



Branch Alliance
for Educator Diversity

REDEFINING QUALITY EDUCATOR PREPARATION



USING **EQUITY REVIEWS**

to Assess and Address
Opportunity Gaps in Teacher
Preparation Programs

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A woman with long dark hair, wearing a red sweater, and a man with short dark hair, wearing a light blue shirt, are sitting and looking at a large blue folder. The woman is holding a pen and looking at the folder, while the man is pointing at it and speaking. They are in a modern office or library setting with large windows in the background.

EQUITY REVIEWS
equip educator
preparation providers
with clear indicators
for how well they are
meeting the needs
of their candidates
and preparing them
to leverage diversity
as an asset in PK-12
classrooms.

Introduction

This report chronicles the history and purpose of BranchED's *Equity Reviews*. Learnings from four prototype reviews conducted at predominately white institutions are provided as well as considerations and opportunities for undertaking like reviews in the future. Many Students of Color continue to experience an opportunity gap that impacts academic and affective outcomes in PK-12 and postsecondary settings and ultimately impact employment opportunities¹. Although more Students of Color are enrolling in higher education, they are less likely to graduate and end up with higher student debt loads².

Educator preparation programs (EPPs) play a central role in addressing the opportunity gap. We know teachers are the most important factor in student success³. We also know that exposure to teachers from the same racial/ethnic background of the students has a positive impact on the academic achievement of Students of Color⁴. Thus, it is essential for institutions of higher education in general, and EPPs specifically, to engage in a systematic process to identify factors that may impede the timely progression and graduation of Students of Color.



Educator Preparation

Changing demographics in America's classrooms requires a systematic re-examination of teacher preparation practices and new consideration of the role of culture and identity in student learning. It also requires a data driven approach to identify college and program strengths, needs, and gaps that support or hinder the admission and progression of Students of Color interested in becoming educators. Given that the nation generally, and the school-aged population specifically, have become increasingly ethnically/racially, linguistically, and economically diverse, the normalization of race-blind, culture-blind, language-blind, and assimilationist teacher preparation practices as the "gold standard" must be challenged. Current guidelines for what constitute "quality" educator preparation are limited or inadequate in their response to issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Tomorrow's classrooms demand that a "high-quality" teacher preparation program be **redefined** as one that equips and empowers teachers to embrace identity and diversity as assets that can be leveraged to enhance learning in their classrooms and result in higher levels of academic achievement for all their students. The **Branch Alliance for Educator Diversity's (BranchED's)** unique approach of explicitly braiding quality and diversity, and addressing them simultaneously as it supports university-based teacher preparation providers, is novel and was recognized by **EdWeek** as one of the **"Ten Game-Changing Ideas in Education"** in 2018.

To date, BranchED has engaged more than 438 faculty and leaders from 133 educator preparation providers (EPPs) at MSIs (located across the country in 36 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands) that prepare some 27,667 teacher candidates, and graduate some 12,783 teachers, per year. An additional 25 EPPs that are not federally designated as MSIs are also engaged in BranchED's network. Taken together, BranchED's core community prepares 39,905 candidates and graduates some 18,695 graduates per year. Given that on average teachers affect over 3,000 students during their career, BranchED's work has the potential to touch the lives of some 56,085,000 children.



438

faculty and leaders



133

*educator preparation
providers (EPPs) at MSIs*



27,667+

teacher candidates per year



36 US states

*the District of Columbia,
Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands*

Differentiated Support Model

BranchED executes its programmatic capacity-building work through a differentiated support model that is grounded in its **Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators**. This differentiated model encompasses the following:



Evidence-Based Resources & Consultation

This is provided via BranchED's online Resource Repository, webinars featuring experts, and private consultations, with the aim of educating participants and inspiring behavior change through sharing best practices.



Peer Learning Events & Collaboratives

Throughout the year BranchED conducts Learning Summits and collaboratives where EPP teams come together, either in person or virtually, to participate in professional development, share lessons and best practices, evaluate performance, and work individually and collaboratively to implement EPP changes over time.



Performance-Based Coaching

Performance-based coaching is BranchED's most resource intensive and highest impact support strategy. BranchED works one-on-one with EPPs to create a customized transformation plan. BranchED's coach or external facilitator provides supportive services with the goal of building the EPP's internal capacity for continuous improvement activities and, ultimately, program redesign and transformation.



