

Data Coaching to Examine, Interpret, and Use Student Data Equitably

The widespread adoption of “data-driven decision making,” in which educators use data to reflect on and improve their practice, often fails to inspire productive conversations about how educators can better serve students from historically marginalized groups (Bertrand & Marsh, 2021). Too often, educators encounter student data disaggregated by key demographic characteristics and draw interpretations and make conclusions reflecting deficit-oriented thinking about students who show worse outcomes on these metrics (Bertrand & Marsh, 2021). In these instances, educators locate the problem of poor academic performance in the students (or their families) rather than examining their own educational practices and systems that shape students’ experiences and outcomes (Bertrand & Marsh, 2021). Ultimately, the potential for data to lead to improved practices and improved outcomes is not realized.

Research on the use of data in education indicates data interpretations are shaped by existing mental models and can often be used to reinforce prevailing beliefs (Coburn & Turner, 2011; Spillane & Miele, 2007). Coburn and Turner point out that data use involves interpretation through the context and its social and organizational conditions. Superficial use of data can confirm assumptions and reinforce low expectations for students who are under-performing (Datnow, 2017). Interpretations of data can be influenced by confirmation bias which may produce the tendency for people to seek and value evidence that confirms prior beliefs and to question or reject evidence that is discrepant with their beliefs (Edwards & Smith, 1996).

How do we counter these tendencies? Through a series of three half-day sessions in 2021, REL Northeast & Islands (REL-NEI) staff engaged a group of school and district leaders from a large school district in New England to share concepts and tools, and to offer support for participants to lead asset-oriented and system-focused data conversations in their organization. Four of the key tools are included below: an empathy interview development guide, a table of Opportunity to Learn data, a Responding to Bias worksheet, and a Data for Equity conversation protocol. Below, we describe the guiding principles that shaped this work.

Guiding Principles

Implicit Bias

Implicit bias is a form of unconscious fast thinking used to refer to associations, beliefs, or attitudes toward any social group held outside one’s conscious awareness. These biases are learned from an early age outside one’s conscious awareness as part of the socialization process into one’s family and culture. They may be positive or negative, but in either case they often influence one’s understanding, actions, and

decisions in an unconscious and automatic manner. It is for this reason that acknowledging the presence of implicit bias and questioning its use as the primary explanation for student outcomes is of great importance. In other words, when analyzing and interpreting student data, it is crucial to question these automatic associations and assumptions, check their validity, and consider what other information is needed to break the causal link between bias, conclusions, and behavior (Staats, 2015-2016).

The following strategies can help disrupt biased thinking when examining student data:

- Pause the process and acknowledge the biases that arise without judgment and encourage questioning and rethinking of these automatic associations.
- Listen to understand why these implicit associations are being made and what they mean.
- Remind the group examining student data to stay focused on what systemic factors are producing the outcomes reflected in the data.
- Consider how implicit bias may be hidden in policies, procedures, and practices, and redesign these with equity in mind. (Boudreau, 2019)

Asset-Orientation

When educators take a deficit-oriented view about students, they place the blame for poor academic outcomes on the students, their families, or the communities from which they come. They assume that the students cannot succeed at higher levels, and by implication, remove themselves from holding responsibility for the students' outcomes. The opposite approach is an asset-orientation, in which educators acknowledge the wisdom and strengths that students and their families bring into a school setting, even when those may be different from the type of knowledge typically rewarded in U.S. schools (Moll et al., 1992). Approaching data from an assets point of view also recognizes that students have growth potential and seeks to identify the best pathway to the students' growth, rather than if students who have struggled in the past will always struggle. An asset-orientation is not synonymous with positivity—it doesn't mean that a discussion about students needs to stay entirely positive. It does mean identifying students' strengths and seeing the whole person, hearing students' and families' aspirations, and understanding the reality that students experience from their standpoint, from an empathic perspective (Axel-Lute, 2019; Shorters, 2021).

