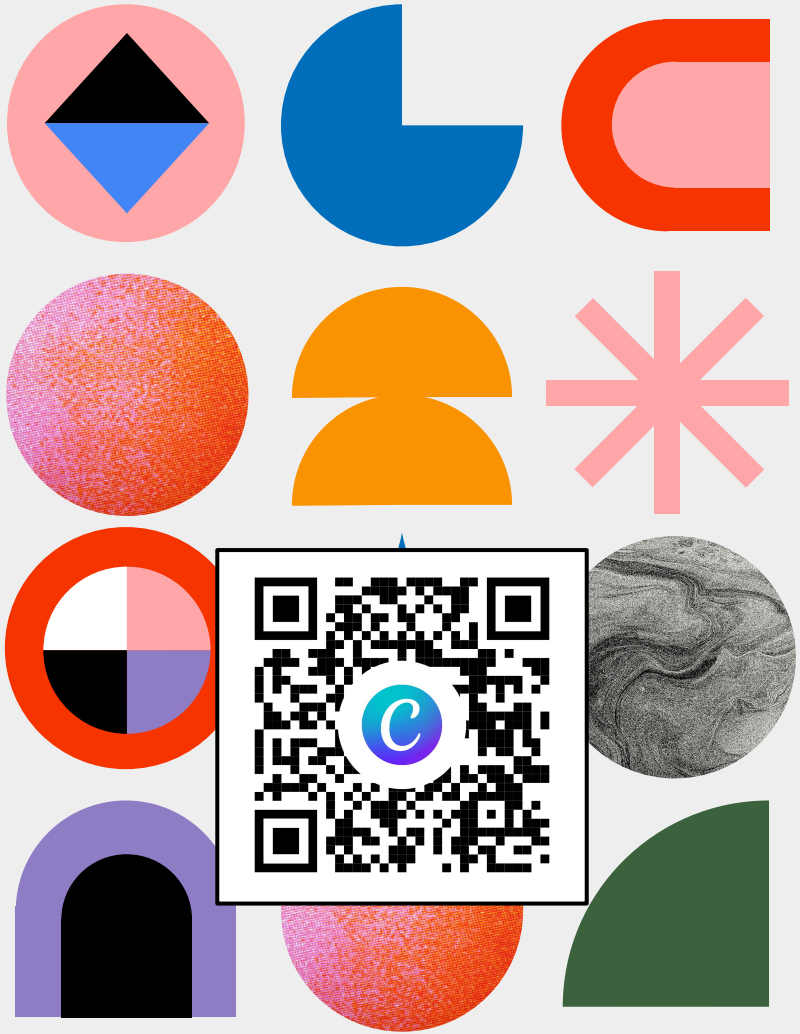
Inclusive Music Ed Strategies

Brandon Ellsworth,

Choir Director & Adaptive Music Teacher
North Salinas High School

@ellsworthsings

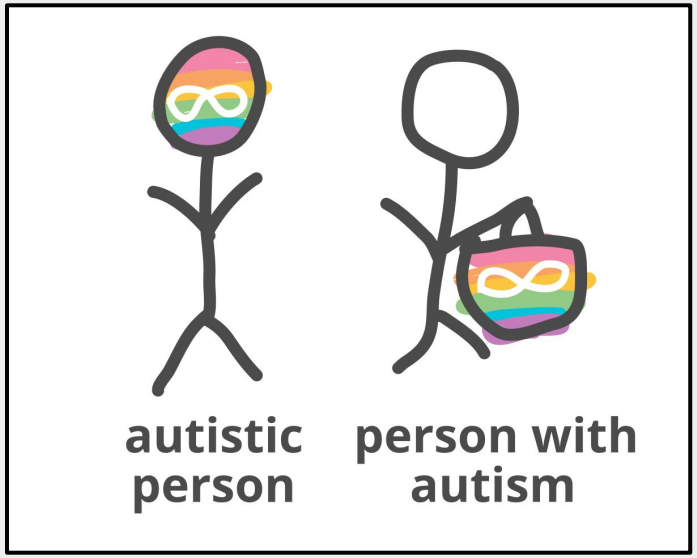






About Me!

- ➔ Graduate of Westminster Choir College (no formal training in disability inclusion)
- ➔ Teaching for 10+ years—Elementary, middle, and high school programs.
- ➔ President, *California Music Educators Association, Central Coast Section*
- ➔ Founder and director of **SingAble** in San Jose, CA.
    - @singablevoices
- ➔ Masters of Music, Music Education (Autism Concentration) @ Berklee College of Music



Identity-First or Person-First?

There is no major consensus among disability advocates about identify-first or person-first language. Please use and respect whichever language the individual prefers.

Identity-First = *Disabled* Individual
Person-First = *Person* with a disability

Overview

Part 1: Legal Frameworks

IDEA, FAPE, LRE

Part 2: IEP Review

Student strengths, demographics, eligibility, AAC/Low incidence materials, related services, present levels, BIPs, accommodations & modifications

Part 3: Design and Practice

UDL + PAL, contextualizing accommodations in the choral classroom

Part 4: Resources & Questions

Reading list & Q&A

Part 1:
Legal Frameworks



Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act

(*IDEA, Amended 2004*) guarantees disabled students...

A free and appropriate public education...

(FAPE)

In the least restrictive environment

(LRE)

Students who qualify for special education services receive an **IEP**

The **Individualized Education Program (IEP)** is...

- ➔ A binding, **legal** document
- ➔ A tailored program to meet the individual needs of a student
- ➔ An overview of all educational goals and progress, provided services, accommodations & modifications, behavioral plans, and demographic information.
- ➔ Written in collaboration with all stakeholders (student, parent, teachers, administrators, service providers, legal representatives, etc.)



