THE 2026 CASE CONFERENCE
PROVIDENCE • NOV 11-13

PROVIDENCE, RHODE ISLAND

November 11-13, 2026

Promoting Independence and Reducing the Reliance on 1:1 Paraeducators

Your Presenters

- Shelli Glendenning BCBA
  - Training Specialist with STAR Autism Support
  - Texas Tech University Graduate
  - Former Special Education Coordinator
  - Loves playing with her granddaughter



- Patrick Mulick BCBA
  - Director of Student Engagement in the Auburn School District
  - Gonzaga University Graduate
  - Former NBCT in Special Education
  - Loves Speaking!



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What problems do we run into when a 1:1 adult is assigned to a student?

Promoting Independence

The Mindset
The Strategies
The Structures

What is a Paraeducator?

The prefix para- means “beside”, “alongside”, or “next to”.

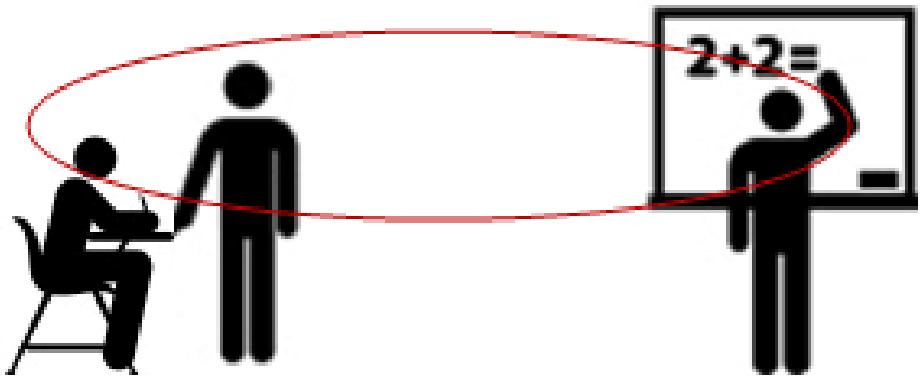


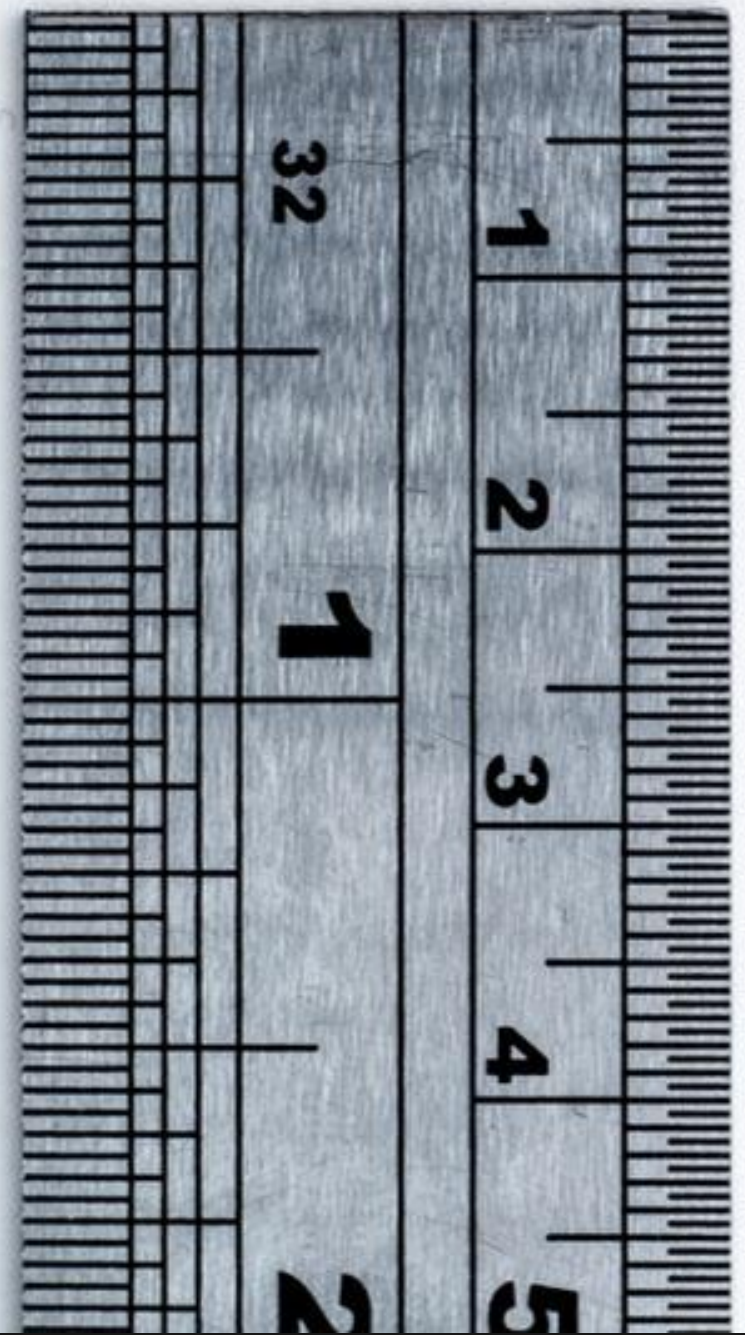
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Detrimental Effects of Excessive Para Proximity

Giangreco et al, 2005

- Separation from classmates
- Unnecessary dependence
- Interference with peer interactions
- Insular relationships
- Feelings of Stigmatization
- Limited Access to Teacher instruction
- Provocation of problem behaviors



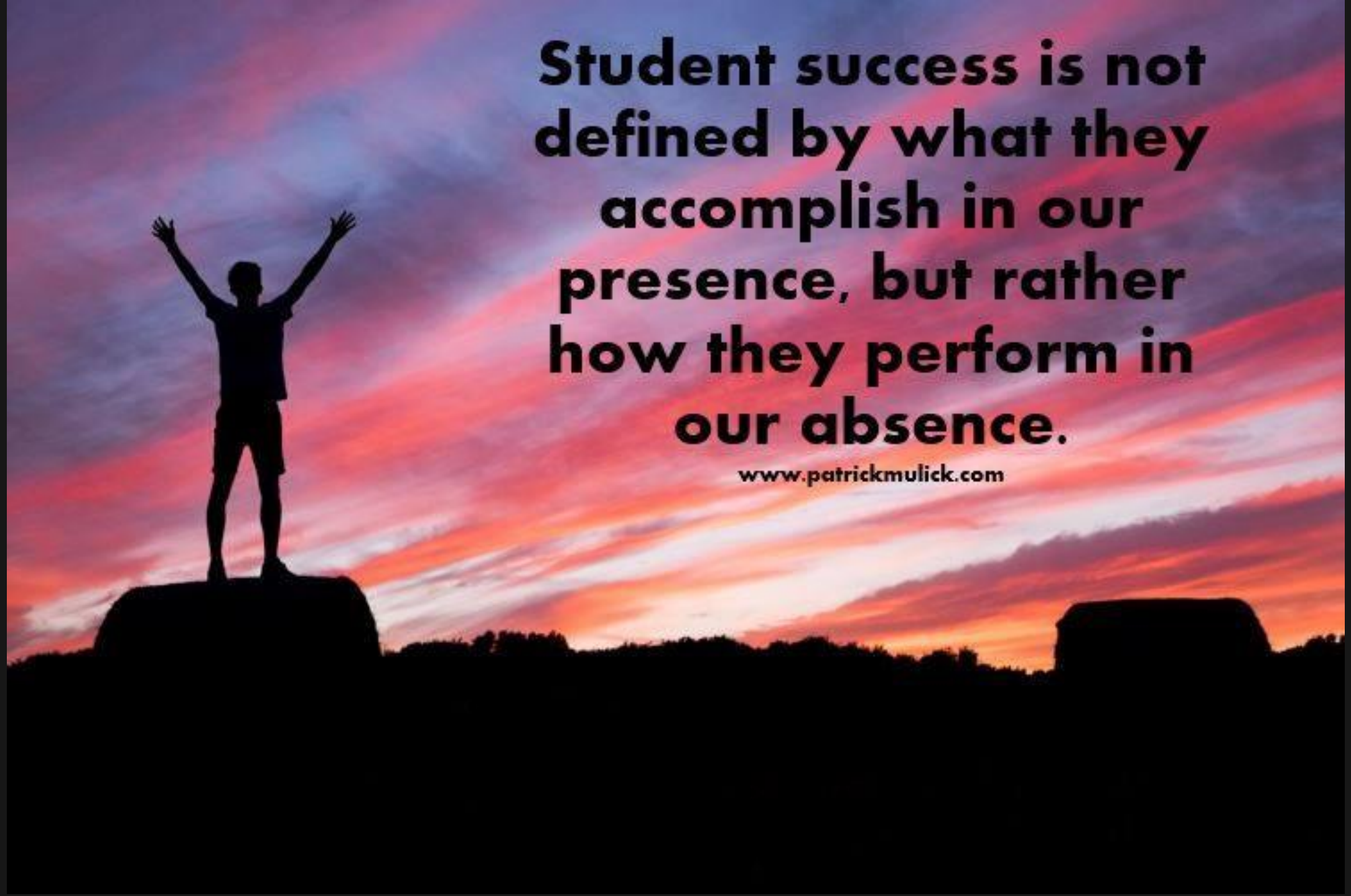


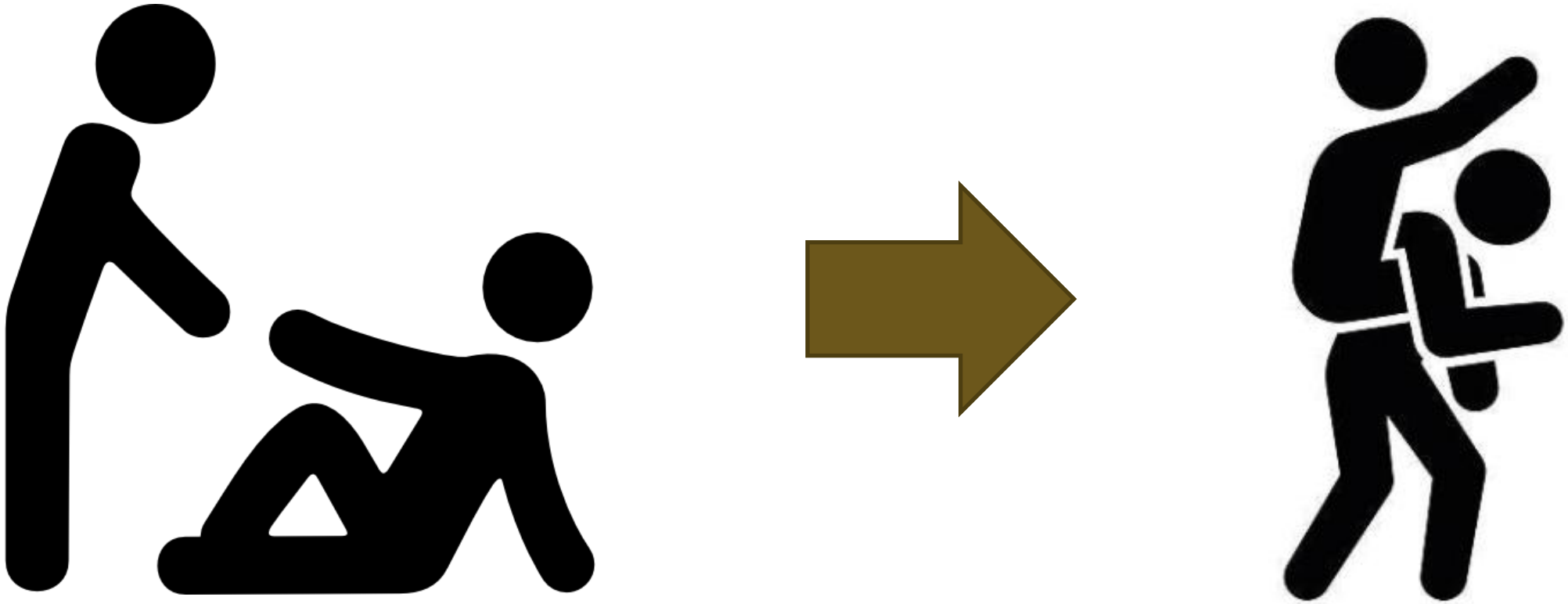
The true measure of a great educator isn't found in what they have done; it's found in what their students can do because of them.