Focusing on the System

A key tenet of continuous improvement is captured in the famous quote from Paul Batalden, a continuous improvement leader in the healthcare field, that "Every system is perfectly designed to get exactly the results that it gets." Taking a systems perspective means understanding the systemic structures, norms, and processes that contribute to the problem at hand, and then working to disrupt and dismantle the problematic aspects of the system (Provost & Bennett, 2015). This stands in explicit contrast to an approach that assumes that the problem of poor outcomes rests in individuals' skills, knowledge, and effort. The shifting of the locus of control from individuals to systems is one aspect of shifting away from deficit-oriented conversations about students and families.

Contexts for Centering Equity in Data Use

Consider the many ways educators process data and information every day. These include informal ways such as through hundreds of daily observations and interactions and more formal ways when interpreting student performance and achievement data in professional learning communities, data teams, public meetings, and department and faculty meetings. In these different contexts, educators can put equity at the center by adopting a few key equity practices reflected in the guiding principles outlined above.

First, groups of educators working together can acknowledge their intention to center equity in their work. They can state explicitly that their goals are to use data and other information to uncover potential inequities in the education system and inform them about who their students are and how they are experiencing the education system. Second, they will seek to include the voices of the students and families they are trying to serve to understand their perspectives on how the system is working for them. This can be done by conducting empathy interviews, having student or family representatives help to interpret the data, and/or by creating a students/families/community advisory team to provide input and share their experiences. Third, educators can also agree that when they are interpreting and applying data and information, they will bring an asset-orientation to the work and focus on identifying and leveraging students' strengths and avoiding stereotypes. They will believe that students can grow and learn from wherever they start. When using data, they can first reflect on or write a short narrative about the strengths they see in the data before calling out areas for growth and improvement. Fourth, they can agree to stay focused on problems of learning that are within their sphere of influence and that they can address and solve. Further, they can agree to examine data beyond achievement data, such as interview and other qualitative data and opportunity to better understand who their students are, the strengths they bring, and the opportunities they do and do not have access to in the education system. Finally, they can get in the habit of questioning colleagues when they hear stereotypes raised to increase awareness of any implicit bias operating in the education system and in its structures and policies.

These equity practices can be used in any of the contexts where educators and education stakeholders are examining, interpreting, and discussing data and information. The tools in this resource provide guidance for making these equity practices a routine part of data use, focused on continuous improvement.

Tools

Empathy Interview Development Guide

This tool supports an interviewer (or group of interviewers) to develop an interview guide that is likely to promote the type of conversation that allows for the sharing and hearing of stories and emotional experiences.

Student Opportunity to Learn Data

This tool provides a list of data types that can be used to better understand students' opportunities to learn and whether students have equitable access to education in their schools and districts.

Responding to Bias

This tool helps identify commonly expressed beliefs about the reasons for student outcomes that tend to focus solely on student or family characteristics. It also helps educators create a repertoire of responses that encourage understanding of the reasoning behind these common beliefs and, most importantly, that move the discussion into exploring the systemic factors that are influencing the outcomes.

Data for Equity Conversation Protocol

This data discussion protocol is structured around the idea of the “Ladder of Inference” – the mental process that people progress through as they encounter new information (Chris Argyris, referenced in Senge, 1990). The protocol takes the participants from understanding to noticing, noticing to hypothesizing and raising questions, and then to next steps.

Empathy Interview Development Guide

Empathy is “the ability to be aware of, understanding of, and sensitive to another person’s feelings and thoughts without having had the same experience” (Battarbee et al., 2014). Taking an empathic stance is one of the ways that individuals can counter implicit biases, by slowing down one’s thinking, listening and observing while keeping a critical lens on one’s own assumptions and theories, and reconsidering an issue from someone else’s vantage point (Battarbee et al., 2014). There are numerous tools of empathic learning, and one that is particularly accessible to school and district members is the empathy interview. An empathy interview is a conversation with someone whose vantage point is likely different from the interviewer, and often is the recipient of services in a social service organization. In the case of schools, students, families, and teachers are common interviewees.