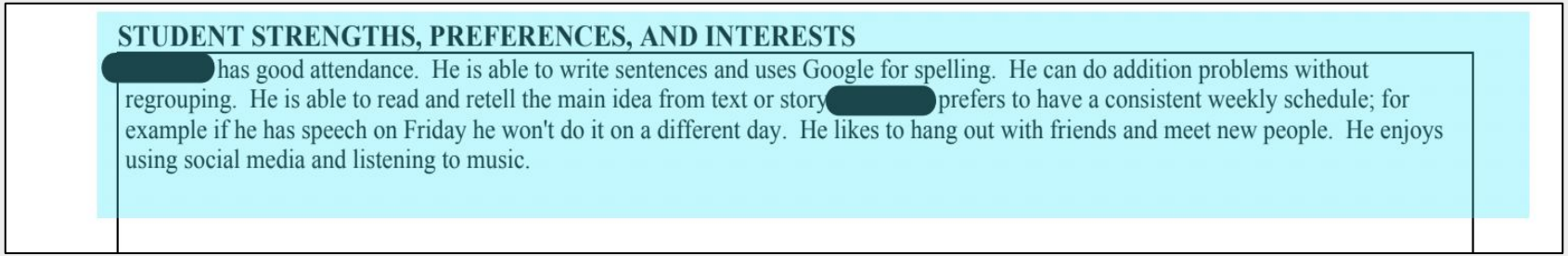
Part 2:
IEP Review



KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

STUDENT STRENGTHS

Don't underestimate the power of **positivity**! Student strengths section may contain information beneficial for establishing social connections with the student, peer-to-peer or peer-to-staff.



STUDENT STRENGTHS, PREFERENCES, AND INTERESTS

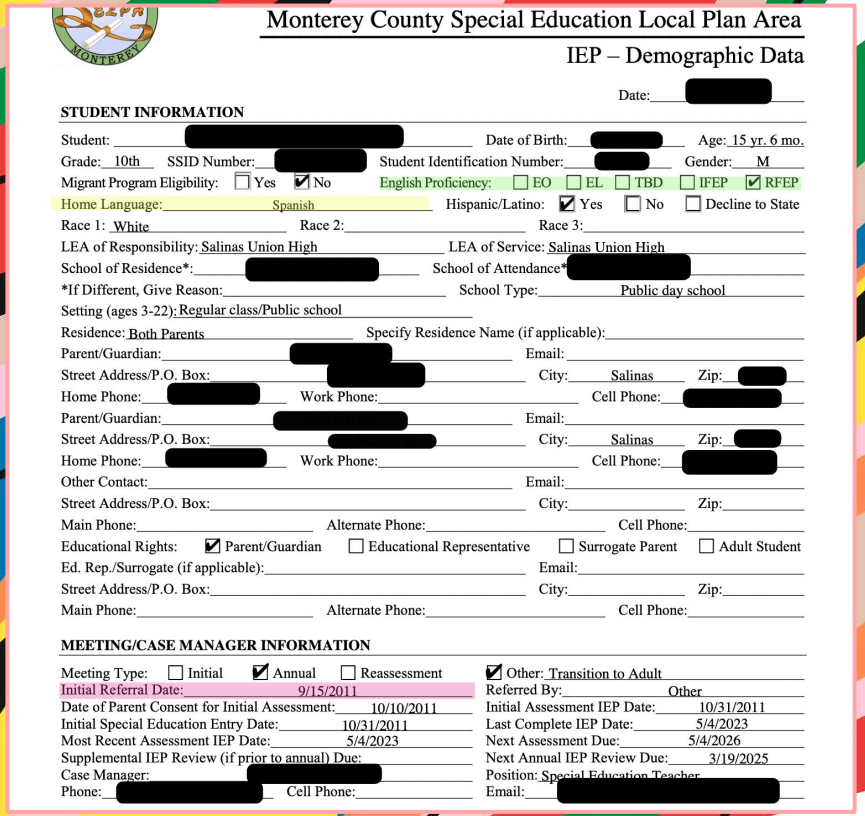
[redacted] has good attendance. He is able to write sentences and uses Google for spelling. He can do addition problems without regrouping. He is able to read and retell the main idea from text or story [redacted] prefers to have a consistent weekly schedule; for example if he has speech on Friday he won't do it on a different day. He likes to hang out with friends and meet new people. He enjoys using social media and listening to music.

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

DEMOGRAPHICS

Contains more than just home address!

- Guardian information
- Foster care/YIT
- Language accessibility
- **Initial referral date**



Monterey County Special Education Local Plan Area

IEP – Demographic Data

Date: [redacted]

STUDENT INFORMATION

Student: [redacted] Date of Birth: [redacted] Age: 15 yr. 6 mo.

Grade: 10th SSID Number: [redacted] Student Identification Number: [redacted] Gender: M

Migrant Program Eligibility: ☐ Yes ☑ No English Proficiency: ☐ EO ☐ EL ☐ TBD ☐ IFEP ☑ RFEP

Home Language: Spanish Hispanic/Latino: ☑ Yes ☐ No ☐ Decline to State

Race 1: White Race 2: Race 3:

LEA of Responsibility: Salinas Union High LEA of Service: Salinas Union High

School of Residence*: [redacted] School of Attendance* [redacted]

*If Different, Give Reason: School Type: Public day school

Setting (ages 3-22): Regular class/Public school

Residence: Both Parents Specify Residence Name (if applicable):

Parent/Guardian: [redacted] Email:

Street Address/P.O. Box: [redacted] City: Salinas Zip: [redacted]

Home Phone: [redacted] Work Phone: Cell Phone: [redacted]

Parent/Guardian: [redacted] Email:

