



## **Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: Addressing Success Gaps**

Toolbox for  
Implementation: Guideline

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As an educational leader in your school or district, you may be struggling to address the diverse instructional and/or behavioral needs of your students so that every child can achieve high standards. Some of your students may not be succeeding as well as others, or their progress may be slower than expected. We hear a lot these days about the “achievement gap.” But there are other gaps too: between students with disabilities and their peers without disabilities and between different groups of students and each other. There are gaps related to dropout and graduation rates; gaps related to achievement in reading, math, or post-school outcomes; gaps or discrepancies between groups of students in terms of discipline or identification as a student with a disability or in educational settings for students with disabilities.

Our definition of a “success gap,” which encompasses all of these gaps or discrepancies, is “A gap in educational outcomes between different groups of students.” We call all these gaps “success gaps” because they result in poor outcomes or lack of success for students in those affected groups. When such gaps are allowed to continue over time, they can lead to poor long-term outcomes for entire groups of students. When your school or district demonstrates success gaps, it means that you are not serving all groups of students equally well. Addressing your school or district’s success gap(s) requires a close look at issues of *equity, inclusion, and opportunity*. This examination is important across all groups of students throughout your school or district, especially those groups that are struggling academically or behaviorally.

Once a success gap is identified, the first step toward ensuring equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all students is to recognize the need for change in your school’s or district’s current practices and policies. The second step is to uncover the root causes that are contributing to the problem you have identified. The third step is to make the changes that address those root causes.

There are resources available to support states, districts, and schools as they consider the presence of and remedies for success gaps. The *Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity: Addressing Success Gaps White Paper* provides background and information about the reasons success gaps may exist and research that supports the elements of high-quality instruction for all students. The *Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: Addressing Success Gaps Rubric* is a self-assessment designed to be used by school or district teams to identify areas of the system that are in need of improvement and the root causes for the identified success gap.

This document and accompanying materials will provide guidelines for those who are leading the use of the Success Gaps materials.

## Who should use these materials?

The Success Gaps materials were developed for use at the district or school level. A state may decide to use the materials in collaboration with its districts to identify success gaps and their causes within the local education agency (LEA). Some states will use these materials as part of their work with districts that are underperforming academically, have school climate challenges, or have identified disproportionality.

Schools or districts may decide to use these materials because they have been identified through their state’s accountability system as a school or district in need of improvement, as low-performing, or because of a discrepancy or gap in performance or achievement that needs to be addressed. Districts may also choose to use these tools to take a closer look at their educational system to identify or prevent “success gaps” to ensure equitable education for all students.

## What is in the toolbox?

The toolbox includes materials, agendas, facilitation guides, and resources for facilitating a team through the process of identifying root causes for success gaps in a district or school and the development of an improvement plan. Each resource is described below and available on the IDC website.

- *Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity: Addressing Success Gaps White Paper*

The white paper focuses on elements of equity, inclusion, and opportunity that make up high-quality education programs for all students. The paper describes a set of research-based factors that can minimize or eliminate success gaps among different groups of students when paid attention to by districts or schools.

- *Equity, Inclusion and Opportunity: Addressing Success Gaps Rubric* (can be saved to your location and completed electronically)  
The rubric accompanies the white paper described above can be used by schools or districts to systematically examine the root causes of success gaps among groups of their students. This self-assessment may be saved to a separate location and completed electronically.
- Suggested readings  
Multiple articles and books are suggested that can be used as supplementary materials or to introduce the topic. They are suggested as “pre-reading material” later in this guide but are also useful for background information for further study on the subject.
- Success Gaps videos  
Video 1: What are Success Gaps? This is a two-and-a-half-minute video that explains what a “success gap” is that could be used to introduce the concept of a “success gap” as part of an invitation to participate on the success gaps team for a district or a school.  
Video 2: Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: Getting Results by Addressing Success Gaps; Introduction to the Tool. This is a video presentation that describes what a success gap is, provides some data-based examples, and describes the rubric and its use to address success gaps.
- Process agendas for team leader(s) (customizable)  
Process agendas are provided for each of the suggested team meetings. They can be edited and customized to fit the context and time frame of each district or school.
- Meeting agendas (customizable)  
Agendas for the team meetings are provided based on a two-hour meeting format. These are fully customizable to allow for the context of each school or district using the materials as well as different time frames. They correspond to the process agendas.
- Presentation shell for each meeting (customizable)  
PowerPoint presentations are provided for each of the recommended meetings. These are fully customizable to allow for local context and for adding local data and other information.
- Action plan templates  
Sample action plan templates are provided for those districts or schools that do not have a format they already prefer.
- Sample meeting evaluation forms  
Each agenda recommends completing a meeting evaluation using a plus/delta format. Samples are included here.
- Additional resources  
(This section is evolving and being added to over time). Resources may include examples of work from other schools or districts, additional presentations that have been developed, etc.