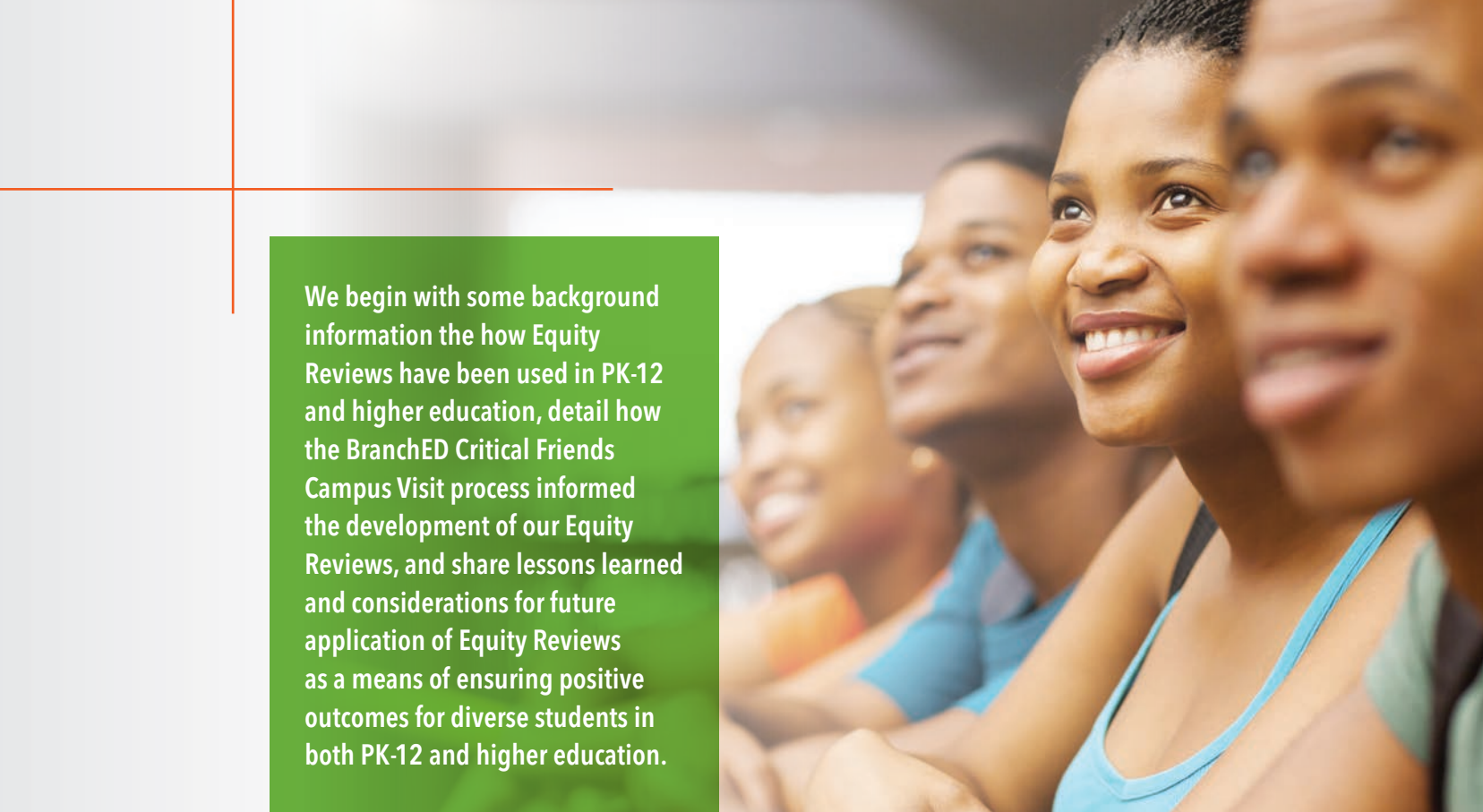
Critical Friends Campus Visits

BranchED conducts Critical Friends Campus Visits to EPPs to identify EPP assets and areas for improvement. This visit provides the EPP motivation and direction for quality enhancement goals.



Equity Reviews

Equity Reviews mirror the Critical Friends Campus Visit process with an emphasis on how equity is embodied throughout all facets of an educator preparation program including field and clinical experiences and policies and procedures.



We begin with some background information the how Equity Reviews have been used in PK-12 and higher education, detail how the BranchED Critical Friends Campus Visit process informed the development of our Equity Reviews, and share lessons learned and considerations for future application of Equity Reviews as a means of ensuring positive outcomes for diverse students in both PK-12 and higher education.

History of Equity Audits

Equity audits in PK-12 have been used as compliance measures, to measure equity in curriculum, and to ensure accountability measures in school reform. The goal of an equity audit is to identify institutional practices that produce discriminatory trends in data that affect students. The premise is that uncovering opportunity gaps is the first step in developing a plan to address them⁵. These audits are especially needed now as inequities were exacerbated by COVID-19 and the transition to online instruction in PK-12 and postsecondary settings. While PK-12 educations have been engaging in equity audits for some time, higher education professionals, including educator preparation providers, have not yet systematized the way they identify, evaluate, and address disparities in their institutions. Furthermore, EPPs have the added burden of ensuring that the educators they produce are equipped and empowered with Equity Literacy⁶, defined as:

THE ABILITY TO

- 1 RECOGNIZE**
biases and inequities
- 2 RESPOND**
to biases and inequities in the immediate term
- 3 REDRESS**
biases in the long term

- 4 ACTIVELY CULTIVATE**
equitable, anti-oppressive ideologies and institutional cultures
- 5 CREATE and SUSTAIN**
bias-free and equitable learning environments

Equity Audits in Higher Education

A college education continues to be important in gaining skills for stable, well-paying jobs and developing a workforce. However, disparities in outcomes of college students from different racial and socioeconomic backgrounds affect long-term wage earnings and employment. Research reveals continued significant gaps in access to higher education for Students of Color. This issue is not simply relegated to admissions into higher education; completion once admitted is also a concern⁷. Olson⁸ identifies equity audits as an important tool that higher education can use to address issues of inequalities, while noting that such audits are not readily used by colleges and universities.