Street Address/P.O. Box: [redacted] City: Salinas Zip: [redacted]

Home Phone: [redacted] Work Phone: Cell Phone: [redacted]

Other Contact: Email:

Street Address/P.O. Box: City: Zip:

Main Phone: Alternate Phone: Cell Phone:

Educational Rights: ☑ Parent/Guardian ☐ Educational Representative ☐ Surrogate Parent ☐ Adult Student

Ed. Rep./Surrogate (if applicable): Email:

Street Address/P.O. Box: City: Zip:

Main Phone: Alternate Phone: Cell Phone:

MEETING/CASE MANAGER INFORMATION

Meeting Type: ☐ Initial ☑ Annual ☐ Reassessment ☑ Other: Transition to Adult

Initial Referral Date: 9/15/2011 Referred By: Other

Date of Parent Consent for Initial Assessment: 10/10/2011 Initial Assessment IEP Date: 10/31/2011

Initial Special Education Entry Date: 10/31/2011 Last Complete IEP Date: 5/4/2023

Most Recent Assessment IEP Date: 5/4/2023 Next Assessment Due: 5/4/2026

Supplemental IEP Review (if prior to annual) Due: Next Annual IEP Review Due: 3/19/2025

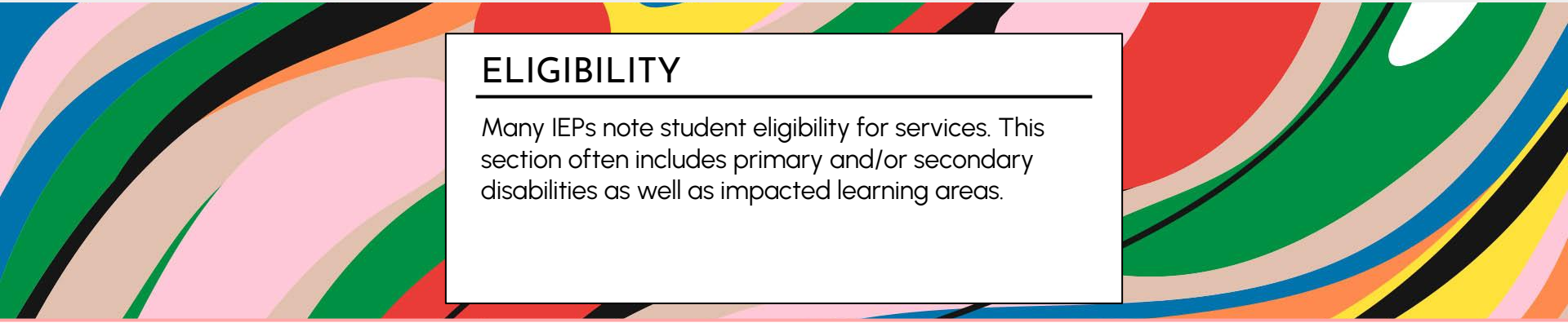
Case Manager: [redacted] Position: Special Education Teacher

Phone: [redacted] Cell Phone: Email: [redacted]

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

ELIGIBILITY

Many IEPs note student eligibility for services. This section often includes primary and/or secondary disabilities as well as impacted learning areas.



ELIGIBILITY

☑ Student is **eligible** for special education and related services in the area(s) identified below.

Primary Disability: Autism

Secondary Disability: None

☐ Student is eligible for low incidence funding (visual impairment, deaf/hard-of-hearing, or severe orthopedic impairment).

☐ Student is **not eligible** for special education and related services (explain on *IEP Notes/Additional Information* page).

☐ Student will be **exiting** special education and related services effective: _____

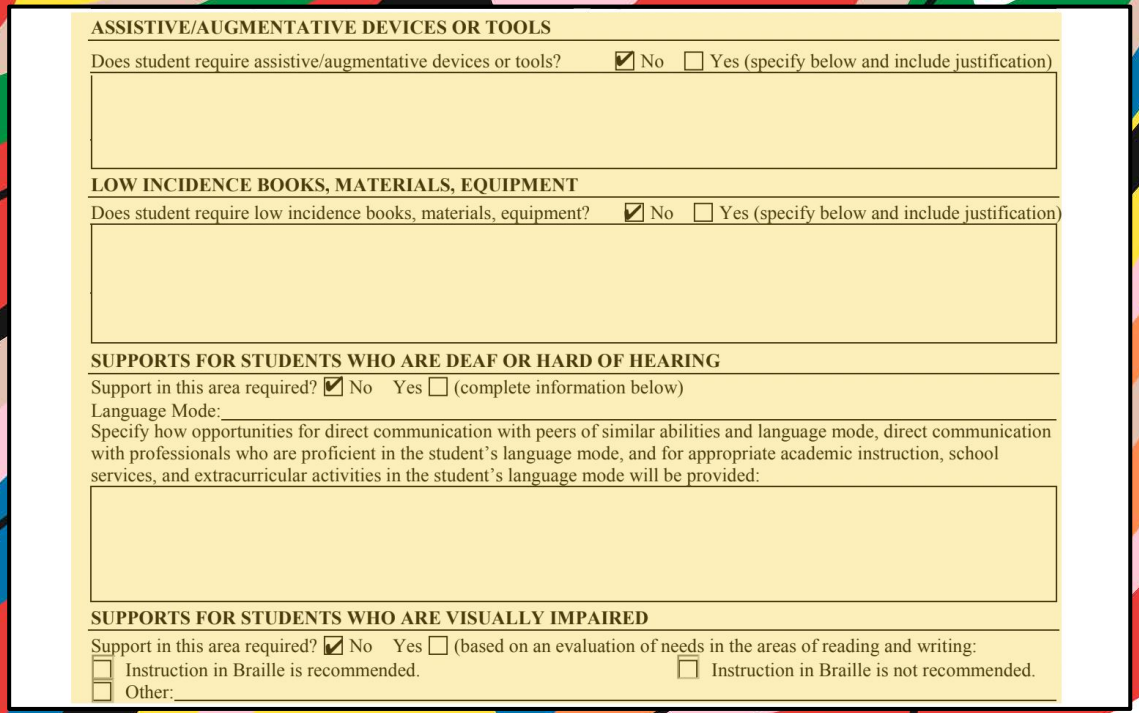
This exit is due to: _____

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

AAC/LOW INCIDENCE

Does the student need access to Augmentative or Alternative Communication Devices or Low Incidence materials?

