



## Equity-Centered Data Practices

Early childhood data can be used to understand the developmental needs of young children, inform instruction and policies, and identify areas where children and families may need additional supports to meet their full potential.<sup>1,2</sup> An equity-centered data practice means an early childhood education (ECE) program continuously identifies and intentionally works toward eliminating inequities so that children's outcomes are not predicted by their demographic characteristics, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, language, or ability.

When we think of data, we typically think about child assessments (e.g., Teaching Strategies GOLD, Kindergarten Readiness, reading or math scores) or measures of classroom quality. But those scores, in and of themselves, don't provide a full picture of children, their families, or teachers.<sup>3</sup>

### To move toward equity-centered data practices, early childhood leaders must understand that:

- People, and their outcome data, are shaped by the resources and experiences to which they do or don't have access.<sup>4</sup>
- Access to services and resources often differs, or is inequitable, across demographic groups.<sup>5</sup>
- Inequities are produced and perpetuated by policies and practices.<sup>6</sup>

### To build more equitable systems, early childhood leaders must

- Use data to examine whether inequities in access to resources, quality of experiences, and disparities in outcomes exist, with attention to which demographic groups are most affected.<sup>7</sup>
- Consider how their policies and practices contribute to inequities in access and disparities in outcomes.<sup>8</sup>
- Change policies and practices to provide more equitable access to resources and experiences.<sup>9</sup>

## Framing for Equity

The Vermont Guiding Principles: Supporting Each and Every Young Child and Family's Full and Equitable Participation offer a valuable frame for centering your data practices around equity.

Building authentic, meaningful relationships with families is vital. Inviting families to share their perspectives and voices from the very beginning and throughout the process ensures that your program's priorities and data-informed decisions are centered around families' values and cultures. Making families aware of your commitment to equity can also help with accountability.

**Reflection Questions:** *What value will families contribute? How might our program's priorities be different if we do/don't include family voices? How can families help keep us accountable in our commitment toward equity?*

Before examining data, it is important for leaders to think about their own identities, reflect on their biases (implicit and explicit), and challenge their assumptions. This process may be uncomfortable, but it is a necessary initial step to begin to move toward quality. Self-reflection should be continuous, and leaders should also encourage others on their team to think about their potential biases and assumptions.

**Reflection Questions:** *What perspectives or privileges do I have? What assumptions do I have about people based on their characteristics or contexts? How might I blame people for their circumstances?*

Use the Vermont Guiding Principles to have discussions with families about your program's priorities, policies, and practices. Understanding where your program may be falling short and where it is doing well is an important step toward equity.

**Reflection Questions:** *How do our program's policies and practices align with each of the Vermont Guiding Principles? Which guiding principle(s) do we already implement? Which one(s) might we begin to work toward? What are the values and priorities of families? How do our program's policies and practices align with families' values and priorities?*

### Vermont Guiding Principles:

**Respect and support families as experts, partners, and decision-makers in the learning and development of their children.**

**Pledge to be open, genuine, reflective, and respectful listeners and communication partners.**

### Vermont Guiding Principles:

**Acknowledge and address biases in ourselves and others and the importance of differences, such as race, class, gender, family structure, ability, and sexual orientation.**



## Equity-Centered Data Process

Below is an outline of a process for engaging in data-informed, equity-centered reflection and action planning. The process is meant to be cyclical and on-going. For each step, there are examples of reflection questions to start your thinking.

### Vermont Guiding Principles:

**Building equitable access to opportunities, supports, and services.**

**Step 1: Plan.** After an initial reflection period, begin planning your data equity strategy. Make a list of the data that you already collect. Then, ask questions to examine whether inequities in access to resources, quality of experiences, and disparities in outcomes exist. Involve families in developing this plan and asking questions. Be clear about why the data are being collected and how they will be used.

