



# Sustaining Inclusive Classrooms

# District Leadership Forum

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# 1) Executive Overview

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## Key Observations

**Align district structures with inclusion goals to establish a culture that supports inclusion.** Most profiled districts adjust strategic plans, metrics, hiring processes, academic calendars, and instructional methods to incorporate the principles of inclusion. Contacts at **District A** add that districts must shift to holistic definitions of achievement, rather than academic-based definitions, to evaluate inclusion initiatives. Contacts at profiled districts that implement structural changes report increased support for inclusion.

**To ensure that school stakeholders view students with special needs as general education students, target advocacy efforts toward IEP teams.** Contacts at **District B**, **District D**, and **District E** report that IEP meetings provide an opportunity to redirect students from self-contained classrooms to general education classrooms and to discourage IEP teams from qualifying new students with special needs for self-contained classrooms. Special education administrators at District E attend every IEP meeting to advocate for including each student with special needs in the general education classroom to the greatest extent possible. At District B and District D, special education administrators use professional development on inclusion to scale their message to reach IEP team across the district.

**To receive support for inclusion from teachers, present inclusion-related instructional methods as general instructional best practices, rather than additional tactics specific to special education students.** Profiled districts design professional development on instructional methods to demonstrate to teachers that all students can succeed in general education classrooms. Contacts at **District A** and **District E** report that professional development on instructional methods (e.g., differentiated learning) allows districts to scale inclusion initiatives. Special education administrators at all profiled districts encourage teachers to use additional instructional methods (e.g., standards-based learning) to teach all students.

**Establish behavior response teams to provide teachers and school administrators with a reliable and robust option to delegate behavioral concerns to experts.** Contacts report that school-level administrators may fear that disruptive behaviors from students with special needs will impact instructional time, teacher engagement, and academic achievement in general education classrooms. At most profiled districts, special education administrators oversee teams of educators and support staff who districts train to address disruptive behaviors. Contacts report that these teams increase teachers' level of comfort with inclusive classrooms. Contacts add that the presence of these teams helps alleviate school administrator resistance to inclusion initiatives.

**Strategically define achievement and communicate success of inclusive classrooms to sustain initiatives.** Some profiled districts broaden the district-wide definition of student achievement to include progress toward mastery of non-academic competencies, such as kindness and independence. Contacts report that recognizing non-academic achievement frames inclusive practices as successful and thus sustain inclusion initiatives. Further, profiled districts use newsletters, assemblies, and word-of-mouth to disseminate these success stories to stakeholders.

## 2) Changing Structures to Promote Inclusion

### District Processes

### Incrementally Scale Inclusive Classroom Initiatives Each Year Following Initial Implementation

The inclusive model of instruction dictates that districts operate one, differentiated system to allow all students (i.e., students with and without disabilities) to participate in classroom instruction and school culture alongside their peers.<sup>1</sup> This principle occasions initiatives to include all students in the general education classroom for as much of the day as possible.

All profiled districts implemented initiatives to facilitate the inclusion of students with special needs in general education classrooms. The extent of inclusive practices within schools varies among profiled districts. Some profiled districts operate most general education classrooms as inclusive classrooms. Other profiled districts recently began to implement inclusive practices and continue to use self-contained classrooms to serve many students with special needs.

Contacts at **District A**, **District C**, and **District E** report that gradually introducing inclusive practices helps sustain inclusion initiatives. For example, during the previous several years, special education administrators at District A delivered professional development to prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms.

### Years of Inclusion and Inclusive Practices at Profiled Districts

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>2</b> <b>District E</b><br>Four co-taught, inclusive classrooms at the fourth-grade level.   | <b>7</b> <b>District D</b><br>80% or more of students with special needs spend 80% or more of their day in general education classrooms.   |
| <b>4</b> <b>District B</b><br>Co-taught classrooms and other inclusive classrooms at each grade level at all three high schools.              | <b>7</b> <b>District F</b><br>No <b>special day classes</b> . <sup>2</sup> Every student attends their neighborhood school.                |
| <b>4</b> <b>District A</b><br>Approximately 52% of student with special needs spend 80% or more of their day in general education classrooms. | <b>30</b> <b>District C</b><br>Contacts report that almost all students attend general education classes with pull-out services as needed. |

### Devote General Funds to Inclusive Initiatives to Signify Commitment to Inclusion

Three profiled districts (i.e., **District A**, **District B**, and **District E**) receive funding for inclusion from a state-sponsored grant. However, contacts report that the grant does not cover the entire cost of inclusive classrooms. Contacts at both District A and **District C** explain that inclusion is expensive. For example, contacts note that educating students with special needs in general education classrooms typically costs more than educating these students in self-contained classrooms. Contacts explain that expenses such as professional development, co-teachers, instructional aids, and pull-out supports increase costs of instruction.

1) Dona Meinders, Janice Battaglia, and Kristin Ludovico, "Inclusive Practices," *CalSTAT*. 2015. <https://www.calstat.org/PA-InclusivePractices.html>.

Contacts at **District C** report that the school board views inclusion as mandated by the principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (**IDEA**).<sup>2</sup>

At District C and **District D**, administrators use instructional or general funds to cover the cost of professional development for general education teachers to learn how to implement differentiated instruction in the classroom. At both districts, contacts report that designating general education funding to inclusive practices signifies the school board's commitment to inclusion. At District D, the school board funds a strategic plan specifically related to inclusion. For more information about the inclusion strategic action plan at District D, see **page 10**.

