TOGETHER

WE'RE BETTER

2026-2027 Toolkit

For Parents and Educators

The Arc Maryland

Maryland Department of Disabilities

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
CREATING CHANGE • IMPROVING LIVES

Maryland State Department of Education

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TOGETHER WE'RE BETTER INCLUSIVE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

The Arc Maryland, Maryland State Department of Education, Maryland Department of Disabilities, and the **Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council** have partnered on our statewide "Together We're Better" (TWB) inclusive education campaign since 2004.

The TWB campaign 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 program are:

Toolkit and Disability Experience Booklists

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

Disability Awareness & Acceptance Presentations

- An interactive celebration of individual differences and commonalities, offered to schools across the State of Maryland!

Elementary and Middle School Artwork Contest

- Students create pieces of unique artwork based on the annual theme of National Inclusive Schools Week, the 2025-2026 theme is "CHILDREN FIRST – Building a Stronger Tomorrow."

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 people with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) 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 through your computer browser:
http://www.thearcmd.org/programs/twb/

ABOUT THE TOOLKIT

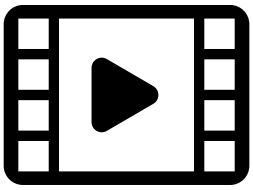
This toolkit was designed by The Arc Maryland, with support from it's statewide "Together We're Better" Inclusive Education Campaign partners:

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

WHAT'S INSIDE?



Lesson Plans/Activities & Classroom Resources



Watch & Learn Videos



Books



Online Resources

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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 in your classroom by using these resources!



Source: Maryland Comprehensive Health Education Framework: Pre-Kindergarten through 12th Grade (June 2021)

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 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)*



Artwork and Drawing Contest submissions Are Due to The Arc Maryland by January 26, 2027

Visit our Website for Contest Rules: Elementary & Middle School Artwork Contest
High School Drawing Contest

The Inclusive Schools Network (ISN) hosts the Annual Inclusive Schools Week during the first week of December, this year we will celebrate December 7 - 11, 2026. 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 reimagined.

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

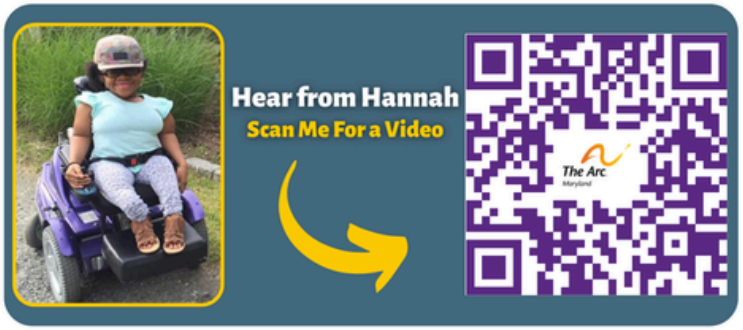
BELIEVE IT IS POSSIBLE, TAKE ACTION, AND WATCH STUDENTS THRIVE!

©ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. DR. JULIE CAUSTON AND DR. KRISTIE PRETTI-FRONTCZAK. LEARN MORE ABOUT US AT INCLUSIVESCHOOLING.COM/MEET-US

*Causton, J., and Pretti-Frontczak, K. (2021). Inclusive Education: A Re-Imagined Definition. New York: Inclusive Schooling, LLC and B2K Solutions, Ltd.

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 (Grades 3 – 8)
Physical Disability Awareness (Phoebe) | 3-minutes
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CL8GMxRW_5Y

"Ian" (Grades 2 – 5)
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
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hz_d-cikWmI

Tamara (Grades K – 3)
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

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4frsp-rR6c
list=PLAJFhAOG3SCd4XvNshmIvesc7i1sHIr55

What's Up With Nick? (Grades 2 – 5)
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
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mtRYKjucDHk&list=PLAJFhAOG3SCd4XvNshmIvesc7i1sHIr55&index=2

Be a Mr. Jensen (Grades 3 – 5)
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 Also for educators and school staff! https://clintpulver.com/educators/

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

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

Katie's Disability Awareness Video (Grades 2 – 5)
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 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S0fs9650Vz8

"Friendship Adventures: Invisible Disabilities" (Grades 4 – 8)
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
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brVxm8tqsC4

