

2022– 2023

# Diversity Celebration Toolkit

## Together We're Better



## Inclusive Education Campaign



Maryland Developmental  
Disabilities Council  
CREATING CHANGE - IMPROVING LIVES



Division of Early Intervention  
and Special Education Services

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# TOGETHER WE'RE BETTER INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

"Together We're Better" exists to raise awareness and increase acceptance of everyone, highlighting the value and importance of meaningful inclusion for students with disabilities. The primary components of the campaign are:

## Diversity Celebration Toolkit

- Contains activity ideas, sample lesson plans for teachers, videos, books, and other resources to promote inclusion and full participation for all students.

## Disability Awareness Presentations

- Offered free to schools across the State of Maryland and can be hosted in-person or through a virtual platform.

## Elementary and Middle School Artwork Contest

- Students create pieces of unique artwork based on the annual theme of National Inclusive Schools Week.

## High School Drawing Contest

- Students submit original drawings that show how inclusion benefits us all. These drawings are used as pages in this coloring book for younger children to enjoy.

## Public Displays of Artwork Throughout Maryland

- Artwork is showcased at State Government buildings, County libraries, public venues, local Parks and Recreation centers, and on social media.

Together, we can create a more inclusive world for everyone; where children with intellectual and developmental disabilities are fully included in all aspects of life and have equal access to opportunities to succeed!

Visit The Arc Maryland's website to learn more about **Together We're Better**. You can use your smart phone to scan this QR code or visit our website on your computer's internet browser:

<http://www.thearcmd.org/programs/twb/>



# ABOUT THE TOOLKIT



This toolkit was designed by The Arc Maryland, with support from it's statewide "Together We're Better" Inclusive Education Campaign partners:

Maryland State Department of Education – Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services  
Maryland Department of Disabilities  
Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council

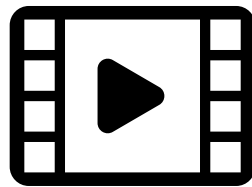
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## WHO CAN USE THE TOOLKIT?

# ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

Content in this toolkit is aligned with **Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)** competencies and Maryland Health Education Standards. Enhance student learning by using these resources!



Social and emotional learning (SEL) is an integral part of education and human development. SEL is the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions.



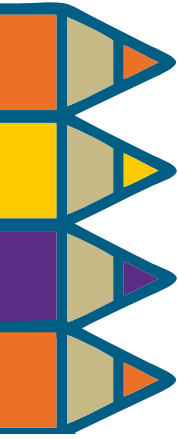
"Students today are more anxious, less connected, and more likely to have experienced trauma—a threat to their safety, agency, dignity, and belonging—than they were two years ago. And these experiences have been most profound for students marginalized by race, ethnicity, and ability."  
(Education Weekly, 2021)

The CASEL 5 addresses five broad and interrelated areas of competence and highlights examples for each: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. The CASEL 5 can be taught and applied at various developmental stages from childhood to adulthood and across diverse cultural contexts. Many school districts, states, and countries have used the CASEL 5 to establish preschool to high school learning standards and competencies that articulate what students should know and be able to do for academic success, school and civic engagement, health and wellness, and fulfilling careers.

**Source:** [Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning \(CASEL\)](#)

# INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS WEEK

Celebrate National Inclusive Schools Week, December 5th–9th!



Check out the "Together We're Better" Artwork and Drawing Contests around the theme of National Inclusive Schools Week for 2022: Unity Within Our Community!

**Elementary and Middle School students:**

<http://www.thearcmd.org/programs/twb/artwork-contest/>

**High School students:**

<http://www.thearcmd.org/programs/twb/hs-drawing-contest/>



**The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN)** hosts the Annual Inclusive Schools Week during the first week of December. ISN's mission is "to encourage, embolden and empower people to design and implement effective inclusive schools, by sharing insights and best practices and by providing opportunities for connection." <https://inclusiveschools.org/>

The ISN provides year-round opportunities for families and educators around the world to network and build their knowledge of inclusive education. The Inclusive Schools Network is guided by the following three principles:

- **Relationships** – To be "inclusive" implies a fundamental commitment to relationships across student peers, colleagues in education and the community, parents, siblings, and the larger family unit and across the global community.
- **Resources** – Extensive bank of resources to be easily accessed through the website; and will identify areas in which new ideas and solutions are required – and in which new strategies, tools, sites to visit, and other resources will support the advance of inclusive education to a new level.
- **Research** – Inclusive education practices are fully grounded in concepts of equity and civil rights yet research tied to academic achievement, post-school success, and improved outcomes for all students is not available in the quantity and quality needed to facilitate widespread acceptance and buy-in for many stakeholders.

***But don't limit your inclusive practices to just one week, check out the rest of the toolkit to see how you can make meaningful inclusion an everyday practice!***



# WHAT DOES INCLUSIVE EDUCATION REALLY MEAN?

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MEANS** we no longer accept that separate classrooms, separate schools, and separate lives are in the best interest of any student. Separating people by ability disadvantages everyone. Belonging is a human need. Our educational system, practices, and spaces, need to be reimaged.

**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MEANS** every student is valued because of their strengths, gifts, and even challenges. As disability is simply... diversity. Everyone benefits from meaningful participation and opportunities to learn grade level content with diverse peers. We must trust that all students come to us as incredible whole people who do not need to be fixed.

**IT IS POSSIBLE TO CREATE INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS WHERE ALL STUDENTS FLOURISH!**

## TO ACHIEVE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION WE MUST:

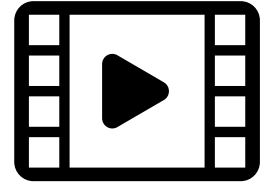


- 1. REDESIGN SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES** that center and value our human diversity, foster strong relationships, and create a true sense of belonging between and among us
- 2. PRIORITIZE HIRING** diverse and inclusive-minded leaders, creative and compassionate educators, and skillful paraprofessionals
- 3. ELIMINATE BARRIERS** to students' access, participation, and learning by abandoning inequitable practices, policies, and procedures
- 4. CREATE WELCOMING SPACES** where students' multiple identities are seen and celebrated
- 5. CO-TEACH AND COLLABORATE EFFECTIVELY** by sharing instructional roles, designing authentic lessons, and generating joy filled learning experiences
- 6. PARTNER WITH FAMILIES** to incorporate their dreams for their children
- 7. DIFFERENTIATE TO CREATE ACCESS POINTS** that allow students to engage in meaningful experiences, share their thoughts and ideas, and demonstrate their competence
- 8. PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT** and enrichment for ALL - continuously and seamlessly - when and where students need it
- 9. UTILIZE CHALLENGING BEHAVIORS** as an opportunity to create warm and safe relationships, reduce stressors, soothe systems, and nurture students' well-being

**BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE, TAKE ACTION, AND WATCH STUDENTS THRIVE!**

# VIDEOS

Featuring people with disabilities discussing their experiences in school and explaining why inclusion is important to them.



