



Principles of Equitable Schools

Developed by the NCSECS Equity Coalition
September 12, 2018

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The Equity Coalition supports the right of students with disabilities to exercise choice as they explore their educational options; it is also essential that all school options uphold civil rights and ensure equitable access. In line with this commitment, we propose the following principles as a standard by which school options should be assessed by parents, policy makers, and other stakeholders. Through this articulation of the essential elements possessed by an equitable school, we aim to establish core principles that should be upheld by any school enrolling students using public dollars. The role of policy is to support these elements and to ensure that schools uphold them, while acknowledging that districts have broader responsibilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). With one unified voice, the Equity Coalition offers the following as “Principles of Equitable Schools,” which will collectively preserve and promote access and quality for all students:



I. Accessibility: An accessible school clearly communicates its commitment to upholding students' rights and protections under the law and articulates policies and procedures to ensure it welcomes, retains, and provides equitable enrollment, programmatic, and physical access to students with disabilities in accordance with federal civil rights statutes.



II. Inclusion: An inclusive school educates students in the least restrictive environment to the maximum extent appropriate to their individual needs; thereby allowing for learning predominantly in high-quality general education settings alongside peers with and without disabilities. It leverages prevention and targeted intervention approaches to support all students and, when necessary, instruction and supports are modified, adapted, and differentiated to promote student growth. Its disciplinary practices do not disproportionately impact students with disabilities.



III. Quality: A quality school holds students to high expectations, provides instruction, both general and specialized, that is data-driven, evidence-based, student-centered, and culturally responsive. It employs highly skilled staff members and provides high quality professional development opportunities.



IV. Collaboration: A collaborative school embraces opportunities for partnership and engagement with stakeholders by providing transparent and accessible information and involving students/parents/guardians in decision making.



V. Accountability: An accountable school is held to high standards. It is required to uphold all applicable laws and demonstrate positive and measurable outcomes for educating students with disabilities as a criterion to continue receiving public funding. It may be overseen by one or multiple entities, and the collective oversight provided must be able to ensure that local education agencies offer a full continuum of services for students with disabilities and uphold a commitment to educating all students.



VI. Autonomy and Flexibility: An equitable school leverages its autonomy and flexibility to maintain high standards, promote quality, and cultivate innovation.



VII. Resources: An adequately resourced school has access to sufficient fiscal, human, legal, programmatic, facilities, and administrative capacity to educate its students. The funding mechanism of an adequately resourced school is equitable and minimizes incentives to over, or conversely under, identify students with disabilities or to serve students in more restrictive settings than necessary or appropriate for their individual needs.

About the Equity Coalition

The National Center for Special Education in Charter Schools (NCSECS) is a national non-profit organization focused exclusively on ensuring that students with disabilities can access and thrive in public charter schools. One of the primary mechanisms for achieving that goal is the NCSECS Equity Coalition (Equity Coalition). The Equity Coalition was formed in 2014 to foster a collaborative community of diverse representatives from the public charter school and special education communities to identify common ground and take collective action. Since that time and through NCSECS's leadership, the coalition has come together to protect student civil rights and provide thought leadership regarding key policy issues involved with special education in the public charter sector. The Equity Coalition includes representatives from a diverse range of organizations with an interest in students with unique learning needs, special education, public charter schools, and education reform.

Mission: The Equity Coalition's mission is to form a united community of diverse representatives from the charter school sector, the special education community, and other fields to find common ground and take collective action to recognize progress and strong outcomes while informing efforts for continued improvement of charter school access and equity for students with disabilities.

Vision: A charter school sector that fully recognizes and welcomes its responsibilities toward students with disabilities, and that serves as a model of innovative and high-quality special education service delivery that raises expectations and improves outcomes for all students.

Signed:

Equity Coalition Organizations

The Advocacy Institute
Advocates for Justice and Education
CAST
Children's Law Center
Civil Rights Solutions
Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates
DC Association for Special Education
DC Public Charter School Board
Diverse Charter Schools Coalition
Green Dot Public Schools National
Hebrew Public

Kingsman Academy Charter School
Kutz & Bethke, LLC
National Alliance for Public Charter Schools
National Association of Charter School Authorizers
National Center for Learning Disabilities
Newark Charter School Fund
NYC Special Education Collaborative
Paramount School of Excellence
Relay Graduate School of Education
TASH

Equity Coalition Individual Members

Azure DS Angelov, *Chief Executive Officer, ADS Education*

Amanda Fenton, *Partner, Capitol Advocacy Partners*

Robert Garda, *NCSECS Board Member and Fanny Edith Winn Distinguished Professor of Law, Loyola University New Orleans College of Law*

Alex Medler, *Chair of the NCSECS Board and Senior Director, SAFAL Partners*

Jonathan Rosenberg, *NCSECS Board Member and Chief Executive Officer, Hebrew Public*