An empathy interview is marked by open-ended questions, eliciting emotions and stories, and the interviewer refraining from sharing their own judgments and stories. This tool supports an interviewer (or group of interviewers) to develop an interview guide that is likely to promote the type of conversation that allows for the sharing and hearing of stories and emotional experiences. This tool is meant to be flexible and to support the interviewers in thinking through the conversation they want to have to better understand the experiences of their interviewees. *Note: The sample questions may not be relevant for all interviewees and contexts, and some may need to be tailored based on the context and interviewee’s role.*

Activity Instructions (Suggested time: 75 minutes)

Establish the focus for your Empathy Interviews

Discuss and answer the following questions to establish the focus and purpose of your interviews:

- On what aspects of our system do you need more information?
- What do we want to know about the experiences of students and families that will provide us with meaningful data to inform the improvement of educational experiences and outcomes for students?
- Who would you like to interview? What about these people or their perspectives do you think would help you to better understand the story behind more traditional data (e.g., data on achievement, suspension, etc.)?
- What opportunities do you have to conduct an empathy interview with any students, families, or community members that you identified above? By what date will you complete the interviews? (Suggested time: 30 minutes)

Develop your Interview Guide

Using the template below, review the suggested questions for the empathy interviews. Revise any of the questions to be aligned to the focus and purpose of your interviews and add any additional questions you would like to ask. (Suggested time: 30 minutes)

Identify Action Steps

- Decide who will finalize and share the Interview Guide and schedule and conduct the interviews
- Establish a timeline for completion of all action steps. (Suggested time: 15 minutes)

Developing the Interview Guide

Section	Purpose and Guidelines	Interview Notes and Next Steps
Introduction	<p>During this portion of the interview, the goal is to establish rapport with the participant/interviewee.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Introduce yourselves and share your connection with the school district (e.g., “I’m originally from here” or “I’m a teacher and parent of 3 children who attended school in the district.”)	

Section	Purpose and Guidelines	Interview Notes and Next Steps
Establishing Purpose	<p>During this portion of the interview, the goal is to help the participant/interviewee understand why you are conducting the interview and how they can contribute.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Offer a broad overview of the interview. (e.g., As you know, we’ve been speaking with families to find out more about their experiences with our system and what we can do to improve them.)	

Section	Purpose and Guidelines	Interview Notes and Next Steps
Entry Questions	<p>During this portion of the interview, the goal is to get a better understanding of who the participant/interviewee is in a broad sense. You might ask questions that get at the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inquire about role and position (e.g., How many children do you have in the district? How old are your children?) • Gain a sense of personal, pertinent history (e.g., “Where did you grow?” or “Are there other places that feel like/you call home?”) • Learn more about the specifics of what life is like for the interviewee (e.g., “walk me through a typical day in your shoes.”) 	

Section	Purpose and Guidelines	Interview Notes and Next Steps
Stories of Experiences	<p>During this portion of the interview your goal is to ask your participants to share stories about their experiences. This is the part of the interview that will be most tailored to who you are speaking with and the information you hope to learn.</p> <p>For example: Tell me about a time when... (e.g., ...you had [did not have] fun learning, ...you felt [did not feel] seen/heard/included, ...you were [weren't] proud to be a part of our schools. Why was that?)</p> <p>Example Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>What do you hope for yourself and for your children?</i> • <i>What would your dream life look like? What role would our school system play in that dream?</i> • <i>What do you want for yourself/your child/your students?</i> • <i>How are our schools contributing value to you?</i> • <i>In what ways would you like to see our schools improve?</i> 	

Section	Purpose and Guidelines	Interview Notes and Next Steps
Thank You and Conclusion	<p>During this portion of the interview, thank the participant and share something that you learned from the empathy interview and any next steps.</p> <p>Additionally, this is when the participant can raise their questions.</p> <p>Example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Thank you so much for taking the time to speak with me. I appreciate learning from you and look forward to using what you've shared to make improvements in our system.</i> • <i>Do you have any questions for me?</i> 	

Student Opportunity to Learn Data

This tool provides a list of data types that can be used to better understand students' opportunities to learn and whether students have equitable access to education in their schools and districts. Educators interested in ensuring equity will examine these data to learn if students are in an inclusive and supportive learning environment as measured by school climate data, student surveys, and discipline data. Educators also use the data to understand which students have access to and are completing challenging college preparatory courses and high quality CTE programs. The data can uncover barriers to students' access to opportunity and help identify what supports need to be provided to all students to increase their success.