## More Watch & Learn Videos

**Talk to Me Physical Disability Awareness (Phoebe)** | 3-minutes (Grades 3 – 8)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL8GMxRW\\_5Y](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL8GMxRW_5Y)

**Disability Sensitivity Training Video** Many of us don't know "how" to interact with people who have disabilities but it's pretty simple. People with disabilities are people first and have the same human needs as you | 4-minutes (Grades 7 – 12)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gv1aDEFIXq8>

**"Ian"** tells the story of a boy with Cerebral Palsy whose fierce determination to be included on his local playground changes the beliefs and actions of his community | 9-minutes (Grades 2 – 5)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz\\_d-cikWml](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz_d-cikWml)

**Tamara** A delicate and sensitive short animation about passion, limits, and life. A film about the power of a child's dream and overcoming obstacles | 4-minutes (Grades K – 3) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4frsp-rR6c>  
[list=PLAJFhAOG3SCd4XvNshmlvesc7iIsHlr55](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4frsp-rR6c&list=PLAJFhAOG3SCd4XvNshmlvesc7iIsHlr55)

**What's Up With Nick?** In an effort to promote a more inclusive classroom environment, this short video uses animation and sound to teach students about their peers with autism | 3-minutes (Grades 2 – 5)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtRYKjucDHk&list=PLAJFhAOG3SCd4XvNshmlvesc7iIsHlr55&index=2>

**Be a Mr. Jensen** Clint Pulver wasn't always a motivational speaker and professional musician. Before all of that success, Clint was just a 10-year-old boy who didn't know how to sit still. His life was forever impacted because a teacher named Mr. Jensen saw Clint's "problem" as a solution | 3-minutes (Grades 3 – 5) Also for educators and school staff!  
<https://clintpulver.com/educators/>

**I'm Tyler** A powerful catalyst for students to talk about assumptions they make about people with disabilities and about all of their peers | 12-minutes (Grades 6 – 10) <http://imtyler.org/index.php/video/>

**Lea Goes To School #IncludeUsFromTheStart** Let our story begin the right way. Check out <http://www.includeusfromthestart.com> to learn more about inclusive education | 3-minutes (Grades 2 – 5) Also for educators and school staff! [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I\\_QGlbwwCy4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I_QGlbwwCy4)

**Katie's Disability Awareness Video** Provides tips on Disability Etiquette in kid-friendly terms. The illustrations are taken from a children's book, "How Katie Got a Voice (and a Cool New Nickname)" | 3-minutes (Grades 2 – 5)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0fs9650Vz8>

**"Friendship Adventures: Invisible Disabilities"** Sometimes disabilities are inside of our bodies, not on the outside. Learn how to be a good friend to someone who has diabetes, an invisible disability | 5-minutes (Grades 4 – 8)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brVxm8tqsC4>

**"I am a person"** A public service announcement created by students about ending the use of the "R" word | 1-minute (Grades 5 – 9)  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTGo\\_dp\\_s-k](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kTGo_dp_s-k)

**DISABILITY | How you see me** What about you makes you a FABULOUS person? How do you think people see you as someone with a disability? | 3-minutes (Grades 7 – 10)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwW6mYdJ7Xc>

**Voices for the Voiceless** Frank Stephens grew up in a world that questioned his worth. But he's determined to build a more loving and inclusive world for people with Down Syndrome | 3-minutes (Grades 9 – 12)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQNW9x7Z08Y>

# FOR EDUCATORS



## Online Resources



## Books

## CREATING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING

[TIES Center](https://tiescenter.org/) is the national technical assistance center on inclusive practices and policies. It works with states, districts, and schools to support the movement of students with disabilities from less inclusive to more inclusive environments. <https://tiescenter.org/>

### Reflecting Together

TIES Center encourages you to reflect as a team on how belonging is experienced by students with disabilities throughout your school. Gather fellow teachers, specialized instructional support personnel, administrators, and other school staff. Invite the perspectives of students with and without disabilities. Speak with parents and other family members of students with and without disabilities. Each will have unique insights into this topic, as well as diverse recommendations on how to move forward.

<https://publications.ici.umn.edu/ties/peer-engagement/belonging/introduction>

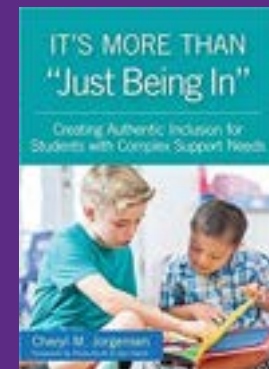
*"When children are included from the start, they are given the best opportunity to develop mutual respect, understanding, and the skills they need to live together in today's diverse communities."*



### [Your Students, My Students, Our Students: Rethinking Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms](#)

By Lee Ann Jung, Nancy Frey, Douglas Fisher, and July Kroener

This book addresses the challenges, maps out the solutions, and provides tools and inspiration for the work ahead. Real-life examples of empowerment and success illustrate just what's possible when educators commit to the belief that every student belongs and all students deserve learning experiences that will equip them to live full and rewarding lives.



### [It's More Than "Just Being In" Creating Authentic Inclusion for Students with Complex Support Needs](#)

By Cheryl M. Jorgensen; Forwards by Paula Kluth & Dan Habib

For students with disabilities, including those with complex support needs, inclusion means more than just physical presence in a classroom—it means full participation and valued membership in their school community. This book is your school team's practical blueprint for making authentic inclusion happen in K–12 classrooms.



# AUTISM ACCEPTANCE RESOURCES



## Online Resources

**Organization for Autism Research (OAR)** is a hub for research and resources around Autism Spectrum Disorder.

<https://researchautism.org/> OAR's Teacher's Corner is full of resources for teachers to learn how to better support students on the autism spectrum in the classroom: <https://researchautism.org/education/teachers-corner/>

**The Autism Society of America** For 57 years and counting, the Autism Society, including their nationwide network of affiliates, has connected people to the resources they need through education, advocacy, support, information and referral, and community programming.

<https://autismsociety.org/resources-by-topic/>

**Pathfinders for Autism** is a non-profit organization that provides resources and training to families, educators and others. Established in 2000 by parents of children with autism, Pathfinders for Autism has since grown into Maryland's largest autism organization. On their resources tab, you can find recorded webinars, statistics and other helpful information. <https://pathfindersforautism.org/>

**ASAN** is the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, a non-profit organization run by and for people with autism. ASAN is a national grassroots disability rights organization whose members advocate for disability rights. <https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/>



**Understanding Autism: Professional Development Curriculum** This ready-made, flexible resource supports all types of professional development – large group (e.g. staff meetings or in-services), small teams (e.g. professional learning communities and department meetings), self-study, and/or one-on-one coaching. <https://researchautism.org/resources/curriculum-in-a-box/understanding-autism-professional-development-curriculum/>

**Understanding Autism: A Guide for Secondary School Teachers** is a comprehensive professional development training tool that prepares secondary school teachers to serve the autism population. <https://researchautism.org/resources/curriculum-in-a-box/understanding-autism-professional-development-curriculum/understanding-autism-part-2/>

# EDUCATIONAL GAMES FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



Online Resources

## *For Developing Social Skills:*

The **Social Express** provides kids with animated, real-life experiences of navigating social situations that are a part of daily routine.

