

BUILDING SCHOOLS WHERE ALL STUDENTS THRIVE



the ability
challenge

A Case Study of Change in Four
D.C. Charter Schools



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Five-fold increases in student engagement. Growth targets met by over 80% of students with disabilities. Inclusive teaching practices improved by 72%. In just two years, four D.C. charter schools found what every leader is searching for—and it was not where they expected. Instead of living in new curricula or technology, leaders transformed their settings by focusing on the systems that connected their classrooms.

Creating schools where all students—including those with disabilities—truly thrive requires more than individual efforts or standalone program improvements. Achieving effective inclusive special education demands bold, systematic transformation of the structures, processes, and practices that shape daily teaching and learning.

Recognizing this need, The Ability Challenge (ABC) partnered with leaders from four Washington D.C. public charter schools during the 2023–24 and 2024–25 school years to convene the THRIVE Systems Leadership Cohort, supported by the Scholarships for Opportunity and Results (SOAR) grant from the Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

Participating schools and leaders included:

| School | Leaders in Cohort | 2024-25 Enrollment | Percent of Students with Disabilities |
|--|--|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| AppleTree Southwest (Southwest) | Early Childhood Public Charter | 84 students | 26.7% |
| AppleTree Parklands (Parklands) | Early Childhood Public Charter | 102 students | 18.6% |
| Center City Petworth (Petworth) | PreK–8 Public Charter | 247 students | 15.8% |
| Washington Yu Ying Public Charter School (Yu Ying) | PreK–5 Mandarin Immersion Public Charter | 638 students | 12.5% |

Using ABC’s THRIVE Framework and a reflective change management cycle, school leaders partnered with ABC to identify root causes of persistent challenges and design high-leverage solutions.



Three schools—AppleTree Southwest, Center City Petworth, and AppleTree Parklands—built co-planning systems bringing general and special educators together for structured collaboration, aligning lesson design, and integrating Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals. Yu Ying implemented data-driven coaching using targeted observations and feedback cycles to strengthen instruction for students with disabilities.

With two years of focused systems work, the schools achieved measurable improvements in teaching quality and student engagement. Co-planning structures at Southwest and Petworth substantially increased student engagement—50% at Southwest and 16% at Petworth. At Parklands, protecting time for co-planning led to 90% meeting fidelity and a 14% increase in quality scores over the year. At Yu Ying, coaching strengthened real-time feedback on instruction, with two-thirds of teachers reporting improved confidence managing student escalations.

Rooted in THRIVE principles, these systems were built for durability—carrying inclusive practices through leadership and staffing shifts, and helping schools maintain momentum even amid change.

Key Learnings

This analysis yields five key lessons for building sustainable special education systems.

1

Always dig deeper than the symptom: When you see challenging behaviors, compliance gaps, or persistent struggles, resist quick fixes. Ask “What systemic barrier is driving this?” and design solutions that address root causes.

2

Build systems with your team, not for them: Include the people who will use your systems in designing them. When educators co-create the structures they’ll implement daily, they become invested protectors of the work.

3

Design with structure and flexibility in mind: Build clear, consistent protocols that guide practice while leaving room for adaptation. Strong systems offer direction without becoming rigid—flexibility ensures they can respond to real-time student and staff needs.

4

Lead alongside, not from above: Step into the work as a partner and learner. By actively engaging in the systems you’re helping to build—not just directing from a distance—you model shared ownership and cultivate the trust needed for lasting change.

5

Strengthen what’s already in motion: Instead of adding new initiatives, focus on connecting and aligning the efforts already underway. Sustainable impact comes from linking what’s working rather than layering on additional initiatives.



The experience of the THRIVE Systems Leadership Cohort shows that building sustainable, inclusive systems is not only possible but essential for creating schools where all students thrive. This case study offers a practical roadmap with tools, videos, administrator voices, and real world examples for leaders ready to take on the important work of systems-level change.



Building Schools Where All Students Thrive

See how four D.C. charter schools partnered with The Ability Challenge to implement sustainable systems change to strengthen teaching and learning for all students.