## Incorporate Inclusion into Hiring and Onboarding to Ensure New Hires Support Inclusion

At **District F**, the superintendent conducts the final interview of the hiring process for teachers. They ask all candidates to demonstrate their commitment to inclusive practices. Contacts report that evaluating commitment to inclusive practices during the hiring process both encourages candidates that support inclusion to apply and discourages candidates who are not committed to inclusion from accepting offers to work at the district.

Immediately after the district hires a new principal, special education administrators at **District C** invite the principal to the district office to learn about inclusion. Further, special education administrators customize inclusions resources and support to meet the needs of new principals. At **District D**, special education administrators collaborate with other district-level administrators (e.g., human resources) to incorporate the basics of inclusion into the onboarding process for new principals.

## Standardize IEP Procedures to Prevent Overqualification of Students for Special Day Classes

Contacts at **District B**, **District E**, and **District D** report that it is essential to ensure **Individualized Education Program** (IEP) teams perceive special day classes or pull-out supports as an invasive measure for students with special needs, rather than a positive alternative to a general education classroom.<sup>3</sup>

## Strategies to Encourage IEP Teams to Prioritize Inclusion



Use professional development to educate IEP teams that students with special needs can succeed in general education classrooms.



Include special education administrators in all IEP meetings to explain the benefits of inclusion.



Inform IEP teams on state regulations that mandate students spend as much time as possible in their **least restrictive environment** (LRE).<sup>4</sup>

2) "Individuals with Disabilities Education Act," U.S. Department of Education. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/>.

3) "A Guide to the Individualized Education Program," U.S. Department of Education. 2000. <https://www2.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/iepguide/index.html#process>.

4) Amanda Morin, "Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): What You Need to Know," *Understood*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.understood.org/en/school-learning/special-services/special-education-basics/least-restrictive-environment-lre-what-you-need-to-know>.

## Methods to Standardize the IEP Process at *District D*

Contacts report that the district created lessons about the IEP process. The lessons explain that state regulations require inclusion whenever possible. Special education administrators disseminate these lessons to IEP teams through multiple channels.



### Administrator Meetings

District-level special education administrators host monthly meetings with school-based special education administrators. During these meetings, district-level special education administrators discuss IEP compliance and practices to write IEPs.



### Special Education Regulation Academy

Special education administrators host designated sessions, which they call an “academy,” for school administrators to learn about state regulations for special education qualification. During these sessions, administrators stress the principles of inclusion and the benefits of inclusion to discourage overqualification for special day classes.



### Online Modules

The district created online modules to standardize expectations and procedures to write IEPs. Special education administrators developed the modules with support from the IT department. Each module reflects state regulations for IEPs, which mandate that students spend as much time as possible in their LRE. See **page 16** for more information on modules at **District D**.

## School Operations

Contacts report that aligning the school day schedule with inclusive practices is one of the most impactful ways that school-level administrators can support inclusive classrooms.

## Structure Academic Schedules to Facilitate Teacher Adoption of Inclusive Practices

At **District B**, contacts report that, due to coincidence, the district simultaneously implemented a new school day schedule and inclusive classrooms. Under the new schedule model, all teachers within the same subject area receive the same planning period in their schedules. Further, school administrators ensure that co-teaching teams also receive the same planning period. Teachers use these periods to workshop effective instructional tactics within [professional learning communities](#) (PLCs).<sup>5</sup> Coordinating planning periods provides co-teaching teams time to workshop and apply effective pedagogies for inclusive classrooms. Contacts report that this coordinated time to plan lessons improves teachers’ comfort with incorporating inclusion into their classrooms, which results in increased support for inclusion among teachers.

5) Kim K. Ruebel, “Professional Learning Communities,” *Association for Middle Level Education*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <http://www.amle.org/BrowsebyTopic/WhatsNew/WNDet.aspx?ArtMID=888&ArticleID=310>.

## Consider Adopting Additional Instructional Practices to Complement Inclusive Practices

Contacts at **District C** and **District E** report that instructional frameworks such as [standards-based grading](#)<sup>6</sup> and [competency-based learning](#)<sup>7</sup> can reinforce the principles of inclusion. Though both districts predominantly use traditional grading and instructional practices, contacts report growing adoption of these frameworks at their district (e.g., summer programs at District C allow students to finish their courses whenever they demonstrate mastery of certain competencies). Contacts at District C report that IEP teams may use standards-based grading as an accommodation to differentiate grading for a student with special needs in the general education classroom. Encouraging teachers to adopt instructional frameworks that allow for differentiation can facilitate implementation of inclusive practices in classrooms.

## Encourage School Administrators to Recognize Non-Academic Achievements to Reinforce Inclusive Practices

Aligning district structures with the principles of inclusion can create an environment for subsequent, cultural shifts toward a more inclusive environment. At **District A**, contacts report that school-level recognition of students who master non-academic competencies reflects and support a shift toward a more inclusive culture. For example, principals recognize student achievement in areas such as intrapersonal competencies (e.g., kindness). Students with and without disabilities can demonstrate mastery in non-academic competencies. Therefore, students with special needs become eligible to receive awards and recognition, which contributes to a school culture where all students participate meaningfully.

### Channels to Recognize Non-Academic Student Achievements

To demonstrate inclusion, principals can recognize the achievements of students with special needs.