<https://www.brightenlearning.com/>

**Way** is the next level for online gaming to improve social skills among children. It calls for collaboration and communication between pairs of participants. This way, the children learn the importance of team spirit and also different ways of non-verbal communication.

<https://makeourway.com/>

**Zoo U** is an excellent online evidence-based game for building social-emotional skills in children. Students in this game get to choose their own avatars and then communicate and interact with other characters.

<https://student.centervention.com/>

**Hall of Heros** is specially designed for **new middle school students** to help them overcome the social anxiety of joining new classes and being in a more mature social surrounding.

<https://www.centervention.com/hall-of-heroes/>

## *For Self-Exploration, College & Career Readiness:*

**Future Quest Island-Explorations (FQI-E)**

is an online accessible college & career readiness curriculum that uses gaming strategies to motivate and support improved self-concept, social and emotional competence, and early college and career awareness for upper elementary students with and without disability in **grades 3-5** using the evidenced-based "Possible Selves" framework.

This online curriculum allows students to choose an avatar and hovercraft where they progress through a series of lessons on a cluster of islands, exploring student's perceptions of themselves in various roles: Person, Learner, Worker, and Friend.

Using the principles of universal design for learning, FQI-E is designed so that all students can create e-portfolios of their hopes, dreams, and goals as a person, learner, worker, and friend.

<https://futurequestisland.weebly.com/>

## *For Young Learners:*

**Sesame Street Games** work on early elementary skills, such as identifying letters of the alphabet, emotions, thinking skills and even games on self-confidence. These familiar characters are relatable to all children and provide a fun and entertaining learning environment for all. Play for free!

<https://www.sesamestreet.org/games>

**4Kidz** is another free website that offers a variety of games designed for younger children, including children with disabilities. The games are designed to develop motor skills, increase attention span and also improve hand-eye coordination. <https://www.4kids.org/games/>

# FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



**Collette in Kindergarten** By Collette Divitto (Grades 1-5)

When Collette, a young girl with Down syndrome, begins her first year of school, her bubbly personality helps her make friends right away. Soon, Collette notices these new friends are not inviting her to playdates--but it's not because they don't want to invite her. Collette comes up with a great idea to show her classmates' parents a new way of thinking. Based on real-life experiences this book shows us how important it is to practice acceptance throughout our lives, just as children do so freely every day.



**The Autism Acceptance Book: Being a Friend to Someone with Autism** By Ellen Sobin

(Grades 1-5) An interactive and character-building book that introduces children to the challenges faced by people with autism while also supporting their personal journey toward appreciating and respecting people's differences. The book offers information, conversation-starters, and engaging exercises that invite children to "walk in someone else's shoes" as they learn to treat others the same ways they would like to be treated.



**My Brother has Autism/Mi hermano tiene autismo** By Richard Carlson Jr. (Grades K-3)

This is a story about Richard, whose younger brother Kevin is autistic. It's based on true life events from the author's life and that of his brother, the illustrator.

Acerca del libro: Mi hermano tiene autismo es la historia de Richard, cuyo hermano menor, Kevin, es autista. La historia se basa en eventos verdaderos de la vida del autor y la de su hermano, el ilustrador.



**Ben's Adventures: A Day at the Beach** By Elizabeth Gerlach (Grades K-3)

Ben loves to imagine some big adventures. He'll make you smile as you follow him to the beach for a fun day of sand, sun, castles, and crabs! It's a sweet story inspired by the author's son and has subtle themes of inclusion, friendship and joy. Ben shows us that ALL kids can play and dream.



**How I Learn: A Kid's Guide to Learning Disability** By Brenda S. Miles and Colleen Patterson

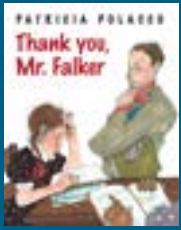
(Grades 1-4) When a child struggles in school, it is difficult to find the words to help. How do you explain learning problems to a child? This book provides a simple explanation of why some children struggle. It introduces learning disability in concrete terms for younger students, emphasizing that they are capable of learning, but they do so in a different way.



**Princess Panda Tea Party: A Cerebral Palsy Fairy Tale** By Jewel Kats (Grades 1-3)

Michelle, age eight, has cerebral palsy and lives at an all-girls orphanage, she is teased for using a walker for mobility. One day, she buys a toy stuffed panda at the local Salvation Army store. When opportunity strikes for the orphanage girls to compete for the privilege of tea with the Queen of England, Michelle's enchanted panda comes to life and her world will never be the same!

# FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



Also available in Spanish! [Gracias, Sr. Falker](#)

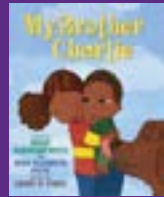
[Thank You, Mr. Falker](#) By Patricia Polacco (Grades K-3)

The real-life story of a dyslexic girl and the teacher who would not let her fail. It's about a little girl named Trisha starting school. Trisha could paint and draw beautifully, but when she looked at words on a page, all she could see was jumble. It took a very special teacher to recognize little Trisha's dyslexia: Mr. Falker, who encouraged her to overcome her reading disability.



[Rescue & Jessica: A Life-Changing Friendship](#) By Jessica Kensky and Patrick Downes

(Grades K-4) Rescue thought he'd grow up to be a Seeing Eye dog. But when he gets the news that he's better suited to being a service dog, he's worried that he's not up to the task. Then he meets Jessica, a girl whose life is turning out differently than the way she'd imagined it, too. Now Jessica needs Rescue by her side to help her accomplish everyday tasks. And it turns out that Rescue can help Jessica see after all: a way forward, together, one step at a time.



[My Brother Charlie](#) By Holly Robinson Peet and Ryan Elizabeth Peete (Grades K-4)

Charlie has autism. His brain works in a special way. It's harder for him to make friends. Or show his true feelings. Or stay safe." But as his big sister tells us, for everything that Charlie can't do well, there are plenty more things that he's good at. Holly Robinson Peete collaborates with her daughter on this book based on Holly's 10-year-old son, who has autism.



[Days With Dad](#) By Nari Hong (Grades Pre-K-3)

Her dad can't walk. But she doesn't care about what he can't do, what she loves is what they do together! Days With Dad is a heartwarming story of love and appreciation between a young girl and her dad, who uses a wheelchair. Narrated by the daughter, the story follows an ongoing conversation between the two about the father's regret over what he is unable to do with his daughter because of his reliance on a wheelchair. But his daughter makes it clear that there's nothing to feel badly about.



[Pedro's Whale](#) By Paula Kluth (Grades 1-2)

Pedro, is heartbroken when he's told to put away his favorite toy whale on the first day of school. But then Pedro's teacher discovers the secret to helping him do his best work: not only giving him his whale, but incorporating his special interest into the whole curriculum. Soon, Pedro's whale is helping all the children learn, as the teacher works whales into math lessons, science experiments, and more! Pedro's whale helps him make friends, as the other children start to share his special interest.