Students' opportunity to learn is also influenced by being taught by qualified and experienced teachers, attending schools led by experienced and qualified principals and by having the opportunity to be taught by race-matched teachers. Having access to high-quality instructional materials and digital learning resources is another important factor for student success, so teams also examine data on the availability and use of curricula resources at the classroom and school levels. Educators and data teams use opportunity to learn data such as these alongside achievement data to get a better understanding of the ways the system is supporting learning for all students and gain insights into which students may need increased access to opportunity to learn.

Student Opportunity to Learn Data¹ Protocol

In addition to examining achievement data to track student progress, educators can also examine and discuss data sources that indicate the extent to which students have equitable opportunity to learn (OTL). OTL data provides valuable information to inform whether students have sufficient and equitable access to the conditions and resources necessary for them to reach expectations for learning, such as those represented in state content standards. Examples of data points that can surface potential inequities in access to opportunity to learn are included below.

Activity Instructions (Suggested time: 60 minutes)

- Individually or with a partner, review the list of OTL data and annotate as follows:
 - Place a check mark (✓) next to any data source you are already using to assess OTL
 - Place an exclamation point (!) next to any data source you would like to start using to assess OTL
 - Place a question mark (?) next to any data source you need more information about(Suggested time: 10–15 minutes)

¹ Cardichon, J., Darling-Hammond, L., Espinoza, D., & Kostyo, S. (2019). *North Carolina's Statewide Accountability System: How to effectively measure progress towards meeting the Leandro Tenets*. Learning Policy Institute.

Marion, S. (2020). *Using opportunity to learn data to support educational equity*. Center for Assessment.

Mundry, S. & Kleiman, G. (2020). *A monitoring system for assessing progress towards a sound basic education in North Carolina*. WestEd.

- With the full group discuss use of the OTL data. Ask everyone to share examples of OTL data they are using (i.e., those that they annotated with a check mark earlier). Ask them to explain how they are using the data and what they are learning. Probe to identify if the use of these data has informed actions to increase students' opportunities to learn. (Suggested time: 10 minutes)
- Next, ask everyone to share the data sources they would like to start using (i.e., those that they annotated with an exclamation point earlier). Make a list of the new data sources the group would like to use on a white board or electronically and identify what actions may be needed to gather or get access to those data. (Suggested time: 15 minutes)
- Next, invite the group to ask questions they have about the OTL data (i.e., those that they annotated with a question mark earlier). Identify any action steps to respond to questions. (Suggested time: 10 minutes)
- Reflection: Wrap up the activity by asking the group to complete a quick write in response to this prompt: How would you like to integrate the use of OTL data into discussions with education leaders, staff and stakeholders to increase the focus on ensuring equitable access and identify system barriers to opportunity? How could this help you take action to improve access to learning opportunities? (5 minutes)
- Action Steps: Review action steps the group will take to increase access to and use of OTL data. (Suggested time: 5 minutes)

Opportunity to Learn Data Points

- Students enrolled in and completing gifted and talented programs, advanced coursework (e.g., AP and IB) and dual enrollment for college credit
- Students enrolled in and completing a CTE course of study/credential
- Students with access to up to date, high quality, and standards-based instructional materials and learning tools, computers, and broadband access
- Students taught by qualified and experienced teachers
- Students taught by race/ethnicity-matched teachers
- Children (aged 3 and 4 years old) in the community enrolled in and attending preschool programs
- Students receiving interventions provided for early reading
- Students receiving interventions through a Multi-Tiered System of Support
- District's policy for allocation of funding, e.g., is equity a criterion for allocating resources?
- Student receiving early intervention to prevent dropout and chronic absenteeism

- Ratio of students to mental health support staff in schools
- Average class size
- Time on task (e.g., hours of face-to-face instruction per week or month; time in distance learning both synchronous and asynchronous)
- Student disciplinary data
- Data on use of disciplinary practices that limit suspensions and expulsions and address disparity in exclusionary practices
- Data on school climate
- Data on teacher expectations
- Classroom observation data on time on task and student-teacher interactions

Responding to Bias

This tool responds to a need often expressed by educators who lead discussions on student data. “How do we respond when the first inclination is to conclude that the reason for student outcomes stems from student characteristics, such as their socio-economic, racial/ethnic, or immigrant status and lack of English fluency?”

