

A large, irregular teal brushstroke serves as a background for the logo text.

EDUCATING ALL LEARNERS

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The Educating All Learners Alliance
CHICAGO SCHOOL STUDY TOURS
October 2023

BUNDLE



EALA School Study Tours

About EALA School Study Tours

EALA developed the EALA School Study Tours initiative to translate knowledge into practice and build more equitable learning environments and student experiences.

As a part of this initiative, in October 2023, EALA alongside the Learning Disabilities Association of America (LDA) selected 4 schools to host tours that focused on centering promising practices for students with disabilities and learning differences.

8 Visiting School Teams toured schools, collaborated and learned with key school and community members, and witnessed implementation whether it be in a classroom or behind the scenes. After all tours, the group attended a Reflection Summit to put their thoughts and reflections into an action plan to bring home. The tour experience centered on reflection and opportunity to bring aspects or strategies back to attendees' home school or district.

About the Bundle

This Resource Bundle is a compilation of resources developed as a part of this initiative intended to support school teams both on, and outside of, these tours. When prompted (see the red arrows), click the images to access the full content items.

Chicago School Study Tours



Click to
play video



EALA PROMISING PRACTICES

INSTRUCTION

Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment

When there are evidence based practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment that show promise for students with disabilities, then their use will contribute to improved outcomes for all.

Culturally & Linguistically Responsive Teaching

When learning incorporates culturally and linguistically responsive teaching practices, all students find a sense of belonging and relevancy in classroom instruction.

FRAMEWORK

Learner Centered Models

When there are practices that schools can implement at both a schoolwide and individual level that can improve student engagement--especially attendance and discipline outcomes--for students with disabilities and learning differences, then their use will improve outcomes for all students.

COLLABORATION

Family Engagement

When all school staff can communicate and work with families through the special education process, then families feel more included and engaged, contributing to improved school experience and transition.

Community Engagement

When schools can lean on communities and organizations for support, more resources are made available and all students have further opportunities for local or community engagement and belonging.

Transition Planning

When there are practices in place that schools can implement to support transition plans to effectively prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary credential, then their use will improve transition for all students.

Data Use

When schools collect, analyze, and respond to data on student achievement, attendance, and discipline, they can use cycles of continuous improvement and can calibrate instruction to craft individualized learning experiences for each student, especially students with individual education plans (IEPs) or learning differences.

Scheduling

When students with individual education plans (IEPs) or learning differences are prioritized in the master schedule, then those students are paired with the right teachers and classes and there is proactive service planning for better collaboration between teacher and service provider.

Compliance Management

When there is effective compliance management, then teachers can dedicate more time to instruction and behavior/transition outcomes to benefit all students.

Leader Commitment

When leaders and teachers have mindsets of shared ownership and the belief that all students can achieve, then outcomes for students with disabilities and learning differences can improve. (For example, mindset impacts instructional choices and allows for better collaboration among adults.)

Innovative Structures of Support

When schools establish multiple means of staffing and innovative structures of support, students receive more personalized instruction and scaffolded support. When staff across specialties have space to collaborate, all students benefit.

Educator Development

When teachers have access to effective pre-service and in-service development, then they are better able to support students with disabilities and learning differences.

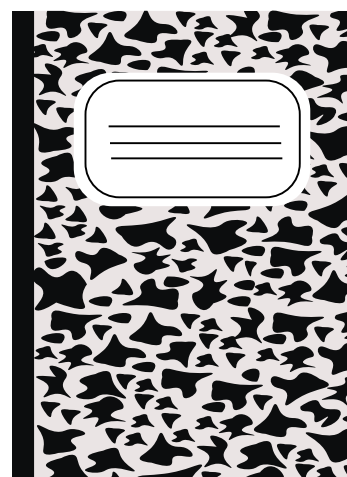
School Study Tours: Collaborative Reflection



EALA Created the Reflection Guide to support visiting educators on the tours. This guide can be used in print or digital* versions.

