

# Equity Pause Planner

## PURPOSE

Intentionally create space within whole-child aligned improvement processes for reflecting on and interrupting the perpetuation of inequitable leadership behaviors and mindsets.

## DIRECTIONS:

Read and reflect on equity pauses – what they are, how they work, and why they are important. Then, create a plan for how you will incorporate equity pauses throughout your whole-child aligned improvement initiative.

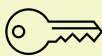
## Launch

An equity pause can be a useful tool for infusing equity consciousness into existing continuous improvement practices. An equity pause can be thought of as **a moment in a discussion or process when participants stop to reflect on their team dynamics, question how they are addressing equity in their work, and critically examine their assumptions and actions.**

In a 2020 study about engaging in continuous improvement to advance educational equity, interviewees shared the following benefits of taking equity pauses:

Benefits of Equity Pauses
Equity pauses can interrupt the team's thinking and "[help] us try to be less attached to our plans and make space for dialogue to occur when it needs to occur, even when we might not have anticipated it."
Equity pauses are a "consistent approach to slowing down . . . so that we can interrupt some of that hegemonic practice that treats our behaviors as just a given . . . and try to slow (us) down enough to interrogate that."
Equity pauses are "a useful tool for infusing equity consciousness into existing continuous improvement practices."
Equity pauses are a "valuable tool to prompt improvement team members to reflect on their assumptions and challenge norms that contribute to inequity."

Source: Valdez et al. (2020, p. 10)



**TIPS:** It is important to note that equity pauses are not used as a one-time pause. Equity pauses are used as an ongoing practice throughout any design process or continuous improvement effort. The goal is to continually revisit key equity-based considerations to counter leadership tendencies to engage top-down, authoritative approaches where the voices of those most proximal to issues are excluded.

1. After reading about the benefits of engaging in equity pauses, what excites you most about the idea of incorporating equity pauses into your continuous improvement efforts?

## Engage

Equity pauses can be designed to prompt thinking and reflection on any number of ways inequities show up in your work and processes. However, if you are looking for a place to start, you may consider prompting thinking and reflection on how white dominant culture norms show up in your work and processes.

The following chart summarizes and highlights a few potential beliefs, habits, or practices you may consider in your pauses. You may consider reflecting on these characteristics or pull from your own resources to help you design meaningful equity pauses.

- ☐ Read through the chart below (or reference your own resources) and then answer the reflection questions that follow.

Characteristic of White Dominant Culture	Example Equity Pause Questions
<p><b>Only One Right Way</b></p> <p>The belief that there is one right way to do things and that one right way is both attainable and desirable for everyone.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are we pushing the same idea without considering different paths?</li> <li>• What can we learn from our community about other ways of doing?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Paternalism</b></p> <p>The belief that those holding power are qualified and entitled to make decisions in the interest of others and determine the one right way for others.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Who is “at the table” right now? Does it include those closest to the problem?</li> <li>• What might this situation look like from others’ point of view?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Urgency</b></p> <p>The habit of applying a sense of urgency to our everyday lives in ways that perpetuate power imbalance, make it difficult to be inclusive, and disregard our need to breathe, pause and reflect.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are we disregarding others to rush and get something done?</li> <li>• Are we using short-term thinking in an effort to meet unrealistic goals?</li> </ul>

Source: Okun (2021)



## Reflect

1. How and when are any of these characteristics currently showing up in your work?

2. Why is it important that you individually (and/or collectively) disrupt some of these tendencies in your work?

## Plan

Now, use the chart below to start to think about when you could incorporate equity pauses into your continuous improvement work and **begin** to craft equity pause questions you could use throughout your work and processes.

Equity Pause Planner	
 Where would be the most important place(s) in your work to take an equity pause?	 What equity pause question(s) could you ask yourself in these moments?
<b>Example:</b> In our student support process, it would be most important to take equity pauses when referring a student for support, discussing a student's needs, and planning their intervention.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What might this look, sound, or feel like from the student's perspective?</li> <li>- What could we learn from other teachers, the student, or their family that might help us think of other ways of doing?</li> </ul>



**TIPS:** If you are looking for a low-lift way to get started using equity pauses, you might consider designing one equity pause question you can ask at any point in your work, as opposed to unique equity pauses for different parts of a process.

In addition, resist getting caught up on making these moments perfect. It is more important that you get into the continuous habit of asking and reflecting on equity-based questions in your work than it is to plan the perfect question for the perfect moment.

## References

EquityXDesign. (2019, January 30). *Racism and inequity are products of design. They can be redesigned*. Equity Design.  
<https://medium.com/equity-design/racism-and-inequity-are-products-of-design-they-can-be-redesigned-12188363cc6a>

Okun, T. (2021, May). *White supremacy culture – still here*. Google Docs.  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XR\\_7M\\_9qa64zZ00\\_JyFVTAjmjVU-uSz8/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XR_7M_9qa64zZ00_JyFVTAjmjVU-uSz8/view).

Valdez, A., Takahashi, S., Krausen, K., Bowman, A., & Gurrola, E. (2020). *Getting better at getting more equitable: Opportunities and barriers for using continuous improvement to advance educational equity*. WestEd.