

Special Education Overview:

Bridging Systems & Partnerships in Education



Washington Office of Superintendent of
PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

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Today's Discussion:

- ❑ Special Education Requirements
- ❑ Research & Data on Inclusion
- ❑ Building Inclusive Systems Statewide
- ❑ Partnering to Support Students & Families



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) & Special Education



6 Core Principles of IDEA

- ❖ Child Find (Zero Reject)
- ❖ Nondiscriminatory evaluation
- ❖ Individualized Education Program (IEP) & Transition Services
- ❖ Free, appropriate public education (FAPE)
- ❖ Least restrictive environment (LRE)
- ❖ Due Process

What Is Special Education?

The term “special education” means specially designed instruction, at no cost to parents, to meet the unique needs of a child with a disability, including—

- ❖ Instruction conducted in the classroom, in the home, in hospitals and institutions, and in other settings; and
- ❖ Instruction in physical education. (20 U.S.C. §1401[29])

Eligibility for Special Education

Students determined eligible for special education services must meet **all three** of the following criteria (or prongs):

- ❖ The student must have a disability or disabilities.
- ❖ The student's disability/disabilities adversely affect educational performance.
- ❖ The student's unique needs cannot be addressed through education in general education classes alone—with or without individual accommodations—and requires specially designed instruction (SDI).

Disability Categories in Washington State

- ❖ Autism
- ❖ Communication Disorders
- ❖ Deaf-Blindness
- ❖ Deafness
- ❖ Developmental Delays (up to age 10)
- ❖ Emotional/Behavioral Disability
- ❖ Health Impairments
- ❖ Hearing Impairments
- ❖ Intellectual Disability
- ❖ Multiple Disabilities
- ❖ Orthopedic Impairments
- ❖ Specific Learning Disabilities
- ❖ Traumatic Brain Injury
- ❖ Visual Impairments

What is an Individualized Education Program or IEP?

An IEP is a working document that outlines a student's educational program and services, including:

- Present Levels of Performance
- Written goals & objectives (SDI)
- Frequency and process for progress monitoring
- Accommodations/modifications
- Related services
- Dates, duration, location & frequency of services
- Must be reviewed annually, at a minimum

The Purpose of an IEP

The IEP is the district's written offer to provide an eligible students with a free and appropriate public education (FAPE):

- ❖ Communication between parents and school personnel
- ❖ Commitment of resources
- ❖ Compliance monitoring tool
- ❖ Instructional management tool
- ❖ Evaluation device

Who is on the IEP Team?

- ❖ Parents
- ❖ Special Education Teacher
- ❖ General Education Teacher
- ❖ School District Representative
- ❖ Someone to interpret test results of any evaluations
- ❖ Student (invitation required if transition services will be discussed)
- ❖ Others as needed

Data tells the real
STORY



Washington State's Journey Toward Inclusion



In 2018, Washington state ranked 44th out of 50 states for K-12 inclusive practices¹.

To support more inclusive schools, the State Legislature funded a multi-year, statewide initiative to support professional development for inclusionary practices.



By 2025, year seven of this initiative, schools in Washington state reported a **10-point** increase in inclusive practices statewide for K-12 and a **12-point** increase for Pre-K².

This means that, since 2018, nearly **30,000** students with disabilities across Washington state have shifted into the highest rates of inclusion!

¹National Council on Disability. (2018). *The Segregation of Students with Disabilities*.

²OSPI. (2025). *Least Restrictive Environment and Child Count Report*.

What's in the



?

80+ years of research: Placement in general education improves outcomes for students with disabilities!

[Carlberg & Kavale \(1980\)](#)

50 research studies
from 1932 – 1970

[Wang & Baker \(1985\)](#)

Meta-analysis
from 1975 – 1984

[Oh-Young & Filler \(2015\)](#)

Research studies
from 1980 – 2013

[Theobald, et al. \(2018\)](#)

WA Study on
CTE & Outcomes

Inclusive practices have also been shown to have positive or neutral results for students *without* disabilities.

