Supporting Rightful Presence
in Policy Development and Implementation



MAEC Center for Education Equity

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USER GUIDE

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Key Terms

Co-generation: A process in which students, families, community members, educators, and leaders work together to develop ideas, policies, practices, or solutions from the beginning.

Co-governance: A formal arrangement in which people affected by decisions share authority for setting priorities, deliberating, making decisions, and evaluating results.

Historically and contemporarily on the margins: Individuals and groups who have experienced, or continue to experience, limited access, exclusion, underrepresentation, or reduced influence within educational systems.

Inherent Value: Recognition that every person has dignity, knowledge, strengths, identities, experiences, and ways of knowing that should be respected and meaningfully reflected in educational policy and practice.

Meaningful participation: Participation in which people receive accessible information, have genuine opportunities to contribute, and can influence decisions and outcomes.

Policy as practice: The understanding that policy includes not only written rules but also how those rules are interpreted, implemented, negotiated, and experienced in everyday settings.

Policy content: The written language, requirements, definitions, expectations, protections, roles, and responsibilities established by a policy.

Policy process: The structures and actions through which a policy is developed, interpreted, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and improved.

Psychological safety: Conditions in which people can express questions, concerns, disagreement, or experiences without fear of dismissal, embarrassment, punishment, or retaliation.

Rightful Presence: An approach that extends beyond physical inclusion by recognizing inherent value, cultivating true belonging, and ensuring that people historically and contemporarily on the margins meaningfully share power in shaping educational policies, practices, and experiences.

Shared Power: The meaningful distribution of influence and decision-making authority among those who lead, implement, and experience educational policies.

True Belonging: The experience of being recognized, respected, connected, affirmed, and able to participate as a valued community member without being required to diminish or separate from one's identities, culture, language, strengths, or ways of knowing.

Introduction

The Supporting Rightful Presence in Policy Development and Implementation Resource supports district- and building-level educators, students, families, and community members in critically examining both the content of educational policies and the processes through which policies are developed, implemented, monitored, evaluated, and continuously improved.

Grounded in the principles of rightful presence, this resource provides a practical framework for shaping policies and institutional practices that foster meaningful participation, shared responsibility, and educational environments where all students and families genuinely belong and thrive.

The resource supports policy development and implementation processes that are:

- **Transparent and Clear:** Policies, decisions, roles, and processes are visible, accessible, and understandable to those they affect.
- **Regularly Monitored and Improved:** Policies and their implementation are reviewed on an ongoing basis to assess effectiveness, strengthen accountability, and identify opportunities for improvement.
- **Co-Generated with Community Members:** Students, families, educators, and community members actively contribute to shaping, implementing, and improving policies that affect their schools and communities.

Together, these practices help ensure that rightful presence is not only reflected in what policies say, but also in how policies are created, enacted, examined, and strengthened over time.



Access Resource Overview Video here

How to Use This Guide

This guide supports collaborative examination of both written policy and policy as it is interpreted, implemented, and experienced in practice. It is to be used with the ***Supporting Rightful Presence in Policy Development and Implementation Resource*** and provides detailed guidance for how to use the resource.

The Supporting Rightful Presence in Policy Development and Implementation resource is organized around three policy types:

1. Allocation of Resources and Opportunities
2. Management of Student Conduct
3. Leadership and Decision-Making

Each policy type section includes:

- A high-level description reflecting the principles of Rightful Presence.
- Policy content and policy process indicators aligned with True Belonging, Shared Power, and Inherent Value.
- A four-point rating scale.
- Space to document evidence, questions, strengths, concerns, and potential barriers.
- Guidance for identifying priorities and planning next steps.

Reflection questions that center the experiences and perspectives of students, families, and community members appear in this guide (pages 5 and 9) and can be used throughout the review.

Forming the Policy Review Team

The guide is intended to be used collaboratively by people who understand the policy, are responsible for its implementation, or are directly affected by it. The review team should include multiple roles and perspectives, such as:

- Students
- Families and caregivers
- Educators
- School and district leaders
- Specialized instructional and student-support personnel
- Community partners
- School board or governance representatives
- Individuals and groups most affected by the policy, particularly those historically and contemporarily on the margins

Teams should examine whether participation is representative and meaningful. Inviting people to participate is not the same as sharing decision-making authority. The team should clarify how students, families, and community members will influence the review, the conclusions reached, and the actions taken.

