



Closing Session: Working Together to Promote PROGRESS! Reflections and Lessons From Implementation

Amy Peterson: So we're here today for the final session of Prepping for Progress, Working Together to Promote Progress, Reflections and Lessons from Implementation.

Oh, gosh! And I want to go ahead and get us started with doing a little bit of work together. So, we're going to use Mentimeter here, to reflect initially on what you have heard from the past 2 days. What are a couple of things that stand out to you? And identify a word or 2 or 3 that you think describes that—what it takes to promote progress for students with disabilities. So just take a second. You can see the Mentimeter code up here on the screen. You can use that QR code right there. I think Mia is dropping the link right into the chat. So, you can link to [menti.com](https://www.menti.com), and then you'll go ahead and put in the code for 4, 6, 0, 6, 0 8, 1, 9, or you could just scan the QR code right on your phone. It will only just be a couple of words to type in, but we'd love to hear from you—a couple of things that you took away from the event for the past couple of days, some things that stand out around promoting progress for students with disabilities.

So while you're doing that, I'm going to pull this down. We can see some of those reflections come, or the comments coming in. I see collaboration, big in the middle. Belonging...flexibility...unlearn to learn. Love that. So lots of different terms that you all are resonating with, as you're thinking about promoting progress, reflection. High expectations. Go ahead and keep those coming.

All right. Well, I'm going to move us on, but I want you to keep looking at this. And I'll keep moving us forward because I want to make sure that we have plenty of time for our panel. Please keep adding your reflections. At the end of the session I'm going to pull this down and pull all your responses over into the presentation.

So, you can see here on this screen a couple of the responses that we had from the past years Prepping for Progress. So here was our very first Prepping for Progress. Some of those big words that you just saw on the screen for yourselves, are also resonating here—collaboration, belonging, and so on. That high expectations piece. One of the things we talked about at that first session was about fidelity and individualization. Those were some of the words that people reflected on, at the conclusion of the first Prepping for Progress we had.

And at the very second one. You could see additional comments here. But you can see the same themes throughout all of these three different sessions that we've had, because I think we have all recognized that some of these key things are really important for us to reflect on and resonate with as we do this work, right? So, we need to make sure that we're holding high expectations, that we are collaborating, that we are ensuring students feel like they belong, that we have clear communication and commitment and patience and persistence.



So, lots of great terms here. Keep them coming. That student voice piece I see showing up over there. Keep them coming into the one for this year. We'll add that to the collection of all of the ones from the past years. And see all of those themes come forward.

But with that I'm going to turn it over to Sara Evans, and she's going to take us through some of the rest of the session here today—focusing on our partnership site work and then introducing the EBR team and their work and all of the great work that they've been doing.

Sara Evans: Thank you, Amy. For those of you who I have not had a chance to be in a session with, I'm Sara Evans. I am a technical assistance provider under the lead of Steven Prater and we have had the honor and privilege of working with the partnership sites within the PROGRESS Center over the past 5 years. Each site has different needs and different focuses. And they have helped us as a Center really develop different resources and materials. They've helped us practice and refine our presentations and messaging to help you, as the field, truly have high quality, free resources that can be utilized within your local context to develop the skills of your staff for the development and implementation of high-quality IEPs. Each one of these local partnership sites have really played an intricate role of that. Today I have the honor and privilege of highlighting East Baton Rouge Parish School System, and some of the work that they have done with us over the past 3 years, but also the work that they've been doing for many years prior to joining the work of PROGRESS Center.

So, before we start into that, I really want to talk about some of the lessons learned that our technical assistance team has really been able to develop and think about how our technical assistance looks. You might call it professional development. We call it technical assistance. It's very similar. And none of these may strike you as oh, my gosh, I had no idea, but they are powerful when you think about how to implement your professional learning for your educators.

And what we found is that we need to be clear, consistent, and have a persistent message. What we were finding in the field is that they were hearing things from different practitioners, different organizations and although everyone was saying the same thing, people were saying it in different ways, and it was creating a lot of misconception and confusion in the field. And so, we have embarked in the journey of really trying to be very clear, very consistent, and persistent with the same thing. You may have experienced that in this third year of Prepping for Progress, where we had a presentation very similar to one maybe you attended last year. And what we have found is people still are learning every single time they attend one of our sessions. And so that messaging is going to be critical.

We found that we needed to focus on the basics. We thought we needed to start higher, higher level. And what we realized is, people need to go back to the basics. Really what does IDEA say? How do I then take that information and put it into usable terms that allow me to develop and implement a high-quality IEP.

