

How one school used the Schools of Opportunity criteria and scoring rubric for school improvement

Broad access to opportunities to learn is a core equity principle.

Portland, Maine's Casco Bay High School has made equity literacy a school-wide goal since 2017, and it continues to be a focus of their school improvement work. Summer Institutes and professional development sessions for teachers include equity literacy activities such as reflections, writings, discussions, and role-playing. Annual *Equity Summits* also enable teacher and student leaders to analyze and share feedback from the full faculty and student body on ways in which the school is equitable and how they could improve.

When Casco Bay leaders received the materials to apply as a Schools of Opportunity, they decided that the program criteria and rubric would provide a useful tool to self-assess their progress in creating a more equitable school. This entailed the following:

- Teachers and students each carefully reviewed the 10 Schools of Opportunity criteria and scoring rubrics. Then they scored the school on each criterion using the 1-4 scale.
- They later tallied the results and obtained means and modes for each criterion.
- Teacher and student leaders reviewed the findings and provided an analysis of areas where the school's equity practices were strong or exemplary as well as areas they might need to improve. (*Note: The results also informed the school's choices about which criteria they would include in their application to Schools of Opportunity—an application that resulted in a Gold recognition.*)
- These results, along with other available data sources, allowed the school community to prioritize their goals and equity action plans for the year.

Based on this process and similar efforts, the educators adopted school-wide equity goals that included faculty and student learning targets to become anti-racist educators and learners—and to improve equitable pedagogies, curriculum, and policies. In addition to increasing collaborative, equity-oriented professional development opportunities for teachers, the school took a dozen steps:

- Developed *Anti-Racism Resources for Casco Bay Educators* (articles, links, videos, podcasts, books, etc.) to be shared and discussed.
- Created a structure for the entire school to discuss challenging issues in advisory groups, called “courageous conversations,” that are now led by trained student facilitators.

- Developed a Future Task Force of students and teachers that gives students a voice in curricular improvements. This has resulted in including more under-represented voices in the curriculum.
- Created a [Vision for an Equitable, Anti-Racist School](#) (Google Doc) that they review and revise annually and that they use to inform their school priorities.
- Documented the school's [Social Justice curriculum](#) (Google Doc), which is also updated annually. One of the focuses of this year's Equity Summit was to review the document for gaps, strengths and redundancies.
- Implemented more restorative practices in the school's student-discipline system including peer mediators. These mediators are a Community Council of students and staff that leads meditations and restorative circles when harm has happened in the community.
- Expanded special education staffing.
- Opened a food pantry.
- Added (and educated about) gender neutral bathrooms.
- Utilized an *Observation Tool for Equity* for teacher-to-teacher observations and reflection.
- Recruited parents to serve as multilingual parent ambassadors.
- Created a student-equity line in the budget to support students in having equal access to educational opportunities.

The school continues their commitments to equity work, celebrates their successes, and shares their progress and future plans with families and community.