of the primary goals of the Oregon's Small Schools Initiative. In fact, it has been said by professionals across the state that *the Oregon's Small Schools Initiative itself is a state wide equity strategy*. While there is no one definition of Educational Equity, OSSI has adopted the following as a working definition.

Working toward Educational Equity involves:

Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system; removing the predictability of success or failures that currently correlates with any social and cultural factors

Interrupting inequitable practices, eliminating biases and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children

Discovering the unique gifts, talents and interests that every human possesses

Bay Area Coalition of Equitable Schools

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- Ensuring high outcomes for all students requires much more than providing access to rigorous curriculum. It requires educators who believe and expect that all students are capable of achieving at high levels. And, it requires high and persistent support for students who may not believe in their own capacity, or who haven't previously been adequately challenged.
- Addressing equity in our small schools benefits all students. There is often a concern that addressing issues of equity places the emphasis on the historically underserved, while ignoring the needs of other students. Closing the persistent achievement gap is a primary goal identified by OSSI, and it has been important to stress our intention to *ensure equally high outcomes for all of our students*.

Interrupting inequitable practices, eliminating biases and creating inclusive multicultural school environments for adults and children

- Inequitable practices exist in most schools, many without our knowledge. As we delve deeply into this area, we discover multiple, historical, and institutional inequitable practices that are extremely difficult to interrupt because they have become 'the way' of school. Examples abound:

- To play in the school band, one must already know how to play an instrument. For many (most) students, music lessons and the purchase of an expensive musical instrument have not been remotely possible. They are excluded from the onset, with no alternatives to an instrumental music experience.
- To be accepted into an AP English class, students must have some or all of the following: High grades (A or B) in an ‘honors’ English class, permission of the AP teacher, recommendation(s) from other teachers. The subjectivity of grading (based often on behavior and compliance rather than learning) may unfairly disadvantage a student from taking an AP course. We have multiple barriers which restrict our under-served students from high-level coursework.

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- Because of the emotional potency of addressing inequities, we offer this aspect of the definition as an affirmation for staff who often feel that identifying inequities negates their commitment to all students and diminishes the hard work that they do everyday. We emphasize our belief that people come into this profession to *discover the unique gifts and talents of all students*. We acknowledge their amazing work and also remind them that in spite of their hard work in this area, and in spite of the success we have with many of our students, there are social forces that prevent some students from achieving in our system, and for this reason “just good teaching” is not enough.
- Historically schools have attempted this goal through the offering of a broad range of electives. While this approach works for some students, we believe that students can be deeply engaged through personal interest and talent in many ways, including:
 - Core academic courses in which student interest may drive the delivery of content, assessment, projects, and products related to the curriculum.
 - Community-based learning, such as internships and senior projects.
 - Thematic approaches to the teaching of core curriculum.