Building Schools Where All Students Thrive: A Case Study of Change in Four D.C. Charter Schools



NOTE:

This case study represents the experiences and insights of these Cohort schools as of July 2025. Systems change is an ongoing process, and schools continue to refine and adapt their approaches based on emerging needs and learning.

Throughout this case study, we seek to provide clarity and consistency in the terms we use: We use “diverse learners” to encompass students’ neurodiverse qualities, recognizing different learning styles, strengths, and challenges. This includes students with IEPs, 504 plans, undiagnosed disabilities, and those whose disabilities may not require formal accommodations. We define disability as a physical, cognitive, or developmental condition that may impact learning or daily activities, while acknowledging the social model of disability that recognizes how societal barriers can create or amplify challenges. We use identity-first language (e.g., “autistic person”) for disabilities often considered integral to identity, and person-first language (e.g., “person with a disability”) when referring to groups or specific services. We promote neutral, descriptive language for specific conditions or learning differences. Recognizing that individual preferences vary, we ask about and respect preferred terminology whenever possible. Our goal is to foster an inclusive environment that values all learners while promoting dignity and self-determination.

WHY SYSTEMS-LEVEL THINKING DRIVES SUSTAINABLE CHANGE

Despite decades of special education law and the dedication of countless educators, many students with disabilities still experience fragmented and inconsistent support in school. Even when accommodations and Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals are carefully implemented at the classroom level, isolated efforts may fall short of providing the sustained, coordinated support that diverse learners need.

High-quality special education requires more than good intentions—it requires intentionally designed systems that embed effective instructional practices into the fabric of school operations. The gap is not in teacher commitment or the existence of more strategies—it’s in the systematic structures needed to make high-quality instruction for students with disabilities consistent and sustainable across all classrooms.

How Systems Shape Daily Practice

At its core, a system is a set of interconnected elements working together toward a shared goal. In schools, this means examining how roles, routines, resource allocation, and decision-making structures interact to support—or impede—instructional coherence. Without strong systems, schools risk relying on short-term fixes that fail to address the deeper structures shaping daily practice.

When leaders prioritize systems-level work, they create conditions for meaningful collaboration, stronger instructional practice, and more consistent student support. Research reinforces this connection, demonstrating that schools with high-quality collaboration structures see greater student achievement gains, while teachers themselves grow professionally at higher rates.

Recognizing that isolated efforts weren’t enough, leaders in the THRIVE Systems Leadership Cohort embraced system-level solutions—redesigning school structures to embed collaboration, clarify roles, and strengthen instructional coherence for diverse learners.

THE THRIVE FRAMEWORK: A VISION FOR HIGH-QUALITY SPECIAL EDUCATION

To drive systems-level change, school leaders need a shared vision of high-quality special education. The Ability Challenge's research-based THRIVE Framework provides this foundation, outlining the knowledge, mindsets, and practices needed for inclusive schools.



Tool Spotlight

THRIVE Framework Overview

A high-level guide outlining the key principles of the THRIVE framework, designed to help school leaders implement and sustain effective change initiatives.

Is your school or district THRIVE aligned?

A brief self-assessment for leaders to see how their school systems and practices align with the THRIVE Framework.



The THRIVE Framework elements are defined below:

- 1 Culture of Inclusion**—Establishing a school culture that embraces learning differences and promotes the belief that all students can succeed.
- 2 Student-Centered Curriculum & Instruction**—Delivering curriculum and instruction that are both evidence-based and culturally responsive.
- 3 Shared Understanding of Special Education Mandates**—Ensuring that leaders are familiar with special education laws and understand their role in supporting high-quality programming.
- 4 Equitable Systems and Resource Management**—Allocating resources in a way that ensures all students have access to the support they need.
- 5 Meaningful Family Partnerships**— Recognizing families as crucial partners in the educational process.



The THRIVE Framework: Building Authentically Inclusive School Communities

Learn more about ABC's THRIVE Framework.



