

Equity Audits: Stakeholders Making Education Policy

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Last month the Panel for Education Policy (PEP) rejected another Mayor Adams/Chancellor Banks policy, the approval of the NYC Department of Education's Fair Student Funding (FSF) formula for the 2022-23 school year. The PEP's rejection highlighted how badly the FSF formula, which drives the majority of the annual education funding to the city's schools, needs recalibration. Among other problems, the FSF formula ignores the fiscal needs of students experiencing homelessness and severely underfunds resources for English Language Learners, and students from low-income families. Simultaneously, the FSF formula lavishes excessive funding on students enrolled in the system's highest performing, most selective, and least diverse high schools.

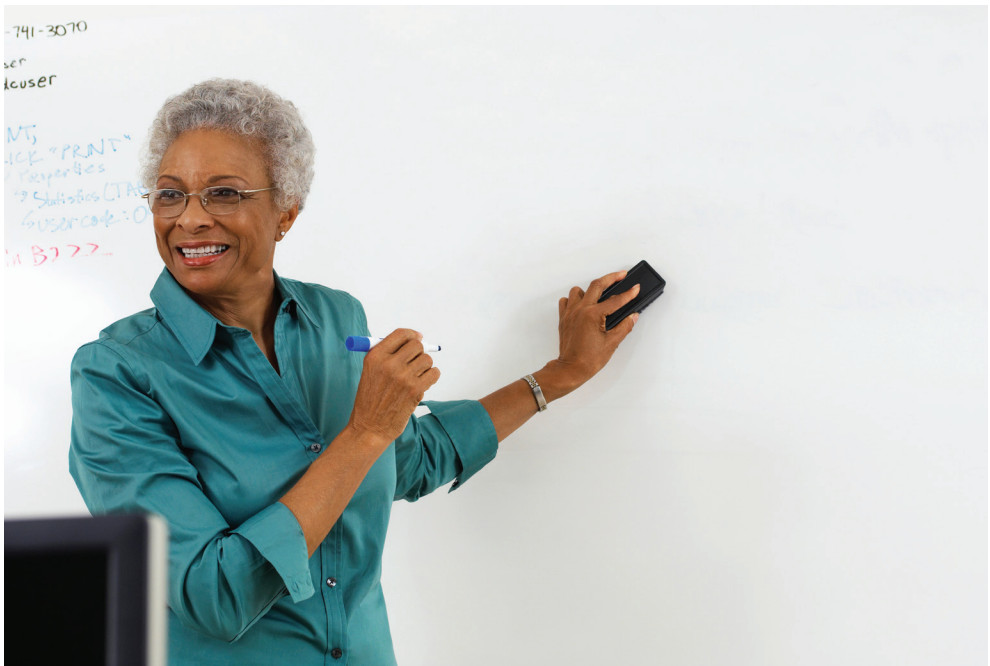
But the PEP members who voted to reject the formula enjoyed a very short victory; the PEP reversed its rejection at the panel's subsequent session. Hopefully, as Chancellor Banks suggested, a more equitable student funding formula will ultimately emerge from this contretemps.

The FSF formula's initial rejection underscores the argument in our piece, "Mayoral Control and the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP)" that the PEP is not a participatory policy-making forum. In fact, it is the NYC school board reconfigured and renamed. This reconfiguration occurred when Mayor Michael Bloomberg, in 2002, reversed the 1970 decentralization of the city school system. As the city's school board, the PEP is required by state law to publicly approve fiscal and administrative policies that schooling administrators have already promulgated.

"Mayoral Control and the Panel for Educational Policy (PEP)" argued that the city's students, parents, teachers, and administrators who are public schooling's critical stakeholders, have little real participation in educational policy making. Consider, in contrast to the PEP, the recent community-based task force on diversifying admission to Brooklyn's District 15 middle schools. This representative stakeholders' group reviewed data showing how the racial, socio-economic and geographic skewing of District 15's middle school admissions policies produced segregated middle schools and examined simulations of policies that produced more diversified student enrollment. The task force ultimately proposed a set of admissions policies to create more diverse and less segregated district middle schools. The group submitted their policy prescriptions to the city schools' administration and garnered approval for them. District 15's middle schools are now significantly less segregated. Contrary to the popular opinion expressed in the op-ed columns of tabloid newspapers, there was not a mass exodus of dissatisfied white parents from the school district. (Take a look at [the District 15 report](#).)