[The Big Umbrella](#) By Amy June Bates and Juniper Bates (Grades K-3)

A simple book about inclusion, hospitality, and welcoming others. By the door there is an umbrella. It is big. It is so big that when it starts to rain there is room for everyone underneath. It doesn't matter if you are tall. Or plaid. Or hairy. It doesn't matter how many legs you have. There will always be enough room under the umbrella for everyone.

# FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



## Books



**[The Prince Who Was Just Himself](#)** By Silke Schnee (Grades Pre-K-3)

The royal couple is looking forward to their third child. "He looks a little different," says the king at Prince Noah's arrival. However, when the youngest prince disarms the cruel knight Scarface, the nation's most dreaded enemy, with an act of compassion, everyone finally realizes how good it is that each person is unique. This book instills appreciation for children with Down Syndrome and other developmental challenges, making it a valuable aid for teaching tolerance in the classroom.



**[The Girl Who Thought in Pictures: The Story of Dr. Temple Grandin](#)** By Julia Finley Mosca (Grades 1-3)

When young Temple was diagnosed with autism, no one expected her to talk, let alone become one of the most powerful voices in modern science. Yet, the determined visual thinker did just that. Her unique mind allowed her to connect with animals in a special way, helping her invent groundbreaking improvements for farms around the globe! This is the first book in an educational series about the inspirational lives of amazing scientists.



**[Stephen Hawking \(Little People, Big Dreams, 27\)](#)** By Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara (Grades Pre-K-2)

When Stephen Hawking was a little boy, he used to stare up at the stars and wonder about the universe. Although he was never top of the class, his curiosity took him to the best universities in England. While in graduate school, at age 21, he was diagnosed with Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), commonly referred to as Lou Gehrig's disease. It also led him to make one of the biggest scientific discoveries of the 20th century: Hawking radiation.



**[Keeping Up With Roo](#)** By Sharlee Glenn (Grades 1-3)

On the farm where Roo lives with Grandma and Grandpa, they climb trees and play school, with Gracie always the student. Eventually, Gracie becomes the teacher, having advanced beyond Roo's limited capabilities. Having always been best friends with her Aunt Roo, Gracie, who has an intellectual disability. As Gracie gets older, she finds new friends, and discovers the differences between the two worlds in which they live. When a school friend visits, Gracie is embarrassed to introduce her to her aunt, but as she shows the girl around, she realizes all Roo has done for her.



**[I'm NOT Just a Scribble](#)** By Dianne Alber (Grades K-3)

A story about kindness and inclusion. Scribble, the book's main character, never thought he was different until he met his first drawing. After being left out because he didn't look like everyone else. Scribble teaches the drawings how to accept each other for who they are, which enables them to create amazing art. This book not only has illustrations that any child can personally recognize but it also addresses inclusion without boundaries so that anyone can relate to it.



**[Wilma Rudolph \(Little People Big Dreams, 27\)](#)** By Maria Isabel Sanchez Vegara (Grades Pre-K-2)

Wilma was born into a family with 22 brothers and sisters, in the segregated South. She contracted Polio in her early years and her doctors said she would never walk again. But Wilma persisted with treatment, and she recovered her strength by the age of 12. Wilma was in college when she went to the 1960 Olympics. She not only won gold in sprint events, but also broke world records with her sprinting skill. She had beaten Polio to become an Olympic champion and is an inspiration to many women in sports around the world.

# FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



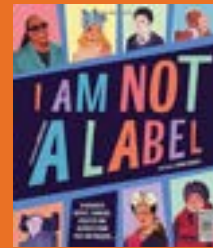
*True Stories About Famous People with Disabilities and Mental Health Conditions*



**A Mind Like Mine: 21 Famous People and their Mental Health** By Rachel Davis (Grades 3-7)

From Michelangelo to Deepika Padukone, Ada Lovelace to Freddie Flintoff, a great many successful people with brilliant minds and talents have lived or are living with mental health conditions.

The biographies in this book show that you can't always tell what is behind a person's eyes. This book helps to remove some of the stigma around mental health, discuss different mental health conditions, what they mean and how they are treated; and ultimately to show that mental health diagnoses do not have to hold anyone back from achieving their dreams. The figures featured are from a range of diverse backgrounds and disciplines across science, literature, art, music, sports, politics, and popular culture.



**I Am Not A Label** By Carrie Burnell (Grades 1-7)

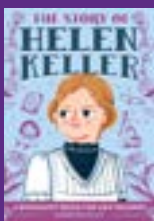
In this stylishly illustrated biography anthology, meet 34 artists, thinkers, athletes, and activists with disabilities, from past and present. From Frida Kahlo to Stephen Hawking, find out how these iconic figures have overcome obstacles, owned their differences, and paved the way for others by making their bodies and minds work for them.

These short biographies tell the stories of people who have faced unique challenges that have not stopped them from becoming trailblazers, innovators, advocates, and makers. Each person is a leading figure in their field, be it sports, science, math, art, breakdancing, or the world of pop.



**Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille** By Jen Bryant (Grades K-3)

Louis Braille was just five years old when he lost his sight. He was a clever boy, determined to live like everyone else, and what he wanted more than anything was to be able to read. Even at the school for the blind in Paris, there were no books for him. So he invented his own alphabet—a whole new system for writing that could be read by touch. A system so ingenious that it is still used by the blind community today.



**The Story of Helen Keller: A Biography Book For New Readers** By Christine Platt (Grades 1-3)

Helen Keller became a celebrated author, educator, and activist who believed in equality for people with disabilities. Before she made history as the first deaf and blind person to graduate from college, Helen was a smart kid who loved learning. She overcame many challenges to learn how to read, write, and talk. She spoke up for other people with disabilities so they could get equal rights. See how Helen Keller went from being a young girl in Alabama to the world-famous First Lady of Courage.

# FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



Also available in Spanish! [La lección de August](#)

[Wonder](#) by R.J. Palacio (Grades 3-7)

August Pullman was born with a facial difference that, up until now, has prevented him from going to a mainstream school. Starting 5th grade, he wants nothing more than to be treated as an ordinary kid—but his new classmates can't get past Auggie's extraordinary face. It's a portrait of one community's struggle with empathy, compassion, and acceptance.



[We All Have Different Abilities](#) By Michelle Higgins (Grades Pre-K-2)

What can you do? Tie your shoes? Play the piano? Everyone has different talents and abilities. Let's share and celebrate our many talents! This book is a great teaching tool about how we are all more similar than different.



[Restart](#) by Gordon Korman (Grades 4-8)

Chase's memory just went out the window. Chase doesn't remember falling off the roof. He doesn't remember anything. He wakes up in a hospital room and suddenly has to learn his whole life all over again . . . starting with his own name. Who is Chase? When he gets back to school, he sees that different kids have very different reactions to his return.



