



Leading System Wide Change for Mathematics Improvement to Meet IDEA's Promise

MASE Fall 2025 Leadership Conference
CAREI, University of Minnesota



Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement



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Session Overview & Objectives

- Understand why cohesive approaches are essential for fulfilling IDEA's commitments
- Explore leadership strategies to align systems and empower teachers
- Identify clear entry points to launch equitable mathematics improvement



Standing in Our Experience

Stand if you have ever sat in ANY meeting where math is the topic of conversation, and:

- Math Conversation felt **fluid and coherent**. All speaking the same language.
- General and special education staff were on the **same page** and knew what to **do next for math instruction**.
- Team was **clear** about what **changes needed** to be made and they knew **where to start**.

Now stand if...

You believe your district could change the story,
but you're not sure where to start.

Realizing IDEA's Promise: Why System Wide Change Matters

*"Students with disabilities have a right to high-quality instruction, aligning content and intervention and designed to facilitate success with grade-level content."
(NCTM/CEC, 2024)*

- Only 47% of 4th grade and 26% of 8th grade students with disabilities met proficiency in math (NAEP, 2024)
- Fragmented systems → Fragmented outcomes
- Cohesive systems → Equitable outcomes

The Divide in Math Instruction

Epistemic Echo-Chambers (Nguyen, 2020)

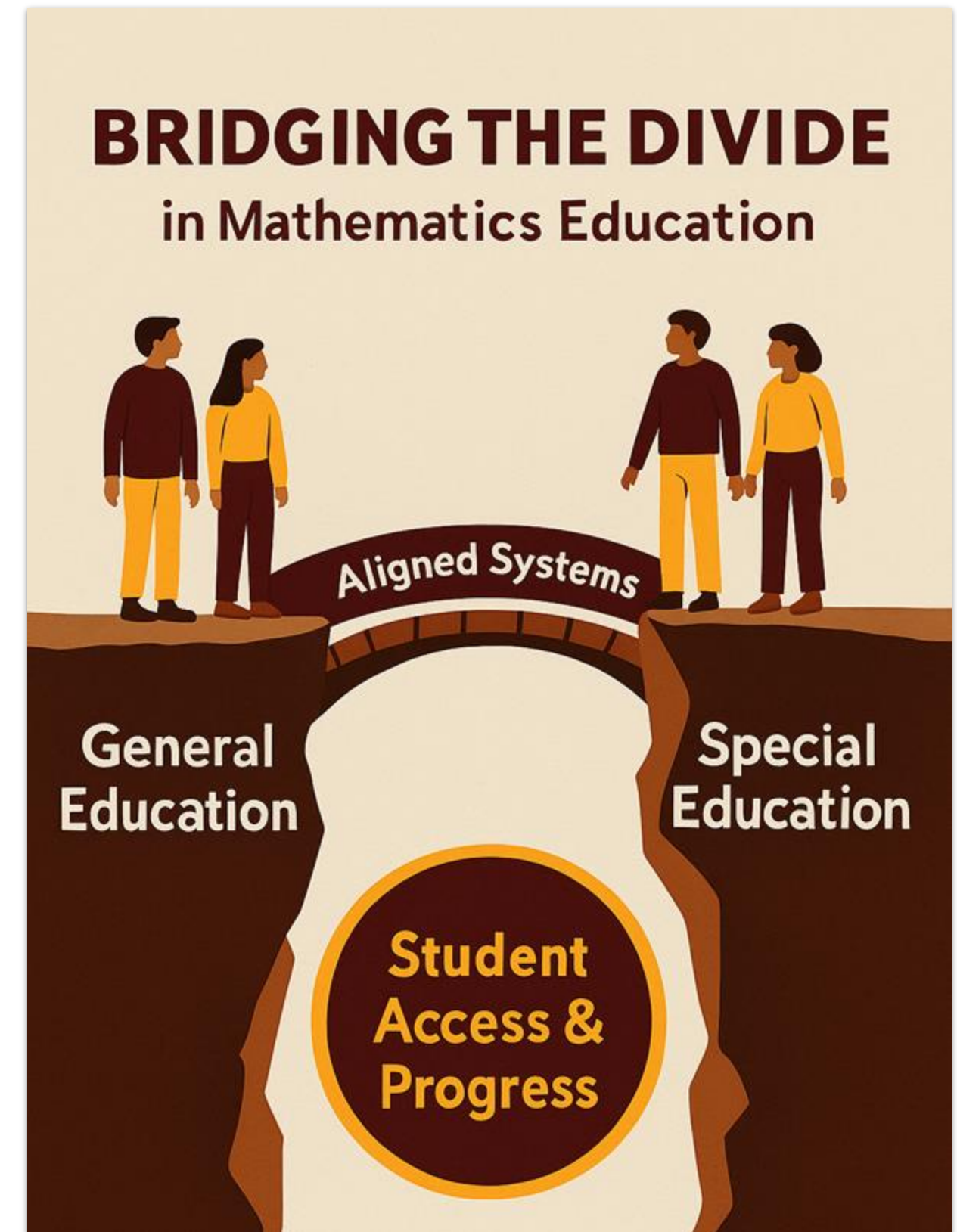
General Education	Special Education
Inquiry and Exploration	Explicit and Systematic Instruction
Productive Struggle	Error Minimization
Open-Ended Discourse	Structured Practice and Feedback
Conceptual Emphasis	Braiding of Concepts with Procedures
Student-Led Exploration	Teacher-Led Modeling

Bridging the Divide

Students with disabilities have a right to:






- appropriate supports to be successful in grade/course-level content,
- high-quality instruction aligning with content and intervention, and
- support from educators who believe in their abilities (NCTM & CEC, 2024)

How can I lead my system toward convergence?



