

Getting Started

“Every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets.”

Dr. Paul Batalden, health care system innovator

What is the Opportunity Gap?

Just as there is an academic education gap in schools marked by disproportional achievement among student demographic groups, so too there is an opportunity gap that exists in student activities. In short, not all student demographic groups are equally represented in many student activity programs. A step toward equity starts with the acknowledgment that there are still structural issues with institutionalized racism, sexism, disparate educational opportunities and different treatments experienced by students of color or groups not in the majority. The opportunity gap is created by the unequal or inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities.

What is the goal of Equity work?

The goal of Equity is to create the conditions and commit resources so all students have the supports they need to participate. Analyzing student leadership programs through an Equity lens can lead to changes which result in increased student participation, especially from underrepresented student groups. AWSL believes in the following Equity goals:

- The students in ASB, leadership classes and clubs accurately represent and reflect the demographics of the school.
- The student leadership program promotes multiple opportunities and access points.
- The premise of the student leadership program is that *all* students can learn to lead, just like all students can learn math, English, social studies, etc.

What are some specific steps I can start tomorrow?

- Know the demographics of your school. A good place to start is the OSPI School Report Card. Consider, gender, race, ELL, Special Education, Highly Capable, free/reduced lunch, transient students, grade point average and other variables.
- Seek input from students and staff through a survey or an interview. Ask them to describe how they perceive student leadership at the school and if they feel there are barriers to involvement both personally and structurally based on the school system.
- Review the ASB constitution and identify how students are elected and selected for leadership positions and what are the requirements to participate.
- Enlist colleagues to identify under-represented students with leadership potential and ask them to intentionally plant the seeds of leadership with these students.
- Form diverse focus groups to improve access and opportunities by reviewing projects, assemblies, spirit days, the ASB budget and the school’s leadership structure.

Resources:

[“The Activity Gap”](#), article in *The Atlantic*, January 30, 2015, by Alia Wong

[“Improving Access to Student Leadership”](#), article *Washington Principal*, Fall 2016, by Randy Heath, Director AWSL Chinook Leadership Camp, *Executive Director, Student & Family Support, Kent SD*