

Employment equity

Employment equity is an organizational, systematic process for changing those workplace practices, which have acted as barriers to the employment and promotion prospects of historically marginalized groups in society. This process of change involves identification and removal of systemic barriers in the employment practices of an organization, as well as implementation of active measures such as goals and timetables to alleviate the results of historical discrimination.

Employment equity is not simply about hiring and recruiting on the basis of a numerical quota system as was the American model of *Affirmative Action*. This model of employment equity is based on a hiring priority for those candidates of Aboriginal ancestry who meet the necessary qualifications for posted positions. It also means examining practices for promotion and retaining employees and providing equitable access to opportunities within the organization.

Educational institutions, which are seen to have the responsibility to provide leadership and act as a role model in moving toward a fairer, more just and equitable society, have a particular obligation to show leadership in employment equity. As a result of prevailing societal attitudes about the role of educational institutions, school boards are facing enormous pressures to implement employment equity programs.

Achieving employment equity requires more than a technical change in policies, practices and procedures; it involves organizational change. A genuine employment equity program is one that involves a qualitative change in how that workplace functions, what its governing values are, what its culture is, and how it deals with diversity and difference. It must be actively welcoming, both when hiring, and in its daily practices.

The following action plan has been developed to assist local school boards, teachers' associations, support staff unions and the local Aboriginal community(ies) develop a process to implement employment equity for persons of Aboriginal ancestry in the public school system of British Columbia. It is meant to be a guide only, in developing a program that is tailored by its stakeholders to work within the unique circumstances of individual school districts.

Some useful definitions:

- *Antiracist Organizational Change*: An antiracist organization is one that is multicultural, promotes diversity within itself and society, challenges racism and includes differences. Antiracist organizational change is the process of moving organizations to this stage.
- *Discrimination*: The unequal treatment of non-dominant groups or individuals, either by a person, or a group, or an institution with dominant identity. Through the denial of certain rights, discrimination results in inequality, subordination and/or deprivation of political, social, economic and cultural rights.
- *Dominant culture*: The most powerful cultural grouping. In most parts of Canada, the dominant culture is white, English speaking, middle-to-upper income Christians.
- *Institutional racism*: The conscious or unconscious exercise of notions of racial superiority by social institutions through their policies, practices, and procedures as well as through their

organizational culture and values. Institutional racism results in the unequal treatment of, limiting of the opportunities of, or discrimination against non-dominant individuals or social group.

- *Systemic discrimination*: Discrimination resulting from systemic policies, practices, and procedures that have an exclusionary impact on different groups of people with shared identities, such as race, age and/or gender. Systemic discrimination inhibits equality and may exist even when there is no intent to discriminate.

Employment equity action plan

1. Establish a cross district committee whose mandate is to examine/discuss employment equity and related issues, develop a district action plan, implement, and amend the action plan as needed, and report and make recommendations to their constituents. The committee should include representatives of:
 - a. The Aboriginal community(ies) in the district
 - b. The school board
 - c. The local teachers' association
 - d. The local PAC
2. The plan should include a statement of philosophical and organizational commitment, a clear assignment of responsibility and accountability, the specification of goals and timelines, a process for evaluating both short-term and long-term progress and a process to amend the plan as needed.
3. Collect status data at the outset of the plan, in real numbers and as a percentage where applicable:
 - a. # of students of Aboriginal ancestry enrolled in district
 - b. # of Aboriginal persons in community
 - c. # of Aboriginal persons in community workforce
 - d. # of Aboriginal teachers employed in district
 - i. # of Aboriginal teachers in targeted funds programs
 - ii. # of Aboriginal teachers in regularly funded programs
 - e. District funding
 - core:
 - electives:
4. Develop a plan to hire, over a period of time, specified in the plan's goals, such numbers of qualified teachers and support staff of Aboriginal ancestry that at the end of the ten year period, the percentage of teachers and support staff of Aboriginal ancestry employed by the school board will be at least equal to the percentage of Aboriginal students enrolled in the school district.
5. Develop a plan whereby the school board will fill annually, over a ten-year period, a percentage of its teaching vacancies with qualified teachers of Aboriginal ancestry new to the district.

The school board should first ensure current employees have exercised all their claiming

rights of appointment/posting and filling/ transfer/recall before filling remaining vacancies with any new appointees.

Those persons responsible for delivering on the district goals should be able to set their own reasonable goals, taking into account the district needs and environment, and the terms of the local collective agreement.

6. Collect qualitative information/anecdotal data on Aboriginal peoples' school district workplace experience.
7. Conduct an analysis of the employment practices involved in organizational functions such as recruitment, formal or informal qualification requirements, hiring, promotion, salary structure, benefits, and training to determine whether or not there are practices that serve as implicit or explicit barriers.
8. Develop a system for tracking employment equity initiatives and evaluating their degree of success. The plan should include review, at the end of each year after the initiation of the program, of employment systems and recruitment and hiring practices in #7 above to determine whether any practices act as barriers to the recruitment, hiring and/or retention of teachers of Aboriginal ancestry.
9. Identify and implement measures that replace or reform employment practices that are found to have an unfair, negative impact or pose a barrier to Aboriginal persons. Introduce special measures designed to eradicate any long-term effects of past discrimination.
10. Conduct comprehensive, ongoing training/in-service/education on employment equity and related issues for district personnel including trustees and all employees in order to build commitment and develop the skills needed for implementing the plan.
11. Communicate with the outside community on what equity is/is not to dispel misunderstandings. Make the education/training available to the community.
12. Link employment equity activities to other organizational change so it is seen as an integral part of the organization's activities, not as an isolated program.
13. Link appraisals and promotions of administrators and senior administrators to the success of employment equity initiatives.
14. Plan to use apprenticeships, special assignments, training programs, mentoring and other forms of support to broaden the pool of qualified candidates and to maximize Aboriginal employee retention.
15. Utilize Aboriginal employment programs and networks to facilitate recruitment.
16. Evaluate success on an ongoing basis. Diarize and thoroughly track all initiatives and activities undertaken to advance employment equity. Be sure to record what didn't work,

what did work. Since employment equity work is in its infancy, this type of documentation will provide the information needed to assist ongoing improvements to the action plan, as well as providing assistance to other groups and school districts in developing effective programs.

Further reading/resources

Copies of these materials will be provided on a request basis from the BCTF

Canadian School Boards Association: *Employment Equity for Racially Visible and Aboriginal People-Laying the Groundwork for Change*, CSBA Race Relations Project-Phase II, March 1995

Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission: *Education Equity-A Report on Indian/Native Education in Saskatchewan*, September 1985

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada: *Aboriginal Workforce Participation Initiative Employer Toolkit*, Ottawa, 1998.

Education Partners Committee: *Aboriginal Educators Employment Equity Toolkit Draft*, May 2001.