Building a Better Tomorrow Together

Conference | Feb. 24-25, 2026

Conference Program

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Tuesday, February 24, 2026

All-Day Literacy Workshop · 9:00 AM – 3:30 PM

Foundations of Literacy: Evidence-Based Practices for All Learners

Dr. Bonnie Garcia & Nancy Brynelson

Workshop Schedule

9:00 AM	Welcome & Introductions: A Narrative in Motion: California's Literacy Story
9:30 AM	Morning Session: California Literacy: Screening for Risk of Reading Difficulties and the California Literacy Roadmap
11:30 AM	Lunch
1:00 PM	Afternoon Session: California Literacy: Screening for Risk of Reading Difficulties and the California Literacy Roadmap
3:30 PM	Closing & Q&A

Session Description: In this workshop, Statewide Literacy Co-Directors Dr. Bonnie Garcia and Nancy Brynelson will provide an overview of new requirements and resources designed to improve literacy outcomes for all California students. They will share California's approach to literacy and biliteracy and highlight two developments: 1) the requirement to screen all students in kindergarten through grade two for risk of reading difficulties, including dyslexia; and 2) the new guidance document developed for the California Literacy Roadmap, Literacy Content Blocks for English-Medium Classrooms in Transitional Kindergarten through Grade Five. They will describe how both screening and the content blocks can be used to improve school districts' systems of assessment, instruction, intervention, and professional learning to enhance the literacy performance of all students and, in particular, students with disabilities.

ROOM
Ambassador A

Stronger Together: Community Partnerships that Power Inclusive College Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities

Presenter(s): Riza Baig, Sara Grignon, Ryan Kong, Sudha Krishnan, Jihyun Lee, Vincent Pena, Nhi Pham, Peter Pham, Myra Rodriguez, Mukund Srinvasan, Prabhav Sriram, Katherine Tran, and Julio Zamora

ROOM
Ambassador B

Intro to Twice-Exceptionality: Supporting Bright Students Who Struggle

Presenter(s): Callie Turk & Abby Kirgin

Twice-exceptional students have high ability, potential, and strengths in one or more areas. 2e students might excel in an academic area; have strong cognitive skills such as memory, attention to detail, or high verbal abilities; have an intense drive to learn in areas of interest; and/or possess unexpectedly high creative ability. At the same time, a learner with a 2e profile has complex challenges. In most systems where twice-exceptionality is a formal learner profile, these will be based on neurodevelopmental disabilities such as dyslexia, ADHD, and autism. This workshop provides an overview to the 2e learner and introduces our DEAR REEL model for working with and understanding these students.

ROOM
Diplomat A

A Better Tomorrow Starts Today: Early ITPs and Collaborative Transition Planning Under AB 438 [Double Session 9:30-11:20]

Presenter(s): Heather DiFede & Jennifer Yales

Beginning July 1, 2025, California Assembly Bill 438 requires IEP teams to consider measurable postsecondary goals and transition services as students enter high school—rather than waiting until age 16. This shift creates earlier, more meaningful opportunities to align supports with students' strengths, interests, and future goals. Join the High Quality IEPs Project for a double session professional learning series designed to help educators, administrators, and service providers develop and implement high-quality Individual Transition Plans (ITPs). Across both sessions, participants will explore the ITP process before, during, and after the IEP meeting to ensure compliance, strengthen collaboration, and promote student-centered transition planning. This series provides practical tools, guidance, and examples to support effective, legally aligned transition practices that prepare students for education, employment, and independent living.

ROOM
Diplomat B

Inclusive Classroom Practices, Strategies, and Supports

Presenter(s): Jovan Jacobs, Dianna Nestico-Arnold, Cherilyn Lew, & Jasmine Campbell

Students with extensive support needs often spend the majority of their academic day in self-contained classrooms or separate settings. Research suggests that participation in general education classrooms and the core content standards improve student outcomes. The EmbraceAbilities Special Education Resource Lead grant project is focused on expanding access to general education curriculum and spaces for students with extensive support needs. Whether you are a teacher, administrator, or parent, join us in a collaborative discussion about ways we can support the access, agency, and achievement of students with extensive support needs. This presentation bridges research recommendations and classroom practices. Participants will review and discuss classroom practices, strategies and supports for students with extensive support needs.

