

Delaware Rethinking Middle Grades Project Equity and Inclusion Framework

Introduction:

The Delaware Rethinking Middle Grades project diversity, equity, and inclusion framework outlines the principles that will help guide the interdependent work of the three agencies, the steering committee, additional subcommittees, and the stakeholder engagement processes. The ultimate goal of the project is to create products, processes, and structures that can “ensure that youth exit grade eight (8) ready for high school, having found success in Career & Technical Education (CTE), academic, and social-emotional (SEL) programming that is equity-centered and inspires student identity and a path to postsecondary success.”

This equity and inclusion framework outlines principles and considerations that will inform all project work to ensure we develop a shared language and apply an equity lens to decision-making. This framework also reflects equitable design principles ([found in the appendix below the table](#)) that are hallmarks of Education First’s approach, which helps surface the perspectives, needs and desires of “end users,” while leveraging design thinking tools to develop solutions.

The following definitions undergird the framework:

- **Diversity**¹ describes psychological, physical, and social differences that occur among any and all individuals, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, nationality, religion, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, age, gender, sexual orientation, mental or physical ability, and learning styles. A diverse group, community, or organization is one in which a variety of social and cultural characteristics exist.
- **Equity**² is defined as the state, quality, or ideal of being just and fair. The concept of equity is synonymous with fairness and justice. It is helpful to think of equity as not simply a desired state of affairs or a lofty value but as a structural and systemic concept. In addition, equitable does not mean equal: applying an equity lens may mean supporting students differently, in response to the barriers they face. With this in mind, fairness is defined as breaking down the specific systemic barriers students face in order to reach their full potential. Achieving equity across Delaware can be defined as closing opportunity gaps, including in college access and postsecondary outcomes, for young women, students with disabilities, students identifying as LGBTQIA+, Black and Latinx students, and students from underserved communities/districts in Delaware.
 - **Racial equity** is the systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. All people are able to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of race, ethnicity, or the community in which they live. Working toward racial equity means actively supporting efforts to dismantle racial and structural inequities that limit opportunities so that people from historically marginalized racial and ethnic communities can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.

¹ Source: [“Diversity Terms” glossary from the National Multicultural Institute](#)

² Source: edglossary.org/equity

- **Socioeconomic equity** is the systematic fair treatment of people of all socioeconomic backgrounds that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. Evidence suggests that students from lower-income households, on average, underperform academically in relation to their wealthier peers, and they also tend to have lower educational aspirations and enroll in college at lower rates. In addition, schools in poorer communities such as rural or disadvantaged urban areas may have comparatively few resources and less funding, which can lead to fewer teachers and educational opportunities.
- **Inclusion**³ is the action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure. More than simply diversity and numerical representation, inclusion involves authentic and empowered participation, and a true sense of belonging. What this looks like in practice: Leaders seek out and intentionally engage diverse groups throughout the development and implementation of policies and initiatives. They are acutely aware of the intersectional identities of those who are leading and making decisions and prioritize those who are closest to implementation, often students, teachers and community members, for leadership and decision-making roles. They honor the experiences of stakeholders and understand successful implementation starts with a deep understanding of the people with closest proximity to the issue or problem they hope to address. They understand that a community is not based on a single story, and that no one individual or organization can represent the full perspectives of an entire group. Leaders create an environment that values and celebrates all members of their community.
- **Systems change**⁴ Shifts among the conditions – including structures, practices, policies, resource, and communication flows, power dynamics, and mindsets – that produce educational and employment inequity.
- **People proximate to the problem**⁵ is a term used to identify those folx who are currently experiencing the problem whose lived experience must be leveraged in the design process, who must engage as co-designers in the process, and to whom decision-making power must be ceded in the process.
- **Asset-based thinking**⁶ focuses on youth and community strengths (also related to strengths-based) and is in contrast with a deficit-based approach that focuses on “problems” or “deficiencies” located within the individual or community. Taking an asset-based approach means seeking to deeply understand the hopes, dreams, and desires of individuals and communities as well as the unique strengths they bring. Asset-based approaches to measurement and assessment often require co-construction of concepts and indicators with those who are most impacted by/closest to the work.