We include teams with various individuals on that. We want new teachers, experienced teachers. We want people with administrative backgrounds, and we want Gen. Ed. staff to be involved in this process. And the more diverse the team is, the more likely to see impact in the district is what we experienced.

We found that in our technical assistance, the importance of incorporating collaboration opportunities—that when staff could talk to each other, when they could process what we were saying, they had much higher outcomes in taking that information back and actually putting it into practice.

We as a Center, had to learn to avoid assumptions, and we encourage you to avoid assumptions. We made assumptions that people really understood what IDEA said, and it's not that they don't know what IDEA says, but they didn't understand some of the intricate details that were critical for them to really understand how to implement it with high quality programming. So we had to strip away assumptions that we had about the field. And we encourage you to think about the assumptions you might be walking into your PD, professional development with.

And the last thing we really found that has really impacted our participants ability to take our information and apply it to their local context, is the gamifying learning or gamification of our activities. That we teach something, and then we use a game where they practice the skills right then and there. And they can ask questions and follow up and get immediate feedback, which is what we know is good for students, but sometimes we don't do that with our adult learners, and that was a huge takeaway from our technical assistance over the past 5 years.

As I move into the next session, next section of our closing session, I really want to focus on, how did one of our partnership sites take those lessons learned and really apply it into the work that they were doing for their students with disabilities? And we're going to highlight East Baton Rouge Parish Schools with their impact story. We have a short video for you to watch about the work that they are doing in the school. During that, if you want to share in the chat anything that resonates with you in the video, we are going to then go into a panel discussion with members from the video that are going to answer questions. And if you have questions for the panelists, we encourage you, while you're watching the video to type it in the chat or the Q&A. So, we can get to those during our panel discussion. So, Amy, do you want to kick off the video

Video: In the heart of Baton Rouge, Louisiana the East Baton Rouge Parish School District is redefining inclusive education, instructing nearly 40,000 students on over 80 campuses. The second largest school district in the state of Louisiana is fostering a culture of collaboration, strategic planning, and innovative programs. They're empowering educators and students alike to exceed expectations. Let's explore some of the transformative efforts that are making a difference.

When I think about our students with disabilities and our educators, it means dedication and resiliency. Also, inclusive leadership. It shows that we're, by providing an equitable service to all of our kids and meeting their needs and needs in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System.

The district's dedication to inclusive leadership ensures that every student can access the general curriculum. Doctor Janet Armelin Harris, Executive Director of Exceptional Student Services, emphasizes the importance of embedding inclusive leadership into every aspect of education, from scheduling to curriculum design. Through the Division of Schools, principals are called in to talk about their scheduling needs for the upcoming year. We've created guidance around master scheduling. Within that guidance, we have submitted recommendations for our students with disabilities.



By engaging principals in comprehensive planning, the district is reducing self-contained classrooms and is fostering an environment where every educator and student can thrive and have a true sense of belonging. In every school in this district, we are pushing inclusion because we want to make sure those students are accessing the general curriculum. We push to ensure there's enough staff available on each campus to ensure that students can be pushed into those regular ed classes to make sure that they are included.

East Baton Rouge Parish School System's commitment to inclusive education goes beyond traditional boundaries. By expanding their infrastructure and emphasizing inclusive leadership, they are breaking down barriers and unlocking the potential of every student. We will continue this momentum by ensuring that we continue to refine IEPs tailored to meet the needs of our students with disabilities. Also, we will continue to invest in our employees, ensuring that they employ the best research practice to ensure that all students meet the needs to their fullest of capabilities. Principals are advised when to develop schedules for students with disabilities, providing with course options for students in need of career courses, and are encouraged to schedule students in a variety of elective courses.

Proudly advocating for her son, Angela Harmon worked closely with the District Assistive Technology Division and IEP team to develop a plan that would support her son. Assistive Technology contacted me and we discussed assessments and evaluations to provide him with the best possible situation to accommodate him. The use of my son's device has created a lot of academic growth. He's engaging more in school and the classroom and his peers.

The school district created an environment where Angela feels supported and engaged in her son's educational experience. Her son has shown growth in his employment and transitional goals, which puts him on track for successfully completing that component of his graduation requirements. At the end of the day, we look at the student, what the student needs and what opportunities we can provide to the students to foster progress, to foster achievement. So through the district's collaborative efforts within the different divisions, we are seeing gains with our students with disabilities. The graduation cohort rate grew significantly. In 2022, it was 53%. In 2023, it grew to 73%. Years of hard work are paying off as a result of effective instruction, staff collaboration and reducing the number of self-contained classrooms. Recent benchmark data shows the number of students performing average or above increased by 14% in 3rd grade mathematics, 17% in English Language Arts 2 and 25% in Algebra 1.