- 1 DURING:** Reflect during the tours...
 - Use the Reflection Pattern within the guide as a start (see guide below)
 - Capture thinking within the team highlights page (Post School Reflection Pages)
- 2 AFTER THE TOURS:** Reflection Summit (see slides below)
 - Reflect in cross-collaborative groups and in school team groups
 - Create a plan of action with your school team
- 3 ONCE BACK IN YOUR OWN CLASSROOM:** Use your reflections to implement Promising Practices in ways that work best for you and your students; use the [Resources Page](#) at the end of the guide for extended reading

Click the image to access the digital
Chicago Reflection Guide



Click the image to access the digital
Chicago Reflection Summit slides

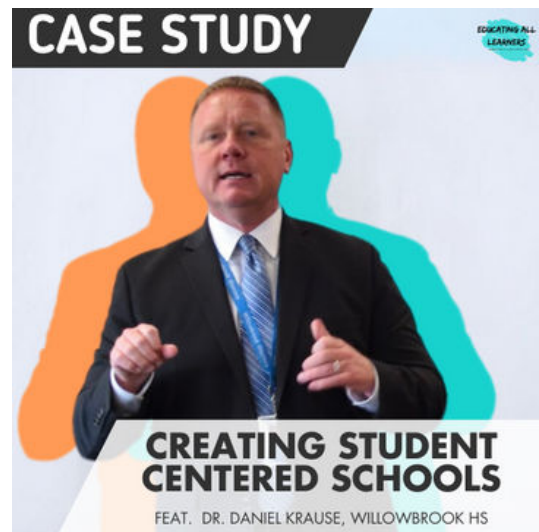


CASE STUDY

Creating a Student-Centered School: Lessons from Willowbrook High School

This Case Study will examine the benefits of a student-centered approach, and how one high school has implemented this strategy.

Click the image to
access the case study



Empowering learners through a student-centered approach

During our [School Study Tours](#) last October, the EALA team and attendees observed Willowbrook High School (WBHS) classrooms. As student guides led us through the halls, one theme became evident throughout this school: student-centered learning.

The visit showcased numerous student-centered approaches in action, from student-led tours to a professional development session hosted by The Brook, a student-run catering service, and concluding with a student panel Q&A.

Cultivating a student-centered environment

WBHS' student-centric approach is no accident.

In his 17-year tenure as principal at WBHS, Dan Krause has spent much time reflecting on ways to engage the school community outside of the classroom.

CASE STUDY

Continued

This desire goes back to his experience as a student, where he says that opportunities to be involved outside the classroom fueled his enthusiasm for school. Krause shares, “I always loved, as a student, the excitement of the beyond the classroom stuff at school [...] and now flipping it to being a leader of the building, how do you engage students more?”

As a leader, Krause wants to cultivate the same feelings of excitement and belonging for WBHS students. “The more you bring students to the table, the more they want to be involved,” explains Krause.

Here are a few key ways Krause has implemented this student-centered model:

1. Engage students from the start

Student-centered schools value student input and integrate their perspectives in the decision-making process. Rather than inviting students to sit in on meetings and informing them of decisions, student-centered schools actively involve students in shaping those decisions.

With this in mind, Krause invites students to speak at staff meetings and contribute to critical thinking and problem-solving.

“Student voice means students are at the table from the very beginning, giving you the feedback about how it’s going to be, what it’s going to look like for them, and how they are going to make it work,” explains Krause.

2. Stay focused on the students

Students are at the center of this approach — a fact that Krause often reminds his staff of. He underscores that adapting to meet students’ needs isn’t an option; it’s a necessity.

“This isn’t our experience; this is theirs,” says Krause. “We change what we do every year because we have new kids.”

CASE STUDY

Continued

Krause will often bring students into staff meetings to keep staff engaged and inspired to share their stories. In doing so, he cultivates an environment where staff are not just informed by but deeply connected to, the evolving needs and experiences of their students.

3. Foster connection and belonging

Popping into hallways and classrooms and saying hello to those he passes in the hallways are some low-lift but high-impact ways Krause models support and respect throughout his school. These small gestures go a long way toward improving morale in the building.

Krause also fosters connections by bringing WBHS students into 8th-grade transition nights as a valuable resource for parents as their children move into high school and Zooming them into conferences he attends. Creating these impactful relationships and strengthening ties within their community adds a layer of belonging to students' lives.

4. Say “yes” or “not yet”

Student-centered schools aim to encourage creativity and autonomy. To that end, Krause encourages students and staff to share innovative ideas openly.