Objectives

The objectives of this tool are twofold:

1. Identify commonly expressed beliefs about the reasons for student outcomes that tend to focus solely on student or family characteristics.
2. Create a repertoire of responses that encourage understanding of the reasoning behind these common beliefs and, most importantly, that move the discussion into exploring the systemic factors that are influencing the outcomes. The resulting document then serves as a resource for data discussion leaders.

Responding to Bias in Data Conversations Guide¹ (Suggested total time: 45–60 minutes)

Activity Instructions

Introduce the Activity (5 minutes)

- Share activity objectives
- Review strategies to disrupt bias (see strategies in the Introduction)
- Review the examples chart

Brainstorm comments heard in the participant’s context (15–20 minutes depending on size of group)

- Enter under the column “When you hear...”

Brainstorm potential responses (20–25 minutes depending on the size of the group)

- Consider the strategies to disrupt bias and the examples in the chart and at the end of the tool
- Enter the potential responses into the appropriate column and note any insights and/or next steps

Discuss how the activity or the completed chart could be used with others (5–10 minutes)

¹ This document and activity are inspired by the work of Melissa Spadin, Kristine Shipman, Shannon Baker, Julie Goldman, and Jeanette Rodriguez-Chien from Learning & Leadership Services at the San Diego County Office of Education. It also draws on the coaching work of Elena Aguilar, which can be found in Aguilar, E. (2013). *The Art of Coaching: Effective Strategies for School Transformation*. Jossey Bass.

Table 1. Common biased comments and potential responses, from the ABC School District

When you hear...	Potential Responses	Next Steps/Notes
“Changing demographics”	<p>You named changing demographics. Can you say more about that?</p> <p>What other factors do you think might explain what you’re seeing? What else might be going on?</p>	
Our program is great for all students	<p>Let’s look more closely at these data. Did you know that ... (e.g., Homeless students are suspended at 5 times the district average?) Are you aware of ... (other data that disproves the statement)? How can you help us understand what’s going on?</p>	
<p>We have a large population of _____</p> <p>which is why our data looks like that.</p>	<p>You named that you have a large population of _____. Can you say more about that? What outcome are you looking for these students? The data conflicts with your expected outcome. What are you thinking about that? What actions are you willing to take?</p>	
<p>Can we ever move Special Education kids academically? It’s why they have an IEP in the first place.</p>	<p>What outcome are you looking for these students? How are you thinking about the students you are referring to?</p>	

[INSERT SCHOOL DISTRICT NAME] Responses to Biased Comments

1. Brainstorm: What do you hear in your setting?
2. How might you respond? Keep in mind the strategies for disrupting bias.
3. What could be some next steps?

When you hear...	Potential Responses	Next Steps/Notes

Sample sentence starters adapted from Elena Aguilar (2013):

- *What I hear you saying is... Am I missing anything? Could you explain that a bit further? It's important that we understand what you mean.*
- *I'm interested in hearing more about... Please tell me more ...*
- *Tell me what you mean when you ...*
- *Would you be open to examining the assumptions behind your reasoning? Let's examine the assumptions behind this statement. What data might we look at to see if this assumption is accurate.*

Data for Equity Conversation Protocol¹

Discussion protocols can be powerful tools to shift the norms of professional discourse, enable equity of voice in a conversation, and move a conversation through stages (e.g., from ideas to actions) (Little & Curry, 2009; McDonald et al., 2003). This data discussion protocol is structured around the idea of the “Ladder of Inference” – the mental process that people progress through as they encounter new information (Chris Argyris, referenced in Senge, 1990). The protocol takes the participants from understanding to noticing, noticing to hypothesizing and raising questions, and then to next steps. These explicit steps through the ladder of inference promotes a conversation about the hypotheses and mental models that participants are drawing upon to make their interpretations—rather than participants assuming that everyone sees and interprets the data as they do. The protocol prompts participants to consider other ways of seeing the data and alternative interpretations. Equity concerns are forefront in this protocol through the framing and norms, the prompting questions, and the “equity pause,” which compels participants to reflect on their own conversation and identify assumptions that might be made.

