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## **Fairness: Everyone uses the term ... but ...**

Everyone is quick to call for *fairness*. In particular, folks want institutions to treat them fairly and to operate according to fair rules.

But what constitutes fair treatment and fair rules often is not well understood. Questions that arise include:

- >Fair for whom?
- >Fair according to whom?
- >Fair using what criteria and what procedures for applying the criteria?

As has long been stressed, the reality is that our society uses a set of different factors in pursuing fairness. For example, think about which of the following you mean when you call for fairness. Which do you reject?

- To each person according to need
- To each person according to effort
- To each person according to contribution
- To each person according to merit
- To each person according to free-market exchanges”
- To each person an equal share

Obviously, what is fair for one person or group may cause an inequity for another. What is fair for the society as a whole may not be fair for a particular individual or group.

Controversies arise because people are using different principles and criteria. Controversies also arise because fairness is a facet of distributive justice that emphasizes equity.

***All school “improvement” efforts reflect overlapping concerns about fairness.***

Note: Equity is the legal facet of distributive justice that ensures and protects individual rights and addresses inequities related to access to the "goods" in life and meeting “needs”. For example, *To each person according to need* is core to special education.

Also note that fairness and equity do not guarantee empowerment. Empowerment is a multifaceted concept. In discussing power, theoreticians distinguish "power over" from "power to" and "power from."

- >*Power over* involves explicit or implicit dominance over others and events
- >*Power to* is seen as increased opportunities to act
- >*Power from* implies ability to resist the power of others

In discussing the concept of empowerment, Riger stresses that it’s sometimes used in a way that confounds a sense of efficacy or esteem (part of 'power to') with that of actual decision-making control over resources ('power over').

**The above distinctions have relevance to concerns about the changes being advocated for schools, and it behooves us all to be specific about which facets we are discussing.**

Our focus on fairness emphasizes (1) expanding school improvement from a two-to-a-three component policy framework and (2) transforming student/learning supports so that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed at school and beyond. See:

>*Student/Learning Supports: A Brief Guide for Moving in New Directions*  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/briefguide.pdf>

>*Transforming Student and Learning Supports: Starting the Process*  
<https://smhp.psych.ucla.edu/pdfdocs/systemchangesteps.pdf>

Let us know your views about all this. Send to [Ltaylor@ucla.edu](mailto:Ltaylor@ucla.edu) .

Best wishes and be well,

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