Over several decades, a variety of teacher-based and data-driven collaborations have developed more participative school reform processes. An example of this participative school reform process can be observed in the efforts of UChicago Consortium on School Research. Their initial analysis of students' on-track academic performance, beginning in the ninth grade, for example, has evolved into a process of data analysis and strategic intervention that engages school staff in continuous improvement efforts. This participative school reform effort has resulted in significant increases in the Freshman On-Track rates in Chicago high schools, as well as correlating with improved graduation rates. These improved student outcomes are consistent across all racial/ethnic and socioeconomic groups, genders, and incoming academic achievement levels.

New York City's *New Visions for Public Schools* developed an analogous effort, the Scaffolded Apprenticeship Model (SAM), in which groups of teachers form Inquiry Teams to improve the academic outcomes of struggling high school students. These Inquiry Teams use a cycle of problem



identification, intervention and assessment, buttressed by data analysis. The data analysis processes are used to identify which students are falling off track, and then determine what school practices need to change to improve students' academic outcomes and close student achievement gaps.

Instructional teams in school systems across the country are developing comparable data analysis and collaborative inquiry methods to identify patterned barriers to student achievement and determine how to reduce the impact on the student's academic performance. Conducting an Equity Audit is yet another example of using stakeholder participation efforts to identify the impact that race/ethnicity and gender have on student outcomes. This representative stakeholder process is not limited to teachers alone, but also includes students, parents, and school administrators. We think engaging such stakeholder participation is critical to identifying the disparities in unfair treatment, structured into the DNA of many schools and districts, resulting in limited opportunities to learn and inequitable student outcomes.

An Equity Audit can help a school or district identify which student groups are not receiving an equitable education. Such an audit can define the school and district processes that produce inequitable educational opportunities and disparate student outcomes. The Equity Audit can aid in defining and implementing strategies and interventions that change how schools and districts operate so that all students receive an education that responds equitably to their strengths and their needs.

A school or district-level Equity Audit can define which students succeed academically and which do not. The Equity Audit is a representative stakeholder process tool that can measure student success amongst diverse school populations; including race/ethnicity, family income, home language, and disability. An equity audit can identify chronic long-term absenteeism by race/ethnicity, student homelessness, disability, and other key student characteristics. An equity audit can pinpoint what categories of students are disproportionately selected for honors programs and Advanced Placement, or are targeted for disciplinary sanctions such as detention, suspension, and incarceration.

Multiplicities of data available at the school and district level can drive equity audits that define how groups of students are misperceived and mistreated. It will not surprise, but will hopefully dishearten, many schools and districts to discover that their chronically absent students are predominantly poor, of color, and homeless; that their students most often disciplined are predominantly Black and Latinx; that their honors students are predominantly from economically advantaged

families. Equity Audits analyze data to document inequitable schooling treatment and outcomes. The data analysis conducted during an Equity Audit provides schools, and their respective districts, to recognize their unfair treatment of vulnerable student groups, while also lending itself to the creation of new systems and processes to correct inequities in order to help all students enjoy equitable learning opportunities. Ultimately, participatory school reform efforts can aid in fostering more equitable educational outcomes for each of our children, regardless of race/ethnicity, income level, primary language, or ability status.

What all parents want from schooling is acknowledgment of and responsiveness to their children's strengths and needs. Far too many students and their parents know that instead of fair schooling treatment, students are too frequently stereotyped by race/ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, language, and disability. These same underserved students are consistently denied the opportunity to learn that all schools should ensure that they receive a quality education. As the primary stakeholders in education, public school students and their parents deserve to be afforded the access to join teachers and administrators in participative school reform processes. Collaborative measures, like Equity Audits, would help to identify, analyze, and correct our manifold schooling inequities. By identifying the unfair treatment of students who have been historically marginalized, neglected, and discriminated against, an Equity Audit can help to reverse the inequitable processes at the core of much of current schooling. This and other participative school reform measures help our schools move towards genuine equity of opportunity for all our students.

**Small edits were made to the original piece to account for the new medium.*