#### Newsletters

Principals include stories that highlight non-academic student accomplishments in their regular communications to teacher and family listservs.



#### Assemblies

Principals recognize non-academic student accomplishments at monthly school assemblies.

6) "What Is Standards-Based Grading?" *Common Goal Systems Inc.* Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.teacherease.com/standards-based-grading.aspx>.

7) "Competency-Based Learning or Personalized Learning," *U.S. Department of Education.* Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.ed.gov/oii-news/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning>.



## Measure Student Achievement, Equity, and Compliance to Assess Inclusion Initiatives

Contacts consider multiple metrics to evaluate the impact of inclusive classrooms on student achievement, equity, and compliance (e.g., the percentage of students with IEPs that spend at least 80% of the day in general education classrooms).

### Metrics to Assess Inclusive Classrooms at Profiled Districts



#### Test Scores

Administrators at **District A** monitor test scores to measure the impact of inclusive classrooms on student academic achievement and equity. Contacts report that the district has not experienced an improvement in student test scores following the implementation of inclusive classrooms.



#### Behavioral Referrals

At **District D**, special education administrators monitor behavioral referral data to identify student groups with significantly different referral rates than their peers. Contacts explain that inclusion initiatives aim to improve equity by decreasing disproportionality in behavioral referrals for students with special needs.



#### Graduation Rates

At **District F**, contacts monitor the gap in graduation rates for students with and without disabilities to measure the impact of inclusion initiatives on academic achievement and equity. Contacts report that this gap has narrowed following implementation of inclusive classrooms.



#### Classroom Time

Administrators at **District A**, **District B**, **District C**, **District D**, and **District E** track the percentage of students who spend 80% or more of the school day in the general education classroom to determine compliance with state targets.

## Align Strategic Plans with Metrics to Measure Inclusion to Establish Inclusion as a Priority

Contacts at **District B** and **District D** recommend district administrators create a clear plan to transition to inclusive classrooms, establish metrics-based expectations for inclusion, and monitor metrics year-to-year to measure progress toward inclusion. District D maintains an inclusion strategic plan at the district level and for each school. Specific, actionable items with corresponding metrics to measure progress compose these plans.

### Excerpt from a *District D* School-Level Inclusion Strategic Plan<sup>8</sup>

Principals and their staff input student data from schools' [Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports](#) (PBIS) systems, which track behavioral referrals, to a central database.<sup>9</sup> This allows school administrators to identify disproportionality in behavioral referrals by subgroup (e.g., students with special needs) and evaluate progress toward strategic goals accordingly.

8) *District D*. Accessed 28 February 2019..

9) "PBIS," *OSEP Technical Assistance Center*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.pbis.org/>.



**Action Step:**

Use professional development on restorative practices, behavioral responses, and disability sensitivity trainings to mitigate disruptive behaviors in inclusive classrooms and improve teacher-student interactions.

**Person(s) Responsible:**

School administrators.

**Resources Needed:**

District-level special education staff members.

**Time Frame:**

Completed by June 2019.

**Metrics:**

PBIS data on behavioral referrals.

## Balance Consistency and Flexibility in Assessment to Mitigate Administrator Resistance to Inclusion Initiatives

Contacts at **District B** report that special education administrators must communicate a long-term vision for inclusion to stakeholders to receive support for inclusion initiatives. However, contacts add that administrators should also set expectations that inclusion goals may adapt due to emergent circumstances. Contacts at profiled districts note that some school administrators resist inclusion initiatives if they perceive district-level inflexibility regarding implementation timelines. Contacts explain that school administrators believe that district administrators do not understand the challenges schools may encounter when they implement inclusive classrooms. School administrators may not engage with inclusion initiatives if they believe that their goals are unattainable or unadaptable.

Consequently, administrators at **District A** do not use quantitative targets to assess inclusion initiatives. Instead, they set expectations with stakeholders that implementation timelines will likely deviate from the plan.

Similar to District A, contacts at District B report that they willingly deviate from their implementation plan due to emergent school circumstances. For example, teacher turnover caused one high school to fall behind schedule in terms of the number of inclusive classrooms, so contacts report that administrators adjust implementation goals to recognize the quality of inclusive instruction at this school.

## 3) Building Inclusive Communities

### District-led Efforts

#### Leverage Parent Advocates to Build Community Support for Inclusion

Two profiled districts (i.e., **District E** and **District D**) channel advocacy from parents of students with special needs to build support for inclusion initiatives from other stakeholders.

#### Methods to Channel Parent Advocacy for Inclusion Initiatives



##### Influential Community Members

- At **District E**, the superintendent is a parent of a student with special needs who advocated for inclusion for their child.
- At union meetings, the superintendent tells their family's story with school administrators who are initially resistant to inclusion.
- The superintendent meets with other parents of students with special needs to organize their advocacy for inclusion.
- Any respected and influential community member who is the parent of a student with special needs could fill this role.



##### School Board Committee<sup>11</sup>

- At **District D**, 20 parents of students with special needs and 1 educator comprise a special education advisory committee on the school board.
- These committee members, selected through an application and recommendation process, serve two-year terms.
- The committee advises the school board on the unmet needs of special education students.
- This committee ensures that the school board adopts inclusion goals as strategic priorities for the district.

