EQUITABLE ACCESS TO CAREERS FOR ALL STUDENTS

Equity in the workplace starts with equitable education

Equitable Access to Careers for All Students

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Do our students have equitable access to careers?

Equity in the workplace starts with equitable education that leads to occupations that offer fair treatment in access, opportunity, and advancement for everyone. This includes identifying and working to eliminate barriers to fair treatment for disadvantaged groups from an individual level through systemic changes in organizations and industries. In order to achieve equity, we first need to understand that the societal systems in which we currently work do not demonstrate equitable opportunities.[1] When looking at the national workforce, there are some well-known, glaring inequities, along with some that are a little less obvious. For example, labor market and census data indicate that black and Latinx workers are overrepresented in service occupations and underrepresented in occupations in STEM fields, as well as management and professional occupations.[2, 3, 4, 5] Furthermore, women are underrepresented in manual trades, such as welding and automotive occupations[3], and also have lower employment numbers in STEM and executive-level occupations.[4, 3, 6] However, women are overrepresented in nursing, teaching, and accounting.[6, 7, 8] Major underlying reasons for the underrepresentation of African Americans and Hispanics in STEM occupations tend to be limited access to quality education that prepares them for these fields and a lack of encouragement to pursue these types of jobs from an early age.[9] Access to higher education is also a significant limiting factor for specific racial and ethnic groups. Overall, the share of all young adults age 25 to 29 with at least a bachelor's degree was 36% in 2018. This share ranged from 19% for Hispanics and 23% for blacks to 43% for whites and 66% for Asians.[5, 10] These large differences further the equity gap in the workforce because individuals with higher levels of education are more likely to to earn more, have

Black and Latinx workers are over-represented in **service occupations** and under-represented in **management & professional** occupations.

From 2001 to 2014, the participation of women in **STEM** remained flat while that of African Americans & Latinxs declined.

4.8% of welders in 2014 were **women**.

In 2017, the unemployment rate for people with **disabilities** was **2x MORE** than that for people **without disabilities**.

Women are over-represented among nurses, teachers, and accountants and under-represented among software developers, CEOs, and physicians.

