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All Learners Action Lab: A Practitioner's Guide to Supporting Students with Disabilities

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ACADEMY



design:tech
HIGH SCHOOL

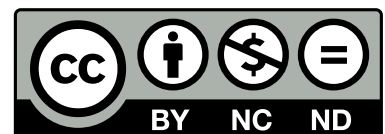


Genesee Community
Charter School



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INTRODUCTION

The All Learners Action Lab (ALAL) is a project of the [Educating All Learners Alliance \(EALA\)](#) at InnovateEDU. It exists for educators and school leaders working on innovative, inclusive practices for students with disabilities who are eager to deepen connections with other schools across the country.

At its inception, participants previously participated in EALA's School Study tours, which placed over 100 educators and 29 districts within schools in San Diego, Chicago, Nashville, and New Orleans to observe inclusive practices for students with disabilities and learning differences through experiential learning. **The ALAL was founded to bring a smaller group of alumni together to continue working together and apply the best practices observed on the School Study tours in their own schools.**

Ten school teams participated in this cohort, each made up of special education and general education teachers, school leaders, and instructional coordinators. The teams were selected from different regions, serving very different student populations across the country. This allowed the cohort to engage with promising practices across different contexts, school populations, and geographies.

The cohort included:

- [Brooklyn Prospect High School](#)
- [Casita Center](#)
- [Creative Performing and Media Arts](#)
- [Design Tech High School](#)
- [Eagle Bay Academy](#)
- [Explore! Community School](#)
- [Genesee Community Charter School](#)
- [Jefferson RISE](#)
- [STEM Prep Academy Middle and High School](#)
- [Washington Leadership Academy](#)



The teams each brought a school-specific challenge to overcome and a practice learned from the tours to implement.

Some of those challenges included:



Closing a significant gap in outcomes for students with disabilities



Rethinking how schools engage families consistently throughout the school year



How to use data more deliberately to guide decisions

Across the cohort, teams assessed practices – such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL), tiered academic support, and targeted professional development – that would best serve their school community.

The cohort met throughout the year to support each other's work and discuss ideas to advance the field. They shared challenges and frustrations, accomplishments, and built a community for action. Each team worked with expert mentors from EALA – Laura Bantle, Symon Hayes, and Krista Reed – who helped cohort members troubleshoot their respective challenges and refine their practices. As a result, each school completed the ALAL with a set of practical, applied approaches that other schools could learn from.

This cohort delivered tangible results:

↗ Genesee Community Charter School raising kindergarten math proficiency from 41% to 77%

↗ Eagle Bay Academy boosting post-lunch attendance by 25%.

Scaling these transformative outcomes nationwide will require district leaders, policymakers, and funders to invest directly in practitioner-driven innovation

This report outlines the major themes resulting from this work, including key takeaways and lessons learned from each school. This report serves as a resource for other educators and leaders, highlighting practices that have been tried, adjusted, and proven to make a significant difference for students with disabilities.

COMMON THEMES AND LEARNINGS:

Across all ten participating schools, the All Learners Action Lab surfaced powerful insights to move beyond compliance toward deeply rooted inclusive practices. While each school designed its own tailored action plan, their collective experiences revealed three important strategic lessons for working with students with disabilities.

RESTRUCTURING TEACHER COLLABORATION AND PROTECTING PLANNING TIME

High-quality, inclusive instruction can't happen on its own. Schools that successfully moved the needle for students with disabilities established structured, recurring collaboration practices that allowed general education, special education, and intervention staff to share instructional ownership. Sustained co-planning proved non-negotiable for all participants, especially compared with one-off professional development sessions.

Cohort Examples in Action

Explore! Community School: The team understood that their instructional systems and practices to alleviate the achievement gap for students with disabilities operated in parallel rather than as a single coherent system. By protecting time for six co-teaching partnerships, they increased their level of teamwork, logging 101 formal collaboration meetings, 250 informal check-ins, and 99 dedicated co-planning blocks. **This structural shift led to a critical mass of students moving into higher performance bands based on their assessments.**

"Success wasn't just about moving students, it was about changing how adults worked together."