#### Consider Presenting Research on Inclusion to Small Groups to Ensure Constructive, Receptive Discussions

Contacts at **District E** report that stakeholders expressed resistance to inclusion after a grant-sponsored expert led a presentation on research-backed evidence to all district special education staff. In response, contacts report that district administrators discontinued the presentation to large-scale audiences. Instead, administrators present the evidence to small groups of stakeholders during IEP meetings, meetings with school psychologists, and staff meetings at individual school sites. This allows special education administrators to guide dissemination and discussion of the material. Contacts explain that these small group presentation fosters more constructive engagement with the research.

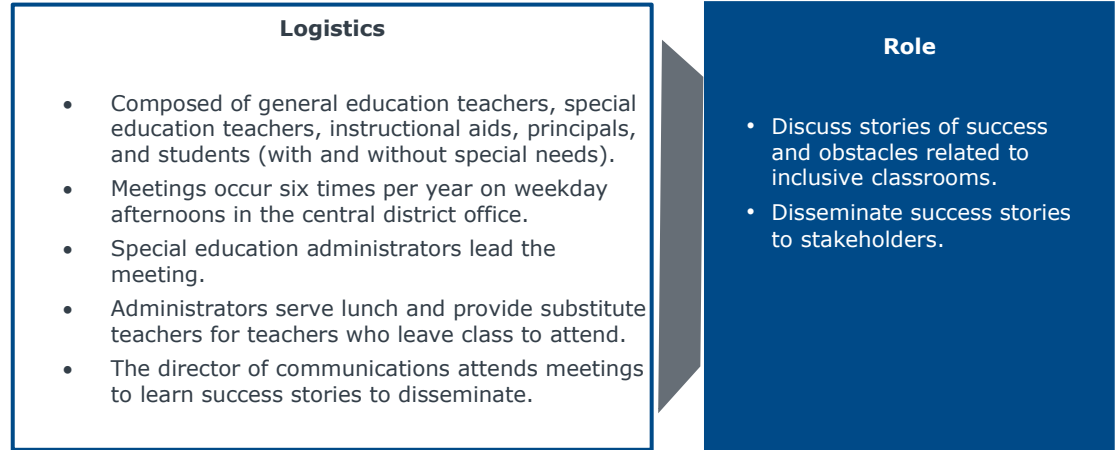
See **Appendix A** for a list of sources from this presentation.

10) District D. 2019.

## Communicate Progress to Stakeholders to Publicize the Positive Potential of Inclusion Initiatives

Contacts at **District B** report that it is necessary to disseminate successes of inclusion initiatives in a timely, ongoing manner after implementation. While districts may not immediately experience large-scale, clear successes, contacts report that it is important to communicate any emerging positive stories, attitudes, or achievements as a result of inclusion. For example, special education administrators may communicate to teachers students' increased level of independence during lunch routines.

### Inclusion Leadership Committee at *District F*



### Channels to Communicate Progress to Stakeholders at Profiled Districts



#### Newsletters

Special education administrators and school-level administrators at **District D**, **District E**, and **District F** circulate newsletters that highlight inclusion success stories to special education department staff, teachers, and parents.



#### Word of Mouth

Contacts at **District B** report that when one long-time teacher discussed their positive experience with an inclusive classroom, the feedback spread among other teachers and helped to build support for inclusive practices.

## Student-driven Inclusion

### Optimize Extracurricular Activities to Encourage an Inclusive Culture

At **District A** and **District D**, contacts report that inclusive classrooms and the structures to sustain them lead to multiple opportunities to include all students. At

District D, school administrators deploy a buddy model to facilitate inclusion during school-based social activities. For example, students may eat lunch, play on sports teams, or attend clubs in pairs of one student with special needs and one student without special needs.

Contacts stress that the school community outside of the classroom must embrace inclusive practices to a shift district culture toward inclusion. Contacts add that school administrators and staff must foster opportunities for extracurricular and social inclusion.

## Examples of Extracurricular Opportunities for Inclusion at Profiled Districts

### *School Organized*



#### **After School Activities**

Students with and without special needs participate in sports teams, clubs, and dances together.



#### **Lunch Buddy Programs**

School administrators pair students with and without special needs to sit together during lunch.

### *Community Organized*



#### **Birthday Parties**

Contacts report that including students with special needs in general education classrooms leads to those students receiving invitations to birthday parties with the rest of their peers.



### **Students' Adoption of Inclusive Principles Demonstrates Cultural Shift**

Contacts at **District B** report that older students model and encourage kindness toward students with disabilities. In one instance, contacts report that an older, well-respected high school student witnessed younger high school students bullying a peer with special needs. The older student, who absorbed the principles of inclusion during his years at the school, explained to the younger students that their behavior was not appropriate or tolerated at the school.

## 4) Supporting Teachers and Administrators

### Instructional Development

### Provide Instructional Professional Development to Ease Concerns About Supporting Students with Special Needs

Contacts at **District F** report that teachers may resist inclusive classroom initiatives if they expect students with special needs will be unable to succeed in their classes. In response, special education administrators at all profiled districts provide professional development on instructional methods to general education teachers. Contacts at **District E** report that optimizing teachers' instructional methods improves instruction of all students and simultaneously prepares teachers to manage classrooms with students with special needs. Contacts add that professional development on instructional methods can shift the mindset of teachers who resist inclusive classrooms.

