



empowerED School Solutions, LLC

empowerED

**Transforming Schools into Communities Where
ALL Students Grow, Belong, and Succeed**



 empowerED School Solutions LLC

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About empowerED School Solutions



About empowerED...

EmpowerED School Solutions, or empowerED, is an education consulting firm with expertise in inclusion, special education, and systems change. The mission of empowerED is to provide supports that develop an educational system where...

- ALL children receive high-quality, grade-level instruction in general education settings.
- Differences are viewed as gifts to be treasured rather than problems to be solved.
- Students are supported in reaching their highest potential and staff are equipped with the tools to realize this goal.
- The foundation for just and responsible societies begins in school.

Our vision is achieved through...

- Interactive and relevant professional development that models the practices we want to see in our classrooms;
- Leadership training in systems change from individuals who have real-world experience in implementation;
- Instructional coaching from educational experts with years of experience as practitioners;
- Support in addressing structural, logistical, and philosophical challenges that inhibit schools from meeting the needs of all learners;
- Comprehensive program reviews of special education, intervention frameworks, and multi-tiered systems of support to provide actionable recommendations for improvement;
- Development of high-quality literacy and mathematics programs grounded in research-based best practices; and
- Consultative support and meeting facilitation to support teams in arriving at consensus to best meet the needs of all students.

Experience

Overview

EmpowerED has worked with school systems, state departments of education, government agencies, and disability organizations in seventeen states and Australia. Notable projects include training special education administrators across Massachusetts, supporting the New Mexico Public Education Department's Special Education Transformation Team, providing statewide professional development on both inclusive practices and disproportionality for the Arkansas Department of Secondary and Elementary Education, and offering workshops through California's Supporting Inclusive Practices (SIP) initiative. EmpowerED has also provided consultative services to the California Department of Justice, and previously, the U.S. Department of Justice, on special education-related matters.

We have supported schools that span a wide range of locations, socioeconomic status, and diversity. At empowerED, we understand that each system has a unique culture that must be understood prior to implementing change.

Our founder and CEO, Dr. Jenna Mancini Rufo, spent nearly twenty years in public education in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts before establishing empowerED. She served as an assistant superintendent, special education director, special education teacher, inclusion facilitator, and policy specialist for the Massachusetts Bureau of Special Education. Her professional experiences, coupled with graduate work completed at Harvard University and



***Dr. Jenna Mancini Rufo,
Founder and Chief Executive Officer***

training in improvement science through the Carnegie Foundation, have provided her with an understanding of both theory and practical implementation.

Dr. Rufo has been featured at national, international, and regional events, including *The Atlantic's* Education Summit, the National Principals Conference, the Council for Exceptional Children's PA Conference, Australia's School Inclusion Network for Educators (SINE), and the Pennsylvania Education for All Coalition. Dr. Rufo has co-authored *Reimagining Special Education: Using Inclusion as a Framework to Build Equity and Support All Students*, *The Way To Inclusion: Creating Schools Where Every Student Belongs*, and *Conquering Math Myths with Universal Design: An Inclusive Instructional Approach for Grades K-8*. Dr. Rufo has also authored pieces in AASA's School Administrator magazine.

Dr. Rufo was inspired to enter the field by her sister, Nina, who has complex support needs. She views education as her calling and is passionate about creating quality learning experiences for ALL students.

Consultant Team

Kate Small

As an instructional leader grounded in the “how” of inclusive education, Ms. Kate Small is a change agent dedicated to accessibility for all learners. Having served as a general educator, special educator, inclusion facilitator and instructional coach, Ms. Small values the importance of collaboration and the impact it has on creating meaningful educational opportunities. Prior to joining the team at empowerED, Ms. Small taught in both urban and suburban settings. As an educational consultant, she has supported systems change at the school, district, and state levels. She is a skilled professional developer who connects easily with audiences. Ms. Small is experienced in coaching the inclusive mindset, and is passionate about practices such as essentialization, Universal Design for Learning, co-teaching, and accessibility through technology. Ms. Small is currently pursuing her doctoral degree, and completed a Masters in Educational Leadership in 2018.



Ms. Small has shared her expertise at the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s annual conference, the Syracuse Summer Leadership Institute, and the PBIS / MTSS Implementers Forum. She provided oral testimony in support of Pennsylvania House Bill 726, piloting a Disability Inclusive Curriculum across the state.

CHOOSIN'
inclusion

Dr. Monica Ng

Dr. Monica Ng is a seasoned educator and educational consultant with extensive experience in teaching and leadership. Holding a Doctorate in Educational Policy, Leadership, and Instructional Practice from Harvard University, Dr. Ng has been deeply involved in educational research and reform. She has collaborated on developing inclusive education research and co-authored the dyslexia guidelines for the state of Massachusetts. She has worked on projects for the U.S. and California Departments of Justice, as well as school district-specific projects. Dr. Ng has also led professional development initiatives, including a statewide Response to Intervention (RTI) project where she supported 14 New York City schools in designing and implementing RTI frameworks over three years. She has served as a teaching fellow for classes on inclusive education, special education policy, federal education policy, school leadership, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) at Harvard. Dr. Ng holds an administrative certification in California as well as early childhood licensure.



Consultant Team



Dr. Kimberly Boyd

Dr. Kim Boyd is an educational leader with extensive K-12 experience who is committed to inclusive education. Dr. Boyd's career in public education spans many roles, including that of general education teacher, literacy coach, professional development coordinator, principal at the elementary and middle school levels, and director of special education. Skilled in implementing intervention systems, Dr. Boyd believes that strong general education and special education programs go hand in hand. She has a practical and hands-on approach to supporting schools. Dr. Boyd holds her superintendent's letter of eligibility and certificates as a principal, special education teacher (N-21) and elementary education teacher (K-6) in Pennsylvania.



Dr. Frances K. Garner

Dr. Frances K. Garner is an accomplished educational leader with extensive experience in special education, student services, and professional development. As a director of student services and assistant director of special education, she has led teams, developed intervention frameworks, and implemented professional development initiatives to support educators and enhance student outcomes. Prior to her work as an administrator, she honed her expertise in differentiated instruction and student engagement as a special education teacher in a variety of settings. Dr. Garner was a panelist at SEE Learning: A World-Wide Initiative for Educating the Heart and Mind in Dharamsala, India, hosted by Emory University and the Office of the Dalai Lama and networked with educators from around the world. She holds her Superintendent's Letter of Eligibility and special education supervisor certificate. Dr. Garner also holds Pennsylvania certificates in special education (N-21), elementary education (K-6), middle level English (7-9), and middle level math (7-9).



