Promoting Progress for Struggling Students and Students with Disabilities in Private Schools

[Slide 1- Promoting Progress for Struggling Students and Students with Disabilities in Private Schools] Tessie Bailey: Welcome to today's national forum, Promoting Progress for Struggling Students and Student with Disabilities in Private Schools. The PROGRESS Center, an OSEP funded Center, and we're excited to share evidence-based practices and resources that can help private school educators meet the increasingly diverse needs of their students. The event is intended for private school associations, their educators and schools, who are responsible for developing and implementing instruction for struggling students and students with disabilities.

 The event's going to kick off with a great keynote by Dr. Erik Carter, a Cornelius Vanderbilt Professor of Special Education at Vanderbilt University. He focuses on developing a sense of belonging for all students in private schools, including students with disabilities. His research and teaching focus on evidence-based strategies for supporting access to general curriculum and promoting valued roles in school, work, community, and congregational settings for children with disabilities.

Following the keynote, panelists will unpack the various ways that nonpublic schools impact community and belonging for students of all abilities. They will share their experiences from a variety of perspectives, including parent and teacher perspectives. Following the even we will have four breakout sessions featuring freely available resources to support students and educators from national educational centers: PROGRESS Center, the National Center on Intensive Intervention, the IRIS Center, and the National Center on Improving Literacy. The resources are designed to assist educators in implementing education and instruction for all learners, including those with disabilities.

[Slide 2- Welcome to the PROGRESS Center!] Tessie Bailey: My name is Tessie Rose Bailey, and I will be moderating today's event. I am the director of the PROGRESS Center. The center provides information, resources, tools, and technical assistance to support local educators in developing and implementing high-quality educational programming. We share guidance, tools, and resources based on existing research, state and federal law and policies, and local experiences. Each year of our project, we support an educator in residence from a private school, and we partner with a select group of local educators, both public and private, to develop their knowledge, skills, and infrastructure to promote progress for students with disabilities and seek feedback about how to improve our supports and resources.

[Slide 3- Development, Implementation, and Access] Tessie Bailey: We believe that when educators collaborate with students and families in the development of technically sound and educationally

meaningful programming, and implement that programming using effective practices for instruction and service delivery, it will result in improved service and outcomes.

And as you can see on this slide, there's a multiplication sign between each of those components, and you know what that means. If either of those components are missing, then we will not have improved access or outcomes, or in a sense, progress. So we want to make sure that we're developing high quality educational programming as well as implementing that, so we can best support our students.

[Slide 4- Introductions] Tessie Bailey: As I mentioned, I am Dr. Tessie Bailey and I will be moderating today's forum as well as the Q&A at the end of each session. I'm really happy to introduce Dr. David Emenheiser who is the PROGRESS Center's Project Officer at Office of Special education Programs and Pamela Allen who is our Education Program Specialist at the Office of Non-public Education both at the U.S. Department of Education.

Pamela Allen: Well, thanks so much, Tessie. Greetings from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Nonpublic Education, or ONPE as we often call it. We are so very grateful that you've carved out time from your schedules to join us for today's forum. And I'd like to thank our partners at the PROGRESS Center and the Office of Special Education Programs, or OSEP, for your collaborative spirit in pulling together this gathering.

It's through your model of collaboration that we continue to bring private school stakeholders together to address educating our nation's children in supportive and caring schools that help them make academic progress and realize the full potential for who they were created to be.
As the U.S. Department of Education's liaison to the private and home-schooled communities, ONPE's mission is to maximize the participation of private school students and teachers in federal education programs and initiatives.

Today's forum is a perfect example of how we collaborate with other program offices to realize our mission by bringing together stakeholders to enhance your knowledge and inspire your work.
We recognize that the past year and a half have been incredibly challenging, to say the least.
You may be interested in knowing that through a recent national assessment of educational progress, NAPE survey, the department learned that over 90% of private schools were open for in-person learning last year during the 2020-2021 school year.

This is significant as it shows the tremendous work and sacrifices you have made and continue to make in overcoming the challenges of COVID-19 and ensuring that your students are in safe, welcoming, and nurturing educational settings on-site in your community school buildings.

We've been truly inspired by your dedication and commitment, your creativity and ability to pivot successfully to educating our children in new environments, not withstanding these challenges. And as a mother to three young children who attend private schools, I know firsthand the difference it's made for my girls both at academically and socially. And thanks again for joining us today.
It really is our privilege to be with you for this forum as we continue to promote academic progress for children in private schools.

And we hope you find this gathering meaningful and that it will generate new ideas and create new partnerships to help you support the students in your care. And now I'd like to pass the torch to my colleague at OSEP, David Emenheiser, for his introduction.

David Emenheiser: Thank you, Pamela. It is a great pleasure to collaborate with the Office of Nonpublic Education in this work. And it's also my pleasure today to welcome you all to the PROGRESS Center's private school forum. I am David Emenheiser. I work in the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education programs, or like we like to call ourselves, OSEP. OSEP oversees the implementation of the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA. And you're likely familiar with parts B and C which provide the funds to the states to serve children with disabilities and includes the equitable services provisions. Monitoring states for compliance and results under parts B and C is one function of OSEP.

I, however, work in a different non-monitoring component of OSEP that we call the research to practice division. And we oversee the competitive grants awarded under part D of idea, and one line of grants is the awards for technical assistance and dissemination. And under this line, we fund centers to help the field build capacity and excellence in serving children with disabilities and their families.

It's important to remember that because tax dollars pay for these centers, all the resources developed by them are free and publicly available. And one of the centers that we fund under this line is the PROGRESS Center. And I get to serve as the progress officer for the PROGRESS Center. Basically that means that I make sure that the PROGRESS Center is doing is doing what we funded them to do.

The PROGRESS Center has been tasked with providing T.A. to a broad audience, basically every school that serves children with disabilities regardless of the category or intensity of disability. The schools include urban, suburban, rural, public, private, charter, and the topic or content of the center's T.A. is equally broad, and that is the development and implementation of high-quality education programming for those children with disabilities.

It's in light of this charge that the PROGRESS Center has called on you, the thought leaders, today to help them understand the needs and the priorities for their work and to share their resources and products broadly across your networks. The PROGRESS Center cannot do everything at one time. And so today we're focusing on belonging as a means of including children with disabilities. How can belonging inform and improve the opportunities for children with disabilities to reach challenging objectives? Preliminary data are indicating that over the last two years, there's been a 11% increase in parentally placed students with disabilities in private schools. We don't have the data yet for this school year, so we don't know whether or not it's still increasing, but my work with parent centers would indicate that there's probably going to be even a bigger rise in this school year.

And the resources of the PROGRESS Center available to help you, the private schools, serve these students. In operation for almost two years, the PROGRESS Center approaches T.A. without assumptions. The field is often full of opinions and beliefs about what's going well and maybe what isn't working so well. And some of those opinions and beliefs are based on evidence and experience, others are just if you forgive the word are scuttlebutt. The PROGRESS Center really cannot build T.A. on

that scuttlebutt. We need your expertise and so we need you to partner with us and to share the evidence and your learned experience. You come from varied backgrounds and we brought you together today so that we really can bring the diversity of perspectives and we covet your varied perspectives on the problems and give us insights so that we would be able to provide good T.A. to you, the private schools. So thank you in advance for participating in our summit today.

[Slide 5- What additional supports would be helpful for private schools to encourage progress for students with disabilities?] Tessie Bailey: Thank you, Pamela and David. I always love hearing from you all. You're so inspiring and I'm glad you could kick off today's event. Before I introduce our keynote, I wanted to open up an opportunity for you to share feedback. The U.S. Department of Education are here to support you in your work but we need to know what you need to be successful in supporting students with disabilities.

We'll be using Mentimeter throughout the event. You can access the Mentimeter by taking your iPhone, opening up your camera and then point it towards the qr code or use the direct link in the chat box to be able to access the Mentimeter. When you get there, you'll be able to type in anything that you feel would be essential to help you move forward. Starting to see folks do that. We'll be sharing that after our keynote presentation and then tell you where we're at and keep it open through the rest of the event. All right.