### Common Instructional Topics for Professional Development at Profiled Districts



**Differentiated Instruction:** Teachers tailor lessons to different learning styles.<sup>11</sup>



**Universal Design for Learning (UDL):** Teachers use one inclusive framework to instruct all students in general education classrooms.<sup>12</sup>



**Personalized and Project-Based Learning:** Teachers evaluate performance based personal goals or projects, rather than quizzes, tests, and other traditional assessments.<sup>13</sup>



**Co-Teaching:** One special education and one general education teacher lead general education classrooms together to instruct students with and without special needs.<sup>14</sup>



**Assistive Learning Systems** (e.g., **Unique Learning System**): Digital curriculum and assessment systems differentiate general education lessons for students with special needs.<sup>15</sup>



**Optimizing PLCs:** Teachers co-teaching teams how to use PLC time to workshop and implement inclusive practices from professional development sessions.



**Inclusion Frameworks/ "Inclusion 101:"** Presentations on the principles and research that supports inclusive practices.

11) Geri Coleman Tucker, "Differentiated Instruction: What You Need to Know," *Understood*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/differentiated-instruction-what-you-need-to-know>.  
12) "About Universal Design for Learning," *CAST*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <http://www.cast.org/our-work/about-udl.html#.XHX-IIhKq2w>.  
13) "Project-Based Learning" *Edutopia*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.edutopia.org/project-based-learning>.  
14) Amanda Morin, "Collaborative Team Teaching: What you Need to Know," *Understood*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.understood.org/en/learning-attention-issues/treatments-approaches/educational-strategies/collaborative-team-teaching-what-you-need-to-know>.  
15) N2Y, *Unique Learning System*, 2019. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.n2y.com/unique-learning-system/>.

## Consider Offering Multiple Professional Development Opportunities to Ensure Teachers Receive Training

All profiled districts offer professional development to teachers and administrators through multiple mediums. Contacts at **District D** report that it is important to differentiate the professional development options available to ensure that all teachers learn topics necessary to sustain inclusion initiatives. Contacts at District D add that attendance is mandatory at some inclusion-related professional development sessions for teachers. However, contacts at some districts (e.g., **District E**) report that special education administrators cannot require inclusion-related professional development due to stipulations in teachers' union contracts.

### Examples of Professional Development Opportunities at Profiled Districts

#### *District-level*



Special education administrators lead [trainings during designated professional development days](#).



Special education administrators lead [workshops after school](#).



[External presenters](#) visit the district during designated professional development days to speak about the benefits of inclusion.

#### *School-Level*



Special education administrators lead [trainings during staff meetings](#).



Teachers apply concepts learned at district-wide professional development at their school sites during [PLCs and staff meetings](#).



Special education teachers, general education teachers, and/or administrators receive district funds to [attend events at external organizations](#) (e.g., [CAST](#)).

#### *Online Modules at District D*



**District D** creates online modules for teachers to complete during their lesson planning time. Teachers must complete all modules, which conclude with an assessment. Teachers earn re-licensure points per the number of hours the module takes to complete. The central district office tracks module completion, and school principals ensure their staff complete the modules. Special education administrators create modules on multiple topics, including IEP standardization and inclusion.



### Track Attendance at Professional Development Sessions to Inform Inclusion Expansion

Contacts at **District A** report that special education administrators use attendance data from inclusion-oriented professional development sessions to determine which teachers may be interested in teaching an inclusive classroom during the next school year.

## Consider Offering Trainer-Led Professional Development After the School Day

Administrators at some profiled districts offer trainer-led professional development on instructional topics both during after-school sessions and designated professional development days to provide teachers multiple opportunities to attend inclusion-related sessions. Contacts at **District C** report that administrators would prefer to pay teachers stipends to attend professional development sessions after school rather than pay substitute teachers to instruct classes that teachers need to leave to attend sessions. Contacts report that providing stipends to teachers ensures that they benefit from inclusion-related funding, which may help to achieve support for inclusion initiatives. However, contacts at **District D** caution that it is too taxing for teachers to attend professional development sessions on weekday evenings, because the lessons contain complicated concepts that may be difficult to retain after a day of teaching. Therefore, contacts report that administrators at District D often offer trainer-led professional development during school.

## Hardwire Special Education and General Education Staff Unity Through Co-Led Professional Development Sessions

Administrators at **District F** and **District D** model co-teaching, differentiation, and other components of inclusion during professional development sessions. At District D, administrators from the special education department and the Office of Instructional Programs collaborate to create both district- and school-level professional development curricula. These teams of administrators use general education program materials as a basic framework for instruction and differentiate the materials to instruct students with special needs. Contacts report that this system dissuades general education teachers from viewing inclusive practices as a new type of instruction. Instead, teachers review traditional curricula and pedagogies, and learn to adjust their instruction to meet student needs.

Administrators offer teachers a stipend to attend these after-school workshops. Contacts report that the registration for these workshops reaches capacity (i.e., 70) almost immediately after registration opens.

At District F, district-level special education administrators select special education teachers and general education teachers to co-teach "Inclusion 101" workshops for general education teachers and school administrators. District-level special education administrators recruit teachers to host these workshops based on their assessment of teachers' strengths, which they evaluate during weekly classroom observations. In addition to co-teaching the session, teachers who lead the workshop organize the room according to guidelines for inclusive physical spaces.