Megan Klementisz

A creative problem-solver with a firm belief in inclusive education, Ms. Megan Klementisz is committed to improving outcomes for students with disabilities. She has spent nearly two decades directly supporting students with disabilities in a variety of roles, most recently as an inclusion facilitator. Ms. Klementisz's career includes employment in public school systems in both Massachusetts and Pennsylvania. In her current role as consultant, Ms. Klementisz has completed literacy assessments for students with complex needs, provided professional development and coaching to school districts, and served as a liaison to the New Mexico Public Education Department's Special Education Transformation Team. She holds Pennsylvania licensure in special education (N-21) and elementary education (K-6).



empowerED

EDUCATION CONSULTING

www.empoweredschool.org



Professional Development

Keynote Addresses

Our keynote addresses are designed to ignite possibility, spark new perspectives, and energize school communities. Each talk delivers a powerful blend of inspiration and practicality—helping educators pause, reflect, and reimagine what’s possible in their classrooms and systems. Whether we’re exploring how to better support diverse learners or offering tools to create more inclusive and joyful learning environments, our keynotes are engaging, uplifting, and deeply rooted in real classroom practice.

Perfect for conference kickoffs or back-to-school events, these sessions offer a dynamic start to meaningful change—inviting every educator to see themselves as a catalyst for equity, connection, and joyful learning.

“

“This first day has given me a boost of energy that is greatly needed to get a new school year started...this was one of the most engaging, informative and inspiring sessions that I have attended.”

- Special Educator, Massachusetts

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Fall In Love with Teaching Again

Supporting a wide range of learners is complex work—but it’s also rich with opportunity. This keynote invites educators to pause, reflect, and reimagine the systemic barriers that can get in the way of joyful teaching and learning. Together, we’ll explore a strengths-based framework designed to better support all students—those with disabilities, English language learners, advanced learners, and everyone in between.

Through active modeling of high-engagement strategies, this session creates an upbeat, energizing, and fun experience. Educators will leave with tools and inspiration to utilize an assets-based framework for learning that helps them redesign instruction in ways that center equity, connection, and possibility—setting the tone for a positive and powerful school year.



Workshops

Teaching without Limits: An Introduction to Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

This interactive workshop introduces the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework and its powerful potential to create more inclusive, flexible, and engaging classrooms. Participants will explore how to “design from the start” by anticipating and reducing common barriers to learning—rather than reacting to them after the fact.

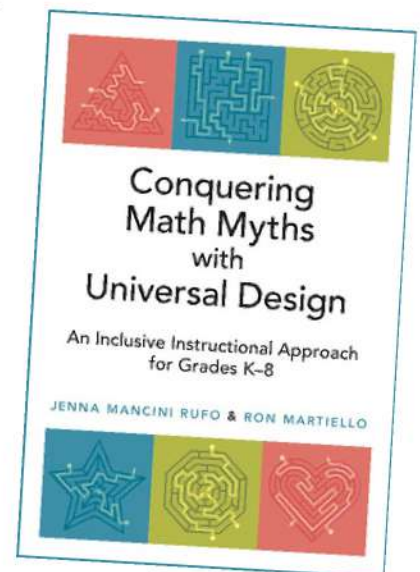
We'll break down the core UDL principles—multiple means of representation, expression, and engagement—into clear, actionable strategies that can be immediately applied in real classrooms. Throughout the session, effective instructional and engagement practices are actively modeled, making this a hands-on, participant-centered experience grounded in practicality and purpose.



Conquering Math Myths with Universal Design

The teaching and learning of mathematics have long been haunted by myths - myths that some people just aren't “math people,” myths that grade-level content can't be accessed until “prerequisite skills” are taught, and many more.

This session, based on the book by Dr. Rufo of empowerED and co-author, Ron Martiello, provides specific tools and strategies for teachers in grades K-8 to “bust math myths” through universal design. A UDL “toolbox” is referred to throughout the workshop, and revisited as new skills and strategies are taught. We show teachers how to use focus and coherence in their curriculum to prioritize major standards while continuing to address student deficits.



Workshops

UDL, MTSS, and Shared Responsibility for All Learners

This session helps teachers understand how Universal Design for Learning (UDL) connects directly to a strong Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) and what that means for daily classroom practice. Participants will explore how designing effective Tier 1 instruction reduces the need for constant interventions, referrals, and “workarounds,” allowing more students to access learning successfully from the start.

Teachers will examine how UDL strategies support flexible grouping, scaffolded practice, and meaningful formative assessment, making it easier to identify which students need additional support and what kind of support is most appropriate. The session clarifies the role of Tier 1 instruction within MTSS and emphasizes shared responsibility—helping educators see how general education, special education, and intervention supports work together rather than in isolation.

Through practical examples and collaborative problem-solving, participants will reflect on common classroom challenges (engagement, readiness gaps, behavior, task avoidance) and identify proactive design moves that support a wider range of learners. Teachers will leave with a clearer understanding of how UDL helps streamline support systems, improves instructional decision-making, and creates classrooms where more students can succeed without being labeled or removed from core instruction.



Workshops

Access with Intention: Accommodations and Modifications in Practice

This session builds on the foundation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and offers a deeper look at how to support students with disabilities through appropriate instructional adjustments. Participants will gain a clear understanding of the difference between accommodations and modifications—what they are, when to use them, and how they impact student access and expectations.

Through real-world examples and practical tools, educators will explore how to thoughtfully adapt and modify instruction and content while maintaining meaningful learning outcomes. Emphasis is placed on proactive planning, clarity in instructional goals, and ensuring that changes to materials or expectations continue to promote equity, dignity, and inclusion.

This session is especially valuable for educators who work with students receiving specialized services or supports and want concrete strategies to deliver instruction that meets diverse needs without compromising rigor or belonging.

Curriculum Essentialization

This workshop introduces the practice of essentialization—the process of identifying the most key concepts within the curriculum and creating intentional access points for students with significant disabilities. Rather than relying on last-minute modifications and oversimplification of concepts without context, educators will learn how to proactively break down complex content into meaningful, accessible learning experiences.

Rooted in the belief that all students deserve to engage in rich, authentic instruction, this session empowers educators to plan thoughtfully for inclusion, ensuring students with complex needs are truly part of the learning community—not adjacent to it. Participants will explore tools, strategies, and mindsets that support deep learning, high expectations, and dignity for every student.

“Just finished your session and I wanted to thank you for a worthwhile three hours of my time. Your presentation was informative, interesting, and useful.”

**- General Education Teacher,
California**



Workshops



Technology Tools to Increase Access

This session explores how to leverage technology to redefine and revolutionize accessibility for students with complex learning profiles. Participants will explore how the strategic integration of technology into classrooms can enhance equitable learning opportunities. Tools will be explored in real time, so that teachers become comfortable with platforms that will allow them to work smarter in tailoring the curriculum to individual students.

Throughout the session, we will examine practical, classroom-ready applications that support differentiated instruction, executive functioning, language development, and access to grade-level content. Emphasis will be placed on using technology not as a replacement for teacher expertise, but as a tool to amplify it. Educators will leave with both a deeper understanding of the potential of technology, along with a toolkit of strategies to implement immediately.

