



Special Areas Series

Special area classrooms are often some of the most joyful, creative, and engaging spaces in a school—places where students learn through movement, expression, collaboration, and discovery. Yet these settings also present unique challenges: large numbers of students, limited instructional time, varied learner needs, and the expectation that every student meaningfully participates. This four-part series is designed specifically for special area educators and provides practical tools for creating learning environments where all students can access, participate, and belong. Participants will build a shared framework for inclusion, explore Universal Design for Learning (UDL), learn proactive behavior strategies, and apply their learning to create meaningful access in daily practice.

Session 1: Building the Foundation: Inclusion in Special Area Classrooms

This opening session establishes the "why" behind inclusive practices and builds a shared understanding of the role special area teachers play in creating equitable opportunities for all learners. Participants will explore beliefs and assumptions surrounding inclusion, understand legal and educational foundations, and examine the difference between presence and meaningful participation. Together, participants will develop a practical framework for thinking about learner variability and begin identifying barriers that may exist in their own settings. This session sets the stage for the work ahead by developing a strengths-based framework to support learners with disabilities and developing common understanding.



Session 2: Designing for Learner Variability: UDL in Special Area Settings

Students enter PE, music, art, library, and other special area classrooms with different strengths, needs, interests, and ways of engaging. This session focuses on Universal Design for Learning (UDL) as a proactive approach for designing instruction that supports a wide range of learners from the start. Participants will explore strategies for providing multiple ways for students to access information, engage in learning, and demonstrate understanding while applying these ideas to special area settings.

Session 3: Understanding and Responding to Behavior in Special Area Classrooms

Special area teachers often encounter unique behavioral challenges due to transitions, large class sizes, changing groups of students, and highly interactive learning environments. This session explores behavior as communication and examines how adult responses can unintentionally reinforce patterns of behavior. Participants will learn to identify behavioral functions and apply proactive strategies that increase engagement while reducing challenging behavior.

Session 4: From Theory to Practice: Creating Meaningful Access in Special Area Classrooms

The final session brings together concepts from the previous sessions and moves from individual strategies to practical application. Participants will apply ideas related to inclusion, UDL, and behavior to common situations encountered in special area settings. Through collaborative planning and reflection, educators will design routines and learning experiences that promote meaningful participation for all students.