

# Increasing Equity in Mathematics Education

## The Launch Years Position Statement

Each student should feel empowered and engaged as a mathematical learner, experience success in mathematics, and become fully prepared for the quantitative demands of their future careers and lives.

It is unacceptable that our current system of mathematics education fails to meet the needs of so many of our students. It is reprehensible that so many students' opportunities to succeed are limited by their race or economic class.

We have a moral and a professional obligation to create the conditions necessary for every student to succeed.

The Launch Years initiative intends to create those conditions through two overarching aims.

The first is to improve learning opportunities for each student during the last two years of high school and into the transition to their postsecondary education and other future endeavors.

The second is to dismantle institutional and systemic barriers that block equitable access and opportunities to succeed in mathematics, especially for students who are Black, Latinx, or Native American, or who come from low-income communities.

To create greater equity in students' mathematical experiences—and to significantly improve educational achievement and attainment for these historically underserved groups of students—we commit to move beyond the concept of “closing achievement gaps.” Focusing only on so-called “achievement gaps” inappropriately privileges and normalizes the performance of some groups of students while creating a deficit-based narrative and limiting expectations for other groups.

The Launch Years vision is to build, scale, and sustain policies, practices, and structures that ensure that each student has equal access to, and successfully engages in:

- **Mathematics courses** with rigorous, relevant, engaging, high-quality, and inclusive instruction that is responsive to the needs of individual students and that is informed by multiple measures of achievement that are economically and culturally inclusive;
- **Mathematics pathways** that are well articulated from high school to and through postsecondary education and careers, that are personally and socially relevant, and that enable students to move across pathways as their interests and aspirations evolve;

**The Launch Years commitment to equity focuses on improving outcomes for Black, Latinx, and Native American students as well as students from low-income communities.**

We have chosen to focus on these populations because we believe this is where the Launch Years strategies can have the greatest impact.

We recognize that other groups, including girls and women, English-language learners, and students with disabilities, are also marginalized in mathematics education. Nor are the problems of inequity limited to the transition from high school to postsecondary opportunities.

The changes proposed in the Launch Years recommendations will likely benefit all populations, and those benefits will likely extend beyond the transition years.

We look forward to opportunities to coordinate and collaborate with other organizations to help expand the scope and impact of the Launch Years work in ways that increase access to an excellent mathematics education for all students.

- **Individualized academic, career, and other student supports** that respect and promote student and family decision-making and that enable students to explore options, make strategic choices, and set and achieve informed goals.

In addition to these structural changes, we commit to challenging and eliminating institutional and systemic barriers to students' opportunities to access—and succeed in—mathematics. This commitment includes proactively working with partners to change institutional cultures and educator mindsets toward recognizing and building upon student assets and student strengths.

While the Launch Years initiative advocates offering new mathematics pathways in parallel with the pathway leading to calculus, we do not minimize how important calculus remains for many students. Student enrollment and success in all mathematics pathways should reflect the demographics of the student population. Unfortunately, many populations continue to be underrepresented in fields that require calculus. Therefore, an important aspect of our work remains strategic and intentional efforts to establish structures, policies, and practices to promote inclusion and success of underrepresented populations in calculus and calculus-based fields.

General efforts to improve mathematics education have value, but will not in themselves create more equitable outcomes for students. The Launch Years initiative takes the position, therefore, that our efforts to improve mathematics education must intentionally and explicitly seek to improve equity in student learning, course outcomes, and attainment of credentials that promote upward social mobility and increase informed engagement in a democratic society.

We look forward to collaborating with other organizations, institutions, and individuals in this journey to ensure all students' equitable access to the mathematics necessary for lifelong success.

## ***Launch Years: A New Vision for the Transition from High School to Postsecondary Mathematics***

Find the full report online at <https://utdanacenter.org/launchyears>

Please cite the full report as follows:

Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin. (2020). *Launch Years: A New Vision for the Transition from High School to Postsecondary Mathematics*. Austin, Texas: Author. Available via the Dana Center's Launch Years website:

<https://utdanacenter.org/launchyears>

The full report includes the Launch Years collaborative's

- “Call to Action,” summarizing the case for change and the opportunities for action and
- “Taking Action on Launch Years,” detailing recommendations and strategies for advancing the movement.

It also includes an extensive list of references that informed the development of these resources.

### **About Launch Years**

Launch Years is an initiative led by the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin—in collaboration with Community College Research Center, Achieve, Education Strategy Group, and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities—focused on addressing systemic barriers that prevent students from succeeding in mathematics and progressing to postsecondary and career success. Leveraging work within states, the initiative seeks to modernize math in high school through relevant and rigorous math courses as well as policies and practices leading to more equitable outcomes for all students.

**Learn more at: [utdanacenter.org/launch-years](https://utdanacenter.org/launch-years).**