Teaching in the Fast Lane: Tools for An Active Classroom

This session invites educators to rethink traditional classroom dynamics by exploring how intentional design and management can transform student engagement. An active classroom shifts the focus from passive consumption to meaningful participation—where students are not just present, but invested. Participants will examine strategies for structuring lessons that promote inquiry, movement, collaboration, and student voice, all while maintaining clear routines and expectations that support a productive learning environment.

Through practical examples and interactive discussion, educators will gain tools for fostering a culture where students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning. Emphasis will be placed on creating conditions that support curiosity, risk-taking, and reflection, while also addressing common challenges such as pacing, differentiation, and classroom management. By the end of the session, participants will leave with a renewed vision of what engagement can look like and actionable steps to bring that vision to life.

Workshops

Behavior and Classroom Management Strategies to Debunk the Myth of the Bad Kid

This session provides practical strategies for educators to implement effective tier one behavioral and classroom management strategies. Behavior is viewed through the lens of unmet needs - what is the student communicating to you about what they need and how can we proactively address those concerns? This workshop also supports participants in developing effective routines and procedures to prevent challenging behaviors from occurring in the first place.

Building on this foundation, the session emphasizes the importance of consistency, relationship-building, and clear expectations as cornerstones of a well-managed classroom. Educators will learn how to create supportive environments where all students can thrive, with an emphasis on proactive rather than reactive responses. Participants will leave with concrete tools for teaching expected behaviors, reinforcing positive actions, and using restorative practices to maintain a healthy classroom culture grounded in respect and belonging.

Behavior PLC

Small group Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, are held to identify a problem of practice related to student behavior, develop potential solutions, implement an agreed-upon solution, and debrief on the solution's effectiveness. This PLC series is highly individualized, relevant, and based upon the needs of educators. Sessions are collaborative, reflective, and grounded in real-time challenges, allowing educators to test strategies in their own classrooms and return with insights that drive deeper professional learning. Over time, this process builds a culture of shared ownership, continuous improvement, and practical problem-solving.

Enhancing Classroom Community with SEL

Social, emotional, and ethical learning is based in the science of compassion and designed to provide educators with tools to foster emotional, social and ethical intelligence in students. In this session, participants will take away practical strategies to use in their classrooms to create compassionate and supportive classrooms.

“Wow! What a powerful and impactful presentation! Thank you for all that you do and for helping us move forward to make positive changes for ALL students!”

- Special Education Teacher, Washington



Workshops

Trauma and the Brain

This session provides participants with a foundational understanding of how trauma impacts the brains of students and leads to stress responses. Strategies for using trauma-informed practices in the classroom are provided with a focus on translating an understanding of trauma to classroom implementation. Educators will explore how adverse experiences can influence attention, memory, behavior, and emotional regulation—and how classroom environments can either reinforce or reduce those effects.

Through practical tools and real-world examples, participants will learn how to create learning spaces that foster psychological safety, connection, and predictability. The session emphasizes proactive, relationship-centered approaches that help students feel seen, valued, and supported, even in moments of dysregulation. Educators will leave with actionable strategies for building routines, responding to challenging behaviors, and supporting all learners in ways that are both compassionate and effective.



Secondary Traumatic Stress and Self-Care

Secondary Traumatic Stress (STS), also known as compassion fatigue, is a common challenge for educators and professionals who support students navigating trauma. This session explores the emotional toll that can arise from empathic engagement, highlighting the signs and symptoms of STS and its potential impact on mental health, job satisfaction, and effectiveness in the classroom. Participants will deepen their understanding of how stress accumulates over time and how it can manifest both personally and professionally.

Grounded in research and real-life application, the session offers practical strategies for building resilience and integrating self-care into daily routines. Participants will explore systems-level approaches and individual practices that promote emotional sustainability, professional boundaries, and a culture of care. The goal is to support educators in doing the deeply human work of teaching without burning out—ensuring they can show up fully for their students and themselves.

Workshops

Students in the Driver's Seat: Reimagining Transition Planning

Transition planning is intended to help students prepare for life beyond school, yet too often students have limited roles in discussions centered on their own futures. Meetings frequently become adult-directed conversations where educators and families make decisions on behalf of students rather than with them. This interactive workshop challenges participants to rethink traditional approaches to transition planning and explore how student voice, agency, and self-determination can become central to the process.

Participants will examine practical strategies for increasing authentic student participation before, during, and after transition meetings while exploring structures that support meaningful engagement rather than symbolic involvement. Through collaborative activities and real-world application, educators will learn ways to prepare students to identify strengths, communicate goals, advocate for needed supports, and actively contribute to planning for their future. Participants will leave with tools and ideas that help move transition planning from compliance-driven meetings to student-centered experiences that build lifelong self-advocacy skills.

“I can not tell you the amount of positive feedback we received in regards to your presentation. The families and administrators were blown away.”

**-Special Education
Director,
Pennsylvania**



Leading Inclusive Education Administrator Series

This series supports school leaders in...

- Communicating the rationale for inclusive education both as a best practice and as a moral and ethical obligation;
- Articulating effective structures that support inclusive education and various models of special education service delivery beyond simply co-teaching and paraprofessional support;
- Applying their understanding of service delivery models to effective inclusive scheduling and resource allocation; and
- Implementing strategies for leading the change process, building consensus, and equipping staff with tools to be successful.

Participants will explore change theories to support them in building consensus and shifting beliefs in support of lasting change.

This series led by Dr. Jenna Rufo is delivered through four ninety-minute live professional development sessions held either in-person or via Zoom. Sessions may also be grouped together to better meet the needs of the client.

"Dr. Rufo's fierce passion for equitable practices and policy merge, resulting in the delicate balance that is her – even-keeled, yet impassioned; steadfast, yet gentle in her approaches.

She is the kind of leader that can garner the attention of a room of educators who may at first be resistant to any kind of change, earn their buy-in and trust, and empower them through the teaching of concrete strategies."

- Related Services Provider, Connecticut



Professional Learning Series

Co-Teaching Series

The foundational concepts of co-teaching, including instructional models, planning, and parity, are reviewed in an initial half-day kick-off session. In this first session, participants will establish goals for their co-teaching partnership and arrive at consensus on how to manage their classroom instruction and environment. A similar half-day session is available for administrators supervising co-teaching pairs to help them become comfortable with the models and structural elements necessary for co-teaching partners to thrive.

A second half-day session is provided mid-year to reflect on progress, and develop an increased understanding of more advanced co-teaching models and strategies. Opportunities for problem-solving and brain-storming are embedded within the session.

Monthly coaching for co-teaching pairs is provided via Zoom. The co-teaching pairs meet with their assigned empowerED consultant to review progress towards goals, troubleshoot problems that may arise, and discuss future action steps. In-person observations are also recommended.