Before beginning, discuss:

- Who is affected by this policy?
- Who participated in developing or revising it?
- Whose knowledge and lived experiences are represented?
- Whose perspectives may be missing?
- Who has authority to recommend, approve, and implement changes?
- How will students, families, and community members share in decision-making?

Policy Selection

As a team, select the policy or procedural document to be reviewed. Ensure that it aligns with one or more of the three policy types included in this guide.

Allocation of Resources and Opportunities: Policies that determine how, where, when, and to whom educational resources, supports, services, and opportunities are distributed.

Management of Student Conduct: Policies that establish expectations for student behavior and guide how schools prevent, respond to, and address student conduct in fair, safe, supportive, and restorative ways.

Leadership and Decision-Making: Policies that define decision-making authority by establishing roles, responsibilities, accountability, and how individuals and groups participate in governance and organizational decisions.

Some policies may address more than one policy type. When this occurs, teams may use indicators from multiple sections to conduct a more complete review.



Individual Review

Team members begin by reviewing the policy independently. Reviewers may divide the policy into sections and examine each section separately, using the policy type description and indicators to guide their analysis. Reviewers should consider both the policy language and how the policy is likely to be interpreted, enacted, and experienced. Each reviewer should document:

- Evidence from the written policy
- Evidence from implementation or practice
- Strengths
- Questions or areas requiring clarification
- Potential barriers or unintended effects
- Perspectives represented or missing
- Possible improvements

Reviewers then rate each indicator using the four-point scale. A rating should be supported by evidence rather than intention alone. When a policy's stated purpose differs from how the policy is implemented or experienced, reviewers should document the difference.



Sources of Evidence

A policy review should draw from multiple sources of evidence. Written policy language alone may not fully explain how the policy is implemented or experienced.

- The written policy and related procedures
- Implementation guidance, handbooks, forms, or communications
- Student, family, educator, and community feedback
- Surveys, listening sessions, interviews, or focus groups
- Observation of policy-related practices
- Participation and access data
- Resource allocation data
- Discipline, attendance, grievance, or complaint data
- School climate and belonging data
- Implementation records
- Information disaggregated across relevant student groups
- Examples of decisions made under the policy

Teams should identify what evidence is available, what evidence is missing, and whose experiences are not adequately reflected in the available information.



Centering Student Voice

Students possess essential knowledge about how policies are communicated, implemented, and experienced. Their involvement should extend beyond providing feedback after decisions have already been made. Whenever possible, students should participate in identifying concerns, interpreting evidence, developing recommendations, and evaluating whether changes improve their experiences.

Use the following questions throughout the review:

- How have students experienced this policy?
- Which students are most directly affected?
- How were students involved in developing or reviewing the policy?
- Were students provided with accessible information and meaningful opportunities to participate?
- How did student perspectives influence the policy or its implementation?
- Do students share authority in determining priorities or recommending changes?
- Are some student groups more represented or heard than others?
- What structures protect students' psychological safety when they provide feedback?
- How will the team communicate its decisions and responses to students?
- How will students help evaluate whether policy changes have improved practice?

Depending on students' ages, communication preferences, and access needs, teams may gather student perspectives through advisory groups, listening sessions, surveys, interviews, classroom discussions, student governance structures, or other accessible and developmentally appropriate approaches.

Individual Ratings

Ratings are intended to support reflection, discussion, and continuous improvement. They should not be used as a compliance score or as a substitute for examining evidence and stakeholder experiences.

When assigning a rating:

- Cite evidence from the written policy, implementation process, or stakeholder experience.
- Note differences between policy intent and policy enactment.
- Avoid averaging ratings until the team has discussed the evidence supporting each rating.

Use the four-point scale: **1** Not Yet Evident, **2** Emerging, **3** Developing, **4** Strong.

See page 12 for the recommended response to each rating.



Team Discussion and Consensus Building

Following the individual review, the team reconvenes to compare evidence, discuss ratings, and identify strengths, gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

The discussion should consider:

- What the policy states
- How the policy is implemented
- How implementation may differ across settings or groups
- How students, families, educators, and community members experience the policy
- Who benefits from the policy
- Who may experience barriers, exclusion, or unintended burdens
- Whether the policy advances True Belonging, Shared Power, and Inherent Value
- What evidence is needed to better understand the policy's effects

Consensus does not require team members to have identical experiences or perspectives. It requires the team to examine evidence, acknowledge differences, and determine a responsible course of action. When consensus cannot be reached, document the differing perspectives, identify additional evidence that may be needed, and specify how the unresolved issue will be revisited.



