

Equality and Equity: What's the Difference?



We all want equal access to good health, quality education, safe neighborhoods and economic stability. Good public policy ensures no one is denied these fundamental benefits of our society based on our race, ethnicity, ability, gender, religion, or any other inherent trait.

However, public policy designed to benefit everyone *equally* often does not consider how we are all *situated differently*. We may not all be able to use the same size bicycle, and so we don't really have equal access to biking—even if we were all given one.

The concept of applying an “equity lens” to public policy making means applying a little bit of common sense and little bit of justice to create solutions to problems facing members of our communities based on how they are situated.

Equality



Equity



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Another important part of using an equity lens in making public policy is to reconsider the concept of “winners and losers” and to think about how we all benefit from these solutions. For example: ramps, elevators and “curb cuts” in sidewalks are designed and installed to ensure people who use wheelchairs are able to get around in our communities independently. Who uses them? We all do. Whether pushing a stroller through a neighborhood or using an elevator to quickly get upstairs, we all benefit when barriers are removed for those who face the most obstacles in



What does an equity-focused policy look like? A good place to start is by asking some basic questions when thinking about the impact a new or existing policy would have on Coloradans. Such as:

- Who would **benefit** from this policy? Are some people much more likely to benefit than others? Do some people have barriers to benefiting from this policy that we haven't considered?
- Who would be **burdened** by this policy? What are the unintended consequences of this policy and how does it interact with other policies or practices in our society?

When we apply these questions to specific issues facing Colorado kids we are often surprised by the results. For example, currently all Colorado schools are able to suspend or expel young children for a variety of reasons. In reality, this tool is more often used on children of color, children with disabilities and boys—for the same behaviors as their peers. It's a policy that unintentionally burdens a specific demographic because it doesn't consider the unique circumstances of their lives, including exposure to racism, ableism, poverty and other risk factors.

A Case Study in Equity-Focused Policy Solutions: School Discipline

Sending a child to school—especially a young child—is an act of faith. Parents have to believe that educators will do the best they can for every child in their care.

For young children—ages 3 to 8—suspension or expulsion from school is the wrong response to a complicated situation. Research shows that they're too little to understand the punishment, and suspension or expulsion don't address the issues at home or in school that contributed to the behavior. In fact, suspensions even contribute to our dropout problem.

But though early childhood suspension and expulsion is almost always preventable, Colorado schools still suspend or expel thousands of young children every year. And, in every part of our state, there is troubling evidence that race, gender, and disability bias suspensions and expulsions. The disproportionate use of this discipline can be addressed by a policy solution that carefully considers who **is most burdened** by it.

Some Colorado educators are using better, cost-effective, tools that help children learn from their experiences, promote safety, and keep kids in class where they belong. Those best practices should be standard practices in Colorado classrooms.

Policy makers should consider solutions that would require schools to adopt research-informed interventions, so suspension and expulsion are always the last resort, never tools of convenience.

When administrators ensure that educators have the right tools—and the commitment to use them—we won't have to choose between keeping schools safe and keeping kids learning. At the end of the school day, all our children benefit when we accomplish both.



Questions for Candidates

Here are questions you might ask candidates to learn more about their positions on issues affecting Colorado kids. Whether you ask in person, online or by phone, these questions are designed to help you educate candidates while learning more about whether they are making kids a priority in their platform:

1. In your perspective, what is the difference between equality and equity?
2. Do you have ideas on how to apply an equity lens to the policies and programs you'll help shape?
3. Have you reflected on your early experiences with race, and racism, and thought about how that has impacted your life and the opportunities you've had?
4. What is your commitment to learning more about your role in advancing equity in Colorado?
5. How will you build relationships with communities of color to ensure your work advances equity for all Coloradans?