



**COMPREHENSIVE SPECIAL EDUCATION**

# EVALUATION

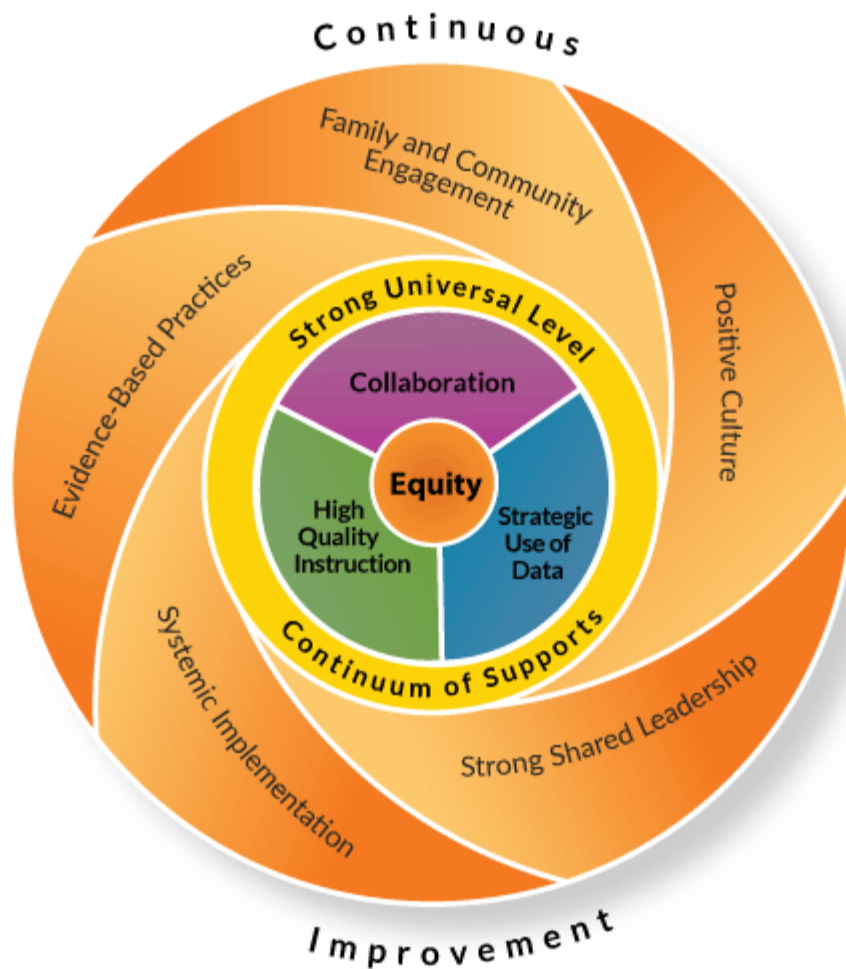
## **Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation within an Equitable Multi-Level System of Support (MLSS)**

### **Overview**

Comprehensive special education evaluation exists within the context of a district's integrated equitable multi-level system of social and emotional, behavioral, and academic supports (MLSS). An equitable MLSS includes all educators and all learners, considers the whole child and system, and attends to equitable access, opportunity, and outcomes for all students, ages 3-21.

This vision of an equitable MLSS is depicted in the graphic and includes the following key system features:

- Equity is at the center of the framework and embedded into all other key system features;
- Academic, behavioral, social, and emotional teaching and supports delivered through high quality instruction;
- The strategic use of data for continuous improvement;
- Collaboration among staff, learners, families, and communities to make the complex work of system change possible;
- A continuum of supports for learners, starting with a strong universal level of support as the base;
- Systemic implementation throughout the district, schools, teams, and classrooms to promote consistency and effectiveness across the system of supports;
- Strong shared leadership and positive culture to provide the context necessary for schools and districts to grow and sustain implementation; and
- Use of evidence-based practices to ensure that school and district efforts positively impact learner outcomes



## Educational Equity

Achieving educational equity is built upon the foundation of an equitable MLSS. When individual student needs arise, educational teams reflect on the instruction, curriculum, and educational environment factors to consider bias or inequities in the system before considering individual learning needs. As special education evaluation and special education services exist within an equitable MLSS, they too must be provided within an equity framework. Following applicable child find requirements, a special education referral starts the special education evaluation process to determine a student’s initial eligibility to receive special education services within the LEA’s equitable MLSS.

A comprehensive special education evaluation is ultimately focused on obtaining a [culturally responsive](#) and accurate understanding of an individual student’s academic and functional performance needs within the context of age and grade level general education. The stronger a school and district’s equitable multi-level system of supports is, the easier it will be to conduct a comprehensive special education evaluation that accurately considers a student’s potential disability

category, as well as the student’s developmental and educational needs. When a district has a strong equitable MLSS, it can more effectively appreciate and address the role systemic bias and racism may play in special education referral and eligibility decisions; and everyone involved in educating students can take active steps to address potential systemic and individual bias within and outside the special education evaluation process. For more information about conducting culturally responsive special education evaluations and addressing systemic and racial referral and evaluation bias within an equitable MLSS, see the [Addressing Bias in a Comprehensive Special Education Evaluation section of this framework](#).

Another important assumption going into a special education evaluation is that the student has had access to education within an equitable MLSS. This includes access to the resources and educational rigor the student needs at the right moment in their education, across race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, sexual orientation, family background, and family income. In fact, IDEA requires that IEP teams consider general exclusions to special education eligibility based on this assumption. Under IDEA, a student may not be found eligible to receive special education services if any of the following general exclusions are the determinant reason for the IEP team decision that the student meets eligibility criteria:

- 1) lack of appropriate instruction in reading (including instruction in the essential components of reading);
- 2) lack of appropriate instruction in math; or
- 3) limited English proficiency. 34 CFR §300.306 (b). Some [disability categories](#) have additional exclusionary factors that must be considered.

## Summary

In summary, a strong equitable MLSS enhances the quality and relevance of data and other information that can and should be used to make special education eligibility decisions and identify student educational needs useful for IEP development. When a student is found eligible to receive special education services, the IEP team develops an individualized education program (IEP) that considers all available school resources including universal educational experiences, and general and special education interventions and supports. In this way, special educational evaluations not only provide important information for each student’s IEP team, but also for the student’s school community, to identify the continuum of equitable support every student needs to access, engage, and make progress in general education instruction, environments, and other school related activities. For additional information, see the Wisconsin DPI guidance on the [Role of Special Education in an Equitable Multi-Level System of Supports](#).

More information on developing an equitable multi-level system of support can be found in this document: [Wisconsin’s Framework for Equitable Multi-Level Systems of Supports](#). You can also reach out to the Wisconsin RtI Center by [contacting their regional technical assistance coordinators](#).



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