## How should this toolbox of materials be used?

This guide provides a suggested process and outline for using the Success Gaps Toolbox. Its purpose is to use the Success Gaps materials to review the components of the educational system, identify areas in need of improvement and underlying root causes and to develop a plan for addressing any success gaps the school or the district has identified. The materials were developed to assist districts and schools to use the Success Gap rubric based on their own context. However, there are some basics that should be followed to have a valid root cause analysis and plan at the end of the process.

- The process requires use of disaggregated local data. This is important in order to identify and target specific groups of students compared to other groups or to all students in the district. The process must be done with a team of stakeholders (details of team described later in this guide).
- Leadership is critical. Commitment and participation of leaders in the district or school will let others know the importance of this work and inspire active participation.
- Using the Success Gaps materials is not a quick process. It will require commitment of team members for multiple meetings over a period of time.

# Implementing the Success Gaps Self-Assessment Process

## I. Form a team

1. Identify a team of individuals from the district or school and community who are interested in the problem and willing to make a commitment to this self-assessment process. Be sure this team includes:
  - Parents (and, in the upper grades, students) representing both the group that is of concern in your school or district and representing students who are experiencing success;
  - General education and special education professionals who work with the target group;
  - General education and special education professionals who work with the students who are succeeding;
  - Professional support staff such as school psychologists, school counselors, and others who may provide support to students who are struggling; and
  - Leaders with the influence and authority to make the necessary changes.
  - Additional invited team members may include community members such as those from church or civic organizations that support youth as well as local business representatives.
2. Invite the potential members to be a part of the team. One way to do this is to create an email that asks each person to agree to be part of the team and outlines the time commitment (frequency and time of meetings) and what the success gap to be targeted will be. A link to Video 1 (*What are Success Gaps?*) could be included in the email as an introduction to the concept of success gaps.

## II. Pre-meeting preparation

1. The team will need some information and background about why they are being convened as a team and what the local concerns are. Consider having team members review some materials prior to the first meeting:
  - One of the articles or books in the Suggested Readings section could be sent to the participants for review ahead of time. Selection should be based on the focus of your success gap and availability of materials. Provide the link to one of the articles or print the article in hard copy for each team member. If a book is selected, order it well in advance so that it can be provided before the first meeting. If you use one of these readings, make sure to incorporate a discussion of the reading in the first meeting.
  - The link to Video 2 (*Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: Getting Results by Addressing Success Gaps; Introduction to the Tool*) could be provided with a request for team members to review it prior to the first meeting.
2. Decide the location and duration of each meeting and estimate the number of meetings you will need. Meeting agendas in this toolbox are set for two-hour meetings. Content of meetings should be adjusted based on time available.
  - Set the dates.
  - Reserve the location.
  - Send dates and details to the team members.
3. Prepare local data to present at the meeting: Consider the reason you are convening the team to study success gaps. What is your success gap? Gather the data that provide the rationale for a focus in this area or on this particular group of students.
  - What data led you to determine the need to conduct this self-assessment?
  - Consider all aspects of those data, both aggregated and disaggregated.
  - Next, consider related data, how do these data affect other data elements, and what do those data look like, both aggregated and disaggregated. (For example, the success gap may be in Hispanic students not achieving in mathematics. Consider data comparing math, reading, and science achievement for all students as well as for Hispanic students; math achievement broken out by grade and race/ethnicity; attendance data broken out by race/ethnicity; discipline/in-school suspension/out- of-school suspension; data by race/ethnicity and even grade, etc.).

- Develop data slides that show the data in a simple format that will be easy for all team members to interpret.
  - Place the slides in a logical format that will tell your story and lead the team to understand where a success gap is occurring.
  - Be prepared. Expect that team members may ask for additional data.
  - Insert data slides into a presentation for the first meeting.
4. Prepare materials for the meeting
- Review the agenda, both Process and Team Member. On the Team Member Agenda for the meeting, personalize it by adding the date, filling out the time of each activity, and making other adjustments as necessary. For some of the agendas, specific sections of the rubric should be named; assignments inserted, and dates of next meeting added.
  - The presentation for each meeting also needs some personalization/customization. Dates should be added; data slides inserted; assignments and next meeting dates added.
  - Make the +Plus/Δ Delta wall chart using the samples provided if desired.
  - Make sure the name tags, projector, screen, chart paper, markers, and copies of any materials are ready in the room for the meeting.

