



# Advocating for Inclusive Education: Supporting Parents & Families

Down Syndrome Association of Wisconsin (DSAW), June 3, 2021

*Katherine M.J. Vroman, Ph.D., Inclusion Facilitator*  
*New Jersey Coalition for Inclusive Education*



# Agenda

- Introductions
- Searching for the “Mr. McKenneys”
- Framing inclusive education
- Not “if,” but “how”?
- Parents & Families: Making your case
  - Create a 1-pager
  - Do your research
  - Clarify your ask
  - Reframe the conversation
- Questions & Discussion



# KATHERINE M. J. VROMAN

## I am...

An educator, researcher, collaborator, signer, facilitator, ally

Youth advocacy, inclusive postsecondary education, inclusive education training and TA, university professor.



# KATHERINE M. J. VROMAN

## I believe...

- In the philosophy of ***presuming and constructing competence*** and the criterion of the ***least dangerous assumption***, and that people **with disabilities and their families are the experts** on their own lives. *Inclusive values are my North Star.*



(Photo credit: Dan Habib, 2018)



9-15-92

Dear Parents,

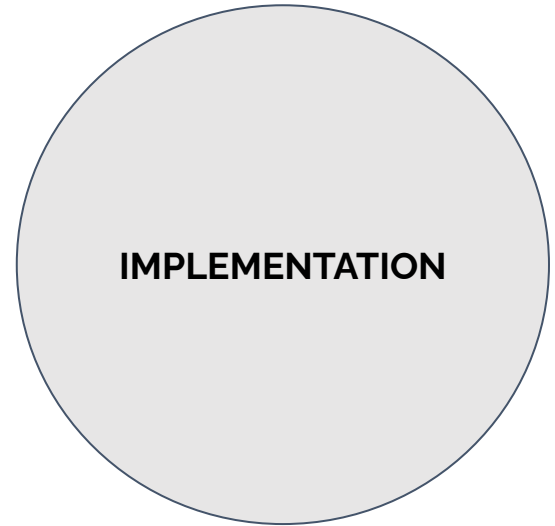
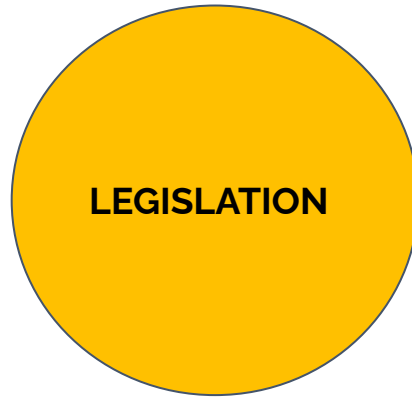
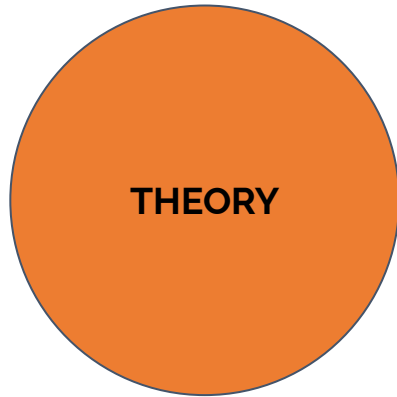
Hello. My name is Michael McKenney. I am your child's teacher. I am writing to let you know about our classroom this year. We have many exciting ideas and activities planned that we feel will educate and enrich your child in this their fifth grade year.

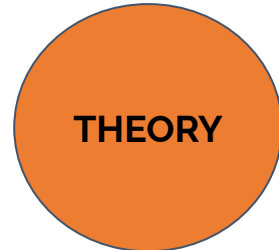
Let me begin by telling you that I believe strongly that all children have many strengths and weaknesses. All children are able to learn and within the walls of our classroom. We are all here to learn and experience the many differences that we all have inside of us. My classroom is set up in a way so that all services for your child are done right inside our class. Chapter one reading/writing is the only exception. Mrs. Carol Straton and I work very closely together intergrating her special education class into the mainstream class by having them as part of our classroom a majority of the time during the day. In this way I feel that children are able to use each other as resources to get done what truly needs to get done. Ms. Knight handles all resource room activities for my students within our class also. She becomes a teacher for all, not just a select few. We work hard to share the teaching responsibility so each of us will be free to enrich the students in need of enrichment, and give help to the students in need of extra help. We were very successful in this approach last year, and feel that this model will only get better over the course of time.