## Administrators

### Involve School Administrators in Professional Development to Mainstream Inclusion Initiatives

Contacts report that when school administrators participate in professional development for teachers, they become more comfortable with inclusive terminology and practices. Contacts report that this normalizes inclusive practices at schools. Moreover, administrators engage with inclusion initiatives, and more easily support teachers during implementation, when they understand the basics of inclusion.

At **District A** and **District F**, special education administrators welcome school administrators at teachers' professional development sessions on instructional methods.



## Strategies to Encourage School Administrator Participation in Professional Development at *District F*



### Solicit Feedback

At **District F**, special education administrators determine the topic of professional development based on input from school administrators. For example, contacts report that when school administrators communicated that they needed additional information about restorative practices to effectively lead school inclusion initiatives, special education administrators designed a professional development session on the topic.



### Organize Demonstration Walks

Special education administrators at **District F** invite principals to walk through their schools every Tuesday to observe which practices teachers use to facilitate inclusion.

## Create Specialized Professional Development Sessions to Enfranchise School Administrators as Key Stakeholders

At **District A** and **District B**, inclusion expert Dr. Richard Villa led professional development sessions specifically for school administrators. Contacts report that administrators left these sessions with an enhanced understanding of the importance of inclusion, and with a degree of ownership over their roles in the districts' inclusion initiatives.

At **District D**, special education administrators attend district-wide school administrator meetings to deliver an abridged version of the professional development sessions that the district provides to teachers. For example, if the special education department hosts a district-wide professional development session for teachers on differentiated instruction, they would also present an overview of the lesson at the next district-wide school administrator meeting. Contacts report that this practice facilitates standardization of district-wide approaches to inclusion. Contacts explain that standardization is fundamental to build support for inclusion initiatives among school administrators.

## Behavioral Trainings

### Enlist Behavior Specialists to Lead Professional Development Trainings on How to Manage Classrooms

Special education staff at **District C**, **District D**, and **District E** deliver trainings to teachers on specific behavioral management strategies. These strategies help teachers to prevent outbursts of disruptive behavior in inclusive classrooms. At District C and District E, behavior specialists lead these trainings. Special education administrators at each district focus on different strategies to support to teachers on how to manage classroom behavior.

For example, the specialist at District E educates elementary school teachers on zones of regulation, a self-regulation and emotional control strategy. The specialist leads trainings during two full-day, district-wide professional development sessions and staff meetings at individual schools. These trainings are optional for teachers.

### Behavior Management Strategies at Profiled Districts

Strategy and District	Definition
Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ( <a href="#">PBIS</a> )  <b>District D</b>	Districts use “evidence-based prevention and intervention practices along a multi-tiered continuum that supports the academic, social, emotional, and behavioral competence of all students.” <sup>16</sup>
Nonviolent Crisis Intervention ( <a href="#">NVC</a> )  <b>District C</b>	Districts sponsor administrators, teachers, and/or staff to receive training that “equips them with an effective framework to safely manage and prevent difficult behavior.” <sup>17</sup>
Social-Emotional Learning ( <a href="#">SEL</a> )  <b>District E</b>	Districts teach students “to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.” <sup>18</sup> An example of social-emotional learning is <a href="#">zones of regulation</a> , a strategy to help students recognize and understand their emotions. <sup>19</sup>

### Scale the Knowledge of Behavior Specialists to Serve Students Throughout the District

At **District C**, two behavioral specialists attended external trainings to learn how to teach the NVC framework. These behavioral specialists offer optional NVC trainings to district staff. They offer trainings for paraeducators, general education teachers, and special education teachers throughout the school year and for school administrators during summer professional development sessions. Further, the specialists train designated behavior teams at each school to respond to students with disruptive behavior in the classroom.

## Ongoing Supports

### Employ Instructional Coaches to Reinforce Lessons from Professional Development Sessions

At **District E**, an instructional coach from the special education department visits classes to provide support for teachers on topics related to inclusion (e.g., UDL). The coach works with teachers to design accessible lesson plans for students with special needs. In addition, the instructional coach ensures that teachers implement strategies that they learn during professional development sessions (e.g., standards-based learning for students with special needs).

Similarly, the special education department at **District A** can assign an instructional coach to respond to students with disruptive behavior in the classroom. For example, if teachers and the coach identify disengagement as the root cause of a student’s behavior, the coach may work with the teacher to create a project-based learning

16) “PBIS FAQs,” OSEP Technical Assistance Center. 2018. <https://www.pbis.org/school/swpbis-for-beginners/pbis-faqs>.  
 17) Crisis Prevention Institute. 2019. <https://www.crisisprevention.com/What-We-Do/Nonviolent-Crisis-Intervention>.  
 18) “What is SEL?” CASEL. 2019. <https://casel.org/what-is-sel/>.  
 19) “The Zones of Regulation,” Kuyper Consulting, Inc. 2019. <http://www.zonesofregulation.com/index.html>.

plan for the student. Contacts explain that when students focus on an assignment tailored to their learning styling and interests, their level of engagement with classroom material increases.

At **District D**, special education administrators recruit teachers who demonstrate exemplary achievements in supporting their peers to serve as “consulting teachers.” These teachers do not teach courses. When principals identify teachers in need of additional support during standard classroom observations, they refer these classrooms to the special education department. The special education department deploys consulting teachers to classrooms and teachers that school administrators refer to provide support.

