



# Equity Statement

Achieving  
the Dream 

**IN THE LAST TWO YEARS**, we have experienced a seismic shift in the way we talk about and act upon equity, as the country witnessed what marginalized communities have known for centuries: that systemic oppression, particularly systemic racism, has a direct impact on the ability of too many Americans to live secure, healthy, and just lives. From housing to healthcare to higher education, systems of oppression harm and exclude millions of people based on their intersecting identities.

Achieving the Dream (ATD) stands in solidarity with marginalized students and is committed to making equity a reality. We believe that for colleges to advance student success, ensuring equity is paramount. Since our founding in 2004, we have taken seriously our responsibility to support ATD Network colleges in their work to dismantle the structural barriers that students face in our institutions. Colleges have looked more closely at their data, formed community partnerships, narrowed equity gaps, and centered student voice in redesigning and redefining access and success for the diverse communities that they serve.

In 2016, ATD released an equity statement that called on colleges to “invest in equity-minded policies, practices, and behaviors that lead to success for all students.” This statement has guided our support of ATD Network colleges, but as I said in 2020, we can do more. Equity work is iterative. It requires constant reflection, renewed commitment, and bold leadership.

ATD Network colleges have a responsibility to effect meaningful change for the students they serve. In the third calendar year of a devastating pandemic that has further exposed just how vulnerable our students are, college leaders stand at an important place, in an urgent moment, to drive this work forward.



As a leader in higher education, ATD understands the need to continually champion the successes of colleges while simultaneously ushering the way forward. Through the release of ATD's revised Equity Statement, we are setting the direction we expect our colleges to navigate: a direction that reinforces an institution-wide commitment to transformational change that eliminates systemic barriers, addresses student needs, and increases social justice and equity.

ATD Network colleges are on individual equity journeys, but they are all connected by a deep commitment to help students reach their goals, obtain social and economic mobility, and make a lasting impact on their communities. This vision can only be achieved if we all take the necessary action to interrogate, reflect upon, and change systems of inequality and oppression.

As our Network colleges demand social, economic, and racial justice in their communities, we are well positioned to support their work. Achieving the Dream is ready to partner with colleges in the design of solution-oriented, equity-centered change. Together, with this as a guide, I hope we act on the dream of transforming our institutions to serve as hubs for equitable, antiracist, and vibrant communities.

As we embark on this journey together, I offer thanks to all members of ATD's staff, board of directors and network community who contributed to the revised equity statement.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen A. Stout".

**DR. KAREN A. STOUT**

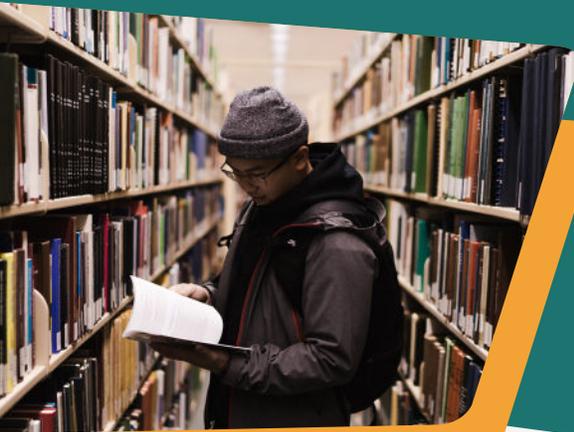
*President and CEO, Achieving the Dream, Inc.  
President Emerita, Montgomery County Community College*

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**Achieving the Dream believes that equity — our core founding principle — is the driving force to achieve the educational, economic, and social benefits of higher education for the students we serve. We believe that when colleges intentionally design and implement antiracist and just structures, policies, and practices that combat oppression, students and their communities thrive. Higher education must interrogate the disconnect between institutionalized practices that impact student success and the systemic structures and processes that continue to oppress and exclude students based on the intersection of race, ethnicity, gender identity, language, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, economic status, and/or religion.**

**Achieving the Dream remains steadfast in our commitment to delivering student-centered strategies to guide and support colleges to disrupt and dismantle historical systemic discriminatory legacies, structures, and barriers that prevent community members from prospering. We expect ATD Network colleges to honor their institutional responsibilities to create and invest in thriving local communities by leveraging their leadership positions to actualize social, economic, and racial justice. Through bold actions, colleges must transform their practices to target and eliminate specific barriers to student success and address their students' needs by centering equity within their local context.**

# Glossary of Terms



## | Equity

The intentional practice of identifying and dismantling unjust structures, policies, and practices that perpetuate systemic oppression based on but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, language, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, economic status, and/or religion to establish corrective justice actions to realize students' academic and social mobility goals.

