



Prepping for PROGRESS 2023 Welcome and Panel Presentation Focused on Fostering Belonging

Amy Peterson: Today we're at Prepping for PROGRESS 2023! Raising Expectations Access and Outcomes for Students with Disabilities. We're excited to have you join us for our second annual Prepping for PROGRESS event. Many of you might have been, had a chance to join us last year and we're excited to have another chance of sharing a lot of good tools, resources, material, and information over the next couple of days. So first of all, just a huge welcome and thank you. We want to share our gratitude with you for taking the time during a busy time of the year. I know some of you have already started up the new school year, some of you are prepping to get started in a couple weeks or a couple days for a whole new school year, and so we're so grateful that you have a chance to join us and hear from us and share with us in the next couple days. So welcome! Welcome! We're really excited to have you here.

Welcome again from the PROGRESS Center. This event is hosted by the PROGRESS Center. The PROGRESS Center is an Office of Special Education Programs funded technical assistance center. We are really intended to provide information, resources, tools and technical assistance to support local educators in developing and implementing high quality educational programming for students with disabilities. We're really focused on enabling children with disabilities to make progress and meet challenging goals and expectations. The center's work is really coupled into three different buckets. First, we focus on our knowledge development work where we share current research, policy guidance, success stories, and experiences from students, parents, educators and other stakeholders. We've conducted focus groups, we've done scans of the guidance from different states around specially designed instruction and in response to *Endrew F* decision—lots of different tools and resources coming out of our knowledge development team. In addition we have some targeted support that we've been doing with partnership sites across the country, really focus at that local level to develop and implement high quality educational programming and to see what it takes to do that, learn from people's experiences, and test out some of the tools and resources that we'll be sharing with you today and over the next couple of days. And finally our last bucket of work is the work that I lead out. I am Amy Peterson, I lead the universal technical assistance for the center and that's really all our tools, resources, training materials that are freely available for everyone, events like today and over the next couple days, webinars, trainings, conference presentations, and so on that anyone can access to really learn more about this work. You can find all of this different information on our website at promotingprogress.org and we hope you'll continue to connect with us, come back, access additional tools and resources over the next couple years as more information comes out.

So as we think about these sessions and topics over the next couple days, one of the things that I want you to keep in mind is this idea of, what do we need to do to ensure that every student is on the path of progress. This focus on progress and outcomes and supporting students with disabilities is really our focus for the center. We know that there are roadblocks along the way. We've faced some major ones with covid-19 and others, teacher shortages, and other challenges that we face all the time, but what systems and supports and services and professional learning do we need to put in place in order to ensure that we can meet the needs of, unique needs of, all of these students. To really support them along the way. So focus on this idea of progress. Focus on what

we need to do, to put in place, to get to progress, and we'll really think about that across the different sessions that we have over the next couple of days.

And with that, I want to just take a short time to let our Project Officer David Emenheiser share a little bit and welcome you to the session today. So go ahead David.

David Emenheiser: Welcome it is my pleasure and privilege to be here welcoming you to this session wherever, whenever you are joining us. This Center has, as Amy sort of described, has a rather large scope of helping provide information and better resources so that students with disabilities can really make significant progress toward their IEP goals through toward graduating and finishing up their school experience. What is super exciting about this is, as Amy also said, you know you are getting started in a new school year, in a new adventure for this —It's been a, it's been a few years since I've been in schools, as the federal project officer, I've been at OSEP for 13 years, but prior to that, I was in schools as principal and teacher, a special education teacher, paraprofessional all the way through the ranks and I always remember the great excitement that comes with the beginning of a school year. Getting to know your new group of students. Getting to know the new set of parents that you're going to be working with. Finding the, whatever the curriculum and requirement changes or scheduling changes and just you know starting to piece all of those things together.

And it can, there's a lot of energy. There's a lot of excitement, but sometimes there can be a little bit of fear. And the hope today and throughout this session this week in Prepping for PROGRESS, is really taking that step and looking at some of the ways that you can organize yourselves, organize your thinking, and really be prepared to serve those students that are on your, in your classes or in your caseload or that you're going to be working with in whatever way your role is this year.

So again, I just want to thank you for attending and I want to encourage you to share this. This is being recorded. It will be posted as I know Amy will talk about again at the end, but please just share that this is an available resource to everybody because this is just it's paid for through taxpayer dollars and so everybody can participate and revisit this information. With that I think I turn it back to you Amy.

Amy Peterson: Yes, thank you David. And thank you all again for being here. As we go forward, I just wanted to share a little bit of context about the event so that you can make sure that you know where you need to be at all of the different times in order to make sure you're engaging in the different sessions that you are interested in and then we'll go ahead and get started with our panel in just a little bit.

So as a reminder, if you have any questions about the event structure, the event program is a great place to look and a great resource for you. Mia will drop a link for that event program into the chat for you so that you can access that and have that on hand, but it was on the same page where you registered for the event. This will cover all of the different sessions, the agenda, the descriptions of those sessions, and all of the logistics for the event over the course of the event.

We have three days—if you've joined us last year you participated in two days of Prepping for PROGRESS— this year we're excited to expand to a third day with our colleagues from the National Center on Intensive Intervention. And so the first day we'll really focus here today on this initial session. We'll encourage you to think about fostering belonging across schools to support students with disabilities across our schools and then we'll really have opportunities to dive in a little bit deeper around some of the components of the IEP and what IDEA says about the IEP.

If you're interested in focusing on the basics, we have an opportunity for that. If you want to dig in a little bit deeper, we have an opportunity for that. Tomorrow we'll have a keynote session from Dr Tessie Bailey and then

we'll have an opportunity to join some concurrent sessions. So there's a range of different concurrent session topics I'll mention in just a moment and then on Friday we'll have those sessions from the National Center on Intensive Intervention.

So today's schedule as I mentioned before, you can see a little bit of an overview of the different sessions that we're just going to talk about today. We're starting right now here in the welcome and panel, we'll have a short break after that so you can grab a lunch if you're here on the east coast— if you're on the west coast it might be breakfast depending on where you are across the country, after that we'll have the Strand sessions. And within that time there will be breaks built in so you don't feel like you're tied up for all of that chunk of time and then we'll have another break and if you're interested in joining one of the topical discussions you can feel free to do that after that from 4 to 4:30 Eastern Time.