Consulting teachers subsequently work with the classroom teacher to optimize instructional methods. Contacts report that classroom teachers do not perceive visits from instructional coaches and consulting teachers as punitive. Rather, contacts report that the presence of abundant and on-going support helps teachers feel comfortable with inclusive classrooms.

### To Increase Teachers’ Comfort with Behavior Management, Operate Systems of Support for Teachers to Report and Deescalate Disruptive Behaviors

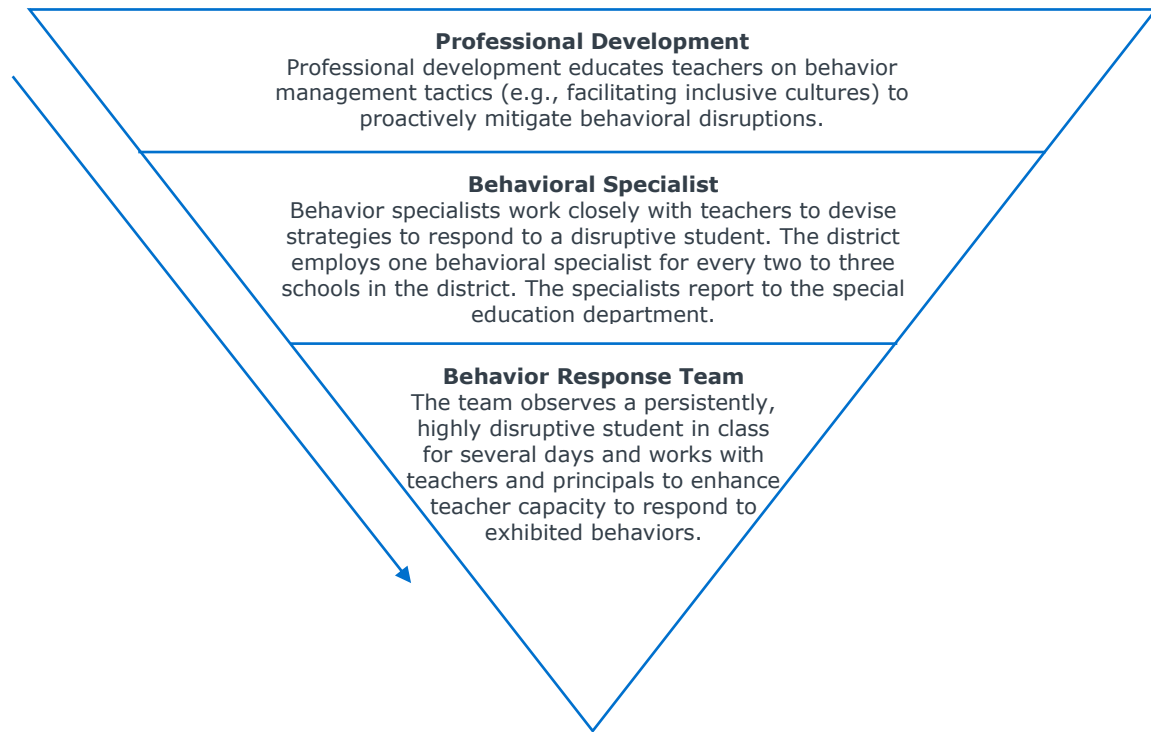
Contacts at **District B** report that teachers most often struggle with behavioral disruptions from general education students who may have unidentified special needs. Special education administrators allow teachers to request behavioral support for any student.

Contacts at all profiled districts report that providing teachers with a clear system to raise behavioral concerns and subsequently receive in-person support from experts contributes significantly to the success of inclusion initiatives. Contacts add that a defined process to report behaviors mitigates teachers’ fears that they will be unable to instruct and manager students with special needs. Further, it convinces principals that disruptive behaviors will not interfere with student achievement, instructional hours, or test scores.

