

Equity and Excellence Plan

The Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy has spent the past two years in transition, moving from the [2014 Board Approved Diversity Plan](#) to the development of its' next rendition, the Equity and Excellence Plan, as directed by the [2018 Board Approved Equity and Excellence Policy](#). Additionally, this policy aligns with the IMSA Impact and Outcomes statement, "By 2022, IMSA is a recognized global leader and catalyst in equity and excellence in STEM teaching and learning, innovation and entrepreneurship."

In the spirit of inquiry and innovation and in an effort to embrace the inclusive nature of IMSA, the development of the [Equity and Excellence Plan](#) was approved as an official research study by the Institutional Review Board. The purpose of the study was:

to develop an equity and excellence plan that is driven by the IMSA Board Approved Equity and Excellence Policy, rooted in Theory of Change, informed by data, and facilitated through an inclusive, equity-minded frame.

Being that IMSA is shifting from an approach of diversity and inclusion to include a focus on equity and from the mindset of this work being the responsibility of a few to it now being institutionalized with collective responsibility; the [Theory of Change \(executive summary\)](#) was utilized to provide IMSA with a framework to guide that change and ultimately inform the development of the Equity and Excellence Plan.

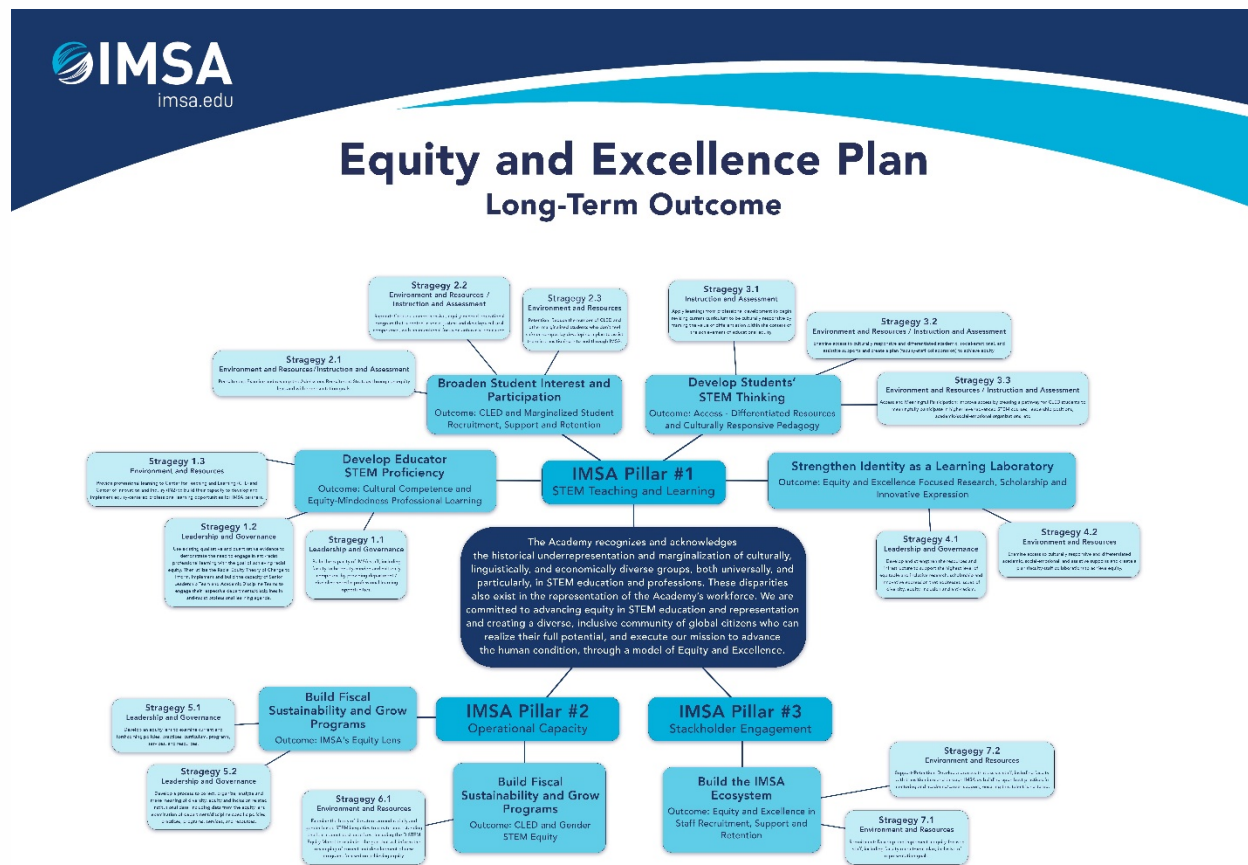
A theory of change is a predictive assumption about the relationship between desired changes and the actions that may produce those changes. The most distinctive characteristic of Theory of Change in contrast to other methods is that it focuses first on outcomes, rather than interventions.

In addition, IMSA partnered with the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center (MAP), utilizing the [Equity Context Process Analysis \(ECAP\)](#), multiple data collection tools and analysis processes, to facilitate systemic examination of educational equity. Through climate surveys, classroom observations, faculty interviews, school building walk-through, course enrollment data, student involvement and student discipline data, the following occurred:

- *provided an assessment of the extent to which aspects of educational equity are evident in the academy;*
- *identified areas that may be opportunities for growth related to advancing educational equity; and*
- *supported equity-oriented strategic planning, as well as ongoing monitoring and assessment activities related to promoting educational equity.*

*See the [ECAP School Data Profile](#), [ECAP School Review Report](#), [ECAP Stakeholder Survey Report](#) and [Student Diversity Climate Survey](#).

