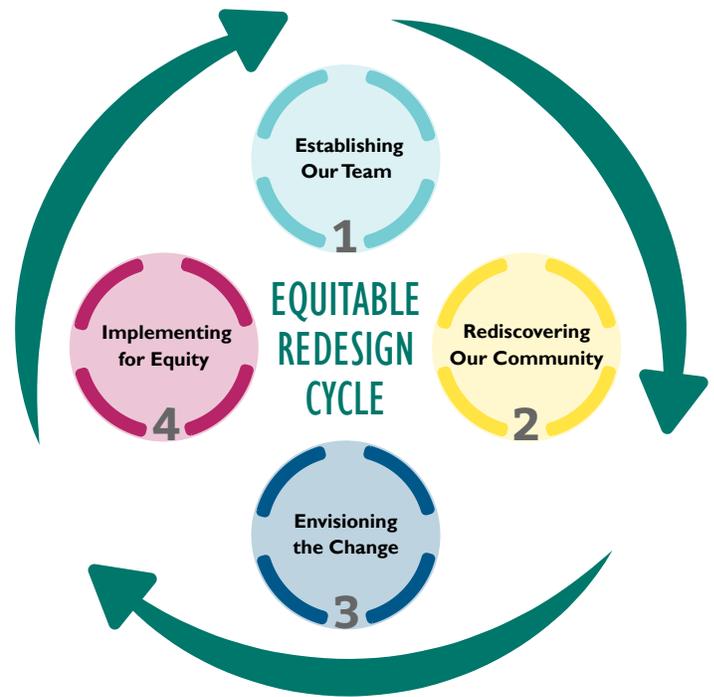


3. Community-Driven Redesign Process

A Community-Driven Redesign Process requires a thoughtful and authentic inclusion of student voices, parent and family voices, and the voices of the wider community. And inclusion alone is not enough: a deep and sustained engagement is the only way to achieve the ambitious transformation that equity requires.

This Critical Driver is concerned not only with *if* the community is involved but also *how*. Sharing power—especially among educators, families, organizations, and students—is far from easy, particularly for those used to retaining the power inherent in social privilege. Equitable school change requires a nimble understanding of—and a willingness to dismantle—long-established power dynamics, at every phase and step. Many design teams benefited from a skilled external facilitator to help them through this difficult work. However, the resources we provide and approaches we describe throughout this guide can become the cornerstone of a school’s change process, with a facilitator or without.



Each and every phase of the Equitable Redesign Cycle is built to support a process shared with the community. Each phase is described in an individual section below and includes the following components:

- Stories from the field
- Practical guidance through the important steps within each phase
- Resources and tools
- Essential questions to guide the work
- Key Considerations for Equity

Prior to actually beginning the Equitable Redesign Cycle, however, the individual or team initiating the process can benefit from a closer look at important considerations around engaging students and their families in school redesign work. These may be found in the Supportive Readings and Resources section at the end of this guide.

The next several chapters are intended to guide school teams through the process of equity-minded school (re)design, beginning with the development of a strong and well-crafted inquiry question and then moving through the four phases of the Equitable Redesign Cycle. The phases of this cycle comprise the Community-Driven Process Critical Driver, as they combine to ensure an inclusive and equity-minded process.

Before You Begin: Developing an Inquiry Question

During the development of this guide and toolkit, the stakeholders who were providing early feedback and beta-testing our materials repeatedly asked the CCE team, Is this about whole school design (and redesign)? Or is it to support smaller innovations within existing schools?

The answer, of course, is *both*. If we believe that every kind of school innovation must be approached with an equity lens¹⁷ in order to achieve equitable outcomes, as the *Building for Equity* framework posits, then every kind of innovation requires tools to support that work. Moreover, all sustainable change involves a cyclical approach that integrates data-based inquiry within multiple iterations, an approach that is embedded in the Equitable Redesign Cycle. Therefore, while users may interact in a variety of ways with the guidebook and accompanying tools, we designed them in a way that can be used from start to finish by those engaging in school change of any scope, provided that equity is a central focus.

An important first step, the development of one or more right-sized inquiry questions, can ensure that the equitable innovation is well-focused and approached with a process adjusted to the correct amplitude. Inquiry questions inspire all the subsequent activities of the Equitable Redesign Cycle; they guide the development of a team (Phase 1) as well as the depth and breadth of the data audit (Phase 2). This team uses the data to inform the plans and approaches developed and implemented for the remainder of the cycle.