“An equity-centered MTSS-Mathematics framework provides high-quality, culturally relevant, research-based instruction and intervention to meet the needs of each student and uses data to guide educational decisions for the whole child.” (Coddling & McKeveett, 2022, p.2)

HOW MTSS IMPLEMENTATION FULFILLS THE PROMISE OF IDEA

IDEA PRINCIPLES	MTSS COMPONENTS
 EARLY IDENTIFICATION AND PREVENTION Universal screening and progress monitoring	 EQUITABLE ACCESS TO SUPPORTS Tiered interventions based on student need
 DATA-BASED DECISION MAKING Ongoing, data-informed decisions	ALIGNMENT WITH INDIVIDUALIZED EDUCATION PROGRAMS (IEPs) Specially designed instruction and progress monitoring
 COLLABORATION AND FAMILY ENGAGEMENT Multidisciplinary team approach	LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE) Supports provided within general education 

Leadership Levers-

Building Cohesive Systems Through Leadership Strategies

Vision and Coherence:

Goal: Establish a shared vision that aligns MTSS with district priorities and student outcomes.

Strategies:

- Develop a clear, equity-focused purpose statement for MTSS.
- Use data to connect MTSS goals with the district's strategic plan.
- Communicate “why” MTSS matters across all stakeholder levels—teachers, families, and community partners.

Distributed Leadership:

Goal: Build shared ownership for MTSS implementation.

Strategies

- Create leadership teams at district, building, and grade levels with defined roles.
- Empower site leaders to use data for problem-solving and decision-making.
- Provide ongoing leadership coaching focused on systems thinking and adaptive leadership.

Leadership Levers-

Building Cohesive Systems Through Leadership Strategies

Data-Informed Continuous Improvement:

Goal: Use data cycles to drive improvement at every tier.

Strategies

- Establish data routines (e.g., problem-solving teams every 6–8 weeks).
- Train leaders to interpret data for both system health (implementation fidelity) and student outcomes.
- Use dashboards to track tiered supports and progress over time.

Capacity Building and Professional Learning:

Goal: Ensure educators have the skills, knowledge, and mindset to implement MTSS.

Strategies

- Offer professional learning aligned with MTSS essential components (screening, progress monitoring, evidence-based instruction).
- Build coaching systems to sustain new practices.
- Embed adult learning principles and job-embedded PD (professional development).

Leadership Levers-

Building Cohesive Systems Through Leadership Strategies

Collaboration and Communication:

Goal: Strengthen collaboration among departments and schools.

Strategies:

- Integrate special education, general education, and student services in one coherent system.
- Foster cross-role professional learning communities (PLCs).
- Maintain transparent communication loops across district levels.

Building Commitment:

Goal: Engage staff in shaping the shared vision and purpose

Strategies:

- Involve teachers, specialists, and paraprofessionals in defining how MTSS supports *their* instructional goals
- Address “initiative fatigue” by clarifying how MTSS connects existing efforts
- Reduce barriers and demonstrate respect for staff time
- Give staff genuine influence in the process
- Offer differentiated Professional learning

Leadership Levers-

Building Cohesive Systems Through Leadership Strategies

Equity-Centered Leadership

Goal: Ensure MTSS reduces opportunity gaps and supports each learner

Strategies

- Disaggregate data by demographic groups to identify disparities.
- Elevate student and family voice in decision-making.
- Prioritize culturally and linguistically responsive practices.

