

Statement on Equity

The Aspen Institute Education & Society Program is committed to ensuring the benefits of public education extend to *all* students, with a special focus on correcting the under-education of students of color and students from low-income families. We pursue this work by informing, influencing, and inspiring education leaders, and through developing our staff as leaders for equity - maintaining a focus on diversity and inclusion in all aspects of our operations.

Public education is essential to America’s aspirational identity as a land of opportunity and a pluralistic democracy. In an equitable education system, all individuals can attain sufficient knowledge and skills to pursue the college and career path of their choice, develop a sense of self, and become active and contributing members of their communities. **Personal and social identifiers such as gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, language, disability, citizenship, religion, and/or income are not obstacles to accessing educational opportunities; the circumstances children are born into do not predict their access to the resources and rigor necessary for success.**

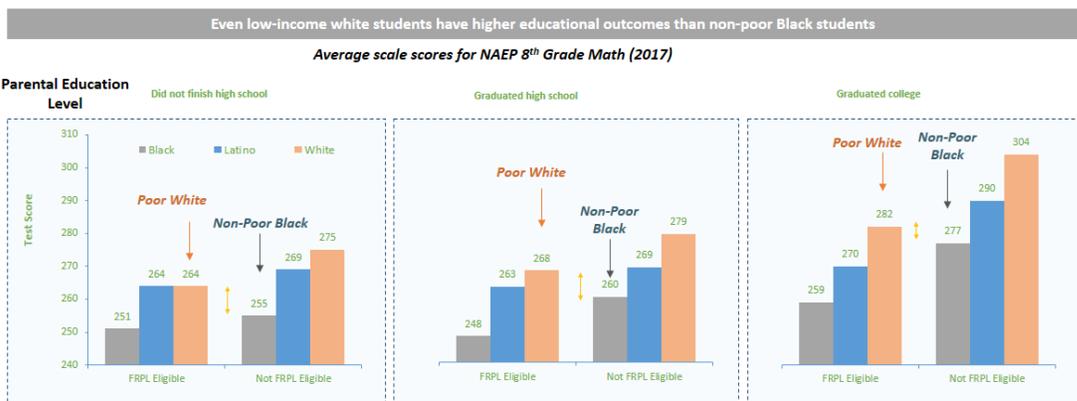
Every student deserves an education that prepares him or her for lifelong learning, success in the world of work, and participation in representative government. Schools are not only places for acquiring knowledge and skills, however; they are also places for identity formation, where young people begin to understand who they are and how they relate to others and society at large.

The Impact of Race on Educational Equity

Race matters. As numerous sources of data on educational inequity prove, race still exerts an undeniable and odious influence on education experiences and outcomes.

Even when other factors are accounted for, such as students’ socioeconomic and disability status, there are serious and persistent racial gaps that can only be solved if leadership makes this an explicit priority. It is important to acknowledge the unique past history and present-day manifestations of racism and inequity in American society, including the stereotypes and unconscious biases that allow these inequities to persist. Creating a space to discuss and address these issues is both difficult and essential. While it is necessary to address issues of race directly, race is not the only paradigm for addressing equity—and we should not conflate race with poverty or use poverty as a way to avoid more difficult conversations about race.

Racial achievement gaps persist even accounting for socioeconomic backgrounds



NOTE: NAEP Mathematics scale ranges from 0 to 500.
 SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, NCES, NAEP, 2017 Mathematics Assessment.

The Opportunity

Unfortunately, far too many students are not receiving the high-quality educational experiences needed to help them reach these goals. This not only hobbles their individual chances for success, but also undermines shared growth in an economy where most jobs that pay a living wage require some form of post-secondary credential.

Meaningful progress toward equity in education does not necessarily mean equal resources for all. Some students are starting with less than their peers – because of current and/or past disinvestment in their schools and communities – and therefore require additional resources to achieve the same level of success. **Educational equity means that every student has access to the right resources they need at the right moment in their education, despite race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, language, nationality/immigration status, disability, family background, or family income.**

Equity does not mean creating equal conditions for all students, but rather targeting resources based on individual students' needs and circumstances, which includes providing differentiated funding and supports. Targeting supports in this way is intended to remove barriers and create the same opportunities for low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities that their more advantaged peers experience. Educational equity is often measured in terms of financial resources – such as per pupil funding levels.

To get a true sense of equity, we must look beyond the amount of money and consider how it is spent – do all students have sufficient access to high-quality teachers, rigorous coursework and instructional materials (including technology), support services, and extracurricular opportunities? We can also look at outcomes, such as achievement scores, graduation rates, post-secondary enrollment and completion rates, and access to well-paying careers and social capital. A truly high-quality and equitable education, however, is also about the student experience and the learning environment. Student and family feedback surveys can provide valuable information about whether schools are safe, welcoming, and caring environments.

Our Responsibility for the Future of Educational Equity

From the founding of the United States through our present day, educational systems and structures have not been designed to serve all Americans. From systemic underinvestment in students of color, students from low-income families, and students with disabilities and the establishment of separate and unequal school systems for white students and students of color, American government and civil society have enshrined educational inequity through policies, institutions, and attitudes. As a result, many people have lost confidence that public officials are committed to ensuring that factors like race and socio-economic status do not determine students' success.

Education leaders must rebuild trust that has been lost between the public and civic institutions, including public education. Furthermore, there is a pervasive lack of awareness about the deeply disparate opportunities and outcomes that persist for low-income students, students of color, English learners, and students with disabilities.

Although federal, state, and local educational systems play an important role in monitoring, promoting, and ensuring equity in education, genuine equity requires agency among families and communities to authentically inform and influence how public education activates the potential in each student and responds to the unique learning needs in the context of community. Equity, therefore, lives in local

adaptation; it can be advanced and supported by policy, but its particulars cannot be mandated from afar or distilled to a single program or set of strategies that are applied in the same way everywhere.

Many educators, policymakers, and community leaders are advancing equity every day through their hard work and determination, often without much-needed support. Despite some progress, achievement and opportunity gaps persist at all levels of the educational system and education leaders can and must do more to advance equity.