Culturally-Responsive Evaluation Practices for School Psychologists

Upon completion of this series, school psychologists will be able to...

- Articulate a foundational understanding of disproportionality in special education identification and placement
- Identify what culturally-responsive evaluation practices look like
- Compare learning profiles of students acquiring a second language and those that have underlying learning differences
- Reevaluate questions asked prior to referral and during the evaluation process
- Analyze how culturally responsive practices can be embedded within all aspects of assessment
- Challenge biases and existing evaluation practices in order to promote culturally responsive assessment

This series empowers school psychologists to honor students' backgrounds and cultures, reducing inappropriate identification.

Reducing Disproportionality Series

Disproportionality is the over-representation of students of color in special education and discipline, and the under-representation of those same students in gifted and advanced coursework. The *Reducing Disproportionality Series* is delivered over four 90-minute sessions with a fifth in-person session dedicated to root cause analysis and action planning.

Session 1 - This session provides an introduction to the concept of disproportionality. Participants will learn how disproportionality is calculated and develop a common language to discuss concerns.

Session 2 - In session 2, participants begin discussing the bias-based beliefs that contribute to disproportionality according to Fergus (2017). This session operates under the premise that in order to change culture and practices, leaders must first address the underlying beliefs and philosophies that contribute to inequitable outcomes.

"I appreciated the opportunity to engage in courageous conversations about race, poverty, special education, and discipline. This series helped me understand the connection between belief systems and the overarching problems we are experiencing in schools."

- Instructional Coach, Arkansas



Session 3 - Session 3 addresses the bias-based beliefs associated with discipline and how punitive and exclusionary discipline exacerbates disproportionality. An introduction to Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS) is provided.

Session 4 - Session 4 examines the structural conditions that contribute to disproportionality, including weak core curriculum, ineffective systems of intervention, inconsistent prereferral and referral processes, and lack of opportunities to learn.

Session 5 - Session 5 is a half or full-day work session provided on-site to guide participants through root cause analysis. Now that participants have the necessary understanding and background of the practices, structures, and beliefs that lead to disproportionality, they can apply that understanding to creating actionable steps for improvement. This is a hands-on session where participants will engage in data analysis and planning.



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.

IEP Writing Series

Writing IEPs with Purpose and Precision

EmpowerED offers a comprehensive IEP development package designed to build confidence, clarity, and compliance in IEP writing. We approach the IEP as a roadmap for student progress and growth, rather than an exercise in paperwork. Our training is unique because we approach each element of the IEP as an opportunity not just to identify student weaknesses, but to seek out and develop their strengths.

The program begins with a three-hour foundational session that covers the legal rationale behind IEPs, how well-written plans drive student progress, and best practices for creating effective, student-centered documents. Participants will explore each section of the IEP using exemplars, and gain strategies for time management, efficient data collection, and streamlining the process.

Following the initial training, a series of six sessions are held throughout the year, with each one focusing on a different section of the IEP.

Additional ongoing coaching between the IEP writing facilitator and teachers is also suggested.



Six sessions, one hour each in duration, are offered to build knowledge and skills of special education teachers in writing IEPs. One major topic will be covered at each session:

- Session 1: Present Levels of Performance
- Session 2: Measurable Annual Goals
- Session 3: Specially Designed Instruction
- Session 4: General Education Participation, Parental Concerns
- Session 5: Placement, Prior Written Notice, ESY
- Session 6: Facilitating Effective Meetings



Early Childhood Series

Early childhood classrooms are filled with tremendous learner variability. Children enter school with different experiences, communication styles, strengths, interests, developmental levels, and support needs. This professional learning series equips educators with practical strategies for supporting a wide range of early learners while creating environments where all children can access, participate, and thrive.



Session 1: Beginning with Beliefs: Building Inclusive Foundations for Early Learners

The first session establishes a shared understanding of inclusion and explores the beliefs that influence our daily practices and decisions. Participants will examine assumptions about children, disability, behavior, and readiness while considering how educator mindsets shape classroom experiences. Through reflection and discussion, participants will build an assets-based framework that recognizes strengths and potential in every learner.

Session 2: Understanding Young Children: Development, Behavior, and Learner Variability

Young children communicate, learn, and regulate in many different ways. This session examines child development and learner variability through a practical lens while exploring behavior as communication. Participants will develop an understanding of behavioral functions and consider how developmental needs, communication differences, and environmental factors influence behavior in early childhood settings.

Session 3: Designing from the Start: UDL and Reducing Barriers for Early Learners

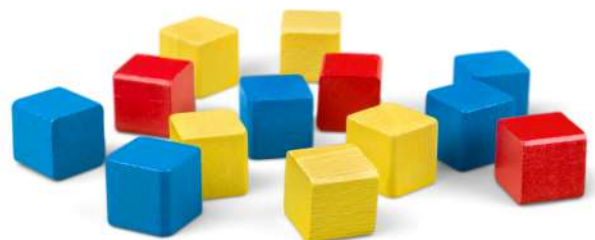
Rather than waiting for children to struggle and responding afterward, educators can intentionally design environments that reduce barriers before they emerge. This session introduces Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and focuses on creating multiple ways for children to access learning, engage with activities, and express understanding. Participants will identify predictable barriers and develop strategies for creating more flexible and responsive learning experiences.

Session 4: Proactive Behavior Supports and Classroom Systems that Work

Early learning environments rely on predictable routines, relationships, and supportive structures. This session focuses on practical approaches for reducing challenging behaviors through proactive supports, classroom systems, and responsive adult practices. Participants will explore strategies that strengthen engagement, increase independence, and create environments where children can be successful.

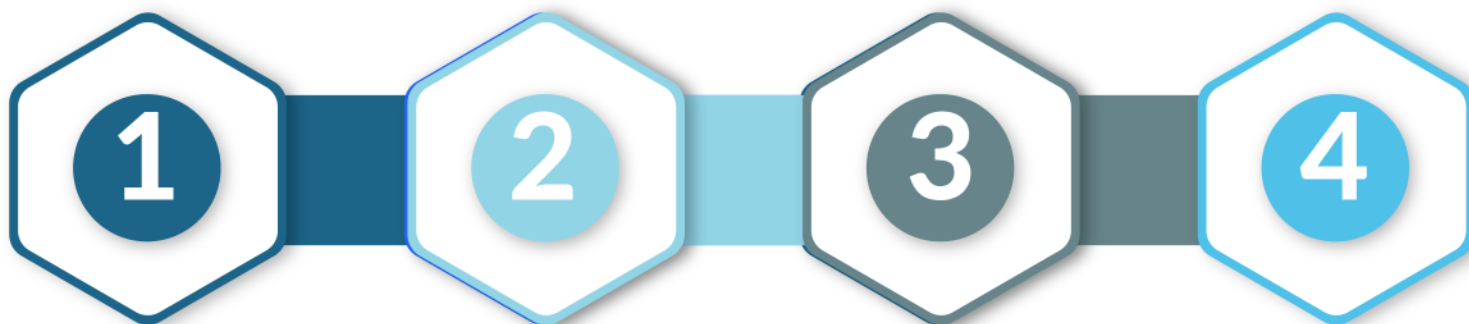
Session 5: Turning Ideas into Action: Creating Inclusive Early Childhood Environments

The final session brings together key concepts from the series and focuses on implementation. Participants will apply learning from previous sessions to classroom scenarios and planning activities while designing supports that promote meaningful participation for all children.