ROOM
Ambassador A

From Support Provider to Instructional Partner: Preparing Paraeducators for Structured Literacy in Inclusive Classrooms

Presenter(s): *Sara Lincoln & Thomas Veloso*

Paraeducators play a critical role in supporting students with mild/moderate to extensive support needs in inclusive classrooms; yet, they often work to implement literacy strategies without targeted training or ongoing collaboration. This session focuses on the importance of intentional, job-embedded training for paraeducators supporting students with Structured Literacy Instruction. Participants will explore how paraeducators can move beyond "helping" to become confident instructional partners when they understand the foundations of structured literacy. The session will highlight how collaboration and shared instructional language between teachers and paraeducators lead to greater consistency, improved student outcomes, and more inclusive learning environments.

ROOM
Ambassador B

Inclusion by Design: What High-Functioning Inclusive Schools Do Differently

Presenter(s): *Wendy Murawski*

Inclusive schools do not happen by accident—they are intentionally designed, supported, and sustained by leadership. This session examines the essential structural, cultural, and instructional elements school leaders must have in place to build and maintain meaningful inclusive practices across classrooms and grade levels. Participants will explore how vision, scheduling, staffing, professional learning, collaboration structures, and accountability systems work together to support students with and without disabilities in inclusive settings. Grounded in research and real-world examples, this session moves beyond philosophy to focus on actionable leadership decisions that make inclusion durable rather than dependent on individual teachers. Leaders will leave with a clear framework for assessing their current practices and identifying next steps toward more coherent, effective inclusion.

ROOM
Embassy A

Inclusive Classroom Practices, Strategies, and Supports

Presenter(s): *Kristen Wright*

Despite growing support for inclusive education, persistent myths continue to create barriers for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This interactive session will tackle five common misconceptions that often hinder inclusive practices:

Academic Skills – Myth: Students must meet certain academic benchmarks to participate in inclusive settings; Specially Designed Instruction – Myth: SDI can only be provided by Special Education Staff; .Medical Needs – Myth: Students with significant medical needs cannot be accommodated in general education settings.; Behavior – Myth: Challenging behaviors make inclusion impractical or unsafe. ; Staffing – Myth: Inclusion is only possible with additional staff or extensive resources.

Through real-world examples, research-based insights, and engaging discussions, participants will gain a deeper understanding of how to overcome these misconceptions and implement meaningful inclusive practices. Whether you are an educator, administrator, family member, or advocate, this session will equip you with practical strategies to support all learners in thriving, inclusive environments.

ROOM
Diplomat B

Where Every Young Child Belongs: Inclusive Project-Based Learning in Early Childhood

Presenter(s): *Prince Estanislao, Hadas Arbit, Maryssa Mitsch and Amber Friesen*

Join this interactive session to explore practical strategies for launching inclusive project-based learning in early childhood classrooms. We'll examine real examples and simple planning moves that make project work accessible and engaging for all young children, including those with disabilities. Participants will leave with ready-to-use tools and ideas they can implement immediately.

ROOM
Ambassador A

Mind Your Ps and Cs

Presenter(s): *Nancy Sullivan & Terese Barbeau*

Mind Your Ps and Cs is an interactive workshop designed to strengthen paraeducators' use of High Leverage Practices to support effective teaching and learning. Participants will explore seven key strategies that improve student engagement and promote strong job performance. The "Ps", Priming, Pausing, Praising, and Prompting highlight proactive and responsive approaches that help students access instruction, build confidence, and stay on track. The "Cs", Consistency, Collaboration, and Communication, underscore the essential habits that create inclusive classroom environments and productive partnerships with teachers and paraeducators. Through practical examples and guided reflection, paraeducators will learn how intentional implementation of these practices leads to positive student outcomes, clearer roles, and greater workplace satisfaction. This session equips participants with tools they can apply immediately to enhance both instructional support and professional effectiveness.