## | Antiracism

Antiracism is an active and conscious effort to work against multidimensional aspects of racism.<sup>1</sup>

## | Economic Justice

A set of moral and ethical principles for building economic institutions, where the ultimate goal is to create an opportunity for each person to establish a sufficient material foundation upon which to have a dignified, productive, and creative life.<sup>2</sup>

## | Ethnicity

A category of people who identify as a social group on the basis of a shared culture, origins, social background, and traditions that are distinctive, maintained between generations, and lead to a sense of identity, common language, or religious traditions.<sup>3, 4</sup>

## | Gender Identity

A person's deeply felt, inherent sense of being a boy, a man, or male; a girl, a woman, or female; or an alternative gender (e.g., genderqueer, gender-nonconforming, gender-neutral) that may or may not correspond to a person's sex assigned at birth or to a person's primary or secondary sex characteristics. Since gender identity is internal, a person's gender identity is not necessarily visible to others.<sup>5</sup>

## | Intersectionality

Refers to the interplay of one's identities, the status of those identities, and the situational context of how, when, and where those identities show up and influence personal experience(s) within multiple dimensions of societal oppression. Intersectionality is a term coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw to explain how individual aspects of our identities (our gender, race, ethnicity, class, etc.) intersect.<sup>6</sup>

## | Oppression

1. Systemic devaluing, undermining, marginalizing, and disadvantaging of certain social identities in contrast to the privileged norm; when some people are denied something of value, while others have ready access.<sup>7</sup>
2. The systematic subjugation of one social group by a more powerful social group for the social, economic, and political benefit of the more powerful social group. Rita Hardiman and Bailey Jackson state that oppression exists when the following four conditions are found:
  - The oppressor group has the power to define reality for themselves and others;
  - The target groups take in and internalize the negative messages about them and end up cooperating with the oppressors (thinking and acting like them);
  - Genocide, harassment, and discrimination are systematic and institutionalized, so that individuals are not necessary to keep it going; and
  - members of both the oppressor and target groups are socialized to play their roles as normal and correct.
3. Oppression = Power + Prejudice<sup>8</sup>

## | Race

A socially constructed system of categorizing humans largely based on observable physical features (phenotypes) such as skin color and ancestry. There is no scientific basis for or discernible distinction between racial categories. The ideology of race has become embedded in our identities, institutions, and culture, and is used as a basis for discrimination and domination.<sup>9</sup>

## | Racial Justice

The systematic fair treatment of people of all races that results in equitable opportunities and outcomes for everyone. All people are able to achieve their full potential in life, regardless of race, ethnicity, or the community in which they live. Racial justice — or racial equity — goes beyond antiracism. It's not just about what we are against, but also what we are for. A racial justice framework can move us from a reactive posture to a more powerful, proactive, and even preventative approach.<sup>10</sup>

## | Sexual Orientation

An inherent or immutable enduring emotional, romantic or sexual attraction to other people. Note: an individual's sexual orientation is independent of their gender identity.<sup>11</sup>

## | Social Justice

A concept of fair and just relations between the individual and society. This is measured by the explicit and tacit terms for the distribution of power, wealth, education, healthcare, and other opportunities for personal activity and social privileges.<sup>12</sup>

## | Systemic

We derive the word systemic from the scholarly work of systemic racism. Systemic represents "...collective practices and representations that disadvantage categories of human beings on the basis of their perceived 'race'", ethnicity, gender identity, language, (dis)ability, sexual orientation, economic status, and/or religion.<sup>13</sup>

Additionally, systemic "...describes what happens when cultural institutions and systems reflect... individual [discrimination]".<sup>14</sup>

## ENDNOTES

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[achievingthedream.org](https://achievingthedream.org)

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