Building Conditions for Early Grades Success: A Series for Administrators and Teacher Leaders

Strengthening early-grade behavioral outcomes requires more than isolated strategies – it requires alignment between vision, Tier 1 systems, and shared adult responsibility. This session establishes a foundation for examining how leadership decisions, classroom conditions, and belief systems shape patterns in early-grade behavior. Through analysis of Tier 1 variability and the introduction of the Results Pyramid, leaders begin identifying the system conditions that must be strengthened to support consistent, proactive behavioral coherence across general and special education. The essential question guiding this session asks:



CLARITY

Session One establishes shared clarity around early-grade behavioral coherence and Tier 1 conditions. Leaders examine how systems, instructional practices, and shared beliefs shape patterns in early-grade behavior across the district. Using the Results Pyramid, participants build a common language for understanding how adult experiences and organizational conditions drive outcomes. The session concludes with alignment around priority data sources and a shared commitment to strengthening Tier 1 foundations.

CAPACITY

Session Two moves from recognizing patterns to identifying a focused problem of practice grounded in evidence. Through structured root cause analysis, teams clarify which factors most directly influence early-grade behavioral outcomes. Leaders develop measurable improvement aims and identify key drivers that must shift to produce meaningful change. The session establishes disciplined prioritization and a clear direction for targeted action.

SCALING

Session Three centers on learning through disciplined, small-scale testing of change. Leaders refine one driver-aligned change idea and design a focused Plan-Do-Study-Act cycle to test its impact. Emphasis is placed on feasibility, prediction, and measurable evidence before broader implementation. The session reinforces the principle of learning before scaling, ensuring that change efforts are thoughtfully informed by data. Leaders leave prepared to implement and study their test in real time.

SUSTAINING

Session Four moves from testing to strategic alignment across systems. Leaders study the results of their small-scale tests to uncover deeper system conditions and implementation realities. Using those insights, teams identify a limited number of high-leverage priorities that connect individual planning with broader Tier 1 structures. The session culminates in a coherent improvement plan designed to sustain progress over the next 6-12 months. Leaders leave with clear priorities, defined responsibilities, and a structured pathway for ongoing monitoring and refinement.

Paraprofessional Training Series

EmpowerED offers a series of engaging and practical sessions designed specifically for paraprofessionals who support students with disabilities. These sessions aim to build confidence, improve day-to-day practice, and strengthen collaboration within inclusive school communities.

- **Supporting Students in Inclusive Settings** - Learn practical strategies to help students with disabilities participate meaningfully in general education classrooms through collaboration, adaptation, and support.
- **Facilitating Independence for Students with Disabilities** - Explore ways to promote autonomy and reduce over-reliance on adult support by encouraging self-advocacy and problem-solving.
- **Using a Prompt Hierarchy Effectively** - Understand how to apply prompts in a structured way that promotes learning and independence while avoiding prompt dependence.
- **Working with Students Whose Behavior Challenges Us** - Gain tools to respond to challenging behaviors with empathy and skill, using trauma-informed, proactive, and function-based approaches.
- **Understanding the Role of the Paraprofessional** - Clarify your responsibilities, boundaries, and collaborative role within the school team to improve effectiveness and professionalism.
- **Special Education 101: A General Overview** - Build foundational knowledge of special education law, IEPs, and disability categories to better support students and work within the system.
- **Facilitating Friendships and Social Skills for Students with Disabilities** - Learn how to encourage peer interactions, coach social skills, and help students build meaningful relationships in school settings.

Any of our sessions that are designed for educators can also be tailored for paraprofessionals. Sessions are available both in-person as well as remotely.

Online Coursework

Need more flexible options for your paraprofessionals? We also offer asynchronous online courses on a variety of topics.

These self-paced modules allow staff to learn on their own schedule while still gaining practical, job-embedded strategies. Each course includes interactive activities, real-world scenarios, and confirmation of participation upon completion.



Family and Parent Group Trainings

Demystifying the IEP Process

This session offers parents and caregivers a clear, supportive introduction to the special education process, including how evaluations work, what an IEP (Individualized Education Program) includes, and the role families play in educational planning. Presented in a practical, non-adversarial way, the session empowers parents with knowledge of their rights while emphasizing collaboration, communication, and shared problem-solving with the school team. Designed to build trust and transparency, the session aims to strengthen partnerships between families and educators for the benefit of all students.

Demystifying the IEP Process

This parent workshop introduces the importance of inclusion for students with disabilities, highlighting how it leads to stronger academic, social, and long-term outcomes for all learners. Families learn what inclusion looks like in practice—such as access to the general education curriculum with appropriate supports, participation in classroom and school activities, and the use of accommodations and services. The session also emphasizes the power of partnership, offering practical tips for working collaboratively with schools to create supportive, inclusive environments where every child can thrive.

Any of the sessions we offer for educators can be tailored for a parent audience.



“I wanted to express my appreciation again for your inspiring presentation this evening. Your years of research, your depth of understanding on UDL and your ability to present these concepts parents and teachers face in such an interesting way produced one of the most memorable conversations in our SEAC programs.”

- Parent Attendee, Connecticut

So Your Child Is Going to Kindergarten...

Starting kindergarten is a big milestone—for children and their families. This session helps parents of children with disabilities feel informed and confident as they navigate the transition from early intervention or preschool to school-age services. We'll walk through what to expect during the kindergarten transition process, explain timelines, and review options available to families and school teams when creating or updating an Individualized Education Program (IEP)—helping families understand how to work with their child's school to ensure a smooth and positive start to their educational journey.



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Inclusion Express: Fast Track Your Learning When Time is Tight

The Inclusion Power Hour

Who is it for?

The Inclusion Power Hour (or three-quarters of an hour) provides an overview of the most critical topics and associated strategies for instructing students with disabilities in inclusive settings. While a complex topic like inclusive education requires opportunities for deeper exploration, this session may be right for you if...

- The professional development calendar has not allocated time specific to inclusive practices and clearly SOMETHING is needed;
- You've hired new staff members after training has already occurred;
- Time is available in short increments like faculty meetings or early dismissal days;
- Your staff is in need of a refresher training; or
- You have a specific student in mind whose team needs help ASAP but time is tight.