I have the pleasure to introduce Dr. Erik Carter. Here's a little bit about him when we first opened. He focuses strategies for promoting full inclusion of participation, belonging, value roles in schools, work, community, congressional settings. He was a high school teacher and transition specialist, so he's been in the trenches like you all. He's published extensively in this area and received the distinguished early career research award from the council for exceptional children.
We are so pleased to have him join us today. And I look forward to hearing the rest of your presentation. All right, Dr. Carter.

[Keynote- A Place of Belonging: Supporting a Strong Education for Every Student in Private Schools] Erik Carter: Thank you, Tessie. And thank you all also to the PROGRESS Center for hosting this gathering.

It is a pleasure to join you today and to be amongst so much teachers and school leaders and professionals and advocates from around the country who I know care so deeply about creating schools in which every student really does flourish, educationally, relationally, and all the ways we know matter most.

I share that commitment and share a commitment to creating schools and classrooms and even broader communities in which people with and without disabilities can learn and live in community with one another. I'm deeply involved at my own private university in Nashville, Tennessee, at Vanderbilt, in leading an inclusive college program for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. So I, along with you, I'm striving to create learning communities where everyone does belong. I'm grateful we can come together and consider what it might look like for schools to be places of inclusion and belonging for all students including and especially for students with disabilities or those who have more extensive support needs.

So the title of my talk is A Place of Belonging: Support a Strong Education for Every Student in Private Schools, and I'm going to lay out some big picture ideas and the panelists that follow will talk about how this is all being put into practice at the local level.

I suspect we would probably all affirm that schools should be a place of belonging for every student. Maybe we want students to really feel at home in their classrooms, want them to feel values and accepted by their peers and by teachers and we strive to create connections among students that ultimately lead to reciprocal relationships and especially sure every student feels like a true member of their school. Every student should know for certain that they belong. I'd like to address in my short time with you the place of belonging and all of our collective efforts to provide a rigorous and relevant education to children and youth in our communities.

But I also want to provoke your own thinking about what it would look like to move in ways that might widen the welcome even further for students with disabilities in private schools. This is such a critical conversation. Because so many private schools still struggle to extend invitations and instruction and supports and opportunities that students with disabilities need to be really full-fledged members of their learning community.

Among those parents that we hear from who approach private schools ask in their local area with enrolling their child with disabilities, turns out there are no lukewarm stories in that area.
Some speak about the extravagant welcome that they encounter, and others talk about the wounding they experience.

I'm focused on fostering belonging for students with a wide array of disabilities my own experience is around individuals with autism and intellectual and developmental disabilities, those were the students I taught as a high school teacher myself. But what you'll quickly see is the framework I share has relevance to fostering belonging for really anyone in your school.

So let me set the stage for this conversation and give historical context drawn largely from the fields of special education and people with disabilities all throughout society. And so I often find a glimpse backward can help us see where our schools fall within the stream of educational history and also helps to see where we might go next in this journey. So as you all know, probably, the experiences we pursued for students with disabilities here in North America have evolved pretty substantially over the last 50 years. And if you go back to the early 1970s, the years I was born, so many students with disabilities at that time found themselves wholly excluded from public education, but also so many other community opportunities.

So if you look at this image on the screen and imagine all of these different circles that are touching one another, if that reflects a particular school or type of community, what we saw at that time was there were lots of holes and lots of students were missing. As advocacy efforts advanced throughout the 70s and 80s and new legislation and policies were pursued, so often what we found is the opportunities that emerged for students with disabilities and particularly those with developmental opportunities those opportunities tended to be offered in segregated context almost entirely apart

from anyone else who didn't have a similar label. Those were special education schools or specialized day programs, sheltered workshops for adults, for example.

What this meant is that most students without disabilities would receive their formative education in the absence of their peers with disabilities. Then of course through the 80s and the 90s, our pursuits as a field, they continued to evolve and develop and grew. And a lot of our work focused then on integrating students with disabilities into the same schools they would have attended if they didn't have a disability.

Many of you might remember we talked about that as mainstreaming. And that reflected incredible progress around the country, but so often it still meant a separate special education classroom, one that was near but not really among other students in the school.
As people got older and workplaces it was enclaves and congregations special needs ministries and people were near one another but really among one another. That takes us to the present day because most recently we've been aiming efforts towards the full inclusion of students with disabilities into every aspect of community life. Inclusion in the same classes and school activities right alongside their peers.

As they get older, inclusion in the same workplaces and worship space and is community activities and neighborhoods, this is really a movement of prepositions. We're shifting apart from one another to being among one another to being with one another. And that makes all the difference.

So I hope you see here the very different portraits of community that are reflected in this series of images. And we could pause right there and unpack these if we want today over the next 45 minutes. But I share them now for a few key reasons. The first is this isn't a picture of past history at all. I framed it as a history lesson this reflects a map of the current landscape. You can find examples of all four of these side by side in any city, in any state, in any country, it's the array of portraits we see in schools. The second reason I share these is they ought to be prompting our own reflection.

As we think about the schools that we lead or we work in or that we support, which of these four portraits really closely most resembles the communities that we see in front of us? Why are we stuck where we are and where perhaps should be the next destination on this journey? Well, the third reason that I share this series of images is because I'm convinced that this progression or this journey doesn't yet depict or final destination. When you talk to students with disabilities spend time talking to their families about what's really most important to them, you start to discover people want to be more -- more than merely integrated and more than simply included. We all want to belong.

So beyond integration, maybe even further past inclusion is this destination of belonging for our schools. I wonder often how that might be depicted. You've probably seen these first four images on the web or in presentations. But this destination of belongings, how do we picture that? I think there's two things that are different about communities marked by belonging. One is that within those communities, we've really come to see one another in fundamentally different ways.

Not as those who are the members and the strangers or the labeled ones and the unlabeled ones or the labelers, the ins and the outs, but one single community. Diverse, absolutely, but every student as

being of equal and incredible worth. That's one part of this belonging dimension. But at another level I think it also means we do more than just share space during the school day. We actually do things in ways that students and others share their lives. In other words, we enter into relationships with one another. And kids remain involved in each other's lives after the school bell rings at the end of the day or we stay involved in people's lives after we clock out of work. We don't live parallel lives. We all live and we learn together.

So you start to see there's this difference maybe between inclusion and belonging. Yes, they go together but there's some differences the difference between being present in a school or being presented in a classroom and actually having a presence in that school or classroom. It's the difference between welcoming someone's presence and actually in some way aching because of their absence. Between accommodating certain students and actually fully embracing those students in all that we do. So this is the destination of belonging I want to park my time on and unpack for you over the next half hour or so.

The question sort of is raised then how might our schools become places of true belonging for students with and without disabilities or for anyone who's been excluded? That begs the question and actually asks you to go to your chat box here in just a minute, but that begs of question of what does it even mean to belong? You might think about your own school and fill in that sentence.
Students in my school know they belong when what? Go ahead and post that in the chat.
Or even think about a community where you experienced belonging, how would you fill in that sentence? I know I belong when... blank.

Right? So curious what some of your responses might be to the things that tell you that you belong in a place. Because belonging is easy to affirm, it's actually much harder to define. It raises the question of, what's it really look like for students with disabilities to experience belonging within inclusive schools? What are the experiences and relationships that really assure them they have a cherished place in your learning community? How will you know that your students have found a place of belonging in your school?

I love the things popping in there: When I'm included, when kids form friendships, get invited to a birthday party, when I'm understood or welcome, when people feel comfortable, when they look out for one another's interests, when they know me, when they value me. When you're missed. And on and on. You can keep those coming in, because you're right on the right track of what's gonna matter, not only for you, but also for your students. Because schools that are committing to this concept of belonging have to have a strong understanding of the practices and postures that contribute to this school.

