

4.2 Advancing Equity

Level at which attention is paid to ensuring that the early childhood system meets the needs of all young children and their families

THIS MEASURE IS IN DEVELOPMENT

Value

There are pervasive disparities in early childhood outcomes by race and ethnicity, and significant challenges in achieving equitable outcomes across other factors like family income, neighborhood, language spoken at home, disability status, and immigration status. One of the contributions of an effective early childhood system can be to focus attention on these issues and pursue solutions that would not be possible for individual service providers.

A well-functioning early childhood system allows leaders and stakeholders to look across the programs and services that make up the system to assess and improve: how well it is meeting the needs of the community's entire population of young children and their families; where there are gaps; and where the system is perpetuating inequities or not serving some families well. While this includes looking closely at the available data to determine where there are disparities in outcomes, there are also other steps that system leaders can take to advance equity in the early childhood system and in the community. Early childhood system leaders can use their position to influence the work of the system as a whole, as well as practice within direct-service programs, through training, coaching, incentives, and requirements.

Advancing equity will likely raise some issues that can seem to be outside of the core responsibilities of an early childhood system – for example, addressing homelessness, or equitable access to safe play spaces. Early childhood systems can't solve these problems on their own, but they can work in ways that raise the likelihood that elected officials and other community leaders will act on them. At the same time, most early childhood systems will find issues within their realm of direct influence, such as disparities in preschool expulsion and diversity of the early childhood workforce and leadership, which can be addressed from within the system.

Definition

Equity has been defined as “just and fair inclusion into a society in which all can participate, prosper, and reach their full potential.”⁸ This system performance measure prompts an assessment of how well leaders and stakeholders in the early childhood system are using the system-level perspective and influence they have to advance racial, economic, and social equity in the community.

The tool below is focused around ten topic areas which include activities at the system level, activities related to influencing practice within the sectors that make up the early childhood system, and activities at the program level. With these activities, early childhood system leaders can understand and improve the ability of the system to meet the needs of all families with young children and reduce disparities in access, quality, and outcomes.

Communities can use the reflective self-assessment tool to discuss and give a rating of how well the early childhood system uses strategies to advance equity in each of ten domains and then assign an overall rating of current efforts to advance equity.

Summary of Steps

- 1. Set intention:** Decide on your community's goals with respect to assessing how well the system is advancing equity.
- 2. Stakeholder engagement:** Identify early childhood system leaders or representatives to participate in the assessment process. With the stakeholder group, affirm or revise intentions.
- 3. Convene stakeholders:** Convene the group to talk through the assessment, reflect on the results, and determine what to do next with the information/analysis. Communities can use the Action Plan template in this Toolkit to help plan next steps.
- 4. Rate:** Discuss each of the ten domains in the tool, arriving at a rating of 1-4 for the question(s) within each domain. Then discuss how well the early childhood system is doing on advancing equity overall.
- 5. Interpret:** Communities should consider several questions as they analyze and interpret their responses on the assessment tool.
 - a.** What differences did you see in how various stakeholders assessed the system's current efforts? While there will always be variations in perspective among a group of people, it is particularly important to pay attention to differences by group when discussing questions related to equity. Did parents' responses differ from those of service providers and system leaders? Did people of color assess the system's efforts differently than white participants? Where you see patterns of differing perspectives, devote some extra time to discussing those perspectives. It may be that system efforts are not visible to community members; and it may be that the efforts being made are not meeting the needs of people in the community. Both of these scenarios offer opportunities for learning and improvement.
 - b.** What would it take for your community to get to the next level in one or more domains, or overall? Responses may reflect various factors including political will or resources.
 - c.** If you achieved a level 4 in any of these domains or overall, what led to that success? How can these successes be shared with other communities to support their improvement?
- 6. Determine what action should be taken as a result of the analysis, and record in action planning guide.** Use this assessment as an entrée to a larger conversation to support system building efforts.

⁸ Angela Glover Blackwell, Policy Link. “Equity Is...” Published October 2016. <http://putnam-consulting.com/philanthropy-411-blog/equity-is/>

Stakeholders

Leaders of the early childhood system should be involved in this assessment process. Ideally this would be led by someone in a convening or coordinating role for the system. It is particularly important for this measure that the stakeholder group include people from a range of backgrounds who can represent multiple population groups and neighborhoods within the community, including parents of young children.

Data Sources

This performance measure uses a self-assessment tool. Participants' assessment of the system's performance may be informed by disaggregated data on child and family outcomes, quality and access data from the sectors within the early childhood system, neighborhood or community needs assessments, and other sources.

Limitations

This measure is preliminary and has not been pilot tested.

