

EQUITY

Equity is the principle by which schools are guaranteed the resources they need to provide the same educational opportunities as other schools while meeting the basic educational needs of their student population.

The result of an effective equity policy would be that every Madison school would be equally desirable and of the highest quality.

Endorsed by the East Attendance Area PTO Coalition and the Northside Planning Council

A comprehensive equity policy should include the following components:

Part 1: Economically Integrated Schools

All children, but especially children from low-income families, have a better chance of success in economically integrated schools. A low-income child in a high-poverty school needs more resources to succeed than he/she would in a low-poverty school; therefore, not only does an economically integrated school increase the child's chances for success, but it is also a more efficient use of District resources.

Part 2: Need-Based Resource Allocations

Since base allocations represent the basic resources a school needs, base allocations should be done using the Educational Needs Index to help insure that schools with above-average concentrations of poverty get resources that are proportional to their needs. Supplemental allocations could be used to supplement resources at low-poverty schools if the base allocations do not cover the same range of programs offered at other schools.

Part 3: Equal Opportunity Curriculum

Curricular opportunities and choices should be the same at all schools at the same level. For example, all middle schools should offer the same opportunities in music and foreign language. Allocations should be made accordingly so that principals do not have to choose between support services (i.e. – a social worker) and academic programs. Furthermore, fractional allocations at smaller schools make it harder to retain the best teachers – more consideration should be put into alleviating this problem.

Part 4: Excellent and Accountable School Leadership

Open, accessible and regular principal evaluations should be conducted involving parents and the school community (this is especially critical because site-based management gives principals lots of discretion). School leadership plays a critical role in how a school responds to the challenges it faces, but parents from the most challenged schools have the least capacity to give the District proactive feedback on an ad hoc basis about the quality of leadership. The District should more actively reach out to those parents and create a meaningful forum where they can provide honest feedback.

East Attendance Area PTO Coalition

The EAAPTOC is an advocacy organization whose mission is to improve the quality of education for all students in the East High attendance area. The group, convened in 2002 by the Northside Planning Council, originally focused on schools from the Northside, but expanded in 2005 to include other East High attendance area schools. The EAAPTOC has been working towards school district equity since its inception.

Northside Planning Council

The Northside Planning Council, founded in 1993, is an award-winning community organization of neighborhood, business and community organization working to improve the quality of life for all residents of the Northside community by increasing citizen participation and voice in issues and decisions affecting the Northside community through neighborhood organizing and advocacy; and building community on the Northside by linking community organizations and residents.

Contact Jim Powell at 661-0060 or jim@northsideplanningcouncil.org for more information

MYTHS/MISINTERPRETATIONS OF EQUITY

- ❖ **Myth #1:** *Small class size is the most important factor in student success*
 - **Reality:** The most important factor in student success is the child's income level and the density of poverty at a school. Even SAGE evaluation data shows that class size is a secondary factor, a way to compensate when a high density of poverty cannot be avoided. Furthermore, middle- and upper-income students experience only slight gains, if any, from smaller class sizes and succeed regardless of the poverty rate at the school.

- ❖ **Myth #2:** *A poor child has the same chance for success at any school, regardless of the density of poverty at that school*
 - **Reality:** As David Rusk reports in "Classmates Count!" a poor child at a school with 20% poverty has a much greater chance for success than a child at a school with a 70% rate of poverty. An economically integrated school provides many qualitative and quantitative advantages, even with the same level of District resources or less than a poorer school, that make it more likely that a low-income child will succeed.

- ❖ **Myth #3:** *Equity will take from the rich to give to the poor*
 - **Reality:** That statement assumes that this is a zero-sum game--that providing what one group needs to succeed means that another group has to suffer. Our current practice of creating "SAGE-like" classes for lower poverty schools was implemented at a time when we could afford that extra luxury, but it does not produce considerable educational advantages in low-poverty schools. SAGE, supplemental allocations and other resources intended for high-poverty schools should not be compromised because we can longer afford to have them at low-poverty schools. Furthermore, there are middle- and upper-income children at high poverty schools who will benefit from a comprehensive equity policy, just as our neighborhoods and community will benefit in the long-run by providing a level playing field for all children. We all win when our children are given what they need to succeed.

- ❖ **Myth 4:** *Equity is only an East side issue*
 - **Reality:** This issue is relevant to the future of our entire district: what kind of a school district do we want to become as our city becomes more diverse and urban? Now is the time to help insure that Madison does not deteriorate into every other "inner-city" school district in the country. While the East side has a high concentration of poverty, a comprehensive equity policy will benefit high poverty schools all over the district. And again, our whole community will benefit by providing all children the tools they need to succeed.

- ❖ **Myth 5:** *Equity will "dumb down" the curriculum*
 - **Reality:** The goal of equity is to allow each student to reach his/her potential. Rather than removing programs like TAG, we should raise the expectations for all students and insure that many more diverse students are actively recruited into more challenging academic programs.

Tensions Inherent in Creating Equity:

- Will giving the resources needed to students at high poverty schools result white flight throughout the district? Conversely, should low poverty schools have the same or more resources than high poverty schools?
- The "same" resources vs. equal opportunity: should every school receive the same resource allocation per student or should allocations be weighted based on the needs of each student.
- Neighborhood schools vs. income integration at a school: does keeping existing neighborhood schools—many with high or low poverty rates—benefit students with the most need when studies show that low income students perform best where the poverty rate at their school is below fifty percent?