

Equity for All Arizonans

WEST VALLEY COMMUNITY TOWN HALL

September 20, 2023 – Avondale, AZ

DEFINING EQUITY AND ITS IMPACT

Equity is addressing different situations depending on what tools are needed for individual and collective success. Equity is using what you need, not necessarily what you're given. It defines individual needs and provides the tools accordingly. In contrast, equality is using the same tools and expecting a uniform result, which is not realistic.

One of the greatest impacts to immigrants and their families is equity because needs are unique to everyone. For example, it is important to give English language learners the tools to first learn the language, so they have a better opportunity for success in other areas of their education.

Another example of equity is making sure everyone understands the collective goals while also considering individual needs. Institutional policies must be updated to allow for more equity. An example of this is recent book banning in certain communities. When this happens, it is vital for external organizations to step in and help make sure students have access to restricted information. Another example is when a small local business doesn't have the credentials to become a vendor on the community college school campus. In this situation, it is incumbent on the administration to update policies that would allow those businesses to participate and fully represent the community.

Though equity is individual, some people don't know what they need and have not been given the chance to explore their needs. In this case, equity is empowering people to explore what their needs are so their needs can be met respectfully and individually.

OPTIMIZING EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL THROUGH EQUITABLE APPROACHES

Equity introduces the ancillary idea that there is no such thing as "one size fits all." Arizona has many rural communities and many Native Tribes. With that comes a lot of funding that allows those communities to improve education in the most remote areas of the state. Individuals must be met where they are both geographically on the broad spectrum of learning abilities. Teaching methods must be adapted to meet the needs of each individual community.

The first step to realizing equity in Arizona is to recognize basic human needs like housing, nutrition, and transportation. Frequently, these seemingly simple things are a barrier to success for people, especially in marginalized communities. But it is important to note that help comes from various sources. Holding events like this (Arizona Town Hall) allows people to express their opinions, which promotes self-reflection.

It is also important to examine the approach rather than just the definition of equity. In the example of education, one must ask the question, "Are we trying to achieve *equity* or are we trying to achieve *learning*?" With respect to this question, it is essential to recognize that compromised rights and standards can inhibit success. It is necessary to optimize purpose-driven people, especially when they feel disenfranchised. It is also vital to admit that logic cannot be realized until the emotion is removed from the conversation. However, commonality must be considered throughout the process.

IMPROVING COMMUNITIES THROUGH EQUITY

One tool that helps with the understanding of equity is history. The federal government's policy of "Separate but Equal" did not work because it ignored equity. Creating hierarchy within communities is counterproductive. It is absolutely necessary to allow each person to have psychological safety in an environment where they are inspired to express their needs.

In general, everyone wants to be successful, and society wants success for others. However, to encourage this, it is essential to remove assumptions from the quest to obtain equity. Doing so does not allow for people to have their needs met on an individual basis.

INDIVIDUAL COMMITMENTS TO ACTION

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions during the West Valley Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Commit to creating trust and a safe place for my staff and colleagues to feel free to express their opinions, needs and wants.
- Communicate my understanding of equity vs. equality to my peers who are curious or may not entirely comprehend its meaning.
- Talk with others about equity and ways to achieve it.
- Try to figure things out myself. I love the feedback of others, but if I can open that room for someone who might have a burning question, that would be my equitable approach.
- Start to look at the little things for people I know and address their needs in a way they will grow.
- Partner with academic faculty to create inclusive program standards while maintaining academic integrity.
- Work to ensure equitable funding for department budgets.
- Create a student panel for the empower (student with disabilities) group at Estrella Mountain Community College. If we hear the needs of students, we can start to address them.
- Try to tell other people what equity means.
- Try to be understanding of what others may need.