www.patrickmulick.com

Less Adult Reliance = More Opportunities

More Adult Reliance = Less Opportunities


Student success is not defined by what they accomplish in our presence, but rather how they perform in our absence.
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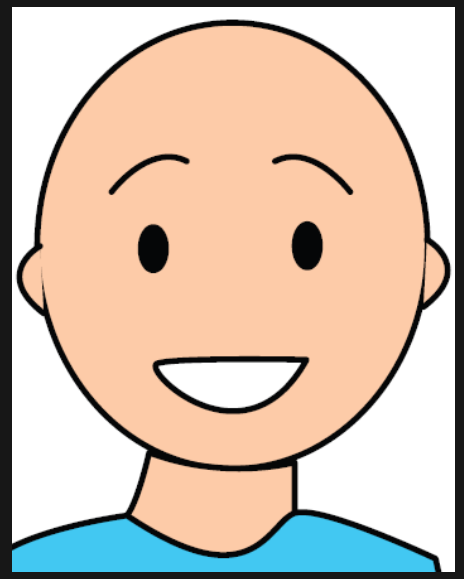
When we end up serving our students a little too well, we end up not serving them at all.



If we are not careful, we can have…

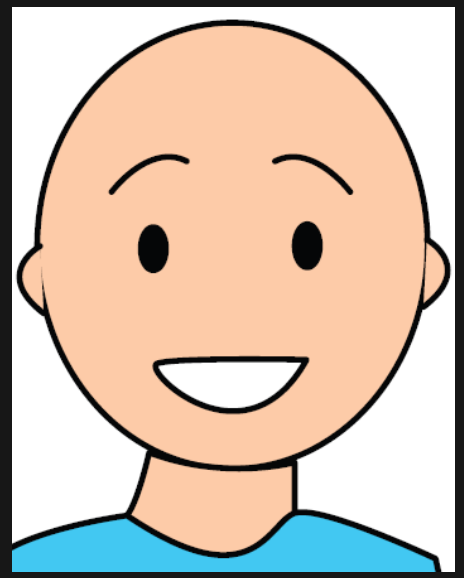
- A preschooler who can write all their letters but does not know how to ask for help
- A first grader who can read at a third-grade level but can't transition to another part of the classroom without holding on to an adult's hand
- A second grader who can multiply double digits but can't turn in papers to the teacher
- A fifth grader who knows the periodic table but can't navigate the lunch line
- A high schooler with basic computer programing skills but is unable to handle unexpected change

The Independence Minded Educator



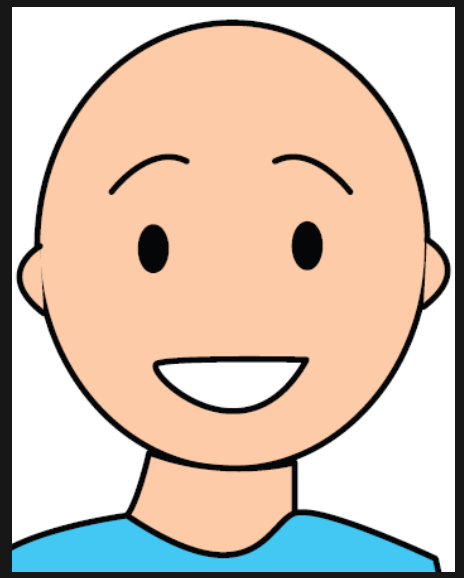
Your need to be independent is more important than my need for this to be done quickly, perfectly, and without struggle.

The Independence Minded Educator



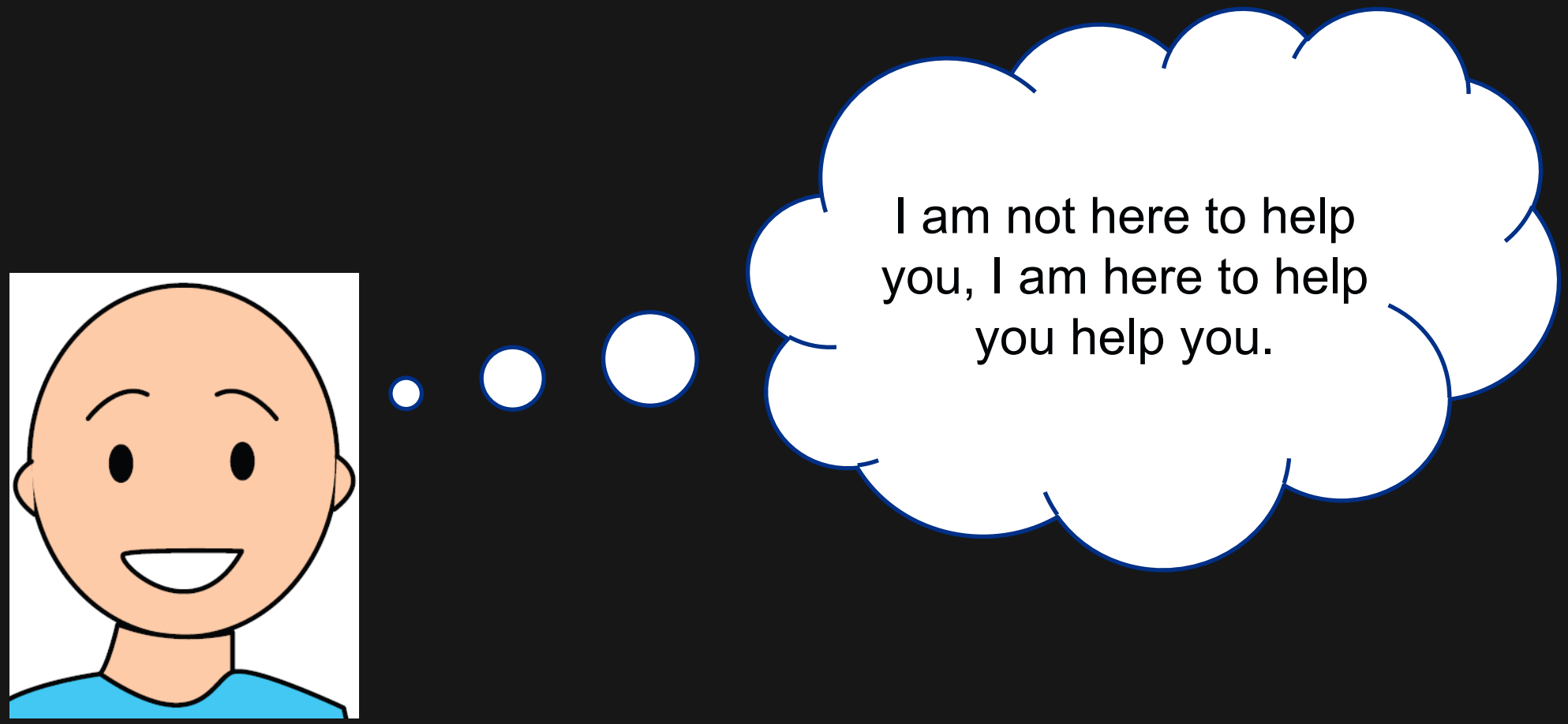
Every time I do something for my student, I deny them an opportunity to do it on their own. Each time I deny them a chance to do something at least partially on their own, I rob them of a more independent future.

The Independence Minded Educator

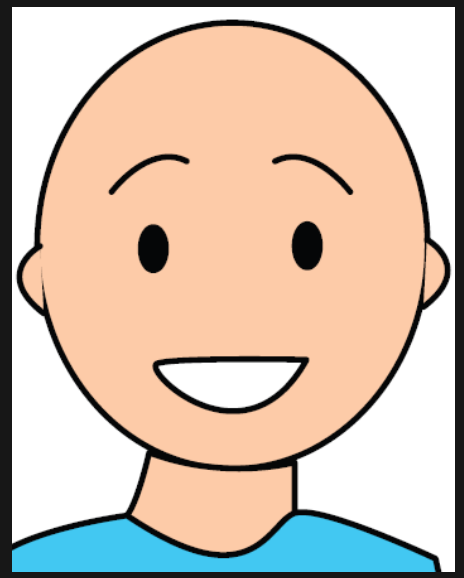


I am not here to do the job for you, I am here to help you get the job done.