As I mentioned before, there's an opportunity to join two different strand sessions today. You can choose the ABCs of the IEP or Are Accommodations SDI? Myth Busting This and Other Common Confusions in Special Education. Strand one, the ABCs of the IEP, is really the basics. What do we need to know about the IEP in order to understand it if we're new to special education and then strand two is digging a little bit deeper into the statement of aids and services or services and aids to really understand what that statement is, what it looks like, what it means, and to address some of the misconceptions that we have in special education. Tomorrow as I mentioned, we have the opportunity to choose from four different concurrent sessions. These will be repeated so you'll have an opportunity to attend two of the four sessions. You can see the different titles or opportunities here on the slide. Creative Ways to Engage Families and Community Members: Lessons From Co-creating Resources, Prepping Preservice and In-Service Teachers for PROGRESS, Ensuring SDI in Secondary Settings, and Providing a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE): Lessons From the Due Process Hearing Front. As I mentioned you can choose to attend two of those four sessions. They will be repeated over that time period.

Now one of the things that we learned last year was a little bit challenging was that we had very basic system and so we had Zoom registrations for each of our sessions and we wanted to make it a little bit easier for you to access and join the different sessions over the course of the different sessions, so one of the things that we did was use a new system. And so there's good things and bad things about that system, I think. So one of the things you can easily do is find your schedule you can choose to add different sessions that you're interested in attending and then they'll appear on the my schedule tabs. You can see all of the upcoming or past sessions in the upcoming or past tab and you can access all of those sessions directly from that system. We do know that some people have had a little bit of challenges navigating that system, so if you have any problems throughout the event, please don't hesitate to reach out to us. We will have people on hand to help you get to the sessions you're most interested in attending. You will probably have noticed this when you joined today, but when the session is live it will say live now and you'll have an opportunity to click the button to say join session or join Zoom. Make sure you go ahead and do that to join the different sessions. That won't appear until just at the top of the hour for that session so for example 11 o'clock for the session today you saw the opportunity to click that button and to join directly through there. Again, if you have any trouble accessing any of those sessions don't hesitate to reach out with any questions.

And another question that you might have is where you can find event materials and recordings after the event. As David mentioned, all of this material will be posted on the website and a lot of it is already there for you to access. This is the web page for Prepping for PROGRESS 2023. You can see the example of this here. All of the slide materials and any related resources or materials are available there. You can expand any of those accordions in order to access the PowerPoint presentations that people will be delivering, to access related resources, and after the session the recordings and transcripts for those sessions as well. And I see Mia just dropped that link in the chat so you can easily access that throughout the session today.

As I've mentioned her name a couple of times, Mia is our go-to support with any technology needs accessing sessions, any questions you have. Her email address is up here on the website, on the screen. She will drop that in the chat for you as well so that you can easily access and reach her if you have any questions. You can also reach out to us at the PROGRESS Center at air.org email box if you have any questions accessing sessions, accessing materials or anything like that throughout the day.

And last but not least, please connect with us, stay connected with us, share your thoughts, your reactions, your learning on Facebook, on Twitter or I guess maybe now it's X— we have not updated this slide with the new information—but we are at K-12 progress on both of those systems. We'd love for you to use the hashtag promotingprogress2023 to share any of your learning, to share your reactions throughout the sessions. So please go ahead and do that at any time. Follow us. We keep updated, sharing resources materials, and any kind of learnings from the sessions, or from the center on those platforms for later date.

And with that I want to start us off and really get into the meat of the session today, which is fostering belonging to promote student progress. I think as we think about the start of this new school year, we know how important it is to ensure that our environments, our communities, and our schools are a place where all students, including students with disabilities feel like they belong—that they are connected, that they have peers that are missing them if they're not there. So many different things for us to think about and how do we ensure that we are creating that environment. How are we ensuring we're creating an environment for which we feel that we are belonging, that we belong and that feel we feel connected? How do we ensure we have a place where parents and families feel that they belong and feel connected and so we want to think about that today as we think about these different sessions. So just to start off, we're going to watch a short video of one of our Stories from the Classroom video series that will allow us to think about kind of what does fostering belonging mean? Why is it so important, as we think about this topic.

[Video Plays]

[Music]

Donna Sacco (in video): Stories from the Classroom: Finding Belonging
Meet Xuan, a young adult recalling her school experiences.

Xuan Truong: Grade school was hard, was tough. You know my peers would be playing basketball or running track or whatever and I would just sit on the sidelines. I just mainly watched. Some, some of my gym teachers when, when we played basketball, they would give me like a ball and let me throw it into a little bucket or something, but it's still like, I still felt like I was the odd one. I didn't feel included and I didn't feel like, I just felt left out. I was a pretty independent kid and I was also a pretty prideful kid and I, I didn't want to ask for help unless I was drowning and then when I was drowning it was too late.

Donna Sacco: While attending a youth conference with members of her church, Xuan heard a speaker discussing depression among students across America. She thought, he's talking about me. It was so powerful to her that she knew right then and there that she wanted to step out of her depression.

Xuan Truong: From then on, I really thought to change my identity. I'm not this like disabled person, I am, I am loved and I am fearfully and wonderfully made and I, I tell myself this and, and it's just done so much for my confidence.

Donna Sacco: Soon after, her youth pastor tried to include her in an activity. She was so used to staying on the outside and not being included, that she whispered to her cousin and asked her cousin to tell him that she couldn't do it, to which he said why can't she?



Xuan Truong: I just remember that phrase, why can't she? And that really stuck with me. Like why can't I do this? Why can't I do whatever everyone else does? And so I think it's just having those people, it doesn't need to be many people, a lot of people, but just those key figures in my life that, that really speak words of life and words of wisdom. And because I as a person with disabilities, I get the word no all the time and it's just so refreshing when someone says you can do this you just have to figure out another way.