So this is the question that's really cut across the work I've been involved with over the last two decades as a professor and a teacher. As we strive to foster belonging in your schools, what are things that tell us we've arrived? What provides us guidance along the way? Research and practice have provided a lot of valuable insights into what leads to belonging. We've been reviewing the literature, conducted numerous studies on inclusive education, and we've interviewed hundreds of families and students and through these conversations and studied identified ten essential dimensions for belong winning students with disabilities that have salience to your work in private schools.

Here's what we've heard from students and families: They said to belong is to be present. To be invited. To be welcomed. To be known. To be accepted. To be supported. To be heard. To be befriended, to be needed. And to be loved. And I see so many of these elements showing up in the chat that you've placed there and I think that when each of these areas is addressed well, schools become learning environments in which students really can thrive and are seen as indispensable members of that community.

I'm going to describe what each of these ten dimensions of belonging meant and for a few minutes, highlight some of the ways our research findings illustrate their absence or facilitate their presence. But the point of this is actually to encourage you to enter into some reflection as you hear each of these ten different areas. What are you seeing done really well in your school? What could be done better or more of or entirely differently? Because these things are not often happening in widespread ways, they're not automatically assured.

So let's begin with the first dimension of belonging, presence. Because belonging always begins with presence. It's built on a foundation of shared experiences and repeated encounters over time. To be present is to be involved each and every day in the same places as anyone else in your school. It's a being part of the every day fabric of school life. And yet it's so hard to feel like you belong if you're never, or rarely, part of the array of activities and events that make up the life of a particular community. Students with and without disabilities should participate together in the same classrooms and hallways and playgrounds and cafeterias. In other words, the presence of students with disabilities, including those with developmental disabilities, should be natural and expected in every school.

We know nearly one in seven children, about 15% children living in your local community, has a disability that somehow impacts their learning and/or relationships. There's about 3 million students with disabilities across the country. And for some students with disabilities, this impact is going to be quite substantial, it's going to be readily apparent. For many others, their needs are going to be best visible, maybe only evident in academic or other areas. But it raises the point of reflection for you. What would a peek into your classrooms and court yards and clubs say about the presence of students with disabilities in your school? To what extent does your enrollment align with or diverge from this breakdown of one in seven kids? Are there children right in your midst who can benefit from the incredible education you have to offer? This first dimension of belonging may be a particularly salient issue within private schools.

Public schools are mandated to serve all students and private schools are not at least legally. Data suggests absence may be more common than presence. For example, about 10% of all students in U.S. attend one of the more than 35,000 private schools but only about 1% of students with disabilities do the same. So what, if anything, is standing in the way of presence at your school? What are the barriers that you need to break down? Is it barriers of attitude or awareness? Barriers of expectation or even invitation? Barriers of finance or training or values or theology or just the barriers of the small boundaries sometimes of our imagination that have to be expanded? My point here is that what we've heard from individuals and families is presence is the baseline for belonging, the starting point, yes, but it's not the destination.

We're asked to press deeper and go further. So you can take a moment and reflect on the presence of students with disabilities in the communities that you care about. What's going really well? What could be better or different? Where might you go next? Well, turns that the antidote to absence is almost always invitation, to be invited. There's something powerful about being picked by someone else and there's something wounding, I guess, about not, as well.

I saw that in your chat, being invited to different things. How encouraging it is to know that others want to be in your midst that your company is actually desired or needed. That's what being invited is. About having your presence and participation south out by another person and really that experience of being invited sends a powerful message to children with disabilities and their families. We want you here. We need your presence. It just wouldn't be the same without you.

So personal invitations can go a long way towards quelling that uncertainty parents feel as they wonder whether there's truly a place for their child in your school. In reality those kinds of invitations to students with disabilities remain pretty rare within compare society. So it speaks volumes when private schools are the forefront of educational inclusion and speaks volumes when they're not. The thing is, when we're not intentional about reaching out into our communities we inadvertently leave people out. In reflecting on the absence of people with disabilities from their faith community, turns out one leader said "It's not that we deliberately excluded people with disabilities, in fact we weren't deliberate at all. And that was the problem."

I share this quote because I think it characterizes so well what we still often tend to see. Schools might be willing to welcome some children with disabilities when asked to do so. But will they actually pursue them in their absence? So it communicates something very powerful when we do. We need you here. And that's easy to say, it's harder to actually mean. We're pretty good at proclaiming we're welcoming or inclusive on our website and signs and our outreach materials. The same is true in our schools. While that's worthwhile, we should say everyone is welcome, we often presume that's sufficient. There's a big difference between an announcement and an invitation, isn't there? An invitation is personal. An announcement, it's not.

An invitation says we're thinking about you, we want your son or daughter here to be part of the school. An announcement always leaves open that possibility that there's an asterisk at the end of the invitation or an exception or some sort of unspoken qualifier like the question mark in this graphic. My point here is that the posture of private schools in this area whether religious or, should be proactive, not passive. Who's missing from your school's membership roles? Are you pursuing the enrollment of children with Down's Syndrome or learning disabilities? With physical disabilities or autism or emotional challenges or other disabilities, kids who live right in your midst?

You start to think about where you might extend new invitations throughout your local communities so the families who would desire to have their children at ten year school would know about your commitment. You might review your website, print materials, social media to make sure they clearly communicate your school's commitment to welcoming and supporting students with disabilities and of course within the school invitations should abound for students with disabilities.

That experience of being asked by peers to sit together at lunch, join in games at recess, collaborate on a project, come to a birthday party, attend a sleepover. Those are things we hope our students will experience. But students with disabilities should also be invited by teachers to join extracurricular clubs and take part in other school activities. Belonging begins with invitations become everyday occurrences from peers, from teachers and from others at the school. Again, it's a place to pause and reflect on the invitations in your community. What's going well, what could you do better or differently, what might you do next?

Belonging involves being welcomed. The way students are greeted and treated by others says a lot about their place in the community. So to be welcomed is really to be received by others with this warmth and friendliness and maybe even authentic delight. And in other words, I'd say people end up finding pleasure in your presence. Isn't that incredible, that kids would come to school and feel delight at their presence? And so the thing is we often struggle in this area of welcoming when it comes to disability. So many people, whether it's kids or staff, they feel uncertain about what to say or not say or do or not do. And we find uncertainty almost always leads to avoidance. When we're hesitant, we tend to avoid.

So students tend to feel welcomed in ordinary ways when others greet them. Strike up the conversation with them. Sit with them at lunch, ask about their day. Join them in activities on the playground, remember their birthday. And notice when they aren't there and follow up to find out why. It's these kinds of ordinary actions that send this powerful message that people are wanted, that they are delighted at your presence. And the extent to which students feel genuinely welcomed in their classrooms and their schools, that ultimately really ultimately elevates their enthusiasm for learning and solidifies that sense of membership. Kids want to come to school when they are welcomed well. And that's the thing, when hospitality abounds students are excited about coming class and when it's absent they feel uncomfortable or have more reluctance.

I think, again, here's a place where that sense of being welcomed is often communicated through these ordinary gestures. So showing peers what it looks like to use respectful language, converse with students who have complex communication challenges or to work collaboratively in the classroom with someone whose support needs are more extensive can help peers feel more comfortable but also our school staff may need guidance on how to engage with students who may communicate differently or require ongoing assistance or behave in unfamiliar ways. They might have benefit from guidance on how to talk about disability in respectful or relevant ways or how to design their instruction and their classroom spaces with a much broader range of students in mind. There are so many organizations now that can provide you with training and guidance in all those areas on how to widen your welcome. Again, it's a place to pause and reflect what's going well, what could be done better differently, or more of.

A fourth aspect of belonging involves being known. And you know it firsthand. Kids love to hear their names. Announced across the cafeteria, shouted on the playground, called upon in class. But the joy of being known is about much more than being noticed and recognized by name, it's also about being understood deeply and personally. To be seen as a unique individual, to be appreciated for all of who you are. So having relationships with people who really understand and affirm you, that's an important piece of belonging. And yet sadly, students with disabilities sometimes feel like strangers in their own

school. When they spend most of their school day in separate classrooms or they're always on the periphery of school and classroom activities, then those opportunities to develop relationships with others and their schools and with staff become more limited. So what we heard from people with disabilities and their families was that whether they are known matters. That's part of belonging. But just as importantly is how they are known that matters. And this is a point worth parking on just a little bit longer.