“I have never sat through a 45 minute presentation where I received so much useful information. This session was exceptional.”

- Middle School General Education Teacher, Connecticut


What does it cover?

This session focuses on the most essential instructional practices necessary for student success in general education, including:

- Universal Design for Learning
- Accommodations and Modifications
- Essentialization of the Curriculum - targeting the highest leverage key learnings in the standards

The Inclusion Power Hour can also be tailored for individual student IEP teams. EmpowerED will consult with the student's team to determine if certain areas need to be covered more deeply.





Time is of the Essence Behavior Workshop

Who is it for?

When challenging behaviors arise, it's not practical to wait until the next in-service day to get training. The *Time is of the Essence Behavior Workshop* provides proactive tier one strategies to support student behavior in positive ways. This one-hour session is a good fit for staff who:

- Need a refresher on effective, whole group behavior and classroom management techniques;
- Are new to the teaching profession and seek to improve their practice in this area
- Work with a group of challenging students for whom a more systematic approach is needed.
- Have students in their classrooms who need more consistency and routine.

This session is NOT a good fit for the IEP teams of students requiring more intensive behavioral interventions (BUT we can help you with that through coaching!).

What does it cover?

This session operates from the perspective that it is better to prevent a challenging behavior from occurring than to stop it once it has already started. As such, the session emphasizes tier one strategies in the following areas:

- Classroom management
- Effective use of procedures and routines
- Relationship-building techniques

Student misbehavior is viewed as communication and approached from the lens of unmet needs. Teachers are asked to consider: *What unmet need are my students trying to communicate to me through this behavior?*

Quick Start for Inclusive Action Planning

Many times, school systems and administrators are ready to take on the challenge of implementing inclusion but don't know where to start. Let us help you with some Cliff Notes for Inclusive Action Planning!

EmpowerED has worked with school districts across the country to support the development of more inclusive schools. The consultants at empowerED are experienced current and former public school practitioners who have engaged in the work of systems-level change for inclusion. We are more than theory, research and ideas - we have done the hard work of transforming public schools to more inclusive systems ourselves.

We will work with your system to develop an inclusive education action plan that contains the following:

- Recommendations for structure and membership of a guiding coalition for inclusion
- Prioritization of goals
- Phased implementation of goals and associated action steps over multiple years
- Action plans for each goal, along with measures of implementation, responsible persons, timelines for completion, and ongoing progress monitoring.
- A plan for professional learning on inclusive practices that incorporates recommendations and incorporates other district priorities



“

“EmpowerED has been instrumental in helping us think through the programmatic and systemic aspects of our inclusion implementation process. They have provided our staff with excellent professional development and coaching. We have found their work to be personalized and adaptive to our needs.”

- Assistant Superintendent and Curriculum Director, Illinois

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Coaching and Consultative Support

Instructional Coaching



EmpowerED delivers both on-site and remote coaching specific to inclusive practices, high-quality tier one instruction, strategies for differentiation, and classroom and behavioral management techniques. Coaching consists of “Before-During-After,” or BDA, cycles that are designed using a student-centered approach. The “before” and “after” sessions are typically held remotely to ensure that time on-site prioritizes side by side support of teachers in their classrooms. Coaches from empowerED are experienced, former public school teachers and leaders who have engaged in implementing inclusive education ourselves. We offer practical, concrete strategies that can be implemented immediately and take pride in building trusting, supportive relationships with staff.

EmpowerED coordinates closely with building and district leadership to ensure alignment with school and district goals.

“
Our coach gave us practical strategies, ideas and solutions to implement in our co-taught classroom immediately.
- Middle School Teacher,
Arkansas
”

Micro Coaching

Maximizing Time and Resources

At empowerED, we realize that schools and systems have limited time and budgets to implement all of their district's priorities. In order to maximize both budgets and the number of educators who are available for coaching, we have developed and revolutionized a model called "micro-coaching."

Micro-coaching involves a pre-visit consultation that is completed electronically. The educator who requests coaching completes an electronic form identifying areas in which they would like the coach to focus. The educator then signs up for a 20-minute time slot where the coach comes to their classroom for visitation. Coaches and educators engage in a subsequent 20-minute debrief time. In the debrief, the coach and educator discuss the focus areas, identify at least one area of strength and one area of growth, and develop a list of "next steps." Following the debrief, the empowerED coach sends the educator a summary of the meeting.

"OH MY GOSH!

So many ideas and such great conversation! I recommend you talk fast to get more out of her!"

- Pre-School Teacher, Massachusetts



Leadership Coaching with empowerED



About Leadership Coaching

The challenges school leaders face today are greater than ever. Balancing daily management tasks of operating a school or system while simultaneously serving as an instructional leader can feel daunting. In addition to supporting leaders with instructional walkthroughs, empowerED can provide individual coaching for all leaders, or a select subset, depending upon need. We have provided administrative coaching to a variety of systems across the country to support leaders in navigating the complexities of their job.

All of our leadership coaches are former or current public school administrators. We understand the legal requirements of educating students in the

least restrictive environment, however, we also recognize that a compliance-based approach to inclusion is not effective in facilitating change. We support leaders in building vision and consensus, developing skills, generating action plans, and motivating and inspiring staff to engage in this work. This is achieved through a blend of practical strategies and research-based strategies grounded in change theory.

Administrative coaching sessions are best scheduled as remote sessions at times convenient to the administrators' schedules. On-site visits can also be established.

Building Capacity with District Coaches



We offer targeted professional learning for instructional coaches through a blend of interactive training sessions and guided classroom walkthroughs. Our trainings focus on applying inclusive frameworks—like UDL, accommodations vs. modifications, and strengths-based planning—directly to the work coaches do with teachers. We then take it a step further by joining coaches in classroom walkthroughs, using real-time observations to deepen understanding and sharpen the lens on inclusion. Together, we reflect on what we see, discuss practical adjustments, and co-create solutions that support all learners. This hands-on, collaborative model builds lasting confidence and clarity around what effective inclusive instruction looks like in action.

Coaching the Coaches

EmpowerED partners with district-based instructional coaches to bridge the gap between content expertise and inclusive practice. While many coaches are highly skilled in curriculum and instruction, they often lack the specialized training needed to support teachers working with students with disabilities or diverse learning needs. Our approach builds capacity by equipping coaches with practical strategies, tools, and mindsets rooted in Universal Design for Learning, collaborative planning, and culturally responsive practices. By embedding inclusion into the core of instructional coaching, we help districts ensure that all students—not just some—benefit from high-quality instruction and support.



“I really appreciated my coach’s extra effort to help me... You can tell she puts her heart into her job.”

*- High School Teacher,
Pennsylvania*



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Systemic Supports

Special Education Program Evaluation

Through detailed data analysis, onsite observations, document review, and focus groups and interviews, empowerED develops a comprehensive written report that will...