The THRIVE Framework: Building Authentically Inclusive School Communities



THE PROCESS FOR IMPROVEMENT: ABC'S CHANGE MANAGEMENT APPROACH

School leaders in the THRIVE Systems Leadership Cohort engaged in a structured, cyclical change management process designed to build long-term capacity while addressing real instructional challenges. ABC formalized this approach as the Inspect-Interpret-Intervene Change Management Approach—a framework for sustainable systems change built around repeated cycles of inquiry and action.

This inquiry-driven work centered on two essential questions:

- How does our school identify, design, and implement the systems to best serve diverse learners in our community?
- How do those systems ensure each educator has the skill, knowledge, and mindset necessary to meet unique student needs in the classroom?

Key Conditions for Sustainable Systems Change

The Change Management Approach is built upon two essential foundations aligned with ABC's THRIVE Framework:

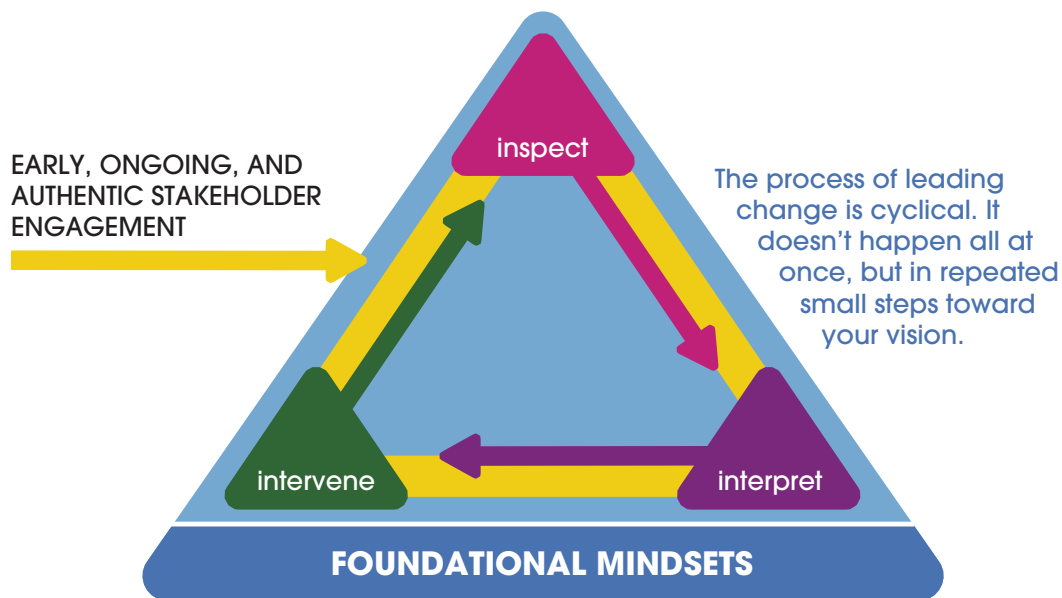
- **Foundational Mindsets**—Successful change requires the belief that serving diverse learners is a collective responsibility, that all students can learn and grow, and that inclusive environments benefit everyone. Leaders must recognize their role in shaping culture and actively work to mitigate bias throughout the change process.
- **Stakeholder Engagement**—Meaningful involvement must occur at every phase, not just during implementation. This includes valuing diverse perspectives, creating multiple channels for input, and treating families as essential partners in the process.

The Three-Phase Cycle

Built upon these foundational mindsets and commitment to authentic engagement is a cyclical process consisting of three interconnected phases:

1. **Inspect:** What needs to change? Examine current practices, gather stakeholder input, analyze data, and identify systemic root causes.
2. **Interpret:** What will success look like? Establish a shared vision, define measurable goals, design system structures, and clarify roles and resources.
3. **Intervene:** How will we get there? Pilot new systems, gather feedback, refine in real time, and scale effective practices while sustaining quality and fidelity.

This framework grounded every phase of system design, ensuring that improvement efforts remained focused on addressing core instructional and organizational drivers



WHAT SCHOOLS BUILT: DESIGNING SUSTAINABLE SYSTEMS

Guided by ABC's change management process, schools moved from identifying key challenges to designing and implementing sustainable systems. The next section outlines how teams progressed through each phase—from selecting priorities to building lasting structures—using real examples from their work.