Much of our learning is done through cooperative

**Mr. McKenney,**  
**Grade 5,**  
**Woodman Park**  
**School**  
*(Dover, NH)*

# Framing inclusive education





# Framing inclusive education

“The fundamental principle of inclusive education is the **valuing of diversity** within the human community...When inclusive education is fully embraced, we abandon the idea that children have to become “normal” in order to contribute to the world...We begin to **look beyond typical ways of becoming valued members of the community**, and in doing so, begin to realize the achievable goal of providing all children with an **authentic sense of belonging**” *(Kunc, 1992, pp. 38-39).*



# Framing inclusive education

LEGISLATION

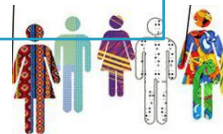
*Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

“...To the maximum extent **appropriate**, children with disabilities...are **educated with children who are not disabled**”

*(IDEA 1990, PL 101-476.)*

“A student with a disability is **not removed** from the age-appropriate general education classroom **solely based on needed modifications to the general education curriculum**”

*(U.S. Department of Education 34 CFR Parts 300 and 301 “Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children With Disabilities; Final Rule” - August 14, 2006, see section regarding “Placements,” p. 46765.)*





# Framing inclusive education

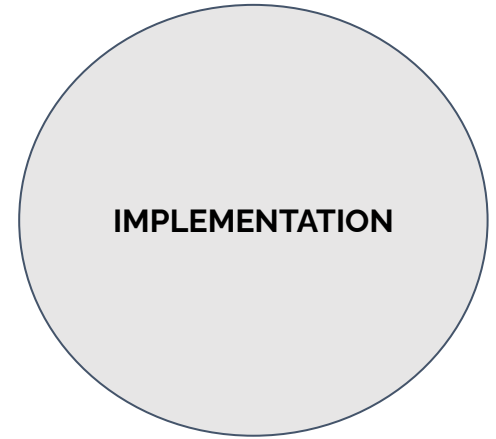
LEGISLATION

Case Law Precedence

Brown v. Board of Education, 1954  
PARC v. Commonwealth of PA, 1971  
Mills v. Board of Education, 1972  
Rowley v. Board of Education, 1982  
Oberti v. Board of Education, 1993  
Andrew F. v. Douglas County, 2017  
**L.H. v. Hamilton County, 2018**

*What the IDEA implies, the case law makes explicit: ... "A child **need not master the general-education curriculum** for mainstreaming to remain a viable option. Rather, the appropriate yardstick is whether the child, with appropriate supplemental aids and services, can make progress toward the [ ] IEP['s] goals in the regular education setting."*

# Framing inclusive education



Not “if”... but “how”???



# Parents & Families: *Making Your Case*

## 1. Create a 1-pager

Develop a 1-2 page **positive profile** that describes your child's strengths, gifts, interests, and talents, as well as strategies of what works best in providing the right kind of support.

## 2. Do your research

Familiarize yourself with key points from the over FOUR decades of **research demonstrating positive outcomes** for students with and without disabilities who are educated in inclusive settings, and share!

## 3. Clarify your “ask”

IEP meetings can often feel like high-stakes negotiations where it's easy to lose sight of your priorities for your child. Clarify and reinforce what it is you (and your child!) really want, and **ASK for it!**

## 4. Reframe the conversation

Be prepared to respond to common arguments against inclusive education, and steer the conversation away from “if” it's possible, towards **HOW to make it work.**

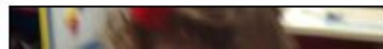
# 1. Create a 1-pager

## About Abby:

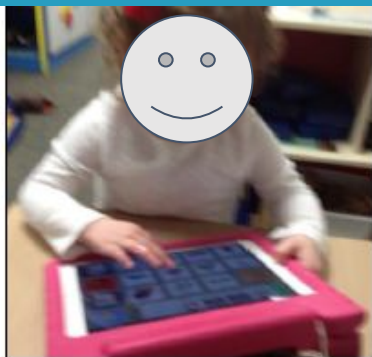
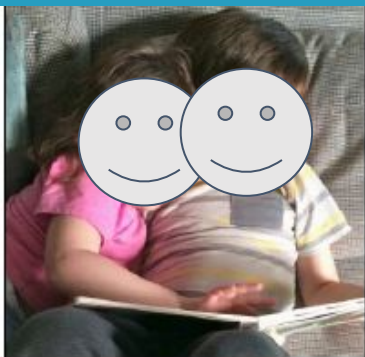
- She is social and cheerful
- She is resilient
- She is empathetic and forgiving
- She is persistent and determined