[Ruijs & Peetsma \(2009\)](#)

Positive/neutral effects

[Szumski, et al. \(2017\)](#)

Benefits for all students

[Shogren, et al. \(2015\)](#)

SEL benefits



Inclusionary Outcomes – Disaggregated



	All PreK-12 Students	Students with Disabilities	Black Students with Disabilities
2024-25 PreK-12 Student Enrollment	1,105,384	165,763	9,776
2024-25 PreK Inclusion (LRE Indicator 6A)	N/A	34.5%	33.9%
2024-25 Kindergarten Ready (WaKIDS)	53.9%	22.8%	13.5%
2024-25 K-12 Inclusion (80-100% general ed)	N/A	66.2%	53.8%
2024 Graduation	82.8%	65.4%	60.4%
2024 Drop-out	9.7%	14.5%	17.3%
2022-23 Leavers Post-School Outcomes	N/A	69.0%	70.7%

Sources: OSPI. (2024). [State Report Card](#); [Least Restrictive Environment \(LRE\) and Child Count Data](#); [Data Performance Profile](#).

The Equity Imperative

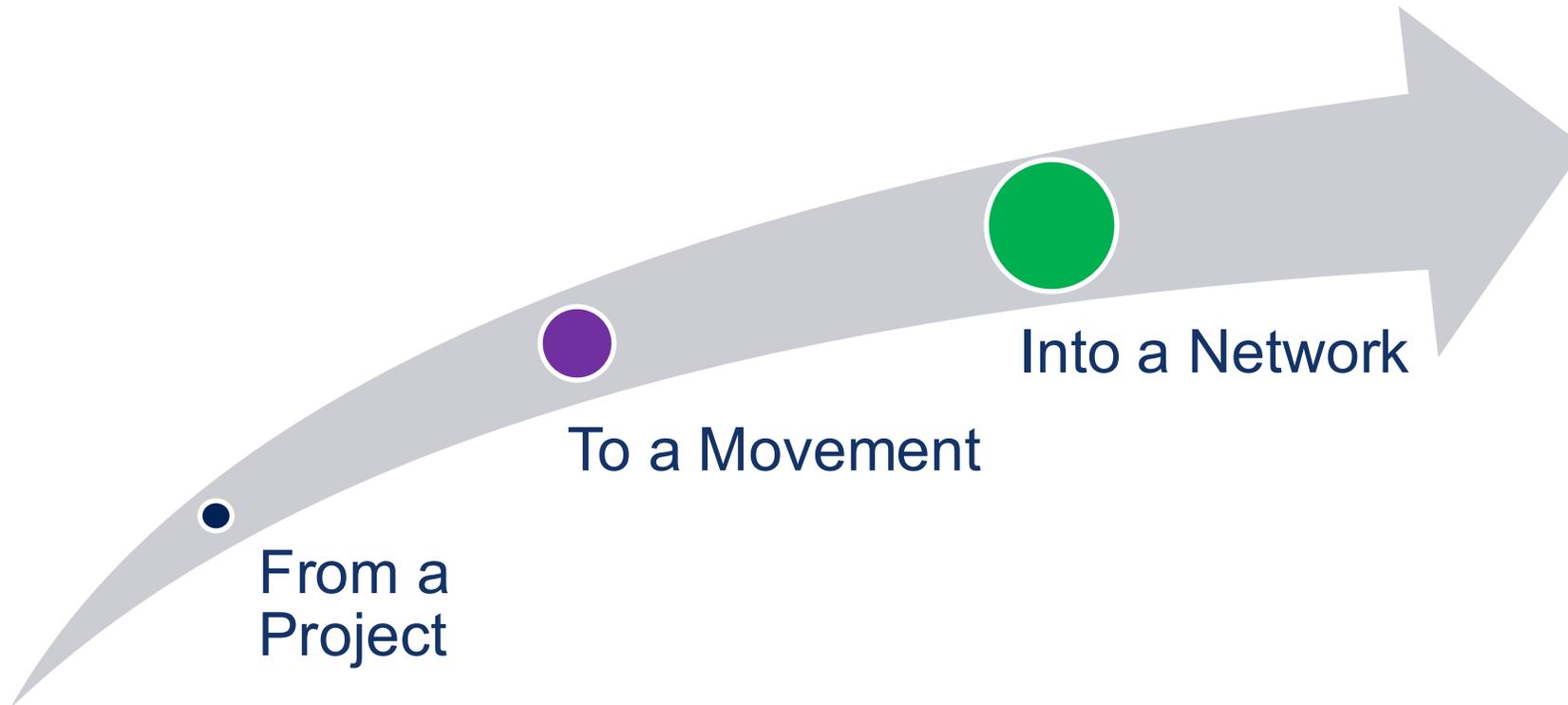
Barriers to equity for students with disabilities:

