# Texas Equitable Access Roadmap: A Toolkit to Support Texas Districts to Develop Local Equitable Access Plans

## Introduction

In 2014, the U.S. Department of Education launched the Excellent Educators for All initiative to support states and districts in ensuring that students of color and low-income students have equitable access to excellent educators. All 50 states submitted equitable access plans, documenting the equity gaps that students in their state faced, the results of a root cause analysis conducted to better understand the causes of these equity gaps, and plans to implement strategies to close equity gaps and monitor progress of implementation. In December 2015, Congress passed the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA),[[1]](#footnote-1) which requires states and districts to determine whether low-income students and students of color in Title I schools are served at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers, and take steps to address any identified disproportionalities (i.e., gaps in equity).

To support Texas districts in better understanding and addressing the challenges they face in providing equitable access to excellent teachers for the students who need it most, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) has developed the Texas Equitable Access Roadmap: A Toolkit to Support Texas Districts to Develop Local Equitable Access Plans. The Roadmap will take district teams through a series of processes to understand, interpret, and implement an action plan around equitable access.

# Step 3. Conducting a Root Cause Analysis

This is the third step in the Roadmap—an overview of the five steps can be found [here](https://texasequitytoolkit.org/#tools), with links to the resources for each step of the process.

## Purpose

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| Problems of Practice Related to Talent ManagementAs districts explore the root causes of their equity problems of practice, it may be helpful to carefully examine current talent management strategies, policies, and practices and consider how they may be supporting or hindering equitable access. The following resources and tools can help districts as they consider how their current approaches support attracting, supporting, and retaining excellent educators in their highest need campuses.[Talent Development Framework](http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/14-2591_GTL_Talent_Dev_Framework-ed_110714.pdf)[Creating Coherence & Alignment Tool](http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/Coherence_Alignment_Tool.pdf)[Talent Management Strategies: District Self-Assessment Checklist](https://easn.grads360.org/#communities/pdc/documents/12611) |

This resource is a discussion protocol guiding stakeholders and facilitators through a process to uncover the root causes that potentially contribute to a district’s equity gaps. The root cause analysis (RCA) process centers on data review to identify possible root causes of the equity gaps calculated in Step 2. Reviewing and Analyzing Data. The protocol guides teams through a process of identifying the perceived reasons they think they are facing each equitable access challenge and continuing to dive deeper until they believe they have reached the root causes that have resulted in their equitable access gaps. This is a data-driven activity that involves reviewing equity gaps and data, and interpreting the data to unearth the root causes of your district’s equity gaps. For example, are equity gaps the result of great teachers leaving or underperforming teachers failing to improve? If great teachers are leaving, why? If ineffective teachers aren’t getting better, why?

This simple and straightforward activity often unearths useful new insights for informing policy and helps participants learn from one another’s perspectives. By the end of the process, facilitators will gather the groups’ identified root causes and general comments to share with the district team, developing the strategies for the district equitable access plan.[[2]](#footnote-2)

## Keep in Mind

This protocol is intended to be used by facilitators and stakeholders at in-person meetings, and may require a series of meetings with additional data gathering between engagements. TEA strongly encourages that:

* District staff spend time going through this process, digging deep and using evidence and data to address why there are equity gaps in the district.
* Districts select staff who are thinking deeply about teacher and talent management issues across the career continuum (e.g., teachers, principals, parents, principal supervisors, district leaders, students). Step 1. Engaging and Communicating with Stakeholdersprovides additional guidance on selecting a broad representation of stakeholders to engage in this process and other steps of equity plan development.

If there are more than 15 participants in the RCA, consider breaking into smaller groups. Ideally, you will have 12–15 stakeholders per group. Prior to engaging in the RCA, districts should review the guidance in Step 1. Engaging and Communicating with Stakeholders to think about how the RCA fits into their larger stakeholder engagement plans. They also must complete Step 2. Reviewing and Analyzing Data to calculate their equity gaps and prepare an overview of the findings of their data analysis to share with stakeholders.