Equity audits can serve to identify opportunity gaps related to equitable access and inclusion, treatment, opportunity to learn, available resources, and academic achievement and other student outcomes. Ultimately, equity audits are not about fault finding; rather, they help to provide a road map as we endeavor to ensure equitable educational opportunities for all students leading to positive academic and affective outcomes. They allow us to identify trends in the data beyond representation and facilitate development of an action plan to ameliorate challenges and address gaps impacting student progression and success.

Evaluating Diversity in Educator Preparation Programs

Our student population continues to diversify while the teacher population remains predominately white and female. The most recent Condition of Education⁹ found that 52% of America's public-school children are Children of Color. Only 21% of teachers and 22% of principals are from those same racial and ethnic backgrounds. Research reveals that Students of Color benefit from having teachers from their own racial/ethnic group. Test scores, grades, high school completion, and college matriculation and completion rates increase, and absences and disciplinary issues decrease¹⁰. Further, experiences with counter-stereotypical authority figures, like teachers and principals, can decrease prejudiced responses to diverse individuals.

While it is essential that we continue efforts to diversify the teacher and leader workforce, those efforts are insufficient in ensuring equitable educational experiences for Students of Color. EPPs must ensure that all graduates possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to meet the needs of Students of Color and from low socio-economic backgrounds. Evaluating diversity in educator preparation programs is central to national accrediting bodies. The Council for the Accreditation of Education Programs (CAEP) revised their standards in 2021 to more explicitly address the need to prepare educators who have strong positive effects on diverse learners. Similarly, the Association for Advancing Quality in Educator Preparation (AAQEP) includes a strong emphasis on candidates who can plan for and support instruction and assessment that is differentiated and culturally response.

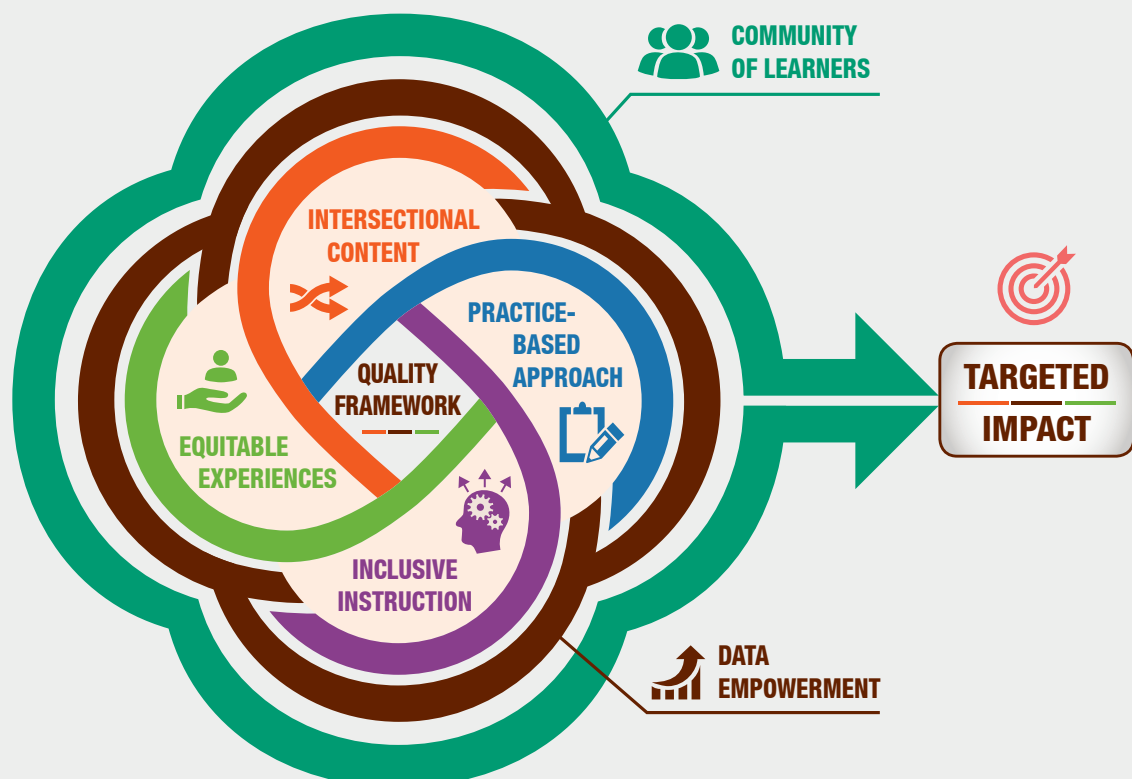
An Equity Review can serve to identify how and to what extent EPPs are meeting the spirit rather than just the letter of accreditation, state, and discipline specific standards related to diversity.

Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators

There are many conceptual frameworks in the realm of education about preparing teachers to address the multiple identities that students bring to the classroom. Some of those conceptual frameworks include culturally relevant pedagogy, social justice education, democratic education, critical pedagogy, and multicultural education. These frameworks can be clustered into those that focus on candidate competencies and those that explore more ideological positions about the level of attention and/or saturation of matters of diversity within educator preparation programs.

BranchED's Framework is unique in that it does not address candidate competencies nor philosophical orientation. Rather, it explicates six principles for the design and implementation of high-quality educator preparation programs that prepare competent and confident educators able to leverage, not fear or ignore, the differences among their students. BranchED's Framework is a framework for action. It acknowledges that there are multiple and varied pathways to effectiveness and places emphasis on assisting participants in understanding and implementing evidence-based preparation practices and in charting their own course for transformation given the importance of local context – its community. By recognizing and embracing each provider's unique potential for excellence, the framework not only builds a customized approach to improvement efforts, but also empowers institutional actors to be the change-agents and champions of the work.

The Framework provides a common language and common vision for the kind of programmatic transformation that will lead to high quality educator preparation programs that make real a commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, and that will afford candidates with the knowledge, skills, and abilities to ensure equitable educational opportunities to positively impact academic and affective outcomes of a diverse PK-12 students.



Framework Components



Quality teacher preparation is catalyzed by a broad-based **COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS**. The EPP establishes a community of learners through leadership, shared responsibility for candidate learning, and professional collaboration.



Quality teacher preparation is **DATA EMPOWERED**. The EPP has an active culture of inquiry, utilizing an authentic and ongoing cycle of evidence-based improvement that begins with asking thoughtful questions, moves through organizational learning and action, and ends with an evaluation of the effectiveness of actions taken.



Quality teacher preparation is grounded in **INTERSECTIONAL CONTENT**. Before program completion, candidates demonstrate mastery of content related to learners, learning, the subject matter, content knowledge for teaching, pedagogical knowledge, assessment, and engagement with families and communities. Such knowledge is dynamic, constructed and overlapping.



Quality teacher preparation is experiential and **PRACTICE-BASED**. The EPP purposefully engages candidates in direct experience of teaching (practice) and focused reflection, to increase knowledge, develop skills, clarify values, and develop the capacity to contribute to diverse communities.



Quality teacher preparation fosters **INCLUSIVE INSTRUCTION**. Inclusive instruction minimizes or removes barriers to learning or assessment and supports the success of all learners, while ensuring that academic standards are not diminished. Such instruction includes the integration of culturally and linguistically sustaining practices, social and emotional learning, cognitive science, and trauma-informed care.



Quality teacher preparation ensures **EQUITABLE EXPERIENCES** for all candidates. The EPP provides a multi-layered, holistic system of candidate-specific research-based supports, just-in-time interventions, and enrichment experiences that are informed by data and the identification of candidate-specific needs. These academic and social supports are regularly provided and actively monitored to determine whether activities are effective in meeting candidates' needs and enabling their achievement.



Through these six design principles, quality teacher preparation achieves **TARGETED IMPACT**. The EPP demonstrates the overall impact and value of its preparation program on its candidates and graduates such that they are competent and confident in their ability to make positive academic gains for PK-12 students, especially Students of Color and low-income students. BranchED's Quality Framework is evidence-based and reflective of the values and experiences of MSIs, while being applicable to all teacher preparation providers.

Humanistic Approach

Our approach requires that we help EEPs develop capacity and address organizational culture to achieve transformational change. The foundational assumptions undergirding BranchED's work include:



DURABLE CHANGE

BranchED intends its impact to go beyond immediate support and professional development. We work alongside institutions to foster program enhancements – the systems, structures, and habits of work – that are embedded within the fiber of operations and, therefore, can withstand changes in personnel, resources, and other external threats to quality.



CONTEXT MATTERS

While keeping in mind shared agreement on high leverage practices, the science of learning, and the principles of social emotional learning, each EPP serves diverse cultural communities with their own cultural capital and funds of knowledge. BranchED's tiered support model is designed to address the unique context of each EPP.



ASSET-BASED SUPPORT MODEL

We believe that organizations, like people, can more easily build on strengths than develop brand new competencies. Every organization has its own unique pool of resources and relationships from which it can draw, and technical assistance should help the organization identify, engage, and leverage the assets that exist when undertaking change efforts.



