

## The Making Equitable Schools Audit partnership: Frequently asked questions

### What is the Making Equitable Schools Audit (MESA) approach?

The MESA approach strives to ensure that all members of the school community—students, teachers, and staff—experience a safe and supportive school environment. MESA is a yearlong facilitated and collaborative approach designed to help schools use existing data and leverage community-wide relationships and move toward more equitable and belonging-filled experiences for all people in a school community.

What is MESA designed to do?

- Use existing school data to identify equity gaps in discipline, student belonging, and high-quality learning opportunities.
- Bring together leadership and diverse representatives from across the school community to look at data, identify common themes, and prioritize findings for action.
- Engage in an intentional planning process to boost student sense of belonging, reduce the use of exclusionary discipline, and improve the overall school environment.

### What are the components of the MESA approach?

The MESA approach has three main components:

- **Facilitated development and planning.** A diverse group of school leaders and staff (“the school leadership team”) prepares for the equity audit sessions.
- **Collaborative equity audit sessions.** School community members review and analyze school data for equity gaps and draft root causes based on the findings.
- **Support for implementation planning and monitoring.** A diverse group of school leaders and staff develop clear next steps for implementation, including strategies and interventions, and create a plan for how to monitor progress.

### What is the cost of the MESA approach?

There is no monetary cost for districts to implement the MESA approach. Districts will need to consider how to allow time for staff to participate in professional learning opportunities or cover time outside staff contract hours. School leadership team members will participate in eight coaching meetings spread throughout the school year (8 hours total) and three equity audit sessions (10 hours total). Other school staff will participate in only the three equity audit sessions (10 hours total).

## What else does implementing the MESA approach involve for districts?

Gathering and reflecting on data are critical features of the MESA approach. As such, partner districts implementing the MESA approach will build their capacity by measuring and reflecting on data, including administrative records (such as student attendance, discipline records, and teacher and student characteristics) and a student climate survey that measures sense of belonging. Data also will include a survey of staff self-efficacy to use and understand data, understand and address inequities in education, and determine the ability of distributed leadership and collective responsibility to make changes to policies and practices. Districts also will administer implementation surveys and invite a select group of staff to participate in interviews about their experiences implementing the MESA approach.

## Which schools is the MESA approach designed to support?

The MESA approach is for high schools with racially and ethnically diverse student populations. MESA participants will include high school leaders, teachers, school staff, students, family members, and community members.

## Who is eligible to join the MESA partnership?

All public school districts in the Midwest region are eligible to join the MESA partnership. Some districts may choose to implement the MESA approach, whereas other districts may choose to join the partnership to learn more about the work and consider opportunities for implementation in the future.

## Who is facilitating the MESA approach?

The MESA approach was developed by Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Midwest in partnership with Akron Public Schools in Ohio. REL Midwest is funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education.

Staff from REL Midwest will support implementation with coaching before and after the conclusion of the equity audit and during the equity audit sessions.

## What does implementation of the MESA approach involve for district and school staff, students, and community members?

**The district.** At least one person from the district office will serve as a champion for the MESA approach. This person will help communicate with and support schools as they implement the MESA approach. The champion also will connect REL Midwest with the district data team to obtain the data necessary for the MESA approach and to examine its implementation and outcomes.

**The school leadership team.** The school leadership team will participate in eight coaching meetings throughout the school year along with three equity audit sessions. We expect the total commitment to be 18–20 hours.

**Equity audit participants.** School leaders, teachers, school staff, students, family members, and community members will be invited to participate in three equity audit sessions (10 hours total).

The following table outlines the expected time commitment for participation in the MESA approach.

Participants	Activity	Duration	Timing
District liaison	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administer survey on MESA implementation and outcomes</li> <li>Provide staff and student data to REL Midwest</li> </ul>	N/A	Fall 2024 and spring 2025
School leadership team	Attend three leadership coaching sessions before the audit	3 hours total	August–December 2024
	Attend three equity audit sessions	10 hours total	January–March 2025
	Attend five coaching sessions after the audit	5 hours	February–June 2025
Selected school community members	Attend three equity audit sessions	10 hours total	January–March 2025
All participating teachers and school leaders	Complete an online survey administered by the district	20 minutes (each time)	September 2024 and May 2025
A small group of staff	Participate in an interview about MESA implementation	45 minutes	April–May 2025

### Who will learn about districts’ experiences implementing the MESA approach?

REL Midwest will summarize the results about the implementation and outcomes of the MESA approach across all implementing districts and present summaries of the results to the implementing districts and the U.S. Department of Education. We adhere to strict codes of confidentiality and will NEVER release individual responses in any way that could identify respondents.

### Who is REL Midwest?

REL Midwest, funded by the Institute of Education Sciences at the U.S. Department of Education, is one of 10 RELs serving educators and policymakers throughout the United States. The American Institutes for Research® was awarded the REL Midwest contract for January 2022 through January 2027 and works with educators in the Midwest region to support the use of evidence and data to improve student outcomes. More information is available on the [REL Midwest website](#).

## **Who can I contact if I have more questions or concerns?**

If you have general questions, please contact Melissa Yisak at [relmw.mesa@air.org](mailto:relmw.mesa@air.org). If you have concerns or questions about your rights as a participant, contact the Institutional Review Board at the American Institutes for Research (which is responsible for the protection of project participants) at [IRB@air.org](mailto:IRB@air.org) or toll free at 1-800-634-0797.