ROOM
Ambassador B

Data to Decisions: How AI Supercharges SPED Teachers in Minutes

Presenter(s): *Richard Capone*

Special educators face increasing demands for accurate present levels, clear IEP documentation, and data-driven decisions, all while managing heavy workloads. This session demonstrates how Let's Go Learn's AI Assistants transform diagnostic data into actionable insights, help identify precise present levels, and streamline IEP writing. Richard Capone will share practical examples of how teams are using these tools to save time, meet compliance requirements, and focus on meaningful student growth rather than paperwork.

ROOM
Diplomat A

Teaching through Intentional Design: Using Embedded Instruction Strategies to Meet the Needs of Our Youngest Learners

Presenter(s): *Andrea Golloher & Cindy Collado*

Research has shown that young children demonstrate greater learning, along with higher rates of maintenance and generalizability, when instruction is embedded in the natural routines and activities of their day. Embedding instruction requires intentional design. This session will review embedded instruction strategies that teachers can start implementing in their classrooms right away.

ROOM
Diplomat B

Making Meaning Stick: Practical Reading Comprehension Strategies for Inclusive Instruction

Presenter(s): *Melissa Jenkins*

Reading comprehension is often described as the purpose of reading. Yet, many students with disabilities have difficulties understanding and responding to text. This session focuses on practical, research-supported strategies that help students identify main ideas and supporting details and navigate both literal and inferential comprehension questions with confidence. Participants will learn systematic instructional approaches for teaching main idea and explore the Question-Answer Relationship framework. Designed for special educators, general educators, and paraprofessionals, the session emphasizes clear routines, shared instructional language, and inclusive application across settings. Educators will leave with concrete strategies to strengthen comprehension instruction and support meaningful access to text for all learners.

Lunch Break · 12:30 – 2:00 PM

🍽 Lunch · 12:30 – 2:00 PM

Attendees are invited to enjoy lunch independently. Burlingame's vibrant downtown offers a variety of dining options!

Wednesday, February 25, 2026 — During Lunch

Poster Session · 1:00 – 2:00 PM

ROOM
Ambassador A

From Exhaustion to Empowerment: Collaborative, strengths-based approaches to challenging behavior in general education settings

Presenter(s): *Alexis Fillipini, Lindi Shepard, & Leah Mills*

Research-based knowledge on supporting positive behavior is often siloed in special education departments, leaving a frustrating gap in the inclusive educators' toolkit. In this session, participants will apply an evidence-based process for generating strengths-based insights to understand, prevent, and address challenging behavior - with dignity. The process is an accessible entry point to the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support approach to school-wide positive behavior intervention supports, leading to increased academic achievement. Despite decades of research on the effectiveness of PBIS and a rapid increase in school-wide adoption, general educators and administrators typically receive little to no training beyond basic classroom management. A systematic, collaborative process for generating strengths-based insights to understand and prevent challenging behavior addresses that gap by building individual teacher capacity and supporting teams before behavior leads to exclusion. Attendees will leave with actionable templates and team facilitation guides for collaboration.

ROOM
Ambassador B

Teaching AI Through Data: Games, Models, and Classroom-Ready Activities

Presenter(s): *Jose Blackorby & Matt Love*

Step into the inclusive AI playground! In this highly interactive session, we explore the exciting intersection of Artificial Intelligence, games, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Participants will get hands-on experience training AI models using Teachable Machine and test their deduction skills in "Chameleon," a thrilling game of spotting the AI. Beyond the games, attendees will leave with practical, ready-to-use strategies for integrating AI into the classroom to create engaging, accessible, and universally designed learning experiences.