**- Explore!
Community School**

Genesee Community Charter School: Genesee leveraged co-planning as an organic form of professional development. The team expanded teachers' capacity by embedding an academic intervention teacher into

kindergarten core instruction and holding weekly co-planning sessions focused on Universal Design for Learning (UDL). **The school reported an increase from 41% to 77% in the percentage of kindergarten students meeting grade-level math expectations.**

Casita Center: The team of educators at Casita understood that “one-size-fits-all” math instruction marginalized students with IEPs. To combat this, they built a plan that relied heavily on protected, highly collaborative systems. Teachers used weekly collaboration periods to focus on co-planning, translating curriculum into age-appropriate math routines, and brainstorming strategies for lowering the barrier to entry for students with IEPs. **These weekly team planning meetings translated directly into increased student autonomy, greater participation among students with disabilities, and a modest boost in assessment scores.**

"Traditional math instruction often relies on a rigid, one-size-fits-all curriculum that prioritizes rote memorization and passive learning over full active engagement. This teacher-centered approach creates a significant systemic barrier for diverse learners, particularly students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), who may require varied access points, pacing, and modalities to successfully grasp abstract and concrete mathematical concepts."

- Casita Center

MENU FOR NEXT STEPS

Teacher: _____ Topic: Agency in Math

			
☐ OBSERVATION COVERAGE	☐ PLANNING TIME WITH A COACH	☐ DEMO IN YOUR CLASS	☐ CO-TEACHING
Coverage will be provided so you can step out and observe another teacher or experience a modeled lesson without worrying about your own class.	Dedicated time with an instructional coach (Liz, Jenny, or Tammy) to collaborate, plan lessons, and tailor strategies to your classroom needs.	A coach (Liz, Jenny, or Tammy) can model a strategy in your classroom with your students, giving you a chance to see it in action in your own setting.	Work alongside a coach (Liz, Jenny, or Tammy) to co-plan, co-teach, and reflect to improve practice.

☐ I got new strategies to try out in my class! Thank you!
 ☐ Other: _____

Casita Center's half-sheet exit ticket for teachers to inform the leadership team of next steps.

LESSONS SHARED

Differentiate Coaching from Co-Planning: Educators from ALAL emphasized that clearly defined expectations for collaborative sessions were key to their success. Co-planning shouldn't feel like an evaluative coaching meeting; rather, it should be a functional working block with concrete deliverables.

Build Sustainable Teams over Relying on a Single Person: ALAL team members consistently shared that collaborative initiatives shouldn't rely on a single teacher or administrator. Schools must build cross-functional leadership teams and document processes to ensure continuity, especially during staff turnover.

REVAMPING FAMILY AND STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

Inclusion needs to extend beyond the classroom and into the homes of our students' families. Several ALAL teams recognized that traditional touchpoints like parent-teacher conferences or disciplinary meetings often alienate families of students with disabilities. Schools found success in engaging their families by creating low-stakes and joyful environments centered on caregiver identity and student voice.

Cohort Examples in Action

Eagle Bay Academy: Eagle Bay leadership noticed that their daily schedule created barriers to student choice and voice. To support student participation, they agreed to design and implement a revised school schedule that better meets the needs of students and staff. One adjustment to the students' schedule changed the approach to lunch. All students ate lunch during the same period, thus creating more time to focus on social-emotional learning, cooperative games, and targeted one-on-one teaching in fundamental skills. Another adaptation centered around student presentations to families, offering afternoon and evening hours; they even provided transportation and meals to overcome potential barriers that might hinder full engagement.

After implementing these changes, Eagle Bay educators reported that post-lunch student attendance increased by 25%, incidents of students wandering throughout the school day decreased by 20%, and family engagement significantly improved.