Because the labels we so often use to categorize students, learning disabilities, intellectual disability, autism, they inadvertently shape how children are known. And they shape it in a way they are known by their struggles rather their strengths, by their challenges rather than by their contributions. I put a couple prevailing definitions on the screen. But the point I'm trying to make is when we only know students in terms of their disability labels we sometimes flatten the portraits of how these kids are known. Because it's equally true like anyone else seems with disabilities have wonderful strengths and talents and personalities and character and interests that are exciting to get to know just like anybody else.

Of course, then there's a different way to know students by the strengths and gifts and passions and positive qualities they bring both to their relationships and to their communities. By the things that remind us that someone is indispensable not the things that imply they are incapable.
So can we in our schools think first and foremost about kids with disabilities as also having strengths and contributions and gifts to be received? And the answer is absolutely. You don't need a study to know this, but we've done one.

I want you to consider a snapshot from a study of nearly 500 parents of children in this case with intellectual and developmental disabilities. We asked them to complete something called the assessment scale for positive character traits. A bunch of statements about the extent to which their child demonstrates character just like kindness and humor and gratitude and empathy and optimism and encourage. What you start to see is that parents see their kids in terms of the strengths and it's a call for us to do that as well. 95% describe their son or daughter as happy and joy filled and were thoughtful for life's simple pleasures, the have a great sense of humor. They were described as thoughtful or helpful to others and kind. They demonstrate care for others who are in need, sons and daughters are bothered or you be he set or concerned when someone else is distressed or uncomfortable. In other words, they are empathic, courageous, bounce back easily, and only about 63% says their sons or daughters don't retaliate. Quick to forgive.

This study went on with strengths and talents their kids displayed and evidenced. Is there a place for these strengths in our schools and throughout our communities? How many schools would be enriched by finding a place for people who are known for their gratitude or empathy or kindness? How many peers would love to develop a friendship with someone who's fun and thoughtful and how many of these traits would did he try to actually cultivate in our students? Schools that are committed to belonging seek to learn each student's story, strive to understand interests in the passions and skills that each person brings to that community. And as others come to know each student well they are in a much better position to support and be friend and need and ultimately to love each student well. Again, in each of these areas, it's a place for your reflection to think about how you're doing in this particular area.

Let me continue on to the next one. It's one thing would be included and another to be accepted. Real acceptance comes from being known personally. Not from merely being known about. Because when we interviewed parents about the markers of inclusion for their children with disabilities, for example, they spoke about their daughters and sons being welcomed without condition. They talked about them being embraced for all of who they are, treated like family, these are the quotes that we hear. And schools are in unique places in which lives the students from so many different backgrounds intersect with one another.

So as students are learning and playing alongside one another, schools are regularly encountering others whose characteristics and experiences or circumstances are different from their own. So promoting acceptance submits this diversity that's central to supporting belonging. To be accepted is to be embraced gladly without condition and to be viewed ultimately as an equal. And this is what students want, this is what every student wants. Attitudes towards disability have improved dramatically over the last 50 years, absolutely. But stigma and labeling, stereotypes, prejudice, all those things can be found all throughout contemporary culture. And also in our schools.

Acceptance is, well, it's not always or even often assured for kids with disabilities. A put a collection of quotes from parents whose children aren't always welcome without condition. Think about what underlie these statements: We're not equipped to serve your child. We don't really do inclusion here. We aren't really sure she'll get much out of being in our typical classes. We only focus on students who are college-bound. What are the attitudes that pervade your particular school as well. Well, shifting the attitudes of others we know is challenging work. But as a field we know a lot about the pathways for changing attitudes.

We can host activities for students and staff, families, that raise awareness or increase understanding. We know there's power in what each of us model to students and in the stories we tell. When we hold high expectations and use affirming language and support shared activities, that's those are ways that attitudes are transformed in our schools. Ultimately it's the investments we make in fostering friendships and promoting inclusive shared activities that turns out will be the most expansion ways we impact the views that others hold. Turns out from lots of research and a lot of different areas that personal contact is the key to promoting acceptance. Research that looks attitude change finds supporting positive interactions over time is probably the most promising pathway for changing attitudes towards students with disabilities.

In other words, real acceptance doesn't come from learning about someone, it comes from getting to know that person personally. Because that's when our preconceived ideas about people with particular labels ultimately get overturned. And so it's one more place to be pausing and reflecting about whether or not students with disabilities are truly embraced in your school and viewed as equals by their peers and by others. And there's lots of ways to address awareness, whether that's integrating disability awareness into classes through carefully chosen books and activities or whether it's undertaking school-wide events in conjunction with so many of those national awareness days or months. Down's Syndrome Awareness Month is this month, so lots of schools highlight and build programming around those areas.

Six, support is critical to belonging. Our true capabilities aren't evident in what we can do on our own, they're evident in what we can do, given the right opportunities and support. To be supported means having those individualized resources that students need to fulfill their potential and thrive in their everyday lives. Students with disabilities often need additional support to participate fully in life at their school. Of course, that's things like receiving academic assistance in certain classes, social supports during non-instructional times, behavioral supports across the school day or emotional supports as a form of care. For some students the support is going to be modest and for others it's going to be more substantial and ongoing.

But this provision of individualized support is a tangible demonstration of your school's commitment to kids educational flourishing and communicates desire for their presence and the absence of the support is often what leads to exclusion or limits meaningful participation. Schools marked by belonging see this delivery of individualized or personalized support as a core commitment. It's not an optional thing, it's a core commitment. So this is the place of course, for asking good questions. It's not a place for making assumptions, the best supports we know from research are always individualized and always contextualized, determined one person at a time.

So supportive schools use person-centered planning approaches to decide what supports are going to be most beneficial for particular children. They build the capacity of all staff to support a diversity of students well in their classes, programs and extracurriculars. And they encourage peers to be natural supports to their schoolmates who might need extra help and regularly revisit the supports to make sure they are continuing to working well for each student. There's some caution that's warranted as we think about supports.

So often we think the best supports are those that are provided by all of us, adults, educators, professionals. And so we're sometimes prone to surrounded kids with parent educators or special ed staff or therapists to the exclusion of peers or other sources are of natural support. When we do this, we just inadvertently crowd out peers other overlook other forms of support. My own research really has parked on this area of peer-mediated supports. Our research has looked at practical ways of involving peers in supporting students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms, cafeterias, extracurriculars or community experiences and field trips.

There are a lot of peer approaches that go by different names depending on the setting. But in every single study that we've conducted and that we've reviewed, we've found noticeable advantages when students with disabilities receive some of their support from same-age peers without disabilities versus exclusively from adults. So the question for you is, how are you engaging all of your students in these types of ways? Again, you can reflect on how supports are provided in your school and hear more about that from panelists in a moment.

Seventh, to be belong is to be heard. Everyone wants to feel listened to and understood and respected. I think knowing that your voice is really valued isn't just empowering, it helps you for more connected to others. To be heard means your perspective is sought and listened to and respected. So amplifying the voices of students with disabilities does a lot of things, promotes their self-determination and their self-worth and sense of belonging. Whenever students feel heard at school by adults, peers, it reminds them they are important, that they have ideas to contribute, a seat at the table. That they are valued.

This is, of course, important, because the perspective of people with disabilities are still not often sought enough. Particularly those with developmental disabilities. So best practices really emphasize this importance of ensuring students with disabilities have a say in all aspects of their lives including in their education as they get older in particular. Instead of getting to share ideas or set goals or express preferences, teachers and other adults sometimes make those important decisions for them or without input and students may be overlooked by peers, never asked what they think or want to do.

