

The Oregon Equity Lens was adopted by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) in 2014 as a cornerstone to the State's approach to education policy and budgeting. The Equity Lens was originally developed by and adopted by the former Oregon Education Investment Board (OEIB), and was implemented by the former Oregon Chief Education Office in addition to the HECC.

Oregon Equity Lens: Preamble

In 2011, the Oregon Legislature created the Oregon Education Investment Board, which had a vision of educational equity and excellence for each and every child and learner in Oregon. The OEIB believed that we must ensure sufficient resource is available to guarantee student success, and that the success of every child and learner in Oregon is directly tied to the prosperity of all Oregonians. As the Higher Education Coordinating Commission, with our Oregon education partners, we continue this critical work started by the OEIB and reaffirm that the attainment of a quality education strengthens all Oregon communities and promotes prosperity, to the benefit of us all. It is through educational equity that Oregon will continue to be a wonderful place to live and make progress towards becoming a place of economic, technologic and cultural innovation.

Oregon faces many growing opportunity and systemic gaps that threaten our economic competitiveness and our capacity to innovate. The first is the persistent gap of student growth as measured by graduation rates, state assessments and daily attendance for our growing populations of communities of color, immigrants, migrants, and rural students navigating poverty. While students of color make up 35% of the educational pipeline in our state¹—our opportunity and systemic gaps continue to persist. As our diversity grows and our ability to meet the needs and recognize the strengths of these students remains stagnant or declines—we limit the opportunity of everyone in Oregon. The persistent educational disparities have cost Oregon billions of dollars in lost economic output¹ and these losses are compounded every year we choose not to properly address these inequalities.

The second opportunity gap is one of disparity between Oregon and the rest of the United States. When the OEIB started this work, Oregon's achievement in state benchmarks had remained stagnant—and in some communities of color had declined—while other states had begun to, or had already surpassed, our statewide rankings. Disparities in educational attainment can translate into economic decline and a loss of competitive and creative capacity for our state. We believe that one of our most critical responsibilities going forward is to implement a set of concrete system changes and policies to deliver a truly student-centric education system that improves outcomes and opportunities for students across Oregon.

The primary focus of the equity lens is on race and ethnicity. While there continues to be a deep commitment to many other areas, we know that a focus on race by everyone connected to the educational milieu allows direct improvements in the other areas. We are committed to explicitly identifying disparities in education outcomes for the purpose of targeting areas for action, intervention and investment. We are simultaneously committed to identifying strengths in communities and promising practices in our educational systems.²

Higher Education Coordinating Commission Vision Statement

The Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC) envisions a future in which all Oregonians—and especially those whom our systems have underserved and marginalized—benefit from the transformational power of high-quality postsecondary education and training. It is a future where innovative public and private colleges, universities, and training providers help Oregonians to reach their highest potentials, build trajectories to family-wage careers, foster a more just society, and break patterns of intergenerational poverty. It is a future where postsecondary education fuels a resilient economy by anticipating workforce needs and by fostering innovation, research, and knowledge. In the future we envision, all Oregonians enjoy well-lived lives thanks to the myriad benefits of postsecondary education and training: higher earnings, lower unemployment

Oregon Equity Lens: Beliefs

We believe that everyone has the ability to learn and that we have an ethical and moral responsibility to ensure an education system that provides optimal learning environments that lead students to be prepared for their individual futures.

We believe that speaking a language other than English is an asset and that our education system must celebrate and enhance this ability alongside appropriate and culturally responsive support for English as a second language.

We believe students receiving special education services are an integral part of our educational responsibility and we must welcome the opportunity to be inclusive, make appropriate accommodations, and celebrate their assets. We must directly address the over-representation of children of color in special education and the under-representation in “talented and gifted.”

We believe that the students who have previously been described as “at-risk,” “underperforming,” “under-represented,” or minority actually represent Oregon’s best opportunity to improve overall educational outcomes. We have many counties in rural and urban communities that already have populations of color that make up the majority. Our ability to meet the needs of this increasingly diverse population is a critical strategy for us to successfully reach our State education goals.