By refining IEPs, investing in educator development, leveraging assistive technology, and actively engaging families, we empower students with disabilities to thrive, fostering academic growth, self-confidence, and independence. The district offers a range of programs and initiatives empowering students with disabilities to excel beyond the classroom. Collaborative efforts across different divisions are witnessing remarkable progress. Programs like JESSI, Jobs for Exceptional Student Service Initiative, provide valuable paid work experiences preparing students for success beyond graduation. The goal of JESSI program is to provide our students with disabilities an opportunity to have paid work experiences.

A great opportunity for students is Project Create which can be an embedded media arts elective or in this case a work-based learning experience where students with disabilities apply for competitive



employment in which they are immersed in creative arts, being paid to learn new skills and work on graphic design and video production projects.

We do have a lot of activities, including the Youth Leadership Initiative to promote inclusion and belongingness for students with disabilities in their school sites. The Department of Exceptional Student Services also hosts an annual Diversity Job Fair where students are able to put their learned work readiness skill to the test and interview for a real job. The district also hosts an annual Transition Fair, providing students and parents with valuable resources and support for academic, social and professional success.

East Baton Rouge Parish School System exemplifies the critical importance of effective inclusion, comprehensive supports, and inclusive leadership. By refining IEPs, investing in educative development, and leveraging assistive technology, they are dismantling barriers and unlocking the potential of every student. This holistic approach underscores the district's dedication to providing exceptional opportunities for all learners, ensuring they achieve their fullest potential. The commitment to family engagement and special programs like the JESSI Program, Student Diversity Job Fair, and Project Create showcases the district's dedication to providing exceptional opportunities for students with disabilities. We provide our students with different opportunities, internships, and work-based learning experiences for them to be productive citizens when they graduate. The success of these initiatives highlights the importance of inclusive leadership, strategic planning, and collaboration. The East Baton Rouge Parish School System is proving that with the right supports and resources, every student can achieve their dreams.

To other school districts, this message is clear. When you embrace inclusive education, invest in your educators, collaborate strategically, and provide diverse pathways for all students, we can create a future where every student has the opportunity to thrive and succeed.

East Baton Rouge Parish Schools created by persuade, persuade.com. Funding for this video provided by the PROGRESS Center.

Sara Evans: Well, it is my pleasure to introduce the team of panelists today. I'm so excited that we've been working on this video and this process for months and to highlight this wonderful work is super exciting for me as a technical assistance provider for PROGRESS Center.

Today we have joining us, Dr. Harris. You saw highlighted in the video. She is the executive director for exceptional student services in East Baton Rouge, Dr. Coates, who is the director of exceptional student services. Dr. Garcia who is a supervisor of exceptional student services. We have Ms. White, who is the exceptional student service instructional support specialist and Ms. Turner, who is also an exceptional student support, instructional support specialist.

So we have a wide variety of representation from the East Baton Rouge district here to talk through how, what you just saw and highlighted in that video. By the way, it gives me goose bumps and chills every time I watch it and it will be available posted on the PROGRESS Center website after this event. We wanted to wait to be able to highlight it in our closing session before we posted it. So if you're looking at wanting to utilize this for something, for yourself in your local context, it will be available for you to use.



I welcome our panelists today. They are an amazing team that has been working relentlessly to change the outcomes for students with disabilities in the East Baton Rouge district. I have had the pleasure to be their technical assistance provider for PROGRESS Center for about 2 years, but they have been a part of PROGRESS Center for almost a little over 3 years now.

And we, as we talk through that today, we're going to highlight how the partnership has helped with this, but also what transform, what transformations have been happening over the years. What you saw highlighted in the video was not something that happened overnight. And they're going to highlight how they started doing this work. So you, as a local educators can think about what you can start doing to see the needle move. Many people right now in the field of special ed feel like the needle is not moving. That we can't change outcomes for students, that we're stuck because of the shortages of educators and the struggles that the field is experiencing, and this district is being able to show that we can make some changes that can help out, change outcomes for students with disabilities. So welcome panelists.

I'm so thankful that you're here with me today, and I look forward to the great discussion. Please use the chat or the Q&A. If you have questions during the panel. We will answer as many as we can live as we have time, but to kick us off, Doctor Coates, I'm going to direct this one to you. East Baton Rouge has seen significant progress for students with disabilities over the last few years, through various systemic changes. Could you tell us what initiated the transformation, and when it all began? Oh, you're muted, Dr. Coates.