Later, two in-depth profiles of Southwest and Petworth illustrate how these systems took shape and evolved over time in practice.

Identifying High-Leverage System Challenges

The first step in the change process involved identifying which systems would most effectively address persistent challenges. As part of the system selection and design process, ABC guided school leaders through the Effective Systems Matrix to reflect on what makes a system effective and what dysfunctions can emerge when those components are missing.

Effective Systems Matrix

| Components of Effective Systems | System Dysfunctions | Steps for Building an Effective System |
|---------------------------------|---------------------|---|
| Intentional | System by default | Define the end goal(s) and outcome(s) |
| Participatory | Power grab system | Understand the roles and responsibilities |
| Causal | Whack-a-mole system | Identify the component parts |
| Streamlined | System of bandaids | Map the process |
| Memorialized | Person as system | Stamp it |

The matrix includes five key components:

- **Intentional:** Effective systems are grounded in clear goals and outcomes. When intentionality is missing, schools often operate a system by default—doing what’s always been done, without a clear purpose or end in mind.
- **Participatory:** Effective systems include shared ownership and clarity around roles. Without this, systems become power grab systems—structures that centralize control and limit who gets to participate, often excluding those most affected by the outcomes.
- **Causal:** Effective systems are built with an understanding of how the parts connect. When this component is absent, schools fall into a whack-a-mole system—constantly reacting to issues without a broader strategy, resulting in disjointed, one-off solutions.
- **Streamlined:** Effective systems are clear and easy to follow. Without streamlining, schools operate a system of band-aids—a patchwork of overlapping fixes that make processes confusing and hard to navigate.
- **Memorialized:** Effective systems are documented and sustainable beyond individual people. When this is missing, the result is a person-as-system dynamic—where one person holds all the knowledge, and the system breaks down if they’re not present.



By reviewing these elements, school leaders were able to name where their current systems aligned—or did not—and began identifying steps to build more effective, lasting structures.

To guide this work, school leaders in the Cohort used ABC's **Selecting a System** tool to anchor their inquiry in the THRIVE Framework, reviewing current practices against clear indicators of high-quality special education.

Leaders engaged in structured root cause analysis to uncover systemic contributors driving persistent problems. Teams asked key questions:

- How does this challenge connect to the deeper purpose or values of our school?
- Which students are most impacted, and what might that tell us about equity in our system?
- What patterns in student outcomes, engagement, or access suggest this issue is recurring?
- What patterns or root causes might be sustaining it beneath the surface?

This process allowed school leaders to select system priorities offering the greatest potential for sustained, schoolwide impact.

Practice Tool

▶ **ABC's Selecting a System Tool**

Use this tool to brainstorm challenges with your team and identify the highest-leverage opportunity for systems improvement.



For Example:

At Yu Ying, leaders recognized an opportunity to build teachers' confidence in classroom behavior management. Through structured inquiry, they discovered that developing coaching systems focused on real-time response skills could strengthen teachers' toolkits and reduce administrative support requests. This insight led to implementing targeted coaching that empowered teachers to handle escalations independently.



For Example:

At Southwest, leaders initially focused on behavioral supports but discovered through data analysis that student engagement could be enhanced by strengthening instructional accessibility. This insight led to prioritizing collaborative planning systems that made learning more accessible for diverse learners.



Why Co-Planning Emerged as a High-Leverage System

Across three of the four schools, teams identified collaborative planning (also called co-planning) as a high-leverage system because it directly addressed gaps in instructional alignment and shared responsibility. Co-planning structures brought general and special educators together to:

- Integrate IEP goals into daily lesson planning
- Align instructional strategies to student needs
- Review student data collaboratively
- Build consistent, shared ownership for all learners

By embedding these structures into regular teaching team work, schools created sustainable systems that improved instruction and engagement for students with disabilities.

Practice Tools

▶ **Co-Planning Agenda Template**

Use this customizable agenda to structure productive co-planning meetings between teachers and school leaders.