Donna Sacco: Xuan is now finishing her Master's in social work while serving on the University's disability advisory board and running a student organization called indivisible that centers around disabilities.

Xuan Truong: That gift that each one of us has, it's not just for us, it's for other people too
[Music]

Amy Peterson: Thank you. So we're going to be lucky because we're going to hear a little bit more from Xuan in just a minute and actually hear about her life post this video because she actually has pursued her degree and has gone off the other side and is doing great work, do we'll hear from her in just a second on our panel, but as we're thinking about this and as we're starting to think about this work, I'd love you to take a minute to think about a time where you really felt like you fit in and then share in the chat some of the words that describe how you felt. What did it feel like or mean to belong? So I'd love to see what other people think about as they think about this idea of belonging.

Oh, I'm seeing them coming in. Understood and accepted. Warm and safe. Safe. Valued. Understood. Appreciated. Powerful. Connected. Love all of these ideas, keep them coming. Confident. So many great ideas that people are sharing about what it means to belong and what it means to feel like you have that sense of belonging.

So, as you think about those dimensions or those ideas that you're putting in the chat, some of the work that Dr Erik Carter and his colleague Elizabeth Biggs have done is think about what are these different dimensions of belonging for students. In their work they've explored and done literature reviews to understand kind of what do we mean when we think about belonging and how can we think about these different dimensions. And you'll see on the screen here 10 different dimensions of belonging that they've really thought about and shared with us in the work that we've done along with the TIES Center to really think about this idea of belonging. So do they feel loved, present, invited, welcomed, known, accepted, supported, heard, befriended, and needed? I see some of those ideas there in the chat that you've been sharing all along. Right, this idea of feeling accepted and feeling heard and valued some of these key dimensions for us to think about as we think about this idea of belonging. And another graphic that they shared, that I think was really powerful is this idea about this story of what it means and what it looks like to belong. So, as we think about kind of our history of the inclusion and the experiences of students with disabilities in our school environments, we can see how that experience kind of changed over time, right. We moved from exclusion to then segregation to then some integration to inclusion and then we want to push ourselves to this idea of belonging—that there are spaces across the school system, in small groups, in large groups for all students to feel that sense of belonging across their different environments. So, keep that in mind and keep that in your head as you hear from this panel, to hear about how they think about belonging, how we can think about belonging as we start the new school year.

So, with that, I'm going to turn it over to Donna and she's going to introduce us to our panelists here and share some of their stories and experiences.

Donna Sacco: Hi everyone I'm Donna Sacco and I'm a senior technical assistance consultant at AIR. Thank you so much for being with us today and I am really happy to introduce our panel. Today we have Xuan Truong who you just saw in the video. She has graduated and she is now a career counselor at Central Piedmont Community

College in Charlotte North Carolina. We also have Dawn DeLorenzo. She's a special education teacher, has been for over 22 years, and she's a teacher leader in Union Township in New Jersey in a middle school. And then we have Jennifer Franks who is the parent and advocate and here's some pictures that I wanted to share with you of Jennifer and her son Jackson. She's going to tell her story. I'm going to let each of them introduce themselves briefly before we get into the discussion, but these are some wonderful pictures she shared with me, with Jackson in his school, and you can see from that face how he feels that sense of belonging in his classrooms. So, Amy you can um take the slides down? I want everyone to be able to see our panel here and for those of you for whom it would be helpful, we have all agreed to describe ourselves, the visuals. So, I am a Caucasian woman with graying blonde hair, chin level, blue eyes. I'm wearing a black colored button-down top and I have a blue background behind me with the PROGRESS Center name on top of it. And I am going to next turn it to Xuan and let you do a brief introduction of yourself and description. Hi Xuan.

Xuan Truong: Hi. My name is Xuan. As Dr. Sacco mentioned, I did graduate and I am in my first full-time employment post-graduation. I am in my office at Central Piedmont. Currently my hair is pulled back. I am an Asian American female wearing a black dress and I have earrings on today.

Donna Sacco: Thank you and Dawn let's hear from you.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Thank you my name is Dawn DeLorenzo. Caucasian female blonde hair wearing a multi-colored top. As mentioned, I have been a special education teacher for this will be my 23rd year, it's like crazy when I say it. Currently I am working at Union Township Middle School in Hampton New Jersey as a special education teacher and this last year and this coming year I will be with fourth graders. The majority of my career has been, it's probably a 50/50 split at this point between upper elementary grades and middle school grades fifth through eighth.

Donna Sacco: Thanks, Dawn. And next hi Jennifer Franks.

Jennifer Franks: Hi, I'm Jennifer Franks. I am a white Caucasian female. Brown hair, glasses, wearing a maroon top. I am the mother of two boys. My 10-year-old has down syndrome and he is currently included in a regular classroom at our neighborhood school. Through my years of learning how to advocate for him and what inclusion looks like, I love to share that information with other families who are seeking the same thing. And I try and help them collaborate with their IEP teams at the school, and just you know help, help the team see what inclusion can look like and how far our kids can go with inclusion.

Donna Sacco: Thanks, Jennifer. Well I'm going to start out just with you all thinking about the path you know as, as we discussed that, you know we have Xuan who's talking about in that video and Xuan I don't know how long it's been since you saw that video, but you know, to recall those kind of feelings and what suggestions you would have for teachers today to help students not feel that isolation you felt?

Xuan Truong: I think um there's a couple of things to consider. I think on a systemic level is to hire people who have lived experience. Because like there's a saying, you can't be what you can't see, right. And so, just having that person with that shared identity, that grew up in similar situations, that I grew up with similar challenges, and then to see them in a professional paying role does wonders for students and those you know growing up. And then the more practical hands-on suggestion is to find activities that everyone can do, instead of an activity for most people and then have a separate activity like a specialized activity for, that's adaptive. So instead, try creating something that everyone can participate in.

Donna Sacco: Yeah, thank you for that. I like those points and I see people—I was just reading in the chat, that people are agreeing with you. Those would be helpful suggestions. Jennifer I, I want to hear from you because I

know you, know you've had, you know, you've experienced a lot of different situations with Jackson. Maybe you can talk a little bit about what worked really well to get those formats in place?