- Serve as the foundation to guide future decisions and action steps around special education programs;
- Provide recommendations based upon triangulated data and sound research techniques;
- Share a rationale for recommended changes grounded in quantitative and qualitative data;
- Uncover barriers to the successful implementation of inclusion due to structures, systems, and beliefs; and
- Deliver a suggested timeline for implementation and recommended professional development

Special education program reviews are developed through the triangulation of multiple data sources. These include snapshot classroom observations, achievement data, perceptual data gained from focus groups and surveys, and document review. A convergent parallel research design is used - this employs a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods because the use of a single approach alone would be insufficient in understanding the complexities of an educational system.

Data analysis completed as part of the review may include:

- LRE metrics
- Achievement data
- Out of district programming trends
- Staffing and resources allocation
- Legal and due process review.
- Stakeholder focus groups
- Onsite information gathering conversations
- Disproportionality data
- Review of documents, procedures, and other qualitative information

“I want to thank you for the comprehensive report you prepared on our special education and intervention services. I think you did a phenomenal job of capturing our glows and grows!”

Director of Special Education,
Pennsylvania



Workshops

From Root Cause to Results: Supporting School Improvement Efforts

This series of workshops empowers school and district leaders to move beyond surface-level fixes and drive meaningful, lasting improvement. Blending the Results Pyramid framework with the tools of improvement science, participants will explore how beliefs, experiences, actions, and results are deeply connected—and how shifting culture starts by addressing root causes, not symptoms.

Participants will engage in rich discussions and interactive activities that bring the Results Pyramid to life—exploring how unspoken beliefs and past experiences often drive actions that conflict with our stated goals. We emphasize that without attending to the experiences and beliefs of the community, change will be short-lived.

Together, we uncover the invisible narratives shaping undesirable and identify opportunities to create new experiences that foster trust, shift mindsets, and align daily actions with long-term outcomes. This session lays the foundation for deeper systems work throughout the series, helping teams see that sustainable change doesn't start with new mandates—it starts with new meaning.

In subsequent sessions, leaders will learn how to define clear aims, engage in root cause analysis, and design intentional experiences that change beliefs and build momentum for change. Through hands-on practice with Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycles, participants will gain practical strategies for testing small changes, measuring impact, and scaling what works.

This support is ideal for schools and districts designated as needing improvement by state or federal systems. We work closely with administration to develop the skills needed to create action plans that are intentional, build collective efficacy, and create systems that support sustainable, student-centered outcomes.



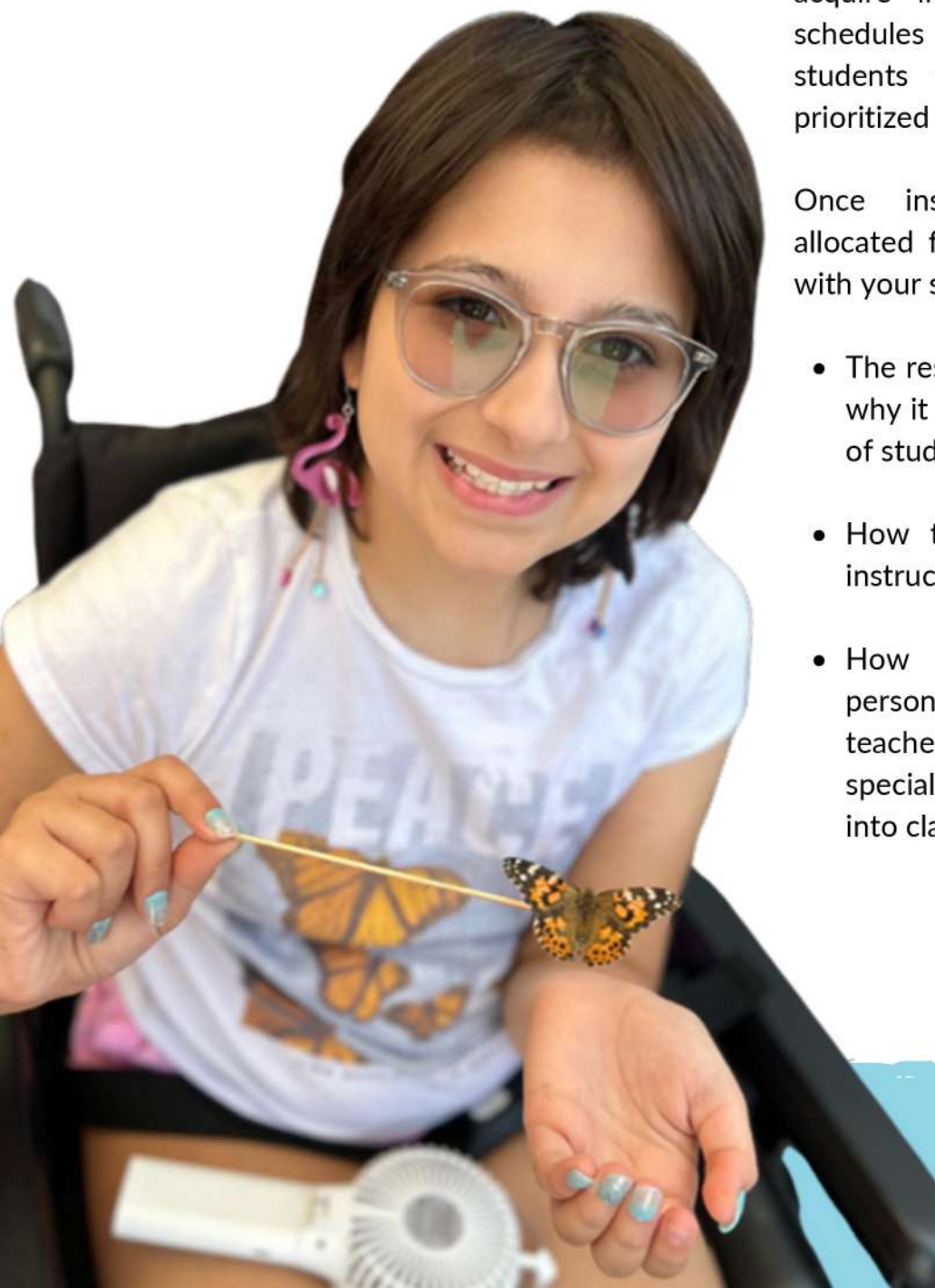
Literacy Block Development➔

Consultants from empowerED work with your school or district to develop recommendations for your literacy block. We collaborate with you to develop a schedule where instructional minutes are allocated based upon research-based practices grounded in the science of reading so that appropriate time is dedicated to the many facets necessary for teaching reading and writing.

Schools invest significant hours each day in the teaching of English/Language Arts. However, numerous districts are not seeing the gains they hope to achieve, even with so much dedicated time available. The Literacy Block Development service supports districts in ensuring that time is allocated appropriately according to the skills we know students must acquire in order to read. Structures and schedules that support the inclusion of students with diverse learning needs are prioritized through scheduling.

