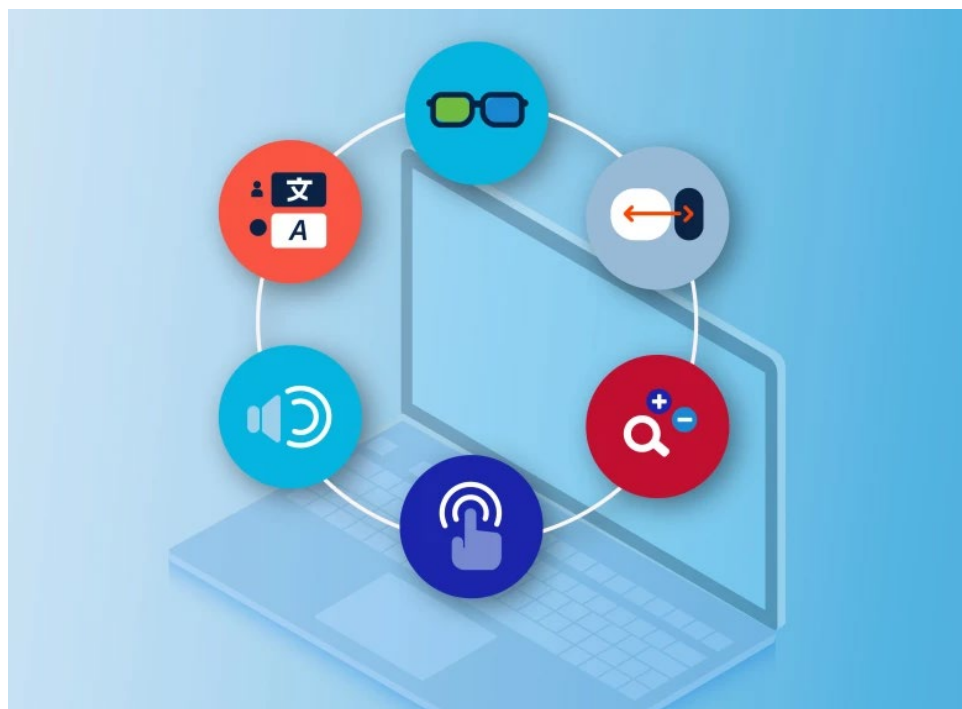


Knock Down Barriers To Inclusive Literacy Instruction



Collage via iStock/Getty

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EDITOR'S NOTE

For students with disabilities, strong literacy instruction is often the **gateway to fuller participation** in school. This collection of articles explores the policies, practices, and leadership needed to ensure access. It examines the barriers that limit students' access to tools and instruction, from funding cuts affecting deaf and blind students to **compliance challenges** for English learners with disabilities. It also highlights promising approaches, including **dismantling segregated classrooms**, creating schools where students with special needs are not singled out, and **ensuring educational technology is accessible** to all learners. Together, the stories underscore a central message: equitable access to literacy-rich instruction, inclusive environments, and the right supports can help students with disabilities thrive academically and socially.



Meron Menghistab for Education Week

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Published January 30, 2026

4 Barriers to Giving Students With Disabilities The Tools They Need to Thrive

By Evie Blad

Assistive technology can address the learning needs of students with disabilities and knock down barriers to inclusion in general education classrooms. But schools often face challenges in providing, maintaining, and using such tools to their full potential, a federal watchdog agency found.

The nonpartisan Government Accountability Office visited school districts in Minnesota, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wyoming. Investigators also interviewed educators and surveyed federally supported centers for parents of children with disabilities to learn how schools deploy assistive technology—and how those processes could be improved. Their findings were published in a Jan. 29 report.

The category of assistive technology includes a wide range of tools—everything from simple cards printed with images to help nonverbal students communicate, to more advanced computer programs that read text aloud for students with processing disorders.

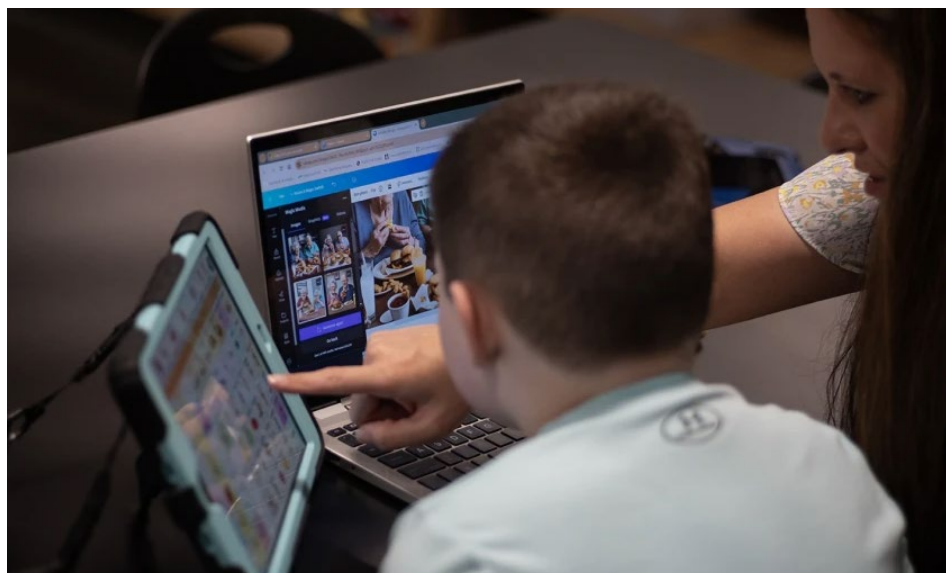
The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires schools to consider the use of the technology when they create an individualized education program, or IEP, for a student with disabilities. But systemic and logistical concerns can stand in the way, the GAO found.

“We frequently face challenges where schools lack consistency in supporting assistive technology ...” one parent-support center reported. “There is a lack of designated individuals responsible for providing training, resulting in teachers not knowing how to effectively integrate assistive technology devices or software into their classrooms.”

Here are four challenges the GAO identified.

1. Teachers, students, and families have limited awareness about the range of assistive technology options

Because assistive technology can include so many things, teachers don’t always understand the full menu of options under that umbrella, districts reported. And families may not be aware of options that could support



Doug Barrett for Education Week

Assistive technologies can be high or low tech, but teachers need help deploying them to match students with disabilities' particular needs. A speech language pathologist in Kansas City, Mo., uses an ed-tech program and its built-in AI software to help her students.

their children, so they don’t know to advocate for them in IEP meetings, the GAO found.

Low-tech options schools use include elevated surfaces to improve writing posture, pencil grips, and swivel stools. Some also use printed materials, including cards with images of school activities, like snacks or a bathroom break, which allow educators to make visual daily schedules to help students know what to expect and regulate their behavior.

Medium-tech options include microphones for teachers that transmit directly to students’ hearing aids. Some schools also use large switches and buttons to make it easier for students with limited motor skills to control devices or even turn off the lights in the classroom.

High-tech options include software that read materials aloud, personalized software programs, and communication devices students control by gazing at various images or letters with their eyes.

“Rapidly changing technology can make it difficult for school district and school staff to keep abreast of current assistive technology options,” the GAO found.

Some districts have sought to remedy these issues by creating assistive technology teams

made up of teachers, special education staff, and technology advisers who are charged with staying up-to-date with new options and consulting with teachers about how they may help students. Some districts have even created “toolboxes” of lower-tech options teachers can experiment with in the classroom.

2. Teachers and staff have limited expertise on using assistive technology

Educators, especially general education teachers, reported that they had limited or no professional development on how to identify appropriate technologies and how to use them to their full potential.