- iPads
- Push to talk devices
- Large print music
- Adaptive seating



ASSISTIVE/AUGMENTATIVE DEVICES OR TOOLS

Does student require assistive/augmentative devices or tools? ☑ No ☐ Yes (specify below and include justification)

LOW INCIDENCE BOOKS, MATERIALS, EQUIPMENT

Does student require low incidence books, materials, equipment? ☑ No ☐ Yes (specify below and include justification)

SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE DEAF OR HARD OF HEARING

Support in this area required? ☑ No Yes ☐ (complete information below)

Language Mode:_____

Specify how opportunities for direct communication with peers of similar abilities and language mode, direct communication with professionals who are proficient in the student's language mode, and for appropriate academic instruction, school services, and extracurricular activities in the student's language mode will be provided:

SUPPORTS FOR STUDENTS WHO ARE VISUALLY IMPAIRED

Support in this area required? ☑ No Yes ☐ (based on an evaluation of needs in the areas of reading and writing:

☐ Instruction in Braille is recommended. ☐ Instruction in Braille is not recommended.

☐ Other:_____

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

RELATED SERVICES

What supports/services do this student receive outside of classroom instruction?

- Occupational therapy
- Speech/Language
- Physical therapy
- Medical services
- Social work
- Mental health services

SPECIAL EDUCATION AND RELATED SERVICES OFFERED

Primary Service: **Specialized Academic Instruction**	Provider: District of Serv.	Responsible Staff: Special Education Teacher	Location: Separate class	
Delivery Model: Small Group, Out of General Ed.	Frequency: Daily	Duration: 180 total minutes	Start Date: 3/20/2024	End Date: 3/19/2025
Service: Speech and Language	Provider: District of Serv.	Responsible Staff: Speech and Language Specialist	Location: Separate class	
Delivery Model: Small Group, Out of General Ed.	Frequency: Monthly	Duration: 90 total minutes	Start Date: 3/20/2024	End Date: 3/19/2025

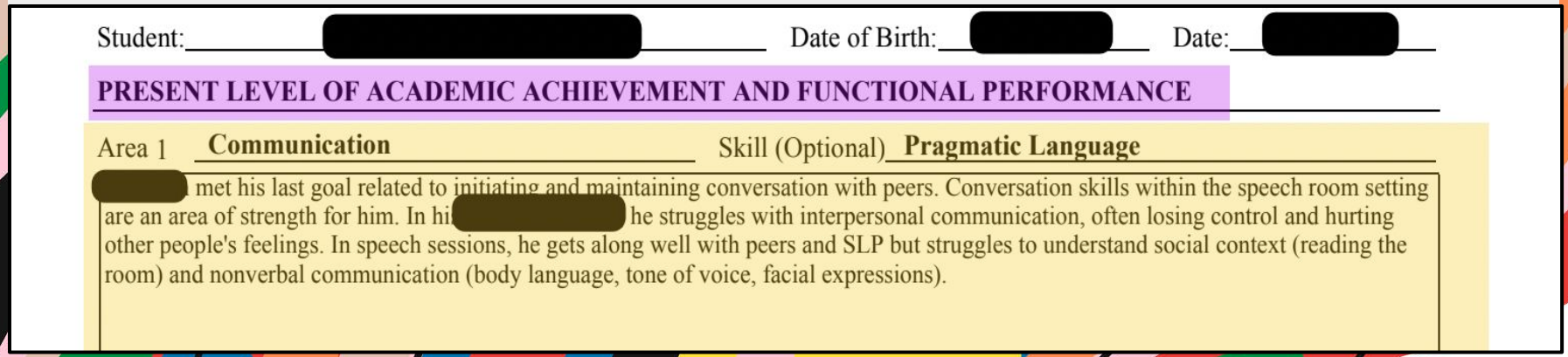
KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

PRESENT LEVELS

Notes current academic progress made. Typically focusing on:

- Reading/Writing
- Mathematics
- Behaviors
- Transition Goals
- Communication

While not necessarily our purview, this section can give us insight into the non-musical skills required of the student in our classroom.



Student: [redacted] Date of Birth: [redacted] Date: [redacted]