ROOM
Embassy A

Building a Better Tomorrow, Together: Supporting Special Educators Through the High Quality IEPs Toolkit

Presenter(s): *Heather DiFede & Jennifer Yales*

Building a Better Tomorrow, Together begins with supporting the educators who guide students through the IEP process every day. This session introduces the High Quality IEPs Toolkit for Special Education Providers, a free resource designed to help case managers stay organized, confident, and student-centered throughout the IEP journey. Participants will explore tools that streamline each stage of the process—from gathering assessment information and writing present levels to developing aligned goals, coordinating with general educators, engaging families, and monitoring implementation. The toolkit includes annotated agendas, checklists, communication templates, student-strength resources, and progress monitoring supports that simplify complex tasks and strengthen collaboration. By the end of this session, special educators will leave with practical tools they can use immediately to improve efficiency, support compliance, elevate student voice, and enhance the overall quality of IEPs—helping schools build a better tomorrow, together.

ROOM
Diplomat A

Beyond "One Teach, One Assist": Designing Co-Teaching For Both Teachers and *All* Students

Presenter(s): *Wendy Murawski & Melissa Jenkins*

Despite good intentions, many co-teaching classrooms fall into the familiar "One Teach, One Assist" pattern - limiting student engagement and underutilizing both teachers' expertise. This highly practical session challenges that default model and offers concrete and practical strategies for designing co-taught instruction that is collaborative, engaging, and universally designed. Participants will explore what it takes to shift toward intentional co-planning and shared ownership of learning, given very limited co-planning time. Using Universal Design for Learning and evidence-based co-teaching practices, educators will leave with immediately usable tools (such as the "Co-Teaching Decision-making Matrix") to plan lessons that value both teachers' time, strengths, and professional expertise—while increasing access and engagement for all learners.

Fraction Fundamentals: Evidence-Based Strategies for All Learners

Presenter(s): *Michael Solis & Leanne Ketterlin Geller*

Learning fractions is challenging for many students, particularly those struggling with math. This presentation covers research on fraction learning, the use of evidence-based practices in instruction, and evidence supporting a fractional intervention for upper elementary students.

ROOM
Ambassador A

Supporting Students with Dyslexia and/or Dyscalculia: Perspectives from a Graduate Student's Lived Experience

Presenter(s): *Lindsay Craft*

This presentation explores effective support strategies for students navigating higher education with dyslexia and dyscalculia, grounded in the lived experience of a current graduate student. By bridging personal narrative with academic frameworks, this session highlights the unique challenges neurodivergent students face, from systemic barriers to invisible cognitive loads. Attendees will leave with actionable, empathetic approaches to foster truly inclusive learning environments, empowering educators and institutions to better advocate for and meaningfully support neurodivergent academic success.

ROOM
Ambassador B

Dignity in Action: Using UDL and Peer Mentoring to Strengthen Inclusive Practices.

Presenter(s): *Thomas Veloso & Sara Lincoln*

Creating meaningful, inclusive learning environments designed for access, choice, and participation—not just placement. In this session, educators, leaders, and family members will explore how ableism, low expectations, and risk-avoidant practices can limit student engagement and belonging, even in inclusive settings. Grounded in Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and learner agency, this session shows how intentional instructional design can make peer mentoring a natural, effective tool for inclusion. Participants will learn how designing lessons for variability, providing choice and voice, and embedding opportunities for students to take risks empowers peers to support one another meaningfully. Peer mentoring becomes a strategy that strengthens participation, engagement, and belonging, while supporting stronger LRE outcomes for all students.

ROOM
Embassy A

LCE 2.0 in Action: Strengthening Transition-Focused Instruction

Presenter(s): *Richard Capone*

Discover Life Centered Education 2.0 (LCE 2.0), developed in partnership with the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) and the Division on Career Development and Transition (DCDT) to support transition-focused instruction beyond traditional high school. In this demo-based session, attendees will explore the LCE 2.0 platform, including customizable lessons, postsecondary goal setting, and curriculum aligned with High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Learn how LCE 2.0 supports person-centered planning and stronger collaboration to better align instruction with postsecondary outcomes.