Here's a place that in which students might benefit from having opportunities, students with disabilities, to practice and learn skills that are needed to share their perspectives and preferences with others. The better people understand themselves, their strengths, needs, their interests, goals, the better positioned they are to advocate for themselves and to advocate for others. So this is a place for perhaps providing instruction in areas of self-determination and leadership that really helps students with disabilities share their thoughts more effectively with others. And then supporting them to be part of student government or valued roles in all their areas can be important as well. So again, what are you doing in these areas to ensure perspectives of students with disabilities truly are sought out and listened to and respected as well?

Well, eighth, we know that relationships are at the heart of belonging. Having people in your life who know you and accept you, who love you and need you and miss you when you're not thereto.
I saw that in the chat, to be missed is to belong. To be befriended, meaning having peer relationships that are marked by mutual affection and reciprocity. It's about having a friend in your life who says I choose you, too.

Friendships contribute so heavily to our well-being, they give meaning to our lives and make us who we are and help us navigate challenges, bring us joy. And put simply, it's not good to be alone. We know this from almost every discipline that's out there. We're not meant to be alone and it hurts us to be alone in so many ways, from our well-being to our learning to actually our physical health. All the other dimensions I mentioned so far in this talk can be addressed in the absence of close and ongoing relationships. In other words, you can support someone or accept them or welcome them at arm's length but friendships take belonging much deeper. And yet alone is so often what we see for some students.

When we think about the relationships that we each have in our own social networks, we've got family members, we've got friends and close companions, people we see occasionally and got people who are paid to be in our lives like our doctor and mechanic and our boss. And hopefully names for your students in your schools. We should have lots of names showing up in all of these different circles. But when we reflect on the set of circles for students with disabilities, particularly developmental, we see lots of names but in different places, that inner circle of family and a lot of staff and therapist and is others.

The challenge is to think about, how do we build out those relationships in the circle of friends and close companions and classmates and teammates? Most school children with disabilities have no shortage of relationships with adults, but it's the relationships with peers that have the strongest influence on their sense of belonging. Their presence of friendships can be enriching, the absence of

friendships can be wounding, and study after study after study finds friendships are often few or often fleeting for so many children with disabilities.

I put on your screen a snapshot from a national study in this case of middle and high school students with disabilities and it's the percentage who have never been invited to any other kids social activities or never or rarely received phone calls from friends, and then the numbers are striking. We have to be intentional about fostering relationships or they just don't happen for lots of students. So think about the students enrolled in your school and ask yourself, can we name plenty of peers who she can eat with or walk with or celebrate or cry with, play with or pray with, shop with, catch a movie with, or just do nothing with? I know I'm ending every one ever those sentences with a preposition, but that's the easiest way to phrase it.

The point in this is that relationships have to be a central marker of anything that we call inclusive. It's not an inclusive education if there are no peer relationships. We can't call that a learning community if some students are always on the peripheries or outside. How do we introduce relationships into this piece of the puzzle? We know a lot about fostering friendships. Certainly more art than science but there's a formula here. We know that friendships are formed through shared activities, around common interests, with just enough support over time. So to build belonging, peer relationships and friendships have to be prioritized right alongside of academic rigor.

We've got to create opportunities as teachers for collaborative learning and shared activities, for students with and without disabilities in classrooms. We should think about peer mediated support models that invite and equip and assist peers to provide some of that support to their classmates or school mates. We should try to connect kids or the next other activities based on their shared interests. All of these are the kinds of things that lead to people getting picked as friends. But this also has a lot of implications for how we think about programming related to people with disabilities.

If our main models are largely separate then the opportunity to be chosen as a friend becomes all the more limited. When the opportunity become limited it means other kids don't have the chance to encounter the friendship and the enviable quality of people with disabilities those too become limited.

That leads to nine, which is to being needed. The richest forms of community I think are marked by a real reciprocity among all of its members. Every person seen as having skills and talents and strengths that benefit others, that actually enrich the community. That's true for our schools. Every student should be seen as a significant member, recognized for the contributions they can and they do make.

So to be needed involves being valued by others and actually considered an indispensable member of the community. It's not uncommon for some students to feel less needed than others. Students with developmental disabilities are often viewed narrowly as the ones in need of support and assistance from others. Rarely are they acknowledged as individuals whose presence and contributions enrich and enliven the learning communities. When students with disabilities assume valued roles in school and community, the ways in which they are viewed by others start to change. This might come from volunteering. From taking on leadership responsibilities. From helping others in need. From participating in high status activities in the school. Assisting in important projects, having a role on a team or just contributing in any number of ways. That shift from being recipient to a contributor, that

brings the sense of significance and importance.

When others come to need you, your absence is suddenly missed. And when you're missed, well, then you can be absolutely certain that you belong. Well, that's the area of being needed. And the opportunity to reflect here as well.

That takes us to, believe it or not, you never thought I would get there, to the tenth dimension of belonging we've heard for people with disabilities and families, that's to be loved. People tending to go great lengths for those who they love. We make allowances, go the extra mile, extend grace, we sacrifice our own interests, we avoid what is expedient, we learn to work for people's good. I think the thing is that that kind of love is what compels us to invite and welcome and know and accept and support and care for and be friend and need students with and without disabilities. When people talk about the communities that matter they often talk about the love they encounter there. Ultimately where love abounds belonging is much more likely to be experienced.

I share this because we don't talk a lot about love. Not in the professional literature, and I never see it listed in evidence-based practices and hardly part of our policies and procedures. We rarely talk about it in our trainings. But silence should not be interpreted as I remember relevance. A pioneer in the area of inclusion of people with disabilities made this insightful observation and said that healing for wounded people with disabilities begins with three messages: you're valuable, you're as valuable as any other person, and you are loved by those around you.

So like anyone else, children with disabilities yearn to be part of a school community where they can love and be loved and it's in such a community that belonging is employees likely to be experienced. Well, that's that takes us to the end of this time with you. Because that portrait of belonging from the vantage point of students with disabilities and their families and others, that ought to push us towards reflection as we think about our own schools, our students with disabilities actively and personally invited.

Are they present in all aspects of our life of our school? Are they experiencing a warm, maybe an extravagant, welcome whenever they arrive, are they well known throughout by their peers and their teachers? Are they accepted without condition or without caveat? Are they provided the support they need to participate fully and meaningfully, asked to share their perspectives?

Are they developing and deepening friendships with others, seen as needed and indispensable to the thriving of their community? And are they loved deeply and unconditionally? So each of these areas you can ask yourself, what are we doing really well right now and what can we be doing better or more of or differently? So I hope you see this journey to belonging as actually one worth pursuing.

There's a lot of reflection to do, a lot of action that we take that follows, but it begs the question which of these portraits describes the communities you work in, that you teach in, that you learn in, that you worship in, that you live in, whatever it might be, and are steps you could take to move further along this journey? Well, there's lots of -- more ideas you're going to get in a few minutes from some of the other panelists. I point I want to make is you don't have to go it alone.

There are resources and centers like the PROGRESS Center and so many other OSEP funded centers that can support you in these areas. And I just wanted to point out if you're really intrigued by this issue of belonging and reflection, the top link at the center has a fuller unpacked version of resources related to belonging as well. So let me close my talk by thanking you each for the investment you're making to transforming the lives of all your students, and really for your commitment to transforming your school communities into places of inclusion and belonging for every student. It's the work that matters most and grateful to know each of you are really partners in this effort.

Thank you so much.

Tessie Bailey: Thank you. That was amazing. And so if you all want to use your emoticons you can give a round of applause or wave your hands, you can see that in the chat box. We got a couple of questions so I want to share some of those. For those who are interested, a copy of the presentation as well as a supplemental handout will be posted on a web page specifically for this event. It's recorded as well as all of the breakout sessions, so you'll be able to come back and access those at any time.

Erik, we did get a question in the Q&A around, are these dimensions conclusively for students with disabilities or spread across all students?

Erik Carter: I love that question. And you picked up exactly what I hoped you would. When you think about these dimensions of belonging, they definitely reflect the needs of students with disabilities. That's emerged from our work. But they actually sound to me like ordinary needs for any student rather than special needs. I think I would say they're universal rather than exceptional in a sense, and they strike me actually as critical to fostering belonging for any student at all.