CO-OWNERSHIP OF PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

We believe that all key stakeholders need to be involved in and take co-ownership of the change process. This means that EPPs need to create and sustain partnerships with school and community organizations that are mutually beneficial and non-hierarchical.




DATA EMPOWERED DECISION MAKING

Evaluation, assessment and plans for individual and institutional growth should be based in rigorous, up-to-date, and multi-method data collection and research. We further believe that data analysis should be action-based.



QUALITY FRAMEWORK

While we do not believe in a one-size-fits-all reform model for educator preparation, we do believe that there are common issues that all EPP programs need to address systematically and intentionally, as reflected in our Quality Framework.



The “Critical Friend” approach has its origins in critical pedagogy education reforms in the 1970s and arose out of the self-appraisal activity which is attributed to Desmond Nuttall. A critical friend can be defined as a trusted person who asks provocative questions, examines data through another lens, and offers critiques of a person’s work as a friend. A critical friend takes the time to fully understand the context of the work presented and the outcomes that the person or group is working toward. The friend is an advocate for the success of that work.

The Birth of Equity Reviews

As part of its process for understanding the current state of an educator preparation provider, BranchED conducts Critical Friend Campus Visits. Critical Friend Visits help to identify EPP bright spots (assets) and opportunities (areas for improvement) and provides recommendations for improvement. These visits include an extensive document review; key interviews with education leaders, faculty, and stakeholders; and classroom observations of EPP courses as well as their candidates’ and alumni’s PK-12 classrooms. Critical Friends Campus Visits provide insight into the level and nature of technical assistance and capacity building support that BranchED can offer programs.

By the Spring of 2018, BranchED had successfully completed a series of Critical Friend Visits at Minority Serving Institutions (MSI) – its core community. The team began sharing out the findings of the visits at professional conferences, and shared stories about how participant faculty and leaders articulated the usefulness of visit insights. Increasingly deans of non-MSI educator preparation providers began to reach out to BranchED to express their interest in having a BranchED visit team come to their institutions. The deans specifically requested that BranchED foreground the equity focus of the reviews – in order to differentiate the visit from state or accreditation site visits. The team felt that a change in the visits’ name would also differentiate the prototype activity at non-MSIs from the continuing work with MSIs. Thus, BranchED’s Equity Reviews were born.

Equity Reviews of Educator Preparation Programs

BranchED's Equity Reviews were refined with the goal of helping non-MSI EPPs assess the degree to which they: (1) have a culturally inclusive climate and culture; (2) are equitably serving low-income students, Students of Color, and other minoritized student populations with respect to access and success; and (3) are preparing their candidates to move forward the achievement gains of a diversity of learners. The Equity Review process mirrors the Critical Friends Site Visit process. The document review and site visit allow BranchED to gain insights into the EPP by understanding the practices that support and/or prevent students from low-income backgrounds, Students of Color, and other minoritized students from being successful in their teacher preparation journey. The six design principles of BranchED's Framework for the Quality Preparation of Educators serve as the lens through which all documents, conversations, and observations are analyzed and assessed.

The Review Process

The Equity Review is executed in three phases: 1) Planning, 2) Site Visit, and 3) Reporting. Once BranchED and the non-MSI EPP Dean have agreed to proceed with an Equity Review, the Senior Vice President identifies the Team Lead for the Equity Review. The BranchED Team Lead schedules a meeting with the EPP Dean and his/her leadership team to review the process, roles, responsibilities, and expectations for the Equity Review, ensure a shared understanding of equity using the six design principles of the BranchED Quality Framework, and develop a timeline for each phase of the review.

Planning

The planning meeting presents an opportunity to not only review the process but also share with the EPP leadership team a template for the schedule, which includes a list of recommended sessions that will ensure perspectives of multiple stakeholders. During this meeting, we discuss the importance of creating brave spaces that encourage transparent feedback to be provided by diverse stakeholders. Once the date for the site visit is set, the timeline for collecting and submitting documents for review by the BranchED Team prior to the site visit is determined. The document review provides insights into the inner workings of the EPP.

Site Visit

The site visit is meant to garner a nuanced understanding of a program's context from the point of view of a broad base of stakeholders within that context. Traditionally completed face-to-face, during the time of COVID, BranchED transitioned successfully to virtual site visits. Site visits are typically conducted by a team of two to four individuals from BranchED. The site visits provide an opportunity for the BranchED team to explore further assets and areas for enhancement and/or gaps that emerged through the document review. It also allows for meetings with key education leaders, faculty, teacher candidates, and PK-12 partners, conducting classroom observations.

Tools and Protocols

The following are the tools and resources developed by BranchED to facilitate the Equity Review process.