Interpreting the Ratings Together

After individual reviews, the team compares ratings, discusses the evidence behind them, and uses the results to identify priorities for action.

When reviewing ratings as a team:

- Document variation across schools, programs, student groups, or settings.
- Record areas of disagreement and the reasons for different interpretations.
- Prioritize indicators with low ratings or evidence of harmful, exclusionary, inconsistent, or inequitable experiences.

Rating	Recommended Response
1 Not Yet Evident	Identify missing or contradictory provisions; determine who is affected; gather additional evidence; prioritize revision; identify the authority to act.
2 Emerging	Clarify language and expectations; define responsibilities; add implementation supports; establish monitoring; engage affected stakeholders.
3 Developing	Target specific refinements; strengthen consistency; address participation or implementation gaps; expand monitoring; establish measures.
4 Strong	Document supporting evidence; sustain and monitor implementation; share effective practices; examine varied experiences; revisit periodically.

Navigating Differing Perspectives

Policy discussions may surface different experiences, interpretations, values, or priorities. These differences can reveal how power, position, identity, and experience shape policy interpretation and enactment.

- **Name the question or point of disagreement.** State the issue clearly without assigning motives.
- **Return to the evidence.** Review policy language, implementation information, data, and stakeholder experiences.
- **Identify who is affected.** Examine who experiences the consequences of the decision.
- **Center those most affected.** Give particular attention to people historically and contemporarily on the margins.
- **Examine intent and impact.** Consider both the policy's stated purpose and its effects.
- **Connect the discussion to Rightful Presence.** Ask which action most strongly advances True Belonging, Shared Power, and Inherent Value.
- **Document unresolved questions.** Record differing perspectives, identify missing evidence, and establish a process for revisiting the issue.

Suggested Discussion Commitments

- Listen to understand.
- Distinguish intent from impact.
- Speak from evidence and experience.
- Avoid expecting one person to represent an entire group.
- Make technical language understandable.
- Acknowledge differences in authority.
- Create space for historically excluded perspectives.
- Explain how decisions will be made.
- Maintain accountability for follow-through.

Practice in Action

The Practice in Action section includes brief scenarios that demonstrate how teams can apply the Rightful Presence Indicators to examine a specific policy, explore its effects on students and communities, and identify opportunities to strengthen belonging, inherent value, and shared power.

Practice in Action: Allocation of Resources and Opportunities

A district is reviewing a policy that allocates technology primarily according to total enrollment. The written policy appears consistent, but access data and student feedback indicate that some students have limited access to reliable devices, internet service, assistive technology, or technical support.

Using the Rightful Presence indicators, the review team examines:

- Whether allocation criteria account for differences in student access and need
- Whether affected students and families participate in identifying priorities
- Whether technologies are accessible and responsive to language and disability-related needs
- Whether allocation decisions are publicly explained
- Whether implementation data are regularly reviewed for disparities

The team uses its findings to clarify allocation criteria, strengthen student and family participation, identify needed supports, and establish a process for monitoring access and correcting disparities.

Practice in Action: Management of Student Conduct

A school's conduct policy applies the same consequences to all students for broadly defined behaviors. Discipline data and student feedback, however, show that behaviors are interpreted differently across classrooms and that some student groups experience more frequent disciplinary responses.

Using the Rightful Presence indicators, the review team examines:

- Whether expectations are clearly and accessibly defined
- Whether decisions are based on documented evidence rather than assumptions
- Whether restorative and supportive responses are available
- Whether students experience the policy as fair, safe, and respectful
- Whether discipline and perception data are regularly reviewed
- Whether students and families share authority in improving the policy

The team uses its findings to clarify expectations, strengthen consistent decision-making procedures, incorporate student perspectives, and monitor implementation and outcomes.



Practice in Action: Leadership and Decision-Making

A district has a family advisory group that meets regularly, but agendas are established by district staff and participants respond to decisions that have already been developed.