Once presented with these ideas, he recommends working together as a team to explore how they can be reasonably integrated into the school's community.

Krause shares, “I think we’ve worked hard always to find a way to say “yes” and keep that lens. It has taken a while. [...] I consistently say the same thing to staff and parents. 25% of students are going to change every year, so every year, we need to change to meet the needs of the new students and new staff that are coming on board. The more we say yes, the more creative kids got and the more excitement kids had for school”. WBHS empowers students and teachers to take charge of their school experience by fostering a culture that welcomes new ideas and input.

5. Be clear with your expectations

Creating a student-centered school requires clear communication and alignment of expectations with staff members. Krause emphasizes the necessity for direct, explicit conversations to ensure everyone shares the same vision for the school.

CASE STUDY

Continued

“If there is a desire for a particular environment, it must be modeled and expressed clearly,” says Krause. “Staff will not read your mind.”

A good rule of thumb is treating staff how you want students to be treated. “When you model the results you want to see, it creates a trickle-down effect that spills over to students,” says Krause.

Transforming school culture

WBHS's student-centered initiatives have had a positive effect on student behavior. Incidents of defiance and disrespect, gang activity, and bullying have dropped across the board over the last 17 years.

Krause attributes this partly to the student ambassador program, which fosters connections with new students and breaks down barriers. “As students feel valued and heard, they typically tend to take down their walls,” says Krause.

Transforming school culture

WBHS's student-centered approach's success shines through in events like the annual Curricular Showcase. Like an Open House, the Showcase invites parents and incoming freshmen to experience learning in action through a student's perspective.

The event is unique because it is led by WBHS' students, who prepare interactive displays and demonstrations of their coursework, offering a glimpse into the student's academic journey and experiences. “Some of the most impactful school events are when the ones are student-led,” says Krause.

WBHS also hosts Lunch and Learns for staff with different cultural student organizations. Through these events, WBHS not only emphasizes the student voice but celebrates it. The result is a welcoming and inclusive environment that enriches the educational experience for students and staff alike.

REFLECTIONS

What I would tell other educators

“Bring kids to the table. You can talk all day about student voice and student agency, but if you’re not doing it with students, you’re not doing it.” - Dan Krause

Having students present at the start of the staff meetings has propelled this work forward. Krause recalls one particular meeting where teachers were discussing different instructional strategies. Students were invited to give their thoughts on how they felt these strategies worked for them. “Ask students for their opinions. You will get something out of it,” he says.

What We are Still Figuring Out

WBHS is committed to supporting all students at the level they need to be successful. One out of three students at WBHS is enrolled in an Individualized Education Plan (IEP), 504 Plan, or English as a Second Language (ESL) program. As WBHS continues its student-centered approach in all aspects, universally designed programming will be more apparent throughout its classrooms.

Resources

[Willowbrook High School](#)
website

[Creating a Student-Centered School: Lessons from Willowbrook High School](#)

About the Author

Dr. Dan Krause, with a career spanning since 1995, has held various roles in education, starting as a high school mathematics teacher and progressing to leadership positions. Currently serving as the Principal of Willowbrook High School in DuPage High School District 88 since 2007, he is also an Adjunct Professor at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and Aurora University.



CASE STUDY

A Deep Dive Into EALA's School Study Tours: Translating Knowledge into Practice

In this case study, we will look deeper into EALA's initiative, School Study Tours. What are School Study Tours? What are the benefits? How can they be recreated on a smaller scale?

Click the image to
access the case study



An Educating All Learners Alliance (EALA) Initiative: School Study Tours

School Study Tours (SST) are a unique EALA initiative designed to translate knowledge into practice, fostering more equitable learning environments and student experiences. These tours offer educators a firsthand look at how teachers around the country are implementing [EALA Promising Practices](#) to meet diverse learning needs.

“There are so many great examples of school study tours out there (Kauffman Foundation, the XQ Super Schools Project, the Learning Accelerator etc.), but we hadn’t seen one yet that centered on students with disabilities or learning differences. So, we created our own,” Project Director Treah Hutchings shared.

The first School Study Tour (SST) was held in January of 2023, exposing educators to innovative teaching methodologies and immersing them in the practical application of EALA’s Promising Practices.