So we often use the word special as a euphemism for different. But I think if we really adopt this framework for thinking about education and service delivery to all our students, then we really start to see how actually this may be a way of addressing needs not just for kids with disabilities who don't always feel known or accepted or supported, but for all of our students who need those very same things.

So the short answer is, is this isn't unique to disability at all. It's only all the more important that we address them for kids with disabilities, but these are things any kid would need to experience belonging in their school. When we look at the literature in the more general education literature we see the same kind of things showing up over and over and over. Often we debate, I should say, often we hear people debate inclusion for students with disabilities. The moment that word pops out we hear all kinds of debates about what that means and who should and shouldn't be included.

But what we found for belonging is it's almost this unifying concept. No one debates belonging. Everyone agrees that kids should belong, and then the question becomes: how do we make that happen for all of our students, including those who are most at risk of not belonging? Short answer is, I would use this as a reflection for anyone in your school and you'll just find that for certain groups some of these are a bit more elusive or a bit more challenging to put in place.

Tessie Bailey: We got another question. For those schools who are in the first four portraits that you

presented and are really thinking about moving towards this concept of belonging, where would you recommend that they start? Start the conversation with their school?

Erik Carter: I think one of the reasons we framed this belonging model is it's actually reflection oriented. That's why I framed it the way did I and gave you the reflection tool you can download. I think that's the starting point. Maybe it's convening teachers and staff and parents and maybe even students at your school to reflect together in each of these areas. What we are doing well we want to celebrate, because we're doing great in some areas, but can we pinpoint some things we might need to start paying more attention to or focus on next?

And then it can lead to what sort of training might we need to do that well. What kind of support should we seek out in our community or from national centers or elsewhere who can help us do each of these different things? So I think the key point is we often have an initial idea of "Yes, of course my school is a place of belonging," but by breaking it down in this way and reflecting on each area one at a time, we start to see things we can practically do differently.

I just wouldn't have that conversation on your own in the absence of parents and others who know the disability side of the conversation really well, because we often presume these things are in place and bring in different vantage points and start to see what some of our blind spots might be or places we're overlooking. That would be, I think, a practical place to do this at a faculty meeting, in-service day or something like that.

Tessie Bailey: Great. I want to share mark's comment in the chat, you presented some very deep questions and points of view that promote accountability. So just what you were saying, we can't just say that we're a place of belonging. We have to be able to demonstrate it, communicate that to our faculty, our students, and our families. Thank you so much.

We're going to move to our panel who's going to reflect also on what Erik shared today.
We have a panel who are going to be talking about supporting struggling students in non-public schools, so our panelists will be unpacking the various ways that nonpublic schools impact community and belonging for all students. Our parents will share their experiences from a variety of perspectives, we have parents, educators, some folks who are supporting local educators in this work. And the conversation that you're going to hear as we start this panel is going to be around two questions, which are: have those aspects of belonging resonated with areas for your life and work around inclusive education? And what are schools doing to support this sense of belonging within schools?

I'm happy to introduce our panelists. We have Dr. Jennifer Camota Luebke, the CEO and cofounder of ability revolution. Whitney Gaines, Access Center director and teacher at the Christian Fellowship School in Columbia, Missouri. Elizabeth Dombrowski is the executive director of All Belong, where she serves as champion for the ability of inclusion in schools and churches and been supporting the PROGRESS Center, helping us get some of these events set up over the past year.

They're going to explain how they are supporting struggling students and students with disabilities within the private schools. I'm going to pass this over to get us started.

Jennifer Camota Luebke: When Antonio was four years old, he was diagnosed with developmental delays and sensory issues. The doctors said he would need a lot of help: physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, tutoring. Everywhere we went, I pushed for inclusion with his peers. But I was told, "You're too single minded. You're too unrealistic about your son's future." I was defiant in my response: "Don't place your limits on my son."

Anthony Kennedy Shriver (founder, chairman, and CEO of Best Buddies International): They fight this fight 365 days a year all day all night. Parents of people with special needs are never done.

Tim Shriver (chairman of Special Olympics): There's no us and them. There's only us.

Antonio: My name is Antonio and I'm awesome. I am awesome.

Jennifer Camota Luebke: My name is Dr. Jennifer Camota Luebke, and I'm best known as Antonio's mom. The two dimensions of belonging that resonates the most with me and my family's experience in having our son attend a private school are presence and needed. Almost 17 years ago, 23 private schools within a 40-mile radius of home in California denied my son admission because of his intellectual disability. Private schools aren't required by law like public schools are to educate students with disabilities?

I was so upset about the fact that most private schools didn't have students with disabilities that I researched it for my dissertation for my doctorate degree in education and found the vast majority of private schools in the country excluded students with disabilities.
The primary reason they gave were that they didn't have the teacher training or the resources to support students with disabilities.

Entire generations of students educated in elite private schools weren't growing up alongside students with autism or Down's Syndrome or intellectual disabilities or severe learning disabilities unless they knew these students from their neighborhood or their families or communities outside of school. Students with disabilities simply weren't present.

In 2014, Antonio was entering his sophomore year of high school and the head of a private school in our neighborhood asked to read my research. After reading it, he decided that Antonio should attend his school and I worked with them to get the training and resources that they needed to support him. And to expand capacity to include other students with disabilities. The organization All Belong in Grand Rapids, Michigan is the organization that I brought in and that has the expertise in disability inclusion for private schools.

This takes me to my next dimension of belonging which is needed. If students with disabilities aren't present in private schools, does the learning community see them as essential? Or do they see them as students who are dispensable and who don't contribute as much as their typical peers to the student body and by the way, who even measures what those contributions are? Dr. Carter says that we are seen as needed when we bring gifts and talents to the community that are essential to its thriving. And this is done by people with disabilities, not necessarily for people with disabilities or to people with disabilities.

Do we see our private schools as incomplete without people with disabilities? When Antonio attended three years of high school in a private school, the community viewed him as essential to the fabric of the community. His cross-country and basketball coaches said he was the glue of the team. His social and entrepreneurship teacher saw him as an integral part of the class and as one who taught others how to have empathy and emotional intelligence skills. He brought value to that community just by being. That is the definition of authentic reciprocity.

Antonio felt needed in his private school because Antonio was both present and needed in his private school, that led to his full inclusion in all things school-related, including applying for and attending college. Antonio came home one day and said, "I want to go to college, too. Just like all my friends."

And I told him that college wasn't for people like him who had an intellectual disability. But Antonio persisted. So I Googled college for students with intellectual disabilities. And now Antonio lives 2200 miles away from home and is in his third year at the Georgia Tech Excel program for students with intellectual disabilities.

I guess that those doctors who said he would never live apart from us, would never have a normal life, and would never go to college, were wrong. Please enjoy the next video.

Antonio: I want to thank God for his many blessings, and thank my parents for taking care of me. For the next four years I'm going to be a… Rambling Wreck from Georgia Tech!

Whitney Gaines: Thank you for that introduction. I am thrilled to be part of this conversation about how private schools should include those with learning difficulties in their schools. My name is Whitney, and I'm the director of our Access Center and a teacher.

Today I'm going to share with you how we help our students who may be struggling and our mission behind what we do. I still feel like we're at the beginning of our journey, but hearing from Erik and Jennifer gives me a greater context of belonging and a bigger picture what we can accomplish. Soon you'll hear from Elizabeth, and they are doing incredible things with their program as well. At our school, we strive to walk alongside students and families. Our mission actually includes our phrase that says we want to be a place for students are known and loved.

Let me share some ways. First, we can't support students without knowing them. Some students may be enrolling in our school with previous experience in education programs, or our teachers may be the first to identify that there's a concern in the classroom. If the students have an IEP or medical diagnosis, we review that documentation, meet as a team, and create a support plan. If we are the ones identifying an area of concern at school, we will walk alongside parents recognizing this is the beginning of their academic journey.

