

Introduction

Equity walks can be an effective component of a holistic approach to equity at the district level. To support Hanover Research's member districts in improving equity, the following research brief summarizes the literature on best practices for implementing equity walks, including offering sample tools for conducting equity walks and providing profiles of districts that implement equity walks.

Key Findings

- **Equity walks are a type of observational learning walkthrough where facilitators gather and review evidence of equitable educational practices.** Equity walks are frequently included as the observational component of a broader equity audit.
 - ➔ **While equity walks do not have a significant research or evidence base**, classroom walkthroughs more broadly are supported by limited research that indicates they can serve as a useful source of information for administrators.
- **Equity walks include four stages**, whereby administrators and facilitators **identify a specific focus area** and purpose for the equity walk; **determine the logistical processes and protocols** for the walkthrough, including selecting an observation protocol and data collection tool; **conduct the walkthrough** and observations using the pre-determined observation protocol and data collection tool; and **analyze the data** to identify trends and findings, **debrief** on the evidence, and **reflect** on and share the findings.
- **When conducting an equity walk, facilitators should observe all school areas, including classrooms, hallways, cafeterias and recess areas, bathrooms, gyms, and libraries.** While specific focus areas will vary based on the equity walk's purpose, facilitators should generally observe physical and environmental features of spaces, classroom resources and materials, interpersonal interactions, discipline, academic grouping, and curriculum and instruction.

Defining Equity Walks

An equity walk is a framework for conducting **observational walkthroughs of a school and classrooms to review evidence of equitable educational practices.**¹ Equity walks are a critical component of broader equity audits that allow district leaders or facilitators to view equity practices and processes in practice.² Typically, district or school

administrators or an external consult will conduct the equity walk, though the facilitator may also invite teachers or community members to participate.³

As equity walks are a type of structured school and classroom observation, districts can apply protocols and best practices from other types of observations and walkthroughs, such as learning visits, to equity walks.

Alternatively, Data Equity Walks are a different type of equity walk where participants (e.g., district leaders, teachers, students, or community members) engage with and reflect on data from an equity lens.⁴ Indeed, participants review the data and discuss issues of equity by examining gaps in achievement, access, or climate between student groups, schools, or across the district as a whole. Accordingly, "[p]articipants explore the data individually before collectively discussing implications and identifying solutions to address disparities and improve outcomes."⁵ Benefits of a Data Equity Walk include:⁶

- Visual data displays paint a powerful picture of disparities in outcomes;
- It provides space for participants to reflect individually and collectively;
- It shows data that underscores the experiences of community members; and
- Participants gain common grounding in the data in order to identify solutions.



EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS

While equity walks do not have a research or evidence base, they are frequently included as the observational component of a broader equity audit. Experts recommend equity audits, including an observational component, to promote equity within a district and identify inequitable practices and policies.⁷

Classroom walkthroughs more broadly have a limited research base, which indicates that walkthroughs can serve as a useful source of information for administrators, who may gain more from the experience than teachers.⁸

Implementing Equity Walks

Best practices for school and classroom walkthroughs and learning visits, in general, lend valuable lessons for implementing equity walks. While equity walks may differ based on the organization, context, and unique purpose,

effective school walkthroughs and observational visits frequently include the following stages:

1 Identify Focus Areas or a Specific Purpose

Prior to conducting the equity walk, administrators should identify a specific focus area for the walk that is relevant to all classrooms and school areas of inclusion.⁹ The focus area will help determine what facilitators look for when conducting the walkthrough.¹⁰ Similarly, administrators should select a facilitator to conduct the equity walk.¹¹

Administrators should consider including teachers in discussions about instructional expectations and the focus of the observation.¹² Teacher participation promotes trust and bolsters the perception that the observation will positively impact teachers' work with students.¹³ Thus, determination of learning visit objectives should give teachers a voice in what observers will look for during learning visits.¹⁴ Because they are always embedded in their particular academic setting and possess intimate knowledge of students' and their own needs, teachers can provide relevant framing and insight into "the unique, contextualized circumstances" in which they work to better direct observations.¹⁵

2 Determine Walkthrough Process and Protocols

After determining the walkthrough's focus, facilitators should select specific items to observe, such as classroom climate, teacher responsiveness to students, student engagement, classroom management, or instructional rigor.¹⁶ The facilitator should then determine and communicate the procedures the observation, including norms for observation, the length and schedule of the visit, and the data collection tool.¹⁷