## What is most important to Abby:

- Being with family and friends
- Being acknowledged and told what to expect
- Being in control of her own body
- Being included in conversations and activities



# 1. Create a 1-pager



## Abby's favorite things:

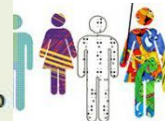
- Music (especially Taylor Swift & One Direction)
- Playgrounds
- Looking at pictures/photographs
- Reading books and snuggling
- Playing chase and being tickled
- Her big brother, Callan

## How to best support Abby:

- Recognize all of her forms of communication (talker, signs, gestures, eye gaze)
- Use her talker to communicate with her
- Verbalize to her what she is communicating to you
- Explain what you are doing and why
- Acknowledge her requests even if you do not grant her requests

## Hopes & Dreams for the upcoming year:

- Form authentic friendships
- Have fun
- Feel safe and secure
- Be accepted and valued for who she is and what she has to



# Strengths & Strategies Profile

(Kluth & Dimon-Borowski, 2003)

- Go around the table and, based on knowing Abby and observing her in your classroom, contribute a **strength, gift, interest or talent** to the list
- Go around the table and propose **strategies that work** to support Abby **in your classroom**

*(This can be a living document that grows with the student!)*



# Strengths & Strategies Profile

(Kluth & Dimon-Borowski, 2003)

## Strengths & Strategies Profile

Kluth, P. & Dimon-Borowski, M. (2003)

This form can be used as an attachment to a positive behavior plan or as a communication tool for teams who are transitioning a student from teacher to teacher or school to school. A student's team (e.g., teachers, family, therapists) should work together to fill in this form. Ideally, each list should contain NO LESS than fifty items.

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### Mischa's Strengths, Gifts, Interests, & Talents

- Can count to one hundred
- Is very neat and tidy
- Can pour her own juice or milk
- Keeps her desk area very tidy
- Likes to have her back rubbed
- Can solve simple addition problems
- Knows how to add with a calculator
- Likes to have jobs/responsibilities
- Fascinated by watches- esp. those with big faces
- Can get started on her morning routine without assistance
- Likes to show family photos to friends
- Improving in comprehension
- Can independently operate CD player
- Enjoys doing class jobs (e.g., watering plants)
- Loving
- Likes to look at animal magazines
- Knows left from right
- Knows how to use her CD player
- Loves the "Dixie Chicks"
- Can read her "All About Me" book independently
- Likes to be a leader
- Energetic
- Can talk like Donald Duck
- Athletic



# Parents & Families: Making Your Case

## ~~1. Create a 1-pager~~

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## 2. Do your research

Familiarize yourself with key points from the over FOUR decades of **research demonstrating positive outcomes** for students with and without disabilities who are educated in inclusive settings, and share!

## 3. Clarify your “ask”

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## 2. Do your research

### Inclusive education: *Optimal for academic outcomes*

- The general education classroom is **the optimal place** where access to the general education curriculum occurs and inclusive education is an **evidence-based practice** for achieving that goal (Wehmeyer & Agran, 2006; Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008/2009).
- The NLTS2 (11,000 students with disabilities) showed that **more time spent in the gen ed classroom was positively correlated with:**
  - Higher scores on standardized tests of reading and math
  - Fewer absences from school
  - Fewer referrals for disruptive behavior

***Independent of students' disability, severity of disability, gender, or socio-economic status***



## 2. Do your research

### Inclusive education: *Optimal for social and emotional outcomes*

- Students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in inclusive settings had a higher likelihood to be identified as a **member of a social network** by peers without disabilities (Wiener & Tardif, 2004).
- Students with disabilities demonstrate **high levels of social interaction** in settings with typical peers and **fewer referrals for disruptive behaviors** (Marder et al., 2003).
- **Social competence and communication skills** improve when students with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings (Marder et al., 2003; Newman & Davies-Mercier, 2005; Sumi, Marder, & Wagner, 2005)
- Students with disabilities have demonstrated gains in other areas of development when they are educated in inclusive settings, such as **level of engagement**, involvement in integrated activities, **affective demeanor**, and **social interaction** (Katz & Mirenda, 2002; McGregor and Vogelsberg, 1998)