Systems Alignment and Resource Allocation

Goal: Align policies, structures, and resources to sustain MTSS

Strategies

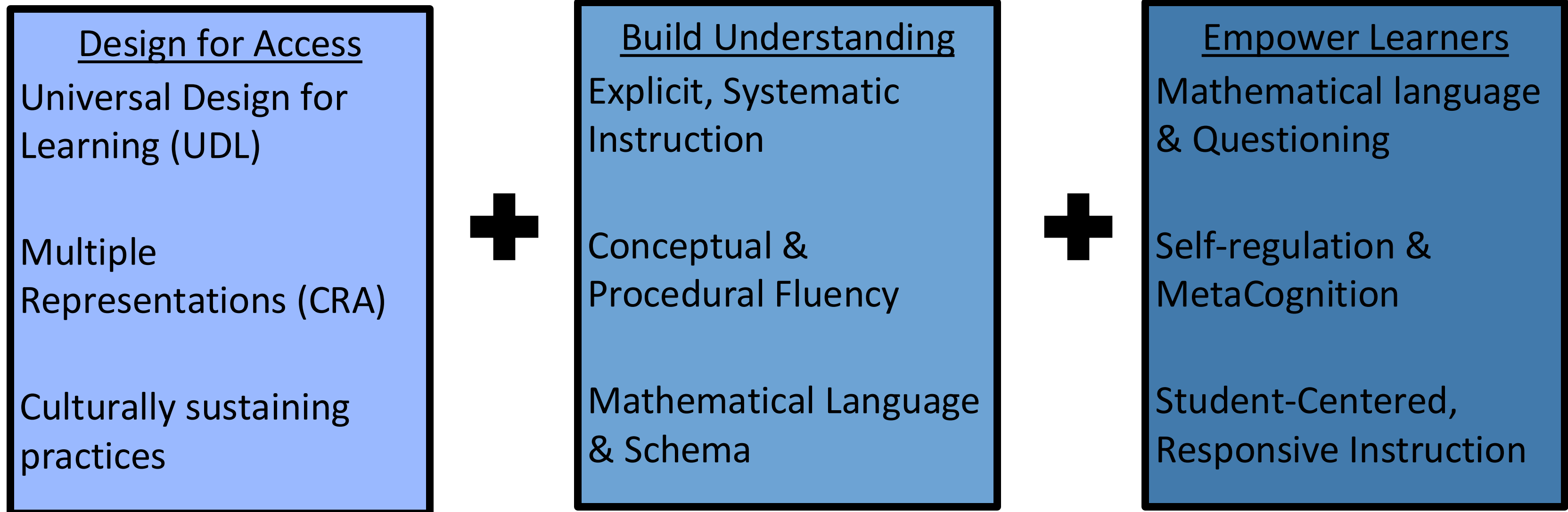
- Review and align initiatives to reduce redundancy (“initiative inventory”).
- Allocate time, funding, and personnel strategically for data and intervention work.
- Integrate MTSS into improvement planning, budgeting, and accountability processes.

What Alignment Looks Like

- Joint professional development
 - Common language building
 - Focus relentlessly on collaboration/common planning
 - Shared formative assessment
 - Maintained single vision of high expectations
- Student-centered instruction that is responsive to individual students
- Consistent improvement in math outcomes for students with disabilities



Core Instructional Practices that Bridge Fields



Reflection Activity - Where Are You Now?

1: Not Yet Started

4: Sustaining

2: Emerging

3: Developing

- Shared Math Vision
- Common Math Language
- Collaboration/Co-Planning
- Math Data System
- Data-Drive Supports
- Beliefs about Student Success

Reflection Activity - Identify an Entry Point

- **Build a Shared Vision:** Unite educators around a clear, districtwide message about what great math instruction looks like.
- **Create a Data Review Routine:** Establish a joint process for reviewing math screening and progress monitoring data - together.
- **Launch Co-Planning Between General & Special Educators:** Align planning times and instructional blocks to collaborate around student needs.
- **Invest in Common PD:** Ensure all educators “speak the same math language” through shared professional learning.
- Or...identify another entry point that fits your context!

Reflection Activity - Pair Meet-Up

- Find a partner - choose someone in the room you don't already know.
- Round 1:
 - Partner 1: Share your *entry point* (where you plan to start or focus your work)
 - Partner 2: Be the consultant - suggest one concrete action step Part 1 could take to get started.
 - Both: Take notes, then switch roles.
- When you're done, rotate and find a new partner.
- **Goal:** Talk with *at least three different people* before time is up!



Start Small. Think Big. Stay Aligned.





MASE FALL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE



Lead for Sustainability

Beginning the Work



What's one seed you're ready to plant?

Who or what will help it take root in your system?

Introducing... CAREIMath

Math for All Teachers + High achievement

CAREIMath: Math for All Teachers and High achievement

CAREI has reimagined mathematics professional learning with a system-wide approach that blends research, multi-tiered systems of support (MTSS), and applied practice. Grounded in evidence and guided by results, CAREIMath is designed for educators, coaches, and leaders at every level.

By the end of the CAREIMath Series, educators will be able to:

- Apply effective strategies to strengthen core math instruction and provide targeted support. Use system and classroom data to guide instruction and meet student needs.
- Enhance lessons and routines to boost engagement, understanding, and achievement for all students.
- Build cohesive systems that improve math outcomes across classrooms and schools.



Register for our Nov. 13 intro webinar!

Join us on
November 13
from 12-12:45
for a free webinar!

Learn more about CAREI's 2025-2026
professional learning opportunities:



Key Takeaways

for Special Education Leaders



Cohesion fulfills IDEA's promise.

Unified systems—where general and special education share a vision, language, and approach—drive equitable math outcomes.



Leadership alignment empowers teachers.

When leaders stay aligned, they create clarity, confidence, and coherence across the system.



Collaboration bridges the divide.

Joint planning, shared PD, and collective data routines strengthen instructional access for every learner.



Start small, think systemically.

Every district can begin with one clear entry point—shared vision, data routines, co-planning, or PD.



Build what lasts.

Sustainability depends on infrastructure—routines, feedback loops, and cross-role learning that outlive individual leaders.



Questions?