COMMUNICATE THAT EQUITY WALKS ARE NOT AN EVALUATION

Equity walks are intended to gather data and evidence to facilitate discussion and reflection, rather than act as a formal evaluation of an individual's practices. Walk-throughs are not intended for staff evaluation but should be viewed as a method to gauge classroom and schoolwide climate and requirements.¹⁸ Districts should clearly convey this information to both principals and educators and assure them that the walkthrough is not tied to performance evaluations. Research suggests that teachers become anxious during walk-throughs, and that this may lead to distrust between the staff, principals, and district administration. Thus, for the equity walk to be most effective and include staff support, administrators should clearly communicate its purpose and ensure that staff do not perceive the walk as an evaluation or to check compliance.¹⁹

3

Conduct the Walkthrough and Observation

During the equity walk, the facilitator observes the identified school areas and uses the data collection tool (e.g., a checklist) to take notes on their observations.²⁰ Facilitators can use the following best practices to conduct the equity walk:²¹

- Observe the classroom's physical environment;
- Review student work samples in folders, portfolios, on desks, on display;
- Focus on stating factual evidence ("I heard..." "I saw..."); and refrain from subjective statements ("I liked...");
- Focus on what is actually said or done, as a video camera might record;
- Be as fine-grained and objective as possible in recording observed behavior and verbatim utterances;
- Ensure that each class visit is for consistent duration; and
- Use observation tools to record data.

Notably, if there are multiple facilitators, they should avoid discussing or debriefing their findings in hallways or other common areas.²²

4

Analyze, Debrief, Reflect, and Share

Following the walkthrough, facilitators should review their observations, ratings, and notes to orient findings more closely with the equity walk's focus.²³

After refining observational data, facilitators should analyze the evidence to identify trends, strengths and areas for improvement.²⁴ Facilitators should use the evidence they gathered to engage in reflective conversations among themselves.²⁵ Next, facilitators should share key findings from the equity walks with teachers and other school staff, encouraging participants to reflect on the process and findings of the equity walk in relation to the district's equity goals.²⁶ Any feedback provided to observed teachers should be reflective and challenge those teachers to self-examine their own strengths and areas of need.²⁷ The following table summarizes the stages of feedback and debrief for a learning visit, which districts can apply to equity walks:

1	Complete a learning visit and record observation data and ratings
2	Debrief with your fellow observers after the learning visits
3	Share feedback and debrief with observed staff.
4	Compose follow-up actions and professional learning plan to learning visit findings.

Source: JSD²⁸

READ MORE



For additional detail on stages for conducting a learning visit or classroom walkthrough, as well as practical tools and examples, see the "[Learning Visits Toolkit](#)."

Equity walks may also involve a series of questions that district leaders aim to reflect on, discuss, or answer. For example, district leaders can use the following equity audit statements:

Sample Equity Audit Statements

Community and Parent Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We know the makeup of our community in regards to race and culture.• Meeting the needs of our diverse community is built in to all our school planning and practices.• Our staff has the knowledge and skills needed to work with a diverse community.• We build networks and connections with groups and individuals who represent different sections or our community.• We reach out to our community in meaningful ways and seek input on school decisions.• Our communication strategies (e.g., posters, website, materials, meetings) are appropriate for our diverse community.• Our budget includes resources such as interpreters or translators for staff and parents.• We speak respectfully about and to people from different races.• We speak respectfully about and to people from different cultural backgrounds.• We have parent involvement programs that address the needs of all cultural groups.
School Policy and Practice Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our school mission and vision statements include a stated commitment to equity and diversity.• We actively recruit teachers from diverse backgrounds.• Our new teacher induction and mentoring program includes equity and diversity components.• Our professional development addresses race, culture, and language.• We examine our school and organizational culture periodically to check for exclusive and inclusive practices.• We examine our school and district traditions, events, and celebrations for exclusive and inclusive practices.• Our racial and ethnic representation in special education, advanced placement classes, honor classes, and gifted programs is balanced.• We have a program or plan to address intercultural conflict.• Our celebrations reflect various cultures and introduce the community to new cultures.
Classroom and Teacher Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Our teachers use effective teaching strategies to accommodate the needs of culturally diverse learners.• Our teachers use effective teaching strategies to accommodate the needs of linguistically diverse learners.• Our teachers make intentional connections to students' culture and prior knowledge.• Authentic student assessment is used to complement standardized tests.
Student Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We provide a variety of leadership opportunities for all students.• We have plans or programs in place to facilitate the adaptation of new students to our school environment.• We listen to students' voices when making school decisions.• Our students interact with students of all races and cultures.
Curriculum and Instruction Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• We use research-based strategies on various learning styles in our classrooms.• The literature selections in our curriculum reflect a variety of cultural perspectives.• Our instruction is differentiated to address all students' needs.• Global perspectives are integrated into curricula at all grade levels.