[I Can't Find my Whatchamacallit!!!](#) By Julia Cook (Grades 3-5)

Cletus and Bocephus are cousins, yet they are nothing alike. Extremely creative Cletus can't find anything in his room. Bocephus, on the other hand, is the most organized person on the planet. This book highlights the importance of being organized in a creative, applicable way. It also spotlights the unique differences and strengths that live in all of us and how we can all help each other.



[Since We're Friends](#) By Celeste Shally (Grades K - 3)

Matt's autism doesn't keep him from having fun! Even when he struggles in social situations, his friend is there to help him out. By working together, a best friend's understanding and compassion change Matt's frustration into excitement. This book is the perfect guide to better understand people with Autism Spectrum Disorders.



[Nelson Beats the Odds](#) By Ronnie Sidney II (Grades 3-6)

Nelson used to think school was all about playing around and talking with his friends. When Nelson learns that he has been placed in Special Education, he fears being teased. Because of this, he keeps his learning disability and ADHD diagnosis a secret. With the encouragement of his parents and his Special Education teacher, Nelson pushes the boundaries and discovers his potential. "Nelson Beats The Odds" is an inspiring story that celebrates friendship, resilience and empowerment.

# FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS



## Books



**Katie Can: A Story About Special Needs** By Erin Palmer (Grades K-3)  
Katie loves school and her family, she's just like you! Katie has Down Syndrome, but that's not what makes her so special. Find out what makes Katie so unique! More than just an engaging book about different abilities, differences, and acceptance, this kids book also includes a vocabulary list, reading tips and activities, as well as comprehension questions.



**No One Needed to Know** By D.G. Driver (Grades 3-6)  
Heidi's older brother, Donald, is 16 and has autism. She has always loved playing with him, but now she's 11 and her life is changing. She's embarrassed to have her brother around and doesn't want her friends to know about him. High school boys bully him. When the kids at her school find out about him, she gets bullied too. No one seems to understand what she's going through. Heidi can't change her brother, but she can change how she feels about him. And she can get people to see why her brother is special.



**The View from Saturday** By E.L. Konigsburg (Grades 4-6)  
How had Mrs. Olinski chosen her sixth-grade Academic Bowl team? She had a number of answers. But were any of them true? Mrs. Olinski, returning to teaching after having been injured in an automobile accident, found that her Academic Bowl team became her answer to finding confidence and success. This is about a team, a class, a school, a series of contests and, four jewel-like short stories that ask questions and demonstrate surprising answers.



**Chester and Gus** By Cammie McGovern (Grades 3-7)  
Chester has always wanted to become a service dog. When he fails his certification test, though, it seems like that dream will never come true—until a family adopts him. They want him to be a companion for their ten-year-old son, Gus, who has autism. But Gus acts so differently than anyone Chester has ever met. Chester's not sure how to help Gus since this isn't exactly the job he trained for—but he's determined to figure it out.



**Rolling Along: The Story of Taylor and his Wheelchair** By Jamee Heelan (Grades 1-4)  
This triumphant story offers a valuable look at both adjusting to a wheelchair and approaching physical differences with boundless energy and determination. Taylor and Tyler are twin brothers and best friends. But the twins are different in one big way: Taylor has Cerebral Palsy, while Tyler does not. When he learns to use a wheelchair, he finds that he is able to get around school more quickly than he could with his walker. He is even able to play basketball with Tyler!



**My Three Best Friends and Me, Zulay** By Cari Best (Grades K - 3)  
Zulay and her three best friends are all in the same first grade class and study the same things, even though Zulay is blind. When their teacher asks her students what activity they want to do on Field Day, Zulay surprises everyone when she says she wants to run a race. With the help of an aide and the support of her friends, Zulay does just that.



# FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS



## Books



Also available in Spanish! *Como pez en el árbol*.

**Fish in a Tree** By Lynda Mullaly Hunt (Grades 5-9)

Ally has been smart enough to fool a lot of smart people. Every time she lands in a new school, she is able to hide her inability to read by creating clever yet disruptive distractions. She discovers that there's a lot more to her—and to everyone—than a label, and that great minds don't always think alike. This uplifting novel that will speak to anyone who's ever thought there was something wrong with them because they didn't fit in.



**El Deafo** By Cece Bell (Grades 6 - 8) Starting at a new school is scary, especially with a giant hearing aid strapped to your chest! At her old school, everyone in Cece's class was deaf. Here, she's different. She's sure the kids are staring at the Phonic Ear, the powerful aid that will help her hear her teacher. Reframing her bulky hearing aid as a superpower, Bell illustrates her desire to fit in with her classmates, losing her hearing, and trying to make friends. The result is a funny and touching story of living with a disability and embracing differences.



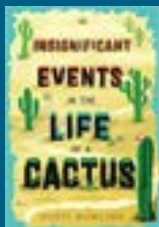
**Resonating the Sound** By Linda Mitchell Maddox (Grades 5 - 8)

The novel that takes place during the eighth-grade year of a girl who has suffered a Traumatic Brain Injury during sixth grade and finally agrees to use an augmentative communication device after not regaining any of her vocal abilities. A special relationship develops between her and a boy in her class who has Asperger Syndrome. He plays a major role in altering the device, which gives the main character access to pieces of a dream she thought were lost forever.



**Extraordinary** By Miriam Spitzer Franklin (Grades 2-7)

Last spring, Pansy chickened out right before going to spring break camp, even though she'd promised her best friend, Anna, they'd go together. But Pansy never got the chance to make it up to Anna. At camp, Anna contracted meningitis and a high fever, and she hasn't been the same since. Now all Pansy wants is her daring best friend back—not the silent girl in the wheelchair who has to go to a special school. What lies at the end of Pansy's journey might not be exactly what she had expected—or wanted.



**Insignificant Events In The Life of A Cactus** By Dusti Bowling (Grades 3-7)

Aven Green loves to tell people that she lost her arms in an alligator wrestling match, or a wildfire in Tanzania, but the truth is she was born without them. Aven's family moves to Arizona. Her new life takes an unexpected turn when she bonds with Connor, a classmate who also feels isolated because of his own disability. It's hard to solve a mystery, help a friend, and face your worst fears. But Aven's about to discover she can do it all, even without arms.

# FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS



## The Summer of the Swans By Betsy Byars (Grades 6-8)

A coming-of-age story that follows 14-year-old Sara Godfrey, a girl caught between a family crisis and her own adolescent struggles. The novel spans roughly 24 hours as Sara searches for her 10-year-old brother Charlie (with an intellectual disability) who goes missing. She must draw upon hidden strength in order to find him. With its third person point-of-view, the novel explores agency and identity, grief and loss, and above all, various social dynamics – explored by both Sara and Charlie’s viewpoints.



## Fighting for Dontae By Mile Castan (Grades 6-9)

Javier hates seventh grade, his father’s locked up, and his mother can’t be relied on. When he is assigned to work with the special education class, Javier thinks that the one thing he had going for him in middle school--his social life--is over. Little by little, though, Javier realizes that he actually enjoys reading to Dontae, a severely disabled boy his age. When everything else around him is falling apart, working with Dontae becomes the one thing worth fighting for.