CASE STUDY

Continued

Exploring EALA's Promising Practices

EALA's twelve Promising Practices originate from extensive research by EALA partner organizations across disability advocacy, special education, civil rights, and K-12 nonprofits. EALA consolidated and compiled these key findings into one cohesive list, the EALA Promising Practices, that serves as a flexible framework to center students' needs.

These are made up of the following twelve categories:

1. Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment
2. Culturally and Linguistically Responsive Teaching
3. Learner-Centered Models
4. Family Engagement
5. Community Engagement
6. Transition Planning
7. Data Use
8. Scheduling
9. Compliance Management
10. Leadership Commitments
11. Innovative Structures of Support
12. Educator Development

The practices are not intended to be requirements but rather as a starting point for which schools and educators can further center students with disabilities and learning differences. EALA recognizes the diverse needs and unique contexts of each student and school environment and encourages a flexible approach to adaptation and customization. While the practices were compiled with students with disabilities in mind, when implemented, these practices positively impact the learning outcomes of all learners. This work is rooted in Universal Design for Learning with the fundamental belief that designing for the most inclusive and accessible environment generally improves all learners' environments.

CASE STUDY

Continued

Understanding the School Study Tour Format

Each School Study Tour is carefully organized, partnering with schools within our network to showcase selected Promising Practices. The tour duration typically spans 2-3 hours per school, allowing attendees to observe practices in action. Visiting teachers are split into small groups to allow observation without disrupting ongoing classes. Collaborative reflection sessions at the end of each tour foster shared learning and exchange of ideas among participants. After touring 3-4 different schools, teachers gather for a full day of reflection the following day in teams.

The Power of Collaborative Reflection

Reflection spaces during tours play a pivotal role in fostering shared learning and deepening the impact of the School Study Tour experience.

“Collaborative reflection gives educators the space to share, learn, problem-solve—collectively improving their teaching practices and providing a community to call back on in times of need,” explained Project Direct Treah Hutchings. “Our hope is that in addition to the instructional practices they may wish to replicate, educators also bring this space of reflective collaboration back to their home districts—fostering a culture of continuous improvement beyond the school study tours they attended.”

Testimonials from attendees underscore the value of these reflection spaces in shaping educators’ practices and creating a community for continuous improvement.

“The time to reflect with other participants was phenomenal and gave us time to further our connections with the work being done in other districts,” explained one SST attendee.

CASE STUDY

Continued

Impact and Results

Since the first tour in 2023, EALA has hosted over 35 attendees from 16 different districts around the country and held two different tours – one in San Diego and one in the suburbs of Chicago. The impact of these tours has been significant.

After EALA's first tour in San Diego, 100% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that participating in the EALA School Visit advanced their thinking and work. "Being able to discuss these practices with others and witness where we saw specific practices happening within the school day was extremely powerful," one attendee reflected. "It made me think about what is happening and what is missing within my own program."

Immediately following the Chicago tour, 100% of attendees expressed the importance of working with other attendees outside of their schools, and 93% of attendees expressed specific strategies they planned to bring home. "The promising strategies have deepened my understanding of the whole inclusive movement to make sure everyone from the students, teachers, administrators, parents, and community are involved in the education of our students," shared another attendee.

Catalyzing Change and Sustaining Impactful Practices

School study tours can drive positive change by providing firsthand exposure to effective teaching strategies and inclusive approaches, such as EALA's Promising Practices. The tour experiences inspire educators to adopt inclusive methods, collaborate with peers, and contribute to positive shifts in classrooms or schools.

"I remember when I was a teacher, I always craved more time for discussion and reflection during PDs," recalled Aurora Dreger, EALA's Networks Lead. "Our School Study Tours aim to give educators an abundant amount of discussion and reflection time so they can hear from and learn from educators from across the country".

CASE STUDY

Continued

To measure sustained impact, EALA is creating a learning agenda for SSTs, utilizing highlights from visiting school teams while on tours as well as surveys at three and six months to gather insights into the implementation and adaptation of inclusive strategies. EALA does its best to capture and share the work being implemented through podcasts and case studies, bringing the tours (or the practices shown on the tours) to educators beyond those who physically attended.