PRESENT LEVEL OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT AND FUNCTIONAL PERFORMANCE

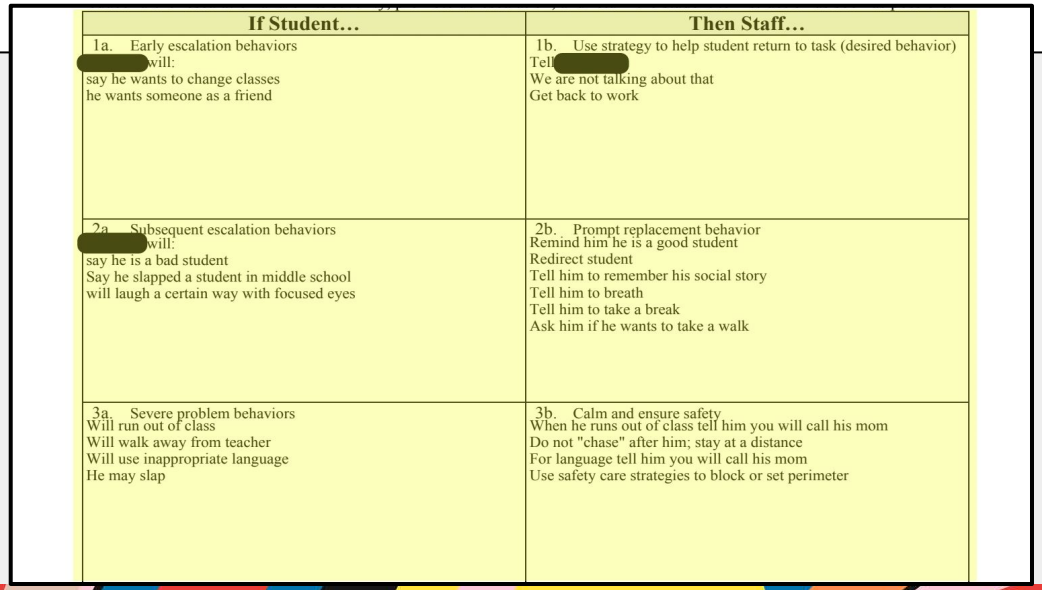
Area 1 **Communication** Skill (Optional) **Pragmatic Language**

[redacted] met his last goal related to initiating and maintaining conversation with peers. Conversation skills within the speech room setting are an area of strength for him. In hi[redacted] he struggles with interpersonal communication, often losing control and hurting other people's feelings. In speech sessions, he gets along well with peers and SLP but struggles to understand social context (reading the room) and nonverbal communication (body language, tone of voice, facial expressions).

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

BEHAVIORAL INTERVENTION PLAN (BIP)

Some students may have a required Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) to help de-escalate unsafe or spiraling behaviors.



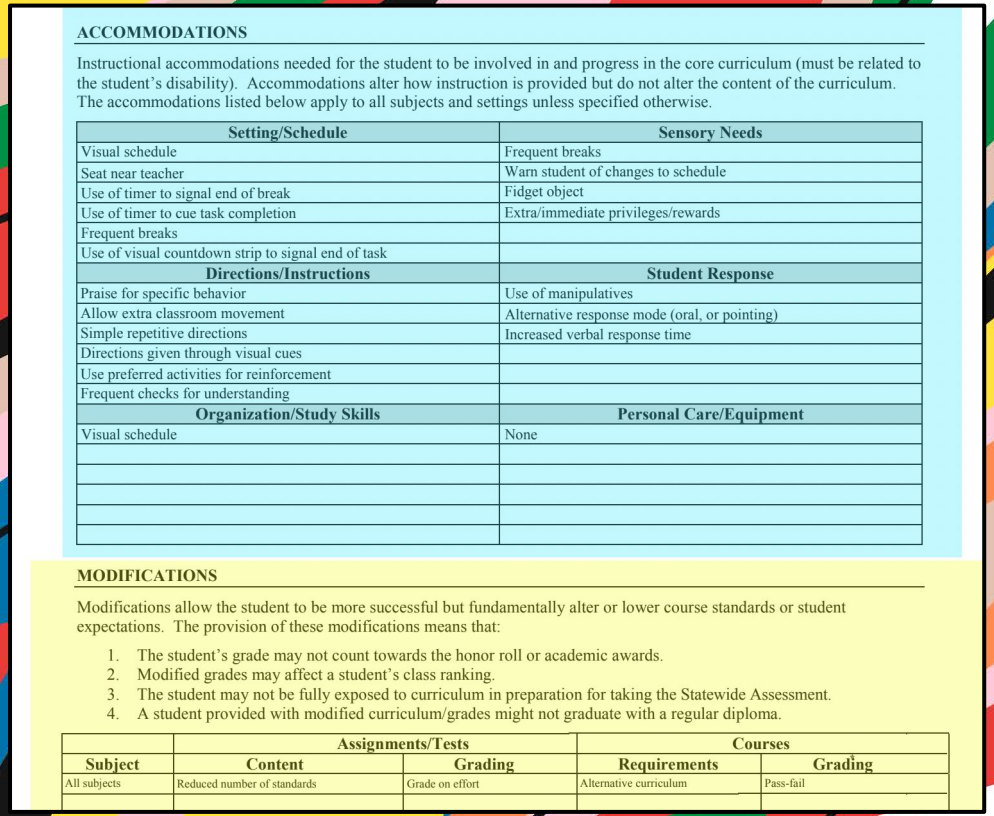
If Student…	Then Staff…
1a. Early escalation behaviors [redacted] will: say he wants to change classes he wants someone as a friend	1b. Use strategy to help student return to task (desired behavior) Tell [redacted] We are not talking about that Get back to work
2a. Subsequent escalation behaviors [redacted] will: say he is a bad student Say he slapped a student in middle school will laugh a certain way with focused eyes	2b. Prompt replacement behavior Remind him he is a good student Redirect student Tell him to remember his social story Tell him to breath Tell him to take a break Ask him if he wants to take a walk
3a. Severe problem behaviors Will run out of class Will walk away from teacher Will use inappropriate language He may slap	3b. Calm and ensure safety When he runs out of class tell him you will call his mom Do not "chase" after him; stay at a distance For language tell him you will call his mom Use safety care strategies to block or set perimeter

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE IEP

ACCOMMODATIONS + MODIFICATIONS

What accommodations and/or modifications need to be implemented so that the student is successful in a learning environment.

Teachers are legally required to follow these requirements*



ACCOMMODATIONS

Instructional accommodations needed for the student to be involved in and progress in the core curriculum (must be related to the student's disability). Accommodations alter how instruction is provided but do not alter the content of the curriculum. The accommodations listed below apply to all subjects and settings unless specified otherwise.