The RCA protocol is organized into three parts:

* Part 1. Welcome and Introductions
* Part 2. Data Dive and Understanding Your Problems of Practice Activity
* Part 3. Feedback Collection and Closing

The content of this resource relies on a set of related materials:

* Data presentation materials or handouts (developed through Step 2. Reviewing and Analyzing Data)
* Feedback forms (examples are provided in this resource)
* Chart paper and pens/markers

# Root Cause Analysis Protocol for Facilitators

## Part 1. Welcome and Introductions

### Why are we here and what is a root cause analysis?

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| Discussion Norms * Assume all participants have good intentions.
* Listen and share the floor.
* Ask questions.
* Respect others’ perspectives.
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* Overview: District facilitator shares an overview of the purpose of the equitable access plan, the agenda for the day, and goals for stakeholder involvement in the process. Facilitator shares key messages from the district team in charge of developing the plan and previews the three steps for RCA to be completed during the day.
* Root Cause Definition: Root causes are the perceived underlying key reasons or causes of a given problem of practice—in this context, the root causes will be the perceived causes or reasons that a district faces a particular gap in student equitable access.
* Group Discussion Norms:District facilitator shares discussion norms (see sidebar)—consider posting these on a chart on the wall.

### Who is in the room?

* Group introductions, including role and interest in equitable access

## Part 2. Conducting a Root Cause Analysis Activity

### Conduct a “Data Dive” With Group Review of the Equity Gaps and Data Metrics

The facilitator presents the data and equity gaps for the district from the front of the room (developed through Step 2. Reviewing and Analyzing Data in the Roadmap Toolkit) and provides handouts for participants. Depending on the number of participants, participants stay in one group or form several small groups. The facilitator will guide the group(s) through the following review process:

* Review Data Presentation Materials(e.g., slide deck, handouts):The facilitator walks the participants through the results of the data analyses and shares definitions, metrics, and calculations of the equity gaps, and any other necessary details.
* Question:What questions does the group have about the results of the data analysis?
* Dig:Each participant independently takes a closer look at the equity gaps and data findings, and reviews the focus questions listed on the following page.

Process note:Record the group’s discussion and answers to the focus questions in the Guiding Questions Template below. Project the planning template on-screen for the group as you record responses, or transcribe these questions on chart paper in front of the room.

* Respond:As a group, answer the focus questions while the facilitator charts the responses. The facilitators will aide in tracking patterns in the answers to support prioritization in the next step.
* Prioritize: What are the primary concerns for the district related to its equity gaps? Ask participants to reflect first and then discuss as a group.

Guiding Questions Template

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| Use these questions to help your district discuss the data and identified equity gaps with concrete language. |
| What are the equity gaps in your district?  |
| Which groups of students are most affected by equity gaps? |
| Are low-income students taught by inexperienced or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than their higher income peers?  |
| Are students of color taught by inexperienced or out-of-field teachers at higher rates than their White peers? |
| What other student subgroups are more likely to have access to inexperienced or out-of-field teachers? |
| Do low-income students experience effective teaching at lower rates than their higher income peers?  |
| What other student subgroups are less likely to have access to effective teaching? |

### Identify and Discuss the Root Causes of the Equity Challenges That Our District Faces

After completing the data dive exercise, the group will now focus the conversation on uncovering the root causes of our district’s equity gaps. Start by asking participants to identify two to three problem-of-practice statementsthat are linked to equity gaps. Frame your problem-of-practice statements around the challenge of attracting, supporting, or retaining effective, experienced, and in-field teachers in the highest need campuses. Using the categories of “attracting,” “supporting,” and “retaining” effective, experienced, and in-field teachers will allow you to frame your district’s challenges and problems of practice through a few different lenses. This should result in uncovering a variety of root causes that the district can then prioritize when selecting strategies to address the district equity gaps. See the following example problem statements.

*Process note:* These can be drafted in advance by the district team based on the data to save time.

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| Example Equity Gaps | Example Problem Statements |
| *37% of the teachers in our highest poverty* campuses *are inexperienced, compared to 26% in our lowest poverty* campuses*, which is an 11% equity gap.* | *Our highest poverty* campuses *are served by a larger percentage of inexperienced teachers than* campuses *serving students with fewer low-income students.* |
| *40% of the teachers in our highest poverty* campuses *have received a Developing performance rating on the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS), compared to 20% of teachers in the lowest poverty* campuses *who received the same rating. This is a 20% equity gap.* | *Our district has trouble attracting effective teachers in our high-poverty* campuses *and provides inadequate supports to improve teacher performance in these* campuses*.* |

