

Establishing District Equity Committees for Senate Bill 732

Section 3: Membership and Participation



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A District Equity Committee represents a partnership between local communities and local district leaders. It is an opportunity for individuals who educational systems have excluded, impacted, marginalized, or underserved to provide regular and consistent feedback to district leadership.

Underrepresented⁷ parents, employees, students, and community members are the core of a District Equity Committee. The focus of the DEC should be rooted in local community voice⁸ and need, and it is important that these spaces remain safe and protected for members to review and reflect on their experiences within the district, and then provide meaningful feedback to their school board and superintendent. DEC's themselves should work with school leaders on how best they can be supported, how to deliver feedback, and what additional work is necessary to fully elevate student experience.

Requirements

Section 2 of [OAR 581-022-2307](#) articulates that:

- A DEC [*Educational Equity Advisory Committee*] shall be selected by the school district board and school district superintendent and must be composed of parents, employees, students and community members from the school district.
- The school district superintendent is responsible for coordinating the member nomination process and proposing finalists to the school district board.
- The school district board is responsible for appointing members from those proposed by the superintendent, and ensuring that membership is primarily representative of underserved student groups.
- For the purpose of selecting members, the school district board and school district superintendent:
 - May not deny members based on language;
 - May not deny members based on immigration status;
 - May not deny members based on protected class, including age, disability, national origin, race, color, marital status, religion, sex, sexual orientation, or gender identity;
 - May not appoint a voting member of the school board or the school district superintendent to an educational equity advisory committee; and
 - Must ensure that the composition of an educational equity advisory committee elevates underrepresented parent, employee, student, and community member voices.
- The school district board and school district superintendent, in consultation with the educational equity advisory committee, shall fill vacancies on the committee in the same manner as original appointments.

⁷ "Underrepresented" refers to communities, groups, families and students that due to systemic barriers and intersectional oppression have been excluded and limited proportionate access to the dominant or mainstream educational system despite efforts to participate. This includes students of color, tribal students, English language learners, LGBTQ2SIA+ students, students experiencing and surviving poverty and houselessness, students with disabilities, women/girls, and students from rural communities.

⁸ "Community Voice" means that members representing the community served by the [project/plan/initiative] will be involved in co-constructing the project design, implementation, evaluation and/or providing strategic guidance in final decision-making.

Nomination & Appointing Process

Superintendents design the application and candidate selection process, which can vary greatly. One of the responsibilities superintendents hold in the nominating process is to put forward candidates who are ready, willing, and open to engaging meaningfully with each other in support of the aims set forth in statute.

The design of the application process can be by intentional outreach, an application or nomination process, or a combination. Designing this process should take into account how existing equity work can be restructured to meet the requirements of the DEC, as well as the ideal size of the group. The following sections include suggestions and guidance for locating potential District Equity Committee candidates, avoiding tokenization, as well as determining roles and ideal group size.

Finding Members through Community Engagement

A recommended practice for finding members begins with authentic community engagement. Authentic Community Engagement provides a critical foundation with students, parents, employees, and community members from underserved and underrepresented communities within the district. Developing a strategy of engagement and outreach to specific focal populations can begin by completing the [Mapping Existing Equity Efforts](#) worksheet which includes an example School & Community Partners Asset Map. The Asset Mapping process documents existing community connections and resources, such as key staff, affinity groups, tribal partners, local leaders, community-based organizations, and culturally-specific organizations. As the impacts of the developing committee will land on students, consider student involvement early on in this process. Solicit student feedback on trusted staff, parents, and community members to include in the School & Community Partners Asset Map. Returning to this Asset Map as a list of contacts to invite will support outreach efforts. To truly broaden support and outreach to underrepresented voices, return to community engagement regularly to expand connections with insights from focal group populations.

Outreach

Outreach and messaging about the development of the District Equity Committee can be an excellent opportunity to find potential members and also to raise community awareness about how to get involved to support the DEC beyond membership. Consider accessibility along with the languages spoken and practiced within the district during outreach.