All strong inquiry questions have the following characteristics:

- **Open to Research.** The team's question must open the team up to some level of research or learning that produces data to inform later work.
- **Unresolved and Debatable.** Although some of those developing or engaging with an inquiry question may have hypotheses and hunches, there should not be a clear answer to the question, or the data-based inquiry process of Phase 2 will be inauthentic or pedantic, which dramatically reduces buy-in.
- **Divergent.** Yes/No questions, or those with a single answer, are limiting to the group and do not allow for natural nuances and ambiguities inherent in any equity-focused work within complex systems, nor do they foster engagement.
- **Reasonably Ambitious.** The question should be answerable within a reasonable period (which varies by setting) by those working with and within schools. However, it should also be ambitious enough to ensure that it prompts a wide enough inquiry to inspire impactful change.
- **Equity-minded.** While some schools have more apparent diversity than others or achieve largely equitable outcomes, there are few that can achieve equity without incorporating it intentionally into innovations—which begins by ensuring that equity is explicitly included in the inquiry question(s).

Regardless of the scope of the inquiry, the questions must include the above characteristics to be useful in guiding data-based inquiry work, particularly with the use of this guide and toolkit.



¹⁷ That is, innovations must be consciously attuned to the opportunities for improving equity and aware of potential pitfalls.

Smaller-Scale, Focused Inquiry

Any inquiry that this book guides should be deep, but if inquiry is focused at a smaller amplitude, then the volume of the change is more limited. Narrowing the question to address only certain departments, programs, or subjects can create boundaries for the inquiry. Possible small-scale inquiry questions that provide clarity and focus for a smaller redesign team or one with more limited resources may include

- *How can our school ensure more equitable enrollment and achievement within our AP courses? Are our AP courses aligned with our school's overall mission and vision?*
- *How can our guidance department better meet the needs of our community?*
- *Why are [subpopulation] students experiencing a gap in science achievement in 4th and 5th grades? What barriers currently exist for this population? How are teachers contributing to, or mitigating, this circumstance?*
- *How can we better meet the needs of our early grades English learners?*

Sometimes narrowly focused inquiry questions can have important and much wider implications. For example, the question about AP courses might inspire some critical inquiry into the school's overall course-leveling system or a legacy of citywide racial discrimination. However, the initial question can still guide the first cycle, if a more comprehensive inquiry process proves too logistically challenging to undertake, leaving the broader question for a second or third iteration.

Whole-School (or District-Level) Redesign

Both big and small questions may reveal deep-seated inequities and suggest big-picture changes. However, if whole-school redesign is intended from the beginning, the inquiry question can be framed in a way that avoids incrementalism and explores—and dismantles—some of the true root causes of existing school inequities.

Possible larger-scale inquiry questions include

- *What populations of students face the most significant equity gaps in our school/district? What are the causes and potential solutions to address these persistent equity gaps?*
- *What underlying issues within our school need to be addressed so that we can ensure that our work to improve overall student achievement is accomplished in a way that ensures equity?*
- *What opportunities and barriers exist to a transition to a more culturally responsive school environment? Are*

there existing solutions to leverage or classrooms that can serve as exemplars for the wider community? What is the readiness level of our staff to make this transition?

- *How can we ensure that our school better meets the needs of our students experiencing economic hardships?*
- *What are the causes of, and potential solutions for, our disparate and overall low graduation rates?*
- *How does the equal distribution of resources within our school/district create and nurture inequality?*

New School Design

If the school is in the process of being newly designed, most of the guidance for whole-school redesign within this guide is appropriate, with the caveat that inquiry within Phase 2 should focus on the community in which the new school would be located rather than, of course, an existing school, and inquiry questions should focus on existing inequities within that larger community and on the opportunities that exist during a new school design to bake in equitable innovation from the beginning. As with whole-school redesign, these questions should be wide in scope. Some appropriate potential inquiry questions for a new school design include

- *What populations of students face the most significant equity gaps in our community? What are the causes and potential solutions to address these persistent equity gaps?*
- *How could we design a school that reflects, honors, and sustains the significant linguistic and cultural diversity within our neighborhood?*
- *What structures of traditional schools act as barriers to success for students of color? What alternative structures could we develop to provide opportunities for equity? How can we ensure that these structures are developed to align with the values of our community?*
- *What does an equity-minded STEM school look like? How can a school with this focus meet the needs of our district?*

Start by Thinking Big

While a design team with limited time and resources may be tempted to create a highly focused question, this may not be the best choice at the start of the process. Few teams have ever complained about knowing *too* much about their schools and communities, as long as the inquiry process results in action within a reasonable time frame using available resources. Knowledge, after all, is power: power for change.