Those challenges are exacerbated by persistent, widespread special education staffing shortages and turnover, educators said.

A lack of support staff like occupational therapists can make it difficult to assess students’ needs and identify solutions. And a churn of new special education teachers, some of whom ultimately shift into general education classrooms, makes ongoing training a challenge.

Students who use assistive technology may

also lack needed training in how to use it, investigators found.

“Staff from one school district said because teachers do not have enough time to train students on how to use devices, the teachers have asked students to train other students on how to use assistive technology,” the report said. “Without receiving sufficient training, students may not use their devices.”

District-level assistive technology teams can take ownership of training and professional development, providing a consistency through staff turnover, the report said.

Districts should take advantage of technical support provided by their states and by the Center on Inclusive Technology and Education Systems, the report recommended. CITES has created an assistive technology framework for districts that includes strategies like coaching and family outreach.

3. Stigma stops teachers and students from using assistive technology

Investigators identified two forms of stigma that hinder the use of assistive technology. First, some teachers wrongly believe tools like text readers provide an unfair advantage to students who use them, administrators said. And second, some students are resistant to using devices like headphones and specialized computer programs for fear of standing out from their peers.

Some of the student stigma has eased as tools like tablets have become ubiquitous in general education classrooms, educators said. And better coaching for teachers can help them understand how specific tools help students address their needs, the report said.

4. Financial constraints pose challenges

Inadequate funding for special education is a perennial concern, and it can also make it difficult for schools to buy more sophisticated tools for students with disabilities, which can cost tens of thousands of dollars, districts said.

States can address these concerns by providing technical assistance about how districts can use federal IDEA and technology funds, the report recommended. Some states have also set up lending libraries that allow schools to share tools housed in regional resource centers. ■



Debra McAdams, executive director of the department of exceptional education at Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, visits Isaiah T. Creswell Middle School of the Arts in Nashville, Tenn.

Published February 09, 2026

How Nashville Dismantled Segregated Classrooms for Students With Disabilities

By Evie Blad

When Debra McAdams stepped into her role leading special education for Nashville schools in 2009, she knew she would immediately face a deeply entrenched system that separated students with disabilities from their peers.

Elementary and middle school students with disabilities were largely taught separately from students without disabilities, often bused past their neighborhood schools—including those attended by their siblings—to regional hubs where educators offered specialized services.

The district, the second largest in Tennessee, operated nearly 200 segregated classrooms, where students with disabilities learned apart from their peers. That included many students with relatively low support needs, such as speech impairments, most districts would place in general education classrooms for the full day. The situation wasn't just stigmatizing; it conflicted directly with a federal requirement that students with disabilities be educated in the "least restrictive environment."

It was McAdams' job to tear down those silos.

Under her leadership, the district committed to a clear principle: students with disabilities would attend their zoned neighborhood schools and participate in core general education classes unless there was a clear educational justification not to.

"All of our students, including those with disabilities, are general education students first, and we should not have separate settings," McAdams, a 2026 Leader To Learn From honoree, said. "We are all part of one big community, and the earlier that everybody understands that for all of our students, the more accepting everyone is."

'A massive mindset shift'

The transformation—part of a broader, multipronged effort to improve education in the 81,000-student Nashville district—required strategic planning, coalition-building, and deep trust-building from McAdams and her team. But the results were measurable: Before the work began in the 2008-2009 school year, about 36% of Nashville students with disabilities spent more than 80% of their time in general education classrooms, a fed-

eral metric used to define the least restrictive environment. By the 2023-24 school year, that number had climbed to 76%.

"It was a massive mind shift change," said Sonya Dobbs, the director of exceptional education student supports for Nashville schools. "It wasn't easy, and it didn't just happen. There were a lot of bumps in the road, but we stuck with it because it's what was best for [the] children."

A committee of educators, community members, and a Vanderbilt University education professor collaborated on the transformation plan with support from the city's mayor and business leaders. Students with disabilities who had previously been sent to hub schools would instead attend their neighborhood campuses, starting with kindergartners the first year and adding an additional grade each following year.

The change required a mindset shift from both special education and general education classroom teachers, McAdams said.

"We had general education teachers who had never had a child with autism or a child with an emotional disturbance in their classroom," she said. "We had to really work to ensure students had access to general education at their new schools."

To support that shift, the district created targeted professional development on inclusive classroom practices for principals, general education teachers, and special education teachers. Leaders trained staff on co-teaching strategies and classroom management, and they embedded special education in clusters of schools to aid implementation.

Special education leaders also focused on the details. One of the first changes was linguistic: The district adopted "people first" language, referring to students as individuals before referencing their disabilities. Where a teacher might have once said "a disabled child," they were encouraged to say "a child with disabilities."

At each school, leaders mapped students' support needs by cataloging all the services and accommodations outlined in every student's individualized education program, or IEP. They then ensured that general education classrooms had the resources to meet those needs—like adaptive technologies or help from a paraprofessional—and encouraged collaborative planning among general education, special education, and English-learner teachers.

Leaders also briefed parents about the changes in their children's IEP meetings, home visits, and larger meetings. While many parents were eager to send their children to neighborhood schools, some needed assur-

Brett Carlson for Education Week

ances that their needs would still be met in the new setting.

At the secondary level, the district has partnered with local employers, like the Nashville Zoo, to offer professional learning opportunities and internships for students with disabilities as part of their transition planning, said Megan Cobb, a former special education teacher who now works as a family-engagement specialist with The Arc Tennessee, an organization that helps families navigate the special education system.

McAdams is “very approachable,” Cobb said. “That’s her strength.”

Shoveling the ramp first

Ask people who work with McAdams to describe her approach to education, and many will point to a cartoon she includes in every presentation. It depicts a ramp and a staircase leading to a school, both covered in snow. Students, including one in a wheelchair, wait at the bottom while an adult shovels the stairs.

“If you shovel the ramp first, we can all go in,” the student in the wheelchair says.

“When we do something for students with disabilities, we do something for all students,” Dobbs said. “That’s really her message.”

With that philosophy in mind, the district emphasized universal design for learning practices, which stress giving students options in how they engage with material and demonstrate understanding. For example, a teacher might tape off an area around a desk, allowing a student with ADHD to stand and move without disrupting classmates. Clearly posted lesson goals and classroom expectations can support students with disabilities who value predictability, but they may also help all students stay engaged in their work.

As logistics and classroom practices shifted, educators noticed less formal but equally powerful signs of inclusion. Students with disabilities no longer had separate field trips and separate tables in school lunchrooms, McAdams said.

“I knew we’d made progress when I opened a yearbook, and there was no longer a separate page for the special education classroom,” she said.

A teacher at heart

McAdams earned credibility with educators because she had spent years as a special education teacher in a variety of environments before stepping into leadership, said David Williams, the deputy chief of academics for the district.

After growing up in Long Island, N.Y., McAdams attended Mansfield University in Pennsylvania before working in a lab school for students with disabilities at Lehigh University, co-teaching students by day and going to class at night.

She held roles as a master teacher, a coordinator for students transitioning to college and career, and a behavioral interventionist before moving to Nashville in 1999. There, she taught at a K-8 school in the Nashville district serving students who needed extensive support for behavioral difficulties. In 2006, she helped create a similar school for high school students.

“It’s difficult because you’re dealing with very aggressive behaviors all day long and students who have had major trauma in their life,” McAdams said. “But at the end of the day, those kids knew that we cared about them and that we weren’t giving up on them.”

Today, McAdams leads the district’s largest academic department, which has about 400 employees, including coaches, behavior interventionists, school psychiatrists, and other staff, Williams said. She has deep expertise in special education law, but she’s also still a teacher at heart, he said.

