Establishing District Equity Committees for Senate Bill 732

Section 4: Structure and Organization

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The structure and organization of your District Equity Committee will vary depending on your district's needs and variables like district size, existing equity teams, and bandwidth to staff the DEC.

Guiding Questions

Once your DEC's membership has been set, here are some key questions that can guide the launch of the group.

1. Why are you meeting? What's the group's purpose?
2. Who sits at the table? How are guests treated? Can visitors audit meetings?
3. Who provides initial leadership?
4. How will the DEC be supported? Consider how notes are taken, food and drinks, communication of action items, and the role of any staff or volunteers to support the group.
5. Will the group use committees to get work done? How will the DEC keep committees accountable for doing the right work?
6. Does the committee see benefits or drawbacks from establishing a quorum to meet, deliberate, or make recommendations?
7. How will the group meet its responsibilities, including responding to concerns, records requests, or questions about public meeting law?

Structure & Processes

As you consider the size of your District Equity Committee, you will also want to plan for key structural, operational, and logistical questions, including: how decision-making will work; what meeting protocols & processes will support DEC dialogue and operations; how frequently the DEC meets; and where the DEC will meet.

Decision-making[11]

How decisions get made is a common part of an organizational document and of a governance structure. **One-person-one-vote** with majority prevailing is certainly one way of making decisions and is quite common, but there are other effective methods, as well. In a **collaborative decision-making** process, the group may decide that reaching a decision by consensus would be best. Then, the governing document would define consensus and define what happens if consensus cannot be reached. The governing document usually also defines how many members of a governing body must be present in order for the decision to be made—called a quorum. Regardless of what method you choose, DEC members will ideally agree with the choice the group sets on decision-making and "own" it for some length of time. Of course, you can change the decision-making method at a specified juncture, particularly if it is not working for the group.

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[11] Work in this section comes from Portland State University and the National Policy Consensus Center's "Creating a Collaborative Governance Framework: Supporting Oregon's STEM Hubs"

One example of language related to decision-making:

The Deschutes Water Alliance (DWA)

1. "The DWA will use a consensus decision-making process and will foster a collaborative approach to problem solving. 'Consensus decision-making' means that every voting member present at the meeting votes yes or abstains. Each decision arising from an agenda item will be structured as follows:
    a. **Discussion of the Item:** The item is discussed with the goal of identifying opinions and information on the topic at hand. The general direction of the group and potential proposals for action are identified during the discussion.
    b. **Formation of a Proposal:** Based on the discussion, a formal decision proposal on the issue is presented to the group.
    c. **Call for Consensus:** The facilitator calls for consensus on the proposal. Each member of the group actively states their agreement with the proposal.
    d. **Identification and Addressing of Concerns:** If consensus is not achieved, each dissenter presents his/her concerns on the proposal, potentially starting another round of discussion to address or clarify the concern.
    e. **Modification of the Proposal:** The proposal is amended or rephrased in an attempt to address the concerns of the decision-makers. The process then returns to the call for consensus and the cycle is repeated until a satisfactory decision is made.
2. Members are encouraged to voice and have recorded all views. If any member sees the need to stand in the way of consensus on a decision, he/she will explain his/her concern with the proposed decision to the group, and the group will make every attempt to understand the concern and the underlying interests. Members may choose not to block the consensus even though they do not fully agree with the decision. Once a consensus decision has been reached, all members agree not to oppose that decision.
3. Sufficient time will be provided for the members to seek advice from the entities they represent, constituents, agencies, or other experts, when desired, before a decision is adopted. All members present at the meeting are included in the consensus process. Any member may abstain from the consensus and may request to be acknowledged as abstaining in the publication of the consensus. Abstaining is a choice not to block or support the decision.
4. The group may decide to delegate an issue to a working group for further exploration, development or recommendation to the full group.
5. The group may delegate decisions on administrative matters to a smaller group, such as the executive committee."