- Low expectations.
- Disproportionate identification, segregation & discipline for students of color.
- Lack of access and opportunity to core instruction from content experts.
- School schedules contribute to removals from core instruction in general education.
- Teacher and staff shortages.
- Training needs for educators & school staff.
- Staffing models that reinforce segregation.



**How can we
remove or reduce
these barriers?**

Washington's Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network (IPTN)



<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/iptn>

Our Partnership Network is Always Expanding!



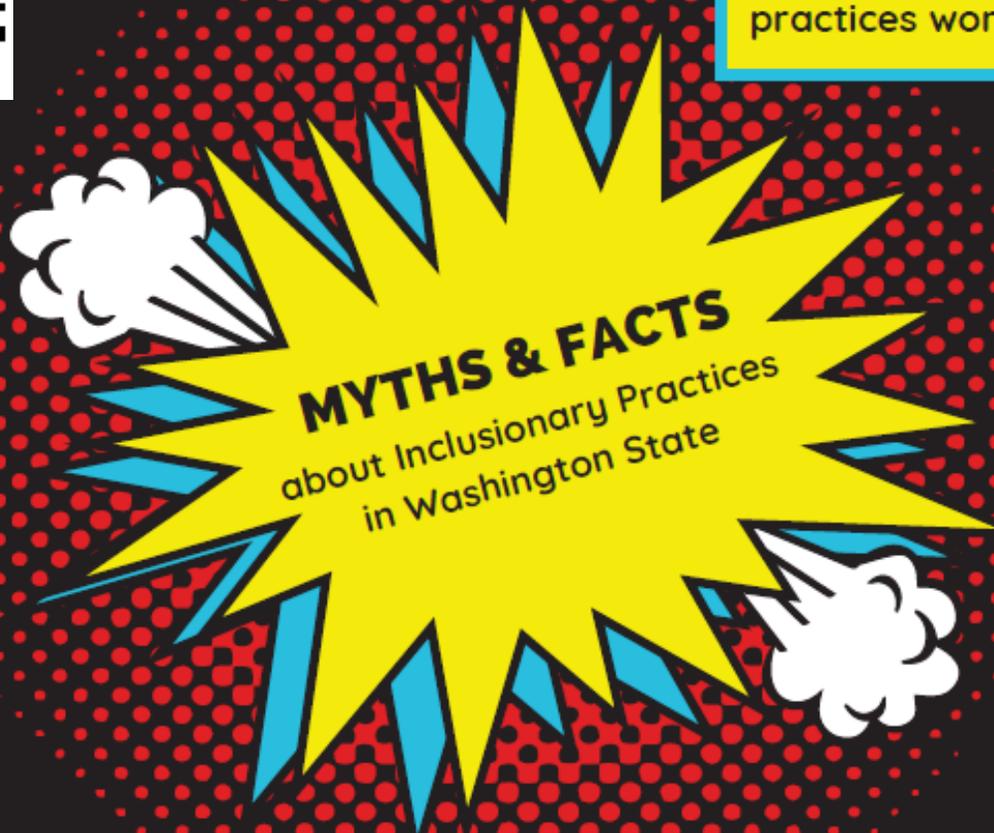
IPTN Aim Statement

The IPTN will provide high-quality guidance, technical assistance, and professional development resources to districts to disrupt segregated systems of disproportionality and reduce exclusionary practices in Washington schools.