Outreach will likely vary depending on the method of appointing applicants, ranging from intentional-and-selective outreach to a broad search. During a broad search for interested applicants, multiple methods of communication and outreach are encouraged. For small and rural regions, connecting with the Education Service District as a hub to foster partnerships is encouraged. Consider what is shared in messaging about the role of the DEC member, the Member Terms of Service (if opting to implement), time capacity required, and skill sets sought, along with a basic outline of the application & appointment process.

Further outreach to raise general community awareness is recommended to provide an opportunity to introduce the DEC, and to invite in student, family, and affinity group involvement. This [District Equity Committee Introduction Message Template](#) could offer some recommendations on how to frame the DEC and extend the opportunity for involvement.

Skill Sets & Lived Experiences

Members are responsible for advising the school board and superintendent on the educational equity impacts of policy decisions. Members should inform the school board and superintendent when a school-based situation arises that negatively impacts underrepresented students, and be able to advise on the proper response.

Additionally, members can highlight effective strategies that support underrepresented students in overcoming barriers to acknowledge and celebrate progress. Ideally, members who hold this responsibility will have direct knowledge of the complexities, dynamics, and nuances of your district. Members should be able to provide guidance on these issues by bringing valuable insights from lived experiences, advocacy work, career history, and community involvement. Members who possess contextual knowledge of public education locally and statewide and who represent the various needs and demographics of your district community will likely have valuable perspectives to offer.

These considerations are recommended:

- When considering member applicants, return to the Equity Lens & short, mid, and long-term goals to ensure a connection between what the member may be able to offer in relationship to the district's equity vision.
- When assembling a new group of DEC members, consider candidates in relationship to one another to foster a supportive and balanced composition.
 - For example, a trusted staff member working alongside students may be supportive in further elevating student voice.
 - As the skills of collaboration and deep listening will be vital to this role, selecting members who either have a history utilizing said skills or who demonstrate their ongoing commitment to collaboration in diverse settings will be important.

Avoid Tokenism

The Oxford English Dictionary defines tokenism as “the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce.” While ensuring the composition of the District Equity Committee elevates underrepresented voices, avoiding the tokenism of individuals from underrepresented populations during the nomination & appointment process is critical.⁹ This is particularly true for regions where diverse populations can be limited. Recommendations include:

1. Frame appreciation for the valuable perspective specific to the experience individuals with underrepresented identities can bring.
2. Build and sustain relationships based on reciprocity and follow-through.

⁹ Statute names that DEC membership should be primarily representative of underserved student groups. This guidance is provided to make this effort authentic and to try to avoid a phenomenon where a member might be nominated with the intent of “checking the box”. DEC membership is a meaningful opportunity to recognize and build appreciation for a range of life experiences and perspectives.

3. Foster environments that allow each member to bring the multifaceted and intersectional identities they hold as individuals. Consider factors of culturally-responsive care and hospitality to foster inclusivity:
 - o These factors include considerations for safety, comfort, scheduling needs, child care, food and fulfillment of ADA requirements in meeting spaces in order to meet the needs of every member and allow them to participate.

Group Size

When designing and adapting the DEC, the size of the group can impact the efficacy of what the group is able to accomplish while working in collaboration. Ideally, the group is large enough to accomplish the tasks needed, yet still small enough to communicate effectively with opportunities for each voice to be heard. A recommended range is anywhere from 8 to 14 people. An effective DEC could function well with as few as five members for small and rural districts. This is not a dictate, rule, or requirement and the size of the group can be set within each district’s policy formation. Here’s information to help inform your decision-making:

Size of DEC	Pros	Cons
Less than 8 members	Decision-making process is much easier with fewer people. Cost of managing the DEC is lower. Recruitment process may be easier. A smaller team may be more nimble and develop more efficient collaboration skills.	Less diversified due to reduced numbers. DEC operations may be impacted due to attendance issues. Greater workload for individual members, potential for burn out. Potential for less analysis and discussion on key issues due to lack of different perspectives. Greater potential for “groupthink”. Desired skill set may not be achieved. Less flexibility in turnover & succession planning.
Greater than 10 members	Greater opportunity for genuine diversity. Broader range of skill sets. Workload may be shared across greater numbers. Potential for enhanced analysis and deliberation. Able to cope with absence of members. More effective for turnover & succession planning.	Less time for each DEC member to weigh-in. Greater potential cost to fund DEC. Potential for cliques to develop. Not enough work to keep members stimulated and interested. Potential for reduced commitment (i.e. plenty of people to do the work). Increased numbers do not necessarily mean better decisions.