Activity Instructions

Suggested time for the discussion, not counting the “Phase 0” pre-meeting preparation: 30–60 minutes.² The suggested times for the data conversation itself (Phases 1–4) assume a 45-minute discussion.

Phase 0: Pre-Meeting Work and Facilitator Considerations

Questions to ask before engaging in this protocol

- *What data do we need to look at? How might we bring in “Opportunity to Learn” data, or qualitative data from empathy strategies, to increase attention on the system and to humanize the data? Who decides what to look at?*
- *How can we display the data to illuminate and understand disparate experiences and outcomes?*
- *What is the purpose of looking at this data? (For example, to identify inequities, understand problems and their causes, check progress, identify bright spots, etc.) Consider modifying the purpose listed on the next page with your additions or alterations.*
- *What questions are we trying to answer?*

¹ This protocol draws primarily on the High Tech High Graduate School of Education [Data Equity Protocol](#), and also draws on elements from the [CASEL SEL Data Reflection Protocol](#). We are grateful to these organization for their generosity in sharing their materials for public use. This protocol has been modified and refined by the WestEd Improvement Science team through use with education partners. It is an evolving document, and we invite you to adapt it for your own context and purpose.

² The length of this activity will depend on the number of data visualizations that are being examined, the number of participants, and the nature of the conversation. Typical data conversations can last somewhere between 30 to 60 minutes.

- *Whose perspectives are represented? Whose perspectives are missing? Who needs to be in the room to ensure multiple perspectives are considered and movement is made?*
- *What is missing from this data? What other data or whose perspectives might further our understanding of the issue?*

Considerations for Discussion Structures and Processes

1. You can use this protocol with a single group or multiple small groups. Consider the number of people in a group to enable everyone to share ideas.
2. Within the group dynamics, are there issues of power, authority, or positionality (e.g., race, gender, age, institutional hierarchy, etc.) that might affect participation?
 - a. Who is participating? Who is missing? How can we bring in the voices of important community members into this or subsequent meetings?
 - b. What supports do you need to put into place to have a healthy, productive, and brave conversation that will achieve the purpose described above? For example, consider the strategy of having participants write reflections before sharing to make space for different modes of processing.
3. Tailor and order discussion questions to suit the data at hand and the conversation you are hoping to promote.

Phase 1: Meeting Framing and Norm-setting (10 minutes)

Equity Definition

[Enter your organization's equity definition here. Below is a sample definition:]

Sample Equity Definition adapted from the [National Equity Project](#) and [Achieving the Dream](#).

Each person receives what they need, when they need it, to thrive socially, emotionally, and professionally through the intentional design of workplace experiences and interacting systems.

Clarify the purpose of this session:

- To identify equity **gaps in our system**, **reflect on the conditions** that create and perpetuate them, and move forward with **concrete steps** for understanding and interrupting inequities.

Framing the way we look at data:

- Embrace the equity definition
- Center thinking on the system: for whom is the system benefitting and harming?
- Acknowledge the complexity of the human experience: the danger of a single story.
- Recognize the shortcomings of data, without dismissing altogether: any given data source is only a piece of the puzzle but can spark curiosity and focus attention about where to look next.

Discussion Process Norms: Conversations about data and equity can elicit a range of emotions. As a result, these conversations can raise feelings of vulnerability. This is not a bad thing. A structured protocol helps maintain focus and constructive dialogue, and when executed thoughtfully, invites participants to engage fully.

- **Share the air...** Take space, make space, invite others in.
- **Lean into discomfort...** We can't improve what we do not face.
- **Embrace "we," not "they" ...** to unpack how our systems can perpetuate and interrupt inequity.
- **Own your intent and impact...** Resist defensiveness/blaming/avoidance and seek to understand.
- **Stick to the protocol...** It helps people be in their brave space and move forward.
- **Stay engaged...** Avoid distractions, close your email, set up a context in which you can focus.
- **Accept and expect non-closure...** When we tackle the deep-rooted inequities in our system, we are not going to resolve issues overnight.
- **Every data point has a heartbeat...** There are people and differing perspectives behind the numbers.