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

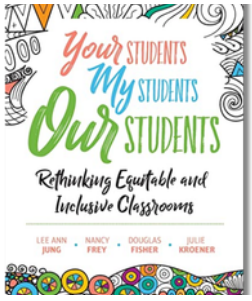
DISABILITY I How you see me (Grades 7 - 10)
What about you makes you a FABULOUS person? How do you think people see you as someone with a disability? | 3-minutes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bwW6mYdJ7Xc

Voices for the Voiceless (Grades 9 - 12)
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 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uQNW9x7Z08Y

FOR EDUCATORS

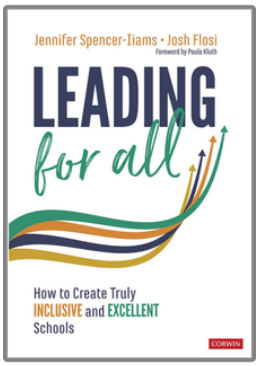
CREATING COMMUNITIES OF BELONGING

Books



Your Students, My Students, Our Students: Rethinking Equitable and Inclusive Classrooms

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.

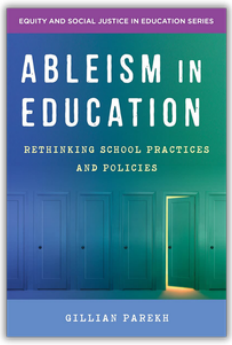


Leading for All

A practical guide that provides a clear pathway for educators to develop a more inclusive school community from start to finish. The authors share lessons learned from years building district schools where all students are served in their neighborhood school and in classrooms with their general education peers.

Features include:

- Three focus areas to guide change: Creating Inclusive Cultures, Improving Instructional Practices, and Increasing Student Voice
- 7 Components of Inclusive and Equitable Learning Communities
- Supporting resources for promoting inclusion throughout the school day, including co-curricular activities and transportation
- Stories of real students and teachers and the actions that impacted their success



Ableism in Education: Rethinking School Practices and Policies

Special education and academic streaming (or tracking) are two of the most prominent ability-based strategies public schools use to organize student learning. Both have had a long and complicated relationship with gender, race, and class. In this down-to-earth guide, Dr. Gillian Parekh unpacks the realities of how ability and disability play out within schooling, including insights from students, teachers, and administrators about the barriers faced by students on the basis of ability. From the challenges with ability testing to gifted programs to the disability rights movement, Parekh shows how ableism is inextricably linked to other forms of bias. Her book is a powerful tool for educators committed to justice-seeking practices in schools



One Without The Other

Shelley Moore explores the changing landscape of inclusive education. Presented through real stories from her own classroom experience, this passionate and creative educator tackles such things as inclusion as a philosophy and practice, the difference between integration and inclusion, and how inclusion can work with a variety of students and abilities. Explorations of differentiation, the role of special education teachers and others, and universal design for learning all illustrate the evolving discussion on special education and teaching to all learners. This book will be of interest to all educators, from special ed teachers, educational assistants and resource teachers, to classroom teachers, administrators, and superintendents.

FOR EDUCATORS

Online Resources

TIES Center
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 recommendations on how to move forward.
https://publications.ici.umn.edu/ties/peer-engagement/belonging/introduction

Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education
Featuring content by MCIE staff and other professionals and family members exploring research and "how to" be inclusive.

Podcasts

Think Inclusive is the official podcast and blog of the **Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education** (MCIE) which exists to build bridges between families, educators, and people with disabilities to advocate for inclusive education by publishing content from disabled advocates, parents of children with disabilities, and individuals who are "all-in" for inclusion.

Five Moore Minutes is a website with videos dedicated to empowering schools and classrooms to support ALL Learners! Created by Shelley Moore, this website is designed with teachers in mind. As educators, we don't always have a lot of time, so this website and video series offers resources, research, professional development activities and inspiration in small chunks! Listen to the Five More Minutes Podcast, **here**.



Learn more about Five Moore Minutes and Shelley Moore at
www.FiveMooreMinutes.com

The Post-Secondary Transition Podcast

Hosted by two high school transition teachers who talk about the ins and outs (and everything in between) of the secondary transition process for families of students with disabilities! They're working to lead families step-by-step up each rung of the transition ladder. Listen to their YouTube channel, **here.**

AUTISM ACCEPTANCE RESOURCES

Online Resources

Autism Society of Maryland (AUSOM)
Howard, Montgomery, Anne Arundel Counties
The Autism Society of Maryland is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and is an affiliate of the Autism Society of America. The mission of the Autism Society of Maryland is to serve individuals on the autism spectrum, their families, and their communities by providing information, support, and advocacy; by promoting awareness of autism that values the dignity and uniqueness of each individual; and by working to improve the quality of and access to services and to educational opportunities. **https://autismsocietymd.org/**