Rodney Coates: I apologize, and it began approximately in 2015. And if you don't mind, I'd like to push that to Dr. Garcia so he can speak to it because he was very instrumental in the beginning of.

Sara Evans: Absolutely.

Robert Garcia: Thank, thank you, Doctor Coates. So around 2015 the State Department of Education here in Louisiana actually offered what we call the Jumpstart Pathway for all students in the state of Louisiana, including students who have significant cognitive disabilities.

So for the ones of you who are not from Louisiana, Jumpstart is actually a state initiative that actually provides students an opportunity to follow a career focused pathway. Aside from the university pathway, we also have the Jumpstart Pathway. Prior to this we observed that our students with, especially the ones with significant cognitive disabilities, were actually enrolled in music, art, PE repeatedly year after year, and it's kind of like a pattern across the districts. And even within our district. So our district, EBR schools actually opted to a more inclusive practice. So we decided, by the way, we did have two options, we can focus on sped career classes to be offered to students with significant cognitive disabilities or we could also schedule them to regular education classes. So as a district, we decided to really go for more inclusive career classes where students were enrolled in the regular career classes, including the ones who have severe and profound disabilities.

Sara Evans: I did it too Dr. Coates, forgot to unmute. Can you tell me when that initiative started Dr. Garcia? Was that just a few years ago, or quite a while ago.

Robert Garcia: It was in 2015 when the Jumpstart Pathway was rolled out. So we decided not, it didn't really happen overnight, like you said. You know, we had to get, keep pushing and pushing with the different high schools. We have over 10 high schools across the district. So we had to reach out to these departments and counselors to make it happen.

Sara Evans: Great. So really, your first start in this conversation around thinking about your students with disabilities in a different context, started way back in 2015 and has continued to grow and that systemic change has happened. One of the things I love, that they shared with me, is that since changing and thinking about that in 2015, it brought to light some of the other needs that the district had, in the middle school and the elementary to better prepare their students for those opportunities as they move into high school. And I think that is very critical to point out. That you can start with something small, and it can snowball into more, larger systemic changes over time. As you understand what students need more, how to support their needs better. So thank you for sharing that. Dr. Harris, how has the initial changes influenced the additional systemic changes discussed in the video? How long has the district been working on these additional changes? So we heard Dr. Garcia talk about this initial piece and then, obviously, you shared inclusive leadership changes. You talked about master scheduling meetings. You talked about reducing self-contained classrooms, and you're focusing on instructional practices and educator support. Then you're looking at transitional services in the high school. You shared so much in that video. How did that process happen? And what did that look like for you guys?

Janet Armelin Harris: Oh, I'll start by saying this for the past 4 to 5 years within the district we've had to look at, mostly because of those Jumpstart Pathways and course scheduling, the district departments with the Division of Academics, the Division of Literacy, Division of Schools came together and asked division leaders and some principals to devise a course catalog where we cataloged all of the courses in the district. In the Exceptional Student Services Department here in EBR, or our Sped Department, we were asked to provide course descriptions for students with disabilities at the time. Since that time, the district has engaged in master scheduling meetings. These master scheduling meetings include pretty much every department in the district. So that all the needs from each school in the district, each school leader are heard relative to scheduling. Out of this came the recommendation from the Special Education Department is that principals prioritize students with disabilities when scheduling classes. They are recommended to be scheduled first and foremost, so that they are not forgotten in the process.

Additionally, there's been collaboration with school level staff among IEP development, implementation, programming and all of the services that are provided through the IEPs in the district. Additionally. And I think we spoke about this in the video, and one piece that we are excited about, is our big push towards more inclusive services. The big push, to make sure those students with disabilities are in that regular education classroom, accessing that core instruction so that they are provided with the content area instruction the same as their non-disabled peers.

In our efforts to do this, our Exceptional Student Services Department or our Sped Department is aligned with the Division of Literacy and the Division of Academics. With that alignment we are now tasked with looking at the data of our students, benchmark assessment data, our high stakes testing data, so that we can identify those students who are proficient, those students who are performing above proficiency, and those who are scoring below or well below proficiency levels. We are

identifying our subgroup of students with disabilities through that data to see within each school in the district and drilling it down to each student in the school to see what differentiated methods they need to enhance their progress with literacy and other core content areas.

And additionally, I have to mention the PROGRESS Center here, through our work with the PROGRESS Center, they have helped us with our push towards specially designed instruction and the PD that they have offered to both our regular and special education teachers, along with our special education district staff has been top notch. I can't say any more any. I can't give you all any more accolades than that, because it has been top notch services to our teams here.

