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Innovative & Inclusive Preschool Practices



CaIECSE

California Early Childhood Special Education Network

Funded by the CDE



Implementation Leadership

Co-Executive Director- Dr. Scott Turner, East San Gabriel Valley SELPA
Co-Executive Director-Melanie Hertig, Irvine Special Education/SELPA



CalECSE

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CalECSE.org



CalECSE is a technical assistance project funded under the California Department of Education (CDE) that supports Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), Special Education Local Plan Areas (SELPA), County Offices of Special Education (COEs), and other Agency Partners in the areas of IDEA Part C to B Transitions, Preschool Assessment Practices, and Preschool Child Find by providing technical assistance, professional learning, and demonstration of tangible practices *that have been proven successful*.

The CalECSE Network *leverages collaboration amongst agencies, disseminates resources, highlights existing exemplar practices, and provides direct technical assistance* to improve the capacity, knowledge, collaboration, and implementation of evidence-based practices across agencies throughout California.

The CalECSE Network is committed to *improving outcomes* for children and their families by *eliminating and addressing barriers* to successful transition for California's youngest children with disabilities.

CalECSE Network

Innovative & Inclusive Practices

Janel Plack

**Lead, Innovative & Inclusive Practices
Program Specialist
Sonoma County SELPA and Charter SELPA**



Taylor Smith

**Exemplar Lead, Innovative & Inclusive Practices
Program Specialist
Bonita Unified School District**



Liberty Grammer

**Exemplar Lead, Innovative & Inclusive Practices
School Psychologist
Bonita Unified School District**



Susan Langer

**Exemplar Lead, Innovative & Inclusive Practices
Special Education Director
Roseland School District and Charter**



Who are we?



Innovative and Inclusive Preschool Practices

What we will be covering today:

- ✓ Bonita Unified School District Inclusion Program
- ✓ Roseland Public Schools
- ✓ Santa Rosa City Schools
- ✓ Question and Answer with Panel



Bonita Unified School District BLAST Program



The Bonita Unified School District's BLAST (Building Lifelong Academic Skills Together) program is a preschool inclusion program for three year old students residing in our communities. This innovative program, which launched in 2015, allows students with special needs to attend school with their typically developing peers. Our BLAST classes promote inclusivity while teaching play and social skills, pre-academic skills, and adaptive skills. Since its inception, our BLAST program has grown from two to three classroom programs, further reaching and meeting the needs of our students.



Bonita Unified School District

BLAST Program

(continued)

- Class consists of at least 50% general education students
- Class runs Monday through Thursday from 8:00–11:00 a.m.
- Supporting Inclusive Practices (SIP) grant for start up, general education tuition covers funding
- Monthly tuition for general education students
- Service Providers utilize a push-in model to support students



Santa Rosa City Schools Inclusive Preschool Program



Program Partners:

- North Bay Children's Center (NBCC)
- Community Child Care Council (4Cs)
- Head Start

Support Staff:

- Special Education Teacher/Embedded Instruction Coach
- Speech-Language Pathologist
- Paraprofessionals
- Additional Service Providers as needed (School Psychologist/Behaviorist, Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Deaf and/or Hard of Hearing Specialists, and Visual Impairment Specialists)



Santa Rosa City Schools

Inclusive Preschool Program Partners (continued)



Program Overview:

- Preschool programs are state and federally funded
- Special Education services are district funded
- Five total classrooms
- Three to four seats per classroom for a total of nineteen seats
- Partnered with NBCC for Teaching Pyramid training
- Embedded Instruction/CalBloom grant to provide coaching, resources, and materials for teachers and students



Roseland Public Schools Apples and Bananas Inclusive Preschool



Support Staff:

Special Education Teacher and Coach



Program Overview:

- State funded
- Holds 10–15 slots
- Instructional Assistant funded by low incidence monies
- Inclusion Coach
- Preschool Assessment Team
- Building and playground funded by Inclusive Early Education Expansion Program (IEEEP) Grant



