

# MTSS Educational Equity Brief

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## Supporting Our Vulnerable Students Living in Poverty

This MTSS Educational Equity Brief offers support for our vulnerable students who are living in poverty. Even with our deep commitment to educational equity, there are still persistent achievement gaps between students who live in poverty and those who do not when data is disaggregated. Therefore, we must be committed to eliminating the ability to predict student achievement based on socioeconomic status. We must systemically create and sustain learning environments that are equitable, culturally responsive and aligned to the needs of our students. Research shows that MTSS is the framework that can eliminate such persistent educational inequities for our students.

In this edition of the brief, we continue to leverage resources, experiences, skills and talents to ensure that our students from low socioeconomic backgrounds get what they need to achieve and be successful in our schools. The following are practical suggestions that educators can use to support students living in poverty.

- When peers taunt the students, act quickly to stop the harassment by naming the inappropriate behavior.
- Add culturally responsive experiences, such as, field trips to art centers, restaurants and museum that connect with the students' classroom activities and real-life situations.
- Help the students build strong relationships with trustworthy adults in the school building or community.
- Boost the students' self-esteem by encouraging school success instead of emphasizing what the students do not have.
- Provide access to computer programs, magazines, newspapers, and books that reflect positive stories about children and adults who have overcome poverty to be a success.
- Keep expectations high and affirm that poverty does not mean a lack of ability to learn.
- Don't make negative comments about students' clothes or belongings unless they are in violation of the dress code.
- Take extra care in helping the students know the correct behaviors for school situations.
- Know the cost of supplies that you expect students to buy and have alternative ways for the students to get those supplies (i.e. fundraisers, sponsors) without humiliation.
- Be intentional about avoiding materials that provide negative stereotypical messaging.
- Make it clear that you value all your students for their character and not for their possessions.

## Powerful Practices

Educators, can integrate four mindsets according to Jensen (2013) that will help students living in poverty succeed in the classroom:

1. *Relational Mindset* – the positive relationship that a student from poverty has with their teachers are one of the biggest reasons for success.
2. *Achievement Mindset* – the teacher’s attitude about success will support or dissuade a student from poverty success in school.
3. *Rich Classroom Culture Mindset* – a rich, energetic, high-performing class culture will transform teaching and student participation. And,
4. *Engagement Mindset* – intentionally engaging the student will change their mindsets about participation, learning and success (Jensen, 2016).

## In the Spotlight

Jessica Handrik, Director of Education at The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts, invited staff from the Agency of Education (AOE) to attend the Arts Literacy Institute: Equity & Expression at the Clemmons Family Farm in August. Where Jean Cherouny, an artist and an Art Teacher shared that she had read one of the books in the “Resources for Consideration” section from the [MTSS Educational Equity brief, Vol. 1, Issue 1](#). According to Jean, the book profoundly impacted her perception around educational equity in a tiered system of supports. What follows is Jean’s reflection on her take-a-ways from the authors.

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While reading *Excellence Through Equity: Five Principles of Courageous Leadership to Guide Achievement for Every Student*, by Blankstein and Noguera (2016), whose forward was written by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, it caused me to analyze the power of thinking. This book was offered as a reading option for the Burlington Public Schools because of its focus on performance based student-centered pedagogy.

All minds want to move. Brain science shows this! Vermont must commit to the responsibility for supporting safe and vibrant working groups. This book encourages all people engaging with students committed to higher educational goals. There is unity and joy in learning these brilliantly beautiful methods. The book shares our widening educational gaps in achievement due to growing inequities. This is not a new phenomenon due to political and environmental changes. The author’s shared concrete steps through stories that show how leaders transformed to proficiencies successfully. This allowed educators to reach goals for all students to achieve proficiency-based learning outcomes by 2020.

I am encouraging others to read this book and commit to spreading the seeds of change that supports educational equity. Implicit in this reading is that all students can move forward in our education system with agency, inquiry, and voice. This book will serve as a guide to shift your classroom practice and serve all student’s needs for schools to examine and create multi-tiered pedagogical frameworks.

The book reminds us that dynamic curriculum practices include collaboration with teachers, community leaders and partners. An example of this is how Burlington Public Schools work with The Flynn Center for the Performing Arts in Burlington, VT, with programing that integrates arts into the school’s pedagogy. We do need to work together to become more courageous and achieve our highest expectations for all students.

*Excellence through Equity* is a must read for all Vermont educators shifting to a student-centered learning.

## Resources for Consideration

To efficiently and successfully meet the unique needs of students living in poverty, it is important to have a systemic approach that takes a holistic view and simultaneously address academic and non-academic (physical, behavioral, social/emotional) needs (Tierney, 2015). The selected resources below are provided for your consideration as tools that support educational equity for students living in poverty.

### [Push, Don't Pity, Students in Poverty](#)

Sarah McKibben (2018, January) interviews Linda Cliatt-Wayman, who led one of the most dangerous high schools in America. Nevertheless, Linda says students in poverty don't need educators making excuses as to why they fail in school. Instead they need a lot of love and unimaginably high expectations from those educators.

### [What Can Schools Do to Address Poverty?](#)

In this article William Parrett and Kathleen Budge (2015, December 10) assert that schools can address poverty by teaching social justice, offering equitable academic opportunities, and inconspicuously providing school supplies, snacks, clothes, and other necessities to students living in poverty.

### [The keys to helping students in poverty thrive](#)

According to Wendy Foster (2015, October 21), providing role models, rich experiences, and social skills are ways that communities can support students throughout the school year.



- [MTSS with poverty in Mind](#)
- [How One School is Fighting Poverty](#)
- [Leading Learning for Children from Poverty: Six effective practices can help teachers help students from poverty succeed.](#)
- [National Center for Children in Poverty](#)
- [Beyond the Spaghetti Bridge: Why Response to Intervention is Not Enough](#)
- [Educating Students Who Live in Poverty](#)
- [Teaching Children from Poverty and Trauma](#)
- [Supporting Students Living Below the Poverty Line](#)
- [Key Facts About Child Poverty](#)

Jensen, Eric. (2013). *How poverty affects classroom engagement*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

Gorski, P. C. (2017). *Reaching and teaching students in poverty: Strategies for erasing the opportunity gap (multicultural education series) 2nd edition*. New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

## Share Your Ideas with Us

We would like to hear from you! Please email us your best practice ideas taking place in your SU/SD or school around your MTSS framework.

You may email materials, ideas, suggestions, or general feedback to Emma at [emma.louie@vermont.gov](mailto:emma.louie@vermont.gov).

## Events and Announcements

### MTSS Listserv

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

To post to this listserv, send your message to: [mtss@list.education.state.vt.us](mailto: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.

\*For November, Office Hour will be the last Thursday in the month on November 29, 2018.

### MTSS Modules

[Link to Modules in Moodle](#)

### Field Guide 2.0

Coming Late Winter/Early Spring!

### 2018 MTSS Survey Summary

Coming in late November!

## References

Jensen, E. (2016). *Poor students, rich teaching: mindset for change*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.

Tierney, W. G. (2015). *Rethinking education and poverty*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.



## We're on the Web!

See us at:

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