And I did mention that we are focused on tracking the data, tracking those students' progress, and with that being said identifying those differentiated instructional methods, we need to help them achieve.

Sara Evans: Well, thank you for that. About our partnership. We have truly enjoyed the work that we've done, and to see the growth that has happened and the hard work that you guys have done. We greatly appreciate that, Doctor Harris, sharing that.

Dr. Coates, over the past three years EBR has implemented several impactful changes, and Dr. Harris just highlighted many of them. What are the three most significant changes that have positively affected the students with disabilities within your district? What do you feel are the top three changes that have had the greatest impact?

Rodney Coates: I think one of the things that we noticed was that departments were working in silos, so we had to bring everyone together to ensure that all students were able to be successful. So there was a big push for the inclusion of students with cognitive disabilities in the regular education classrooms across the district, as well as in extracurricular activities, because we want it to be an all inclusive, to service the whole child, right? So in 2023, last year we implemented something called the Youth Inclusion Leadership Summit. And that was through a partnership with a grant through Unified Champion Schools and Special Olympics.

In addition, we have work-based learning experiences with workforce development with the community partner called Opportunity Now. This allows our students to have an awareness of students with inclusion with students with cognitive disabilities inside the classroom as well as outside of the classroom.

And then the layers of collaboration among staff from district leadership across divisional meetings. As I indicated, you know, not working in silos, but working together collaborative effort to ensure that we have success for all students across the district.

Sara Evans: Awesome. Thank you. I want to turn to Ms Turner and Ms White, who are local educators in the district. And they both hold a role within the district where they're supporting the teachers within the school. Not just special education teachers, but the general education teachers and the families.

And so, Ms Turner I have a question for you—the video highlighted family engagement, and how one parent had an experience with the district, a very positive experience, can you share with us from



school levels how are, your local schools really engaging families within this process? Because that has had a huge impact on your students overall. So what have you been seeing the local schools doing?

Kimberly Turner: So we recognize and we know that studies show that parental involvement and engagement with children, with their children, including through parent teacher conferences and PTO organizations, school events, that that has a grave impact and it can lead to higher achievement and better social, emotional outcomes. So as a result of that, we host a multitude of activities at the elementary, middle, and high school level. And even through our department. For example, on the video you saw the Transition Fair. That's one of our big department activities that we have. And at the Transition Fair, what we do is we invite different agencies and organizations to come out and share information regarding the supports and services that are available for students once they exit. But not only once they exit, but while they're still currently in school as well.

In addition to that, at the school level, elementary, middle, and high. Again, we have activities like literacy night, math and science night, concerts, plays, symphonies. We have mother son dances, father daughter dances. We have Hispanic heritage month activities, autism awareness month activities, holiday activities like Mardi Gras parades and trunk or treat. So we have a multitude of activities and events that are made available for our families to promote the engagement piece.

Sara Evans: And I love hearing you say that Ms Turner, because it speaks to the belonging. I think you know you talk in the video a lot about inclusiveness. But I really think from my perspective, what I'm hearing you say and what I'm experiencing when I'm there and hearing in the video, it's you've created a culture of belonging for your families as well. And that is so critical. And one of the pieces that we shared that Amy Peterson shared this morning as part of that bigger ecosystem to really make that systemic change. And all of those activities really highlight that.

Dr. Harris, excuse me, or Dr. Coates, I'm not sure whichever one wants to answer this one from a district perspective. What have you guys done to highlight the engagement of families within the work that you're doing systemically to make changes with families?
Do you want to share that with us?

Janet Armelin Harris: Yeah, I'll share some, and I'm sure Dr. Coates has some things he'd like to share as well. We, with all the district initiatives that Ms Turner mentioned, the ESS Department has been a part of that. And I want to take the opportunity to share what we, what we are going to be doing within the ESS Department as a part of our reorganization and our rebranding to the community. We have the addition of our exceptional student services parental involvement group, which is inclusive of 4 parent liaisons who are skilled in the area of special education. They have served as special education teachers, instructional support specialists.

We have one parent liaison who is going to be, who is bilingual, who's going to be servicing us in that capacity. But these 4 parent liaisons are charged with the responsibility of coordinating and developing a parental involvement calendar where we're going to provide activities for parents throughout the year.

We want to be a resource for our parents, so that they are educated in those basic tenets of special education, especially those of the IDEA. Where we educate these parents, and we're providing these



parental involvement liaisons to parents. They are strictly for parents, and they will be on hand for those parents who may need representation in IEP meetings, or who may need a person there with them in evaluation, determination of eligibility meetings. They are specifically for parents, however, they're hired to the district.