## Out of My Mind By Sharon M. Draper (Grades 5 - 8)

Eleven-year-old Melody is not like most people. She doesn’t walk. She doesn’t talk. She can’t write. All because she has cerebral palsy. But she also has a photographic memory; she can remember every detail of everything she has ever experienced. She’s the smartest kid in her whole school, but NO ONE knows it. Most people—her teachers, her doctors, her classmates—dismiss her as someone who has severe disabilities because she can’t tell them otherwise. But Melody is determined to show everyone just how much she does really know.



## My Louisiana Sky By Kimberly Willis Holls (Grades 6-8)

Tiger Ann Parker is smart in school but she’s forever teased about her family by the girls in class. She wants nothing more than to get out of the rural town of Saitter, Louisiana—far away from her family. Her family is different from others because her aunt and father have intellectual disabilities. One day, Aunt Dorie Kay arrives, offering Tiger Ann a way out. Now, Tiger Ann must make the most important decision of her life.



## The Ables By Jeremy Scott (Grades 7-12)

Excited to begin high school until he discovers he’s assigned to a "special ed" class for disabled empowered kids, Phillip suddenly feels like an outsider. Bullied, threatened, and betrayed, Phillip struggles, even as he and his friends--calling themselves the Ables--find ways to maximize their powers to overcome their disabilities, and are the first to identify the growing evil threatening humanity.

# FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS



## The Running Dream By Wendelin Van Draanen (Grades 7 - 12)

When Jessica is told she'll never run again, she puts herself back together—and learns to dream bigger than ever before. As she struggles to cope, Jessica feels that she's both in the spotlight and invisible. People who don't know what to say act like she's not there. Jessica's embarrassed to realize that she's done the same to a girl with cerebral palsy, named Rosa; a girl who is going to tutor her through all the math she's missed. With the support of family, friends, a coach, and her track teammates, Jessica may actually be able to run again. She doesn't just want to cross finish lines herself—she wants to take Rosa with her.



## Pinned By Sharon G. Flake (Grades 9-12)

Autumn and Adonis have nothing in common and everything in common. Autumn is outgoing and has lots of friends. Adonis is shy and not so eager to connect with people. Autumn has a learning disability. Adonis is confined to a wheelchair. He has no legs. But he's a strong reader who loves books. Autumn and Adonis are forced to see that our greatest weaknesses can turn into the assets that forever change us and those we love. Issues of self-discovery, friendship, and what it means to be different are explored.



## Rules By Cynthia Lord (Grades 7-12)

Twelve-year-old Catherine just wants a normal life. Which is nearly impossible when you have a brother with autism and a family that revolves around his disability. The story follows a brother with autism and a sister who shares a lot of responsibility for teaching her brother the rules of getting along in a world that does not always have compassion and understanding for someone with autism. Catherine creates rules to help David understand how to live in the world. Catherine also learns a few lessons about other disabilities.



## The Lightning Thief By Rick Riordan (Grades 7-12)

Twelve-year-old Percy Jackson is on the most dangerous quest of his life. With the help of a satyr and a daughter of Athena, Percy must catch a thief who has stolen the original weapon of mass destruction — Zeus' master bolt. Along the way, he faces a host of mythological enemies determined to stop him. Most of all, he must come to terms with a father he has never known, and an Oracle that has warned him of betrayal by a friend. As a young man with ADD and Dyslexia, Percy has unique strengths but also has some difficulties that he learns to view as superpowers on his quest.



## Are You Alone on Purpose? By Nancy Werlin (Grades 7-10)

Harry Roth is the bane of Alison Shandling's existence. He's obnoxious and rude, and thinks nothing of taunting brainy Alison or making comments about her twin brother who has autism. Then Harry is injured in a diving accident and winds up using a wheelchair. Now Harry is vulnerable too and Alison finds herself inexplicably drawn to him. Initially cautious, these unlikely companions begin to understand each other, and their relationship grows into a beautiful friendship.

# RIGHTS, LEGISLATIVE ADVOCACY, AND HOW TO BE AN ALLY



## Books



*Did you know that children and adults with disabilities did not always have the same recognized rights that they have now?*



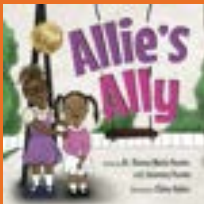
**Fighting for Yes! The Story of Disability Rights Activist Judith Heumann** By Maryann Cocca-Leffler (Grades 1-4)

A picture book biography celebrating the life and work of disability rights activist and icon, Judith Heumann, highlighting one of her landmark achievements—leading the historic 504 Sit-in in 1977. Along with a personal reflection from Judy herself, this picture book biography captures the impact and influence of one of America’s greatest living activists.



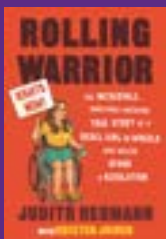
**We Want to Go to School! The Fight for Disability Rights** By Maryann Cocca-Leffler & Janine

Leffler (Grades 3-5) There was a time in the United States when millions of children with disabilities weren’t allowed to go to public school. But in 1971, seven kids and their families wanted to do something about it. They knew that every child had a right to an equal education, so they went to court to fight for that right. The case *Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia* led to laws ensuring children with disabilities would receive a free, appropriate public education.



**Allie's Ally** By Dr. Donna Marie Hunter and Jeremy Hunter (Grades K-6)

Allie is a girl with autism. She has difficulty navigating school and Suzie's Dad, Mr. Hall teaches her how to help Allie and become her ally. Allie has no friends until Suzie gets to know her. Suzie encourages others to join her in becoming an ally - a friend to those who are differently-abled. This book offers easy to follow steps on how we celebrate diversity, model equity and become more inclusive.



**Rolling Warrior: The Incredible, Sometimes Awkward, True Story of a Rebel Girl on Wheels Who Helped Spark a Revolution** By Judith Heumann (Grades 5-9)

Judy Heumann was only 5 years old when she was first denied her right to attend school. Paralyzed from polio and raised by her Holocaust-surviving parents in New York City, Judy had a drive for equality that was instilled early in life. In this memoir, Judy shares her journey of battling for equal access in an unequal world—from fighting to attend grade school after being described as a “fire hazard” because of her wheelchair, to suing the New York City school system for denying her a teacher’s license because of her disability.



**Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to be an Ally** by Emily Ladau (For young adults)

An approachable guide to being a thoughtful, informed ally to people with disabilities, with actionable steps for what to say and do (and what not to do) and how you can help make the world a more inclusive place. Authored by celebrated disability rights advocate, speaker, and writer Emily Ladau, this practical, intersectional guide offers all readers a welcoming place to understand disability as part of the human experience.

# TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT DISABILITIES



## Lesson Plans/Activities & Classroom Resources

The **HIE Help Center** provides different lesson plans about autism, communication disorders, general disability, hearing and vision impairments, learning disabilities, and physical disabilities. As classrooms become more inclusive, it is important for every child to be welcomed and treated with respect. The goal of this resource center is to provide teachers with lesson plan ideas that will help students better understand what it's like to live with different disabilities.