Once instructional minutes have been allocated for the literacy block, we will work with your staff to ensure they understand...

- The research behind the new schedule and why it will more effectively meet the needs of students;
- How to use data to drive small group instruction within the literacy block; and
- How to effectively utilize support personnel such as special education teachers, paraprofessionals, reading specialists, and other providers pushing into class to maximize student growth.



MTSS Development and Coaching→

empowerED partners with schools and districts to strengthen systems that support all learners through a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) approach. Through ongoing professional development, coaching, and strategic consultation, we help schools build responsive structures that align instruction, intervention, and data practices across tiers.

Our work begins by understanding the unique context of your school or district—existing strengths, areas of concern, and student needs. From there, we collaborate with leadership teams to clarify roles, refine practices, and develop practical solutions that enhance equity, coherence, and impact.

As we engage in this work, empowerED consultants support your team to:

- Build shared understanding of MTSS as a framework for instructional equity and student growth;
- Strengthen Tier 1 instruction while aligning intervention efforts across tiers;
- Develop or refine team-based structures for analyzing data and responding to student needs;
- Clarify how specialists, interventionists, and support staff contribute within the system.
-

This is not a one-size-fits-all model—we meet you where you are, and stay alongside you through the process. Whether you're just beginning to define your MTSS framework or working to deepen existing systems, empowerED provides the thought partnership and practical tools to help your team move forward with confidence.



New Teacher Induction

EmpowerED partners with school districts to design and deliver high-impact new teacher induction programs that go beyond procedural onboarding to build strong, confident, and instructionally effective educators from day one. Our induction training helps new teachers feel equipped, supported, and connected to their school communities. Whether delivered in person, virtually, or through a blended model, EmpowerED's approach emphasizes practical strategies that teachers can immediately apply in the classroom—anchored in evidence-based practice and aligned with district priorities.

A central focus of EmpowerED's induction model is building capacity for strong Tier One instruction. We work with new teachers to develop a deep understanding of how to design and deliver high-quality, universally accessible lessons. This includes strategies for clear learning targets, active student engagement, checks for understanding, and instructional routines that foster academic achievement across content areas. We also provide support in using curriculum materials with fidelity while encouraging flexibility to meet diverse student needs.

We help new teachers build confidence in supporting students with disabilities, English learners, and other diverse learners within the general education classroom. This includes training in universal design for learning (UDL), differentiated instruction, co-teaching models, behavior support strategies, and using focus and coherence to align instruction to standards. Our goal is to help new teachers feel supported while ensuring that all students receive the support they require.

In addition to foundational pedagogy, EmpowerED supports new teachers with professional skills that promote long-term success: effective classroom management, parent communication, collaboration with specialists, and reflective practice. Each session is designed to be interactive, encouraging dialogue, modeling, and real-world planning time. With a focus on sustainability, we can also work with districts to build internal mentoring structures and follow-up coaching supports that extend beyond the initial induction window.





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Student-Specific Supports

Curriculum Adaptations

Essentialization

Essentialization is a process of curriculum prioritization that reduces the depth, breadth, and complexity of grade-level content to support the meaningful access of students with significant disabilities in general education.

EmpowerED conducts an initial consultation with the district to determine needs and develops essentialized pacing guides to serve as a roadmap for students with complex challenges.

These pacing guides can be developed generally, through analyzing state standards in conjunction with the Dynamic Learning Maps Essential Elements, or specific to individual students through the incorporation of Specially Designed Instruction.

General Package

The general package includes:

- Consultation with teachers to review grade level standards and key focus areas for student learning
- Review of current general education curricula, standards, and materials
- Creation of an essentialized guide to direct programming. The guide includes:
 - Description of instructional resources and lesson format
 - Side-by-side of general education standards and essentialized standards
 - Pacing guide with estimated targets
 - Direct correlation to resources currently utilized in general education
- Coaching support around the development of modified resources aligned to the essentialized pacing guide.



Student-Specific Package

In addition to all the materials provided in the general package, the student-specific package includes:

- Check-in meetings throughout the development of the pacing guide to ensure suitability for the learner
- Analysis of specially designed instruction in student IEP with guidance on instructional presentation, engaging practice and progress monitoring of essentialized skills.
- Coaching support around the development of modified resources aligned to learning outcomes identified within the essentialized pacing guide and specially designed instruction.

“Since collaborating to develop this essentialized pacing guide, all members of the IEP team are on the same page about the ways in which we provide presentation, process and product modifications to remove barriers in general education.”

**- Special Education Teacher,
Pennsylvania**

Inclusion and Educational Environment Assessment and Training Package



The Inclusion and Educational Environment Assessment consists of the following components:

- Three-hour on-site visit from an empowerED consultant that consists of:
 - Observation of student in current placement
 - Observation of general education classroom of the student's current grade level
 - Interview with members of the student's team to determine current strengths and needs
 - Review of curricula currently in place
- Written report that includes:
 - Strengths and barriers from observation
 - Recommendations for programming
 - Recommendations for modifications to student's participation in general education
- One-hour debrief session with student team to review findings
- Customized training plan with recommendations for professional development
- Monthly coaching support - two hours per month of remote consultation to discuss successes and develop solutions to challenges

“ Thank you for your support! I’m learning a lot and I feel good about the level of resources we have been able to provide to the staff. We are excited that the team is all in too- they have really welcomed and appreciated your support. It can definitely take a village sometimes.

- *Principal, Pennsylvania*



Literacy Support Service for Students with Complex Needs

The Literacy Support Service for Students with Complex Needs consists of the following components:

- Half-day on-site visit from an empowerED consultant that consists of:
 - Observation of student's current reading instruction
 - Interview with members of the student's team to determine current strengths and needs
 - Review of curricula currently in place
- One to two hour assessment of the student using modified materials to determine baseline literacy skills
 - Prior to the assessment, the consultant will discuss the student with the special education teacher and work collaboratively to develop appropriate assessment materials (may include addition of responses to a communication device, manipulatives, etc.)
- Written report that includes:
 - Results of the assessment
 - Recommendations for structured literacy program
 - Recommendations for modifications to student's participation in general education
- Two-hour training on adapting supports to structured literacy programs
- Monthly coaching support - two hours per month of remote consultation with individual implementing the literacy program to discuss successes and develop solutions to challenges
- Monthly remote observation - monthly remote observation of the teacher implementing literacy instruction to support fidelity of implementation (in-person can be arranged depending on distance)
- Participation at student IEP meetings or team meetings can also be arranged



→ NEXT STEPS

LET'S GET STARTED!



Please contact Dr. Jenna Mancini Rufo through email at jenna@empoweredschool.org to discuss details.

We look forward to supporting your team!