Williams recalled visiting a middle school classroom with McAdams and noticing a student struggling to manage his emotions.

“The first thing Debbie does is sit on the floor next to him and talk to him. She had never met him before, but that part of her nature just turned on,” he said. “She carries that clarity and credibility into interactions with kids, lawyers in remediation, parents, principals.”

A process that never ends

McAdams acknowledges that the district still has work to do.

Like most districts, Nashville struggled to address the needs of students with disabilities during the abrupt shift to remote learning in March 2020. Parents worried about lost instructional time for their children when services like physical therapy couldn’t be delivered in a remote environment and when technology platforms didn’t seem to fit their complex learning needs, said Tiffany Acuff, who chaired the district’s Exceptional Education Families Advisory Council during the pandemic.

Acuff credited McAdams for her willingness to hold online forums to hear concerns from families of children with disabilities, even when there weren’t clear answers. Acuff also ran a private Facebook group for parents, and met with McAdams weekly to share feedback.

Despite significant progress, the district fell short of the state’s least restrictive environment targets last year, McAdams said. In response, educators are auditing IEPs school by school to determine what resources they need to provide in general education classrooms to ensure students with disabilities can spend more time learning with their peers.

It’s a process of continuous improvement that will never end, McAdams said.

“This is not just me,” she said. “This is our department, this is our team, this is our district.” ■



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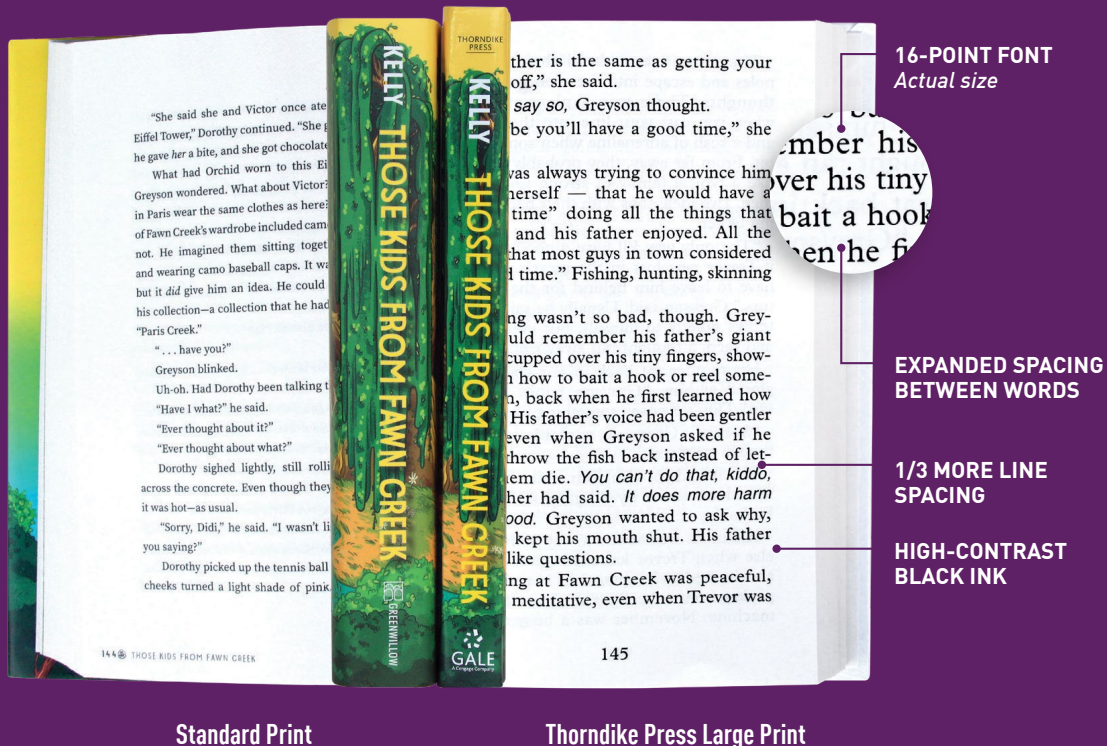
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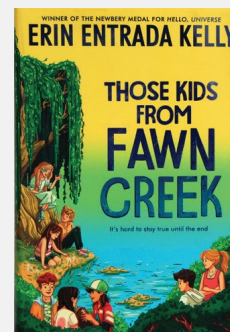


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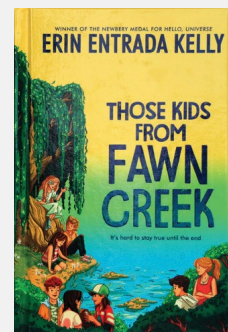
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Published October 07, 2025

Trump Funding Cuts Hit Particularly Hard For Deaf and Blind Children

By Mark Lieberman

April Wilson is responsible for teaching 36 students this school year—not squeezed into a single classroom, but spread among 19 school buildings in 12 districts across rural southern Illinois.

For her job as one of only two itinerant teachers of the visually impaired, or VI, in all of Illinois, Wilson drives as many as 1,400 miles a month. Not only does she provide instruction for blind students from ages 3 to 21, she has to supply special equipment for them, too—and make sure they, and their teachers, know how to use it.

To help her brush up on some of the skills required for the job, Wilson enrolled this fall in a 10-month Braille training program offered virtually by the University of Massachusetts. Class started a few weeks ago.

“Some VI teachers can go years at a time and not teach Braille,” Wilson said. “When we get that student who’s blind in our district, we’d better get ready.”

But the future of her professional development is in jeopardy. On Sept. 5, after business hours on a Friday, the U.S. Department of Education abruptly announced it was discontinuing the federal grant paying for Wilson’s program, along with more than 30 other ongoing grants related to special education totaling nearly \$30 million over the next three years.

Nearly a third of those grants were promoting efforts to support K-12 students who have both vision and hearing impairments—among the most complex and rare of all the learning disabilities.

In addition to Wilson’s program, federal funds for two other Braille training grant programs got the axe, as did grants for three university programs training interpreters to work with deaf people of all ages and four state deaf-blind projects, which help schools serve students who have both visual and hearing impairments.

Earlier this year, as part of a broader crack-down on federal funding for Columbia University, the Trump administration also canceled \$2.5 million in scholarship grants for Columbia students training to become teachers of



Michael B. Thomas for Education Week

Ryker Elam works with itinerant teacher April Wilson at Greenville Elementary in Greenville, Ill. Wilson is a teacher of the visually impaired who works at schools across rural Illinois. A Braille training program Wilson enrolled in this fall was among dozens of special education-related programs for which the U.S. Department of Education has ended grant funding.

the deaf, as well as several National Institutes of Health grants for programs supporting deaf college students exploring science careers.

Now, the nationwide community of children with impaired vision, hearing, or both, as well as their families and the educators who support them, is on high alert.

“If our students don’t have the best quality of teachers, what are we really giving them?” Wilson said.

Federal funding supplies crucial support for vulnerable students

Advocates for all the affected programs say federal funding was a crucial lifeline for programs serving a small population of children with big, complex needs.

Out of more than 73 million children under 18 nationwide, roughly 630,000 are blind or visually impaired; more than 300,000 are deaf or hearing-impaired; and close to 11,000 are deaf-blind, meaning they have both hearing and visual impairments. K-12 students with those conditions qualify for special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The special education field is already under strain. Widespread shortages of qualified teachers leave educators like Wilson responsible for dozens more students than they would ideally handle. This year alone, schools that serve deaf and blind students in Alaska, Arizona, and Indiana have weathered budget cuts, as have deaf studies programs at universities in Minnesota, New York, and Utah.