The Independence Minded Educator

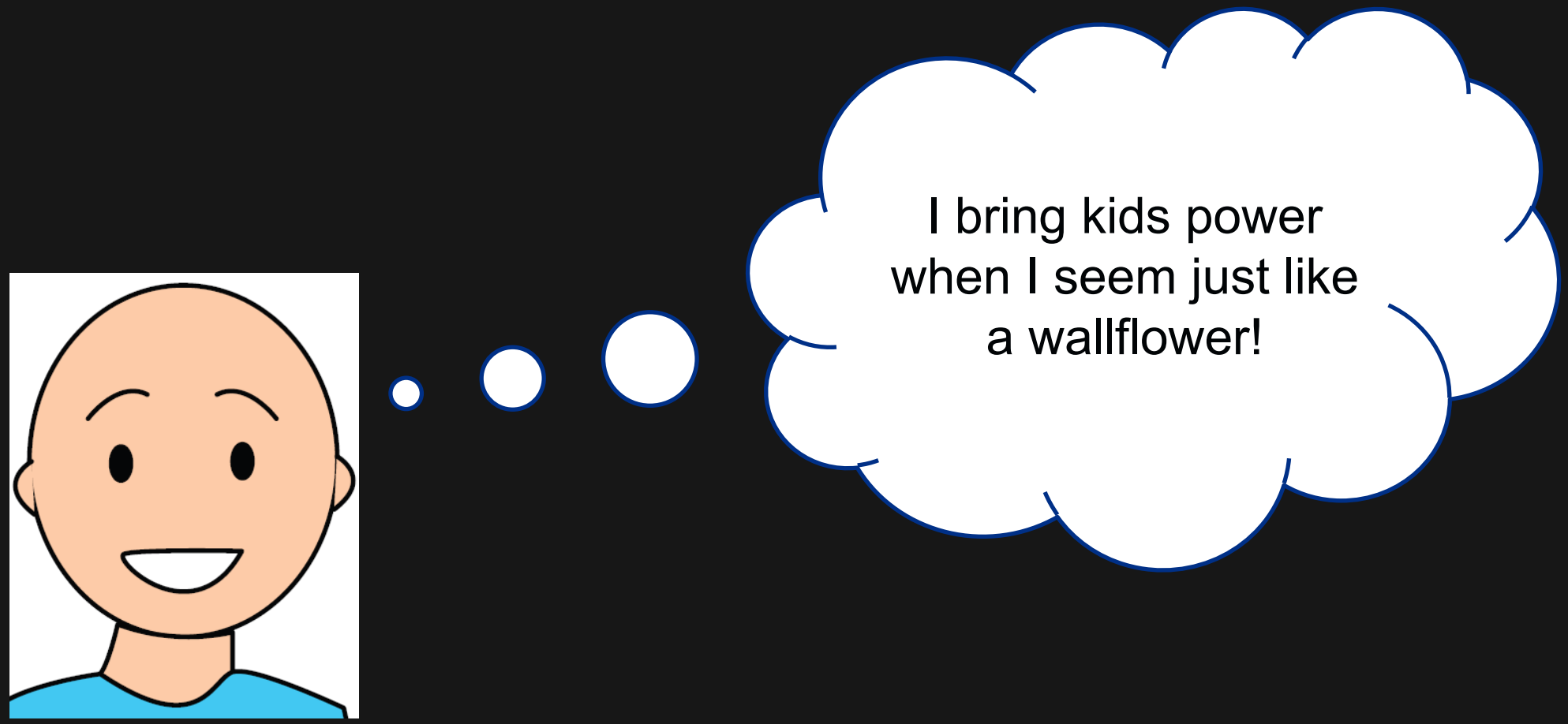


The Independence Minded Educator

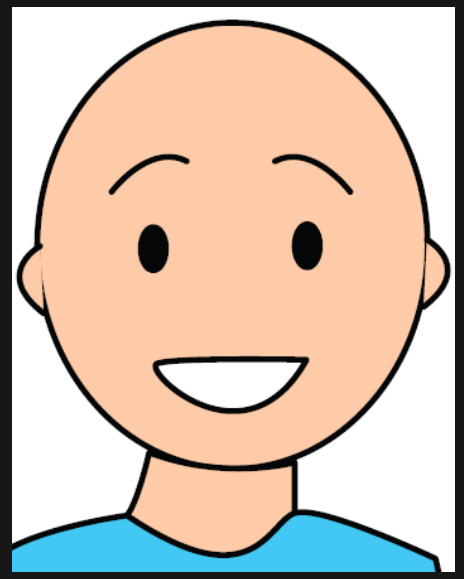


I am here to witness your success through helping you with less!

The Independence Minded Educator

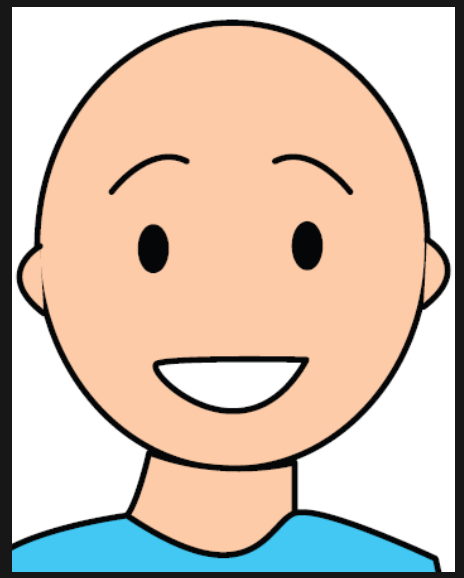


The Independence Minded Educator



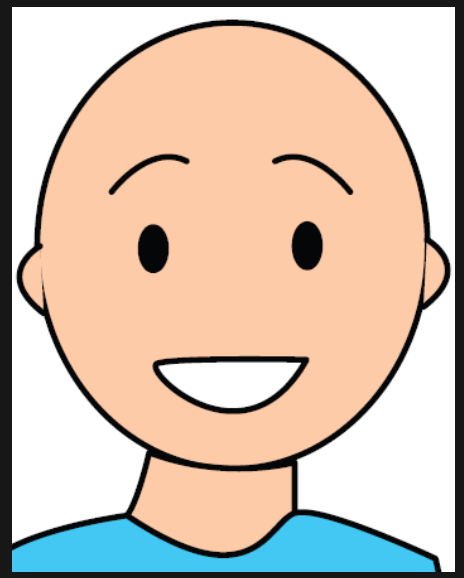
I am here to spread
the “can do” glitter,
not be a baby sitter!

The Independence Minded Educator



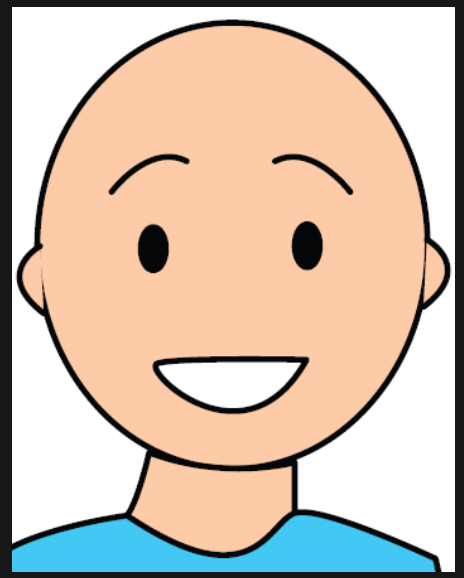
Here comes the *BOOM* of my student being independent in this room!

The Independence Minded Educator



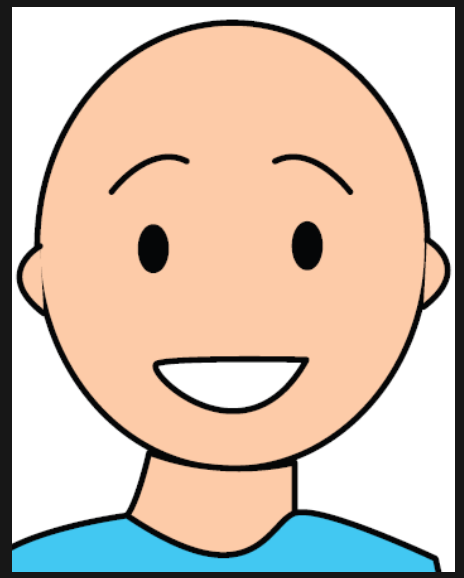
I do the wave when at school I am not your fave!

The Independence Minded Educator



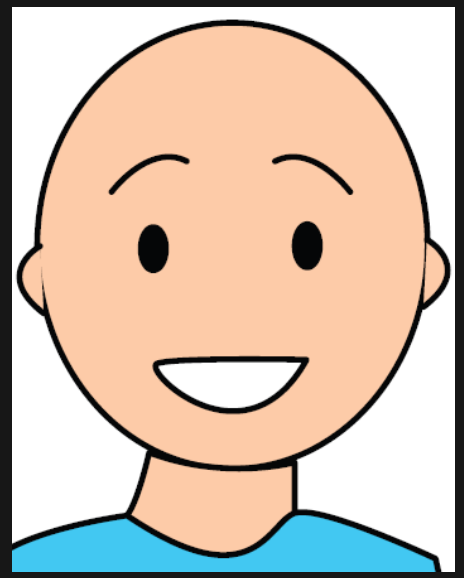
Giving too many cues
and too many clues
only lights the
dependent fuse!

The Independence Minded Educator



I raise the roof when my student fixes their own goof!

The Independence Minded Educator



Despite all your quirks, get ready for fireworks! Somehow, someway, I will make *this* your Independence Day!

The Independence Minded Educator



The Independence Minded Educator



The Independence Minded Educator



Supplement, not Supplant



It’s not about giving them a smaller mountain to climb, it’s about giving them the hand they need to help get up the same mountain everyone else is climbing.

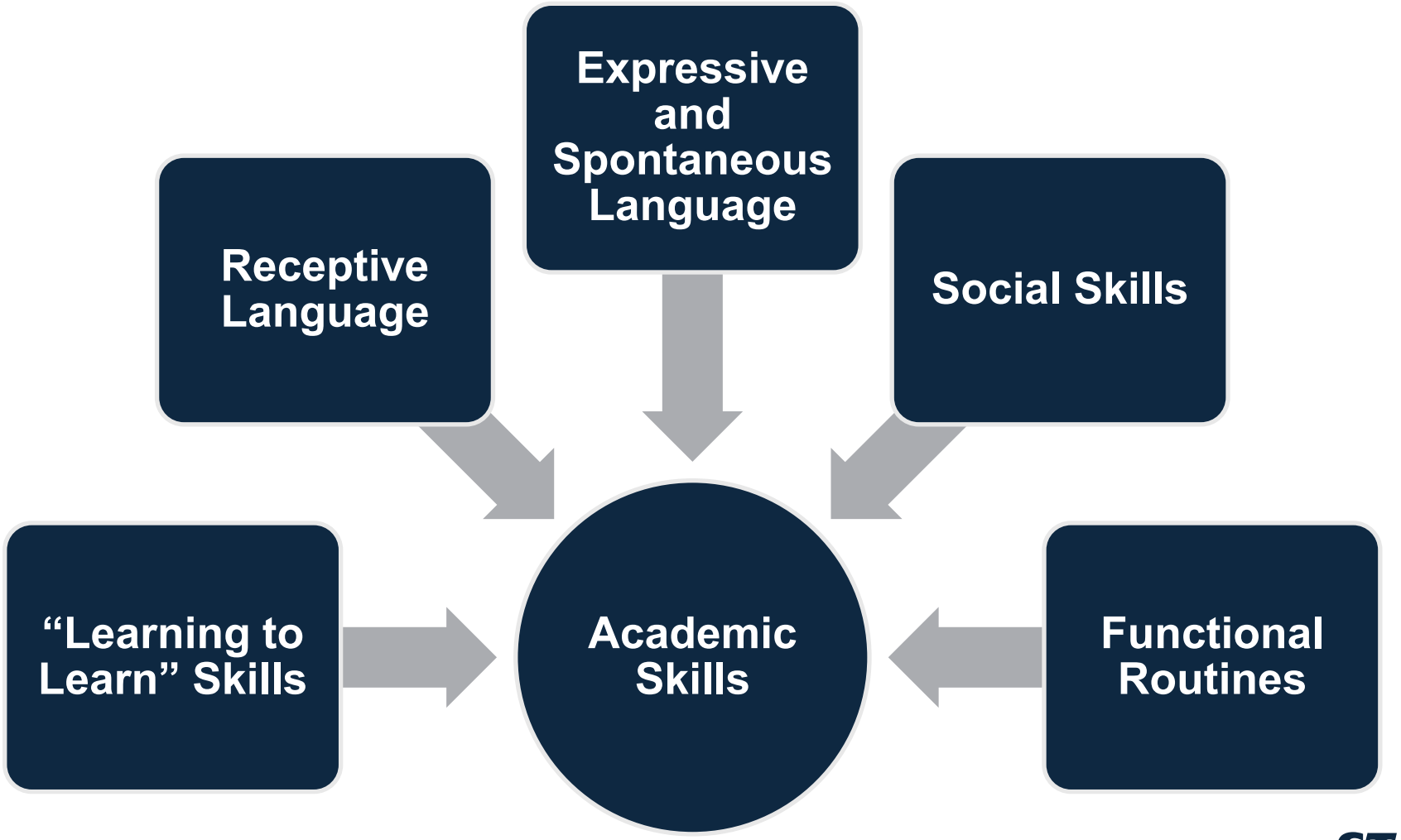
The goal is to be more inclusive, not more intrusive.



What is more important, inclusion or independence?

