

# MTSS Educational Equity Brief

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## Supporting Our Students of Color

This *MTSS Educational Equity Brief* offers research, best practices and resources that support students of color. Despite our deep commitment to educational equity, still achievement gaps persistent for many of these students based on academic data. Results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) consistently show gaps between African-American and white students in math and reading (Anderson, 2018). This trend from the NAEP is reflective of patterns seen in state and local assessment data as well. Therefore, it is important that we provide access, opportunity and equity through culturally responsive environments that are aligned to the needs of students. The MTSS framework promotes an actionable systemic approach that can effectively address the needs of our students of color.

The smallest positive acts of support by educators can have an enormous impact on the success of students of color. The following are practical suggestions to consider:

- Invest time in getting to know your students of color.
- Offer ways for students of color to bring pieces of their culture into the classroom, school and district.
- Provide a safe place for students of color to have hard conversations and explore the issues that are relevant to them.
- Invite families and community members to become educational partners.
- Expose students of color to role models of color.
- Invite guest speakers and mentors of color into the classroom and school.
- Use texts and media that include positive, successful and diverse characters.
- Support efforts to improve teacher/educator diversity.
- Empower students of color to tell their own stories.
- Pay attention to your own storytelling, your own language and ensure that it does not reflect a single exclusive narrative.
- Exude a culturally responsive mindset when talking to students of color and about students of color.
- Correctly pronounce students' names to signal respect and to help validate who they are.
- Ensure the physical environment—classroom, school, district—reflect diversity.
- Be actively visible in your support of students of color.
- Cultivate mindfulness and awareness to reduce unconscious bias.

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## Powerful Practices

*Best Practices in Educational Equity* (2017) offer several strategies that district leaders, school administrators, and teachers can use to promote equity. These practices include: recognize students and their cultural heritage; link the curriculum to what students already know; accommodate diverse learning styles; set clear expectations for student learning and behavior; communicate high expectations; do not accept excuses for a lack of achievement; change school schedules, curriculum, and use of staff time to support learning; adjust classroom practices to support struggling students; and encourage respectful dialogue among faculty about their role in helping all students learn.

## In the Spotlight

Equity and student success are inseparable for students of color. The five figures below from the [Center for Urban Education](#) topic on “Equity and Student Success” (n.d.) affirm that achieving parity in educational outcomes for students of color require practitioners to critically evaluate their system.



Fig. 1 states: Equality imagines an equal world – “I care about all students equally”.

Figure 1. Equality images an equal world.

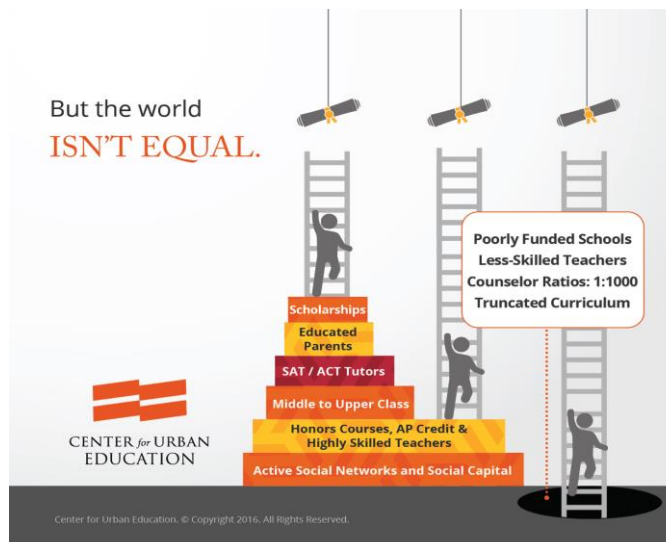


Fig. 2 responds with a reality check: But the world Isn’t equal. The graphic visualizes the supports some students have: scholarships, educated parents, SAT/ACT tutors, middle to upper class, honors courses, AP credit and highly skilled teachers and active social networks and social capital. It also shows the disadvantages facing other students: poorly funded schools, less-skilled teachers, counselor ratios of 1:1000 and truncated curriculum.