Discontinued federal grants supporting students with vision and hearing impairments—\$3.4 million worth for the upcoming fiscal year, and another \$3.1 million that was set to roll out in future years—came from programs under Part D of IDEA, and from the Rehabilitation Services Administration in the Education Department.

The grant terminations have all fallen under the umbrella of the Trump administration’s efforts to eradicate diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives both within and outside the federal government.

The administration has also proposed that Congress eliminate IDEA Part D altogether, and instead increase investment in Part B formula grants for special education services in schools. U.S. House and Senate committees

have so far rejected that proposal in budget bills that were advancing through their respective chambers before the government shutdown.

Programs losing funding have policies or practices that “conflict with the department’s policy of prioritizing merit, fairness, and excellence in education,” or “violate the letter or purpose of federal civil rights law,” wrote Murray Besette, who currently leads the department’s office of planning, evaluation, and policy development in notices to grantees that their awards were ending.

Oftentimes, such notices have highlighted passages in grant applications that emphasize diversity-oriented goals—often because the department required grantees to include them when applying—but haven’t noted any problems with grantees’ performance or accomplishments.

The department didn’t answer a request for comment in time for publication.

Deaf-blind centers fill gaps for families in needs

Many state education agencies have offices that support deaf students or blind students, but state-funded services for the smaller population of deaf-blind students are few and far between, said Maurice Belote, who leads the National Deafblind Coalition, an advocacy group.

To fill that gap, IDEA mandates the existence of federally funded deaf-blind centers. Congress annually invests roughly \$12 million for close to 50 of those centers. Funding has remained essentially flat for the last three decades, despite inflation.

Deaf-blind students are “the quintessence of the populations that gave rise to special education: they are an extremely low-incidence population, challenged as learners, and difficult to instruct under traditional conditions,” wrote the authors of a 2018 federally funded analysis of deaf-blind center programs and services.

Katrina Noyes didn’t know where to turn when, in 2023, her son Jasper, then 1 year old, failed a hearing test after having already been diagnosed with retinal damage that was impairing his vision.

“I was just like, ‘What am I going to do with a kid who can’t see and can’t hear?’ This is just wild. This is so insanely beyond what I expected,” Noyes said.

A quick Google search turned up the Massachusetts Deaf-Blind Center, so she emailed its director, Tracy Evans-Luiselli. The cen-

ter, based at the Perkins School for the Blind outside of Boston, serves students in Massachusetts as well as Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, and Vermont.

“She just replied, ‘I’ll be there next week, I’ll come see you,’” said Noyes, who lives an hour’s drive outside Boston. “She has been visiting us in person at least once a month since then.”

Evans-Luiselli has brought Jasper, now 3, toys appropriate for kids with his needs; accompanied Noyes to appointments with doctors and therapists; connected the Noyes family to a community of other parents of children with similar challenges; and helped coordinate services for Jasper’s preschool instruction at home.

Noyes has never paid Evans-Luiselli a cent and was shocked to learn recently of the Massachusetts center’s small budget.

“She’s definitely provided way more than what it seems like \$1,000 per kid would get us,” Noyes said.

Grant cuts threatened highly-regarded and well-established programs

On Sept. 5, Evans-Luiselli received a notification from the U.S. Department of Education that the Massachusetts deaf-blind center’s grant would be discontinued after Sept. 30.

Identical notices went out to her deaf-blind project peers in Oregon, Wisconsin, and Washington state. The department also discontinued grants for four state education agencies and 20 universities investing in training educators working with students with disabilities; and for three nonprofit resource centers for parents of children with disabilities.

All of these cuts were part of a larger effort by the Trump administration to pull back hundreds of education grants it claims were clashing with administration policy priorities.

For some discontinued grants, agency officials have cited policies that state law requires grantees to have, or language the original grant materials, published before President Donald Trump took office in January, urged applicants to include.

According to the department’s letter, the Oregon Deaf-Blind Center lost its grant because Portland Public Schools, which serves as the center’s grant recipient, operates a Center for Black Student Excellence—even though it’s completely separate from the deaf-blind center.

“I know it’s there, but it doesn’t have anything to do with our project,” said Lisa McConachie, project director for Oregon’s deaf-blind center.

Seventeen U.S. senators—all Democrats—are urging U.S. Secretary of Education Linda McMahon to reinstate all the discontinued special education grants, and answer questions by Oct. 14 about her agency’s decision to nix them.

“This unprompted reallocation of funding places students, families, teachers, and schools at risk of losing access to critical services, programs, and technical assistance to meet the individualized needs of students with disabilities,” wrote the senators in a Sept. 30 letter to McMahon. Signatories include the ranking member of the chamber’s education committee, as well as all the senators from Maryland, Massachusetts, Oregon, and Washington state.

Non-continuation notices gave grantees one week to submit an appeal request to the department. Within four weeks of issuing the non-continuation notices, the Department of Education had already rejected appeal requests from all the defunded programs related to deaf and blind students, grantees told Education Week.

On top of the four deaf-blind centers, the Trump administration also discontinued seven grants—each worth \$420,000 a year—fueling training programs for educators and others who work with deaf and blind people of all ages.

In addition to the Massachusetts program April Wilson is attending, the Trump administration discontinued the final four years of funding for the only other ongoing federal grants for Braille training, at the California State University system and the University of South Carolina. The department awarded those Braille training grants last year in the final year of the Biden administration, marking the first such awards in five years.

Similar cuts came down for four programs training interpreters to work with deaf children and adults.

At Western Oregon University, a federal grant for interpreter training was fueling efforts to conduct research and expand resources around “pro-tactile language”—a method of using touch to communicate words, ideas, and spatial information.

Amy Parker, an associate professor of special education at Portland State University, used some of those materials to help her students learn how to teach deaf-blind people to make maps. The Western Oregon instructor, herself a deaf-blind individual, even visited Parker’s class to walk them through activities face to face.

“It was just really beautiful and rare,” Park-

er said. “I can’t say how much of a loss this is to an already underserved community to have this knowledge disappear.”

Online course materials for the Western Oregon University training were due to expire on Oct. 1, but instructors managed to find another organization willing to host them on its website. But the program no longer has staff available to answer questions, project leaders wrote in an email to class participants announcing the federal cancellation.

More than 13,000 people participated in one of the university’s interpreter training programs or accessed the online modules during their nine-year lifespan, according to project leaders.

“May this grant only be the beginning of what comes next for those learning about the DeafBlind community and their language,” they wrote.

The department also discontinued interpreter training grants at Idaho State University; St. Catherine University in Minnesota; and the University of Northern Colorado. All four were expecting their fifth and final year of grant funding to flow on Oct. 1.

The department has said it plans to award the funds from the discontinued training grants to other Rehabilitation Services Administration programs. The agency hasn’t said whether it will continue funding Braille or interpreter training.

Parker added, “You can’t give a national Braille training grant to someone else and they’ll just pick up and take over.”

A glimmer of hope has emerged for some grant recipients

In recent weeks, an unexpected lifeline has emerged for the deaf-blind centers.

The Education Department rerouted the clawed-back funds from the four state-level programs whose grants it ended to the federally funded National Center on Deafblindness. That organization, in turn, offered to let the four state centers that had lost their awards serve as subcontractors to the national group.

In effect, those four centers can now continue their planned programming for the current school year. But all four will have to apply next year to regain their distinction as designated centers for their respective states.

“Families deserve consistency, they deserve equality, they deserve access to qualified staff and information so their kids can be in school,” McConachie, the Oregon center’s director, said. “We’re not sure of what’s going to come, but we’re hopeful.”

Other grantees serving deaf and blind

students have a steeper path to continuing their work.