YES!

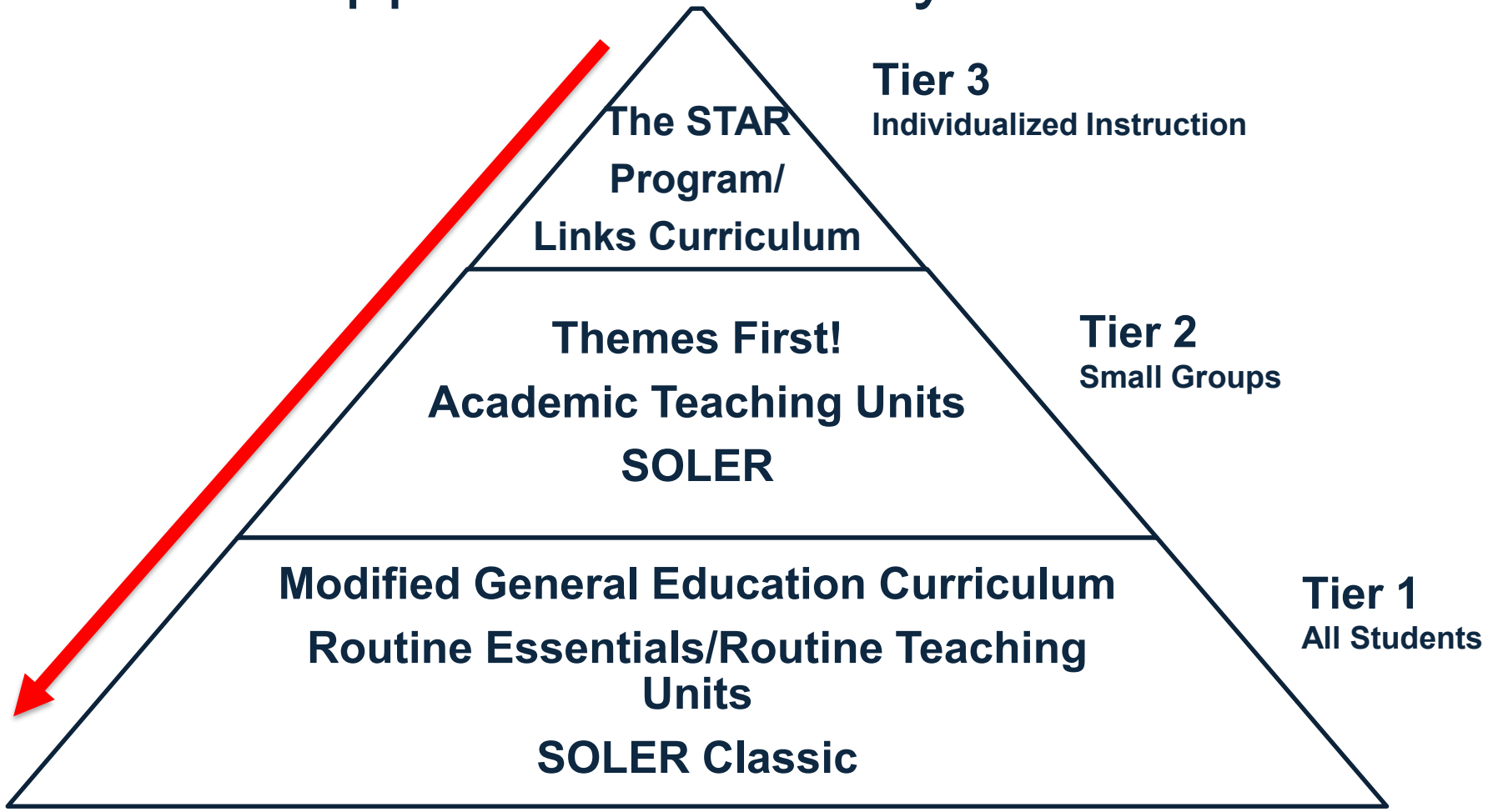
Building Foundational Skills



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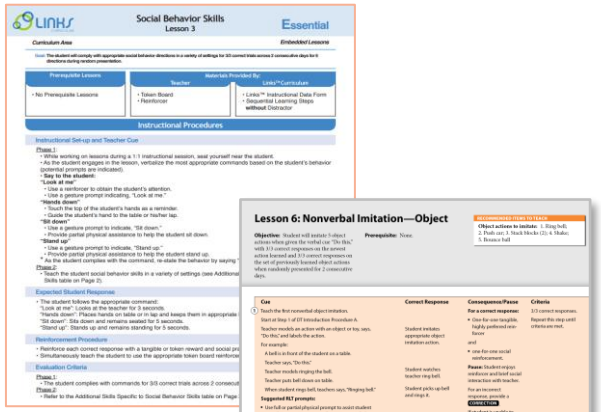
STAR Approach: Pathways to Inclusion



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Linking Instruction to Routines

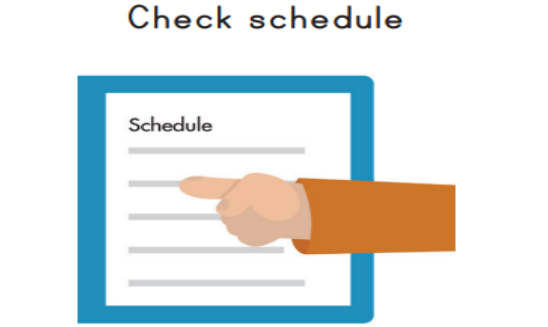
Lessons



Routine Pre-Teaching Activities and Materials

(e.g., simulations, small group, visual supports, etc.)

Routines





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Teaching Routines: Identifying Skills

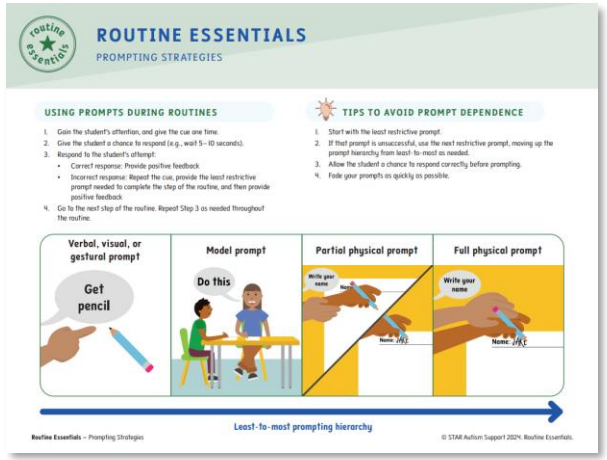
- What skills does a student need to participate in the “Purchasing Food in the Cafeteria Routine?”
  - Shout out some skills!
- How else do we learn new routines?
  - Modeling – watching others!
  - Prompting – a little help when needed!
  - Visuals – signs, pictures, lists!
  - Reinforcement – social praise, internal or external motivation!