- **Equity Visit Logistics Slide Deck**
is utilized during the kickoff meeting with the EPP leadership.
- **Critical Friends Visit Evidence Aligned to Design Principle**
includes the documents that should be requested from the EPP to allow the team to learn the inner workings of the EPP through the document review.
- **BranchED Virtual Site Visit Meeting Guidance**
describes the roles and responsibilities for the BranchED team during the site visit.
- **Schedule Template**
provides the EPP support in building a site visit schedule and suggestion on the stakeholders to be included as part of the meetings/focus groups.
- **Report Template**
is used by BranchED to document the formal report that is issued to the EPP. The format of the report was adjusted for the last Equity Review in response to lessons learned from the initial reports.
- **Equity Review Question Guide**
includes a set of guiding questions for each design principle to guide both the document review and the site visit.

The site visit includes meetings and focus groups with diverse stakeholders: university leaders, education leaders, faculty, candidates, alumni, school partners, community representatives, diversity committee/officer, and other stakeholders identified by the EPP. The sessions are designed to collect as many perspectives as possible on how the EPP has integrated diversity, equity, and inclusion into the program. The meetings and focus groups allow BranchED to gain deeper insights into the program and to triangulate the data from the document review.

Reporting

Following each visit, a confidential report is generated and shared with the EPP. The report is written to assist EPPs in understanding where they are, defining their priorities, and identifying and implementing specific actions for continuous improvement. The report details the EPP's alignment with BranchED's six design principles and is presented as Bright Spots, Opportunities for Enhancement, and actionable Recommendations. The entire process is strictly confidential, though BranchED may request consent to amplify exemplars.

EQUITY REVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Sample Equity-Focused, Framework Aligned Question Sets

Framework Principle	Indicator Principle	Equity-focused Questions
Intersectional Content	Critical Orientation Cultivation	What teaching practices (if any) are candidates expected to demonstrate to address racial, ethnic, linguistic, and other differences? In what ways, if any, do you train candidates to analyze educational resources and research (curricula, textbooks, other instructional materials)?
Inclusive Instruction	Equity Literacy	What processes/practices are in place to build and grow critical, cultural, and sociopolitical consciousness among the faculty?





■ Four Prototype Equity Reviews

BranchED conducted four prototype Equity Reviews between Summer 2019 and Spring 2021. An individualized report, grounded in findings from the document review and a site visit, was developed for each institution.

Description of Sites

Equity Reviews were conducted at four geographically diverse institutions within the United States. Of these institutions, three were public universities and one was a private university. Each institution is accredited to offer educator preparation programs. Three of the institutions have programs scaled across multiple campuses.

 INSTITUTION	● ● ● TYPE	 EPP
Institution A	Public research institution	14 academic programs leading to certification
Institution B	Public research institution with four campuses situated across a metropolitan area	24 academic programs leading to certification
Institution C	A regional multi-campus public institution	2 academic programs leading to certification
Institution D	Private, nonprofit online university with multiple state affiliates	16 academic programs leading to certification

Trends in Results/Findings

While each institution had a unique program and findings were individualized, there were common themes that emerged across the four prototype Equity Reviews. These themes include demonstrated commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, opportunity to deepen equity literacy, a focused effort on duty of care and student supports, and responsiveness to student and community voice.



Commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

It was identified that three of the institutions exhibited an explicit commitment to fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion. This commitment was demonstrated through intentional efforts by EPP leadership, as well as diversity and equity focused advisory committees. While the presence of these committees and councils was a bright spot, opportunities existed across institutions to clarify the purpose and scope of the work of the committees to enhance support for transformative efforts. This empowerment would allow these committees to lead the faculty in explicitly and clearly defining the desired competencies for teacher candidate and faculty practice related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Opportunity to deepen equity literacy.

A consistent finding across all four institutions was an opportunity to deepen equity literacy across the faculty. This desire was also communicated by faculty at multiple institutions expressing readiness to engage in deeper diversity, equity, and inclusion work. Recommendations included introducing coursework where students learn about education inequity (racism, ability, sexism, gender identity, etc.) early in the programs and adjusting disposition assessments and observation protocols to include actions/issues related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Opportunities

existed across institutions to enhance practices that model culturally relevant and sustaining pedagogy and support of intersectional identities of students (beyond English language learning status and/or special education status).

Focused effort on duty of care and student support.

A bright spot across programs was a commitment to student supports and duty of care. These supports are intended to remove barriers to student success. Alumni shared stories of faculty building and sustaining relationships with students. Strong advising supports were noted across multiple institutions with opportunities present to expand those services beyond academics to remove non-cognitive barriers to academic success for all students.

Responsiveness to student and community voice.

Observations across institutions indicated opportunities to be more intentional in using student voice to understand student experiences. The integration of additional voices from the community, including non-education partners (e.g., families and grass-roots community organizations), can help ground the narrative in the assets of the community and its families. This provides opportunities to engage students and communities in the design and development of experiences.