We believe that intentional and proven practices must be implemented to return out of school youth to the appropriate and culturally sustaining educational setting. We recognize that this will require us to challenge and change our current educational setting to be more culturally responsive, safe, and responsive to the significant number of elementary, middle, and high school students who are currently out of school. We must make our schools safe for every learner.

We believe that ending disparities and gaps in achievement begin in the delivery of quality Early Learner programs and culturally appropriate family engagement and support. This is not simply an expansion of services—it is a recognition that we need to provide services in a way that best meets the needs of our most diverse segment of the population—0-5 year olds and their families.

We believe that resource allocation demonstrates our priorities and our values and that we demonstrate our priorities and our commitment to rural communities, communities of color, English language learners, and out of school youth in the ways we allocate resources and make educational investments.

We believe that communities, parents, teachers, and community-based organizations have unique and important solutions to improving outcomes for our students and educational systems. Our work will only be successful if we are able to truly partner with the community, engage with respect, authentically listen, and have the courage to share decision-making, control, and resources.

We believe every learner should have access to information about a broad array of career opportunities and apprenticeships. These will show them multiple paths to employment yielding family-wage incomes without diminishing the responsibility to ensure that each learner is prepared with the requisite skills to make choices for their future.

We believe that our community colleges and university systems have a critical role in serving our diverse populations, rural communities, emerging bi-lingual students and students with disabilities. Our institutions of higher education, and the P-20 system, will truly offer the best educational experience when their campus faculty, staff and students reflect this state, its growing diversity and the ability for all of these populations to be educationally successful and ultimately employed.

We believe the rich history and culture of learners is a source of pride and an asset to embrace and celebrate.

Finally, we believe in the importance of supporting great teaching. Research is clear that “teachers are among the most powerful influences in (student) learning.”³ An equitable education system requires providing teachers with the tools and support to meet the needs of each student, and a dedicated effort to increase the culturally and linguistically diverse educators who reflect Oregon’s rapidly changing student population.

Case for Equity

Oregonians have a shared destiny.

Individuals within a community and communities within a larger society need the ability to shape their own present and future, and we believe that education is a fundamental aspect of Oregon’s ability to thrive. Equity is both the means to educational success and an end that benefits us all. Equity requires the intentional examination of systemic policies and practices that, even if they have the appearance of fairness, may in effect serve to marginalize some and perpetuate disparities. Data are clear that Oregon demographics have been changing to provide rich diversity in race, ethnicity, and language.⁴ Working toward equity requires an understanding of historical contexts and the active investment in changing social structures and practice over time to ensure that students from all communities have the opportunities and support to realize their full potential.

Oregon Equity Lens: Purpose

The purpose of the Equity Lens is to clearly articulate the shared goals we have for our state, the intentional policies, investments and systemic change we will make to reach our goals of an equitable educational system, and to create clear accountability structures to ensure that we are actively making progress and correcting where there is not progress. As the Chief Education Office executes its charge to align and build a cradle to career education system and the Higher Education Coordinating Commission executes its charge to foster pathways for postsecondary success, an equity lens is useful to ensure every learner is adequately prepared by educators for meaningful contributions to society.

The Equity Lens confirms the importance of recognizing institutional and systemic barriers and discriminatory practices that have limited access and success for many students in the Oregon education system. The Equity Lens emphasizes historically underserved students, such as out of school youth, emerging bilingual students (English language learners), and students in some communities of color and some rural geographical locations, with a particular focus on racial equity. The result of creating a culture of equity will focus on the outcomes of academic proficiency, civic awareness, workplace literacy, and personal integrity. The system outcomes will focus on resource allocation, engagement, communications, data collection and analysis and educator hiring, preparation, and development.

Oregon Equity Lens: Objectives

By utilizing the Equity Lens, the Higher Education Coordinating Commission aims to provide a common vocabulary and protocol for resource allocation, partnership, engagement, and strategic initiatives to support students and communities.

The following questions will be considered for resource allocation and evaluating strategic investments:

1. Who are the racial/ethnic and underserved groups affected? What is the potential impact of the resource allocation and strategic investment to these groups?

2. Does the decision being made ignore or worsen existing disparities or produce other unintended consequences? What is the impact on eliminating the opportunity gap?

3. How does the investment or resource allocation advance opportunities for historically underserved students and communities?