Jennifer Franks: Yeah, so we have moved quite a bit. He has been in, gosh I want to say two or three different school districts, and he's going to fourth grade. And you know, when he started kindergarten, I thought I knew what inclusion was, and so I was excited to have him in a regular kindergarten class. He started out, and I thought this is great. This is it. He's in. We're done. Woohoo. And then I realized as the years have gone on, inclusion is so much than just having a seat in the classroom, it's having a seat within the classroom amongst the peers, not separated in the back. It's, it's being welcomed in to share your ideas, to ask questions—even though your speech is unintelligible—you're still welcomed to speak and talk. What has been so fascinating to see from his peers is they have welcomed him so much that when he does get up and he presents or he asks questions they, you know, will say at the end, you know I think that Jackson is trying to say da da da da da. And they'll say Jackson is that what you are saying. And he say yes or no, but I thought the intent of them just listening, like you know, just listening to, to hear what he has to say and trying to figure out, you know what, what input is he bringing to our discussion is so wonderful.

And it's just, it's having teachers who, you know—like that was pointed out before—it's you have to be able to reach all students, right and so when you have a child who needs more support and who is going to learn better with movement and hands-on activities and teamwork, you know it's how can we incorporate our lessons to include all children, so that everyone is getting what they need.

And the funny thing is, is that when I talk to other teachers about this, they say, you know it's not just Jackson who learn that way, all of our students learn that way. And so I kind of like to joke, like why would you not want to have a child with an IEP, because I feel like it opens the door to resources and allows you to be more creative to how you're going to teach. And I always tell the teachers, you know tell me what you need. You need it, I'll put it in his IEP. You need movement in that classroom, I'll put it in his IEP that he needs movement with whatever lesson.

As a parent the sense of belonging for him is, I, I don't even know—I can describe the feeling, but when we go out into the community and to see, you know, kids that he knows from school, to see those kids coming up to him, and saying—not just stopping—and saying, oh hey and then moving along, they're stopping and they're inviting him into their play or they are coming into his play, whatever he's doing. You know, he, he gets invited to parties and to me that that just means a lot, because I know that these kids are they're possibly going to be future employers who are going to hire him, or they're going to hire someone like him. Or they're future teachers who are not going to be afraid of a child coming in who's different, right, because they've been exposed to that, and they know that they're capable of learning.

So I, I get excited every year when we start a new year to think of how many lives he's going to change with it, with the kids in his classroom, and the teachers that are going to be teaching him. But one of the things that stands out to me is our principal, when we started in this county, towards the end of the year, he said, he said, I just have to tell you Jackson is the definition of inclusion and he said that there are just some wonderful things happening down in that classroom. And that, he said the kids are just, the other kids are learning so much from him. And I said and he's learning a lot from them. And I thought, he gets it. Like the principal, this principal gets it. He gets it. It's not just my kid coming in and taking what he can, it's those other kids also learning from him and taking you know taking all those lessons throughout their life as well.

Donna Sacco: That is so powerful. Thank you for sharing that and I you know I was watching Dawn and she was just in agreement because she's also a parent as well, of a child with a disability. Dawn, you know, I, I just saw you—



Dawn DeLorenzo: I was like shaking my head through everything you were saying Jennifer. I was like yes, yes, and the comment section too with UDL. You know, so many people, I, I'm like a big fan of Brené Brown and she has a quote that true belonging doesn't require us to change who we are it requires us to be who we are. And I was looking in the chat section when you asked everyone to share about belonging and some of the things that stood out to me were like relaxed and comfortable and safe. And I, I do in a way feel blessed because having a child who receives special services, and you know what they call an invisible disability—a lot of children you know with learning disabilities, ADHD these are invisible disabilities that a lot of people can't see and often look at the child and think like oh there's nothing wrong with her, you know what, I'm saying— so it's like I feel blessed that I've been on both sides of the IEP table. But yeah, I really was shaking my head with Jennifer because I, I feel a tremendous sense of responsibility for the kids that I serve as an educator. And you know belonging does not always happen organically and as an educator you, you have to be intentional. This is, this is probably my biggest piece of advice for educators, is to be intentional and yes, we want friendships to have, to happen authentically and organically, but sometimes we do have to create those scenarios for that to happen. And the biggest thing is what many people put in the chat that sense of feeling safe. Can I be who I am in this classroom? And especially at middle school, at the middle school time where many of them are learning who they are and kind of actively, like a butterfly kind of actively coming into their own skin, you know, exploring their identity—who am I?

Middle school, yeah we all know it's like, those are the years—and one thing that stood out to me, somebody else put what, what it feels in the chat, they put to be believed. I have been on both sides of the IEP table and heard this—when a parent comes to the parents, parental concerns section, I myself has been have been the parent who said my child doesn't feel like she has any friends, my child doesn't feel like she belongs, and I've also been the one at the other side of the table for a parent expressing that and I've heard this and it's kind of it's a sad rebuttal, people will say well you know, well that's not true, like, I see her talk to Joni and I see her talk to Sarah and I see her you know joining in this.

I mean you could see me in the hallway talking and having a laugh with my colleague, that doesn't necessarily, you know, mean that I feel like I belong. You know, how many of us, like it's, like you know have been in those situations where you know you talk about the weather, what you did for the weekend, but that doesn't mean you have a sense of belonging. So when, when someone says, you know I feel, when I feel I belong, when I feel believed, believe the parents when they tell you my child just doesn't feel like they belong and actively do something about that.

You know that's why, my biggest piece of advice is the intentionality. You need to, group work is so important, but you can't just hope for the best. Put you know, put two or three people together and hope it goes well. You know, I'll speak from my own perspective with the invisible disabilities, it's that you do have to set up roles and expectations for the group work, perhaps pre-teaching and letting the child know this is the role you're going to take, rather than leaving it up to the other two or three kids who sometimes unintentionally end up just taking charge and leaving the child out. Like, oh I'll do it because she can't. I'll read everything. I'll write everything. You don't seem like you can do it. So yeah, I do I, I do think and it takes that extreme intentionality.