At that time we have a conversation that's really about saying, I'd love to get to know more about you rather than, what can't you do? So we work together with the parents, teachers, and students to determine if support is needed, or if even outside testing should be recommended. When support is needed, we'll get a support plan that includes a list of students' strengths and weaknesses, a diagnostic

past medical history if there is one, and helpful strategies to be used in the classroom. And we offer instruction with standard curriculum or even modified curriculum at a remedial level depending what the student needs.

We also try to support our fellow teachers giving them strategies, resources, or plain ideas so there's a lot of "Let's try that," or "Let me come and observe the classroom and sit with you afterwards." It truly is a collaborative effort. For example, an accommodation may be a student needs to be given an assignment in chunks rather than at one time. Or maybe they need a quiet place to take a test free of distractions. Sometimes it takes a simple idea and sometimes the best fit may be to be get individualized support for a small portion of the day. Wherever their needs may lie, parents are always included in the conversations and decisions.

So now that I talked about some ways we support our students across campus I want to talk about, how do we incorporate a sense of belonging in our schools by truly knowing and loving our students? My position focuses mostly on middle and high school, teaching math courses and smaller groups. These classes are comprised of students with an academic need in that particular subject, because sometimes it's not just math, or overall they've been identified as needing more support. And so let me tell you a story.

I had a high school student in my room the other day, and an elementary student walked past the door. We're big on relationships, and he said, "Why did he come to the access center?" My short version to him was, "Well, he came to school needing extra help with reading. The student was really struggling in first grade when it was cut short due to COVID, second grade was mostly online, and then he just continued to decline compared to his peers. So now in third grade he's here and needs help learning to read."

So my student sat for a moment and finally looked at me and he said, "So he just needs a chance?" And I thought, yeah, actually, that's it. He just needs a chance. And I couldn't help but think, I hope that my student who has been here with me for a few years now feels that same way: I'm just getting a chance. And we actually were able to pair this high schooler and third grader through a mentoring opportunity we had at school. Here he is mentoring one of our brand new students. So it's moments like this of teaching where I feel everything comes full circle.

We're teaching our kids to ask questions, figure out how they can help, and I think that when struggling students are missing from schools, we're missing out on big opportunities for the whole community. I hope I was able to provide some insight on the school aspect of this topic of allowing diverse learners into the private school setting.

In conclusion, our goal is to support students for who they are and not just teaching them all these amazing things, but show them they are worthy of their time, and at the end of each day they feel loved and they feel known for exactly who they are.

Elizabeth Dombrowski: Thank you so much, everyone, for being a part of this group today. I'm pleased to be here. I represent All Belong, a nonprofit organization and we come alongside 91 nonpublic schools in 11 states in the U.S. territory. So I can share today what we have seen in those schools over

the years and how a couple of these areas of belonging particularly impact our work in the most tangible ways.

The first area I want to talk that's been touched upon earlier is the sense of being known. I think it's important to remember we're talking about knowing students and not necessarily knowing about them. In other words, those hushed hallway conversations that might be happening. Are we looking at students truly as essential contributors for the community and getting to know them so they can be seen that way for everyone? One of the big ways we do that and get to know kids is by using what we call puzzle piece perspective. And we like to think of our puzzle pieces as representing each one of us in pinks and greens. Greens are our strengths and the pinks are weaknesses. And we're designed as puzzle pieces.

So for a lot of us -- and this is a lesson plan that we do with students -- we want to only talk about our greens, this way. So we don't necessarily want to the show everyone our pink areas. We also have pink areas. There are no all-green people. There are no all-pink people either. Despite what society might see when it looks at students with disabilities, it's often all the pinks and that's what parents hearing a lot about too. We can talk about greens first, we can be strengths-based. And pinks. And then talk about how those are meant to fit together in community.

And when one of those pieces is missing and one of our students is missing, we all become incomplete. We need each other, we need to look like this puzzle piece, community, based on our mission. So when we talk about this puzzle piece and fill it out to understand students most excellently we use a set of frameworks, a comprehensive set of frameworks that provides a common language to understanding both the head, the academic pieces of what might be going on for a particular student, but also the heart and what's going on from social, emotional learning perspectives. And then we can build supports and services around that knowledge of the student really well. Sometimes we might partner with school psychologists or with the public school district in order to build that out but we're always starting from the strengths-based perspective.

We're always looking for ways that a student can build their day around pinks and greens and giving time for green areas in every student's day. So, for example, one of those students that I think of with this is a student I know who loved puzzles, and maybe that's a theme today, but he was able to do 1,000 piece puzzles really fast. So then the question became how can we use that puzzling ability to build social skills. How can we invite other students in do that puzzle with him, do other things with him, how can we incorporate that perhaps through the his school day so he can fell successful?

The second area I want to talk about links closely to that sense of being known, but it's that idea of being accepted. And at nonpublic schools this is especially important because we have plenty of leeway in the admissions process. And that can contribute to the sense of a student being enrolled until, until they have a behavior issue, until they can't keep up, until something else happens. Right? And in order to build belonging, inclusion, acceptance is really a prerequisite to that.

I think of a student who couldn't keep his clothes on at sixth grade camp and he was having some sensory issues and had a really hard time falling asleep at camp. So the after the first night teachers calling the administrator saying, "He doesn't belong here. He can't make it, he can't do it, this isn't a

good environment for him," and the administrator said "No way, he's the sixth member of the sixth grade class. He needs to be in the sixth grade activities in order to belong in that class. What else can we try? What else can we put into place so he can be successful and belong with his classmates?"

So when we as the adults in the room model that acceptance, model ways of thinking about belonging that build on inclusion and acceptance, then we're model that go for our students and that then can contribute into sense of befriending and other areas and aspects of belonging as well. That acceptance needs to be unconditional. We need to expect difference in our students, we need to expect challenges and doing inclusive education. But we can also build on our confidence once we start doing this by collaborating.

There's going to be a lot of people in your community who can speak into the puzzle piece of a particular student. So we want to collaborate with each other on behalf of that student. So that we can highlight different pinks and greens. So finally, when we do this belonging in a nonpublic school communities, we're increasingly seeing research show the impact of this investment.

Particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, schools investing in support services are seeing increases in enrollment, they're seeing increases in student needs, and then when we make those investments in the progress reports systems around a student coupled with a vision for belonging and building on that prerequisite for inclusion, then we can really achieve our mission in very stainable and demonstrative ways. Thanks.

Tessie Bailey: I want to thank our panelists. Feel free to use your emoticons.

We've gotten questions in the chat box and in the Q&A box. So we can see our panelists, Jennifer, Whitney, Elizabeth, we want to turn your videos on. Elizabeth, since you just came on first, for me, I'm gonna give you our first question. In the chat box we received questions around that maybe some schools in certain areas have more resources so it's a little bit easier for them to do this.
I'm curious if you can talk a little bit about how you've seen schools leverage various funding sources or other resources to be able to do this.

Elizabeth Dombrowski: Absolutely. Thanks so much, Tessie, and thanks for the questions, folks. We work with 91 schools and 11 states. So there's a wide variety of how schools fund inclusive education and how nonpublic schools fund inclusive education. The biggest thing to remember is that it's part of a multi-tiered system of support that's there for every student. We're doing inclusive education not for those particular students but for all of our students, and because part of who we are as a school. So the budgeting, the financial piece, needs to reflect our mission and our belief in that. And it's a power message to parents.

That's where we get into things like tuition equity as an idea that parents of students with disabilities shouldn't pay more tuition than any other student because what that does for the nonpublic school is retains the flexibility and collaboration and really exemplifies the partnership that we're seeking to have with parents both parents of students on who might need additional supports and those who don't.

I know donors love to give to this. There's also extensive federal funding available right now through emergency assistance for nonpublic schools. Most of the schools we work with do access some speech PT and OT's for physical therapy and occupational therapy supports from their local public school district. So we want to promote partnerships as much as we can as well.