Research Opportunities

CSSP is interested in identifying funding and community partners to further develop a tool for early childhood system leaders and stakeholders to assess their current efforts in advancing equity in the community and in the early childhood system itself, as well as to assess the effectiveness of those efforts. This is a critical need in the field, and it will require a thorough process to do it well.

Resources

- ▶ [RACE Matters: Organizational Assessment](#), Annie E. Casey Foundation
- ▶ [Racial Equity Impact Assessment](#), Race Forward
- ▶ [Racial Inequality in Policies that Impact Infants, Toddlers, and Families](#), Zero to Three and Center for Law and Social Policy

4.2 Advancing Equity: Rating Tool

Participating stakeholders collaboratively discuss how well the early childhood system as a whole and each of its component parts use strategies to advance equity in each of the following domains. For the questions in each domain, we suggest that communities identify:

- ▶ A significant strength and/or recent accomplishment that they can build upon;
- ▶ A significant challenge they need to address in order to make further progress;
- ▶ A tentative rating on a four-point scale about the extent to which these practices are being used, as follows:
 - 1—This is not being done or done rarely
 - 2—This is being done at times or within particular sectors
 - 3—This is being done pretty consistently across most sectors
 - 4—This is core work throughout the early childhood system

1. Data					
a. Data are routinely disaggregated and analyzed by race, ethnicity, neighborhood, and other relevant factors.		1	2	3	4
b. System and sector leaders use the data to drive action to address gaps and disparities that are revealed in analysis of early childhood data.		1	2	3	4
2. Policy analysis					
a. Proposed policy and practice changes are analyzed for the differential impact they may have on children and families in specific neighborhoods, racial or ethnic groups, or on parents and children with disabilities.		1	2	3	4
b. Parents are part of the decision-making process to design solutions that will work for them and their neighbors. (A lower rating may reflect that parents are invited to give feedback on proposed changes but not involved in designing solutions.)		1	2	3	4
3. Access and high quality					
a. High-quality services for children and families are located equitably throughout the community. (For example, all neighborhoods have access to high-quality early care and education.)		1	2	3	4
b. High-quality services are accessible from all areas within the community. There are public transportation options or other supports for families that need to travel to access needed services.		1	2	3	4
4. Investment					
a. The system invests its resources in a manner that makes services more equitably available to underserved and historically underinvested groups and neighborhoods.		1	2	3	4
b. Funding processes are accessible to smaller, grassroots organizations and those led by people who represent the communities they serve.		1	2	3	4
5. Professional development					
a. Organizations and direct service providers within the early childhood system participate in professional development on topics such as race, racism, implicit bias, cultural humility, and partnering equitably with parents.		1	2	3	4
b. Service providers have access to coaching and consultation to help them better serve the children and families in their programs, such as infant mental health consultation to address challenging behaviors.		1	2	3	4
c. Career pathways and professional development opportunities are available to help increase the diversity of the early childhood workforce.		1	2	3	4
6. Leadership					
a. There is diversity within the leadership of the early childhood system and the sectors within it.		1	2	3	4
b. The leadership has demonstrated commitment to addressing issues of equity and justice.		1	2	3	4

<p>7. Partnership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The early childhood system is connecting and partnering with other community leaders to address drivers of inequity and disparity that are outside of the early childhood system. b. The early childhood system is connecting and partnering with other community leaders to address drivers of inequity and disparity that are outside of the early childhood system. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p> <p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>8. Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The system communicates the importance of equity to service providers, decision-makers, families, and the community as a whole. b. Materials like posters and brochures are reflective of the families that live in the community in terms of race, disability, and family structure. c. Materials are translated, and interpretation is offered, so that non-English-speaking families can participate fully in the programs that serve their children and in early childhood system efforts. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p> <p>1 2 3 4</p> <p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>9. Incentives</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The early childhood system incentivizes or encourages programs and services to take concrete action on equity in their own programs or neighborhoods b. The early childhood system helps programs and agencies identify steps they can take to work toward more equitable outcomes and provides funding to support that work. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p> <p>1 2 3 4</p>
<p>10. Equity agenda</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The early childhood system has articulated an equity agenda. 	<p>1 2 3 4</p>

After considering the domains above, communities can evaluate the current performance of their early childhood system on advancing equity overall. Levels are defined as follows:

Level 1—There is limited activity related to advancing equity in the early childhood system.

Level 2—Some programs or services are focused on advancing equity, but these efforts are not crossing over into other parts of the early childhood system; there is no coordinated activity at the community or system level.

Level 3—System-level efforts are underway to work across programs and services with a focus on equity.

Level 4—Equity is a focus of the early childhood system, including tracking the effects of efforts to reduce disparities at the child, family, and/or community level.