Thus, the development of the [Equity and Excellence Plan](#), is data-driven, student-centered, inclusive of an array of voices of the IMSA community, and developed through an equity-minded frame.



Rationale for Equity and Excellence

According to the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE), a fundamental commitment to inclusive excellence embedded throughout educational institutions is critical to their health and functioning. Inclusive excellence starts at the highest level of administrative authority, is expressed prominently in institutional missions and strategic plans, and is supported through meaningful allocations of fiscal, human, and physical resources. NADOHE further suggests that education leaders should embody and demonstrate the critical values of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and should enable entire campus communities to access and articulate the contributions of and the rewards gained from an inclusive learning and working environment. *Over the past two decades, there have been national trends toward (a) diversification of students and faculty in colleges and universities throughout higher education (b) assessment and improvement of the campus climate for diversity (c) improvements in the representation and inclusion of diversity in the curriculum (d) development of intergroup dialogues in curricular and co-curricular student engagement and (e) integration of broad*

campus-wide diversity plans integrated into institutional strategic planning. Being that IMSA is under the Illinois Board of Higher Education and that IMSA’s Equity and Excellence Policy is rooted in Inclusive Excellence, the need for an Equity and Excellence Plan is justified. In addition, adopting these best practices are in alignment with the outcomes laid out in IMSA’s Equity and Excellence policy and will assist in achieving the long-term outcome. ¹

This same diversity, equity and inclusion trend is evident on the global level. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) is the United Nations’ specialized agency for education that provides global and regional leadership in education. UNESCO states “education is a basic human right and the foundation on which to build peace and drive sustainable development”. In fact, Sustainable Development Goal 4 calls for countries to *‘ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’*. Being that IMSA has adopted the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, an Equity and Excellence Plan can assist in making a global impact and guide the achievement of IMSA’s Impact and Outcome Statement, “By 2022, IMSA is a recognized global leader and catalyst in equity and excellence in STEM teaching and learning, innovation and entrepreneurship.” Furthermore, it can help IMSA achieve the long-term goal of creating a diverse, inclusive community of global citizens who can realize their full potential, and execute our mission to advance the human condition. ²

IMSA also utilizes the Danielson’s Framework to guide teaching and learning. This framework has diversity and equity at the heart of it, *“it is the primary common theme and describes the ultimate purpose of our work with students... in the classrooms of excellent teachers, the purpose of instruction is not the transmission of basic knowledge or student compliance but deep understanding, important learning, and active intellectual engagement so that each student can succeed in school and beyond.”* If equity is the goal, *“it is important for students, all students to acquire deep and flexible understanding of complex content, to be able to formulate and test hypotheses, to analyze information, and to be able to relate one part of their learning to another.”* Students need to experience this type of learning to be successful in their education, their careers, and their lives. An Equity and Excellence plan can enhance IMSA’s application of the Danielson Framework in an intentional and equity-minded manner, and assist IMSA in achieving the long-term outcome of advancing equity in STEM education. ³

According to the Midwest and Plains Equity Assistance Center, *“educational equity is when educational policies, practices, interactions, and resources, are representative of, constructed by, and responsive to all people such that each individual has access to, can participate, and make progress in high-quality learning experiences that empower them towards self-determination and reduces disparities in outcomes regardless of individual characteristics and cultural identities.”* However, the assurance of great teaching for every student has proven difficult to achieve in both policy and practice. According to the Danielson Framework, teachers strive for excellence, but *“a commitment to excellence is not complete without a commitment to equity.”* Each student deserves access to world-class teaching and learning environments that promote joyful inquiry, intellectual rigor, and reflection. Thus, an Equity and Excellence Plan will not only assist IMSA in addressing educational inequities, but can also be shared with the educational sector to advance excellence. ⁴

These educational inequities also exist in STEM education and careers. The stark reality is that a disproportionate number of people of color, particularly Black and Latinx persons, are even further away from becoming STEM-literate and having the ability to thrive in a hyper-competitive, global marketplace. The nation has persistent inequities in access, participation, and success in STEM subjects that exist along racial lines, which threaten the nation's ability to close education and poverty gaps, meet the demands of a technology-driven economy, ensure national security, and maintain preeminence in scientific research and technological innovation. If the U.S. wants to maintain its' status as a global leader in STEM, be competitive in the STEM space, and address global challenges, diversifying the STEM education to career pathway must be a take precedence. STEM and diversity are integral to the sustainability of our schools, the innovation of our businesses, the prosperity of communities and the global competitiveness of our economies. IMSA has acknowledged racially based STEM equity gaps in its Equity and Excellence Policy long-term outcome. Thus, an Equity and Excellence Plan will assist IMSA in developing a more diverse, STEM-literate workforce who are truly solving the world's problems through an equity-minded frame, ultimately achieving the tasks put forth in the policy.⁵

A focus on diversity, equity and inclusion in relation to STEM is trending on both a national and international scale, in education, business, and independent sectors. As IMSA continues to situate itself globally, as students are preparing to solve the global problems of the world, as our alumni serve as leaders in an array of entities throughout the world, it is imperative that IMSA is strategic to ensure equity and excellence.

Sources:

¹ [*National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education Standards of Professional Practice for Chief Diversity Officers*](#)

² [*UNESCO: Education Transforms Lives*](#)

³ [*The Danielson Groups: The Framework's Common Themes*](#)

⁴ [*Great Lakes Equity Center – Every Child, Every Day Institute: Culturally Responsive and Sustaining Practices in the Classroom*](#)

⁵ [*D-STEM Equity Model: Diversifying the STEM Education to Career Pathway*](#)