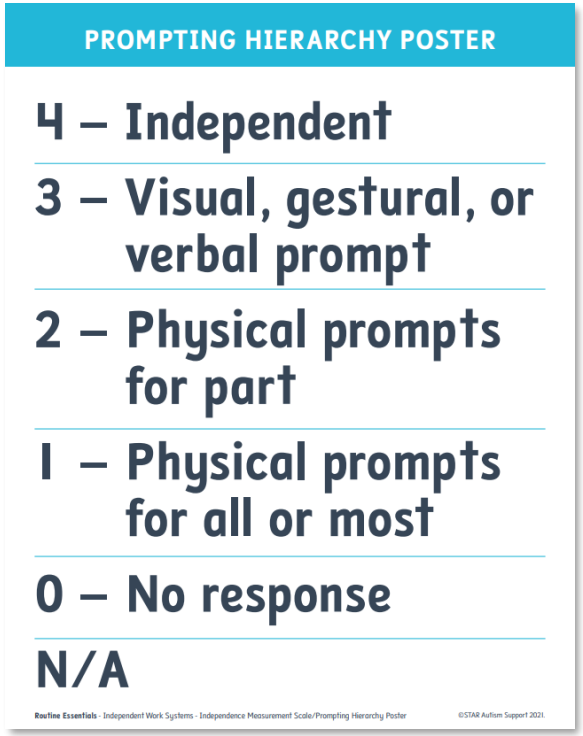
Tier 1 Supports for Educators



Common Language



How to Prompt and Fade

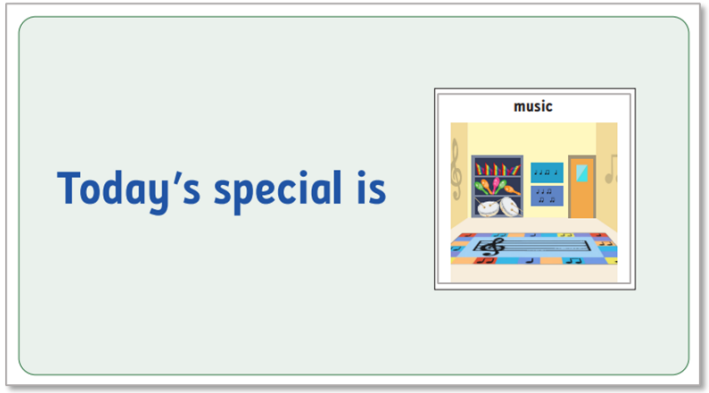


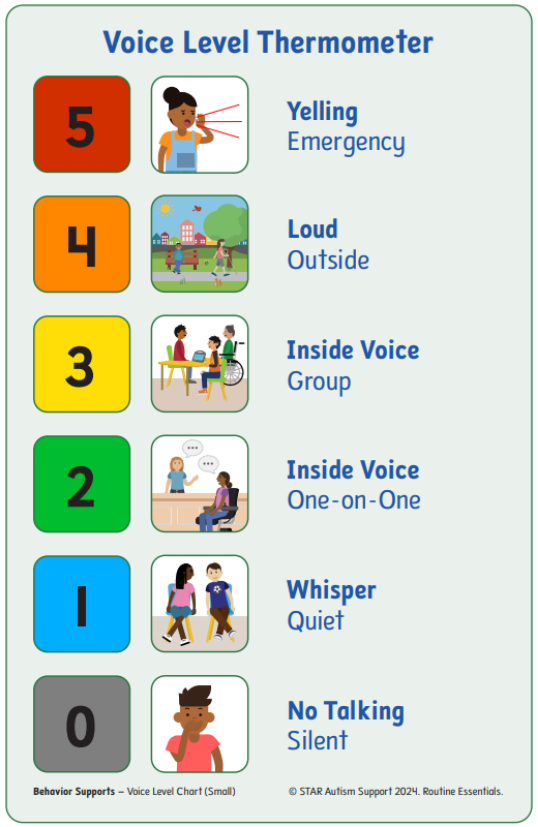
Independence Scale

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Examples of Tier 1 Supports



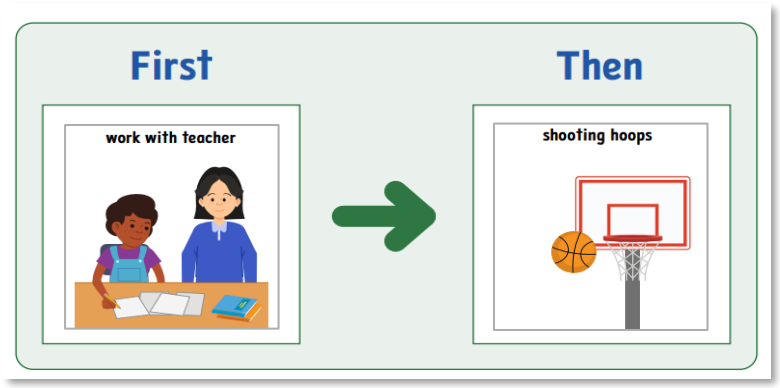


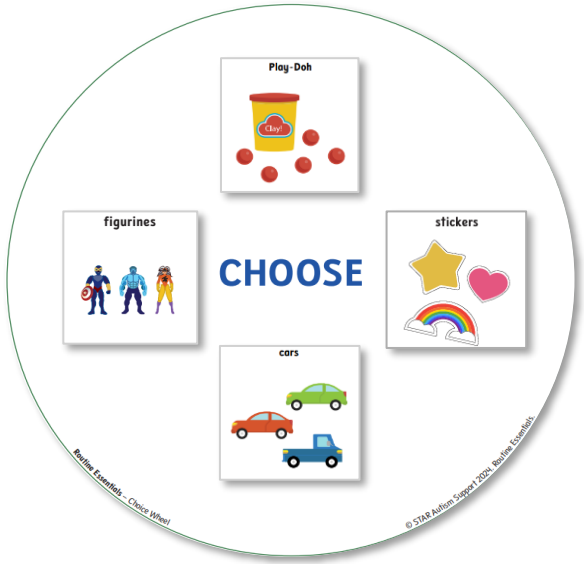
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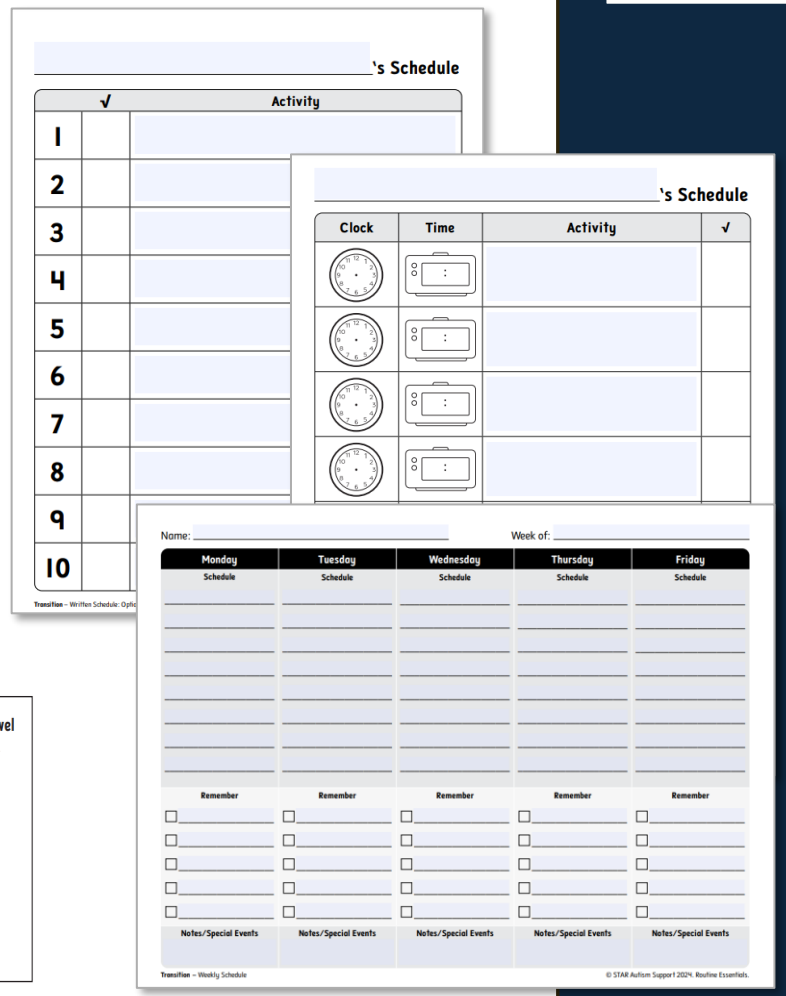
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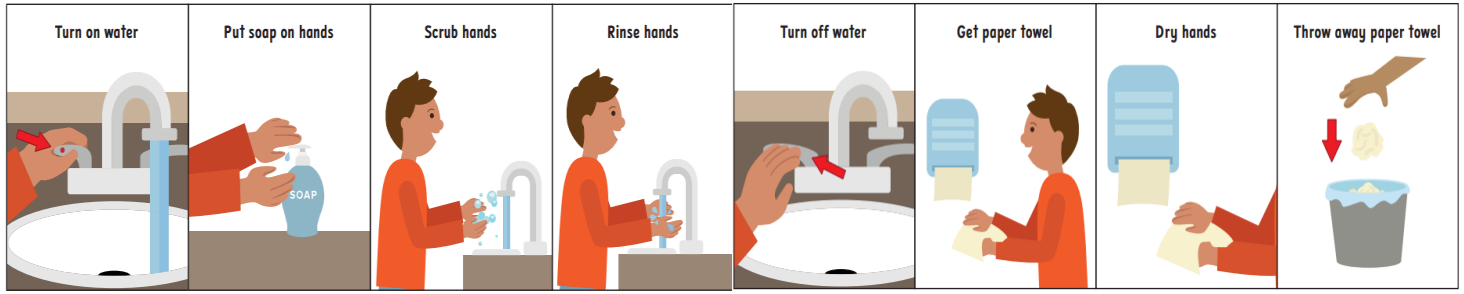
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Environmental and Behavior Supports









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Partner Practice: Routines

- Form small groups (3–4 people)
- Review the behavior visual supports
- Brainstorm routines where these visuals can help students understand “what to do”
- Think about routines that often need extra support or where teachers have shared challenges
- Discuss: How can these visuals make routines smoother and more effective?



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How Can Visuals Make Routines Smoother and More Effective?

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Classroom & Instructional

- ★ Transitioning between activities or centers
- ★ Packing up materials at the end of a lesson
- ★ Asking for help appropriately
- ★ Using classroom materials (books, technology) responsibly

Social & Group

- ★ Greeting peers and adults
- ★ Sharing materials during group work
- ★ Taking turns during games or discussions
- ★ Participating in recess

Daily Living & Self-Management

- ★ Putting away personal belongings
- ★ Washing hands before meals or after restroom use
- ★ Restroom or self-care

Navigating the School

- ★ Lining up for recess, dismissal, or specials
- ★ Arrival or dismissal
- ★ Walking in the hallway
- ★ Attending assemblies
- ★ Participating in fire drills

Use Tools to Focus on Quantity and Quality

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Student Number: _____ **Date:** _____

Time spent in inclusive settings					
☐ 0%	☐ 1-20%	☐ 21-41%	☐ 41-60%	☐ 61-80%	☐ 81-100%

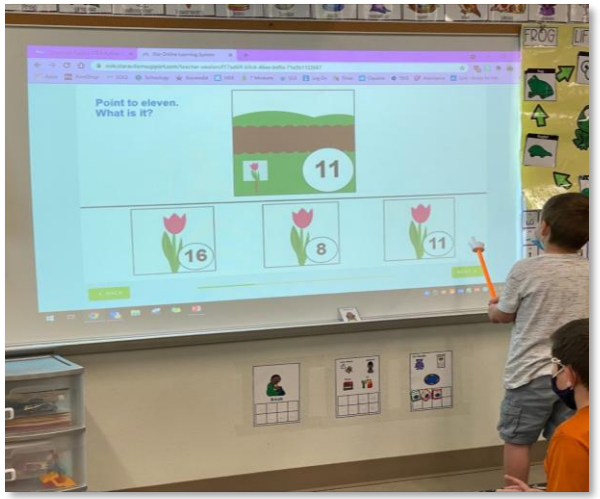
Component of Inclusive Setting	Not yet 0/5	Emerging 1/5	Some 3/5	Most 5/5	N/A 0/0	Score
Routines (e.g. snack, lunch, recess, arrival, departure)	Does not yet successfully participate in any routines in the general education setting, even when provided support from an adult	Participates in **some** general education routines with significant (full physical) to moderate assistance (multiple prompts- e.g. Verbal and visual).	Participates in 2-3 routines independently and/or all routines with minimal support (visual, verbal **or** gestural).	Participates in most routines independently or with minimal teacher assistance (e.g one verbal reminder sometimes)	X	
Attention/ Following Directions	Not yet able to sustain attention or follow directions in the general education environment	Will follow teacher directions some of the time when provided with significant (full physical) to moderate assistance (multiple prompts- e.g. Verbal and visual).	Follows teacher directions most of the time with minimal supports (visual, verbal **or** gestural)	Follows teacher directions independently most of the time	X	
Social Communication	Not yet communicating with peers even with prompting	Communicates with peers some of the time when given moderate support (multiple prompts- e.g. Verbal and visual).	Communicates requests to peers spontaneously, may need some adult support to engage in a turn-taking conversation with peers	Engages in conversation with peers following appropriate social conventions (taking turns, sharing ideas etc) most of the time	X	

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Examples of Tier 2 Supports





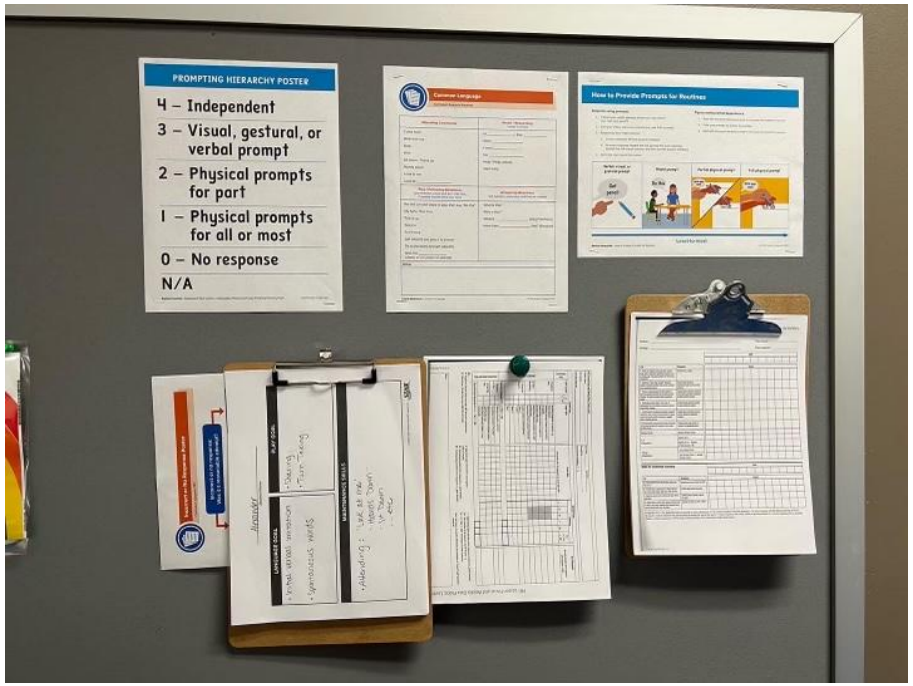


- Identify and teach skills to increase access to Tier 1 instruction:
  - Small group instruction includes academic, social, and communication skills
  - Focus on development of SEL for more independence in group settings
  - Continued focus on independence in all routines

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Examples for Tier 3 Classrooms: Primary and Secondary Model Sites