Meeting Protocols & Processes

While establishing a DEC, it is as important to talk about the kind of dialogue the group wants to have and how it wants to have it, as it is to set the technical roles and logistical needs. Because the larger purpose of a DEC is to help a diverse community come into relationship and identify both community assets and solve challenges, the methods used for agenda setting, discussion and supporting member participation are essential. As DECs set their agendas and agree on how meetings should be facilitated, ODE suggests that time should be spent building relationships and determining an approach both to participatory decision-making and how the group engages with tension in a way that supports different perspectives.

Fostering a Generative Space

DECs are meant to support deeper equity reflection and response in the district. As such, they are meant to be able to hold sensitive, tender, and sometimes contentious discussions on issues that matter deeply for students, families, and staff. There are many approaches to holding a space that is conducive for this. You should consider your own community and culture, what frameworks (e.g. Courageous Conversations; Critical Friends Protocols) that are already in place or understood, and what you could build on to foster a generative space for the DEC. As an example, Arao & Clemens's "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces" offers five equity-centered alternatives to some common "ground rules" that can engender a generative space:

1. Instead of "agreeing to disagree," center "controversy with civility," a "value whereby different views are expected and honored with a group commitment to understand the sources of disagreement and to work cooperatively toward common solutions"
2. Instead of "Don't take things personally," an agreement around "own your intentions and your impact" supports an understanding that "the impact of our actions is not always congruent with our intentions and that positive or neutral intentions do not trump negative impact."
3. Rather than simply asking others to "Challenge by choice," instead interrogate and name the factors that inhibit comfort (e.g. power, privilege, race, class, gender) to being comfortable with challenging others in the space.
4. While "respect" is often understood as a universal value, what is less discussed is the different ways that respect looks across cultures and communities. "The objective here is not to lead participants to consensus but rather to support them in maintaining increased mindfulness of the different ways they can demonstrate respect to one another.
5. Finally, a common ground rule says there should be "No attacks." Rather than accept this rule casually, Arao & Clemens "ask [their] participants to describe the differences between a personal attack on an individual and a challenge to an individual's idea or belief or statement that simply makes an individual feel uncomfortable." This can lead to deeper nuance around what is underneath the perceived threat.

Frequency

Each DEC will have the autonomy to decide the frequency of meetings based on their context and needs. It might make sense for the DEC to meet more frequently (e.g. weekly or bi-weekly) as it first gets going to create conditions for relationship, purpose, and clarity of structure. ODE recommends a regular meeting rhythm of at least one time per month. There are likely times when the DEC needs to gather to be responsive to community needs or to support more significant engagement in planning efforts or budgeting.

Location

The DEC can work in conjunction with the superintendent to determine a central location (either on a school campus or other community location) so that all members have access (thinking about distance and time). Meeting location may be in a virtual setting in order to provide accommodations for distance, travel, or other considerations.

The Very First Meeting

As you plan the very first District Equity Committee meeting, here are some considerations that could be structured into the first agenda:

- Ideally, the superintendent would attend the first meeting to help provide purpose, background, and lay a foundation for why the committee is critical. The first meeting will set the stage for the function, spirit, and trajectory of the District Equity Committee and the superintendent can help reinforce the value and the need for the DEC.
- The DEC should spend time building relationships, sharing stories, and offering mutual connections. The DEC is composed of individuals, each with their own unique experiences, voices, and perspectives, and will be nourished by the degree to which these can be fully expressed.
- If key logistical/operational details have been decided already (such as the variables previously outlined: leadership & decision making; meeting protocols & processes; frequency; location), spend time walking the DEC through those decisions and why those have been made. If some/all of those have not yet been deliberated, those details are themselves valuable to dedicate intentional time to.
- Offer visioning/strategy space: the District Equity Committee is intended to be a long-term support for the district while also being able to be responsive to short-term needs/issues that arise. Creating conditions for success over the long haul may involve dedicating time upfront to shared visioning, collective brainstorming/whiteboarding, free-flowing discussion, and activities that allow the DEC to envision what might be possible for the group.
- Begin an initial conversation about how the DEC will keep the community informed and if the DEC will exercise its ability (the statute reads *may*) to generate and share an annual report. ODE recommends districts and the DEC discuss any implications of this choice with legal counsel.