Using the Rightful Presence indicators, the review team examines:

- When and how families and students enter the decision-making process
- Whether participants can identify priorities and set agenda items
- Whether participants have the information needed to make decisions
- How recommendations are documented and acted upon
- Whether participants share formal authority through voting, consensus, or another defined process
- Whether the advisory structure includes those most affected

The team uses its findings to revise the advisory structure so that students, families, educators, and community members share responsibility for setting priorities, reviewing evidence, developing recommendations, and evaluating outcomes.



From Review to Action

Completing the ratings is not the final step. The purpose of the review is to identify changes that strengthen policy content, implementation, stakeholder experience, and alignment with the principles of Rightful Presence.

Step 1 — Identify Strengths to Sustain

Document the policy language, structures, or practices that currently support True Belonging, Shared Power, and Inherent Value.

- What is working well?
- What evidence supports this conclusion?
- Who benefits from the current strengths?
- What is needed to sustain or expand these strengths?

Step 2 — Identify Priority Findings

Review indicators rated Not Yet Evident, Emerging, or Developing, as well as evidence of inconsistent or inequitable implementation.

- Which findings have the greatest effect on students and families?
- Which groups experience the greatest barriers or unintended burdens?
- Which finding requires immediate attention?
- Which improvement is both meaningful and actionable?
- What requires policy revision, and what requires implementation change?

Step 3 — Determine the Type of Change Needed

Possible responses include policy, process, communication, participation, support, evidence, and accountability changes.

- Revising policy language
- Clarifying definitions or expectations
- Revising implementation procedures
- Assigning responsibilities
- Strengthening communication
- Providing professional learning or implementation support
- Expanding student, family, or community decision-making authority
- Collecting additional evidence
- Addressing inconsistent implementation
- Establishing monitoring and accountability processes
- Recommending changes to an external policy-making authority



Step 4 — Develop the Action Plan

Action-Planning Element	Team Response
Priority finding	What did the review identify?
Supporting evidence	What policy language, data, or stakeholder experiences support the finding?
People most affected	Who experiences the effects of the current policy or practice?
Proposed improvement	What should be revised, added, removed, clarified, or strengthened?
Shared decision-making	How will students, families, and community members shape the response?
Responsible person or group	Who has responsibility and authority to advance the action?
Needed support	What information, resources, learning, or partnerships are required?
Evidence of progress	What will show that the action has been implemented?
Evidence of effect	How will the team determine whether experiences or outcomes improved?
Review point	When and how will the team revisit the action?

Step 5 — Communicate and Monitor

Communicate findings and planned actions in language accessible to students, families, educators, and community members. Explain what was reviewed, who participated, what evidence was considered, what strengths and concerns were identified, what actions will be taken, who is responsible, how stakeholders can continue to participate, and how progress will be monitored. Monitoring should include implementation evidence and information about how the revised policy is experienced. A change in policy language does not, by itself, demonstrate a change in practice.

When the Team Did Not Create or Cannot Directly Revise the Policy

A review team may identify concerns in a policy established by a school board, district, state agency, legislature, or another external authority. When the team does not have authority to revise the policy directly, it can still:

- Document how the policy is interpreted and experienced locally.
- Identify areas in which local implementation can be improved.
- Clarify which provisions are required and where local discretion exists.
- Develop recommendations supported by evidence and education constituent perspectives.
- Communicate concerns to the appropriate decision-making body.
- Request clarification, reconsideration, or revision.
- Partner with affected students, families, and community members to present recommendations.
- Monitor the policy's effects while recommendations are considered.
- Document concerns that cannot be resolved through local action.

Teams should distinguish between changes that can be made locally and changes that require action from another governing body. They should not treat externally established requirements as barriers to all local improvement when changes in communication, participation, implementation, or monitoring remain possible.

The Supporting Rightful Presence in Policy Development and Implementation Resource was developed through a collaborative partnership between the SWIFT Education Center at the University of Kansas and the Center for Education Equity (CEE) at the Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC) to support the work of the Region III Equity Assistance Center (EAC).

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The contents of this product were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (OESE)) under grant award number 84.004D. The Department does not mandate or prescribe practices, models, or other activities described or discussed in this document. The contents of this product may contain examples of, adaptations of, and links to resources created and maintained by another public or private organization. The Department does not control or guarantee the accuracy, relevance, timeliness, or completeness of this outside information. The content of this product does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department. This product is not intended to represent the views or policy of, or be an endorsement of any views expressed or materials provided by, any Federal agency. [89 FR 70333, Aug. 29, 2024]



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