Problem Statement Planning Template

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| Equity Gaps | Problem Statements |
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| Encourage participants to focus on systems challenges to frame their root causes, not symptoms. For example, the tendency of early career teachers to move from inner-city to suburban campuses after a few years is a symptom, while a lack of strong preparation and leadership in inner-city campuses is a systems challenge. Also, the high percentages of teachers of students with disabilities who leave teaching for work in the private sector is a symptom, while unmanageable workloads for these teachers is a systems challenge. |

Next, the group brainstorms explanations for each problem statement, considering factors in three categories—challenges in ATTRACTING excellent teachers, SUPPORTING excellent teachers, and RETAINING excellent teachers. For each problem statement, facilitators ask, “Why is this the case?” and then describe the data and evidence they have available to support their thinking. Keep in mind, this is a data-driven activity. After having identified an initial set of root causes of the problem, participants continue to probe “Why is that the case?” and “How do I know?” to get to a deeper set of the root causes of their problems of practice. The group continues through this cycle until all factors have been considered. This is a lengthy process and may require the group(s) to ask “Why?” and “How do I know?” as many as 10 or more times. Data and evidence must be included when responding to the “How do I know?” parts of the activity. Because using data/evidence is a critical component of the RCA, participants are not only brainstorming ideas, they are getting to a deeper and more precise understanding that can uncover the root causes of the problem statements.

By the end of this section of the RCA process, the group will have a long list of possible root causes of the problem statementas they relate to attracting, supporting, and retaining excellent teachers**.** Using the Conducting a Root Cause Analysis planning template in this tool, the group(s) will list their problem statements and associated root causes. An example of a problem statement and possible root causes follows. A blank template for your district to record its problem statements and root causes is included at the end of this tool in the Putting It All Together section. You also might consider documenting this process on chart paper as group members work through their thinking.

Example of Conducting a Root Cause Analysis Process

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| Problem Statement:  |
| Our highest poverty campuses are served by a larger percentage of inexperienced teachers than campuses serving fewer low-income students. |
| How might you frame this problem statement in terms of ATTRACTING excellent teachers? | How might you frame this problem statement in terms of SUPPORTING excellent teachers? | How might you frame this problem statement in terms of RETAINING excellent teachers? |
| When we lose experienced teachers in our highest poverty campuses, we have trouble attracting experienced replacements, so we end up with many inexperienced teachers on the campuses. | Having many inexperienced teachers in our highest poverty campuses means our teachers require extra support to develop their instructional practices. We are not currently providing this additional support. | The majority of teachers leave our highest poverty campuses after 2 to 3 years. Teacher retention is a challenge—this means we are frequently working with new teachers to replace the ones that have left. |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
| Experienced teachers prefer to teach in population centers and areas around us. | Although inexperienced teachers do go through the T-TESS process, campus leadership doesn’t spend much time coaching inexperienced teachers. | Teacher attrition may be due to teacher burnout. |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
| Teacher exit surveys, teacher exit interviews, human resources/marketing studies | Surveys and conversations with new teachers on the quality of support; number of campus staff dedicated to coaching and mentoring inexperienced teachers, frequency of principal observations and coaching conferences, frequency with which inexperienced teachers get to observe effective teaching | Teacher exit survey and interview data  |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
| Our district offers a relatively low teacher salary compared to other districts in our area. Experienced teachers prefer other campuses because of higher salaries offered by those campuses.  | The amount of time the principals at our highest poverty campuses observe and coach inexperienced teachers is limited because the principals are “spread too thin” and feel uncomfortable providing instructional coaching. | Our new teachers are overwhelmed—they aren’t receiving enough induction support up front, and they don’t get the individualized attention from principals that they would need to feel more supported. They struggle with classroom management and designing engaging lessons and often burn out after a year or two. |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
| Teacher exit surveys, teacher exit interviews | Principal appraisal data, conversations with supervisors of principals, review of principals’ schedules | Teacher exit surveys, conversations with teachers, discipline referral data |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
| Salaries are higher in neighboring districts because they have a larger tax base and more flexibility to adjust their salary structure to provide incentives or better salary scales. | The principals have too many administrative tasks and not enough time to provide instructional coaching. The principals have not received sufficient professional development to improve their coaching skills.  | Teaching conditions and campus climate are overall a challenge in some of our highest poverty campuses. We have campus climate surveys that tell us this, but we aren’t doing any type of systematic analysis of these data to understand the causes of our campus climate or teaching conditions issues, or improve in these areas. |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
| Salary scale information from neighboring districts, demographic data on income and property taxes | Principal surveys, review of principals’ schedules, focus group with principals | Climate data—surveys of instructional staff, conversations with our data office |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
| Our district also lacks financial resources to recruit experienced teachers to our highest poverty campuses. | Principals report receiving little support or training from the principal supervisor to improve coaching. The principal supervisor has worked through the T-PESS process with the principals but hasn’t spent much time working on time management or observing the principals in coaching situations and providing guidance on how to be effective with feedback and coaching.  | Our district doesn’t have the resources to conduct a thorough analysis. We do not have the resources to more purposefully analyze the climate data that are collected and report on them in a way that would be useful for action planning. |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
| District financial records, human resources data | Principal appraisal data, conversations with principal supervisor, principal appraiser and supervisor schedule | Conversations with research and evaluation staff |
| Root Cause | Root Cause | Root Cause |
| Because financial incentives are minimal, recruitment efforts tend only to work for new teachers who are looking for jobs and not experienced teachers. As a result, more experienced teachers tend to be attracted to neighboring districts with more attractive salary and incentives packages. | The principal supervisor lacks the skills to effectively coach principals on improving their instructional coaching for inexperienced teachers.  | Our district does not have systems or practices in place to systematically collect and interpret campus climate data so that we can better understand our teaching conditions challenges and aim to actively improve teaching conditions so that we might reduce teacher burnout and improve retention. |