This will result in improved student outcomes, with an additional focus on the outcomes and inclusion of students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) & Black students with disabilities.



Special education has its fair share of myths and facts about inclusion for students with significant cognitive disabilities. This resource was developed to challenge those myths and highlight the facts of why inclusionary practices work for each and every student.



MYTH #1: COSTS OF INCLUSION

MYTH #2: WHO CAN PROVIDE SPECIALLY DESIGNED INSTRUCTION?

MYTH #3: READINESS FOR INCLUSION

MYTH #4: CURRICULUM & STANDARDS

MYTH #5: PARENTS & INCLUSION

MYTH #6: DISABILITY & PLACEMENT

MYTH #7: ASSESSMENT & ACADEMICS





MYTH #3:

Students with significant cognitive disabilities must show they are ready for the general education setting.

FACT:

Every student is a general education student. All students have the right to be educated in general education settings.

The Truth Is...

- Students should not be required to reach specified benchmarks (e.g., a 2nd grader at Kindergarten proficiency) before receiving instruction in general education.
- A student's needs, rather than disability, should determine placement. For example, a student with an intellectual disability should not automatically be placed into a segregated setting.
- Mission and vision statements that read "all means all" should include the experiences of students with significant support needs.
- Students with IEPs, including students with significant support needs, should not have to "earn their time" in general education or "prove" they will not engage in challenging behaviors before gaining access to general education environments.

EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THE FACTS:

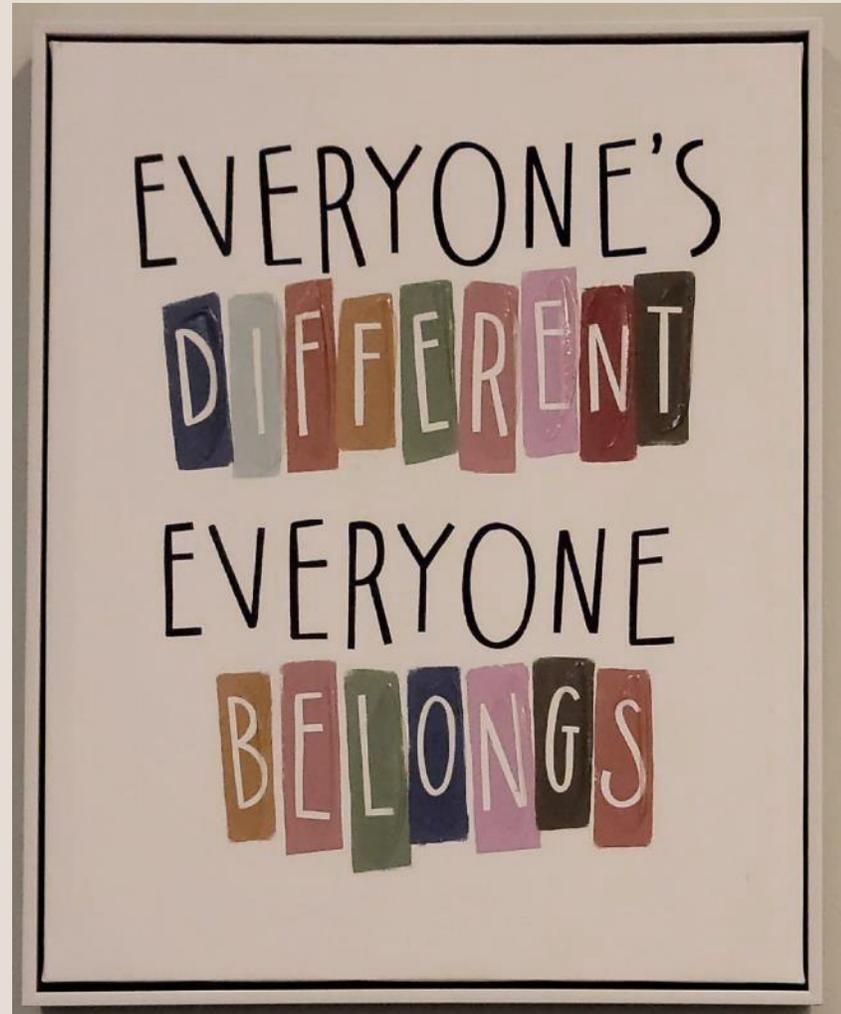
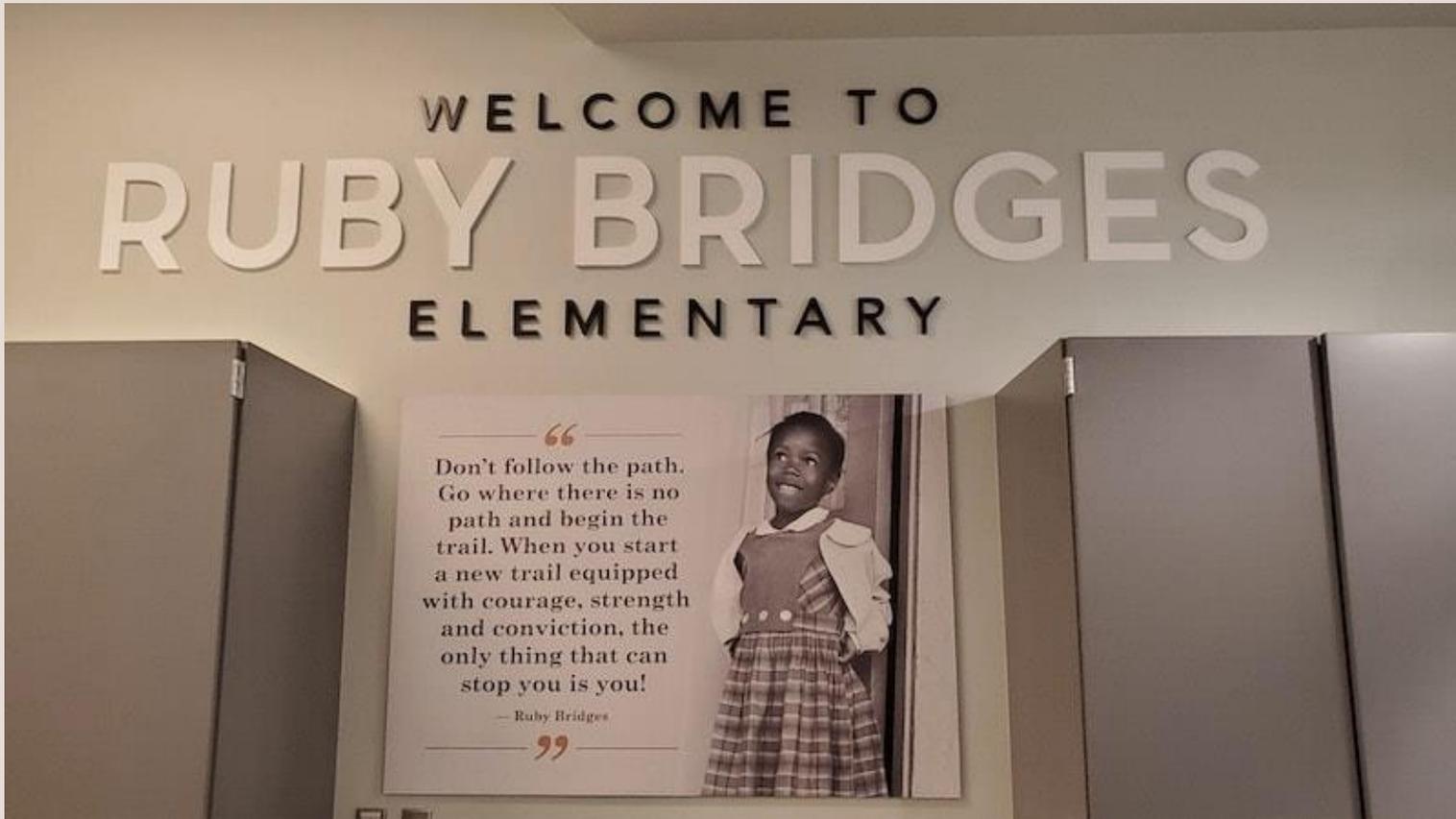
- OSPI's [Inclusionary Practices Project \(IPP\)](#) defines inclusion as all means all: Inclusive instruction rebukes the problematic perspective that students receiving special education services need to 'fit in' or 'earn their way' into general education classes. The belief that general education instruction is not malleable and that students should be making adaptations to be included in the general education setting has contributed to the continuation of two parallel systems of education in which students receiving special education services are marginalized and devalued as a result of their environmental segregation.
- TIES Center Resource: [Taking the Alternative Assessment Does NOT Mean Education in a Separate Setting!](#)
- [Outcomes of Inclusive Versus Separate Placement: A Matched Pairs Comparison. Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities](#) - Gee, K. Gonzales, M., & Cooper, C. (2020)