Renee Gregory, Education Specialist (Bonita Unified)



Renee Gregory attended Azusa Pacific University, where she obtained a Bachelor's degree in Liberal Studies and a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential. She taught second grade for four years before taking some time off to stay home with her children. As her daughters grew, she spent a few years teaching preschool part time, and then decided to return to school for an additional credential. She obtained an Education Specialist Credential in Early Childhood Special Education from Cal State San Bernardino. Renee spent three years teaching preschool in Etiwanda School District's inclusion preschool program before moving to Bonita Unified School District (BUSD). She has taught in BUSD for the past 12 years. Renee was on the team that developed the district's inclusion preschool program, BLAST. Renee currently teaches a BLAST inclusion class in the morning and a Special Day Class (SDC) preschool class in the afternoon. She enjoys cooking and gardening.



Kimberly Morton, Education Specialist (Bonita Unified)



Kim holds a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary and Special Education from Western Governors University, reflecting her dedication to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. Kim is credentialed with a Multiple Subject Credential and a Mild/Moderate Support Needs Credential, along with an Added Early Childhood Authorization, equipping her to support diverse learners across all age groups.

For the past nine years, Kim has been proud to serve the Bonita Unified School District. She began her journey as a Specialized Services Paraeducator in preschool, where she developed hands-on experience supporting students with unique needs. For the last three years, she has been an Education Specialist, further deepening her commitment to creating equitable, engaging, and student-centered educational experiences for our earliest learners.

Kim believes in meeting students where they are and empowering them to thrive. Her goal is to foster growth, resilience, and a lifelong love of learning in every child she teaches.



Veronica Perez, Speech Language Pathologist (Bonita Unified)

Veronica Perez is a Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) who specializes in working with preschool-aged children at Bonita Unified School District. After earning her Master's degree in Communication Sciences and Disorders, Veronica immersed herself in the field, concentrating on assessing and treating speech and language disorders in preschoolers. She has worked with the three to five year old population for the last 15 years. With a focus on early intervention, Veronica is dedicated to helping young learners overcome communication challenges. She collaborates closely with educators, parents, and other professionals to create opportunities that promote the communication skills of her students. With a focus on inclusion, she is passionate about ensuring that all children have access to the support they need to thrive.



Erin Roundtree, Speech Language Pathologist (Bonita Unified)



Erin has been in the profession for 18 years and continues to learn each and every day. She is grateful for CalECSE and the learning opportunities it provides!

Erin entered the field of Speech-Language Pathology as an aide for Santa Ana Unified School District, which motivated her to complete her Bachelor's degree at California State University, Fullerton. Erin went on to earn a Master's degree at California State University, Los Angeles. After a short stint working in brain injury rehabilitation, she returned to the schools in 2009, with Los Angeles Unified School District. Erin is currently employed with Bonita Unified School District, where she works with a preschool and elementary school population.

Erin feels that working with preschoolers is the best part of her job. She loves encouraging language development through play, working with parents to foster communication at home, and training staff in communication development.



Pauline David, Occupational Therapist (Bonita Unified)



Pauline is a dedicated and compassionate Occupational Therapist with over 20 years of experience working in school, hospital, home and clinic settings. For the past thirteen years, she has proudly worked alongside teachers, staff, parents and students of Bonita Unified School District. Specializing in pediatric therapy, Pauline has an understanding of the unique needs of students with varying abilities and is committed to fostering an inclusive and supportive learning environment. With training in sensory processing, functional vision, executive functioning skills, assistive technology and handwriting development, Pauline is deeply committed to helping children achieve their fullest potential in both academic and everyday settings. She takes pride in helping students thrive by promoting the development of motor skills, supporting sensory processing needs, empowering students, and enabling independence in the school and home settings.