higher positions, and are more likely than others to be employed and move up the socioeconomic ladder.[5] Another contributing factor to occupational inequity is societal influence. Societal influences begin to reinforce the traits and hobbies that are assigned to males and females through gendered toys. Boys, for example, are primed to like action and building through toys such as building blocks, tools, and action figures, while girls are taught to focus on domestic skills and caretaking through kitchen sets and dolls. From here, boys and girls are sent completely different messages as to what they should be interested in or good at, which ultimately shows in their interests and career choices later in life.[7, 11] As noted above, females tend to be significantly overrepresented in caretaking occupations such as nursing and teaching. Another factor contributing to the inequitable workforce is culture. Members of individualistic cultures tend to be encouraged to choose their own careers and develop competency in establishing a career path for themselves. Individuals from collectivist societies, however, tend to conform to familial and societal standards and they are often expected to follow a pre-determined career track.[12] Individualist cultures have higher occupational mobility, which can be associated with having higher-paying jobs.[13] Collectivist cultures prioritize familial and societal harmony, which can lead to a greater need for work flexibility, lower occupational mobility, and lower-paying jobs.[14] Within the United States, groups that contain people of color and minorities tend to be more collectivist. People who subscribe to an individualist culture or conform to the individualistic culture of the United States tend to have more social and occupational mobility than people who subscribe to a more collectivist culture.[13, 14]
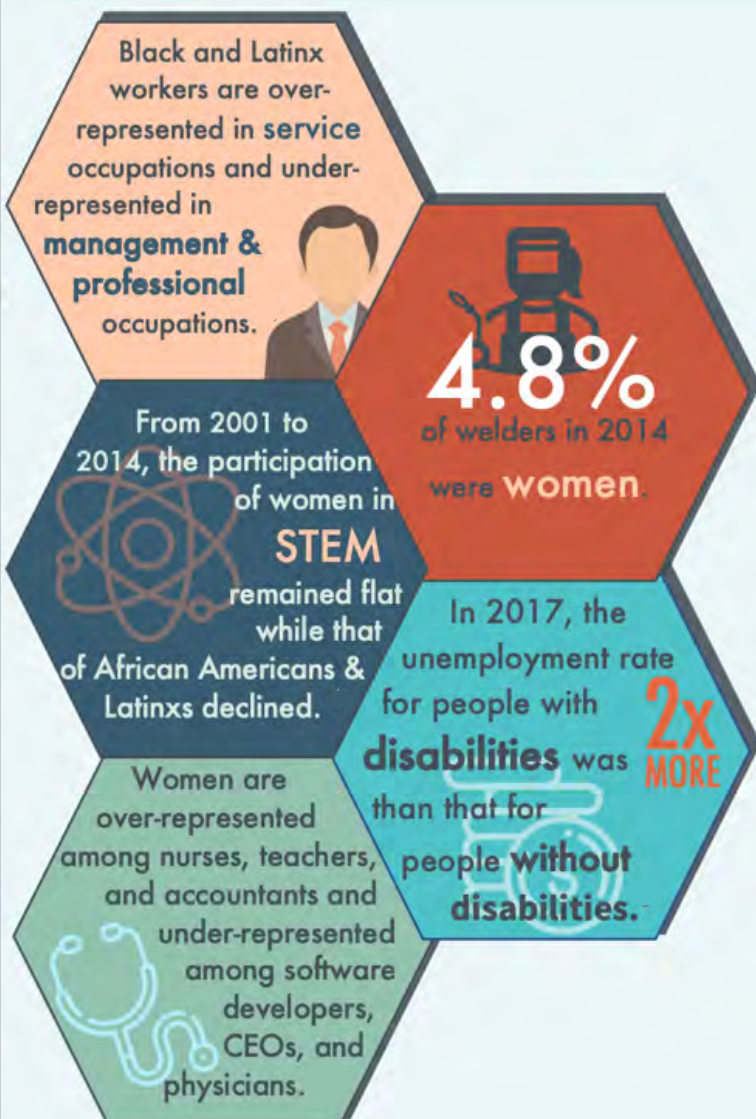
Labor Market Data

The best way to find out if our students have equitable access for their futures is to look at the current labor market. Unfortunately, the labor market shows that not all occupations portray equity. Labor market data is a collection of data complied primarily by government agencies for the purpose of analyzing job trends, wages, employment status, and economic changes related to workforce development.[15] This data provides a breakdown in the demographics of the national workforce. This helps show the racial and gender disparities in different types of occupations (see table below).

Occupation	Women	White	Black or African American	Asian	Hispanic or Latinx
Totals in the workforce	47.0	77.5	12.3	6.6	18.0
Healthcare support	85.1	64.5	24.5	6.8	20.9
Elementary and middle school teachers	79.2	83.8	10.0	3.4	10.7
Computer and mathematical occupations	26.2	65.4	8.45	23.3	8.3
Construction and extraction occupations	3.9	87.2	7.1	1.7	38.9