Autism Society of Baltimore - Chesapeake (ASBC)
Positively impact the lives of children and adults who experience Autism and their families in the Baltimore-Metropolitan area through: support groups, social and community connections, information and resources, networking, and public awareness.
https://www.baltimoreautismsociety.org/

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/**

The Autistic Self Advocacy Network (ASAN) is 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/

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/**

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 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 Heroes 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://pbskids.org/sesame/games/**

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/

Special Books by Special Kids

Normalizing 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

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

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

For Young Children

Inclusion Matters® by Shane's Inspiration (Formerly "Together We Are Able®")
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://inclusionmatters.org/**

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/

For Grades 3-5

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-qa.scholastic.com/flauntit/pdfs/AllMaterialsDHIFI2021.pdf?fs=e&s=cl

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/

For Youth

Embracing our Differences
Uses the power of art and education to expand consciousness and open the heart to celebrate the differences 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/**

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/**

For All Ages (K-12)

The Nora Project
**June 2025 update: The Nora Project is being integrated into CEL (Center for Enriched Living)*
Teaches 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/

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/

Find a SibShop Near You!
https://siblingsupport.org/sibshops/find-a-sibshop-near-you/

Sibling Leadership Network
https://siblingleadership.org/

Siblings with a Mission
http://www.siblingswithamission.org/

SibShops (Ages 4-13)
SibShops provide young brothers and sisters with peer support and information in a lively, recreational setting.

Learn more about SibShops, presented by the Sibling Support Project:
https://siblingsupport.org/

The Arc of Frederick County
SibShops meet on the second Saturday of each month, from 1-4 pm.

The Arc Baltimore For siblings ages 4–13 of children with disabilities
SibShops meet on the third Saturday of each month, from 12-3 pm. *New - Lasting Bonds support group for adult siblings (ages 21+) of people with developmental disabilities



Kennedy Krieger Institute
Siblings ages 8 to 12 of patients receiving care at a Kennedy Krieger outpatient medical clinic are eligible to participate. SibShops meet quarterly on Saturdays at Ronald McDonald House Charities Maryland.

FOR PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES



Family Support

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

Find your local Family Support Center Contact here! **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



Local Family Support Coordinators provide the following support to help families:

- Responding to family concerns by phone, face to face meetings, or emails;
- Provides support to parents about the IEP process, including preparation for the IEP meeting, and
- implementation of services;
- Provide suggestions for parents to prepare for IEP meetings;
- Follow-up with parents throughout the IEP Process;
- Arranging parent-to-parent contacts and social or support activities;
- Sponsoring playgroups; and
- Operating a lending library of shared resources.

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

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.

Visit here to find resources for: **Early Childhood**; **Access, Equity, Progress**; and **Secondary Transition.**

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.

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.

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!

Allegany 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

Maryland has a network of 24 Patty Centers (formerly named Family Support Centers) in 14 counties that offer free, educational and health-related services to parents and their children ages birth through three.

The network is managed statewide by the Maryland Family Network in partnership with the Maryland State Department of Education as part of the Blueprint for Maryland's Future.

Patty Centers offer a range of services including:

- Quality infant/toddler care and assessment while parents are on site
- Parent education
- Adult education, family literacy and job readiness training programs
- Health education and referral for services
- Home visits for some services
- Peer support
- Service coordination between agencies

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 (9) provide direct supports from respite services and childcare to adult and aging-adult services and supports. **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 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.ppmd.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**

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!

Playgrounds for All!

Maryland's Developmental Disabilities Council has created an online resource and toolkit, offering information and resources on how to create inclusive playgrounds or to improve existing playgrounds to be more inclusive. Inclusive playgrounds benefit everyone. They create spaces for everyone to play, connect with each other, and build stronger communities.

Inclusive playgrounds are designed to meet the needs of different people, including people with disabilities who may play in different ways. They encourage people to come together to play, learn, and make people feel good when they are there. When playgrounds don't exclude anyone, they can benefit everyone!



Find an inclusive and accessible playground close to you by viewing the directory:
https://www.playgroundsforallmd.org/findinclusiveplaygrounds

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.



The Arc Maryland

Maryland Department of Disabilities

Maryland Developmental Disabilities Council
Creating Change · Improving Lives

Maryland State Department of Education