

New Definitions Driven by Equity; Informed by Science

Robust Equity

Robust Equity is the intentional counter to inequality, institutionalized privilege and prejudice, and systemic deficits and the intentional promotion of thriving across multiple domains for those who experience inequity and injustice.

Built on the basics – countering inequality and institutionalized privilege and prejudice, addressing contextual deficits, and creating conditions that support overall well-being. The terms equity and equality are not the same. Equity is more than a commitment to equal access to content, supports and effective teaching. Equal access to one service (e.g. AP classes) without attention to issues of identity, stereotype threat, implicit bias, unmet mental health needs, and unequal opportunities to learn make it unlikely that all are equally able to participate – emotionally and cognitively – and, therefore, will not result in equitable outcomes.

Multi-dimensional – mindful of overall thriving, and how well-being in one area (e.g., housing) contributes to well-being in others (e.g., health). Efforts to achieve equity in a single area or to reduce disparities between populations will be limited, and often unsuccessful, as these domains interact at an individual, group, and social system levels. For example, housing inequities contribute to health and educational inequities. Robust commitments to equity in any domain incorporate all thriving across all domains and address both the individual and collective dimensions of thriving.

Cumulative – rooted in historical awareness, with a commitment to long-term, complex change. Even though equity decisions may focus on one outcome or apply to one domain or system at one moment in time, the results of these decisions are affected by individual and collective equity status in other dimensions and over time (e.g., income security vs. wealth accumulation). Hence it is important that decisions take into account cross system and domain effects and address how these accumulate over time and lead to longer-term consequences.

An individual young person’s sense of robust equity is:

Influenced by the degree to which they and their peers have the experiences and relationships they need to learn and develop.

Young people experience equity when they are assured that they and their peers benefit from development-rich environments that are culturally responsive and respect young people’s efforts to make meaning based on lived experiences.

Informed by their awareness and experience of how groups they are a part of are treated. Identity development is informed by young people’s unique individual experiences in the world, their experiences as a member of groups, and the sense they and others who matter to them make of these experiences. Their sense of equity is shaped by the degree to which they encounter inequality and institutionalized privilege and prejudice.

Leaders of robust equity acknowledge:

Focus on thriving, not just surviving. Robust equity-oriented strategies – in addition to intentionally countering inequality and institutionalized privilege and prejudice, addressing contextual deficits, and creating conditions that support overall well-being -- also ensure access to experiences that give all young people opportunities to build upon and communal assets and make changes that can transform their lives individually and collectively.

Create access and accountability working from the margins into the mainstream. Ensure that marginalized individuals and communities thrive and have access to mechanisms to achieve social mobility by giving them voice. Create integrated opportunities for groups to name their realities, address how systems of oppression play out, and develop solutions that draw upon and build individual and collective strengths. These might include resources, histories, and understandings that are not valued by systems but are tied to their sense of culture, belonging, and connectedness.

Surface and address complexity – across systems, across domains of development, and over time. Inequities were not created overnight. They are baked in deeply into policies and procedures in multiple systems that have come to inform public and professional perceptions of what different groups and communities can do. Robust solutions have to acknowledge history and anticipate the need to work across systems to create stable, sustainable solutions that the clear paths to young adulthood.