This data shows that, at a national level, women are overrepresented in healthcare and teaching professions and underrepresented in computer, math, construction, and extraction occupations. It also shows racial inequities, such as an overrepresentation of Asian individuals in computer and math occupations, Hispanic or Latinx individuals in construction occupations, and Black individuals in healthcare occupations.[16]
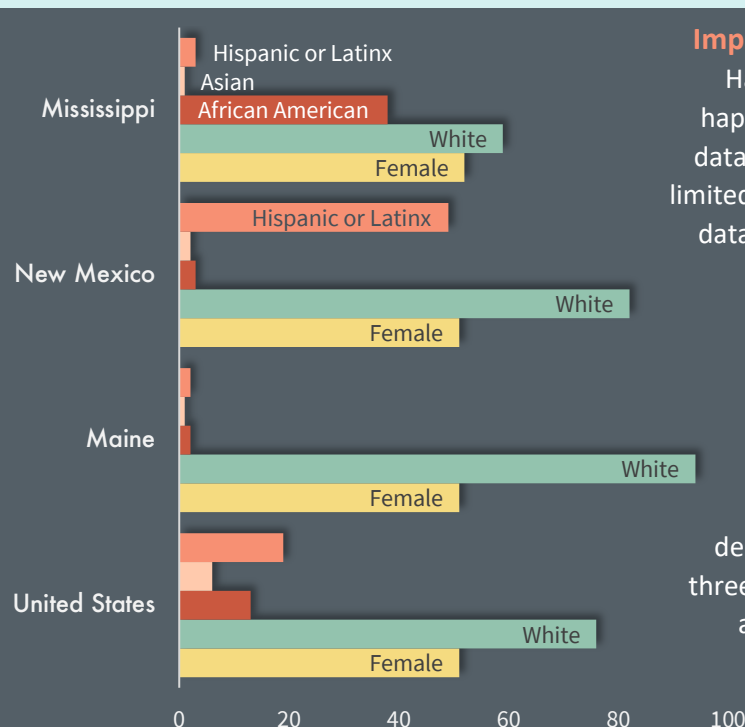
Importance of accessing regional occupation data

Having regional data helps better understand what is happening on a smaller, more impactful scale. National data looks at the average of all state demographics. It is limited in that it does not look within each state. Regional data show the makeup of the population by each state.

Why data differs by region

Different regions have different needs due to job opportunities, economies, and regional population breakdown (age, race/ethnicity, gender, education, wages, etc.). The graph to the left shows the demographic differences of the national averages and three different state averages (Mississippi, New Mexico, and Maine). This shows that an equitable workforce does not look the same for every region.[17]

How can this information be useful in supporting career readiness for students?

Acknowledging the inequities and understanding the reasoning behind them are the first steps in creating a more equitable labor market. Social factors, such as limited diversity in books, media, and pop culture with substantial lack of representation in careers, play a key role in educational and occupational inequities. When students have little to no representation in media or their immediate environments, they lack awareness of the opportunities they have, and consequently assume they are destined to be what they see. Once we understand the inequities and where they are in different occupations, we can begin to make changes. Being able to see the inequities within states is a critical step toward change in showing state leaders and educators where they can direct attention and resources to better represent their population within the local workforce. Academic interventions throughout standard K-12 education with integrative career exploration and work experiences help combat these inequities.[18] Additionally, aligning CTE programs to the workforce connects careers to education and shows students, through representation, that they can be what they want to be because when they can SEE it, they can BE it.[19]

Factors that contribute to inequity

There is a lack of opportunity for children with lower SES and minorities.[20]

Students are not able to see themselves in certain occupations due to a lack of representation.[18,19]

Cultural and family influences have an impact on student choice & academic achievement.[21]

Students with high-SES are more likely to graduate than students with low-SES and high math grades.[22]

Diversity in books, media, & pop culture is often limited.

Solutions to support equitable access

Studies show that continuing academic interventions throughout K-12 and integrating career exploration and access to high-quality work experience in high school helps combat education & occupation inequities.[18,19]