And everyone here seems to be a very huge proponent and fan of UDL and I can't say enough about that. It really is essential and everyone was saying not having separate activities, even I thought about this year, like field day there are so many wonderful activities that can be brought into field day where the child doesn't need to feel like, I can't participate in that or like Xuan said, like I can dunk this basket in a little, in a little bucket and that's my level of participation. We really have to intentionally sit down and prepare for those children to not be just included but to make sure that they feel they belong.

Jennifer Franks: Can I just say something? It's as a parent, it's okay if you don't know. To reach out to the parent and ask, you know we're having this project or we're doing this activity and some of these might be difficult for your child to do, we're reaching out to you—do you have any ideas? I love when parent, when the teachers call me and say we, were not, were just not sure. you know. And we make it work. And I'm always honored that they, they call and ask, ask me that. So include the parents if you're not sure.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Absolutely.

Donna Sacco: You know I, and I would love you know the three of you please jump in at any time and add to the conversation. Don't feel like you have to wait to be called on or just jump in—but you know, gosh I love watching all of the comments that are coming up as you all are sharing and thinking about, oh you know just how much it benefits and this is what you know I heard this from Xuan's video, from Jennifer, how much this is a benefit for everyone and that we're really you know changing lives. I remember Jennifer once said that to me, you know Jackson is changing people's lives.

Jennifer: Franks: and he doesn't even know it. I'm making big changes, he doesn't even know it and it's, it's just it's so fun to see, so fun to see.

Dawn DeLorenzo: I would love to hear from Jennifer and Xuan because I know personally as a teacher, I like to get this put into IEPs, as a parent I've taught my daughter and she's learned pretty well how to self-advocate. Jennifer, do you feel like your son, he's young I know, he's young, but that will grow his ability to self-advocate and Xuan do you feel that you knew how to advocate for yourself?

Xuan Truong: Well I had to, because my parents didn't speak English. Yeah, childhood was tough, I, I don't know what having a parent who can advocate for you, I don't know what that looks like so I had to navigate it myself.

Donna Sacco: So you were translating your IEP meetings?

Xuan Truong: yeah so, I am..

Donna Sacco: And all your medical needs as well?

Xuan Truong: Yes. So I am first generation immigrant, so my parents are immigrants from Vietnam and so they came over and they, they didn't know, they can get by with English, but I was the firstborn with a very visible disability and so how do you navigate? Already not knowing the language and the system to having a child, who like, I don't even know how they got me the services that I got. It was it was a miracle, but I on the flip side, I do yeah like Dr. Sacco said, I grew up with very stereotypical like first generation child experience, so I would have to go with my parents to their doctor's appointments and be their translators and translate paperwork from a very early age and that's very typical for a first generation and on top of that figure out how to navigate my school stuff.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Did you feel comfortable, Xuan it sounds like you were probably, you were shy or as a, as a child did you feel comfortable expressing, like hey it would help me if this was presented in this manner to your teacher? And I was also curious if you had, did you have a paraprofessional with you in school or were you on your own?

Xuan Truong: I want to say I had a social worker somewhere in there. I don't remember them. The teachers did the best they knew how to, with helping me. And then there were some case managers that would come in and sit with my mom during the IEP meetings and kind of explain and like break things down in a more simple English. So it wasn't, I wasn't all the way on my own, but I did have to do a lot of it by myself.



Donna Sacco: You're a social worker now and that you had, you have clients, private clients, but also at Central Piedmont, I know they have some programs for students with disabilities as well, where they may have had, you know, they may come to the Community College with different kinds of high school certificates or some with traditional degree, diplomas, but I wonder, you know, what sorts of—you're in the career counseling and how, how you bring that life experience to that with, with the students you're seeing?

Xuan Truong: Yes, um so in college it is a very separate world from K-12, in which the student has to advocate for themselves in order to get the accommodations that they need and so it's very less parent focus and very more on the student. Like you need to take responsibility since you are an adult.

And so, before this role, I was actually in another role in another department and I was the academic advisor for the i-league program which is a program for students with intellectual disabilities and it was very much, students came to this program, and they have they never advocated for themselves ever. And I come from an IL philosophy, which is an independent living philosophy, which is you choose to live the life that you want to live. No one gets to make that choice for you. Sorry, and for people with disabilities a lot of the times the choice of how they should live is made for them and with that, with the IL philosophy it puts the responsibility on the person—that it's not about your parents, what they want, it's not about what your teacher wants, it's, it's about what you want and how do you, how are you going to live the life you want to live?

And I can help you and I can sit there and help you, teach you how to navigate, and empower you to do so, but I cannot go out there and bust down those doors for you.

Donna Sacco: And how wonderful if that starts earlier than college, right—of giving students, empowering students and starting from that sense of belonging that they are then able to feel that comfort and welcome so they can self-advocate, because, I constantly think about transition, you know, so we start very early from Jackson in elementary and Dawn in middle school, but still thinking about that life after, after post-secondary or after secondary.

Dawn DeLorenzo: I was curious also Jennifer does your son have a paraprofessional in the room or a co-teacher and do you feel like it hinders? I, you really have to be careful with the paraprofessionals like that they're not because sometimes that can exclude your child just having that other adult standing next to them all the time.

Jennifer Franks: He has always had either a shared assistant—and what that meant was, in one of our other counties was he shared an assistant with another child who was in a different classroom so the assistant would come in at the times when he needed it most. When we moved over to a new county, he was given an assistant full-time basically. The first year she was there to help out with making sure he understood instructions, major we're transitioning from one class to like say, a special or lunch or recess successfully, and there to help the teacher as well. This last year, third grade year, the support was kind of reined back a little bit.

But this is, the support of a paraprofessional, is always a hot topic with parents, especially in our down syndrome community. And I tell them just get one, like get one, get one because you can train, we can train the paraprofessional to know when to back off. Because every day is going to be different. Some days the child needs a little more support and then some days you can start to kind of go back and then two weeks down you're going to have to go back in and do a little more support.