Some universities may be able to continue Braille and interpreter training using other funding sources. Western Oregon University isn’t among them—the pro-tactile language program there “will not be able to continue,” a spokesperson confirmed.

Spokespeople for the other affected universities didn’t return requests for comment in time for publication.

Wilson said her University of Massachusetts instructor has told students the course itself will continue, but original plans for participants to take the Braille knowledge they gain and spread it to others might be on hold. She and her fellow students also might not get the \$2,000 stipend that was promised to cover child care and technology expenses.

The Columbia University professors who ran the deaf education program there said earlier this year that 24 aspiring teachers would lose training opportunities that were planned for the next three years.

“That doesn’t seem like a huge number,” the program’s co-director, Elaine Smolen, told KPBS in April. “But the impact of 24 teachers working with 30-plus students a year, that’s huge.”

Schools and students are already feeling ripple effects from the mere threat of disruption to all these programs.

Several state directors postponed community gatherings and training sessions they had already scheduled for September and October. Others froze long-term planning efforts as rumors swirled that cuts were on the horizon. One center had already seen several staff members depart for new jobs before the continuation award arrived, leaving openings that will be difficult to fill with qualified candidates.

Noyes worries about the long-term effects of reducing investment in nationwide efforts to support children like her son.

Jasper’s ventilator prevents him from being able to speak, he’s spent most of his life in a hospital, and he can’t use some of the devices designed for visual impairments because of his hearing challenges.

Even so, his mother said, “he also has a lot of potential and has shown an ability to learn and be interested in his environment and be really cheerful and happy. With the right help, we can only further that and move it along and make his life better. I really think he deserves that.”

“This is such a niche issue that the importance of a national network is so huge,” Noyes said. “The expertise is so limited that if you push this to the states, a lot of students are going to fall through the cracks.” ■



Terri Daniels, the principal of Folsom Middle School in California, poses with National Association of Secondary School Principals President Raquel Martinez and NASSP CEO Ronn Nozo. Daniels was named the 2025 NASSP Advocacy Champion of the Year and recognized in Washington, D.C.

Published April 18, 2025

Speaking Up for Students Is Part Of This Principal's Job

Terri Daniels advocates for students with disabilities in her school and on Capitol Hill

By Olina Banerji

Terri Daniels, the principal of Folsom Middle School in Folsom, Calif., believes that principals have a responsibility that goes far beyond the school building.

Over her 40 years as an educator, and 17 of those as an administrator, Daniels sees it as part of her role to speak up—for her students, her staff, and her community—and has applied this maxim to her advocacy with legislators, school board members, and parents alike.

“If we don’t tell our own stories, they’ll be made up for us,” she said. “[School leaders] are really in the trenches. We’re working with our teachers, we’re working with our students, ... we are the ones letting people know what’s going on in our schools.”

Last month, Daniels—who was recently named the National Advocacy Champion of the Year by the National Association of Secondary School Principals—was in the nation’s capital to meet with her state representatives

and lobby for continued federal support for services essential to students with disabilities or those from low-income households.

Back home, Daniels is a regular at community and rotary club meetings and hosts several parent nights to keep the community informed about the support her teachers, paraeducators, and even students provide children with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities in her school. Out of 1,600 students in her school, about 300 require special education services.

Within Folsom, Daniels and her staff started a buddy system five years ago that pairs up students in general education classes with students with disabilities during gym class or elective periods like choir practice. The buddy system, Daniels said, has expanded, with more students signing up than there are spaces available.

Advocating on behalf of students and teachers is a key part of Daniels’ job—but it wasn’t always considered part of the principal’s role, she said.

When Daniels was a special educator and history teacher, the principal was a “disciplinarian,” a figure out of reach for students and parents. The contemporary principal cuts a very different figure, said Daniels, with a much expanded set of responsibilities and an obligation to “tell our stories to those who [make] our laws.”

Daniels said she was happy within the confines of her classroom. She’d trained as a history teacher and was certified as a special educator. Getting an administrator license was more of a failsafe.

“As a single mother, then with three kids, I realized to make any money in education, I should get the license,” said Daniels.

She interviewed for an assistant principal’s role on a whim—and got the job. Daniels has been an administrator ever since, and her background in special education has helped her connect better to students with disabilities, and the educators who teach them, she said.

Aspiring administrators should have dedicated training on special education, Daniels said, to “truly understand the different types of disabilities, services, and support that students now require.”

Daniels received the title of the National Advocacy Champion of the Year due to her work in special education, as well as her advocacy for better mental health services and parent engagement. Education Week spoke with Daniels about the honor and why the role of the principal-advocate is more important now than ever before.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

What are the current challenges in supporting students with disabilities?

There are a lot of things that I believe were written with very good intention [in the laws], but what it looks like on the ground floor in schools is not necessarily as effective as we would like it to be.

The [Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the federal education law] is written with a lot of restraints and a lot of expectations on schools, and we’re not able to always fulfill those expectations. We have only been funded about 12 percent when we should be funded at 40 percent.

Another part of it that’s truly impacting [special education] is that not a lot of people are going into the field, and so we are having to hire interns and new teachers in positions with some of our most difficult classes. That

leads to a high burnout rate and maybe not the [highest] quality of educators. When I'm in Washington, D.C., I [talk about] how I'm very much bothered by the fact that we can't meet compliance because of some of the requirements in [IDEA]. There's just not people that we can get to fulfill those positions.

In your school, what efforts have you made to better support students with disabilities?

A lot of my advocacy is geared toward supporting parents. Parents use the IDEA law for what they believe is best for their students, when in the long run, it may actually be hindering their students.

For example, requesting a one-on-one paraeducator for their child, when having that person following that student around may actually hinder their ability to be more independent. The student [will] rely on that person more than they need to.

Focusing on the disabilities more than the abilities of that child can be detrimental. Our goal is always to help them to be independent human beings once they leave the program.

How do you get your message across to parents and the larger school community?

Through social media, through blogging, through local news stations. I talk to parent-teacher groups. I've gone into my own community, and spoken about special education to Rotary Clubs, etc., to get the word out about how, as a community, [we can] work together on what is the best way to educate.

It's my main goal to educate [people] on what's actually happening and what's needed in the schools. I advocate for resources so that we're better able and better equipped to meet the needs of students.

In my own personal school district right now, they are offering incentives for even our paraeducators to go back to school and get a teaching credential, because there's just not enough special education teachers to fill all the spots.

More generally, to address mental health needs of middle schoolers, I'm trying to work with parents on understanding the adolescent brain. Middle school is such a unique time for students. Kids are growing up. I want to support parents so that they can support their children.

I started a parent series where I meet with parents every Tuesday night in person. It's a

four-week series where I will cover how parents can understand what's going on with their students socially and emotionally during these years as they enter adolescence.

I just started it this spring. But it's already overwhelming because of the number of parents who've signed up.

You also started a peer-support program in your school for kids with disabilities. How is that going?

I have to give credit to my teachers who created this program with me. We have "buddy" PE, art, and choir classes for students with severe disabilities. Students who are typically developing can sign up to partner with them.

In each of those classes, general education students are assigned to a special education student and they work with that student, whether it be on their art projects or their PE assignments. It's just been a really, really great program. It gets the students with disabilities more integrated into the general education community, and their buddies look out for them. The general education students get credits for these classes like they would for an elective class.