Tessie Bailey: Great. All right. Jennifer, we had some questions for you. And how would you recommend that schools go about engaging families in the same types of conversations that you found were necessary for your child to be successful?

Jennifer Camota Leubke: Can I just ask a clarifying question? Engaging other families, families of people -- of students with and without disabilities or --

Tessie Bailey: I think it would be both. But one of the questions we get is from a school is, parents knows their child best, so we've got to be able to be able to collaborate them to develop this comprehensive programming. How would you recommend that schools engage in those conversations?

Jennifer Camota Leubke: Yeah, I think in any school, whether or not someone has been identified as a student has been identified as someone who needs additional support or someone who has an actual IEP from a public school there are students that struggle. Y'all know this. And so engaging parents that is a tricky one.

Parents of students, from my experience talking with different parents, parents with kids that have disabilities or learning disorders, they want their student included and many times parents of students that don't have disabilities are the ones who don't want students like that there. There's a reason that parents of students without disabilities have their students attend private schools, and sometimes those reasons have to do with an exclusionary sort of attitude.

So as far as engaging them, one of the things that I've done with parents is just talk to them about what's to come in the world of employment. So there are many federal programs that are encouraging companies that have federal contracts to employ people with disabilities and we all know that one in five people have some sort of disability.

And so, is the school they're in preparing them for their workplace in the future? And if they are not engaging with students while they are students in K-12, they're going to be running into these students when they are in college, because right now there are over 300 colleges just like Georgia tech where Antonio attends school where there are students with whether it's a physical disability or an intellectual disability. And then in the workplace there are many companies that are specifically hiring for people with disabilities so that they can become more diverse. So really it's a preparation. If you're in a school that doesn't have people of all different abilities, will you really truly be prepared for life after K-12?

Tessie Bailey: We've got some comments that came in through the Q&A saying that's a very good point. Thanks for saying that. Whitney, we have a question around just thinking about teachers, what do you see are the learning needs of teachers to really be successful in supporting diverse learners?

Whitney Gaines: So I think sometimes for our teachers, there's a permission that needs to be granted and giving them the opportunities and strategies of what to use. Some teachers have not had the professional development like they have in a public school. So we try to provide some of that, just like I said, the strategies and just going alongside them and saying what is appropriate and what isn't. It's also just a guide but a lot of times I use it as a provision of yes, let's go ahead and try this for our student.

Tessie Bailey: I know we're going to have a couple sessions following this in the breakout but I'm going to provide some of those free professional development opportunities, free online modules and training materials that can support teachers.

I had one more question for you, and this I'll open up to you as well, Jennifer and Elizabeth, as we have some folks who are resource teachers or dyslexia therapists working in schools wondering how to work with teachers in a way that helps them understand the importance of the accommodations that the student has as part of their programming.

How would we engage not necessarily with parents like we just talked about, but between teachers to support the use of appropriate accommodations? Start with you, Whitney.

Whitney Gaines: Thank you. So I think part of it is making sure they understand the diagnosis or disability, providing those resources too. When we don't know something we try to figure it out as well. And then working on strategies, different things that work inside the classroom already or maybe we need to modify something in the classroom. And then always going back and checking with them and seeing is this working, do you need more support, how is the student doing with it, and -- that's where we would start. And we just continue throughout the year making adjustments where necessary.

Tessie Bailey: Elizabeth?

Elizabeth Dombrowski: I would jump in and say, too, that, I just want to call it out and put a spotlight on it, is the time and space and expectation of collaboration. It's so important for this to be a team approach to the needs of every student because when there's resistance, it's often a feeling of like I'm going to fail this child somehow, I'm not going to provide what they need. I don't know enough is where that fear comes from. When we put the systems around every teacher and in our intentionally set aside that expectation and that time, it becomes a team and collaborative effort we can be much more successful in. The other piece is making sure that students are speaking into it themselves.

Whitney Gaines: I think, too, sometimes us even saying we don't know let us find the answer or even relying on their expertise of what do they know and then working that way.
And sometimes it is one of those things, they might know more about something than we do but it is collaborative.

Tessie Bailey: I think both of you highlighted what's so critical is that no teacher can do this work alone. There's no school that can do it alone. And I think Erik mentioned too, this is really part of this broader community that is supporting the family, the student and the teachers to create this sense of

overall belonging. Jennifer?

Jennifer Camota Leubke: Yeah, I was just gonna say as a parent, I try not to tell teachers what to do just because that's their expertise and their domain. But when I discussed having Antonio brought into the private school that he attended for three years in high school, I wanted to make sure the teachers had some support.

So given that his type of disability it was a model very similar to what happens in public schools as far as inclusion programs, and I hate that word, but for the sake of explaining what it is, it's inclusion program. My husband is actually an inclusion specialist in the public school, and he works with the teachers, he's a co-teacher and helps modify assignments.

That was the approach we took, is that I really wanted the teacher to go ahead and teach and to accept my kid in the classroom, but I knew that would happen in stages as they learned and gained more confidence in terms of teaching him. And the other students around my son also gained confidence in terms of being able to help him. We had a person who was really Antonio's tutor that we converted in the school to help modify his assignments, and make sure that he was participating in class. And so they did a lot of heavy lifting and then as a teachers figured out how to do it then they started doing similar work. I thought it was really successful the way that it worked out for my son.

Tessie Bailey: Sounds like, Jennifer, it's not like the next week everything was perfect --

Jennifer Camota Leubke: No.

Tessie Bailey: Your son attended school and everybody had it worked out. That it was really this iterative process of learning how to do this. Is that what you're saying?

Jennifer Camota Leubke: That's the key word is iterative. And I went in with the full expectation that it was not going to be perfect. So I felt like I had realistic expectations and I think the school was very nervous at first like oh, does he have to, you know, learn everything to get high school diploma? And I just said I honestly don't care what learning objectives he hits or doesn't hit. He has an intellectual disability. If he's included in a classroom he's going to learn more than if he wasn't in that classroom, right?

So do what you do, I was extremely flexible and I think that was the other key thing in trying this out and making sure that it was successful for my son and it was successful for the learning community, it was really having, I don't want to say low expectations, but realistic expectations, knowing that as people gained confidence learning community gained confidence, that they would continue to iterate on how to teach him.

Tessie Bailey: Now, I know we have some questions around, but there are some kids who maybe have behaviors that maybe compromise other kids' safety or maybe we're not equipped to support that student. And I don't know if, Elizabeth, you want to talk about those students who may have behaviors that are not what we would typically see in a school setting.

Elizabeth Dombrowski: Yeah, and we get called on those questions a lot. It happens. And we talk a lot about behaviors, communication, how can we teach this student and help them develop a community for the long-term. I think that's key here, too, is we have to look back at our missions as schools and the community we want to be long-term. Sometimes there's a short term investment we have to make in order to achieve our long-term goals and long-term identities. Sometimes there is a need for a peer educator to be available for the entire school day.

Sometimes it's better for that student, based on everything we're doing, all of those supports that we put into place are developed with a strong knowledge of that student. And how can we use their strengths to grow, how can we continue to build the supports and services around them so that long term they can maintain community? Like these are our future employers, these are our business leaders, these are our government officials. How did we make the expectation that community is not always going to be easy? But it's important and it's worth investing in.

Tessie Bailey: I want to thank you, and I think that's a good way to close this panel, as a mother of a child who was adopted from the foster system and who had a lot of those challenging behaviors, I was able to work with his private school to help him be in your included and to manage the stressors he had that were not his own fault and the school in working with them helped us be able to make him a successful student excelling in his setting.

I want to thank you for your time and I want to make sure we have enough time for our participants to get ready and move over into our breakout groups to learn about a lot of great resources available for our stuff. Give our panelists a round of applause. We will be posting their videos on the website so you'll be able to see those.

I want to remind folks on our next slide is -- if there are resources that you heard today I know there's some questions around -- that we weren't able to get to about how do we fund some of the accessibility features. There's always guidance that comes out of U.S. Department of Education that responds to some of these and guidance coming out of PROGRESS Center or our other entities to help of navigate some of these questions.