But we need our parents to know that we care about them, the families, their children, and we want to make them a part of the process, so they can have meaningful participation. And what better way to do this than to engage the community and to engage parents around the roles of these 4 parent liaisons.

Also within our parental involvement scope within the department, we want to make sure that parents see us in community events through our child find activities. So we are engaging in that way with the community as well.

Rodney Coates: I would like to add that Dr. Harris would mention this as the former chair of the special education.

Janet Armelin Harris: Yeah.

Rodney Coates: Parent Advisory Council. So we want parents to have input, right? So there is a, we did form a council for parents to provide input and suggestions to the department of, to our department, to the Special Education Department, to better service and to better provide opportunities for students within our district.

Sara Evans: Awesome. And I'm going to turn this out to anybody because we had a question around family engagement come in in the chat. And it was asking, do you find that families with intellectual or developmental disabilities participate in the community events that Ms Turner referenced at the same rate of those of neurotypical children? So are you finding that you're having those students participate at that same rate? And anyone can answer it. Whoever wants to.

Rodney Coates: Well, Ms Turner could piggyback, but I know that one of the things that we did differently, and the last couple of years was providing an opportunity for families to come out on a Saturday versus on a workday for these opportunities. So when we did that, and, Ms Turner, you could speak to it, we saw numbers increase drastically. We had maybe 200 families participate.

Kimberly Turner: More than 200.

Rodney Coates: More than 200 families participate when we change the way that, to make it more accessible to families versus, then what's convenient to staff.

Sara Evans: Awesome.

Kimberly Turner: Right, and to piggyback off of that I would say, yes with the families. In a lot of instances we see families with students that are most significant, they participate in activities more than our other families. So the answer to that is, yes, they do.



Sara Evans: Awesome. That's great to hear, because I think that's a barrier that many people in the field here today are experiencing where it's hard to get families with students with disabilities, but especially our more significant students engaged in that school community and feel that sense that they belong, and they have a purpose and a role. And so thank you for sharing that.

This one is going to be for Ms White or Dr Garcia. We had a couple of questions come in around transition, before I ask my last couple of questions. Several people are asking around some of the things that were highlighted in the video around your JESSI program. And I know Ms Turner referenced your job fair. And they're asking, what funding sources are you using to support those initiatives? And then, does EBR Parish School System have a relationship with Louisiana Vocational Rehabilitation? So either one of you, I know you do a lot of that work, so either one can take it.

Robert Garcia: So I'm going to start with a background and then I'm going to let Ms Turner and Ms White kind of finish it. So yes, we do have relationship with the Louisiana Rehabilitation Services. With actually through the pre-ETS program, pre-employment transition services through Ioa. And that's of course, that's Federal funding. So what we experienced prior to this being a big JESSI initiative was that we did have difficulties, having our community members to employ our students for gainful, work-based learning experiences. And it was just a struggle. We reached out to different businesses. We couldn't make it happen. So what we decided, we found a partner Opportunity Now who is willing to work with us. So we partnered with them and partnered with the Louisiana workforce rehabilitation services. And we created this program, laid out the different things that you would like to have it. Initially it goes through the EBR School Board. So we had to pay first and then it morphed, evolved into something totally different. And I'm going to let Ms. Turner continue because she is actually facilitating that this currently.

Kimberly Turner: Okay, because we were having such a difficult time, we knew we had to make changes. So the major change that we made was we allowed Opportunity Now, parent company to handle payroll situations for us now. So instead of the district doing it, the parent company for Opportunity Now now pays the kids and the kids are reimbursed through LRS [Louisiana Rehabilitative Services].

So our JESSI program is just simply a work-based learning experience, just like the opportunity that we created with Project Create which is a paid internship. It's just simply a work-based learning experience. So when those kids are paid, they are reimbursed through LRS. So that's the funding source. So it's reimbursement through Louisiana Rehabilitation Services.

Sara Evans: And Ms White, are you guys using pre-ETS or WIDA of funding for not WIDA, sorry, pre-ETS funding for this as well.

Pamela White: Well, I'm going to actually let Dr. Garcia and Ms Turner answer that question. Cause that's more of their area.

Sara Evans: Okay. Sorry.

Robert Garcia: What is the question again?



Sara Evans: Are you using pre-ETS funding? So —

Robert Garcia: Yes, yes. So we get the funding from, so how it works is the Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, they do have pre-ETS funding. And then, of course, we do. They do have a vendor Opportunity Now, where the vendor and their sister company will pay our students, and then the sister company will seek for reimbursement from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services funding. So they receive reimbursements from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services. Our School Board also receives reimbursement from Louisiana Rehabilitation Services, because right now we still have a group of students who actually, their payroll goes through our school board, and so we pay them upfront. And then we seek reimbursement from Louisiana Rehab for pre-ETS funding.