Some of the students who have signed up for the program [five years ago] have gone on to high school. Some of them come back. Some of them are looking at going into teaching special needs. That's a plus right there. We were able to give them that experience in middle school, and it's something that they saw value in, and made it their goal for their future jobs. ■

Published February 28, 2025

The Steps Schools Should Take So All Students Can Use Ed Tech

By Lauraine Langreo

Much of what a student needs to do for school is online nowadays. Students need to access and submit their assignments on learning management systems; teachers use videos, online quiz apps, or digital games for student engagement; and an increasing number of schools are using adaptive learning programs to help supplement instruction.

But these digital tools are not always built to accommodate all students, especially those with disabilities or multilingual learners. Some educational technologies might not have captions for videos, their content might not be easily readable by students who need to use screen readers, or they might not have the option for students with physical disabilities to verbalize their responses.

To help schools create more accessible digital learning environments, the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Educational Technology and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services in January published a brief on digital accessibility that provides recommendations for districts to consider. The brief was produced under the direction of the Biden administration, not the current Trump administration.

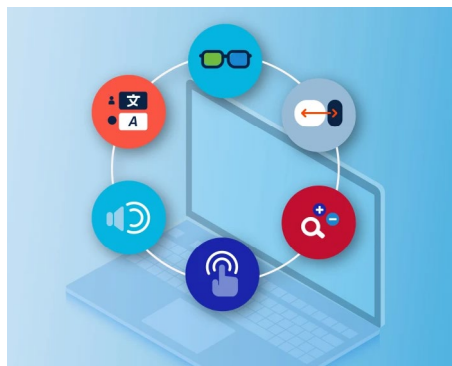
The accessibility advice for schools came nine months after an update to regulations for Title II of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which calls for public entities—including schools—to verify that those with vision, hearing, cognitive, and manual dexterity disabilities can access their online content.

In a conversation with Education Week, Desmond Rudd, an American University professor who works on special education issues and served as the project lead for developing the Education Department brief, discussed what accessibility is, why it's important, and what schools need to do to ensure their digital infrastructure meets the needs of all students.

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.

What does the brief mean by 'digital accessibility'?

We're really focused on making sure that when we're talking about online platforms



Collage via iStock/Getty

and engaging students from the digital perspective—anything that is based online or using any form of technology—students should be able to have equal access and opportunity to whatever is happening within that classroom, regardless of their disability. [It's about] specifically making sure that we're reducing the barriers within our classroom environment when using technology.

Why do K-12 schools need to think about this?

When we talk about digital infrastructure, accessibility is a prerequisite. It is foundational. [The digital infrastructure] impacts our daily lives. It's a huge part of us making sense of what is happening, of being able to determine whether something is factual or not factual. It's also the distance between whether or not someone's going to have a solid education.

For instance, let's think about someone who may be hearing-impaired or has a visual impairment of some sort. That can be very difficult if their resources online aren't accessible. It isn't conducive for learning.

That is why it is so important that we should be talking about this, that schools should be worried about it, because it is producing the next generation of leaders within our society.

What's one thing districts and schools need to do if they want to make their digital infrastructure more accessible?

The first thing that they could do is stop working in silos. When we talk about creating things that are accessible, it's not just a special education department's job. The school lead-

ership needs to be on board with it. The IT department needs to be on board with it, as well as procurement. We need to make sure that we are communicating with each other, sharing ideas and thoughts around what we think about accessibility and how we approach it.

What other steps should schools take?

Assess what you have, what you don't have, and bring in everyone in the room, including special educators, your speech language pathologist who deals with the assistive technology pieces; you want to bring in school leaders' voices, as well as your procurement team. Bringing them all to the table is going to be really important as you talk about the idea of digital accessibility.

Once you do that, gather information, thoughts, and opinions around how you all define digital accessibility and create specific pieces around who's responsible for what.

Engage with other school districts. People are doing this work across our country. We've seen it, and it's highlighted within our accessibility brief, as well as our national ed-tech plan. Be in community with those who are also having the same issues, because you're not the only school having issues around digital accessibility.

The last part within that is to develop a rigorous plan so that everyone understands who's a part of what. Educate your families on what's happening. ■



Published November 14, 2024

English Learners With Disabilities: The Rules Schools Have to Follow

By Ileana Najarro

The English learner population in the United States stands at about 5.2 million students. Sixteen percent of these students also have disabilities. So, in addition to English-language instruction, they're legally entitled to special education services.

While most schools are doing right by these students and their families, there remains confusion over how schools can ensure they're following all federal laws that apply to these dual-identified students, said Laurene Christensen, the director of accessibility research at WIDA, which administers English-language-proficiency assessments in most states.

Not all states have clear guidance on how to meet both the English-language development and disability-related needs of students. Sometimes educators face challenges determining whether a student's needs for extra support are related to their disability or the fact that they're still mastering English.

Many schools still provide that extra help to students by pulling them out of a general education classroom both for English-language and disability-related support, which can keep students from getting exposed to all the academic content their peers are learning. And

schools might have translators on hand to help parents whose first language isn't English—but when an English learner also has a disability, those translators also need to be well-versed in individualized education programs, or IEPs.

Now, the U.S. Department of Education's office for civil rights has tried to clarify matters. It published a fact sheet on Nov. 12 detailing some of the legal requirements schools must follow when educating English learners with disabilities and fulfilling their duties under civil rights laws and those establishing rights of individuals with disabilities.

"I think that we have a moral obligation to treat all students equitably in this country," Christensen said, "and so I think that this is a great list of things to consider when you're thinking about supporting multilingual learners with disabilities."

Federal guidance offers scenarios for schools to avoid

Schools risk violating federal civil rights laws—and thus prompting an investigation from the office for civil rights—in a number of scenarios OCR laid out.

Schools can't, for example:

- Determine that students who are English learners also have disabilities

only on the basis of their limited English proficiency.

- Determine that students who are English learners and who have disabilities do not need disability-related services because they receive English-learner services.
- Delay disability-related evaluations, placements, or services because of a student's English-language needs, or vice versa.
- Force a student who is eligible for both English-learner services and disability-related services—or their parent or legal guardian—to choose between English-learner services or disability-related services.
- Only provide disability-related services in English for a student who is an English learner and requires some or all services in their native language.
- Schedule English-language and disability-related services at the same time, forcing students to miss one type of service they require.
- Communicate with a parent with limited English proficiency about a student's special education services exclusively in English.

The OCR's full—though not exhaustive—list of scenarios for schools to avoid can be found on the fact sheet here.

Translators don't always know the details of special education

Christensen has come across some of these listed examples in her research and work with schools on serving students who need English-language and special education services.

"We hear from time to time that people think that you need to wait to evaluate a student for a disability," she said. "Of course, we want to make sure that they're not being mistakenly identified because of language proficiency, but [the fact sheet] also gets into that, too, because it talks about how it's important to make sure that the evaluation is conducted in the student's home language, if needed."

Sometimes, it's a challenge for schools to find translators who are well-versed in IEPs,

though Christensen said training programs exist to help translators grow their knowledge base.

Christensen hopes schools give equal weight to students' English-language development and disability-related needs, even as questions remain about the future of federal funding to support English-learner and special-education services as a new presidential administration prepares to take office.

"It's probably too early to tell what will happen in the future, but I'm personally very committed, and I know WIDA is really committed, to serving the educators who work with all of our multilingual learners, including those with disabilities," Christensen said. "We should just keep on doing this important work because these kids and their educators really deserve it." ■

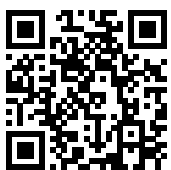


“For the first time, my son read because he wanted to.”