Figure 2. But the world isn’t equal.



Figure 3. Bias and systemic racism.

Fig. 3 continues: And [the world] has bias and systemic racism. We see that the students with additional supports are predominantly white, while the students with disadvantages are predominantly of marginalized racial/ethnic groups facing disruptive obstacles of microaggressions, implicit bias, and disproportionate remediation.



Figure 4. Looking through a diversity lens only.

Fig. 4 notes: Within this same picture, a Diversity lens focuses only on bringing more students into an unequal pathway.



Figure 5. Equity redirects and fixes the system.

Fig. 5 presents an alternative: In contrast, Equity redirects resources to the pathways with greatest need to fix barriers and intentionally provide support. This approach, characterized by regular data disaggregation and analysis, goal setting and action planning, faculty and staff trained to be equity facilitators, and inquiry to understand how practices impede equity, creates a unified, achievable path to student success.

“These figures show a way to visualize thinking about systemic change that can support the academic, behavioral, emotional/social needs of all students.” ~ Nancy



## Resources for Consideration

Educational achievement is perhaps the greatest indicator of success and progress and high school graduation is one of the most important benchmarks in the reduction of lifetime poverty for students of color (Bowman, Comer, & Johns, 2018). So, knowledgeably and effectively meeting the unique needs of students of color in PreK-12 schools is important and indicative of life long success. The selected resources below are provided for your consideration as tools that support educational equity for students of color.

February is [Black History Month](#). The references to classroom activities that celebrate African-Americans accomplishments may prove value this month and the entire school year.



- [Four Ways to Teach Black History This Month \(And the Rest of the Year\)](#)
- ["I Am From Here" film and discussion guide](#); and [VT NEA racial equity resources page](#)
- [Vermont Coalition for Ethnic and Social Equity in Schools \(VCESES\)](#)
- [Up for Learning Restorative Practices](#)
- [Quality and Equality in American Education: Systemic Problems, Systemic Solutions](#)
- [I Thought I Knew How to Support Students of Color Until I Learned This](#)
- [Building Better Narratives](#)
- [K-12 Disparity Facts and Statistics](#)
- [Twelve Tips All Educators Must Know About Educating African American and Latino Students](#)
- [Closing the Diversity Gap](#)
- [Facing Race Issues In the Classroom: How To Connect With Students](#)
- Zehr, H. (2015). *The little book of restorative justice*. New York, NY: Good Books.
- Smith, M., O'Day, J. A. (2016). *Quality and equality in american education: Systemic problems, systemic solutions*. Princeton, New Jersey: ETS.
- [Educational Equity: What Does It Mean? How Do We Know When We Reach It?](#) (2016). Center for Public Education.
- [9 Things Every Educator Should Know When Teaching Black Students](#)
- [Instead of Suspension: Alternative Strategies for Effective School Discipline](#)
- [Black History Month Lessons & Resources](#)
- [Share My Lesson: Black History Month](#)

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## 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 and educational equity.

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 proving equitable educational opportunities for all students.

### MTSS Office Hours

Please join us for [MTSS Office Hours](#) the fourth Thursday of the month from 3-4 p.m. Additionally, individuals can [subscribe or unsubscribe online](#) through the Weekly Field Memo.

### MTSS Modules

[Link to Modules in Moodle](#)

### Field Guide 2.0

Coming Fall 2019!



## References

- Anderson, M. B. L. (2018). [A seat at the table: African american youth's perceptions of K-12 education](#). Washington, DC: UNCF.
- [Best practices in educational equity](#). (2017). Hanover Research. Arlington, VA.
- Bowman, B. T., Comer, J. P., & Johns, D. J. (2018). [Addressing the african american achievement gap: Three leading educators issue a call to action](#). National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- [Equity and student success](#). (n.d.). Center for Urban Education. Los Angeles, CA.

We're on the Web!

See us at:

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