### III. Conduct the self-assessment

1. During all meetings and discussions, keep these points in mind:
  - As a team, study the relevant data prior to attempting to complete the rubric. Data should be both aggregated and disaggregated and reviewed for the identified reason for self-assessment. In addition, the team members may want to expand the data they are reviewing to determine how other results such as graduation, drop out, achievement, disciplinary practices, and attendance are related to the identified success gap.
  - As a team, conduct the self-assessment with integrity by studying the rubric, then answering each question with complete frankness and honesty. Keep in mind the group of students who are experiencing the success gap as responses and ratings are developed.
  - Provide evidence. Be sure to document the data supporting each response.
  - Always keep in the mind the experiences of the group of students for whom there is a success gap in the school or district.
  - Ensure equitable participation so that all team members' voices are heard and respected.
2. Meeting 1: Introduction and getting started
  - a. Convene the team and introduce the purpose, the Success Gaps materials (white paper and rubric), and team members.
  - b. Consider showing the short introduction to the Success Gaps video: *Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: Getting Results by Addressing Success Gaps*; *Introduction to the Tool* (video 2 in the resources).
  - c. Use Presentation 1 that includes data that demonstrate the reasons the success gaps are being studied.
  - d. Use Agenda 1 (team member and process agenda) to set the pace for the meeting. Be sure to customize the agenda as needed and make selections for “assignments,” deleting the sections not assigned.
  - e. Assign “homework” for the team: read the white paper and independently complete specific sections of rubric before the next meeting. Number of sections to be completed is dependent on how much time is devoted to each meeting. If meetings are half day or whole day, more sections can be completed at one time and meeting agendas may be combined.
  - f. Materials for the meeting: *Success Gaps White paper and rubric, Equity, Inclusion, and Opportunity: Getting Results by Addressing Success Gaps; Introduction to the Tool* (Video 2 in the resources), *Process Agenda 1, Team Member Agenda 1, Presentation 1.*

3. Meetings 2-4: Delving into the self-assessment. (Note: Teams will complete all sections of the rubric in either two or three meetings, depending on time allowed for each meeting.)
  - a. The team will review and discuss the sections of the rubric they completed independently and reach a group consensus on responses and evidence.
  - b. Use Agenda 2 (team member and process agenda) to set the pace for the meeting. Customize the agenda as necessary for the number of meetings needed to complete the self-assessment. Be sure to select the correct sections of the rubric for review and for assignments.
  - c. Use Presentation 2 during the meeting and customize as needed.
  - d. The team will make recommendations for further data and/or information that may be needed to respond to some sections.
  - e. Assign next sections of the rubric to read and complete independently before the next meeting.
  - f. Materials for the meeting: Success Gaps White Paper and Rubric, Process Agenda 2, Team Member Agenda 2, Presentation 2.
4. Meetings 5 (and 6, if necessary): Developing a plan of action.
  - a. As a team, develop an action plan to address the root causes identified.
  - b. Review and discuss any follow-up data from previous meetings and review each section of the completed rubric to determine and develop priorities for action.
  - c. Use Agenda 3 (team member and process agenda) and Presentation 3. Customize each for the meeting or meetings as necessary.
  - d. The team will develop action plans for each priority area. Use either the action plan format included in this toolbox or one that the district/school already uses for other improvement activities.
  - e. Materials for the meeting: completed rubric, Process Agenda 3, Team Member Agenda 3, Presentation 3, Action Plan template.
  - f. This meeting should be repeated until the action plan is complete.
5. Meeting 7 and on-going: Reviewing implementation of the action plan:
  - a. The team should meet no fewer than two times per year (quarterly is preferred).
  - b. The purpose of the meeting (s) is to monitor progress on the plan through:
    - i. reviewing the data and results of implementation; and
    - ii. making any needed revisions to the plan.
  - c. Use Agenda 4 (team member and process agenda) and Presentation 4.
  - d. Materials for the meeting: Process Agenda 4, Team Member Agenda 4, Presentation 4, action plan.

## IV. Keep moving forward

Equity, inclusion, and opportunity for all students is an important goal, but one that is not easily achieved. The systemic factors that contribute to success gaps for particular groups of students are often difficult to identify and even harder to address. If you have gone through this Success Gaps self-assessment process, then you have more information about the root causes of your success gap(s), and you have made a plan to address those root causes. You also have a team in place to support the work and assist you to keep moving forward.

Implementation and monitoring of your plan will assist in addressing the gaps in order to provide high-quality instruction for all students. The plan should be reviewed on a quarterly basis. Data and updated activities should be provided to the team to review and measure progress. The team may recommend revisions or changes to the action plan as part of their review. The action plan can be integrated with other initiatives and activities the district or the school is undertaking. As a leader in your school or district, we know you care deeply about all of the children you serve. You are in a position to improve the opportunities and outcomes for those students requiring additional support. We hope this document will help you recognize and deliver what is needed so that every student in your school and district is successful.