Phase 2: Reviewing the Data (20 minutes)

Step 0: Discussion facilitator orients team to data

1. Orient and describe how the data was collected and displayed.
 - a. Contextual framing, e.g., what the data focus on and why are looking at them
 - b. Data Collection/ Method: Timing, sample, survey tool, etc.
 - c. Who is included/not included?
 - d. Describe Data: title of visualization, x-y axis, units
2. Give the group the opportunity to ask clarifying questions about the data before moving to Step 1.

Sentence Frames and Examples:

- *These data include 2021 math test scores for all 4th graders at ABC Elementary...*
- *The data come from a survey mailed to parents...*
- *On the x-axis you see... and on the y-axis you see...*
- *The green bar shows...*

Step 1: Low Inference Description / Observation

1. Make sure that each person on the team understands the data display. Ask:
 - a. *What do you notice? State a fact from the data, not an interpretation or an inference.*
 - b. *What jumps out at you from the data?*
2. Provide the group 2 minutes to review the data in silence (longer if more displays).
3. Each member should share one thing they notice.

Sentence Frames and Examples:

- *I observe that...*
- *Some patterns/trends I notice...*
- *I'm surprised to see...*

Note: Avoid words like 'because' and 'therefore'

Notes:

Step 2: Hypothesize and Raise Questions

- *What do these data suggest about who the system is benefitting and who it is harming (e.g., race, gender, disability status, grade level, economic status, etc.)?*
- *What root causes might account for what we see in the data (i.e., system failures, not personal characteristics)? What alternative explanations exist about our systems/processes?*
- *What additional data do we need to understand the problem more fully or (dis)confirm causes?*

Sentence Frames and Examples:

- *I believe the data suggests... because...*
- *Additional data that is needed to inform/confirm/verify is...*
- *Possible root causes behind these findings may be...*

Note: To avoid a tendency to place blame on people and turn to deficit mindsets, return to the norms and remind the group that we are looking at data to understand the systemic nature of the problem.

Notes:

EQUITY PAUSE

Take a moment to consider: How might we be making assumptions, engaging in deficit thinking, or blaming others rather than taking a critical eye to our system and our own practices and policies? Bravely focusing on the system and our own contributions helps us identify what is in our locus of control/influence and where we can target our improvement efforts.

Step 3: Next Steps

- *Given the root causes we discussed, where should we focus our attention?*
- *What changes, strategies, and interventions can you test to see if you can address key concerns that were raised in this conversation? Who do these changes serve?*
- *How can we learn more about inequity from those most marginalized or underserved by the system?*

- *What can you do to answer key questions that were raised in this conversation? Who can you talk to or what additional data or analyses might be insightful?*
- *When should this team meet again?*

Sentence Frames and Examples:

- *We should focus our attention on...*
- *An area to further investigate is...*
- *Some people we should talk to are...*
- *I think an equitable action to begin addressing the issue is...*
- *To advance equity in our system, a process that we need to modify or redesign is...*

Phase 3: Group Alignment on Next Steps (8 minutes)

How can you learn more? (Consider various sources: Data, interviews, etc.) OR What might be intentional next steps to work to disrupt the status quo?	Who is responsible for taking this action?

Phase 4: Reflect on Content & Process (7 minutes)

The facilitator leads the group in reflecting on this *process*. Resist the urge to return the conversation to the data. Aim to share both “warm” and “cool” feedback—it can be just as helpful to know what to keep as to know what to change.

Helpful Guiding Questions:

- *What are some appreciations, acknowledgements, and aha’s from today’s session?*
- *What was this process like for you?*
- *What steps were helpful? What helped to keep the conversation focused on equity?*
- *What adjustments would you make and why?*

Participant Name	What feedback (warm and cool) do you have about the data session, protocol and facilitation that would be supportive for our work internally and with external partners?

References

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