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Tier 3 Video Examples: Pre-Teaching Skills for Secondary Routines



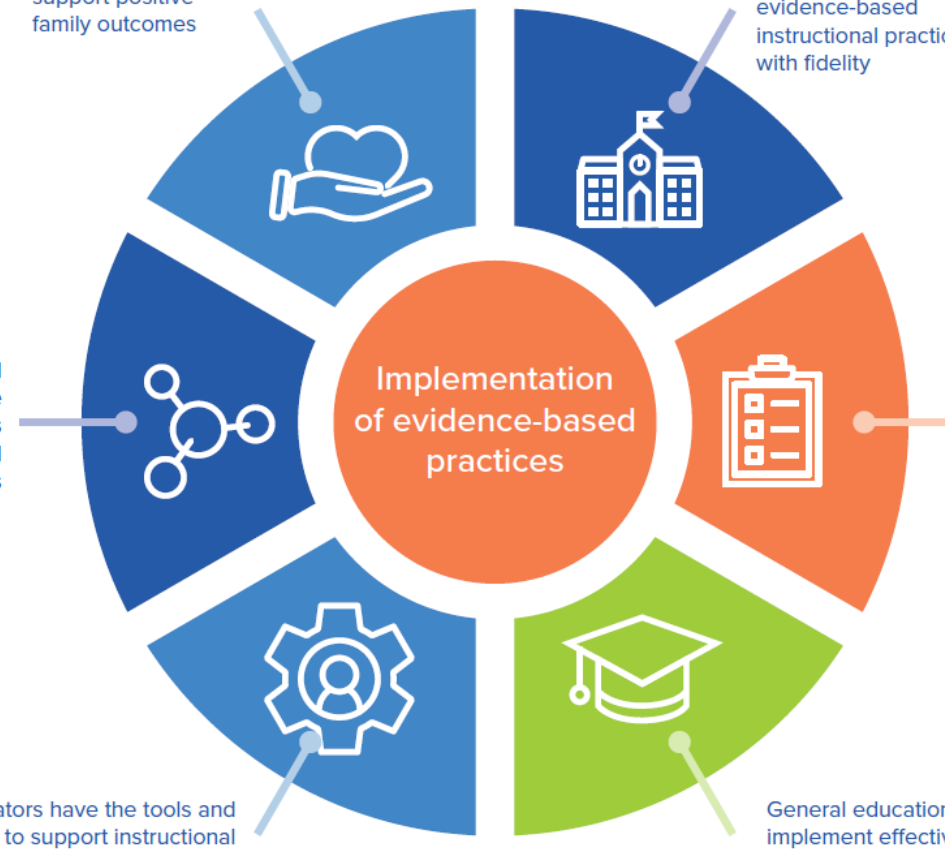


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Include All Stakeholders



Parents receive information and training to support positive family outcomes

Training sites and coaches implement evidence-based instructional practices with fidelity

Instructional staff and administrators communicate and collaborate to share ideas and resources within and between school districts

All special education staff are able to implement evidence-based practices across developmental levels, ages, and the autism spectrum

Administrators have the tools and knowledge to support instructional staff in implementing evidence-based practices

General education staff implement effective strategies to support students in inclusive settings

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Support and Train Paraprofessionals

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- Research Shows:
  - Paraprofessionals actively desire more training on evidence-based practices (EBPs)
  - Investment in paraprofessional training leads to increased skills
  - Training improves job satisfaction and staff retention
  - Contributes to schools' capacity building to better serve students' needs
- Topics May Include:
  - Basic Behavior Principles
  - Teaching New Behaviors
  - Understanding Reinforcement
  - Using Visual Supports
  - And more!

Workshops can be full day, half-day, or mini-trainings, as well as asynchronous options!

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Provide Comprehensive Workshops: STAR, Links, and SOLER

- Learn to use curriculum-based assessments to identify skills to teach
- Apply evidence-based practices with demos, video examples and hands-on practice
- Simplify data collection with practical strategies built into learning sessions
- Create structured learning environments with visuals & supports



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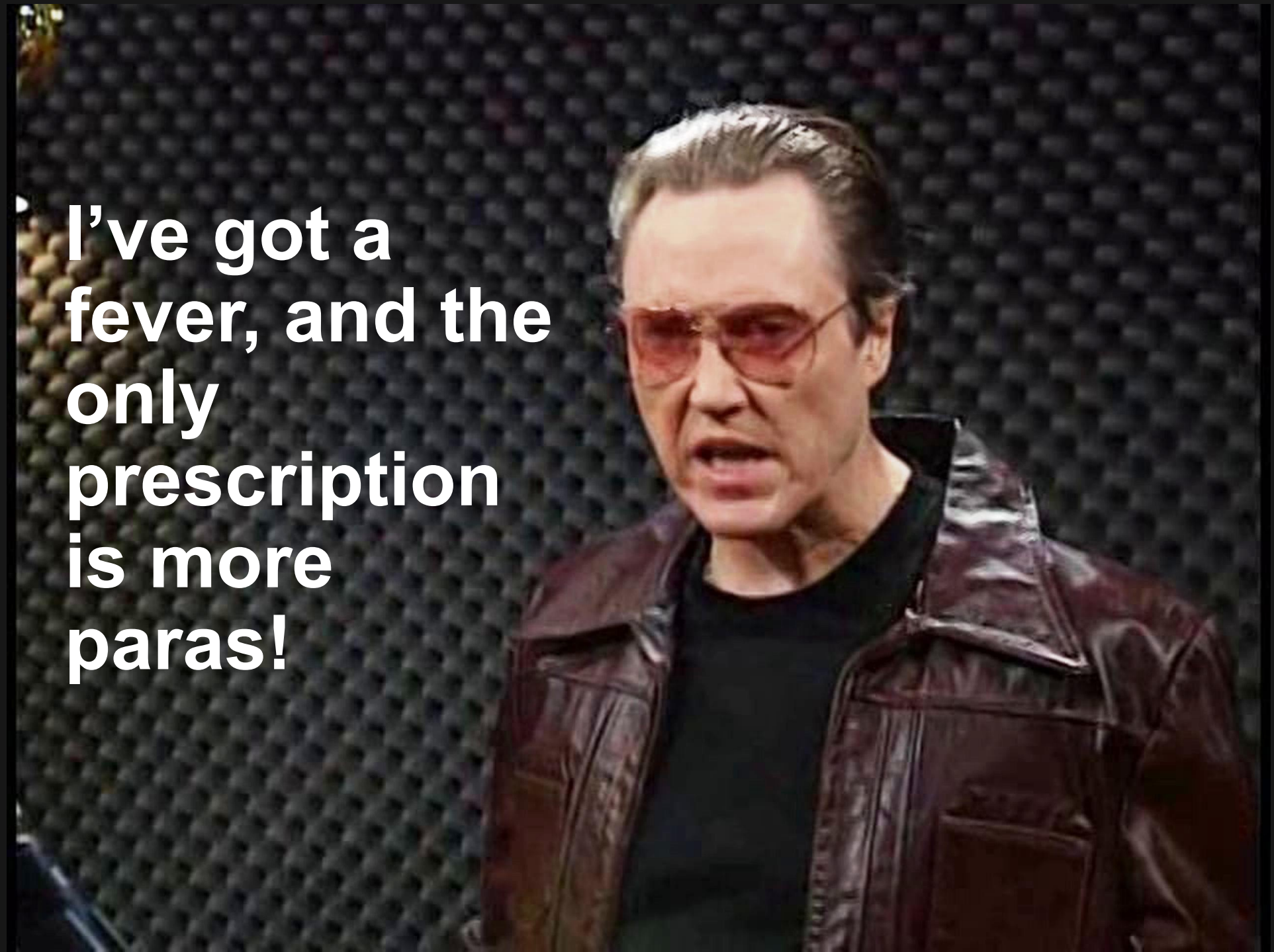
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Free Support for Caregivers, Educators, and Community Members

- Free monthly webinars for caregivers, educators, and community members
- Each session is one hour, includes a certificate of completion, and a recording will be sent to everyone who registers along with session handouts.

SCAN ME

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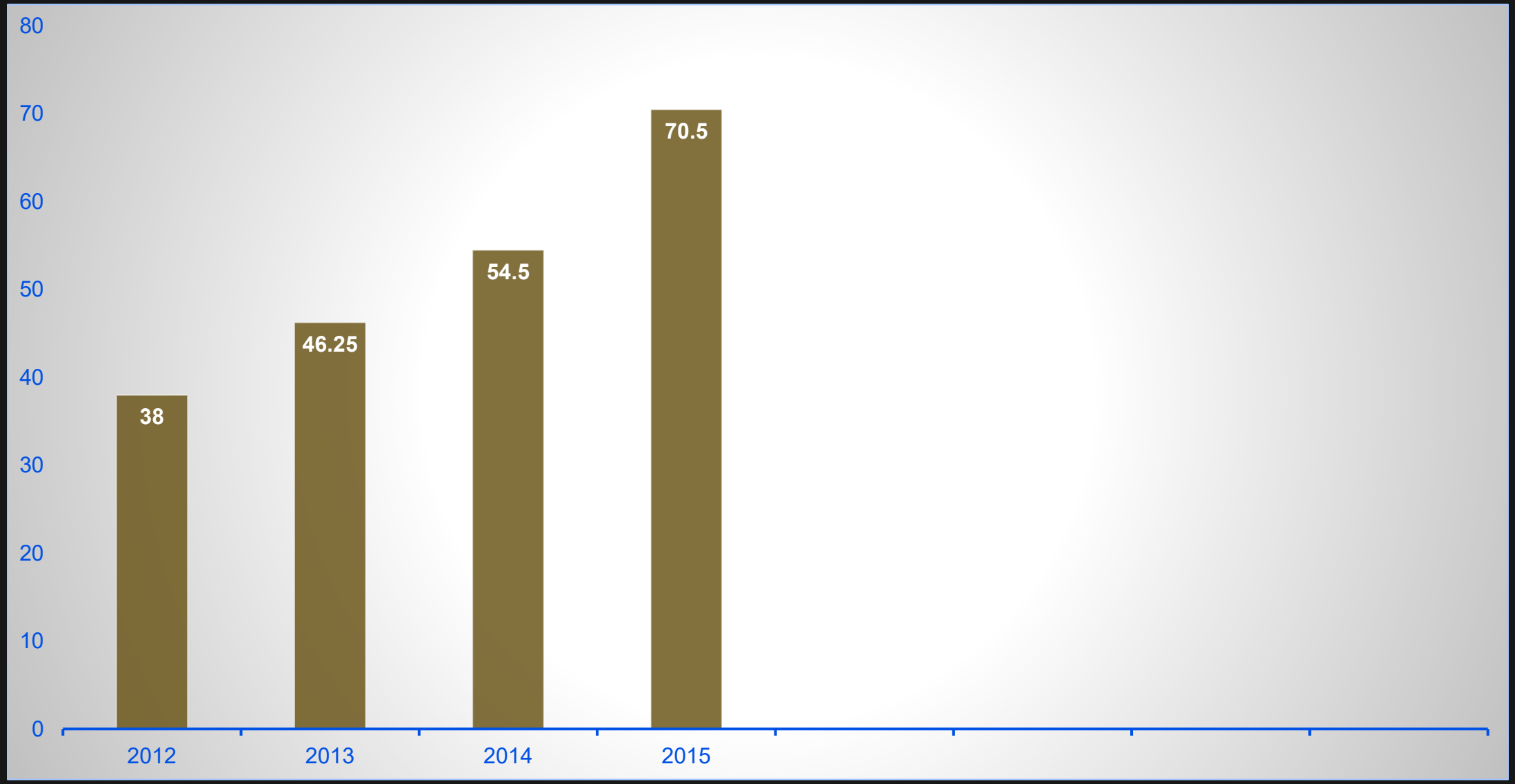

I’ve got a fever, and the only prescription is more paras!

