PBIS Forum in Brief:
Equity – How do we start the conversation?
Data, Dialogue, or Decree

Introduction

The purpose of this brief is to explore three currently accessible approaches for igniting a conversation to address equity issues: Data, Dialogue and Political Decree. In the context of school, equity means providing the resources students require in order to learn; and creating systems that focus on meeting students' needs in order to achieve equitable outcomes for all. (Brown, 2004). Achieving equitable outcomes in school discipline, especially considering the preponderance of disproportionality in school discipline (Losen and Skiba, 2010; Shaw and Braden, 1990; Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson, 2002), the urgency for intentional and systemic change to create equitable outcomes across the spectrum is evident.

In our perspective, commitment to equity takes a systems approach to improving teacher practices. This system based approach can be, but is not limited to, three common forms: data driven examination of teaching practices and student outcomes; dialogue driven examination of teaching practices and student outcomes; or decree driven examination of teaching practices and outcomes. Each approach comes with strengths and challenges. This brief outlines each approach and provides a suggested course of action, with the goal that the chosen course of action will move schools and district toward more socially just and equitable outcomes for all.

Data

Using data as a starting point for examining issues of equity takes an open and honest assessment of disaggregated data. The most common forms of disaggregating data include organizing data in a clear visual (data tables, pivot tables, and trend graphs) that can be examined by stakeholders. Disaggregation may include looking at data by race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability. Several methods for examining disaggregated data can prove useful such as frequency of infraction or consequence by race, and trend analysis by infraction or consequence by race. This brief includes a third method: Risk Ratios. Risk ratios are calculated by using risk index of an individual group divided by the risk index of the comparison group. Using the approach outlined by Gibb and Skiba (2008) schools can use the calculated terms to follow the four step process provided.

Risk Index calculation

This calculation describes the students represented by a given group and their risk of a certain outcome. Specifically the number of students in a specific group divided by the total number of students. In the example given office discipline referrals (ODRs) are being examined, specifically the risk index for students in group x.

Number of Students in Group X with ODRs ÷ Total # of students in Group X= Risk Index
Determining a risk ratio calculation for students uses the risk index calculation divided by the risk of all other groups.

Risk Index of Group X with ODRs ÷ Risk of all other groups with ODRs= Risk Ratio
Once the risk ratio has been calculated, using monthly, quarterly, or semester data the four step approach and its application from McIntosh, K., Barnes, A., Eliason, B., & Morris, K. (2014) can be employed to examine data. This can determine the areas where further inquiry, intervention and resource placement to address

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outcomes can be brought into sharper focus. The four steps are shared below:

1. Problem Identification (Is there a problem?)
2. Problem Analysis (Why is it happening?)
3. Plan Implementation (What should be done?)
4. Plan Evaluation (Is the plan working?)[1]

While examining the risk indices and risk ratios school teams (PBIS team, grade level teams, discipline team) can go through this four-step approach, posing and answering the accompanying questions. Use of this approach can assist in planning for and implementing equitable practices that will move schools toward achieving more equitable outcomes.

Dialogue

Beginning a dialogue with K12 educators about equity must be preceded by acknowledging that student outcomes are directly connected to school climate and teacher dispositions (Pollock, 2008). Dialogue starters can include, taking a self-assessment (identifying personal strengths, culturally influenced values, and cultural bias), and/or discussing identity development of students and their families, identity of practitioners, the school and local community identity. Self-examination of one's background is a common way to engage in dialogue to address climate and teacher disposition.

When engaging in dialogue, setting clear goals for the conversation is critical. The ultimate goal of dialogic activity is to help teachers identify how their own cultural background, experiences, and disposition impact their view of students, and how this is related to student outcomes. This type of dialogue includes:

*   A clear goal for the dialogue
*   An activity that addresses teacher's cultural background, or understanding of students'
*   Time to identify how the teacher's cultural background and reactions, impact students
*   Opportunity to examine how certain students are not being treated equitably
*   Time to discuss action steps to address teacher disposition and how students will be impacted for the better.

One starting place for engaging in a dialogue that follows the steps given is by identifying a student outcome and a connected teacher disposition that is evident within the school. For example: students should be in class and ready to learn at all times. A teacher disposition might be: if students aren't ready (all necessary supplies) for class they need to be sent to the office. This disposition is counterproductive to the student outcome that 1) students be in class, 2) student are ready to learn. Students can be ready to learn and not have necessary supplies, due to several personal or school related barriers. Addressing both the lack of supplies and why the teacher's cultural background compels them to send the student out of class for not having supplies can improve student outcomes by reducing the time out of class.

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[1] For more on this process and its implementation see, McIntosh, K., Barnes, A., Eliason, B., & Morris, K. (2014). Using discipline data within SWPBIS to identify and address disproportionality: A guide for school teams. OSEP Technical Assistance Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports. www.pbis.org.

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When teachers are unable to make connections between their cultural background and their relationships with students, dialogue will be unproductive. Constructive dialogue, while it may include conflict or resistance, includes respectful spaces that are non-judgmental. This means not judging students or the teacher for their cultural beliefs, but rather identifying the nuances of the beliefs that may have a negative impact on equitable outcomes. Additionally, determine action steps that can be taken to improve outcomes and relationships. Constructive dialogue can encourage teachers to make the connections between student and teacher behaviors and how both are related to cultural background. Ultimately, this dialogue moves toward more equitable student outcomes by directly connecting teacher dispositions to cultural background.

Decree

Political decree can come from schools, school district administration, state agency or the federal level. When decrees are received immediate action is expected. A decree can be viewed as an opportunity to thoroughly examine and create traction about a student outcome that is most in need of improvement. A decree driven examination of equity often includes an action plan (see McIntosh, Barnes, Eliason, & Morris, 2014) identifying specific immediate steps that will be taken to address the decree. Decrees while sometimes received as negative are positive opportunities to galvanize district leaders, administrators, teachers, and parent representatives to work collaboratively to address the decree. These four groups of people are imperative to the 4D approach of addressing a decree. This 4D approach inherently has 1) four perspectives (District Leaders, building administrators, teachers and parents) 2) a consistent time and opportunity to address the decree, 3) the shared goal of creating systemic long term equitable change for students and 4) determine a process for ensuring changes are made and are consistently examined and systemic. The 4D approach by itself is not a solution to systemic change. Once the 4D approach is established, the following are steps to create systemic change.

1. Review of research that is specific to the decree that needs to be addressed
2. Professional development about identified practices for improvement
3. Discussion with community stakeholders about the decree and the proposed solutions to the decree.
4. A concrete actionable plan for implementation of knowledge gained from research, professional development and community discussion.

Having a 4D view of a decree requires an action plan to address the problem to ensure that those that are responsible for the implementation of the action plan are a part of the process of creating the action plan and implementing changes that will result in equitable outcomes.

Conclusion

The use of data, dialogue or decree is a start to moving toward social justice in the school and community. The approaches shared in this brief are tools to help ensure that there are actionable processes in place to address issues of equity, with the ultimate result of improved equity for all.

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