³ Source: www.thefreedictionary.com/inclusion

⁴ Source: [Equitable Pathways Intermediary Framework](#)

⁵ Source: [Equity X Design framework](#)

⁶ Source: [Critical Public Health, Volume 30, Issue 2](#)



Principles	Key Actions
<p>The Delaware Rethinking Middle Grades Strategic Planning Team will center diversity, equity, and inclusion over the lifetime of this project.</p>	<p>Throughout this project, members of the strategic planning team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ agree to and operate with clear and common definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion listed above as well as terms related to the work of our project: system change, structural racism, people proximate to the problem, and asset-based thinking. ▪ engage in the design process related to deliverables, programming, and implementation through a lens of equity (encompassing inclusion, diversity and access). ▪ gather and use personal stories to illustrate systemic patterns of inequities impacted populations across Delaware (districts, schools, and community) have experienced. ▪ project positive and shared values, such as advancing equitable access to opportunity, engaging in transparent communication about data, promoting belief in every child’s potential to achieve, ceding power to the community, and using shared measures of success.
<p>The Delaware Rethinking Middle Grades Strategic Planning Team will thoughtfully engage, support and elevate the power and voices of populations impacted by this work.</p>	<p>As the strategic planning team organizes interviews and focus groups and invites stakeholders to provide feedback on emerging decisions, its members will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ ensure engagements with the steering committee, subcommittee, stakeholders, on-the-ground partners, community members, and families/students are inclusive, representative, and authentic. ▪ understand where this project may not be inclusive of those most significantly affected by it and resolve this lack of inclusion to the extent possible. ▪ practice the concept of ‘process as product’ by genuinely, regularly and intentionally collaborating with people proximate to the problem(s) we seek to resolve and the change(s) that need to be made on behalf of Delaware students. ▪ elevate student voice in ways that inform, impact and shape significant aspects of the project.
<p>The Delaware Rethinking Middle Grades Strategic Planning Team will prioritize authentic and intentional collaboration when designing the experience of the steering committee, subcommittees and those impacted by this project.</p>	<p>In order to reap the rich benefits of honest, ongoing, and purposeful collaboration, the strategic planning team will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ honor the norms, values, and agreements that were proposed and accepted in the kickoff meeting. ▪ periodically revisit the norms, values, and decisions made in order to ensure a high fidelity of practice. ▪ communicate through a humanity-centered lens whereby we realize that we are collaborating with human beings in virtual spaces for the purposes of redressing entrenched systemic inequities. ▪ celebrate the conclusion of study-planning-implementation-debrief cycles by discussing the decisions that made the cycle successful as well as the observable actions that reflected the previously agreed upon norms and values. ▪ make adjustments to the scope of responsibilities, as needed, to maximize the gifts of each team member.



The Delaware Rethinking Middle Grades Steering Committee will design and produce deliverables through an equity and student-centered paradigm.

As the steering committee composes guiding documents, frameworks, and other products, its members will:

- consider the impact of their words and recommendations on the choices and options students, especially from underserved populations, will ultimately have access.
- gather relevant information concerning the task at hand and apply any new or experiential knowledge to the creation and design process.
- prioritize clarity and justice in the ideas outlined in the products.
- integrate beliefs about social emotional learning, child development, and CTE principles in the process of composing subcommittee-facing documents and guides.
- charges subcommittees to keep these equity principles in mind when creating work products.
- reviews the work of the subcommittee through the agreements and commitments of this framework and the overall vision and purpose of the project.

Note: Three of the principles outlined in the above table are connected to the strategic planning team, while the fourth relates to the steering committee.

Appendix

Equitable Design Principles⁷:

- **Self Assessment:** Analyzing system-wide policies and practices that contribute to the current advising and academic experience of middle school students in Delaware who are preparing to choose their high school pathway. This principle also could involve a refining of the problem(s) that we are trying to solve for students and the possibilities that we are committed to realizing.
- **Designing at the margins:** Convening stakeholders representative of the diverse Delaware community so that solutions for this redesign can meet the needs of those closest to the problem(s).
- **Co-creation:** Depending on folk typically positioned on the margins to collaborate with us in designing a model that gives greater autonomy to students and more effective support by teachers and leaders.
- **Intentional inclusion:** Focusing on the perspectives of every person (Delawarean), especially those who are traditionally not centered, in this redesign process. Inclusion is a major focus both internally at Education First (through our internal Race, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity initiatives) and will be a core value guiding our approach to supporting the Delaware Department of Education and Rodel.

⁷ Adapted from [The Equity X Design framework](#)