In learning about different kinds of disabilities, students will gain further understanding of what it is like to live with a disability. Each lesson plan provides: an introduction, a list of materials, instructions, a "spotlight" (a notable individual with the particular disability), and a list of sources. Some of these hands-on activities will even give students a chance to somewhat experience what it is like to have a disability. Check out these activities! <https://hiehelpcenter.org/disability-awareness-class-lessons/>

**The Inclusive Class** Using research-based teaching strategies and activities, teachers can build an online community that is inclusive of students with a wide variety of abilities and interests. <http://www.theinclusiveclass.com/2020/08/10-easy-ways-to-create-inclusive.html>

**Special Books by Special Kids** Normalizing the diversity of the human condition. Educational resources providing stories of adults and children with I/DD and complex medical conditions on YouTube and Facebook. <https://sbsk.org/>

**Laughing at my Nightmare** Practical advice from Shane Burcaw, author of "Not So Different," who lives with a form of Muscular Dystrophy. Shane has used a wheelchair for over 20 years, and has had plenty of experience with curious children! <https://www.laughingatmynightmare.com/discussing-disability>

### **Inclusive School Communities for Students with Disabilities: 10 Reasons Why**

Despite the slow rate of implementation and the challenges involved, educators, students and families have found many compelling reasons to support inclusive education. Here are 10 of them!

[https://ici.umn.edu/products/inclusive\\_schools.pdf](https://ici.umn.edu/products/inclusive_schools.pdf)

### **Why Inclusion Matters On The Playground**

When general education students and students with special needs play together, it breaks down unconscious biases about disability and fosters relationships.

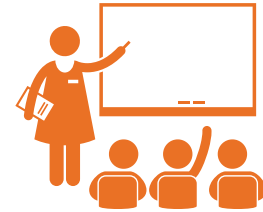
<https://www.edutopia.org/video/why-inclusion-matters-playground>

Helpful Teacher Resources: Autism Spectrum Disorder; Amazing Me: Developmental Milestones Book for Children; Bullying; Bullying Among Children & Youth with Disabilities; Warning Signs a Child is Being Bullied; Epilepsy <https://www.ppmmd.org/resources/>

**National Association for the Education of Young Children** Promoting high-quality learning by connecting practice, policy, and research. Inclusion and Disability Awareness Training for Educators <https://www.naeyc.org/>

**Educators for Social Change** Teaching disability awareness to students <https://educators4sc.org/topic-guides/teaching-about-disability/>

# TEACHING CHILDREN ABOUT DISABILITIES



## Lesson Plans/Activities & Classroom Resources

Lesson plans, teaching units, classroom management techniques, student assessment tools, special education information, and more! Ideas for kindergarten through high school <https://www.brighthubeducation.com/special-education/>

**Inclusion Toolbox** – Resources to help special educators succeed in inclusive classrooms <https://www.thoughtco.com/an-inclusion-toolbox-3111034>

**Creating Inclusive Lesson Plans** – Improving outcomes for all children by providing products and services that enhance early learning and help children reach their full potential <https://www.kaplanco.com/ii/creating-inclusive-lesson-plans>

**The Nora Project** Their mission is to teach empathy by sparking friendships between students and their peers with disabilities. The program is laid out over the four quarters of a school year and delivered in general education classrooms in grades 2-12. <https://thenoraproject.ngo/>

**Together We Are Able® – Social Inclusion Education Program** The curriculum fulfills key social-emotional learning goals. The 60-minute modular social inclusion video training is a companion to the curriculum. The combination of tips and visual demonstrations is a powerful resource that can help create an inclusive social setting on a school campus. <https://shanesinspiration.org/inclusion-curriculum/>

**Sesame Street in Communities** Sesame Workshop created Sesame Street and Autism: See Amazing in All Children, a nationwide initiative aimed at communities with children ages 2 to 6. See Amazing in All Children offers families ways to manage common challenges, to simplify everyday activities, and to grow connections and support from family, friends, and community. <https://sesamestreetincommunities.org/topics/autism/>

**Embracing our Differences** Uses the power of art and education to expand consciousness and open the heart to celebrate the diversity of the human family. It accomplishes this through a comprehensive series of educational initiatives, programs and resources designed for teachers and students. Through the transformative power of the arts, they educate and inspire to create a better world. <https://www.embracingourdifferences.org/lesson-plans/>

**Don't Hide It, Flaunt It®** Works to advance acceptance, understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect for a person's visible (or invisible) difference. Inspired by the theme, "The things that make me different make me me," DHIFI Inc. encourages people of all ages to flaunt one's own difference and ultimately embrace and celebrate what makes us all unique. Check out this great lesson on embracing individual student differences: <https://www-ga.scholastic.com/flauntit/pdfs/AllMaterialsDHIFI2021.pdf?fs=e&s=c1>

**I'm Determined** Focuses on providing direct instruction & opportunities to practice skills associated with self-determined behavior. This project facilitates youth, especially those with disabilities to undertake a measure of control in their lives, helping to set & steer the course rather than remaining the silent passenger. <https://imdetermined.org/>

**Understanding Our Differences The Leader in Disability Awareness Education** Lesson plans & programs for children focused on fostering respectful and inclusive schools and communities for people with disabilities and chronic medical conditions. Resources are focused on third through fifth graders. <https://understandingourdifferences.org/enrichment/>

# Sibling Scene

SUPPORTING THE SIBLING JOURNEY



Siblings play an important role in the lives of their brother or sister with intellectual and developmental disabilities (I/DD). It is crucial that siblings are supported to be the best advocate they can be. To achieve this goal, they must have access to information and resources to help them make informed decisions – whatever their involvement.

Learn More About Why Siblings Matter on The Arc US' Website:  
<https://thearc.org/get-involved/siblings/>

**Sibling Leadership Network**  
<https://siblingleadership.org/>

**Siblings with a Mission**  
<http://www.siblingswithamission.org/>

**SibStrong**  
<https://www.sibstrong.org/>

Find a SibShop  
near you!

<https://siblingsupport.org/sibshops/find-a-sibshop-near-you/>



**SibShops (Ages 4-13)**

SibShops provide young brothers and sisters with peer support and information in a lively, recreational setting.

Sibling Support Project  
<https://siblingsupport.org/>



Down Syndrome Network  
of Montgomery County

The Arc Baltimore  
(Statewide)

Anne Arundel County  
Infants & Toddlers SibShop

Eastern Shore SibShop  
(Talbot & Queen Anne's  
Counties)

# FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



## Family Support

Maryland State Department of Education  
Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services

### [Directory of Maryland Local Family Support Services](#)

MSDE works to provide technical assistance, support, and guidance to each [Family Support Center](#), which are a part of each local school system in Maryland.

Family Support Center staff are committed to providing information to parents and families in order for them to work as equal partners with the school system. Specifically, each Family Support Center seeks to:

- Increase parental involvement in the early intervention and special education decision making process;
- Increase collaborative relationships through information and training;
- Assist families in resolving concerns and making informed decisions regarding their child's education;
- Provide information about disabilities and school system and community resources.