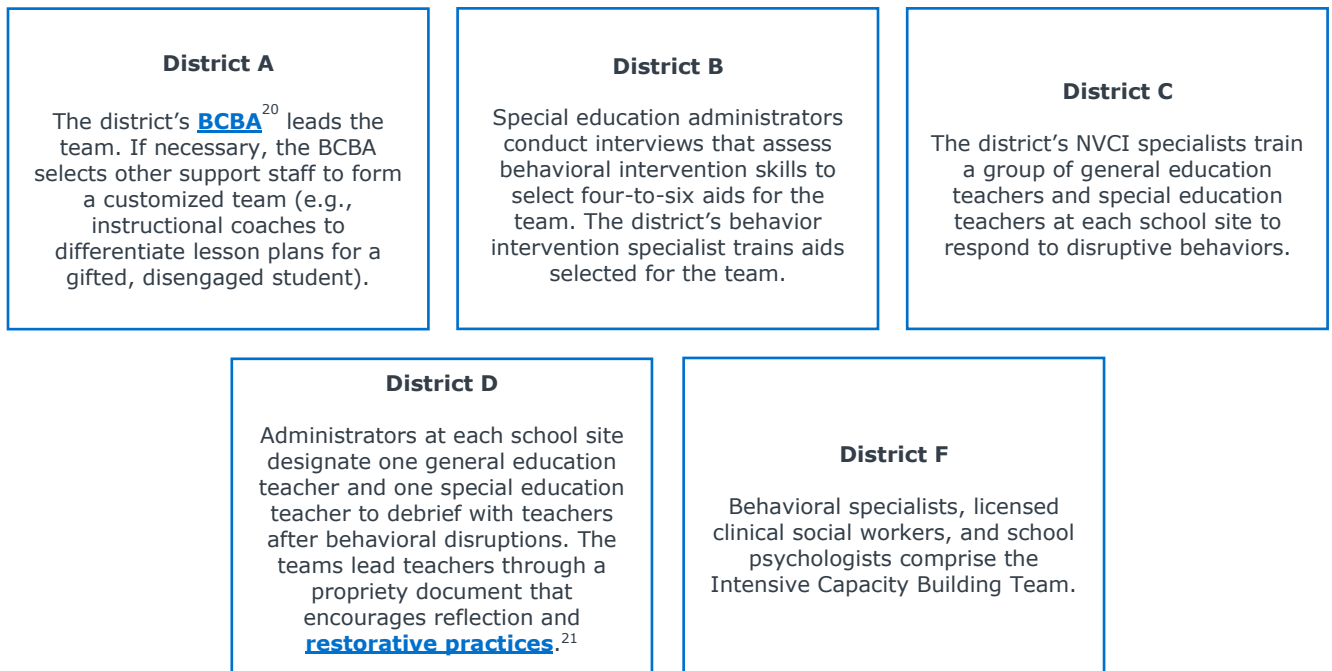
To ensure that teachers feel comfortable handling disruptive behavior, **District A**, **District B**, **District C**, **District D**, and **District F** provide between two and three sequential behavioral support options to teachers. At all five districts, behavior response teams reinforce and supplement inclusive classroom management strategies that teachers learn from professional development opportunities. At District F, a behavioral specialist intervenes first, and then the behavioral response team may respond if needed.

## Behavior Supports at Profiled Districts

### Behavior Support Process at *District F*



### Behavior Response Teams at Profiled Districts



20) "Board Certified Behavior Analyst," *Behavior Analyst Certification Board*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <https://www.bacb.com/bcba/>.  
21) "Restorative Practices: A Guide For Educators," *Schott Foundation for Public Education*. Accessed 28 February 2019. <http://schottfoundation.org/restorative-practices>.

## Establish Regular Communications Between District Administrators and Stakeholders To Triage Teachers' Emergent Concerns

Special education administrators support inclusive initiatives through frequent opportunities for transparency and discussion, which contacts report reassure teachers and administrators.

At **District E**, special education administrators lead an inclusion committee. About 25 general education teachers, school psychologists, and special education teachers comprise the committee, which meets once per month in the evenings. Though attendance is not mandatory, teachers receive a stipend to attend. At the meetings, administrators facilitate discussions topics related to inclusion (e.g., UDL). Contacts report that the inclusion committee serves as an opportunity for stakeholders to voice grievances and concerns in a constructive setting. Contacts add that participants appreciate that administrators use the opportunity to demonstrate to teachers their accountability for inclusion initiatives, which contributes to support for initiatives among teachers.

At **District C**, special education administrators attend district-wide meetings with principals to learn about their developing concerns related to inclusion. These meetings occur twice per month at the central district office. Contacts report that discipline and state testing emerge as frequent concerns. Contacts note that special education administrators attend these meetings prepared to address these topics.

## 5) Research Methodology

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### Project Challenge

Leadership at a member institution approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What professional development opportunities related to inclusive classrooms do contact districts offer to general education teachers?
- Who leads these opportunities at contact districts?
- What professional development opportunities or support related to inclusive classrooms do contact district administrators offer to school administrators?
- How do district and school administrators at contact districts support efforts to achieve teacher buy-in for inclusive classroom initiatives?
- How do contact districts track teachers' use of professional development resources?
- How do contact districts teach general education teachers to respond to behavioral problems in inclusive classrooms?
- How do contact districts diffuse teacher discomfort following behavioral problems?
- How do contact districts provide ongoing support to inclusive classroom teachers, beyond professional development?
- How do contact districts fund inclusive classroom initiatives?
- Do contact districts use funds other than special education funds to support inclusive initiatives? If so, what funds?
- What metrics do contact districts use to measure the effectiveness of inclusion initiatives?
- How do contact districts highlight the successes of inclusive initiatives?
- What research-backed evidence do contact districts use to present the value of inclusive classrooms for all students to stakeholders?
- How do administrators at contact districts recruit school leaders to act as allies for inclusive classroom initiatives?

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## Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed special education administrators at districts that demonstrate commitment to inclusive classroom initiatives.

## A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

District	Location	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Pacific West	9,500
District B	Pacific West	12,000
District C	Pacific West	8,500
District D	Mid-Atlantic	78,000
District E	Pacific West	5,000
District F	Pacific West	10,000



# Appendix A

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At **District E**, an external facilitator presented research that supports inclusive classroom. The presentation cites the following research:

Baker, Edward T., Margaret C. Wang, and Hebert J. Walberg. "Synthesis of Research/The Effects of Inclusion on Learning." *Education Leadership*, vol. 52, no. 4, 1994: 33-35. <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/dec94/vol52/num04/Synthesis-of-Research-~The-Effects-of-Inclusion-on-Learning.aspx>.

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Kalambouka, Afroditi, Peter Farrell, Alan Dyson, and Ian Kaplan. "The Impact of Placing Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools on the Achievement of their Peers." *Educational Research*, 49, no. 4, 2008: 365-382. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00131880701717222>.