## 2. Do your research

### Inclusive education: *Optimal for students with the most complex support needs*

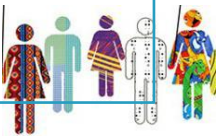
- **Higher expectations** for student learning (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2007)
- Heightened **engagement**, affective demeanor, and participation in integrated social activities (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994)
- Improved **communication and social skills** (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2005; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; McSheehan, Sonnenmeier, & Jorgensen, 2009; Soto, Muller, Hunt, & Goetz, 2001)
- More satisfying and diverse **social relationships** (Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996);
- Optimal access to the **general education curriculum** (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010; Wehmeyer & Agran, 2006)
- Improved **academic outcomes** in the areas of literacy and mathematics (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Ryndak, Alper, Ward, Storch, & Montgomery, 2010; Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999)
- Better quality **Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)** (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992)
- **Fewer absences from school** and referrals for disruptive behavior (Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, 1998)
- Achievement of more IEP goals (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984)
- Improved adult outcomes in the areas of **post-secondary education, employment, and independence** (White & Weiner, 2004).



## 2. Do your research

### Inclusive education: *Best for all students*

- The performance of students without disabilities is **not compromised** by the presence of students with disabilities in their classrooms (Baker, Wang, & Walberg, 1994/1995; Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Farrell et al., 2007; Friesen, Hickey & Krauth, 2010; Gandhi, 2007; Idol, 2006; Kain, & Rivkin, 2002; Kalamouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan, 2007; Ruijs & Peetsma, 2009; Salend & Duhaney, 1999; Staub & Peck, 1994; Waldron & Cole, 2000).
  - Example: A study of 1,000 primary school students in Indiana found positive impacts of inclusion on the progress of non-disabled students in mathematics. **59% percent of non-disabled students in inclusive schools had higher scores on a standardized mathematics exam** compared to the previous year, while only 39 percent of non-disabled students in traditional schools made similar progress (Waldron & Cole, 2000).
- Schools adopting inclusive education showed improved academic learning for **all students** in their building (Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2010).
- Improved **attitudes towards diversity** (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009);
- Unique opportunities for learning about prejudice and equity (Fisher, Sax, & Jorgensen, 1998)
- Increased academic achievement, assignment completion, and classroom participation by **students providing peer supports** (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997).



## 2. Do your research

**Inclusive education:** More beneficial than a self-contained setting

Jackson, Ryndak, and Wehmeyer (2011) said that any benefit to students of the intensive, one-on-one instruction that they *may get in a self-contained* classroom is **overridden by the benefits of being in a general education classroom.**



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# 3. Clarify your ask



## Abby's Long-Term Goals:

### **1 Autonomous Communication**

- Being able to say whatever she wants, whenever she wants, to whoever she wants.
- Literacy - ability to read and write at grade-level.

### **2 Educational & Community Inclusion**

- Being a participating and contributing member (not simply present) in school, home and community activities.
- Having a life worth "talking" about.

### **3 Authentic Friendships, Natural Supports & Personal Safety**

- Being loved and supported by peers and others within the community.

### **4 Academic Rigor in the Least Restrictive Environment**

- Have access to grade-level academic knowledge (with appropriate individualized instruction and supports) to help her achieve high levels of learning.

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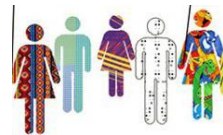


## 4. Reframe the conversation!

*What do I say when...*



*Not "if"... but "how"???*

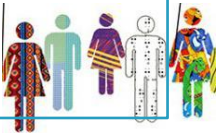


*“We don’t offer inclusion here...”*

Special education is **a service, not a place**, so let’s talk about **what kinds of supports my child needs** to access and participate in the general education curriculum, in the general education classroom.

*“Inclusive education isn’t an evidence-based practice.”*

Actually, there is ample evidence that demonstrates positive outcomes for students **with and without disabilities (including those with more complex needs!)** who are educated in inclusive settings. Can I send you some resources?



*“Your child isn’t “ready” to be included...”*

Can you show me the policy that defines “readiness”? **There is no prerequisite** that my child needs to demonstrate to be educated in the general education classroom. Let me share with you this excerpt from IDEA.

*“But he/she is not at grade level...”*

I understand that any classroom has a **heterogeneous group of learners** with different strengths and needs. Let’s look at my child’s **“Strengths & Strategies” profile** and figure out what needs to be in place.



# Parents & Families: *Making Your Case*

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**Example 1-pager (Abby);  
Strengths & Strategies**

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**Research summary**

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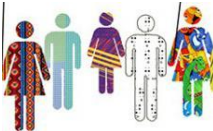
**Example 1-pager (Abby)**

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**Slides from this webinar**

# Questions & Discussion



# NJCIE

N J COALITION FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**Lingering questions? Please reach out to me!**

Katherine Vroman, Ph.D., Inclusion Facilitator

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