

MTSS Educational Equity Brief

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Welcome to the first VT AOE
MTSS Educational Equity Brief!

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Welcome to the MTSS Educational Equity Brief

Welcome to the Multi-tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Educational Equity Brief series, which is designed to support the comprehensive and systemic work of leadership teams. The MTSS framework layers preventative and intervention supports for all students in Vermont schools. With that in mind, each brief will contain information, strategies, and resources beneficial in closing educational equity gaps for economically disadvantaged students, students from minority racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, students who identify as LGBTQ, and English learners through the MTSS framework. This initial brief contains a general overview and layout for upcoming briefs, where our goals are to:

- celebrate success stories around educational equity best practices,
- engage leadership teams in learning communities,
- increase awareness and address issues related to educational equity,
- offer conversation starters and a network that supports educational equity, and
- share high quality resources, strategies, and research with practical applications.

The MTSS survey data, Supporting Educational Equity (SEE) Project, Integrated Field Reviews (IFR) and conversations with the field helped to establish the purpose and goals of this brief series. From those sources, we received the clear message that educational equity is relevant and beneficial to your work. That being said—we welcome feedback—and ask for your success stories to share in upcoming briefs.

Why Focus on Educational Equity through MTSS?

We must be intentional about educational equity when it comes to our most vulnerable students. This deliberate focus is reflected in the [Vermont State Plan \(2017\)](#), the [MTSS-RtII Field Guide \(2014\)](#) and the District Management Group (DMG) report. However, it is not only because of reports and mandates that educators must be intentional—it is because we care about our students. Therefore, we will continue to improve the good first (universal) instruction in the general education classroom for the full range of learners in our schools.

Working Definition of Educational Equity

In this brief, “educational equity means that every student has access to the educational resources and rigor they need at the right moment in their education across race, gender, ethnicity, language, disability, sexual orientation, family background and/or family income” (CCSSO, *Leading for Equity*, 2017, February, p. 3). You might recognize that VPA, VSA and others have a slightly different definition of educational equity. However, these definitions are similar and reflect a shared commitment to the belief that educational equity is a priority.

A Bold Approach

A foundational principle of MTSS is the notion that leadership teams can eliminate the barriers that students face in school. Leadership teams along with administrators, teachers, staff, parents, community leaders and other stakeholders can remove the educational inequities that hinder student learning. Therefore, closing educational equity gaps in our schools demands a bold commitment to intentionally address unacceptable outcomes for historically marginalized students. Students' potential to succeed in school should not be limited by their racial/ethnic group, disabilities, socio-economic status or identification as migrant, foster, or homeless.

Through the MTSS framework, students' needs can be met. Consider a student who is struggling with reading comprehension. A caring adult can provide intervention in the general education classroom by providing the student with, an assortment of culturally-responsive books that reflect a sundry cast of characters, from various backgrounds, with mixed talents, interests, and dreams. This instruction can go a long way to improve this student's self-esteem and promote reading. This simple equitable act can help close an educational equity gap for a struggling student. An intentional focus on educational equity accounts for and adapts to the diversity of learners which can be implemented in a systemic and comprehensive approach through MTSS. As educators, we need to engage in a deep and honest examination of assumptions about our students and affirm that we value all of them.

In the Spotlight



The SEE Project

In 2017, the Vermont Agency of Education (AOE) received a \$10,000 Innovating ESSA Educator Engagement grant from the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO). The grant was designed to support improvements in classroom practice and teacher understanding tied to the federal approval of Vermont's ESSA State Plan.

A critical area of focus within Vermont's Plan was increased commitment to goals for equity. The AOE proposed measures to implement Act 77 equitably. The AOE also sought to eliminate the achievement gaps that persist between Vermont's affluent white students, and students who have historically demonstrated achievement gaps within our state's school systems.

Given this equity focus, the AOE used the CCSSO grant funding to collaborate with fourteen K-12 teachers from around the state through two focus group-style meetings. This project was named Supporting Educational Equity (SEE). The meetings asked SEE participants to consider the following: "What classroom-level and systemic improvements would need to happen to fully leverage the equity-related changes described in Vermont's State Plan?".