Source: Nebraska Department of Education²⁹



SPOTLIGHT

Evanston/Skokie School District 65 (District 65) implemented equity walks as part of a broader, comprehensive strategy to promote and embed equitable practices throughout the district. Other components of the broader equity plan included the development of a racial and educational equity statement, the creation of an Equity Advisory Committee and District Equity Leadership Team, and cultural competence training and professional learning opportunities for teachers, administrators, and other staff.³⁰

The district conducted equity walks at all district schools during the 2016-2017 school year "to provide District 65 with the opportunity to take a comprehensive look at policies, practices, and procedures through a racial equity lens. Information gathered will be used to inform a district-wide equity policy as well as future equity initiatives."³¹

District 65 hired an external equity consultant to conduct the equity walks and gather additional insights from students and staff through interviews and focus groups. The consult explains her plans to "spen[d] time in each of the district's 18 schools - walking through the buildings, talking with the adults and students, and hosting family/community meetings during the day and evening to examine policies, practices, and procedures through a racial equity lens."³² The consultant conducted two to three schools per month from September 2016 through April 2017.³³

- Note the level and quality of the questions asked by the teacher and whether these foster the development of critical and higher-order thinking;
- Observe the amount of respect and consideration for the opinions of the students;
- Observe the emotional climate: if the teacher has constructed a climate of cordiality and confidence;
- Note if the placement/movement of the teacher favors all the learners, or certain students;
- Note the frequency and quality of the feedback given to the students; and
- Determine if the feedback given stimulates positive self-esteem and learning.

The equity walk includes observing the classroom as well as other areas of the school, such as hallways, cafeterias and recess areas, bathrooms, gyms, and libraries. The facilitator should observe all **public spaces, the classroom's physical set-up, physical and environmental features** of other areas (e.g., signage, representation), **classroom resources and materials, interpersonal interactions and relationships** across locations, **discipline and behavioral responses, academic grouping and tracking, and curriculum and instruction.**³⁶ In the classroom, facilitators should look for evidence of an equitable classroom, as characterized by:³⁷

- An inclusive climate and visual environment;
- Multicultural and culturally responsive pedagogy, curricula, and materials;
- A wide variety of instructional strategies to meet differing learning styles and backgrounds;
- Utilization of student funds of knowledge and outside resources to provide diverse tools, strategies, and role models;
- Availability of extracurricular activities to enrich the curriculum and provide multicultural experiences;
- Active outreach to and substantive involvement of parents/families from all groups in varied aspects of the educational program, both planning and instructional; and
- Recognition of multiple intelligences and student strengths through academic opportunities, honors, leadership roles, and creative options.

What to Look for on an Equity Walk

When conducting equity walks, facilitators should focus on identifying evidence of equitable practices according to the identified focus area, rather than looking for superficial measures (e.g., if the teacher posts objectives).³⁴ Accordingly, during the equity walk, the facilitator should use the evidence-gathering tool to:³⁵

- Detect important classroom issues that often times occur unnoticed, in a silent manner, or quickly;
- Discover who has the leading role in the classroom;
- Understand and question the teacher's classroom practice;
- Perceive patterns in relations according to gender, ethnicity, regions, etc.
- Assess the role of the teacher and whether he/she follows a traditional model versus a learner-centered, constructivist approach;
- Determine if the strategies are focused on what the student learns or on what is being taught (i.e., If the teacher achieves what they are supposed to cover in the curriculum);



SPOTLIGHT

During the 2017-2018 school year, Manchester Public Schools (MPS) partnered with the Race & Equity in Education Center (RE Center) to conduct an equity-informed school climate assessment of the district.³⁸ The multi-method evaluation included gathering data from students, staff, and families through exploratory focus groups, interviews, a review of documents and data, stakeholder surveys, affinity-based focus groups, and ethnographic site observations.³⁹