**Reflection Questions:** *What data do we already collect on child-level outcomes, or “outputs” (e.g., developmental, health, academic, discipline data)? What data do we already collect on “inputs” (e.g., teacher-child interaction quality, attendance)? How are child outcomes (outputs) affected by their access to experiences and resources (inputs)? What data do we have on child and family demographic characteristics (e.g., race, home language)? What data do we need to collect? How are the perspectives and contexts of families reflected in our data? Do we have a system for linking data together (i.e., assigning unique identification numbers)?*

**Step 2: Collect.** Collect information that will help you answer your questions. Consider if you already have the necessary information or if there is additional data that you will need to collect. Data should come from multiple and varied sources that can provide you with a comprehensive picture of children’s, families’, and staff’s outcomes, characteristics, contexts, and opportunities. Data can come from formalized assessments, surveys, and interviews that are collected systematically, and informal methods, such as conversations, brief observations, or email exchanges. Be thoughtful to only collect data you will use.

**Reflection Questions:** *Which data collection methods will we use? Who will collect data? From whom will we collect data? How can we ensure that everyone is represented? When should we collect data? How often will we collect data?*

**Step 3: Understand.** Engaging in equity-centered data practices requires that you look beyond the surface by breaking down data, or disaggregating, by race, ethnicity, disability, socioeconomic status, gender, and home language.<sup>10</sup> Then look for differences, or disparities, among groups. The method for identifying disparities can vary based on your access to or comfort with technology -- percentages can be calculated using a spreadsheet and simple totals can be counted and compared across groups. You can also use a spreadsheet to graph disproportionality by graphing the percentage of enrollment in your program for a particular group and the percentage of a particular outcome they represent (e.g., suspensions). If the group is over-represented in a negative outcome or under-represented in a positive one, there are likely inequities in children’s experiences leading to those disparities that warrant further investigation. Together with families, think about potential root causes of differing outcomes for children, families, and staff. Remember that data points represent people, so they should be interpreted considering people’s characteristics, access to resources, and experiences, as well as the program’s policies and practices that may impact them. Seek out support to understand data and identify potential disparities, as sometimes it is difficult to recognize patterns in our own program data.

**Reflection Questions:** *Who is represented in the data? Who is not represented? Are certain groups over-represented or under-represented? Which groups have higher/lower outcomes? Which groups have more/better opportunities or experiences? What are the strengths of each group? What policies and practices are in place that may be contributing to different opportunities, experiences, or outcomes?*



**Step 4: Do.** The purpose of uncovering patterns of inequity is to reflect on why they are occurring and how programs can adjust their policies and practices to move towards data-informed improvement. Brainstorm potential ways to address the program’s practices and/or policies that may be causing patterns of inequity. Develop an action plan that includes input from families in your program, particularly families who may be experiencing inequities. Determine clear and actionable steps that may include professional development, training, and policy changes. Begin to implement the plan with clear timelines and benchmarks articulated, and engage in ongoing progress monitoring. Share the plan and your program’s commitment to supporting equity with families and other stakeholders. Data-informed reflection and action-planning is an ongoing, iterative process, and equity should be continuously incorporated into this process.<sup>11</sup>

**As you examine your data, consider your policies on:**

- |   |                            |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1) Enrollment   | 4) Language of instruction |
| 2) Inclusion of and supports for children with disabilities | 5) Toilet training         |
| 3) Discipline   | 6) Hiring                  |

*Reflection Questions: How will we address the inequities that emerged? How will we involve families who are experiencing fewer opportunities or supports? How can we share this plan with families and ask for their input? What are the clear action steps to improving policies and practices? When will we collect information to monitor progress? How can we ensure that improvement is ongoing and continuously monitored? How can families help hold us accountable? How will we know that we are having a meaningful impact?*

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## Support from Larger Systems

The responsibility of moving towards equity-centered data practices cannot fall solely on ECE programs and leaders. We recognize that programs have limited time and resources, and function within complex, larger systems of services that impact their policies, priorities, and overall capacity. Programs need tools, resources, and supports to build a capacity for engaging effectively in equity-centered data practices.<sup>12</sup> Vermont’s early childhood system should consider

- Developing a self-assessment tool that programs can use to evaluate their alignment with the Vermont Guiding Principles.
- Developing a guide that outlines the types of data that programs can collect about their children, families, and staff.
- Providing professional development for leaders and staff on topics related to equity, such as anti-racism, anti-bias, culturally responsive practices, culturally responsive data literacy, and responsive family engagement.
- Providing programs with a platform/ database that can facilitate disaggregating data and creating reports.
- Incentivizing programs to provide services to children and families who are marginalized to support equitable outcomes for all children and families.





## Endnotes

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