Sara Evans: Great. I honestly think we could do a whole webinar in your transition services. But that's for another time. Ms White, I have a question for you. PROGRESS Center invited EBR to share their successes based on the outcomes in our partnership. You have been instrumental in the relationship as the lead point of contact for us over the last 3 years. Could you explain how the partnership began, how it's evolved over time, and the role the role it's played in driving systemic change within your district? And I know Dr. Harris shared a little bit about that, but you've had a very integral role in that process. So could you share that with us?

Pamela White: Yes, Miss Evans, so our partnership with the PROGRESS Center came about a few years ago under the provision of our previous director, under the leadership of Ms Elizabeth Chapman. She was our previous director of special education, so the goal of this partnership was to pretty much partner with a national organization that could provide us support in improving our practices around special education within our district as a whole.

So at the beginning of our relationship, of course, you know it didn't start off with a bang. We were kind of spending just a little time just trying to sort things out and figure out how the support would look and how this would unfold over time. So initially, we started with pretty much just receiving the technical support on IEP compliance.

We establish an IEP workshop. You know we focus on how our IEP should be written to ensure that they align with the requirements that are outlined by IDEA. And then it pretty much evolved from there to PROGRESS Center, really becoming a partner trainer here in our district, you know, helping to train our instructional support staff, our special education teachers, and our regular education teachers, and even our paraprofessionals. We've even had our trainings with our paraprofessionals as well. So, and that training has been on IEP writing, specially designed instruction, ensuring that the present level of academic performance, our PLAAFP section of the IEP is compliant, using the IEP compliance rubric.

We have many staff members that participated in the, our team. In fact, our PROGRESS Center team actually was able to participate in the PROGRESS Center with the refinement of the PROGRESS Center's ecosystem rubric. We're really happy to be a part of that. And that rubric also helped us to kind of look at our practices here within our district and identify areas of refinement for our department and our district as a whole.



So in addition to that, we were able to really focus on sped practices within our district to improve our students performance. And that was through just the various professional developments that have been offered. The workshop series and most recently the Coaching Institute, and we definitely look forward to those things that we have planned for the future in our relationship and a continued partnership with the PROGRESS Center.

Sara Evans: Awesome. It has been a great partnership. And I would say that we have gained as much from EBR as EBR has gained from us. And learning what local educators have been dealing with especially post Covid, since our center was launched during Covid and the roles and what is happening in our field have changed dramatically. And it's great to know that we have been able to learn from people on the ground to ensure that our resources and our TA materials are usable in a high-quality way for local educators.

I'm going to turn this over to anyone. Whoever wants to take this question. It's one last question. We only have about 3 to 4 more minutes. But if you were, if you were sitting in the audience today and you watched that video and you wanted to make this change in your district and you were back at the beginning in 2015, when you saw only 50 percent of your students in special ed graduating high school, what would you, where would you begin? Who should be involved in this process. And how do you avoid feeling overwhelmed or discouraged? Because I know there's times where I've had some conversations where it's like, what do we? What can we do to keep moving this momentum forward? And you have found ways to do that. So help the audience know how they can start this process and make some similar changes in their district. So whoever wants to take that.

Rodney Coates: I guess I'll start. I guess it. It's helping all stakeholders understand that students that receive special education services are students first. So they have access to all of the general education programs, but they have additional services that, to help them be successful.

So that that's first of the biggest barriers. You know, to try not to have our students secluded, but to have them include. So that's why we have a big push for inclusion right now. And as mentioned throughout this entire presentation, it does take a collaborative effort across every department to ensure that students that receive special education services get the best education that they can throughout the district.

Janet Armelin Harris: And I'll chime in by saying, be bold, be fearless, be inclusive and communicate. Communicate to your district leaders. It takes collaboration of all departments. It takes the mindset that all students can achieve.

Sara Evans: Awesome anybody else.

Rodney Coates: And the data. And utilize the data. And having the data and not actually using it makes a big difference.

Robert Garcia: I'd like to chime in. And this is from the space where with our efforts on the scheduling and even our job initiative — do not stop. You know you will encounter a lot of challenges. You have a lot of ideas, brilliant ideas for our students with disabilities, and do not stop looking for ways, approaching different agencies. That's what we did. We've approached, you know, the local



government, the provincial government about our initiatives. We run into roadblocks then we continue looking for some ways so that we can make it happen for students with disabilities, especially for the work-based learning experiences, similar to scheduling. We had some pushbacks with counseling, we pushed, we pushed and pushed and pushed so that we were able to achieve the systemic change across the district.