So, but it takes, it takes some training for that paraprofessional to know when to step in when to step back, but that is the only way my son has been able to be successful, to be honest with you in the classroom, because he needs someone to be able to sit there with him keep him on task—not because he doesn't want to work, I mean



sometimes he doesn't want to work, but you know what I mean like—but we're able to say something, keep on going, you can do this, okay you've got that, great job, like keep going, you can do it.

And as far as the self-advocacy, I'd say the worst thing that, the teacher actually started to see a lot of that this past year. And I can tell you, talk about belonging, he felt such a sense of belonging among those peers, with that teacher—that teacher spoke his love language, was dancing and being silly, he felt so safe, safe there, and I think it's a little bit of maturity.

He has an expressive speech delay, so it's not easy for him to get out what he is thinking and so I think these past two years, in this District, with maturity, with the kids and friends that he has made, with teachers that have worked with him, he has felt that belonging, he feels safe, he feels he can be himself.

And boy is he himself, like he is himself. The antics that he gets into, the silliness, but they all love him there and he knows that, so he's been able to self-advocate for himself and let the teacher know, look this work is too hard, I don't understand or I'm tired. You know, and she's had to learn too when she can push him and when he just needs to take it back a little bit because he's having a rough day or he's tired, his body is just tired. So that's self-advocacy we've seen a little bit this year and I, I foresee we will see more of it as he gets older.

And absolutely my goal for him is to be as independent as possible. For him to have his own apartment with a friend. We want that independence for him and definitely will help him self-advocate for whatever he wants.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Someone was..

Donna Sacco: I'm noticing, oh sorry, sorry Dawn, I was just noticing some of the questions in the chat and I wanted to bring those up so that we can address them as well and a lot about self-advocacy. So Xuan how would you teach self-advocacy as a teacher? Would that, would that be a role for the teacher in the IEP process as well? So thinking about students advocating in their own IEPs and then we have some more coming up too, some more questions in the chat that we'll get to, but let's start with that, Xuan.

Xuan Truong: Can you repeat the first part of the question?

Donna Sacco: Yeah, it's in the chat there, so what would be, how would you teach self-advocacy if you were a teacher? How would you recommend teachers teach self-advocacy to students? Because there's always that chance of learned helplessness as well, right, but we want to get to the other side.

Xuan Truong: I think there is a something on the internet called like five steps to self-advocacy. I think if you Google it, but it just breaks it down to what it is. Like identify the problem. And then identify people who can help you solve that problem. And then it's speaking out and reaching out to those people. I forget what the fourth step is, but the fifth step is gratitude.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Xuan, I think one of the, maybe the fourth step in there was like anticipating barriers, like anticipating roadblocks to getting to your goal. That might have been one.

Xuan Truong: I think so that sounds about right.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Something that I that I do, especially at middle school, because they, you try to be a little more discreet —something middle school students tend to start doing is with the in-class support teacher, they don't they're like do not hover over me, don't be, you know, do you need help, do you need help. They can't stand it. Because you know they make, it makes them feel like they're standing out.



I have made up little cards, that are almost like business card size, and it literally will say—because sometimes I'll come over and say, oh you need help? What do you need help with? And sometimes they're not quite sure how you can help them and I've given them choices like I need you to repeat this for me, I need you to show me another problem, I need you to watch, maybe it's math, I need you to watch me do this problem and show me where I'm going wrong. Just a little card, to get, with prompts to let them know like well specifically what do you need from me to help you get to the goal here.

And the other thing for me as far as teaching self-advocacy in the classroom as a teacher, is I tell my students that clear is kind. If you are telling me that you need to go to the bathroom, but truly you're doing this because you need to go have a break, I want you to be honest with me. Because that's speaking to, you're telling me what your needs are and you're giving me the opportunity to meet your needs. Some children assume that people are not going to meet their needs and so they figure I have to tell you I need to leave the room to go to the bathroom, but truly that's not what I need. I need a, I need a break. I need to get out of here or this problem is overwhelming me and I don't know what to do.

My own daughter has told me, I've asked for help and I'm not getting the help I needed, so sometimes I'm like, I'm out of here. I'm going to the bathroom for 15 minutes and I hope this problem will go away. So yeah, those are things that as a classroom teacher I found to be effective and relationships. They have to be comfortable to tell you the truth.

Jennifer Franks: And I just—what you were saying Dawn, just made me think of when we talk about inclusion and we give, we're giving you know kids choices as far as self-advocating for themselves, you know I've had to learn over the years too, as much as I want my son to be included, and I want him to feel that he belongs, I also have to listen to him when the environment is just too much for him in that moment.

And this is something that we had kind of happened this past year, you know the lunchroom is crazy, crazy loud and I wanted him to be in there with the kids and be able to talk amongst the kids and you know I'd go in there and I'd visit the school and I'd see him kind of sitting by himself or sitting with one other kid, and then we then he got to the point where he was sitting on the floor, and I said look what's going on? And she said, I don't know we were trying to get him onto the table, we don't know what's going on.

I said, you know what, let's, can we just, let's give him a visual—because he needs visuals, he needs choices, let's give him choices, you know visual choices, of you know today I want to sit by myself, today I want to sit with a friend, because you know I don't want to force them into you know being amongst his peers when all he needs right now, he just needs that break from noise or trying to converse with someone when he doesn't have the language skills in that moment.

So, I think that's important too, is that you know yeah inclusion, inclusion is fantastic, but that's, also we have to allow you know everyone to self-advocate. You know, we need to step back for just a second.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Yeah, because sometimes we mistakenly believe that inclusion means go and join in with this group. There's 20 people, you know, go be a part of it. Be a part of it. Like you're saying with the cafeteria, we've seen that this year too. We kept seeing a girl left out and we were like oh we don't want her to be left out, but when we spoke to her, she was like it's too noisy in here. I can't, like she wanted to be alone. That was like her time to regroup. So again, that kind of goes back to believing the student and asking them like, hey what's going on? Maybe they don't want to be with a peer at that time. Maybe they need that regrouping time. Great point, Jennifer.