Leslie Sandoval, Grace Miller Elementary School Principal (Bonita Unified)



Leslie Sandoval is the principal of Grace Miller Elementary School, a preschool-fifth grade 2023 Blue Ribbon School in California. She enjoys being a part of the early intervention program for the community, housing the preschool assessment team, two preschool inclusion and two preschool self-contained classes at Grace Miller. Leslie also supports three transitional kindergarten classes including a co-teach inclusion class, a mild/moderate self-contained class and a moderate/extensive needs self-contained class. Prior to becoming the principal of Grace Miller, Leslie served for four years as the assistant principal at Roynon Elementary and taught for seventeen years at Lone Hill Middle School. Leslie enjoys working and giving back to the community she grew up in and is passionate about supporting all learners and her staff to create a positive and effective learning environment.



Carolyn Miles, Occupational Therapist (Santa Rosa City Schools)



Carolyn graduated as an Occupational Therapist (OT) in 1992, and following several years working in a variety of settings, finally found her true "passion" — working with young children with special needs. She has devoted much time studying and exploring the specific challenges children with special needs experience, as well as ways they can best flourish and succeed at home, school and in the community. Her career has involved working with preschool children for both the Los Angeles Unified School District as well as Santa Rosa City schools. Additionally, she spent 8 years working as an Early start OT providing in home services to children zero to three; as well as being the Coordinator of the program for two years. Carolyn also vendored for North Bay Regional Center providing in home Early start services. She has completed many additional studies and certifications including a Masters in Education with a specialty of Autism (Children) in 2008, as well as advanced training in Sensory Integration and Praxis. She continues to seek opportunities to enhance her knowledge and skills to best support young learners.



Robert Johns, School Psychologist (Santa Rosa City Schools)



Robert Johns is a school psychologist and behavior analyst with Santa Rosa City Schools. He has worked with their early childhood special education program for the last eight years. He also teaches Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) credential courses at the local university. Robert is part of a collaborative autism diagnostic team in partnership with North Bay Regional Center. He is particularly interested in embedding the science of applied behavior analysis into everyday, functional preschool routines.



Neira Saenz Site supervisor, Apples and Bananas (Roseland Public School)



Neira has a passion for learning, teaching, and helping students, parents, and teachers to reach their full potential. She joined 4Cs in 2012 but has been part of Apples & Bananas Preschool for 29 years. She holds a site supervisor permit as well as an Associate of Arts (A.A.)/Associate of Science (A.S.) from Santa Rosa Junior College. Neira is proud to work for an organization that gives opportunities to families who otherwise may not be able to access the care and education their children need.

Neira has gone through the Teaching Pyramid training as well as the Beginning Together trainings for inclusive practices.

She enjoys reading and traveling, visiting libraries in new places, listening to music and caring for her dog, Lola. She also has a very close bond with her sister and her children.

Her favorite children's book is "Where the Sidewalk Ends."



Roseland Public Schools

Aileen Wakefield, Inclusion Coach and Educational Specialist (Roseland Public School)



Aileen Wakefield has been dedicated to supporting students with disabilities across the Bay Area since 2007. She began her career in Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) therapy before transitioning to a role as a self-contained classroom teacher. Now serving as an inclusion specialist, she works with preschool, Transitional Kindergarten, and Kindergarten children, fostering inclusive learning environments that support their growth and success. Aileen holds master's degrees and credentials in Early Childhood Special Education and Educational Administration and Leadership. She resides in Petaluma with her husband, two children, and their two dogs.



Questions for our Panel:

Ask our experts on the frontlines...

What is required to have an effective co-teacher team?

How can a District support preschoolers with Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) who attend community-based centers/programs within the district (e.g., state preschool, Head Start, District's fee-based options?)

What academic assessments
do you recommend for
preschoolers?

What is the ideal ratio of
students with and without
IEPs?

Do you have Early Childhood
Special Education Itinerant
Teachers serving local Head
Start and State preschools?

Can you explain your inclusion model? How do you support the needs of students and staff in your model?

Can you share how related services are provided in the inclusion setting?

How do you help to create a
supportive inclusive environment for
students and staff?

How can you offer inclusion within the school system without general education preschool students?

Can you discuss how you embed
inclusive support into your
classroom design and
curriculum?



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