<https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Pages/Special-Education/FSDR/FamilySupport.aspx>



Find your local family support center by viewing this directory!  
<https://marylandpublicschools.org/programs/Documents/Special-Education/FSDR/FSS/FSS%20Directory%20rev.01.12.2022.pdf>

***You are not in this alone.***  
Families across Maryland have developed support systems to guide parents and guardians through your child's educational journey!



Division of Early Intervention  
and Special Education Services



# FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



## Family Support

Maryland Learning Links is the Maryland State Department of Education, Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services' (DEI/SES) online portal providing educators and leaders with the special education resources, guidance, and professional learning resources they need to improve outcomes and narrow the gap for students with disabilities.

The DEI/SES provides leadership, accountability, technical assistance, and resource management to local school systems, public agencies, and stakeholders through a seamless, comprehensive system of coordinated services to children and students with disabilities, birth through 21, and their families.

The vision of the Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services is that all students, including students with disabilities, will be ready for school, achieve in school, and be prepared for college, career, and community living.

Helping students with disabilities succeed is a combined effort between local school systems, education advocates, and legislation adopted by the Maryland State Board of Education, with families at the center. Families know their children best; and when they are empowered with the right information, they are also their children's best advocate.

Visit the Maryland Learning Links website to find resources for: Early Childhood; Access, Equity, Progress; and Secondary Transition.  
<https://www.marylandlearninglinks.org/>

### CORE FUNCTIONS:

#### Leadership

Establish policy guidance and frameworks to govern the provision of early intervention and special education, including actions in response to new legislative policies, and transparent and ongoing communication with stakeholders.

#### Accountability

Set clear expectations for implementing the federal and state regulations, policies, procedures, and practices that ensure State and local compliance and maximize development and learning for all children and students.

#### Technical Assistance

Monitor and provide performance support to programs in an effective, efficient, and systematic manner that builds and sustains State, local, and stakeholder capacity.

#### Resource Management

Ensure efficient and transparent use of federal, State, and special funds through innovative, layered funding mechanisms to leverage the full complement of dollars to maximize the benefit for children and families receiving services.



Division of Early Intervention  
and Special Education Services

# WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP



## Family Support

### Special Education Citizens Advisory Council (SECAC)

One of the best indicators of student success is parental engagement. SECAC's mission is to review systemic issues and trends that can be addressed through policies, programs and services that have the potential to impact many students with disabilities.

IDEA and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE), Division of Early Intervention and Special Education Services (DEI/SES) support strengthening the role of parents by ensuring that parents and families of students with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home. Meaningful participation on SECAC's benefits ALL students and school communities.

The purpose of SECAC is to seek meaningful input on issues related to the provision of a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). SECAC's actively collect parent input and concerns from many sources such as letters, comments, surveys, etc. Input from these sources should be considered in advising the district on the facilitation of positive changes. Additionally, each jurisdiction shall develop specific procedures, reports, or practices for which a local director may wish to solicit input from parents, administrators, and teachers.

### Find your local SECAC here!

- [Alleghany County](#)
- [Anne Arundel County](#)
- [Baltimore City](#)
- [Baltimore County](#)
- [Calvert County](#)
- [Caroline County](#)
- [Carroll County](#)
- [Cecil County](#)
- [Charles County](#)
- [Dorchester County](#)
- [Frederick County](#)
- [Garrett County](#)
- [Harford County](#)
- [Howard County](#)
- [Kent County](#)
- [Montgomery County](#)
- [Prince George's County](#)
- [Queen Anne's County](#)
- [Somerset County](#)
- [St. Mary's County](#)
- [Talbot County](#)
- [Washington County](#)
- [Wicomico County](#)
- [Worcester County](#)

**Judy Centers** work with all prior environments children have attended before entering school; including Head Start, child care, nursery schools and children at home with a parent or relative. These environments help us to understand the child's development and engage them in appropriate activities that will better prepare them for school.

<https://earlychildhood.marylandpublicschools.org/families/judy-center-early-learning-hubs>



# WHERE TO TURN FOR HELP



## Family Support

The Arc Maryland began in 1960 by a group of parents who wanted a better life for their children with disabilities. Today, it is one of the largest grass-roots organizations dedicated to protecting and advancing the rights of people with IDD. The Arc Maryland provides parents with information and referral services, and local chapters of The Arc in Maryland (10) provide direct supports from respite services and childcare to adult and aging-adult services and supports. [www.thearcmd.org](http://www.thearcmd.org)

The Parents' Place of Maryland (PPMD) began in 1990 as a grass-roots effort of families, professionals, and community leaders determined to provide resources, support, and information to parents of children with disabilities and special health care needs. Our philosophy of "families helping families" reflects our commitment to supporting families of diverse backgrounds.

Today, the Parents' Place offers a variety of programs and services that continue to support families of children with disabilities and special health care needs. Serving as Maryland's Parent Training and Information Center and Family-to-Family Health Information Center, Parents' Place supports thousands of Maryland families each year.

Parents' Place, staffed primarily by parents who have faced these challenges, believes that experienced parents are a key source of knowledge and support to help other families become effective voices for their own children. <https://www.ppmmd.org/>

The Maryland Developmental Disabilities (DD) Council has been creating change to improve the lives of people with developmental disabilities since 1971. They focus on children, family, and adult issues. The Council is an independent state agency, led by people with developmental disabilities and family members of people with developmental disabilities. [www.md-council.org](http://www.md-council.org)

Maryland Coalition of Families (MCF) is a state-wide nonprofit dedicated to connecting, supporting and empowering families who are experiencing behavioral health challenges.

MCF also advocates to improve services and systems that impact individuals with behavioral health challenges and to reduce stigma related to behavioral health.

Start connecting today!  
<https://www.mdcoalition.org/>

*Hablas Español?*  
PPMD also has Bilingual Parent Educators and resources available in Spanish!

# EVERYONE CAN PLAY!

## Accessible Playgrounds in Maryland

**Maryland State Parks** have thirty-three accessible playgrounds across the state. All have been designed for children between the ages of 5 to 12 years of age. For more information about additional accessibility amenities such as cabins, camp sites, hunting areas, fishing piers, boat ramps, trails, picnic areas, and other adaptive recreation equipment, visit their [Marylands' Accessibility for All](https://dnr.maryland.gov/Publiclands/Pages/accessforall.aspx) website. <https://dnr.maryland.gov/Publiclands/Pages/accessforall.aspx>

For a full listing of Maryland's playgrounds visit the [Accessible Playground Directory](https://www.accessibleplayground.net/playground-directory/pg/1/?cn-cat=36). This directory lists playgrounds that have inclusive and accessible features. Yes, we would all love to have the perfect inclusive playground in our neighborhood. But we know that is not yet a reality. Here you can find the best of the best, as well as playgrounds that have added accessible swing seats or other accessible features. <https://www.accessibleplayground.net/playground-directory/pg/1/?cn-cat=36>

### Did you know?

All local Recreation & Parks departments must comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and will provide reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who may need assistance in order to participate in recreational activities.