Donna Sacco: There was another question to Jennifer. There's so many good comments going on, you know, please get the chat—there's so much going on in there, but someone was asking of Jennifer, what your goals, let



me see if I can find it now, what your goals um for one-on-one support as your son transitions to adulthood? And I love that you said, you're, you know, you want to see him living independently, so how, how are you thinking about that progression?

Jennifer Franks: So for me when I think of one-to-one support right now, it's academics, you know. Let's get him through academically through the schools. He, any of the self-care stuff, we take care of at home. As he transitions into adulthood, what does that look like, you know we have wonderful services here. We have a place called Gigi's which is a down syndrome achievement center and so they help kind of transition our kids into those jobs. I want him to live with a friend, you know, and again those are my long-term goals for him and but I also tend to take year by year goals.

But long term, you know, I want him to be by himself. What will that look like as far as help, I don't know to be honest with you. I don't know at this point how much help he will need as an adult. I mean, to be honest with you, right now he runs our house better than our 13-year-old. He can cook. He's, he transfers my laundry over without me asking. I mean he's pretty self-sufficient. So I don't know how much support this kid is going to need. We always joke that he, my 10-year-old with Down Syndrome is going to be the one taking care of my older son who right now is 13 because he just knows his way around stuff. He just observes. I've never taught—I, I don't teach him things around the house, he honestly just observes, he picks it up, and he just does it. You know, that's just also part of his, his personality. He just wants to help, but you know, if he needs support as an adult, we'll find it. We'll provide that for him. As parents we will always be there to help him with whatever. I hope that answers the question. I know it's kind of, I don't know, I really don't know.

Donna Sacco: Well it's evolving isn't it? Things change.

Jennifer Franks: It is. Yeah.

Donna Sacco: Someone said I need Jackson to come and teach my 12-year-old.

Dawn DeLorenzo: I was thinking the same thing. 14 and oh boy. Can I, can I pay him to come help around the house.

Jennifer Franks: He amazes me all the time. Yes, I'm sure his my oldest son just gets you know, tired of it, but I just— it amazes me. What he can do. And I'll just tell my oldest, go ask your younger brother how to do that because he's got that down, you know so um yeah, he's a great kid. Like I said it's part of his personality, he just, he wants to help in any way that he can.

Donna Sacco: And someone mentioned in the chat, Xuan were you about to say something? I'm sorry. Someone mentioned in the chat the PATH process the person-centered planning and I've even participated in that at the college level, when someone was getting ready to graduate from University of North Carolina Charlotte where I used to work, but I, Dawn have you done that person-centered planning?

Dawn DeLorenzo: Oh I just wrote that down. What was that through?

Donna Sacco: The PATH process, but person-centered planning in terms of you know really developing a crew. I don't know how else to put it and maybe someone else— life course framework is awesome too. Someone said planning alternative tomorrows with hope—

Dawn DeLorenzo: But one of the other things I think our district personally, like does a really good job about this, but basically seeking out those marginalized voices and having opportunities in the extracurricular area too,



is so important. Like thinking about your sports and your clubs. A lot of kids are, you know, reticent to sign-up, not knowing if their support will be there, not sure, but it's a great way to create belonging for children and just making sure that that's also discussed at IEP meetings. Like what's going on? Is your child, you know actively participating in anything? And even if it's just one, getting their toe in the water. I know from for my own child that's been important too.

Jennifer Franks: Yeah, and as a parent too, that's hard. I feel like to find those extracurricular things for your child to do. It's not only the acceptance of whatever you're putting him into, right like the coaches or whatever are accepting him and taking him at his level, it's also knowing that as we get older we're not physically able to keep up with what our peers were doing, right. And then you don't want to place them with younger kids because you know you try and put them with same age peers, it's hard.

I actually, I just signed uh Jackson up for acting classes because I thought he loves to be silly, he loves to, he loves to act stuff, you know, but his speech isn't the best. It's unintelligible, and I thought you know, and this is something I talked to a speech therapist about, was it's so hard to find. Because he needs that social interaction, right. We don't get that during the summer and it's not like I can call up say hey typical peers could you come and talk to my child for a little while so that we can get this time in, you know and then the kids who are going, who are in speech therapy, well they're there too for whatever therapy they're needing and so Jackson just really needs those typical peers. And so I thought, acting let me try this. Let's just see and so I talked to the center and they're super excited to have him and today will be his first day. I don't know how it's going to go, but I thought I just I have to find something fun for him, where he doesn't know he's working and you know hopefully it will go well. And just, I just want him to have fun and have some peer support and so yeah, yeah it's hard. It's hard as a parent to find those different avenues to help your child.

Donna Sacco: You know, I love that idea um. I'm going back to, because I'm, I'm still thinking about Xuan and thinking about having parents who are immigrants and I really wonder how you could give teachers some suggestions of being, you know that intersection of language acquisition and disability and the culture. So being culturally and linguistically responsive. How can special educators or all educators work with families in a way, like there's stigma in some cultures around disability and how to, how to you know work with families in a way that helps them see what can happen in schools.

Xuan Truong: That's a great question and Dawn I'm not sure how you picked this up, but I was a shy kid. I was so, so shy. And I think educators have the responsibility of being culturally competent. So Vietnamese, Asian Americans, right it's—this is a wide like paintbrush, broad stroke, but a lot of East Asian cultures are very community centered and very what we call like a very collectivist community centered society. So, the rights of the individual are often overlooked in favor of the, to do what's best for the community.

Now on the western side, it's more individualism, right. Like pull yourself up by your bootstraps. It's about independence. It's about self-determination. It's myths you know about the self. And it's not saying that one is bad and one is good. There's just different, different approaches to life. And so, one of the reasons why it was so hard for me to speak up was because I didn't want to make, to you know cause a wave or rock the boats. And I didn't want to quote-unquote like be a burden to people and so asking for help was really hard. And I'm also pretty passive in nature and

Donna Sacco: Not anymore!