Setting/Schedule	Sensory Needs
Visual schedule	Frequent breaks
Seat near teacher	Warn student of changes to schedule
Use of timer to signal end of break	Fidget object
Use of timer to cue task completion	Extra/immediate privileges/rewards
Frequent breaks	
Use of visual countdown strip to signal end of task	
Directions/Instructions	**Student Response**
Praise for specific behavior	Use of manipulatives
Allow extra classroom movement	Alternative response mode (oral, or pointing)
Simple repetitive directions	Increased verbal response time
Directions given through visual cues	
Use preferred activities for reinforcement	
Frequent checks for understanding	
Organization/Study Skills	**Personal Care/Equipment**
Visual schedule	None

MODIFICATIONS

Modifications allow the student to be more successful but fundamentally alter or lower course standards or student expectations. The provision of these modifications means that:

1. The student's grade may not count towards the honor roll or academic awards.
2. Modified grades may affect a student's class ranking.
3. The student may not be fully exposed to curriculum in preparation for taking the Statewide Assessment.
4. A student provided with modified curriculum/grades might not graduate with a regular diploma.

	Assignments/Tests		Courses	
Subject	**Content**	**Grading**	**Requirements**	**Grading**
All subjects	Reduced number of standards	Grade on effort	Alternative curriculum	Pass-fail

Collaboration

Special Education Teacher

Working with the special education teacher can give you real-time strategies, insights, and valuable information relating to each student. What are they discussing at the IEP meetings?

Administrators

Advocating for equitable classrooms for all students. Is your program a 'dumping ground' or do you have a landing spot for all students?

Service Providers

Occupational therapists, Speech-Language Pathologists, and Behavior Therapists all have great insights to help aid learning. These professionals often work one-to-one with the same students.

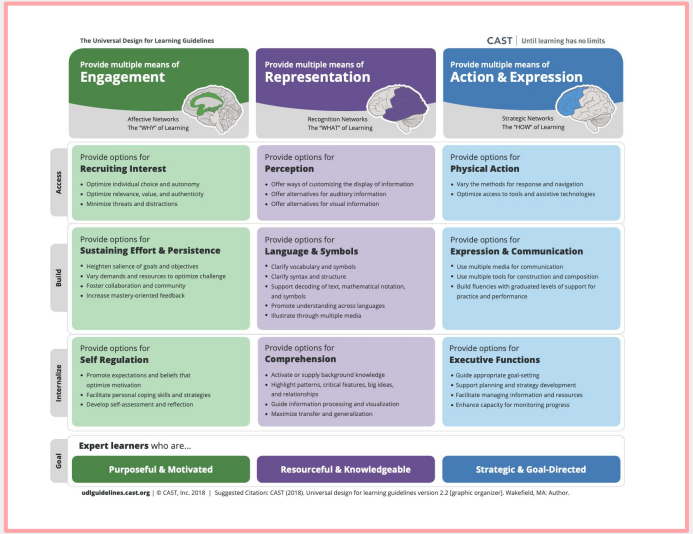
Part 3:
Design + Practice



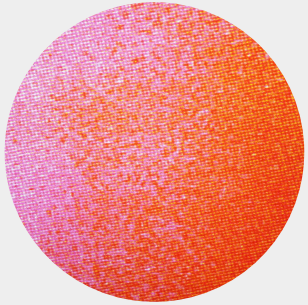
Universal Design of Learning (UDL)

Inclusive music teaching should be **proactive**, not **reactive**. Rather than applying 'techniques' to your teaching (reactive), best practices center designing your classroom to meet the needs of all students from the beginning (proactive).

A 'Tips & Tricks' mentality for inclusion tend to not be sustainable as it creates more work for the educator more consistently throughout the year (think band-aids when you really need surgery).



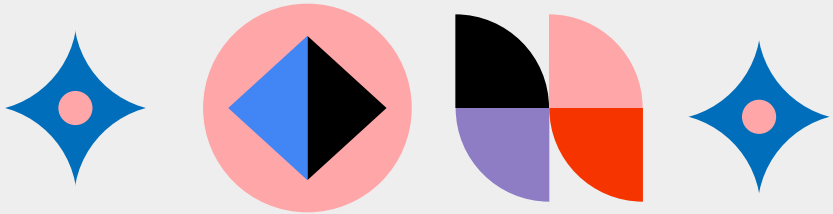
PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING (PAL)



➔ Cornerstone of many inclusive, accessible models

<u>Why does PAL often fail to meet its potential?</u>

- ➔ It is used inconsistently or sparingly
- ➔ Learning is not reciprocal (Leadership models)
- ➔ Primarily used for *new* information, rather than for reinforcement
- ➔ No opportunities for social application



RECIPROCAL PEER-ASSISTED LEARNING

‘THINK, PAIR, SHARE’	JIGSAW LEARNING
COLLABORATIVE REASONING	ASYMMETRICAL ROLES

VISUAL SCHEDULES & TIMERS

Allows students to anticipate transitions, while serving as an assessment tool. Particularly effective when used in combination with a visual timer.



Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
29th	30th	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th
	DD m.104-129	LDUS (ALL)	YG (Introduce)	DD m.74-97	Test	
	Pitch/Rhythm	Run/Musicality	Unison	Pitch/Rhythm		
	IWBT (ALL)	DD m.1-73	IWBT (ALL)	LDUS (ALL)		
	Run/Musicality	Pitch/Rhythm	Run/Musicality	Run/Musicality		
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
6th	7th	8th	9th	10th	11th	12th
	DD m.74-97	S/A Focus	YG (ALL)	T/B Focus	IWBT (ALL)	
	Pitch/Rhythm	ALL REP	Round	ALL REP	Run/Musicality	
	T (ALL)		T (ALL)		DD (ALL)	
	Pitch/Rhythm		Pitch/Rhythm		Run/Musicality	
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
13th	14th	15th	16th	17th	18th	19th
	ALL REP	S/A Focus		T/B Focus		
		ALL REP		ALL REP		

Repertoire:	Pitch Accuracy	Musicality	Memorized
Dixit Dominus	75%-99%	Beginni...	No
Liebst du um Schonheit	75%-99%	Beginni...	No
I Would Be True	100%	Beginni...	No
Time	50%-75%	Beginni...	No
Wanting Memories	75%-99%	Beginni...	No
Yenyere Guma	>50%	Beginni...	No

TASK CHECKLISTS

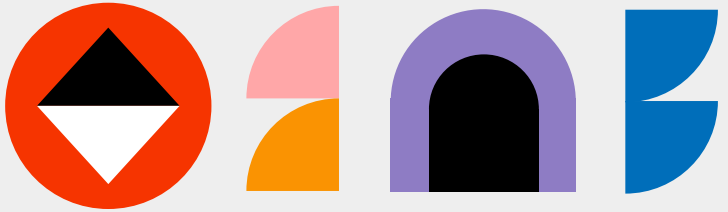
- Communicates to the student what the expectations of class are
- Visual aides are a very effective tool for many students
- Print out, laminate, provide to student daily OR leave in designated area
- When implementing this, consistency (especially the first few weeks) is essential



Example Student
Daily Checklist

Before Class Check That I...	Task Completed
Arrive to class on time	
Drop off backpack at the back of the room (cell phone included)	
Grab pencil	
Grab music	
Patiently wait for class to begin	
During Class I...	**Task Completed**
Participated to the best of my ability	
Wrote in all rehearsal notes from the teacher	
Was respectful to everyone in the room	
After Class I...	**Task Completed**
Put my music away	
Cleaned up my area	

STRUCTURES AND ROUTINES



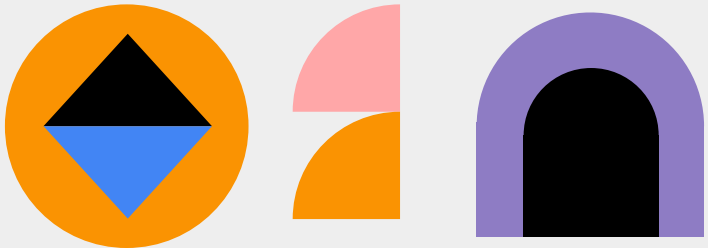
Consistent routines and structures help our students to anticipate activities and learning. Most behaviors occur in transition between activities or because activities are too long.

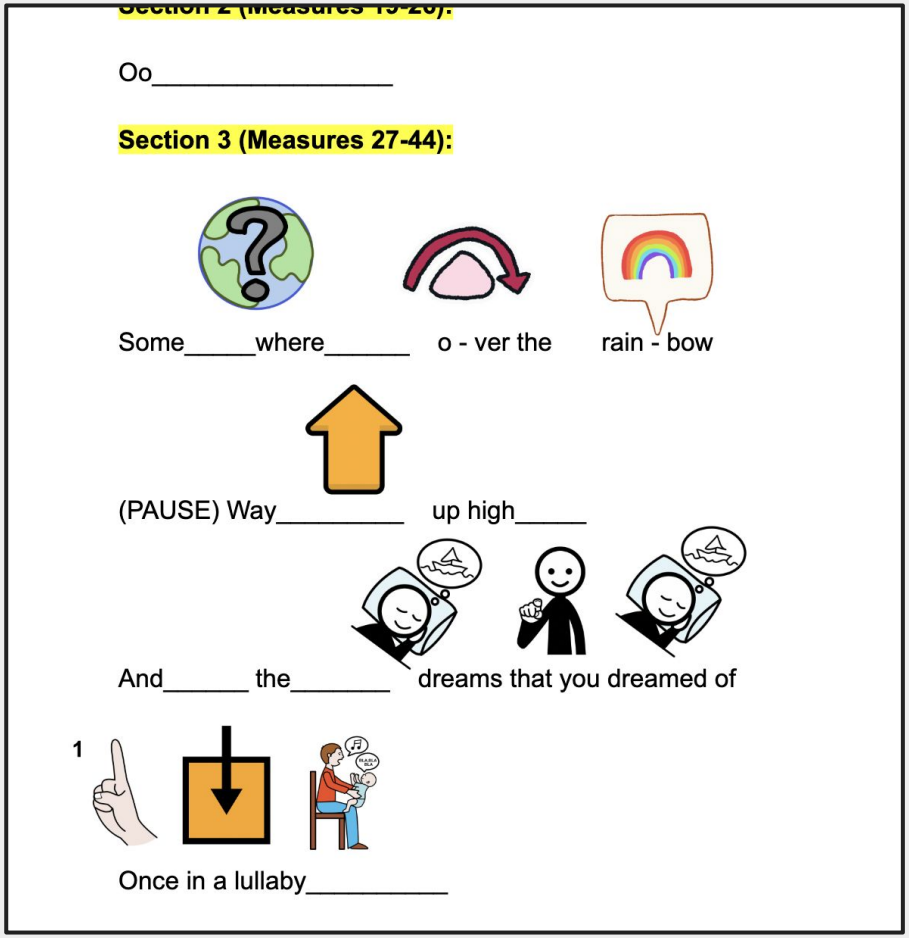
Activity	Time
Class Check-In	3-5 Minutes
Stretches	5 Minutes
Breathing Exercises	3 Minutes
Vocal Warm-Ups	7-10 Minutes
Sight Reading & Solfege	5-10 Minutes

For educational purposes only, please do not distribute.