Pamela White: And if I can add Ms Evans, just remember it takes effort and collaboration by all. You know not just, although we're working with students with disabilities not just focusing on that special education staff, but ensure we're focusing on special education, regular education, our paraprofessionals and ensuring that everyone is coming together to put forth that effort to support our students.

Janet Armelin Harris: And don't forget about your parents.

Sara Evans: Yep.

Janet Armelin Harris: Parents are your power. Get your parents on board with everything and you'll have a group helping you to sustain whatever momentum you get.

Sara Evans: Well, I want to thank all of you for joining us today and sharing your story. I know that many of you said we're not done yet. In our preparation for this. Like, that we're excited to be highlighted, and we're excited to show that we've made some great growth, but you know you're not there yet, and that you continue to do this work, and you're going to be bold and be fearless and you're going to not quit. And I thank all of you for your work for the students with disabilities in your district, but also sharing your story on a national level, so that others can understand that the needle is moving. And that sometimes all we hear about is the negative in the news and the media, and we forget that there are, there are things happening, and I'm sure there's other districts out there doing similar work. And I hope people can glean from this today that it is really doable, and that it can start with something small, like an initiative that came from a state that maybe the state that maybe you didn't agree with, but you took that and amplified it into something greater. I'm going to turn it back over to our PowerPoint.

And we just want you to take the last few minutes here to fill out a reflection of the entire event. Not just today's closing session, but all the training sessions that you went to all of the opening, the strands, the concurrent sessions that we had, and share with us your experience with that. Help us understand how to make this better for you as a participant, and what other things you might want to hear from us. It should take you no more than just a few minutes.

And we'll leave this up here for just a second as you're filling that out. Because we only have 4 min left in our session.

I just want you to know that— I will reiterate what Amy has said in previous sessions, that all of the information is going to be available on the promotingprogress.org website. And you can find that under events and the Prepping for Progress 2024. Many of you asked in the chat, how can we have access to the video that we shared, that you may want to share the EBR story within your own district or in a context. We will be posting that video on the website too so that you, allow you to access and



share and that will be posted after. This is kind of a movie premiere. We held on to it because we were so excited about it, to premier it today. So please be looking for that on our website under the Prepping for Progress 2024.

And we hope that this, the last 2 days, have allowed you to experience some amazing professional development, hear from educators across the nation around the work that they're doing, connecting with others and finding resources with PROGRESS Center. If PROGRESS Center can be a help to anybody out there in any way, please email us at [promoting progress@air.org](mailto:promotingprogress@air.org) or progresscenter@air.org. Excuse me. Amy will put that in the chat. We'd love to see how we can help you. In your local context in the future as well.

And we'd like to hear from you about struggles that you may have or things that you're doing that amaze, that are amazing and changing outcomes for students with disabilities.

We'll keep this reflection up. You will receive a follow-up email with this in it as well to remind you, if you didn't get a chance to take it today, and you had to jump off to go ahead and fill out the reflection for us.

Amy, is there any other information our audience needs to know from today.

Amy Peterson: I don't think so. I think that was great, Sara. And as a reminder all of that material available for you on the website. If you have any questions or you can't find something, don't hesitate to reach out to us. We will point you in the right direction. We know there's a wealth of resources on there, and sometimes it can be hard to figure out what you need or where to find those resources. But most of all we just want to share our gratitude with all of you for your engagement over these past two days. We know that this is a busy time of year. We know that you have a lot of work to do. We know you have lots of different opportunities for learning, and we are grateful that you took the time to be with us these past couple of days. To share your learning and experiences and all of that with everyone who's here. So thank you! Thank you! Thank you so much for your work with us! And we hope you'll stay connected with us, connect with us on social media, connect with us as our newsletter. Stay up to date on our website, reach out to us at any point. We'd love to connect with you all and learn from you all as well. So thank you EBR team. That was amazing. Thank you, Sara for leading out this session, and we are so grateful for you all. So thank you! Have a great one, and enjoy the last couple weeks of summer.

And I hope you, as we were saying in our session for strategies, for empowering educators and self-directed learning, sometimes we need to reward ourselves with a good ice cream cone. So, after all of these learnings for these past couple of days, I hope you all have a chance to reward yourself with an ice cream cone if you desire, or whatever you desire. Because we're grateful for your work. Thank you!

Sara Evans: Again, to our EBR team for sharing your story today. Have a great afternoon.

Rodney Coates: Thank you all.

Janet Armelin Harris: Thank you.