—Amy Dix



Hear from Amy



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87%

of **teachers** saw improved reading success

71%

reported Lexile gains of two grade levels for at-grade readers

81%

noted reduced anxiety among struggling readers

89%

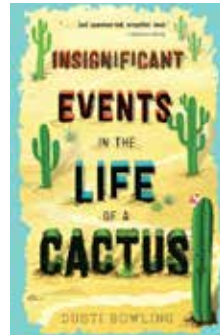
of **students** said they enjoyed reading large print

The 12 Titles in Sid's Collection

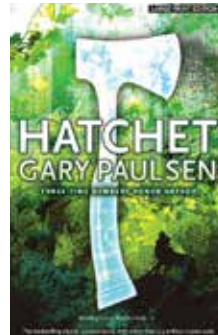


A kid-approved mix of adventure, heart, and imagination—handpicked by Sid himself.

Curated through the eyes of a young reader, Sid's Collection celebrates stories kids want to read—books that spark focus, imagination, and confidence. Each title was selected with input from Sid and a team of literacy professionals, creating a truly **kid-approved collection** built for classrooms, libraries, and young readers everywhere.



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Adventure



I, Cosmo
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9781432874209
Fiction



Pax
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Fiction



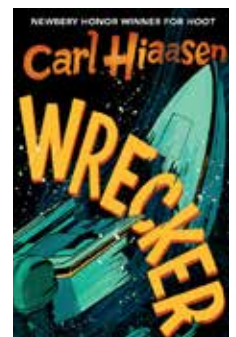
A Rover's Story
Warga, Jasmine
9798885783163
Fiction



Dogtown
Applegate, Katherine;
Choldenko, Gennifer
9798885794565
Fiction



The One and Only Ivan
Applegate, Katherine
9781432860400
Fiction



Wrecker
Hiaasen, Carl
9798885797887
Adventure



Published April 14, 2024

Inside a School That Doesn't Single Out Students With Special Needs

By Caitlynn Peetz Stephens

When students walk into Ruby Bridges Elementary School to start their day, nobody is pulled aside or separated from their peers to receive special instruction.

There's no need.

Everything at the school—from the seating to staffing—was designed to ensure students with disabilities can learn alongside their peers, transforming what has traditionally been a model of exclusion in U.S. public schools to one of inclusion and belonging.

Ruby Bridges opened in 2020 and the staff at the Woodinville, Wash., school have spent the past four years creating an environment that conveys to every child who walks in: “We thought of you when we made this place, and today could not happen if you weren't a part of it,” said Principal Cathi Davis.

“So obviously we don't want you to leave the classroom to do something else because, then, how could science [class] be the same?” she said. “It's this idea for kids that they are so important that something would be missing in a unique way if they weren't there.”

The K-5 elementary school about 20 miles northeast of Seattle serves just under 500 students. It's one of 16 schools in Washington state that partner with the Haring Center for Inclusive Education at University of Washington with the goal of demonstrating that all students benefit when schools are deliberately crafted with the needs of students with disabilities in mind.

There's no singling out students with special needs

At Ruby Bridges, staff have structured everything around the idea of keeping students with special needs in mainstream classrooms as much as possible.

Instead of pulling students with complex needs into separate classrooms for lessons specially tailored to their needs, they head to class with their peers.

There, everyone has access to supports traditionally outlined in students' IEPs or 504 plans, like the ability to take breaks when



Meron Menghistab for Education Week

During recess at Ruby Bridges Elementary School in Woodinville, Wash., students have access to cards with objects and words on them so that all students, including those who do not speak, can communicate. Pictured here, a student who has been taught how to lead and use commands with a campus service dog does so under the supervision of a staff member.

feeling overwhelmed. Students may choose to wear lanyards around their necks with cards that display words and pictures so they can communicate with classmates who do not speak. Some students may choose to learn in a group with the teacher, while others might work independently on a tablet with headphones on.

Many students at Ruby Bridges—where about 16 percent of students are identified as having disabilities—can't communicate verbally, so every student has access to assistive communication devices, like picture boards or computers that synthesize speech from text.

“Our responsibility is to have a school with classrooms that are ready for kids, not a school where kids are forced to be ready for classrooms,” Davis said.

In practice, this means that students with disabilities spend 80 to 100 percent of their academic time with grade-level peers.

There are resource rooms students can use when they need a break or for a specific, one-on-one activity with a paraprofessional, but they are all “flex spaces” with no set schedule. They are open to everyone, Davis said.

Instead of pulling students out of class for extra help with phonics or other skills, paraprofessionals come to them. The same goes for English learners.

And rather than having a designated paraprofessional assigned to each student who needs that level of extra support, paraprofessionals work with different students all the time. In the morning, they could be supporting an advanced math group and working with a different group on phonics in the afternoon.

What's more, small group and intervention time is built into the calendar for everyone so that when paraprofessionals come in to work with specific students, nobody is singled out—everybody is working on something, and nobody is missing a whole-class lesson.

The setup reduces stigma that students may feel when they're singled out for extra help, Davis said.

“You see lots of adults everywhere, and it's because no one's working separately behind closed doors, and all of the adults in the school are communicating and collaborating to support all students,” Davis said. “Kids pick up on

if one para only helps kids who are really struggling with one thing, so there's a very specific effort to make a heterogeneous mix."

Belonging can be 'elusive for students with disabilities'

There is increasing evidence that work to create a full sense of belonging for students with disabilities, like what's happening at Ruby Bridges, benefits all students' achievement and social skills.

Students with special needs perform better when they spend significantly more time in mainstream classrooms than in special education rooms, according to researchers who, writing in the *Journal of Special Education* in 2022, found that the students who spent more time in mainstream classrooms were exposed to more rigorous coursework. Researchers have also found that the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms has resulted in students without disabilities learning how to respect others and gaining awareness and skills to help others. Several studies over the years examining these more inclusive practices have found either neutral or positive effects on all students' performance in core subjects like math and reading.

"Belonging matters for kids with disabilities in the same ways it matters for any other student in our schools. The difference is that belonging can be much more elusive for students with disabilities," said Erik Carter, the executive director of the Baylor Center for Developmental Disabilities at Baylor University who has conducted extensive research on the topic.

Only including students with disabilities in activities outside of class, such as recess and lunch—or including them in classes that aren't set up to accommodate their needs—isn't enough to foster a sense of real belonging and camaraderie, Davis said. The work has to be intentional, and it's often uncomfortable because it requires challenging the setup that has been the status quo for decades in many places.

The payoff is incalculable, though, Davis said.

"The parents and families of students identified as having a disability are constantly going to meetings, being told how different their children are from an arbitrary set of norms and all of the services they need, that often mean having less community," Davis said. "But we have a responsibility to create spaces where we don't make deep, impactful lifelong

decisions about the lives our students will have before they even have an opportunity to make decisions for themselves."

Fostering belonging can give students 'their dignity back'

The partnership between the University of Washington and schools including Ruby Bridges was made possible by a grant to support more inclusionary practices in the state—particularly to reach that threshold where students with disabilities spend at least 80 percent of their time in general education classrooms, a goal driven by federal policy that requires students be taught in the "least restrictive environment" appropriate for them. About two-thirds of students with disabilities met the goal in the fall of 2020, according to the National Center of Education Statistics, markedly higher than the 32 percent who did in 1989.

But Washington state has struggled to keep pace, with about 60 percent of students with disabilities spending 80 percent or more of their time with their peers in 2020. As of 2018, a report cited by state officials ranked Washington 44th out of 50 in inclusionary practices, which prompted state lawmakers to earmark \$25 million to spur improvements through professional development statewide and more targeted support in pilot schools.

Ruby Bridges is considered a "demonstration site" for the partnership with the university, opening its doors over the past two years to more than 350 visitors and observers who want to learn about best practices in teaching students in the least restrictive learning environment.

