



## Equity Indicators in School Improvement Policies and Practices: Focus on Student Outcomes and Examining Disparities

March 23, 2022

### Session Summary

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**Facilitators:** Donna Elam, National Comprehensive Center, Project Co-Lead  
Carol Keirstead, National Comprehensive Center, Project Co-Lead  
Chris Dwyer, National Comprehensive Center, Senior Advisor

**Presenter:** Tom Munk, Ph.D., Senior Study Director, Westat

### Session Highlights

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- Donna Elam highlighted the importance of the norm “Seek to understand before being understood” when doing equity work, encouraging the group to practice empathic listening to promote equity.
- States reported out on their strategic priorities (works-in-progress) while participants listened for the rationale and context for the priority, the attention to root causes along with structures and systems, and the specifics that are the basis for action. Common themes among the state priorities include: shifting from compliance to support on the part of the state agency; looking for change in systems, not only schools; inter-departmental cross-agency work to bring coherence; building data systems to support the information needed to address equity; and listening to and learning from stakeholders at the local level.
- Dr. Thomas Munk presented on using risk ratios to understand and communicate about disparities in outcomes and opportunities. Highlights included:
  - How states can organize and present data to identify disparities in student outcomes and opportunities. States must recognize that the “weak” outcomes for which schools are identified are only single data points. In reality, for example, 3<sup>rd</sup> grade test scores reflect nine years of education starting from birth. Similarly, graduation rates reflect twelve years of schooling experiences. Thus, educators need more data points to better understand disparities in student educational experiences and improve outcomes.
  - Measuring indicators of disparities in access to educational opportunities is as important as measuring indicators in student outcomes. Currently, the proposed indicators are not available in every state and even those available exist in varying degrees. The goal is to have well defined indicators in every state. States have report cards with different letter grades, percentages and data for sub-populations. These data, however, do not easily show which differences matter most or which areas should be prioritized.
  - Risk ratios are a tool that states and district leaders can use to help illuminate disparities. Risk ratios help identify gaps in outcomes and opportunities and make it easy to compare large amounts of data for different population groups. The federal IDEA significant disproportionality regulation requires that districts with high

racial/ethnic risk ratios in areas of identification, placement, or suspension of students with disabilities identify the factors contributing to those gaps and apply 15% of their federal special education dollars to address the root causes.

- Risk ratio tables can be used for finding high-leverage ways to improve student outcomes in schools by looking for large groups of students with high-risk ratios. Dr. Munk shared how to use a risk ratio table to express inequities and prioritize areas for improvement. He explained how to adjust the table to incorporate available data for variables of interest in schools or districts. States can use the table to compare students in low-performing schools to students who are not in low-performing schools.

### Shared Resources

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- >>  [Less Gaps Toolkit: Rubric and Root Cause Analysis](#)
- >> Table: School Risk Ratios—Outcomes Focus
- >> Table: Risk Ratios—Comparing Low Performing Schools with Others