Evaluators conducted six observational visits at five school sites over a period of 16 days, where each site hosted five to 20 evaluators.⁴⁰ The site observations included the following components, where evaluators:⁴¹

- Observed the day-to-day interactions between administrators, educators, school staff, students, and family members;
 - Including noting interpersonal interactions in classrooms, hallways, libraries, bathrooms, gyms, lunchrooms, at recess, and at after-school activities;
- Noted curriculum, teaching styles, academic tracking, discipline, and language around consequences in the classroom;
- Observed activities throughout the buildings, in and out of classrooms;
 - Including noting of the physical spaces including hallway signage, library book content, and overall building environment; and
- Staffed a space during school hours, called the "drop-in room," that was open to any student, staff, family, or community member who wanted a private, or small group conversation with a RE Center evaluator.

Criteria for Selecting a Teacher Evaluation Instrument

Comprehensiveness	The degree to which an instrument captures all of the target instructional foci of a learning visit
Generality	How well an instrument captures the full range of contexts in which teachers perform their work
Utility	How useful scores and ratings from the instruments are for improving teacher practices
Practicality	The logistical issues associated with the instrument's usage in practice
Reliability	The degree to which the instrument measures data consistently across contexts and between users
Credibility	The degree to which observers and observed teachers view the instrument as valid

Source: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality⁴⁴

In particular, classroom observation visits should feature data collection instruments that are concise enough that observers and teachers can process the presented information, yet also focused enough to distill observers' attention to the essential components of equity.⁴⁵



Observation checklists are a common tool for conducting equity-focused site observations, and districts can use observation checklists, such as the [Equitable Classroom Practices Observation Checklist](#), as they conduct equity walks to document the occurrence of equitable practices in a classroom.⁴⁶

The table on the following page displays publicly available tools and resources that districts can use to facilitate equity walks.

Tools for Conducting Equity Walks

Districts and schools should either select a pre-existing observation data instrument or develop their own tool for gathering data that aligns with the specific focus of their equity walk.⁴² Consequently, any personnel involved in planning should carefully scrutinize any potential assessment instruments to determine the degree of applicability they have to the equity walk focus, parameters, and protocols. Likewise, planning personnel should also identify precisely what a given instrument does and does not measure in order to determine its potential strengths and weaknesses.⁴³ While the following figure presents characteristics of effective teacher evaluation instruments, districts can apply these criteria to a tool for conducting an equity walk.

Publicly Available Tools and Resources for Conducting Equity Walks

Tool Name	Organization	Overview	Link/QR Code
<u>"Equity Audits"</u>	Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium	This source offers checklists related to equity that observers can leverage during an equity walk: Criteria for an Equitable School; Criteria for an Equitable Classroom; and Teacher Behaviors that Encourage Student Persistence	
<u>"Equity Walk-Through Tool"</u>	Epoch Education	This is a draft rubric/checklist that observers could use during an equity walk. The tool focuses on five areas related to equity: relationships (respect and connectedness); relevance (choice and personal relevance); rigor (challenge and engagement); results (authenticity and effectiveness); and the classroom physical environment (acknowledging and connectedness).	
<u>"Criteria for an Equitable Classroom – Equity Audit"</u>	Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium, Inc.	This resource features three separate checklists related to equity that observers can leverage during an equity walk: Criteria for an Equitable School; Criteria for an Equitable Classroom; and Teacher Behaviors that Encourage Student Persistence	
<u>"Ready-Made California State-level Data Slides"</u>	The Education Trust - West	This source offers resources, including editable California data slides, for conducting a data equity walk.	
<u>"Observing for Equity"</u>	Teaching Tolerance, Sothern Poverty Law Center	This observation form asks users to record evidence of equitable instructional practices in the areas of teacher tone, student engagement, appeal to multiple learning styles, and the classroom environment.	
<u>"Equity and Inclusive Education Equity Walk: A Research-Informed Leadership Practice"</u>	Ontario Principals' Council	This video provides an overview of the equity walk process.	
<u>"Pyramid Model Equity Coaching Guide"</u>	The National Center for Pyramid Model Innovations	This guide offers a step-by-step reflection and observation tool for equity coaches to identify equitable practices using the pyramid model.	

Project Evaluation Form

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Endnotes

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