The school models its work around the "10 dimensions of belonging" developed by Carter at Baylor, which begin with allowing students with disabilities to be present, then invited, and ultimately accepted, supported, befriended, needed, and loved.

"Belonging is more than just being included or present in a space," Carter said. "People want to experience belonging, and that's more than merely a location of classrooms or participation in clubs—it's about what students experience and the relationships that develop in those places."

Monroe High School, located about 30 miles northeast of Seattle, is also part of the partnership with the University of Washington, working to foster belonging in school for older students with disabilities.

Oftentimes, that means they arrive at the high school having spent their entire academic careers receiving much of their instruction

apart from their peers in general education, said Principal Brett Wille. So, when students with disabilities spend most of their time in a mainstream classroom, they "get their dignity back," he said.

"When you have a kid in an exclusionary classroom in the corner of a school building doing 1st grade math problems, that doesn't give them a lot of hope or dignity," Wille said. "But when you put these students with their peers, you're telling them you value them and you believe in them. Kids pick up on that."

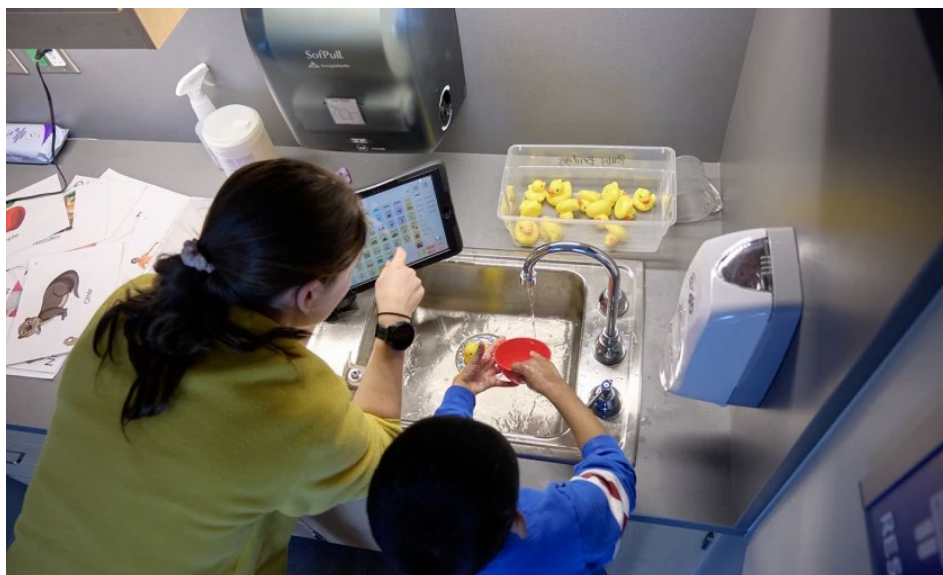
Another upside: Employee retention

The model requires a shift in adult mindsets: Educators aren't responsible only for their classroom or a specific group of assigned students. Instead, everybody is responsible for every student.

It can be a daunting perspective, Davis said, but once it becomes ingrained in the school culture, it can prove a rewarding environment for staff with an added benefit of less staff turnover, particularly among paraprofessionals who can be difficult to retain.

In fact, paraprofessionals who have completed teaching licensure programs have stayed on staff at Ruby Bridges waiting for a teaching position to open up, rather than leaving for open teaching jobs elsewhere.

"When you shift in those ways, you create deeper connections for students and staff, too, and when you're set up around real belonging, then adults feel like something would be missing if they were gone, too," Davis said. "You create systems that are less isolated in every way." ■



Mercon Menghistab for Education Week

A student works with a staff member at Ruby Bridges Elementary School in Woodinville, Wash. Special education students at the school are fully a part of general education classrooms.

Published April 14, 2024

5 Tips to Help Students With Disabilities Feel Like They Belong

By Caitlynn Peetz Stephens

Creating a school community where students with complex learning or developmental needs feel welcomed and valued takes more than merely including them in classes or clubs, according to a leading researcher on the topic.

Erik Carter, the executive director of Baylor University's Center for Developmental Disabilities, has developed what he calls the 10 dimensions of belonging, a list of principles that, together, create an environment in which all students—but particularly those with disabilities who have historically been excluded—feel as if they authentically belong.

The principles begin with allowing students with disabilities to be present in the same spaces as their peers, then invited, and ultimately accepted, supported, befriended, needed, and loved.

There are some tangible steps school and district leaders can take today to begin working to create this kind of environment, Carter said. All students stand to benefit, he said.

1. Understand the difference between 'inclusion' and 'belonging'

There is a difference between simply including students with disabilities in classes and activities and deliberately creating a community in which all students feel as if they belong and are valued, Carter said.

Inclusion often refers to students with disabilities “just being present,” he said, whereas belonging is “more about how we see one another and the relationships formed within those activities in which we are present.”

It's an important distinction, he said, because students who experience a sense of belonging are more excited about and likely to show up for school each day. They're also more likely to be “primed and ready to learn with other kids in your classrooms or in extra-curriculars.”

“Belonging really is inextricably linked to your learning component,” Carter said.

2. Reflect on current practices

School and district leaders should take an honest inventory of how their students experience school.

Rather than “just assuming and declaring that we are a community of belonging” solely because students with disabilities participate in some classes or activities with their peers, Carter said, “we need to be intentional about noticing whether students are actually experiencing a sense of belonging.”

It can be uncomfortable and painful to admit that any group of students may not feel completely valued and welcome, he said, but it's important to be honest in your observations.

What do kids' relationships look like? Are programs and services siloed so that students who need additional support are routinely excluded from activities or classes or even portions of them? Do leaders have high expectations for students with disabilities?

Researchers have in recent years “learned a lot more about the practices that lead toward belonging,” Carter said.

Those include things like peer-mediated supports, in which a student who has disabilities may work with a peer who doesn't have disabilities on lessons or activities, he said. That gives students of all abilities the chance to “come to know each other, work together, and, out of that, perhaps develop some friendships and reciprocal relationships with other kids, which is really at the heart of belonging.”

3. Ask students how they feel

One of the most important steps to assessing and improving students' sense of belonging is to simply ask them about their experiences in focus groups or one-on-one conversations, Carter said. That exercise should include questions to discover both what students feel is working well and what they enjoy, and how they may feel separated from their peers.

It can be a tricky task if some students with disabilities cannot communicate verbally or in other traditional ways, he said, so it may require a more observational approach, like interpreting their body language when they arrive at school, which can communicate their enthusiasm about attending.

4. Collect data

Anecdotal observations of students are important, but so are data, Carter said.

Some possible data to track, according to Carter, include: the extent to which students with disabilities are participating in general education classrooms or being pulled out for support and the extent to which students with

disabilities are taking part in extracurriculars, clubs, and volunteer opportunities.

“There’s a whole set of indicators that schools might pick as helping them track their movement toward more widespread experience of belonging for all students but particularly for students with disabilities,” he said.

5. Make the work a priority

Ultimately, research shows that all students—including those with disabilities—perform better in school when they feel they are valued and belong there, Carter said.

To ensure all students feel that way about school, educators must make it a priority to foster a sense of belonging, he said. School and district leaders must bring the same emphasis that they do to academics, not only ensuring that students are prepared for postsecondary life but that they also feel accepted and valued while they’re in school, Carter said.

“If there’s not a similar commitment and intentionality around belonging, it will always get pushed to the back burner, or we’ll always think we don’t have the time to get to it, which is a disservice to the kids we have a commitment to serve,” Carter said. ■

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Published by Editorial Projects
in Education, Inc.
6935 Arlington Road, Suite 100
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