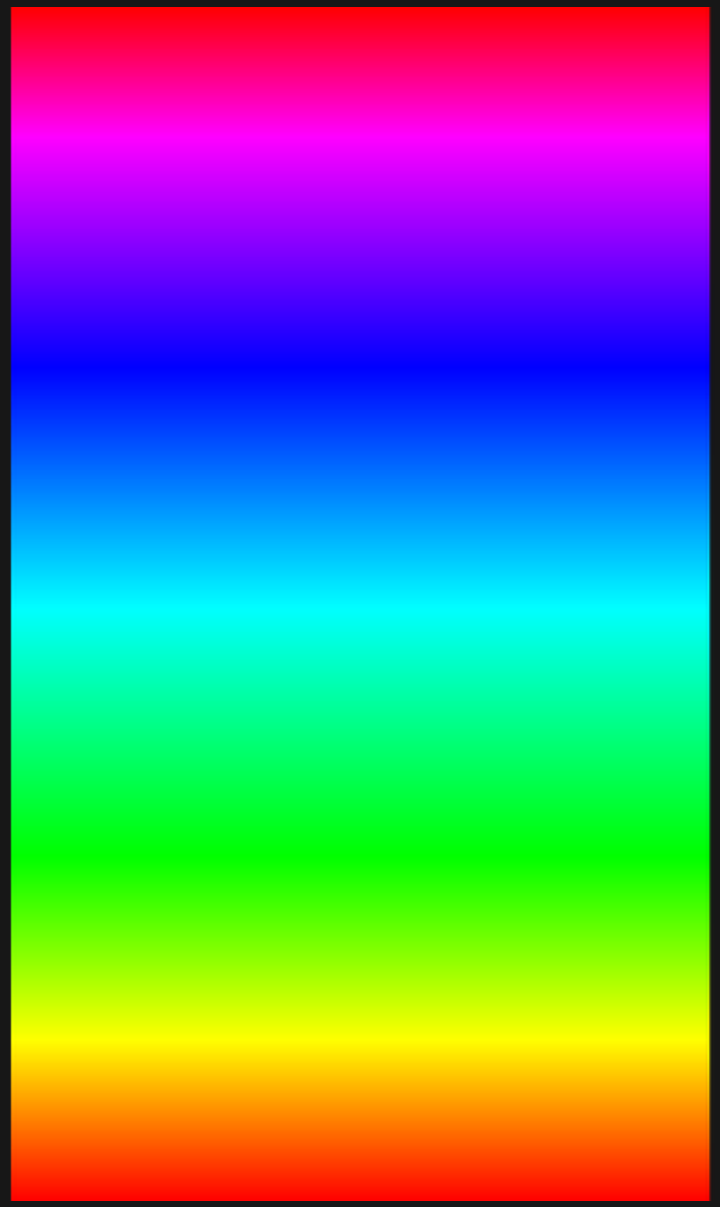
The Auburn School District

- Home to over 17,000 students
- 11.9% access special education services
- 16 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 3 high schools, 1 alternative high school
- Fastest growing district in King County
- Very diverse community
  - 44% of students live in multilingual households
  - 11% of students are new to the country within the past two years
  - 111 languages spoken



Targeted Staffing Through the Years





“Categories lead us toward certainty but away from clarity, and categorical thinking moves us away from understanding the bigger picture.”

-Bob Johansen



Just like with your students, you must meet adults where they are at and not where you want them to be.

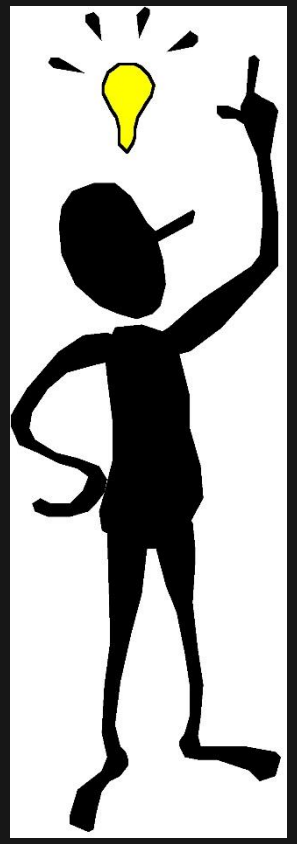
The Beginning

- Assembled a critical mass of special education staff
- Reviewed district data and practices related to 1:1s
- Had authentic discussion around barriers that exist in the district
- Made recommendations for next steps



What If?

- What if we created a paraeducator position specifically designed to help student programs get up in running?
- What if that position was staffed by seasoned veterans who had the filter of promoting independence?
- What if that position was not housed or supervised from a building, but rather from Student Special Services?





Para Floaters

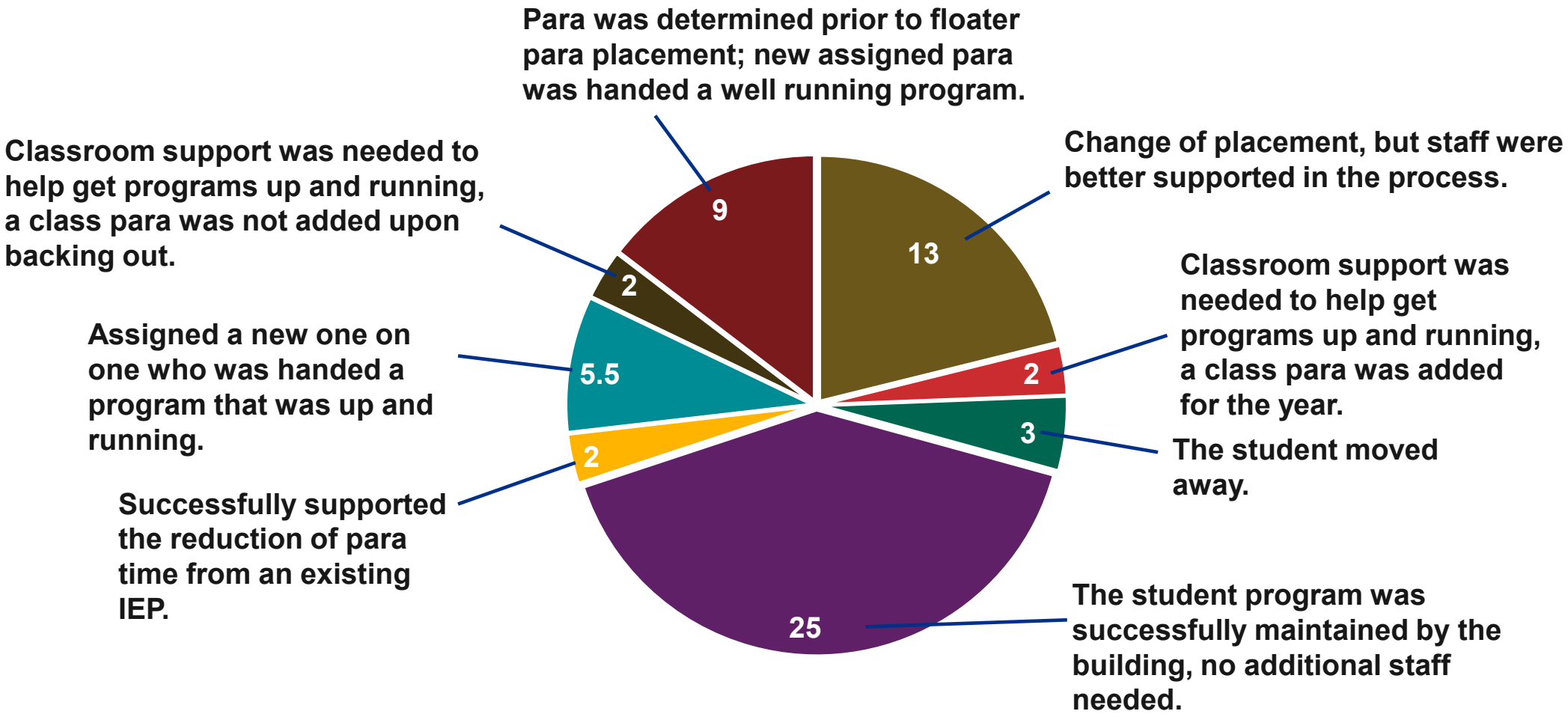
- High performing special education paraprofessionals whose job it is to support a student's program getting back on track
- Never assigned to one assignment for more than a couple of months
- Has a strong focus and goal of promoting student independence
- Through the guidance from Student Special Services, they strategically navigate both student and staff challenges

Table 2. Alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals

CATEGORY OF ALTERNATIVES	BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES
Resource Reallocation	Trading in paraprofessional positions to hire additional special education teachers provides increased access to more highly qualified personnel.
Co-teaching	Teachers and special educators work together in the same classroom. To maintain a naturally occurring number of students special needs, it may be necessary to share a special educator across three or four classes.
Building Capacity of Teachers	Teacher capacity can be built in a variety of areas (e.g., expectations of teacher engagement with students with disabilities, differentiated instruction, universal design, response to instruction, positive behavior supports, assistive technology, information about current evidence-based practices).
Paperwork Paraprofessionals	Paraprofessionals may be assigned clerical paperwork duties that free time for special educators to collaborate with teachers and work directly with students.
Improving Working Conditions for Special Educators and Classroom Teachers	Special educator conditions can be improved by reducing caseload size, the grade range covered, and the number teachers with whom special educators interact. Explore changes in class size, increase availability of special educator and related supports, schedule coordinated meeting times, and provide access to adapted materials, to improve conditions for teachers.
Peer Supports	Encourage peer support strategies that provide natural ways to support students with disabilities and may also benefit students without disabilities.
Self-Determination	Teach self-determination skills and provide opportunities for students with disabilities to have a voice in determining their own supports.
Paraprofessional Pools	Establishing a small pool of skilled paraprofessionals (or one floating position for a small school) allows for their temporary assignments to address specific, short-term needs.
Fading Plans	Developing a plan to fade paraprofessional support as much as possible can lead to greater student independence and more natural supports.
Dually Certified Teachers	Hire teachers who are certified in both general and special education to provide enhanced personnel capacity for all students

ADAPTED FROM: GIANGRECO, M. F., YUAN, S., MCKENZIE, B., CAMERON, P., & FIALKA, J. (2005). "BE CAREFUL WHAT YOU WISH FOR...": FIVE REASONS TO BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ASSIGNMENT OF INDIVIDUAL PARAPROFESSIONALS. TEACHING EXCEPTIONAL CHILDREN, 37(5), 28-34.

Our data after 4 years and 62 cases



Floater Updates



- Created an intake and exit process
- Changed the Name to **Inclusive Support Professional**
- Changed the actual category of the position due to the type of work involved
  - Supporting staff who are struggling to support a student
  - Collaborating with many adults and co-creating student systems
  - Coaching gen ed teachers on interventions
  - Being flexible with start/end times

High Quality PD on Promoting Independence

For case managers who had a student with a 1:1 paraeducator assigned, multiple opportunities for PD on PI were provided. The course highlighted:

- Strategies to promote student independence
- How to lead this work with families and school teams
- Tools and resources
- Shifting mindsets




Sometimes the best way to forge a
new path is through gentle
pressure, relentlessly applied.