▶ **Co-Planning Observation Rubric and Observation Checklist**

A set of detailed criteria for evaluating meeting effectiveness, and a quick-reference companion to the rubric.

▶ **Co-Planning Teacher Survey**

A survey designed to gather teacher feedback on the co-planning process, effectiveness, and areas for improvement.



Breaking the Silos: The Power of Co-Planning in Inclusive Schools

Learn more about co-planning!




Breaking the Silos: The Power of Co-Planning in Inclusive Schools



Engaging Stakeholders to Build Ownership from the Start

Before designing new systems, schools partnered with ABC to ensure stakeholder voice guided the work from the start. Core teams included administrators, teachers, service providers, and key staff responsible for implementation. Schools also gathered input from the broader staff to surface real needs, build buy-in, and ensure the design process reflected authentic, on-the-ground perspectives—not top-down assumptions.

 **For Example:** At Parklands, Principal Tara Young intentionally assembled a core team that included their social worker and experienced lead teachers, noting, “the staff looks up to teachers that have been doing this for a while.” The team also surveyed all staff to gather input on what meaningful support should look like. This early stakeholder engagement helped create trust, foster early buy-in, and ensure that system design work reflected genuine classroom realities.

Designing Systems with Educator Ownership

Before designing systems, schools developed clear success visions. Using ABC’s Vision Creation and Feedback tools, teams gathered input from teachers, staff, and stakeholders to define what inclusive instruction and collaboration should look like. These visions grounded the design process, ensuring systems reflected shared aspirations and classroom realities.

With visions in place, schools moved into design using ABC’s **System Planning Worksheet** to map roles, responsibilities, timelines, and success measures. A central principle was engaging educators directly in shaping systems they would implement. Rather than imposing top-down solutions, leaders facilitated collaborative design that surfaced classroom needs and built ownership.

Practice Tools

▶ **ABC’s Creating a Vision Tool**

Use this protocol for setting a vision for inclusion in your setting, which creates a shared purpose that grounds the work.

▶ **ABC’s Vision Feedback Form**

Ask these questions to a diverse cross-section of your school community and collect feedback through notes, interview transcripts, surveys, etc.

▶ **ABC’s System Planning Worksheet**

Start thinking about your system’s goals and objectives by answering these prompts. Be sure to identify what questions need to be answered to best understand what is happening now.

Effective design consistently included:

- Clarifying roles and responsibilities for participants
- Developing structured protocols to guide collaboration
- Protecting dedicated time within the schedule
- Embedding feedback mechanisms to continuously strengthen system quality over time.

These elements helped ensure that newly designed systems were not only launched successfully, but positioned to sustain quality as they matured.

By involving educators as co-designers, schools improved system relevance while fostering shared investment in sustainability.



For Example:

At Petworth, Assistant Principal Devin James recognized that clarifying expectations was not enough. Teachers needed shared structures embedding IEP goals into daily planning. Educators developed co-planning protocols aligning lesson design, strategies, and goals. Leaders incorporated vertical alignment structures breaking down silos between grade levels. As Devin explained, “Teaching can feel like a silo... Bringing teachers together, we could deconstruct standards and look at student data as a team.”



For Example:

At Parklands, leaders and teachers created protected co-planning time within the whole school schedule—something that had not previously existed. As Principal Tara Young explained, “We knew we needed to be intentional about our scheduling—how often to meet, what we could sustain.” Teachers helped define structures themselves, with Young noting, “Having some of our teachers in the planning stages was key. They were the voice of, ‘This is what we need.’”



IMPLEMENTING, SCALING, AND SUSTAINING SYSTEMS

Piloting with Intention

With system designs in place, schools launched small-scale pilots—not simply to test whether new systems “worked,” but to gather actionable learning before full-scale implementation. ABC supported schools in structuring these pilots with clear goals, well-defined action steps, and mechanisms for collecting meaningful data throughout the pilot phase. Using ABC’s **Pilot Planning Template**, school teams mapped out who would participate, what success would look like, and how learning from each pilot cycle would inform next steps.