Creating Your School Study Tour

For those interested in implementing SSTs in their school or district, here are five steps to consider:

1. Assess feasibility and interest within your team or district
 - a. Will this work with existing schedules?
 - b. Is there interest?
2. Determine the scale of your tours
 - a. Would you want to conduct tours within your school or collaborate within your entire district?
 - b. Would you want to collaborate with schools outside of your district?
3. Determine your Host Schools & Classes
 - a. Which schools & classrooms will you be observing?
 - b. What kind of lessons will you observe, and how do they align with EALA's Promising Practices?
4. Create your invitee list
 - a. How many educators are you inviting on these tours?
 - b. How will you break them up into groups?
5. Plan for collaborative reflection
 - a. How will your tour attendees take notes?
 - b. How will you make time for questions and answers with the host schools?
 - c. When and where will you host a whole-group reflection summit?

REFLECTIONS

What I would tell other educators

“School Study tours are more than just a change of scenery from your home school or classroom. It is an opportunity for professional and personal growth, insights, and innovative practices, and a chance to connect with fellow educators from across the country. Why not go?”

What We are Still Figuring Out

We want to be responsive to attendee feedback, so the focus for the next two tours will be striking the balance between form and function. We want to see a wide variety of learning environments, but we also want to minimize travel time and feel free at each stop on the tour. EALA is also committed to seamlessly maintaining a sense of community and collaboration among the cohort of educators post-tour.

Resources

[EALA Promising Practices](#)

About the Author

The Educating All Learners Alliance (EALA) is an uncommon coalition of over 140 organizations committed to resource sharing and community-building that supports the efforts of the education community to meet the needs of students with disabilities.



Podcast



Creating a Student-Centered School: Lessons from Willowbrook High School

EALA is joined by Dan Krause, Principal of Willowbrook High School and former School Study Tours host school leader. In this episode we discuss the importance of, and how to's of creating a student centered school.

Click the image to access
the podcast episode



To access the full transcript go to bit.ly/StudentCenteredDanKrause

Blog

Translating Knowledge into Practice: EALA School Study Tours Chicago 2023

A blog that dives into EALA's October 2023 School Study Tours.

The EALA team arrived at O'Hare Airport on October 18, 2023. This marked the beginning of an educational adventure that would leave a lasting impact on all involved. As we set foot in the Windy City, our first stop was Madison's Bar and Grill, where we had dinner and a chance to meet and greet attendees of the School Study Tour.

The next day, we dove headfirst into our mission by touring several educational institutions in the area. This included visits to Homer Junior High School, Willowbrook High School, Addison Trail High School, and the Transition Program for District 88, designed to cater to students aged 18-22. Each of these institutions offered a unique insight into the educational landscape. Witnessing the diversity in teaching, learning strategies, and administrative support was fascinating.



Attendees at Homer Junior High School being toured by Kristen Jurca.

We began our tour witnessing innovative teaching methodologies in action at Homer Junior High School. From co-taught Language Arts lessons to Adaptive P.E. and the Wilson Reading Program, attendees were able to observe a wide range of educational practices. Homer Junior High School provided insights into how educators are addressing the diverse needs of their students. Highlights from this tour were watching the co-teaching pairs and seeing the Adaptive P.E. in action. It was evident that this school is committed to inclusivity and catering to all learners' needs. The methods employed by their educators were seamlessly integrated. Our attendees appreciated the obvious preplanning and collaboration the Homer Junior High staff puts into their work. "This [visit to Homer Junior High] already made the trip [from Louisiana to Chicago] worth it," said Justin Barron as we began taking our seats on the bus.



Principal Dan Krause of Willowbrook High School leading our whole-group reflection at the end of our tour.

In addition to classroom experiences, we were able to attend a period-by-period meeting at Willowbrook High School, which was akin to a monthly staff meeting. It was a unique opportunity to observe the collaborative nature of the faculty and their dedication to continuous improvement. A highlight of our visit at Willowbrook was witnessing students actively participating in student-centered models. During the meeting, students were helping out with the Brook Catering company, gaining valuable work experience by taking food orders and preparing hors d'oeuvres for the staff in attendance. The Brook Catering Company “[provides] students with basic lessons in culinary arts to skills that will be necessary for careers in the food service industry, catering and nutrition/menu planning” (Willowbrook High School). Other students were engaged in Project Lead the Way, exploring Engineering, Career and Technical Education (CTE), and Biomedical Sciences. The schools’ commitment to providing students with opportunities to acquire practical skills was very clear from the moment we began our tours with student leaders as our guides.