Xuan Truong: I'm so, you know, still finding my voice in different things. I think in the advocacy area, I'm really comfortable. I just started as a clinician, so as a therapist, so I'm still finding my voice as a therapist—but I think being able to empower parents, connect them to groups that are Multicultural, connecting them to



communities, connecting them to people who have children with disabilities in the same communities is really helpful or like being able to provide them with resources. Of course, like being from a marginalized identity, like I did need more support and so just having someone there as an advocate, like we talk about self-advocacy, but like having allies is so important because self-advocacy is tiring!

Donna Sacco: You know we're getting close to the half hour and what I'd really like each of you to do is give us, what is one big takeaway you want people in this session to have when they leave? Anyone can start.

Xuan Truong: Okay, well I'll start. This is going to be a slightly controversial one, but my, one of my bosses told me and this, this has stuck with me, it's very simple—people with disabilities are allowed to make dumb decisions. So, and they are allowed to make mistakes and they are allowed to fail and one of the things that I really tried to platform is dignity, right? Like I talk about the dignity of risk, the dignity of failure, and just giving the child the dignity to be able to fail and make their own mistakes instead of like shielding them from everything, is going to teach them a lot more about life than if they were to be shielded and protected.

Dawn DeLorenzo: Great points.

Donna Sacco: Yeah, I love that!

Dawn DeLorenzo: For me, I just feel like, I'll repeat again the intentionality, the responsibility that you have as a teacher to set the tone of your classroom. You really are, you are the guiding light in that room and the more you can put relationship front and center and, and make it so that children feel safe to be themselves and know that they can take risks in that room and be protected—that if some, you know if someone else is not respecting, that individual will be dealt with and not ignored. Yeah, that every person in that classroom is valued and just understanding that these things are not always going to happen organically and you need to be the one who makes it entrenched in your, in the dynamics of your class.

Jennifer Franks: I would say, as a parent, you know one thing I request from teachers, administrators, is please presume competence. Please presume the kids know what you're teaching. Presume that they can. Have high expectations. I think you'll be amazed at what they can rise to when you keep that bar high for them and please include the parents. You know we love to come in and brainstorm with you. I love collaborating with my son's team. I don't expect them to have all the answers on how to teach my child. You know I, I, parents will do the research. We've done the research since they were born. We can bring you lots of resources. I've given my team several, several books. I know there are other parents like that. We do want to help and we want to offer suggestions and it's never a, we are challenging what you know, we just want to help you so that you can help our child.

Donna Sacco: Oh, that is a really strong message. Thank you for that, you know, all three of you, thank you so much for your strong messages and promoting belonging across all of our schools. I see the amazing comments that have been coming through the chat and you have really helped so many people out there and some of the people in the chat have been providing so many wonderful resources as well so thank you to all of you. I'm going to turn it, thank you, thank you, thank you, I'm just so pleased to have had you here today. I'm going to turn it back over to Amy and she's going to show you some of the resources that we have at the PROGRESS Center that are related to belonging and some discussion guides and take it away Amy.

Amy Peterson: So one of the things that we just wanted to share as we wrap up with this conversation of belonging, as Donna mentioned, there's a lot of good links that people shared in the chat. We will collect all of those and add them to the related resources and share those in that information out with you all, but I wanted to just flag one other place where you can find some additional information or resources on belonging, if this



topic hit home for you and you wanted to think about it more or talk about it and share it with your teams and others who might not be here. So where can you learn more about belonging, under the implementation tab on the PROGRESS Center website, you'll see one of the sections in the accordions there is around belonging and, in that section, you'll see a range of different resources that highlight information around belonging that we shared today.

So one of the pieces that I had talked to before was these dimensions of belonging from Dr Erik Carter and last year he did a, or I think it was last year maybe two years ago now, time is a time warp for all of us, he did a presentation for us around 10 ways schools can foster belonging among students with and without disabilities and he did a great job of sharing and defining each of those dimensions and sharing a little bit more about each of them. And so, they might be helpful for you as you think about this topic. Part of that webinar is this resource on reflecting on practice and so on the front side are the dimensions and the graphic that we saw earlier, on the back side is some reflection questions that really guide along with each of those dimensions of belonging that you can use to have some conversations.

Another piece here is the stories from the classroom video featuring Xuan. So if you want to share that with others, please do. As a companion to that, there are resources and discussion guides and ways that you can share it to really spark conversation and as I mentioned as well Dr Erik Carter also did a good amount of work with the TIES Center along with his colleague Elizabeth Biggs and so our partners at the TIES Center have shared some great resources on belonging, specifically for students with significant cognitive disabilities, so there's resources and materials there as well. So lots of different tools you can find them, as well linked at the bottom of the section for this session, and we'll add some other ones in there.

But we really appreciate all our panelists sharing your great perspectives and experiences and hopefully these will help you guys as you think and get ready and started for the new school year to think about how to be more intentional, to think about how to build some of those self-advocacy skills, and opportunities to really think about how to ensure and foster belonging for students, all students across the students with and without disabilities, across different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and so on. So please keep this in your minds as you think about the rest of the sessions today.

And as a reminder not to forget, we're going to take a break after this. It's about 12:23 now, so we'll break until one o'clock. At one o'clock we'll start those strand sessions. So, you can choose one of those two strand sessions that you would like to attend. You'll be in that strand session until 3:45 with some breaks included in that time. We'll have another time for a break and then if you would like to join a topical discussion you can do that at four o'clock. Again, keep connected with us on Facebook and Twitter at K-12 progress. Keep sharing takeaways. There's so many good takeaways that were in the chat, so please share those online as well so that others who might not be here, have that opportunity to connect and keep connected with us. If you would like to sign up for our mailing list there's a link there as well. Again, these resources are available for you on the PROGRESS Center website along with all of the slides that will be used throughout the session for the next couple days.

So hopefully this was a good start for your session of Prepping for PROGRESS. We're looking forward to seeing you in the Strand sessions later today and lots more information and sharing to come. So again, thank you Donna, thank you panelists, thank you David for your introduction earlier, and we are so grateful for all of you to be here and look forward to interacting with you over the next couple days. Thanks so much!