4. What are the barriers to more equitable outcomes? (e.g. mandated, political, emotional, financial, programmatic or managerial)

5. How have you intentionally involved stakeholders who are also members of the communities affected by the strategic investment or resource allocation? How do you validate your assessment in (1), (2) and (3)?

6. How will you modify or enhance your strategies to ensure each learner and communities' individual and cultural needs are met?

7. How are you collecting data on race, ethnicity, and native language?

8. What is your commitment to P-20 professional learning for equity? What resources are you allocating for training in cultural responsive instruction?

Creating a culture of equity requires monitoring, encouragement, resources, data, and opportunity. The HECC will apply the Equity Lens to policy recommendations, and internal, and external practices as education leaders.

Oregon Equity Lens: Definitions

Equity: Equity in education is the notion that each and every learner will receive the necessary resources they need individually to thrive in Oregon’s schools no matter what their national origin, race, gender, sexual orientation, differently abled, first language, or other distinguishing characteristic.

Underserved Students: Students whom systems have placed at risk because the systems have operationalized deficit-based thinking. Deficit thinking is the practice of having lower expectations for certain groups of people based on demographics or characteristics that they share. In doing so, an “at-risk” narrative is formed, in which students navigating poverty, culturally and linguistically diverse students, and/or historically underserved groups, and their families are pathologized and marginalized. This includes students who are treated differently because of their gender, race, sexual orientation, dis/ability, and geographic location. Many students are not served well in our education system because of the conscious and unconscious bias, stereotyping, and racism that is embedded within our current inequitable education system.

Race: Race is a social—not biological—construct. We understand the term “race” to mean a racial or ethnic group that is generally recognized in society and often by government. When referring to those groups, we often use the terminology “people of color” or “communities of color” (or a name of the specific racial and/or ethnic group) and “white.” We also understand that racial and ethnic categories differ internationally, and that many local communities are international communities. In some societies, ethnic, religious and caste groups are oppressed and racialized. These dynamics can occur even when the oppressed group is numerically in the majority.

White Privilege: A term used to identify the privileges, opportunities, and gratuities offered by society to those who are white.

Embedded Racial Inequality: Embedded racial inequalities are also easily produced and reproduced—usually without the intention of doing so and without even a reference to race. These can be policies and practices that intentionally and unintentionally enable white privilege to be reinforced.

40-40-20: In 2011, the State of Oregon enacted legislation (ORS 350.014) creating the 40-40-20 educational attainment goal: that by 2025 all Oregonians will hold a high school diploma or equivalent, 40% of them will have an associate’s degree or a meaningful postsecondary certificate, and 40% will hold a bachelor’s degree or advanced degree.⁵ 40-40-20 means representation of every student in Oregon, including students of color.

Disproportionality: Over-representation of students of color in areas that impact their access to educational attainment. This term is a statistical concept that actualizes the disparities across student groups.

Opportunity Gap: The lack of opportunity that many social groups face in our common quest for educational attainment and the shift of attention from the current overwhelming emphasis on schools in discussions of the opportunity gap to more fundamental questions about social and educational opportunity.⁶

Culturally Responsive: Recognize the diverse cultural characteristics of learners as assets. Culturally responsive teaching empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills and attitudes.⁷

¹ U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimate.

² Alliance for Excellent Education. (November 2011). *The high cost of high school dropouts: What the nation pays for inadequate high schools.*

³ Hattie, J. (2009), *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to student achievement.* P. 238.

⁴ ODE (2016), *Oregon Statewide Report Card, 2015-16: An Annual Report to the Legislature on Oregon Public Schools.*

⁵ *The Opportunity Gap* (2007). Edited by Carol DeShano da Silva, James Philip Huguley, Zenub Kakli, and Radhika Rao.

⁶ The 40-40-20 statute was updated with the passage of HB 2311 (2017), refocusing it on students in the educational pipeline.

⁷ Ladson-Billings, Gloria (2009- Second Edition, 1994). *The Dreamkeepers: Successful Teachers of African American Children*; Gay, Geneva (2010). *Culturally Responsive Teaching: Theory, Research, and Practice.* New York: Teachers College Press.

* NOTE: *The Equity Lens* was edited in 2017 by the Higher Education Coordinating Commission with technical and data related updates.