

# From Intention to Impact: Living Equity Through Systems and Facilitation



## SAY WHAT?

Each spring, we're reminded that growth takes both intention and nurturing. Equity in education is no different. It's a word we often say with urgency, but it risks becoming hollow if we don't constantly ground it in action. Equity isn't a separate initiative or something we "get to" if time allows—it is *the* work. It must also be embedded in how we design systems, support educators, and honor our students' diverse identities and needs.

When we talk about equity, we're not referring to a single group or issue. CEC looks at Educational Equity as a means of building systems that work for *all* learners—multilingual students, students with disabilities, racially and culturally diverse students, and any learner navigating systemic barriers like poverty or trauma.

As someone who works with schools across various contexts, I often see passionate teams struggling to operationalize equity. Not because they don't care—far from it—but because the structures, mindsets, and tools to live equity daily are still underdeveloped or misunderstood. Let's break that cycle.

## Educational Equity Isn't Extra: It *Is* MTSS

Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) is often viewed as a way to "catch students who are struggling," but that interpretation misses the mark. MTSS, when implemented with fidelity and integrity, is an equity framework. It's a way to design proactively, respond flexibly, and ensure that every student—not just the ones who fit a traditional mold—receives what they need to thrive. Equity shows up in how we define "data." Are we looking beyond standardized tests?

### Are we centering student voice and lived experience?

Equity shows up in Tier 1—are our core practices inclusive by design, or are we relying on intervention to fix what Tier 1 never addressed? Equity shows up in leadership—are we building systems that shift from reacting to responding, from gatekeeping to gateway-making?

**MTSS is our vehicle. Equity is the destination.**





### Multilingual Learners: From Deficit to Asset

One of the clearest litmus tests for equity in a school system is how multilingual learners are supported. Too often, these students are labeled, sorted, or misunderstood—viewed as “behind” rather than recognized for their immense linguistic and cultural assets. Equity means building systems where language development is not mistaken for a lack of intelligence. It means:

- Tiered supports that account for language acquisition
- Culturally responsive instruction
- Family partnerships that center home language and community knowledge

If we’re not designing MTSS through the lens of multilingual learners, we’re not designing for equity—we’re designing for compliance.

### Special Education: Dignity, Access, Belonging

In many systems, special education exists in tension with equity—when it should be a cornerstone of it. Equity in special education isn’t just about compliance with IDEA; it’s about access, voice, and dignity for students with all types of disabilities—cognitive, physical, emotional, and sensory.

**Special education is not a place—it’s a service.** And when we treat it that way, we expand what’s possible. We shift from asking, *“Where should this student go to receive services?”* to *“How can we bring services to wherever this student learns best?”*

#### We must ask ourselves:

- Are we over-identifying students for special education services?
- Are we isolating students in ways that contradict our inclusion commitments?
- Are we scaffolding general education environments to welcome all learners, or are we defaulting to pull-out models because they're easier?

Educational equity means presuming competence. It means rejecting the narrative of “fixing” students. It means co-creating spaces of belonging—where neurodiversity is embraced, and strengths are recognized as central to learning.



# Facilitation Is Equity Work

**Let's name the obvious:** systems don't change unless the adults in them do.

Facilitation refers to how we design and lead adult spaces for learning, collaboration, and decision-making. Whether it's a data meeting, a PLC, or a professional development session, how we facilitate matters.

Educational equity often blooms—or breaks—here.

Who gets to speak? Whose data drives the decisions? Are we building space for reflection or rushing to quick solutions? Are we listening to respond or listening to understand?

Equitable facilitation is not just about logistics—it's about power. It's about psychological safety, balanced airtime, addressing discomfort, and naming the dynamics that shape our adult culture.

If we want equity for students, we must first model it with the adults in the system.

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## NOW WHAT?

Let's get real. Educational equity isn't theoretical. It's not a vision board or a lofty mission statement. It's how we respond when a multilingual learner struggles with Tier 1. It's how we talk about a student with an IEP in a data meeting. It's whether we normalize behavior supports—or stigmatize the students who need them.

We don't need more equity posters. We need more courageous conversations. More aligned systems. More inclusive instruction. More intentional facilitation. And more humility.

Educational equity doesn't live in perfection. It lives in the messy, human, relentless work of showing up differently each day.

**Let's stop waiting for the system to change.  
Let's be the system that changes.**



*Blog Authored by Valerie Pena-Hernandez, Field Associate  
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**CATALYST FOR EDUCATIONAL CHANGE**

**PROBLEM STATEMENT:**

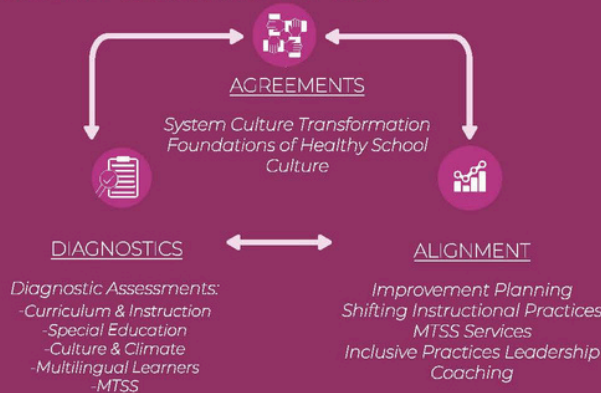
*Lack of coherence and shared ownership limits the quality of improvement and innovation in educational settings*

**SYSTEM  
CONTEXT**

**PEOPLE**
**STRUCTURES**

**CULTURE**
**POLICIES**

**DATA**
**RESOURCES**

**COMMUNICATION**
**CAPACITY BUILDING INPUTS**

**MEASURABLE OUTCOMES**

**SHORT-TERM**
**SYSTEM IMPACT**

Decision-Making

Policy Changes

Resource Flow

**PEOPLE IMPACT**

New Knowledge or Skills

Attitude Shifts

Common Language

Adapting Practice


**MID-TERM**

Sustaining Practice

Improved Alignment

Strengthened Culture

Empowered Educators

**LONG-TERM OUTCOME:**

*Increased system capacity to orchestrate equitable, inclusive transformation to reach intended outcomes through large-scale organizational change.*

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When stakeholders work together around shared agreements...the unthinkable is possible. CEC's focus on the **System Agreements** in school reform efforts aim to realign the adult culture and dynamics. We know when systems cultivate healthy, values-based relationships within each school and classroom measurable outcomes are more likely. People matter. And people working together really matters in schools. Developing a strong adult culture as[1] a foundation of a change agenda is what makes CEC stand apart.

CEC uses **System Alignment** to create collective efficacy on the agreed upon improvement aims of a school or district. Our tools and processes are designed to empower those closest to the issues to own the work. Our change management approach intentionally paces improvement through attainable short-term, mid-term, and long-term goals. It is the "secret sauce" of school improvement.

We invite you to explore the role our **Logic Model** might play in your system's large-scale improvement. Our website includes [FREE](#) resources that might be helpful in opening up dialogue with key stakeholders. Let's work together to turn ideas into action, so we can all see what's possible for our schools.

