KnowledgeWorks | CCSSO
Council of Chief State School Officers

Educator Competencies for
Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments

Centering Equity: Guiding Questions

Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments

Centering Equity: Guiding Questions

This Centering Equity guide is part of a series of supplemental materials and resources created to support schools, districts and states in their implementation of the *Educator Competencies for Personalized, Learner-Centered Environments (2020 Edition)*. Additional materials can be found at https://studentsatthecenterhub.org/ed-comps.

The Purpose of this Tool

The following questions provide conversation starters and guidance designed to foster more equitable learning environments capable of de-centering whiteness. In the Educator Competencies, explicit attention to equity and inclusion is woven through every domain, in both competencies and indicators. This guide can be used to initiate or further enhance a teacher's or a learning community's efforts to assess readiness to embrace, deepen or expand learner-centered, anti-racist competencies.

The questions are designed to help learning communities not just improve existing structures and behaviors, but more deeply consider where and how to dismantle systemic racism. While much of this guidance is broadly applicable to any educational approach and not solely to a personalized, learner-centered environment, no educational approach can be truly learner-centered without addressing these guiding questions or others like them.

How to Use this Tool

This guide is intentionally loosely structured. Depending on the learning environment, there are a number of ways to put it to use. For example:

» Choose several guiding questions from each topic area – or a single topic area – to discuss at department or professional learning community meetings

» Turn the questions into a self-assessment or site-assessment rubric and invite multiple stakeholders into the process

» Use the questions to prompt a community text study and data discussion

» Create a cross-functional team charged with facilitating a customized approach to narrow, prioritize and develop a customized learning plan for the learning community based on the assessment of areas of highest need

» Craft professional development opportunities and prioritize those opportunities based on conversations and assessments related to the guide

The Educator Competencies embrace the spirit of the National Equity Project's definition of educational equity – which, by its very nature, is personalized and learner-centered: Educational equity means that each child receives what he or she needs to develop to his or her unlimited academic and social potential. Working toward equity in schools involves:

» Ensuring equally high outcomes for all participants in our educational system

» Removing the predictability of success or failure that currently correlates with any social, economic or cultural factor

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

» Discovering and cultivating the unique gifts, talents and interests that every member of the learning community possesses[1]

1. National Equity Project. Educational Equity: A Definition. Retrieved from https://www.nationalequityproject.org/education-equity-definition

Guiding Questions by Topic Area

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

» Does the learning community have a clearly stated and defined equity commitment?

» Can everyone in the learning community speak to that commitment?

» Is that commitment measurable, with specific targets everyone is striving to achieve and held accountable for?

» Are the students most marginalized by the school structures known (data collected and used), seen (relationship connections made and sustained) and heard (opportunities to provide feedback in what structures might need to change)?

» Do individual educators understand their own implicit biases, privileges and cultural assets and how they impact the students in their classrooms?

STAFFING

» Are effective policies and procedures in place to hire, maintain and support staff diversity?

» Do staff receive or lead adequate training on issues of structural racism and antiracist teaching, culturally-sustaining pedagogies, trauma-informed counseling and instruction and the effects of poverty, exclusion and microaggressions on student engagement?

» Do staff receive adequate development opportunities to acquire knowledge on the science of learning and development and the impact of adversity and unchallenged status differences on learning?

» Are staff trained on how to encourage and support inclusion of all students, in particular students with learning differences?

» Does every student have access to enrichment opportunities and supportive and highly skilled teachers?

» If not, are plans in place to remediate that situation swiftly?

» Are all staff provided regular opportunities to understand and address their biases and how these impact learners?

» And in extreme cases of prejudicial actions or ongoing unwillingness to address repeated microaggressions or inequities, can a staff member be removed from the learning community?

RESOURCES AND OPPORTUNITIES

» Are resources and opportunities equitably distributed so that all students can discover and cultivate their interests and progress toward achievement of high standards?

» Are there resources and strategies in place to facilitate inclusive opportunities for students with disabilities within and beyond school hours, including extended learning opportunities and extracurricular activities?

» What barriers are present that restrict access to enriched learning opportunities such as gifted and talented classes, AP courses or extracurriculars?

» Do all students have the ability and support to successfully participate on teams and collaborative groups?

» Are expanded learning opportunities supported so that all students can access them (e.g., means to buy sports equipment, instruments or art supplies if a student can't afford them; buses for students with no transportation; online versions available if a student has to care for a family member after school)?

» Does every student have access to reliable Internet and operational hardware/software before, during and after school hours?

» Are use, training and access to digital tools available equitably?

CLASSROOM PRACTICES AND CLIMATE

» Do teachers establish culturally responsive classrooms and understand how their biases shape daily and long-term practices, such as communications with/to students and identified families, group assignments, classroom participation, feedback, disciplinary and grading decisions?

» Are teachers provided the opportunity to understand how to mitigate the impact of racism, adversity, trauma, poverty and stress on learning and students' readiness to learn?

» Are teachers empowered to use this information to improve classroom culture and behavior?

» Are marginalized students over-represented in disciplinary interventions? If so, are the teacher beliefs that lead to this over-representation understood and mitigated?

ASSESSMENTS

» Are assessments designed to capture, support and inform each student's learning, rather than reward compliance or threaten failure?

» Do educators understand how to design valid, reliable and motivating assessments and how to accommodate learning differences?

» Do educators know how to design, administer and evaluate forms of summative and formative assessments that are as culturally responsive as they are cognitively rigorous?

ADVOCACY

» Do staff and leaders advocate on local, state and national levels for policies, programs and funding to ensure that learner-centered, personalized approaches are available and effective for all, including underserved learners, learners with learning differences or English language learners?

» Are there productive partnerships with public and private sectors that promote learning community improvement, student learning and local and global citizenry?

» To what extent are the voices, insights and leadership of marginalized individuals and groups centered in such work?

CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

» Are teachers provided with the support they need to lead identified family or community conversations about learning, cultural and racial equity issues?

» Do school leaders and staff engage in critical, meaningful and ongoing dialogues with families and community members to inform reform efforts and achieve equity in outcomes?

» To what extent does the curriculum (explicit and implicit) represent the students and families the school serves?

» Whose perspectives and modes of communication tend to dominate classroom discussions, faculty meetings, school events, back-to-school nights, parent-teacher conferences, etc.?

» How are teachers encouraged to build and sustain productive cross-cultural relationships with their diverse students and to shift approaches to match individual student interests, insights, needs, behaviors and skills?

» When and where are teachers shown how to avoid deficit explanations of marginalized students and instead build on the funds of knowledge and cultural assets all students bring to any new learning opportunity?