Assurance is of little value to someone who does not trust the person who is giving it.



The Independence Plan

- An independence plan is a required part of a student's IEP when the student accesses 1:1 adult support. It is a tool in which the IEP team clarifies the steps that will be taken so that the student can become less dependent on their assigned 1:1 adult and more independent with the ability to transition to existing classroom structures while still being successful. This involves targeting the role of the 1:1 adult throughout the day and the strategies that can be used to build up the student's skill set to function on their own. Goals from the IEP are cross referenced to ensure that independence is a priority in the student's plan and next steps are considered as the student advances their ability to navigate their school day.

Paraeducator Role Rubric

Time of Day, Activity, or Class Period	What can the student do independently with the provided classroom supports and should not be given extra help with by the 1:1 paraeducator?	What does the student need 1:1 assistance with that cannot be provided by the existing classroom staff?	What accommodations and strategies can be utilized that would permit the student to complete the activity independently?	What work can the paraeducator do when their targeted student is not in need of support?

Student Skill Analysis

What missing skills are interfering with the student's ability to function more independently at school that cannot be supported by the existing classroom staff? Please list each skill with a corresponding goal from the IEP that is addressing it and how data is being collected. Finally, list out the next steps or future goals that will need to be reached before the support of the 1:1 paraeducator can be fully transferred over to the existing classroom staff. If the next step is to transfer the support back over to the existing classroom staff and reduce the 1:1 paraeducator time, please write "reduce paraeducator time."

Missing Skill	Description of the IEP goal that is addressing the missing skill	Method of data collection	Next steps or future goals that need to be reached before the student can become independent of the 1:1 paraeducator

What is your estimated timeline in which you believe the student will be able to continue to make progress on their goals independent of an assigned 1:1 paraeducator?

List an estimated 1:1 paraeducator support reduction plan:

	The Reduction in 1:1 Paraeducator Support	*Estimated Timeline of Achievement*
Step 1		
Step 2		
Step 3		
Step 4		
Step 5		
Step 6		
Step 7		

Reduction of 1:1 Paraeducator Time

Misleading Language

- Remove the para
- Yank the para
- Dropping support
- Getting less help
- Decreasing student support

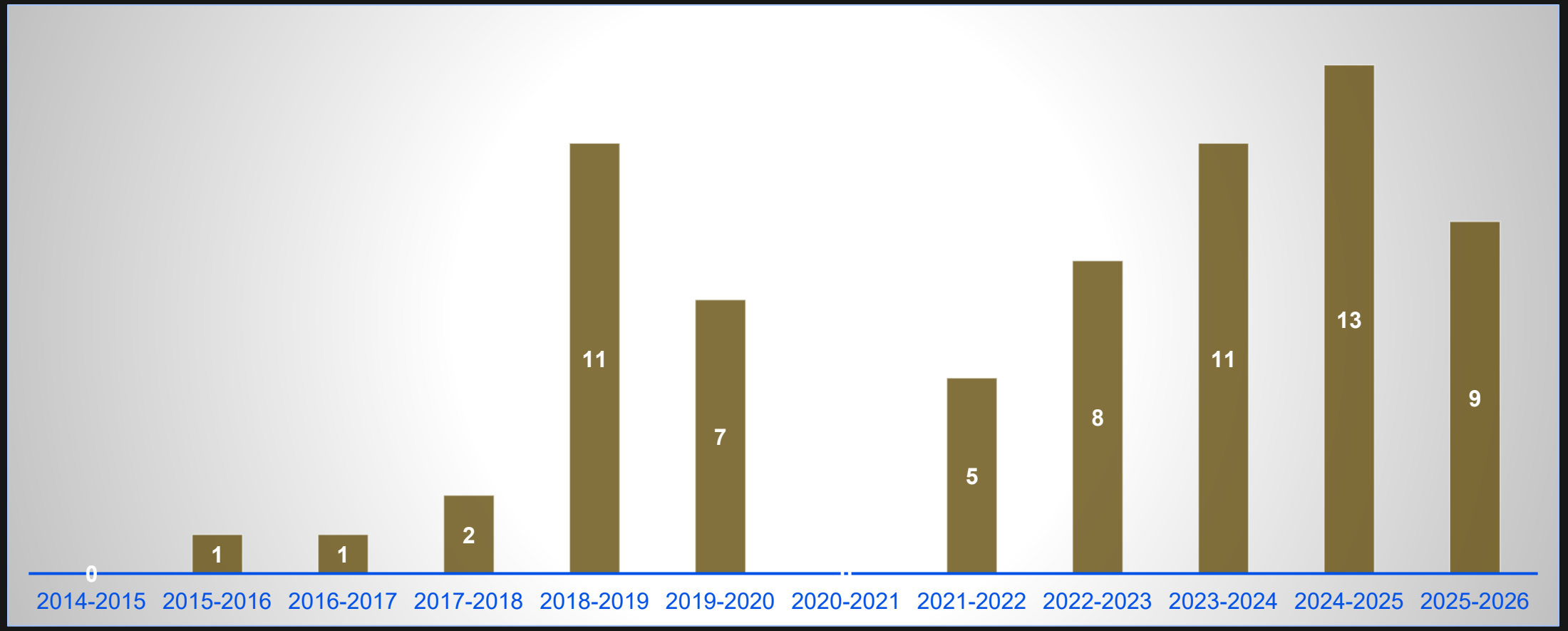
Growth Centered Language

- Increasing opportunities for independence
- Progressing the student's learning through the use of naturally occurring academic, social, and behavioral cues
- Transfer instructional control from the para to their teacher
- Increasing student's ability to do it all on their own
- Growing the student's ability to be a do it yourselfer
- Maximizing direct learning from peers and the highly trained teacher
- Advancing the student from being dependent on their own adult to be successful

Asking a parent if they are ready to remove a 1:1 from an IEP is like asking a teacher if they feel completely ready for the first day of school.



Removal of Targeted Staffing from IEPS



Adult Support Role Rubric

Fill out the table below that specifies the role of the adult support. Indicate "N/A" for times that do not apply.

Time of Day, Activity, or Class Period	**What can the student do independently and does not need additional help with?**	**In what ways will the classroom teacher assist the student and in what ways will the adult support assist the student?**	**Beyond the direct assistance of an adult, what supports can be used to help advance the skills of the student and build their independence? (for example, a visual schedule, voice scale, break card, timer, eye gaze device, switch, etc.)**	**What work can the adult support do when their targeted student is not in need of support?**
General Education Setting:		Teacher assists by: Adult support assists by:		
Special Education Setting:		Teacher assists by: Adult support assists by:		

1. What is the intent of the assigned 1:1 paraeducator as described in the adverse impact statement of the IEP?

2. In what ways has the student demonstrated greater independence in the past year?

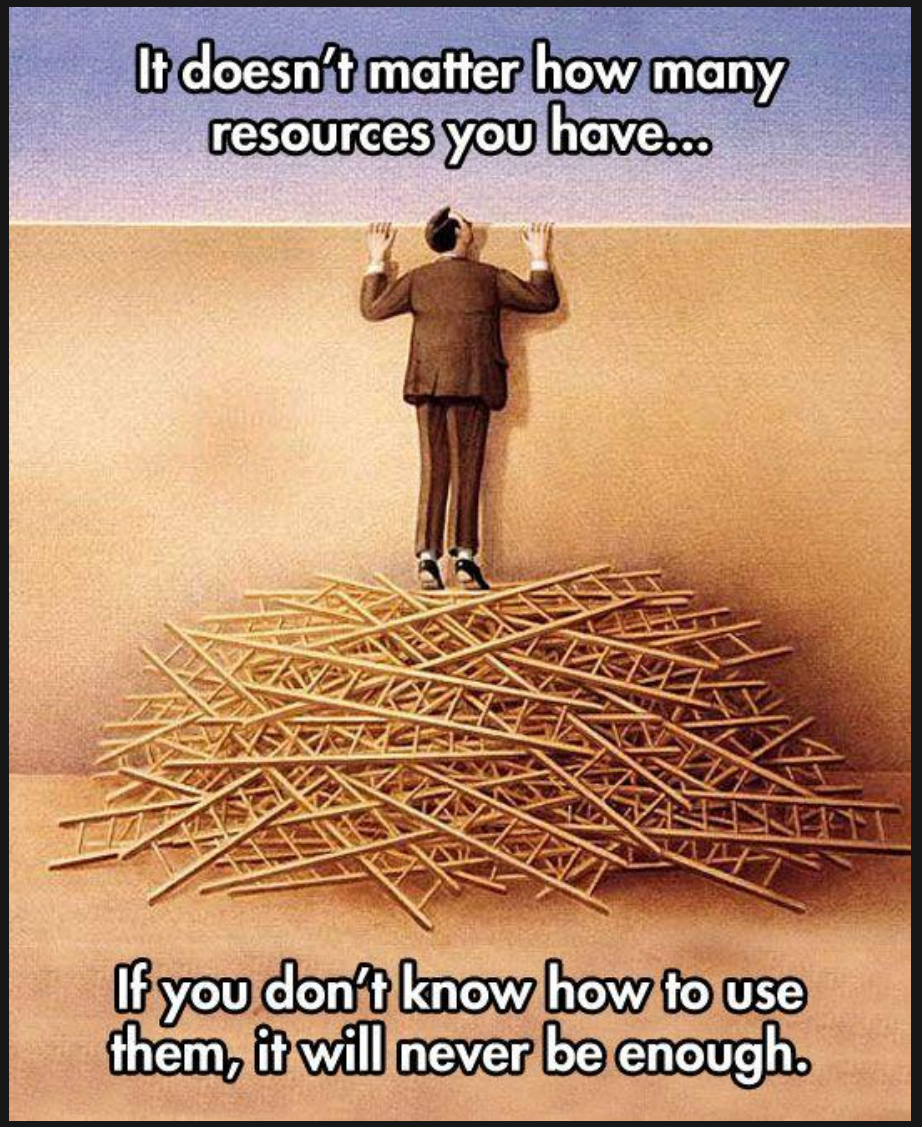
3. What skills, when developed, will indicate that the student is performing at their highest level of independence?

4. What specially designed instruction is the student currently receiving to help advance those skills and how is it being delivered?

5. What next steps can the staff take to support the student in becoming more independent?

Where Things Sit Today

- 70 1:1 Paras
- 17 Behavior Specialists
- 2 LPNs



Everything rises and falls on leadership.

Micah

John C. Maxwell

Updates



Meeting with building principals and principal leadership about promoting independence in buildings



Moved promoting independence professional development to an asynchronous option



Periodically having school teams return to Student Special Services to provide updates on students



This work is still hard!!!!

Bringing It All Together



- Identify your messaging and mantra
- Engage in the conversation about the practice of 1:1 adult support and be prepared to listen
- Target PD on Promoting Independence that pairs with your inclusive practices and district priorities
- Create the needed structures and supports to work against how we are naturally wired
- Identify a system of accountability at the leadership level
- Start with, end with, and everywhere in-between discuss the why of the work

Here's an IDEA!

The purposes of IDEA include ensuring that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and **prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.**





"I cannot do all the good that the world needs. But the world needs all the good that I can do."

-Jana Stanfield

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THANK YOU!!!

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