Increase in post-lunch student attendance



Decrease in incidents of students wandering throughout the school day

Washington Leadership Academy (WLA):

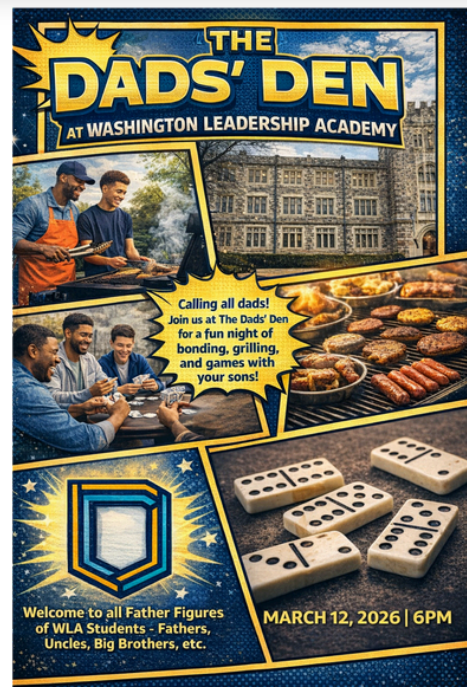
Facing geographic barriers and declining engagement with middle school parents and guardians, WLA organized identity-focused spaces, including Dad's Den and the Moms' Lounge. These events centered on community building through activities like barbecues and games rather than academic compliance, creating space to establish deeper connections and trust in the community.

"Both events provided space for open dialogue regarding the challenges and successes experienced by students receiving special education services...This moment not only elevated student confidence and representation but also reinforced the school's commitment to creating an inclusive culture where every learner can meaningfully participate in the community."

- WLA Staff



Flyer for Washington Leadership Academy Mom's Lounge engagement initiative



Flyer for for Washington Leadership Academy Dad's Den engagement initiative



Brooklyn Prospect High School's flyer for Alumni, College, and Career Fair

Brooklyn Prospect High School: The ALAL team at Brooklyn Prospect High School launched a 9th-grade Alumni, College, and Career Fair designed to foster representation of marginalized groups at the school. They recruited 30 alumni and upperclassmen as panelists and created small-group breakout circles, allowing students to learn more about potential pathways after high school. This deliberate design gave students with IEPs (20% of the student population) an intimate, low-stakes environment to see themselves reflected in older peers and to actively participate in career dialogue.

Design Tech High School: Design Tech pivoted to a student-driven weekly academic counseling intervention designed to foster student autonomy after recognizing their traditional tutoring model made students reluctant to participate. Rather than relying on adult-led interventions, which contributed to educator burnout, the team implemented student feedback to ensure students felt comfortable and had a sense of ownership in the process. Ultimately, students saw themselves as partners in the process, knowing their voices were heard and prioritized.

"My biggest advice is to be willing to adjust your plan and really listen to what the kids are saying between the lines."

- Design Tech Staff

LESSONS SHARED

Create Opportunities for Family Engagement Outside of Academic Frameworks: When families have a safe space to interact with administrators and educators, they can build greater trust. Ultimately, schools and families establish stronger community relationships and are better prepared should challenging situations arise.

Design Events with Representation in Mind: When planning career fairs, panels, or community events, ensure full representation in leadership roles, including students and alumni. It is imperative to allow students to see older peers with

similar learning needs and/or identities in leadership positions that could influence their future pathways.

LEVERAGING DATA-DRIVEN SYSTEMS

To move from standard compliance to systemic inclusion, schools need a clear, honest relationship with their data. When student data is scattered across multiple platforms or buried in compliance paperwork, educators don't receive accurate information about their students, leading to students often receiving outdated or inconsistent accommodations. The following schools demonstrated how to reduce administrative burdens while still radically accelerating student growth. These schools achieved this by centralizing data systems, aligning coaching with real-time analytics, and using data to guide targeted remediation.

Cohort Examples in Action

Jefferson RISE: Special education staff at Jefferson RISE struggled to balance a significant amount of compliance paperwork with hands-on classroom support. The team built a Student Services Master Spreadsheet and dashboard to centralize special education student information, improve data integrity, and support more accurate accommodations and compliance decisions.

The Student Services Coordinator collected and entered student data through multiple sources, including teacher input, student and parent interviews, and student testing information. This new resource led to more accurate data for accommodations, reducing the likelihood that students would be over- or under-accommodated or assigned supports based on outdated information.

"A strong system should improve data integrity, reduce errors, and make compliance work more manageable. However, the deeper goal should be to help teams make better decisions for students. When done well, compliance systems can strengthen collaboration, increase teacher input, improve accommodation accuracy, and help students receive the supports they actually need."