Practice Tool

ABC’s Pilot Planning Template

Use this tool as a step-by-step template for designing and organizing a pilot initiative, including goals, stakeholders, timelines, and key action steps.

For Example: At Southwest, leaders structured their co-planning pilot around three intentional stages. The team began by focusing on student engagement during small group learning centers, then shifted to integration of IEP goals into daily planning, and eventually addressed broader instructional problems of practice surfaced through co-planning discussions. Each phase built on learning from the prior stage, allowing leaders and staff to develop both skill and confidence as the system matured.



Learning Through Reflection

Throughout piloting, schools applied ABC's Inspect-Interpret-Intervene framework to continuously analyze what was working and where adjustments were needed. Rather than viewing course corrections as setbacks, teams saw refinement as a core feature of sustainable systems change. Using ABC's **Pilot Step-Back Reflection Guide**, teams paused to review pilot data, gather staff feedback, and identify targeted adjustments before expanding implementation.

Practice Tool

Pilot Step-Back Reflection Guide

Once your pilot is in place, use this tool to reflect and evaluate pilot progress, analyze data, and determine adjustments for successful system implementation.

For Example: At Parklands, initial pilot plans called for weekly co-planning sessions. However, as Principal Tara Young gathered feedback and observed early implementation, she recognized that this frequency v sustainable given competing demands on staff time. Working with ABC, she adjusted the model to a biweekly schedule—balancing consistency with realistic capacity.



Through these iterative learning cycles, schools not only improved their system designs but also built leadership habits rooted in inquiry, responsiveness, and shared problem-solving.

Scaling While Sustaining Quality

Once pilots demonstrated early success, schools transitioned into full implementation—expanding system structures across grade levels and staff teams while protecting the core design elements that made early pilots effective. Leaders provided ongoing facilitation, peer modeling, and additional coaching to ensure clarity and consistency as more teams joined the work.

ABC supported schools throughout this scale-up phase with targeted coaching, leadership facilitation, and fidelity checks, ensuring that as systems grew, they remained aligned to each school's vision while continuing to adapt to real-time needs.

Tool Spotlight

System One-Pager Template

Use this one pager to summarize your system's key elements and communicate progress to the broader team of stakeholders.



Inspect, Interpret, Intervene: Building School Systems That Endure

See how continuous monitoring and reflection helped schools adapt their systems in real-time, creating stronger and more sustainable practices through ongoing cycles of improvement.



Inspect, Interpret, Intervene: Building School Systems That Endure



Building Staying Power

Perhaps most importantly, schools discovered that this deliberate, iterative approach fostered durable systems that lived within the organization—outlasting leadership changes and staffing transitions.

By approaching implementation as a continuous learning process, schools developed systems that became valued structures protected by staff—creating inclusive instructional practices that could endure leadership changes, staffing shifts, and evolving student needs.



For Example: At Southwest, the creation of the co-planning system persisted through three principal transitions, allowing the work to continue without disruption. Teachers were able to take ownership of the systems they had helped design, ensuring that quality implementation continued even as personnel shifted. Teachers also took growing leadership roles within these systems. “The teachers are really empowered to just use it for what they need it for... They led the discussions, and I just made sure things moved along,” explained Campus Lead, Tashira Lyles.



Early Signs of Impact

Despite the everyday complexities of school life, partner schools demonstrated meaningful, measurable progress across multiple areas of practice and student achievement.

➔ **Improved Student Engagement:** Classroom observations conducted throughout the initiative captured substantial growth in student engagement at each school:

- At Southwest, observed student engagement saw a 50% point average increase across all classrooms.
- At Yu Ying, student engagement rose 14% over the year, reflecting early progress as coaching systems supported teachers in developing new classroom management and Social Emotional Learning (SEL) strategies.

➔ **Strengthened Instructional Practices:** Observation data also reflected significant increases in teachers' use of inclusive, evidence-based instructional strategies:

- At Southwest, observed use of inclusive instructional practices—such as flexible grouping, varied participation structures, and creative seating arrangements—increased by 50% from beginning to end of year.
- At Petworth, observed use of instructional strategies—such as graphic organizers, reference tools, manipulatives, clear expectations, and consistent routines—increased by 72%.