Principal Jack Andrews of Addison Trail High School leading attendees in a tour.

Addison Trail High School, our third stop on the tour, showcased a strong commitment to diversity and inclusion, particularly for the growing English Learner (EL) population. In classes like EL English and Sheltered Geo Science, educators created nurturing environments for students with diverse needs, ensuring they feel safe and supported.

The Academic Success Center Tier II, serving as a skills lab, further emphasized Addison Trail's dedication to fostering inclusivity by giving students a more individualized approach to learning by providing tutoring services and helping students create personalized academic goals. Their approach is a valuable example of how schools can accommodate the diverse needs of students while promoting an inclusive and equitable learning environment.



Attendees touring the Transition Academy.

Our tours were enriched further at the Transition Program for District 88. The Vocational Education Transition “program helps students with diverse needs obtain job training in a community setting and transition to life after high school” (DuPage High School District 88). The teachers and staff at the Transition Program exemplified a profound commitment to preparing students with diverse needs for life beyond high school, equipping them with essential job training and life skills through their daily lesson planning. Staff even stayed beyond school hours to show us around their classrooms, and we were truly grateful for this opportunity.

During our tours, one particular quote resonated deeply with us: “As a principal, you don’t drive instruction, you drive culture,” as stated by Dan Krause of Willowbrook High School. It served as a profound reminder of administrators’ pivotal role in shaping their schools’ ethos. The impact of a positive school culture cannot be underestimated in fostering effective teaching and learning environments.

We ended the day at Giordano's Pizzeria for some Chicago-style deep-dish pizza. Attendees and EALA staff spoke about their main takeaways from the day, but also had time to get to know each other on a more personal level. There were conversations of past work history, family, and future plans. After a delicious meal and great conversation, we returned to our hotel to prepare for a full day of reflection early the next day.



Attendees participating in our Reflection Summit with their advisors.

The Reflection Summit was a dynamic gathering of advisors and attendees who came together to focus on the implementation of Promising Practices and methodologies they would like to bring back to their home districts. The summit aimed to identify how schools plan to integrate the practices they've seen on these tours while also shedding light on the opportunities for growth and challenges they may encounter when doing so. Educators participated in three rounds of reflection: a small group reflection based on their role in education, a small group brainstorm with their school teams, and a final round of a whole group reflection.

As we left the Reflection Summit, we did so with a renewed commitment to fostering inclusive education and a strengthened network of allies to support our efforts. One participant reflected on their journey, "The promising strategies have deepened my understanding of the whole inclusive movement to make sure everyone from the students, teachers, administrators, parents and community are involved in the education of our students".

By forming an uncommon community of educators and leaders united by the common goal of centering best practices for students with disabilities and learning differences, we can bring about meaningful change. We left with a profound appreciation for the commitment of educators, administrators, and students in creating vibrant, inclusive, and dynamic learning environments. As we departed O'Hare Airport, we carried with us a deeper understanding of the power of culture in driving effective education and a renewed commitment to fostering such environments.

Host School Resources

Homer Junior High School

The following resources were utilized by host schools during our tours.

- [Wilson Reading System](#)
 - The Wilson Reading System (WRS) is an instructional program used to help struggling readers. It's one of several programs that uses the highly structured [Orton-Gillingham](#) approach

Host School Resources

Willowbrook High School

The following resources were utilized by host schools during our tours.

- [Project Lead the Way](#) (PLTW)
 - PLTW Distinguished Program Recognition celebrates districts and schools committed to helping students own their education by increasing student access, engagement, and achievement in their PLTW programs.
- [The Brook Catering Co](#)
 - The Brook Catering Co. was established in 2012 to transition the Willowbrook culinary program from providing students with basic lessons in culinary arts to skills that will be necessary for careers in the food service industry, catering and nutrition/menu planning.

Host School Resources

Addison Trail High School

The following resources were utilized by host schools during our tours.

- [Addison Trail Academic Success Center](#)
 - The Academic Success Center (ASC) provides tutoring in a variety of subject areas during the school day.
- [Distict 88 Transition Program](#)
 - Dupage High School District 88's Vocational Education program helps students with diverse needs obtain job training in a community setting and transition to life after high school.