These inequities in the occupational market can be resolved by connecting careers to education and showing students, through representation, that they can be what they want to be.[18,19]
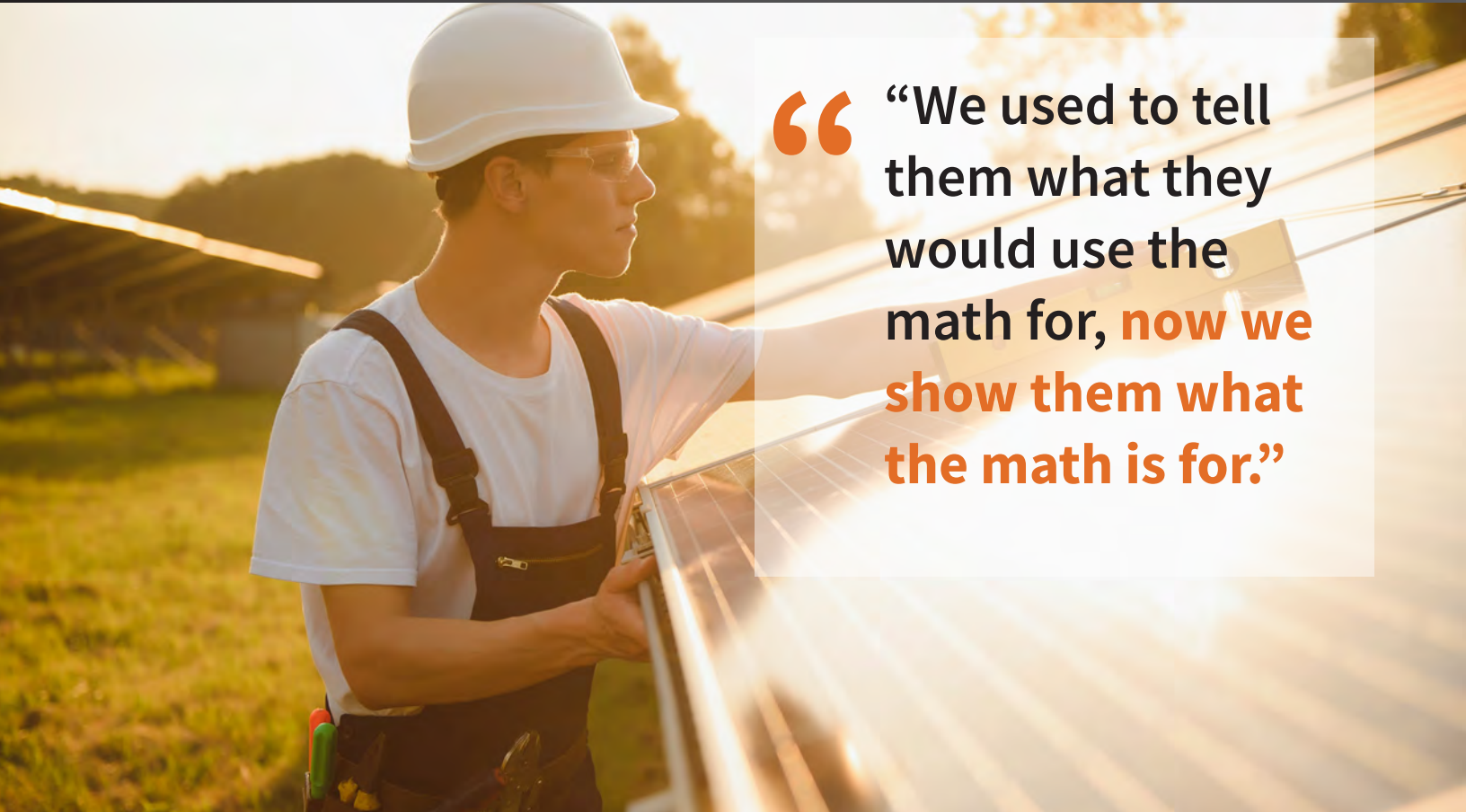
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OUR COMMITMENT

Through our commitment to drive results, our partnerships have led us to building comprehensive career and college education solutions. We focus on solutions relevant to education practices and ensure a seamless approach to support career readiness efforts in schools everywhere. Our innovative approach focuses on delivering the best possible solutions to support long-term student success.

"We used to tell them what they would use the math for, **now we show them what the math is for.**"

Contact Us

200 East Broadway, Suite 215
Maryville, TN 37804

hello@ns4ed.com
www.ns4ed.com

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