STRATEGIES FOR DISPELLING THE MYTH:

- Provide [examples/frameworks that show how students with significant cognitive disabilities can engage in lessons/units](#) (e.g., lesson examples, share inclusive IEP process, and Inclusive Education at a Glance).
- Include core content data and stories about students with and without disabilities. [Identify environmental, attitudinal, and other barriers to general education curriculum and access.](#) Presume competence for all and meaningfully consider supports needed for instruction in general education settings.
- Implement Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into all lesson planning and ensure students with significant cognitive disabilities are included in all aspects of classroom- and school-wide [Multi-tiered Systems of Support \(MTSS\)](#) including academic, behavior and social-emotional.
- Assign every student to the roster of a general education teacher with a seat in a general education classroom. This means that there is no negotiation about whether a student belongs in general education. It also clearly conveys that special education services are supplementary to general education.



Models of Excellence: Inclusionary Practices Demonstration Sites



Inclusive (Accessible!) Instruction



Progress not Perfection...

What is the Next Right Step We're Ready to Take?



- ❖ Elevate and celebrate the strengths of the team and larger system for including and supporting students with disabilities.
- ❖ Stay curious: analyze data, systems, and support structures... are students with disabilities included across all areas, with all staff roles?
- ❖ Balance urgency with sustainability: it's not possible to 'fix' everything at once. What is the next step the team is ready to take?
- ❖ Embrace the messy middle: be open with the team, students, and families that change takes time; collect input along the way.

How Can Partners Help?

- Ask schools and districts about special education funding and how budget decisions are made. Ask about interventions for students that are culturally affirming.
- Share lived experiences and ideas for ways to foster learning and belonging in schools.
- Talk to local representatives about fully funding special education and inclusionary practices.
- Reach out to OSPI Special Education with questions or feedback at speced@k12.wa.us.

Ideas for Getting Involved...

Feedback and Voice:

- Students, families, and education partners are invited to advise Washington's first statewide IEP system.
- Reach out to our office with specific concerns – and to share positive examples of student supports and collaborative efforts!
- Email speced@k12.wa.us to share information.

Take Action:

- Visit the [IPP Demosite webpage](#) and organize a site visit with school/district and community partners.

Resources to Support Inclusive Practices

- [Inclusionary Practices Technical Assistance Network \(IPTN\)](#)
- [Comprehensive Inclusive Education guide](#)
- [CAST UDL Guidelines](#)
- [Online Module on Inclusive Schools: A Model for School Leaders](#)
- [Myths & Facts about Inclusionary Practices](#)
- [Inclusionary Practices Demonstration Sites](#)



Discussion & Questions



<https://media.istockphoto.com/photos/red-flag-with-question-mark-on-map-background-3d-rendering-picture-id537276026>