Blank Root Cause Analysis Planning Template

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| Problem Statement:  |
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| How might you frame this problem statement in terms of ATTRACTING excellent teachers? | How might you frame this problem statement in terms of SUPPORTING excellent teachers? | How might you frame this challenge statement in terms of a challenge in RETAINING excellent teachers? |
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| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
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| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
|  |  |  |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
|  |  |  |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
|  |  |  |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
|  |  |  |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
|  |  |  |
| Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? | Why do you think this is the case? |
|  |  |  |
| How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) | How do you know? (data/evidence) |
|  |  |  |
| Root Cause | Root Cause | Root Cause |
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| Gathering Feedback on the RCA ProcessYour district may develop its own feedback form to use at the end of the RCA, or you could choose to use or adapt an existing feedback form like this one, which was developed by the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders: <http://www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/GTL_Resource_05_IncorpFeedback-ed-fmt.doc> |

## Part 3. Feedback Collection and Closing

### Feedback Form Completion

Review the root causes determined by the group. To ensure all participants have the opportunity to share their perspective, they should complete a feedback form. The facilitator will walk through the feedback form to resolve participant questions. Information on developing a feedback form is provided in the sidebar.

### Closing

The facilitator shares the timeline for use of feedback and next steps for plan development. Stakeholders will be invited to join future sessions if possible.

# Next Steps for District Equity Planning Group

Now that your team has planned to engage stakeholders (Step 1), engaged in data review and analysis (Step 2), and conducted the RCA process (Step 3), you’re ready to move forward to Step 4. Selecting Strategies based on the results of Step 3. First, take a moment to record your key findings from
Step 3. Conducting a Root Cause Analysis into the Putting It All Together section below.

# Putting It All Together: Incorporating Your ***Conducting a Root Cause Analysis*** Efforts Into Your Roadmap Reporting Template

After completing the processes suggested in Step 3, record in the following table the results of your RCA process. You will be able to transfer your findings directly into the centralized [Roadmap Reporting Template](https://texasequitytoolkit.org/Resource_files/roadmap.docx)**.**

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| Problem Statement:  |
| Root Causes as They Relate to ATTRACTING Excellent Teachers  | Root Causes as They Relate to SUPPORTING Excellent Teachers | Root Causes as They Relate to RETAINING Excellent Teachers |
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1. For more information on the Every Student Succeeds Act, visit <http://www.ed.gov/essa?src=rn>. Information on equity as it relates to states is included in section (1111(g)(1)(B)). Information on equity as it relates to districts is included in section (1112(b)(2)). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. TEA notes that the district equity plan should be developed at the “district level,” even if some root causes and strategies are ultimately targeted at specific campuses. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)