ROOM
Diplomat B

Listening to Students Across Time: What 1971 and 2026 Reveal About Power, Belonging, and Learning

Presenter(s): *Rosalie Barnes, Steve Seidel, Adria Steinberg, & Arlene Creadick*

In 1971, a group of working-class teenagers—many who had dropped out or been pushed out of school—co-founded an alternative high school in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Many of these students would today be identified as students with learning disabilities. A newly released documentary from The Group School Archive captures the school's early months and offers a rare example of student-led learning and shared authority. When Rosalie Barnes, a special education teacher at Berkeley High School, showed an eight-minute excerpt from the film to her students, they heard students from 1971 describe classroom experiences that felt strikingly familiar in 2026. This sparked unusually honest conversations about power, belonging, and learning, leading to shifts in classroom norms, student participation, and shared responsibility. In this session, participants will view the film clip and engage in a discussion protocol exploring how student voice, trust-building, and shared classroom design can shape learning in contemporary special education classrooms.

ROOM
Ambassador A

Dissecting Trust in the IEP Process

Presenter(s): *Vickie Fairchild*

Trust is often lacking in partnerships between parents and educators during the individual education plan (IEP) process, and this lack of trust can negatively affect children with special needs. Using original doctoral research with 21 parents, this presentation will dissect the development of trust in the IEP process from the parent perspective and describe what educators can do to improve these relationships. Participants will be able to define the components of trust (benevolence, reliability, competence, honesty, and openness), identify actions and attitudes that develop trust with parents and break trust with parents, and identify how they can foster more trusting relationships in their districts and schools.

ROOM
Ambassador B

To MD or not to MD? That is the Question!

Presenter(s): *Leonard Martinez & Allison Smith*

You don't need a PhD in Shakespearean Literature to learn how to be a Manifestation Determination expert and make data-based decisions, while remaining objective, collaborative, and compliant. Participants will review scenarios to analyze data to determine behavioral trends to make appropriate decisions and participate in student-centered discussions. "The conduct in question was caused by or had a direct and substantial relationship to the disability. The conduct in question was the direct result of a failure to implement the IEP." These two statements are at the heart of a successful Manifestation Determination meeting and must be considered by all relevant team members. Join us as we engage in a rich conversation about a very complex topic!

ROOM
Embassy A

Time Well Spent? A Comparison of Instructional Loss in ESN, MMSN (SDC), & RSP Classrooms

Presenter(s): *Sara Caniglia Schulte*

Instructional time is a critical yet frequently overlooked component of special education service delivery. Our recent research highlighted this factor particularly for students in Extensive Support Needs (ESN) classrooms and Mild Moderate Support Needs (MMSN) in a Special Day Class (SDC). This session examines the current state of instructional time in special education classrooms and highlights how lost instructional minutes disproportionately affect students with complex learning needs, raising concerns related to equity and access. Drawing on teacher perspectives and emerging research, the presentation identifies systemic and classroom-level barriers that interfere with sustained instruction. Participants will explore practical, research-informed strategies to protect and increase instructional time, including intentional instructional routines, effective use of paraprofessionals, scheduling, and technology-supported efficiencies.

ROOM
Diplomat A

Examining Outcomes of Autistic Students to Improve IEP Decision Making

Presenter(s): *Eunice Kim & Lauren Fischbacher*

IEP teams make critical decisions that shape autistic students' long-term outcomes, yet these decisions are often made without clear evidence about how high school experiences translate into meaningful postsecondary outcomes. This session integrates large-scale administrative data and qualitative interviews of autistic young adults to examine how educational placement and exit pathways influence postsecondary enrollment and employment for autistic youth. Findings from a large urban school district demonstrate that greater inclusion in general education is strongly associated with higher postsecondary enrollment, while many autistic students are systematically guided into extended or alternative exit pathways. Case studies with AAC using adults provide additional insight. Beyond building individual educator capacity, this session focuses on what it takes to implement decisions, transition planning, and cross-disciplinary collaboration to better support special educators and their students.