- Jefferson RISE Staff

STEM Prep Academy: STEM Prep Academy partnered with the Diverse Learners Cooperative (DLC) to receive layered support for both general education and Exceptional Education (EE) teachers.

DLC facilitated monthly coaching cycles for EEs along with professional development focused on collecting, analyzing, and responding to academic and behavior data.

Creative, Performing, and Media Arts (CPMA) Middle School:

CPMA used iReady data analysis to build a targeted Response to Intervention system to address a critical achievement gap affecting approximately 111 students with mild-to-moderate disabilities who were falling behind in math. The leadership team structured dedicated math team release days and meetings to review of diagnostic progress, plan 30 minutes of weekly remediation, and align curriculum. By specifically tracking students with special needs through iReady Growth Reports and observation tools, educators successfully delivered targeted, data-informed instruction to meet students where they need it most.

STEM Prep Academy's proactive model was part of a multi-tiered system allowing teachers to accurately identify root causes of behaviors, resulting in students with exceptionalities in 6th and 8th grade ELA outperforming their grade-level peers by 6–10% in growth.

LESSONS SHARED

Build a single source of data for accommodations:

Don't let student accommodations live in isolated IEP documents that are difficult for general education teachers to reference. Centralizing this data into a secure, single source eliminates administrative burdens and guesswork, prevents misalignment in student accommodations, and saves coordinators hours of prep time.

Data is only as good as the action it leads to:

Collecting academic and behavioral data is only the first step; teachers need structured, collaborative cycles to learn how to respond to the data. Pairing data collection with dedicated coaching and professional development allows teachers to diagnose root causes and adjust their instruction accurately.

Providing protected time (such as release days) for teams to focus exclusively on data and collaborative planning is essential for addressing systemic achievement gaps."

- CPMA Staff

The All Learners Action Lab shows that when school teams are empowered to adapt proven, inclusive practices to their unique local contexts, systemic transformation for students with disabilities is possible and measurable. The ten participating cohort teams moved beyond compliance to build deeply rooted, high-impact inclusive systems despite the varying geography and student demographics of each team.

To sustain this momentum and scale these outcomes nationwide, the education sector needs to turn the Action Lab's insights into strategic action across the field.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Invest Directly in School Leader Initiatives:

Systemic change requires leadership that models a strong commitment to all learners and actively distributes authority among general education, special education, and administrative staff. Policymakers, funding organizations, and district leadership should prioritize investments in school-level, practitioner-driven cohorts. Providing school leaders with the resources, expert mentorship, and peer networks needed to champion local action plans yields immediate, practical improvements for students.

Protect and Structure Co-Planning and Collaboration:

High-quality, differentiated instruction cannot rely on a single, isolated educator. Districts and school systems must reconfigure master schedules to protect recurring collaborative work blocks for cross-functional teams. Differentiating functional co-planning from evaluative coaching ensures that general education teachers, special education staff, and interventionists share true instructional ownership.

Reframe Family Engagement Beyond Academic Compliance:

To build trust and foster authentic belonging, schools should design family touchpoints centered around caregiver identity, community building, and pressure-free interactions outside traditional compliance frameworks. Furthermore, career fairs, panels, and school events must be intentionally designed to include visible representation that ensures students with disabilities see older peers and alumni with similar learning needs leading in the community.

Centralize Data Systems to Drive Actionable, Real-Time Support:

Fragmented data leads to outdated accommodations and administrative burnout. School systems must establish centralized, secure, single-source data dashboards for accommodations and student progress. Educators can identify root causes and deliver timely, calibrated support through a combination of accessible data platforms, structured review cycles, and targeted professional coaching.

THE ALL LEARNERS ACTION LAB COHORT HIGHLIGHTS A CLEAR PATH FOR K–12 EDUCATION:

When we invest in collaborative school leaders and equip them with evidence-based, peer-reviewed strategies, we create sustainable environments where students with disabilities can thrive and equip schools to incorporate promising inclusive practices for all students.

CONTRIBUTORS

This report is based on reflections submitted by the 10 participating school teams. The individuals listed below contributed directly to this work and signed on to share their perspectives.

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