Participant Evaluation/ Reflection

BranchED routinely conducts follow-up surveys of participants after an Equity Review campus visit. Results are analyzed regularly, and feedback is incorporated into visit plans and activities. One hundred percent of participants in these initial Equity Reviews were satisfied or very satisfied with their experience of the review and the review report. All participants were very satisfied with the planning process, team visit, and composition of the BranchED site visit team.

When asked what insights from the review participants found insightful, they shared the following.



100%
Satisfied
or
Very Satisfied

” First, it was gratifying and validating to learn of our Bright Spots – now from multiple sources, but particularly from the lens of DEI. Thank you! Second, the Equity Review Report provided key insights into the practices where we have opportunities for growth. In nearly all cases, the Report helped us to see and articulate clearly where these opportunities are. Moreover, across the 6 design principles, patterns clearly emerged about areas for improvement.



” It was encouraging and honest. It was impressive how well they really learned our program. It made the recommendations and conclusion very specific and relevant to our program. Their recommendations are both in process and outcomes.

” Leveraging an equity council for strategic direction on system change. Strategic partnerships to drive the development of shared goals between the district and the higher education institute.

” This matched our expectations and hopes. . . and was nearly as thorough as our stateside accreditation/ review. Can’t say enough about how appreciative we are of this careful review work and the thoughtful road map for future DEI work. This will no longer be a wandering through the morass situation, as we have a guide, with waypoints. Thank you, BranchED Team!!

One hundred percent of respondents indicated that they would recommend BranchED to another institution and three of the institutions created action plans for addressing the areas for enhancement noted in the review report. It should be noted that, after receiving the report, one of the deans decided not to share the report with the broader faculty and did not take any additional action related to the review. BranchED will follow-up with all of the institutions six to twelve months after their respective reviews to learn what changes have been made.

■ Considerations

Looking back on all Equity Reviews to date, the BranchED team and site visitors comprised the following set of considerations for any institution interested in conducting an Equity Review.

— *Have a broad base of participants who represent the educational ecosystem served.*

To get useful and accurate data, it is critical to have representatives from the groups affected by the policies, programs, and practices being studied in the review. Without such “stakeholder” involvement, the review can be seen as one group examining another and convey a message that one of the groups is “the problem.” A more broadly based group will both (1) provide pertinent insight and (2) more likely send a “we’re all in this together” message.

— *Create brave space yet acknowledge high stakes.*

What makes equity reviews challenging? We maintain that by their very nature – attention to societal, organizational, and personal values and how those are enacted – Equity Reviews are fraught with great potential for conflict. Participants may have no clear sense of the range of inequities that may exist in their programs. They may see the review as totally unnecessary and a diversion of resources.

Depending on the history of the EPP’s leadership, equity may never have been an acknowledged area of concern. Hence, little, or no disaggregated data on candidates or staff may be available. Or there may be an attitude of “it’s not my problem” associated with data being gathered and supplied to an external agency, and no systematic process for internal examination of data findings moving to action. All these reasons – and others – can interfere and generate resistance to an Equity Review.

— *Resistance is inevitable; expect it and be prepared.*

If a change is to be effective, it will generate questions. Recognize that not all questioning is “resistance” (though some will be). Wanting to understand before committing to change is a good thing. This is especially true for equity changes. What is the EPP’s institutional culture about change? Do faculty and/or leaders have a theory of change? Perhaps change is seen as disruptive and negative, something to be avoided. Questions, reluctance, and other forms of “resistance” can be a barometer of the potential impact of the change. Remember, in most cases, the greater the change, the greater the resistance. Knowing the source and type of potential resistance can help you respond positively rather than defensively or fearfully. Let the push-back of the resistance be an indicator of what stakeholders are thinking and feeling about social justice issues in the program.

There are two major ways of decreasing resistance to change: increase the tension of not supporting the change (for example, document thoroughly the need for change) or decrease the tension related to trying the new way (for example, determine the concerns of the resisters and respond with appropriate actions).

— ***Design the review to be systemic – it should touch on all parts of the system.***

Equity permeates an entire organization's policies, programs, and practices, affecting faculty as well as candidates. If inequities are pervasive (as they often are), then a review needs to take a comprehensive view. That means examining student access to educational programs, the programs themselves, and the results of such programs – all inputs and outputs.

— ***Have a minimum of two experienced and skilled people on your team. One person with Equity Review expertise and one with expertise in organizational evaluation (sometimes a single person will have both).***

Leading an Equity Review is not a task for a novice. Whether your review will be conducted by internal staff or external consultants, you need a person(s) skilled in conducting reviews and especially Equity Reviews. Certainly, junior persons can be team members, but an experienced person needs to provide leadership. It is also important for the team to be comprised of racially/ethnically diverse individuals with expertise and experience in teacher education and higher education. Having a group with diverse areas of expertise related to developing teachers and equitable programming provides valuable insight and perspectives in conducting a thorough Equity Review.