Adaptive Lyrics

- Adapting traditional notation so that visual tracking is made easier
- Include measure numbers or other section indicators so that participants using standard notation can also follow along
- Use of AAC Images to support the lyrics.
    - Images should be clear and support the main idea - not always a literal translation.

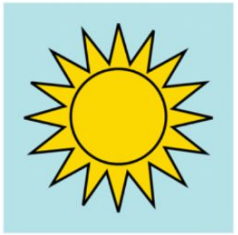
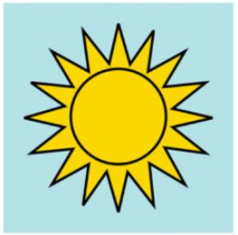




AAC Boards

- Websites like Cough Drop allow you create personalized AAC boards
- Licensing is based per student, but educators may create a board and share with SLPs to program directly into multiple students' devices (like a template).
- Some softwares allow for programming of voice.



here comes	the sun	doot n doo doo	here comes	the sun	and I said	it's alright sidebar
						

Example AAC board for choir

Sensory Needs:

Sensory sensitivity, sensory seeking, sensory avoiding, and low registration are common examples of sensory needs. In the music classroom:

Sight	Smell	Touch	Taste	Hear
Common sensitivity to light Use of sunglasses or hats on stage (also cool) House lights on + stage dimmed Music stand lights for folders Reverse imaging (print white ink on black paper) Placement to conductor, board, etc.	Ask individuals to refrain from strong colognes or perfumes Limit the sale of food at events or place outside if possible For candles or scent diffusers—ask before use	Participants choose their own performance uniform (prescribe color palette or concert black) Pre-fold corners of music Digital scores Temperature of room Space between students Texture of rugs or carpet	Having water or preferred beverage nearby Taste is related to smell, so keeping cologne + perfume limited	Having extra headphones on standby Audience use of ASL for applause Incorporation of ASL for performance Strategic group set up - In group or beside? - Circle or rows?

Sensory Needs:

Sixth and Seventh Senses

Sensory Processing — Vestibular System

CHICAGO OT THERAPY

Our inner ear's detection of our head position and speed/direction of movement.	Tells our body to make adjustments to help our balance, vision, muscle tone, and coordination.	Affects balance, coordination, attention, and regulation.



Sensation Seeking
If a child is Sensation Seeking, they typically enjoy sensory input and are constantly seeking for more within their environment.

Low Registration
If a child has low Sensory Registration, they interpret the sensory input around them less (at lower intensity levels) than others, and notice less in their environment.

Sensation Avoiding
If a child is Sensation Avoiding, they may appear bothered or overwhelmed by sensory input and tend to avoid these experiences as much as possible.

Sensory Sensitivity
If a child is Sensory Sensitive, they detect the sensory input around them more than others, and even notice sensory input that others may miss. They have a greater awareness of sensory input.

Signs of Difficulty

- Avoids **or** actively seeks out swinging, jumping, or climbing
- Lack of coordination, frequent falling
- Slow, cautious movement
- Easily becomes dizzy **or** never seems to become dizzy
- Watches moving/rotating objects (i.e. fans, clocks, etc.)
- Prefers to sit during activities **or** has difficulty sitting still/paying attention
- Slouches, holds head up with hands, prefers lying down

Activities & Ways to Help

- Somersaults and cartwheels
- Log rolling
- Hanging upside down



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Sensory Processing — Proprioceptive System

CHICAGO OT THERAPY

Tells us where our body is in space to help us develop body awareness within our environments.	Located within our muscles and joints. Helps us learn to exert the appropriate amount of force needed for tasks.	Affects body awareness, coordination, and overall functioning within our environment.



Sensation Seeking
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If a child has low Sensory Registration, they interpret the sensory input around them less (at lower intensity levels) than others, and notice less in their environment.

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If a child is Sensation Avoiding, they may appear bothered or overwhelmed by sensory input and tend to avoid these experiences as much as possible.

Sensory Sensitivity
If a child is Sensory Sensitive, they detect the sensory input around them more than others, and even notice sensory input that others may miss. They have a greater awareness of sensory input.

Signs of Difficulty

- Easily frustrated/lacking confidence
- Frequent crashing or pushing self into objects
- Kicking/stomping feet
- Enjoys bear hugs and weighted blankets
- Uses too much force or plays too rough
- Prefers tight clothes/accessories

Activities & Ways to Help

- Yoga poses
- Animal walks and wheelbarrow walks
- Pushing/pulling heavy, child-sized items



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Part 4:
Resources + Questions



Recommended Readings:

Accessible Arts Education: Principles, Habits, and Strategies to Unleash Every Student's Creativity and Learning (Bernard, 2025)	*Including Everyone: Creating Music Classrooms Where All Children Learn* (Jellison, 2015)
Teaching Music to Students with Differences and Disabilities, 3rd Ed. (Hammel & Hourigan, 2024)	*Music Education for All: Planning Effective and Inclusive Lessons* (Fard, 2025)
Neurotribes: The Legacy of Autism and the Future of Neurodiversity (Silberman, 2015)	*Demystifying Disability: What to Know, What to Say, and How to Be an Ally* (Ladau, 2021)
The Accessible Music Classroom for All (Wagner-Yeung, 2025)	*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970)
Welcome to the Autistic Community (ASAN, 2020)	*A Disability History of the United States* (Nielsen, 2013)

Check out the Berklee ABLE Assembly April 10th-12th, 2026
In-person (Boston, MA) OR online!

HOW CAN I HELP?



What questions do you have?

Contact me: brandon.singable@gmail.com
TikTok: @ellsworthsings
Instagram: @singablevoices

Link to today's presentation