<p>Between 8-10 members</p>	<p>Potentially large enough to meet diversity and skill base needs.</p> <p>Adequate numbers to “spread the workload” and retain interest at the same time.</p> <p>Cost to fund DEC is not excessive.</p> <p>DEC member engagement can be maximized without impact on the decision making process.</p> <p>Orderly succession can be managed.</p> <p>Attendance issues are mitigated.</p>	<p>At 8 members, if 2 or more are absent, DEC effectiveness and diligence may be negatively impacted.</p> <p>Requires full commitment of all members as numbers do not allow individuals to take an extended leave of absence.</p> <p>Lower numbers may impact community perceptions of appropriate representation and governance.</p> <p>Even numbers may be problematic in a 4 - 4 vote.</p>
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Roles

Your DEC’s design may include leadership and role titles. If this is the case, it is advised to document any authority that is delegated. In general, it is helpful to define roles, duties, and responsibilities early on for all members. Consider how roles can be designated to foster efficacy and collaboration. Some roles may best be suited to individuals with specific skill sets, and some may rotate. Responsibilities to consider include:

- Facilitation
- Note Taking¹⁰
- Liaison to the Board Budget Committee
- Time keeper
- Agenda Coordinator
- Schedule Coordinator
- Liaison between the DEC and the school board

DEC Member Appointment

The School Board is responsible for appointing candidates who are nominated by the superintendent based on applications submitted. **The school board and superintendent must ensure that membership is primarily representative of underserved student groups.** During this process, it is recommended to anchor in this guidance and to apply the district’s equity lens and/or decision tool.

In the hypothetical case of disagreement or dissonance between the nominations of the superintendent and the appointments of the School Board, districts are encouraged to seek technical assistance from their legal counsel, education service district, OSBA, and COSA.

¹⁰ In consultation with your legal counsel, note taking may be best completed by a trained volunteer, DEC member, or district staff person who has access to information about best practices for keeping notes when or if a discussion is considered to be a public meeting.

Member Terms of Service

While not required, districts may consider establishing Member Terms of Service that clearly outlines the roles, responsibilities, and commitments of each member. This could be a collaborative opportunity for boards, district leaders, and DEC members to develop a Member Terms of Service agreement together (formal or informal), if desired. Since a school board selects the DEC, it may want to establish these terms in board adopted policy. If Member Terms of Service are established, ODE guidance on best practices includes:

- Determining what is most appropriate for the district’s need and context, whether an informal document to be shared amongst members, or a more formal contractual document.
- If informal, consider:
 - Collaboratively developing the Member Terms of Service with the DEC; possibly including:
 - Commitments expected of individual members;
 - The process for leaving or being asked to leave the position.
- Communicating the Member Terms of Service to potential members interested in joining before they begin the application process.
- Ensuring the Member Terms of Service is accessible and available as a translated document.
- Considering general term of service variables, including:
 - Does a member’s term of service extend beyond their enrollment in the district, such as when a student graduates?
 - Does a member’s term of service continue if they leave their status of employment within the district?

Addressing Barriers to Participation

Longstanding barriers may impact participation from underserved or marginalized communities. These could include easily fixable variables such as making these meetings in a place, time, and way of doing business that is accessible and less rooted in protocols that are difficult to follow (e.g. Robert’s Rules). This could also include deeper variables such as relationships that have not been built with communities. If the district has created a team tasked with coordinating the membership nomination process, this team could also address these kinds of barriers.

Again, consider factors of culturally-responsive care and hospitality to foster inclusivity for each member: safety; scheduling needs; child care; food; transportation, translation, interpretation, and fulfillment of ADA requirements in meeting spaces. Considering these factors will help reduce barriers to participation and support the needs of every member.