➔ **Positive Student Academic Outcomes:** Early academic data for students with disabilities also showed promising growth:

- At Parklands, students with disabilities outperformed the network average growth rate by 41%, as measured by the Every Child Ready assessment.

➔ **Increased Teacher Confidence and Ownership:** Teacher surveys reflected growth in confidence, collaboration, and perceived instructional impact:

- At Parklands, teachers reported high levels of ownership and investment (as well as 90% meeting implementation fidelity) due to their involvement in co-designing the co-planning structures and expectations.
- At Yu Ying, 100% of teachers reported feeling equipped to manage classroom escalations using SEL strategies—a key focus area for the school’s coaching system.

In-Depth School Profiles: The Change Management Cycle in Action

While all schools in the THRIVE Cohort followed a common change framework, each applied it differently based on their unique context. The profiles of Southwest and Petworth show how each navigated the full cycle—facing distinct challenges, making key design choices, and building lasting systems.

AppleTree Southwest: Building Resilient Systems



Download the
Southwest school profile

Center City Petworth: Building Vertical Coherence in a Unique Staffing Model



Download the
Petworth school profile

CONCLUSION:

KEY LESSONS FOR SUSTAINABLE SPECIAL EDUCATION SYSTEMS

The work of building inclusive schools where students with disabilities thrive demands more than isolated programs or temporary initiatives. It requires bold, systems-level transformation embedded into the daily structures, routines, and collaborative practices of schools.

This effort uncovered five key lessons and essential learnings for school leaders seeking to build sustainable systems for improved special education:

1

Always dig deeper than the symptom: When you see challenging behaviors, compliance gaps, or persistent struggles, resist quick fixes. Ask “What systemic barrier is driving this?” and design solutions that address root causes.

2

Build systems with your team, not for them: Include the people who will use your systems in designing them. When educators co-create the structures they’ll implement daily, they become invested protectors of the work.

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Design with structure and flexibility in mind: Build clear, consistent protocols that guide practice while leaving room for adaptation. Strong systems offer direction without becoming rigid—flexibility ensures they can respond to real-time student and staff needs.

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Lead alongside, not from above: Step into the work as a partner and learner. By actively engaging in the systems you’re helping to build—not just directing from a distance—you model shared ownership and cultivate the trust needed for lasting change.

5

Strengthen what’s already in motion: Instead of adding new initiatives, focus on connecting and aligning the efforts already underway. Sustainable impact comes from linking what’s working rather than layering on additional initiatives.

The experiences of these partner schools offer practical lessons for leaders committed to building sustainable, inclusive practices that endure beyond any one leader, team, or moment of urgency.

Looking Ahead

The two-year THRIVE Systems Leadership Cohort gave school teams a roadmap for system development to address student needs and success. This effort was anchored in vision, grounded in reflection, and supported through partnership. But the work is far from finished. As this case study is shared more broadly, it serves as both a milestone and a springboard—a moment to reflect on what’s possible and imagine what comes next.

A Call for Continued Innovation

The challenges these schools tackled—collaborative planning, instructional improvement, and inclusive culture—reflect broader needs across American education. While the THRIVE Systems Leadership Cohort offers valuable frameworks and tools, each school must adapt them to its unique context. This case study aims to make systems change visible and actionable, inspiring new ideas, questions, and a shared commitment to schools where all students and educators can thrive.

Acknowledgments

This case study would not have been possible without the dedicated leadership teams at AppleTree Parklands, AppleTree Southwest, Yu Ying Public Charter School, and Center City Petworth. Their commitment to improving outcomes for students with diverse learning needs and willingness to share their learning journey has created valuable insights for the broader education community.

We also acknowledge the support of the Washington, D.C. Office of the State Superintendent of Education through the SOAR grant program, which made this initiative possible.

Finally, we thank all the educators who participated in co-planning sessions, implemented new practices, and provided feedback throughout the process. Their daily work with students is where systems change truly comes to life.



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