In addition to being experienced, at least one of the people heading up the review team needs to demonstrate skills in evaluation. The evaluation expert needs to know how to design an equity study, how to gather and interpret data, how to present results, and how to make recommendations for change.

They also need to be culturally and interculturally competent. This means being aware of their own cultural orientations, the perspectives of different stakeholder groups, and strategies for working within and across professional and personal cultures. They also need to be seen as trustworthy to all stakeholder groups, including those who may be in the minority.

— ***Calibrate team members understanding of equity and educator preparation programs' roles in ensuring equity.***

The Equity Review Team completes the document analysis first then convenes prior to the virtual visit to collectively norm on questions and areas of inquiry for each focus group. During this preparation session, the Equity Review Team shares the questions they feel would overarchingly explore the roles of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the EPPs. As we engaged

in these discussions, we found that although the theoretical underpinnings of equity were aligned, team members' explicit definitions of equity, the role of it in teacher preparation, and suggestions for how EPPs should approach transformation differed. The multiple perspectives were important as they provided a more comprehensive analysis. That said, we feel it important, once the team is identified, to engage in a calibration and dialoguing session to ensure a consistent definition of equity and observable evidence of same.

— **Balance support for transformation while mitigating the risk of additional harm for People of Color.**

A clear benefit to this work is the role we play as "outsider experts" in the process. Our stated goal as a team and organization in doing this work is to help support the institution in the journey to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in their EPPs. An Equity Review team has the potential to provide meaningful perspective into the sociocultural environment and the structural system within the EPP.

Equity Review team members spoke to the tension of inviting faculty and Staff of Color to give voice to their experiences during focus groups. Even though we are careful to not to name individual stakeholders when we produce the report, there is still risk when inviting candid critical feedback in this area, particularly for those who may have already experience marginalization and potential retaliation due to their identity and/or critical perspectives. This risk is particularly heightened in spaces where there are very few faculty and Staff of Color. Understanding the long-term effects of microaggressions and explicitly racialized climates for People of Color made team members keenly aware of their limited abilities to provide wrap-around and ongoing support to any focus group participants who may have had to relive traumas in the process of the review. To explicitly mitigate this, we encourage leaders to provide follow-up communications to all stakeholders regarding the Equity Review Visit and intended next steps to honor and be responsive to the emotional investment of the process.

— **(Re)Envisioning the institutional report to spark transformational change.**

The Framework is an excellent tool for considering the overlapping features of programs; however, using the framework areas as the primary organizing feature of the report was somewhat constrained or forced an inauthentic reporting of bright spots. We determined revising the structure of the report so that we begin with the bright spots, followed by opportunities for enhancement or what we are renaming "On the Right Track" and corresponding recommendations makes for better flow. We also added a new section, which we titled "Areas for Further Inquiry." These are a series of probing questions based on the Team's experiences in conducting the site visit and document review. Each of these are still aligned to the Framework.

■ Opportunities

Equity Reviews are a leadership tool used to collect data that informs the process of removing programmatic barriers that impede full participation, access, and opportunity for all students to receive an equitable and excellent education. With this process, leaders can assess the extent to which equity is present in such areas as teacher quality, the overall instructional setting, and student achievement and attainment¹¹. Equity Reviews support proactive leaders with assessing and planning for campus improvement that addresses the specific cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and racial dynamics present the school community.

As a nation we continue to grapple with systemic and institutionalized inequities within and beyond education. The pandemic exposed what many of us already knew—Communities of Color have and continue to experience education, health, and legal inequities, with negative and sometimes lethal consequences. There has been increased public awareness on issues of racism and systemic inequities and increased demand to address this reality. CAEP, a national accreditor of EPPs revised its standards to address diversity more explicitly. Accreditation bodies have revised standards to more explicitly address diversity and there has been increased philanthropic investment focused on equity and access.

At the state level, there has also been increased attention to equity and other related issues. In some states there has been a trend in teacher education competencies that are infused with equity and cultural responsiveness. As an example, in 2021 the Illinois legislature approved an overhaul of their teaching standards which centered on cultural responsiveness and tasked teacher preparation programs to immediately start making plans to implement the new standards into their program. Parallel to this increased interest, other federal, state, and local legislatures are pushing back against practices that center equity, cultural responsiveness, and discussions of race in schools. Although there is a pronounced divide among states, the commonality is a heightened awareness of these themes and an understanding that teacher educator programs need to be ready to grapple with any of these discussions and subsequent impact on their programs.

While it is encouraging to see federal, state, and education systems grappling with the issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion and to see needed changes proposed for teacher preparation, an overlooked entity is the readiness of teacher preparation programs to enact these changes. Findings from our Equity Reviews demonstrate that there is often a lack of essential knowledge around these themes and even when the knowledge base around equity is strong; guidance is needed as to how to implement these themes programmatically across the curriculum and embed them in experiences of teacher candidates. Equity Reviews can be a starting point for programs seeking to improve their readiness in this area.

Endnotes

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