Ethics Statement
Education Equity Alliance

This Ethics Statement ('the Statement') has been developed by the Education Equity Alliance's Board ('the Alliance'), with advice from relevant academics and stakeholders. The Statement provides guidelines for how the Alliance supports the ethical and responsible participation of children and young people in its work.

Critically, the Alliance sees children and young people as partners in their activities, as compared to research participants. This statement guides this work with students.

If you have any questions regarding the Statement, please do not hesitate to contact the Alliance's Founder, Tim Warwick (tim@equityalliance.com.au)

About the Education Equity Alliance

The Education Equity Alliance is an independent, not-for-profit organisation that works with students, teachers, school leaders and system stakeholders on improving equity in education. This includes ensuring there is a deep understanding of the key challenges to inequity by engaging with the lived experiences of both students and teachers. It also involves supporting the collaboration of these different stakeholders to identify innovative solutions.

The Alliance's Activities

The Alliance works with schools and youth organisations to engage young people in the following ways:

- Equity Workshops – Students explore critical research and data about education equity in Australia. They discuss their experiences and perspectives. They work with their peers to consider changes to the education system to make it more equitable.
- Equity Social Labs – Students work alongside teachers, school leaders and other education stakeholders to analyse the root causes of equity in the education system and to design innovative solutions.

The purpose of these activities is to provide students with the opportunity to:

- Build their understanding of equity in the education system
- Contribute ideas for how the education system can be improved
- Collaborate with their peers, teachers and stakeholders to identify priorities for improvement and to explore solutions

The output of both of the Workshops and Social Labs will be used by the Alliance to identify priorities for achieving equity and to then pursue projects that allow students and teachers to collaborate on these priorities. The participating students will both be informed of these priorities and projects and invited to participate.

The critical nature of student voice and agency

The Alliance believes that student voice and agency is critical and that it adheres to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which was ratified by Australia in 1991. This specifies the right of children and young people to have their opinions taken into account on matters that effect their lives (Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989).

What are the possible benefits?

There will be a range of benefits for the participating students including:

- Feeling that their experiences of education equity have been heard and recognised
- Connecting with their peers over their experiences of education, and in turn improving their understanding of one another
- Reflecting on their strengths in navigating and overcoming barriers to inequity
- Feeling as thought their ideas for improving education are heard
- Feeling a sense of agency through collaborating with teachers, school leaders and other stakeholders on possible solutions.

It should be noted that research demonstrates the link between student voice and agency and their wellbeing and efficacy (Ginwright, 2018; Kirschner, Zion and Hipolito, 2022).

The student contributions will support a deeper understanding of the root causes of inequity within Australia's education system. Through these contributions being considered as part of the Social Lab collaborative problem-solving process, they will inform the identification of critical leverage points for change. In turn, this will influence possible actions and priorities to achieve a more equitable education system.

Currently, there is considerable inequity within Australia's education system. This includes a gap in the average Year 9 NAPLAN reading outcomes of our most advantaged and least advantaged students of 5 years (Grattan Institute, 2023). This gap has increased despite considerable investment. It is anticipated that these student contributions will support a deeper understanding of why this inequity continues to be produced by the system and a more effective response.

What are the possible risks and how will we address them?

The Alliance's activities involve engaging directly with students about their thoughts, feelings and experiences regarding equity in education. While we believe it is critical that students have the opportunity to explore this, we recognise that this process may touch on challenging and uncomfortable topics for young people, depending on their experiences or those of their peers.

In order to ensure this is an enjoyable, inclusive and safe experience for students, we will:

- Establish clear norms and expectations at the beginning of each workshop and social lab
- Emphasise throughout that students only need to share and engage to the extent they are comfortable
- Regularly check in throughout the workshop/social lab
- Co-facilitate workshops with at least one trusted/known adult to the students
- Emphasise/refer students to the existing wellbeing processes within their school setting

There is a risk that involvement in the pilot may result in additional burden in terms of both the co-facilitating staff members and the students' own time. To minimise this, we have aligned the workshops and social labs to the existing Victorian Curriculum, particularly the Personal and Social Capability, so these activities can serve as an integrated part of the students' curriculum program. We also align schedules so that the workshops can be run during existing class and meeting times.

As noted above, the output of both the Workshops and Social Labs will be used by Alliance to identify priority actions and to inform future projects where students and teachers collaborate on these actions. To ensure students are comfortable with their contributions to workshops and/or social labs being used in this way:

- Students will provide assent to participating in the workshop and/or social lab
- Students will provide assent to their contributions being using by the Alliance to identify priority actions
- A parent/guardian will provide consent to students participating
- Assent/consent can be withdrawn at any time
- Student confidentiality will be protected (as below)

Do you have to take part?

Students will be invited to take part in the workshops through their school or youth organisation as part of their student leadership program or curriculum offering.

Students will provide their assent to participating and parents/guardians will provide their consent.

What will happen with the output of Alliance activities?

Throughout the workshops and Social Labs, there will be a range of opportunities for students to provide their reflections and ideas. This will include students collaborating with their peers to 1) identify key barriers that students from certain backgrounds face; and 2) put forward possible initiatives to respond to the inequity.

These will be used by the Alliance to support:
1. Developing an overall understanding of the inequity that is occurring within the education system, including from the lived experience of students;
2. Identifying critical leverage points where if we put improvement efforts we will see the greatest impact on equity; and
3. Identifying priority actions and initiatives that will address these leverage points.

The Alliance will produce documentation that summarises the output of workshops and social labs based on these three objectives. This documentation will be shared directly with key education stakeholders, Alliance supporters, and through the Alliance's website and social media.

Critically, student participants will be invited to be part of these further activities. The workshops are designed to prepare them to be partners with teachers and education stakeholders in this work. All documentation produced that utilises student contributions will also be shared directly with them.

How will information provided by students be protected?

The output of workshops and social labs will be used in a way to ensure the confidentiality of students. Exact quotes will be used to provide examples of key themes or ideas and to provide important insights. These will not be attributed to specific students. Schools will only be identified by their context (for example – public, metropolitan school) and students only by their age/year level. Any contributions shared by students that have the potential to identify them will not be used.

Strict procedures are followed to ensure that only authorised people have access to this output. Any personal information we collect that might identify participants (e.g., name) will be kept in a separate

database from the information provided for the project. Names of participants will not be used in any publications, presentations or reports. De-identified data will not be shared beyond the Alliance.

Compliance with Child Safe Standards

A number of measures have been taken to ensure compliance with Victoria's Child Safe Standards:

- Facilitators from the Alliance have a Working with Children Check
- Alliance Facilitators co-facilitate with a School Staff Member – they will never supervise students independently
- Facilitators agree and sign the relevant school's Child Safe induction/agreement upon sign in
- Facilitators will report any disclosures of harm, in line with Child Safe and mandatory reporting requirements.

Full details of the Alliance's compliance with the Child Safe Standards can be found in its Child Safety Policy.

Who do I contact for further information?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding the Ethics Statement or the Alliance's work, please contact the Alliance's Founder (Tim Warwick, tim@equityalliance.com.au).