The SEE group made multiple recommendations for the AOE addressing perceived problems of practice at the classroom, LEA, and AOE-level. After reviewing those recommendations, the AOE identified which of those recommendations we could address immediately. To see recommendations, we received and the steps we plan to take in 2018-19 and beyond to address them, view [Summary of Outcomes: Supporting Educational Equity \(SEE\) Project online](#).

Resources for Consideration

These resources are provided for your consideration as possible tools to support educational equity.

- [Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Guide to Evidence-Based Practices for Teaching All Students Equitably](#) - Published by the Northwest Equity Center, this report offers free descriptions of evidence-based teaching practices that improve equitable outcomes. This report offers information for a common reading assignment for leadership teams and professional development conversations.
- [Educational Equity: What does it mean? How do we know when we reach it?](#) - Published by the Center for Public Education (CPE), this research brief provides a brief overview of educational equity and its various, sometimes overlapping parts. They begin by reviewing the data on the students served by in public schools. They then describe the areas in an equity agenda that research shows will have the greatest impact on student outcomes: funding, curriculum, teachers and discipline policies. This research brief offers rich material for a common reading material for staff development conversations.
- [Reaching All High School Students: A Multi-Tiered Approach](#) - Discover how one high school meets the academic and social-emotional needs of every student. According to this article, MTSS is a relatively new framework that is still being worked out by schools across the country. P.K. Yonge began by implementing the framework successfully at the primary grade levels, and since 2009, have developed a “work-in-progress” model at the secondary level. According to the article, MTSS looks different at the secondary level, because the focus for students is on content and a wide variety of classes. This report offers rich insight for a discussion on MTSS at the secondary level.

The following books offers research that can lead to rich discussions on educational equity.



- Blankstein, A.M., and Noguera, P., with Lorena Kelly. (2016). *Excellence through equity. Five principles of courageous leadership to guide achievement for every student*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2010). *The flat world and education: How America's commitment to equity will determine our future*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Dewhurst, M. (2018). *Teachers Bridging Difference: Exploring Identity with Art*. MA: Harvard Education Press.
- Jensen, Eric, 1950-. (2009). *Teaching with poverty in mind: what being poor does to kids' brains and what schools can do about it*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Neuman, S. B. (2009). *Changing the odds for children at risk: Seven essential principles of educational programs that break the cycle of poverty*. New York: Teachers College Press.

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Share Your Ideas

We would like to hear from you! Please email us pictures of best practice activities taking place in your SU/SD or school around MTSS. We might use the photos in the header on page 1.

Send us write-ups for consideration in one of the upcoming Educational Equity Briefs. We might share them in the “In the Spotlight” section.

If you have an idea for a topic—let us know that as well. Maybe you have a great resource or strategy—tell us about it. We want these briefs to be helpful and reflect the positive work that is taking place in VT schools. We will consider all input.

We encourage you to email materials, ideas, suggestions, or general feedback to Emma at emma.louie@vermont.gov.

Events and Announcements

MTSS Listserv

Please join the mtss@list.education.state.vt.us mailing list! Also, let us know how we can best use this listserv to support your work toward proving equitable educational opportunities for all students.

To post to this listserv, send your message to: mtss@list.education.state.vt.us. General information about the mailing list can be found [online](#).

MTSS Office Hours

Please join us for MTSS Office hours the fourth Thursday of the month from 3-4 p.m. You may sign up to participate through the Weekly Field Memo.

MTSS Modules

Coming This Fall!

Field Guide 2.0

Coming Late Winter/Early Spring!

References

- CCSSO. (2017, February). Leading for equity: Opportunities for state education chiefs. *The Aspen Institute: Education and Society Program*. Washington, DC. Retrieved from <https://assets.aspeninstitute.org/content/uploads/2017/05/LeadingForEquity.pdf>
- Vermont Agency of Education. (2017). [ESSA Vermont State Plan](#).
- Vermont Agency of Education MTSS-RtII Field Guide (2014). *Vermont Reads Institute*. University of Vermont, Burlington, VT.



We're on the Web!

See us at:

<http://education.vermont.gov/student-support/multi-tiered-system-supports>