

The following resources offer a variety of strategies for supporting the development of self-worth, engagement, purpose, and voice for ALL students. The goal is to help schools create an environment where students feel accepted for who they are, celebrated for the unique gifts they can contribute to the school community, and certain their voices matter! This can be achieved when schools establish a positive atmosphere where students know they belong, are deeply engaged in learning, and see purpose in their lives. As you support the development of Voice & Aspirations for ALL students, we hope the most important lesson you take away is to never make assumptions. Instead, include students as partners when deciding how to best support their learning needs.

| Voice Strategies | Self-Worth Strategies |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide time and space for students to gather their thoughts prior to group discussions. This may include providing questions to consider ahead of time so students can process the information and be better prepared to participate. • Allow students to represent their ideas in a manner that works for <i>them</i>. Options should be varied and wide-ranging, including writing, drawing, interviewing, or responding through adaptive devices or computer programs. • Be cautious of limiting response options. For example, if a choice board with established picture and/or word options does not represent all the response options, provide the alphabet to allow students to express their thoughts. • Remember that background noise is a challenge for students with hearing impairments, and simultaneous small group discussions can contribute to these students remaining silent. Create quiet spaces for students with hearing impairments. Encourage peers to make eye contact and speak directly to each other. • Support <i>all</i> students in understanding each other and valuing each other's voices. Listen to the podcast Tips for Supporting Nonverbal Students to learn more about the importance of seeing each other as communicative partners, as well as five tips for communicating with nonverbal students. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask students with disabilities which peers they would like to work with as partners for projects. Do not assume you know who they feel comfortable and confident working with. • Talk <i>with</i> students, not <i>for</i> them. Do not speak on behalf of students who communicate in nonverbal ways or have a challenging time expressing their thoughts. Ask students what works best for them and help them implement that successfully. • Work with students who have visual impairments to create a classroom environment that supports and respects them. • Involve students in celebrations that are important to <i>them</i>. For example, while you may want to celebrate how a student who struggles with communication developed a unique strategy to communicate with others, that student may be more excited about being acknowledged for their athletic talent. • Ensure that every opportunity available to the entire student body—from classroom responsibilities to student council to community service—can accommodate students with a range of disabilities. If you are not sure how to accommodate various learners, processors, communicators, or physical abilities, <i>ask the students!</i> And even if you think you are sure, <i>ask the students!</i> |

Inclusive Strategies to Support Students with Unique Needs

| Engagement Strategies | Purpose Strategies |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use presentation accommodations that allow students to access instruction in ways other than standard print. These alternative modes of access include visual, tactile, auditory, or a combination. • Refrain from asking students with reading challenges to read aloud unless they have volunteered or had an opportunity to practice and you are confident they will be comfortable in this situation. • Strengthen your active listening skills: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Give students your undivided attention. o Recognize that nonverbal communication also "speaks" loudly. o Use your own body language and gestures to convey your focused attention. o As a listener, your role is to understand. Ask questions and reflect back what you learned to demonstrate and confirm your understanding. o Allow students to finish their point before asking questions. • Provide feedback as soon as possible and celebrate students' accomplishments. This encourages students to succeed at more challenging tasks and raises their self-esteem. Timing is crucial for students with learning disabilities. To be most effective, provide feedback either while students are working on the task or as soon as it is completed. For example, telling your student mid-lesson how great their idea is can boost their confidence and increase engagement. • Create a safe environment that fosters choice and agency, allowing students to truly engage as partners in their learning. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage mutual respect and understanding by having a panel of students with and without disabilities share their learning needs. How do they like to learn? What is most effective for them? What does not work well? Discuss how peers can support each other as learners. • Dispel myths, stereotypes, and harmful attitudes about disabilities. Use this resource to create a more accessible, more inclusive classroom. • Ensure all students have opportunities to be a teacher or peer helper. • Ensure your class and school foster leadership skills and provide leadership opportunities for all students. Teach and demonstrate the fact that leaders do not have to be extroverts or skilled presenters. • Learn another way to communicate with the entire class. For example, learn sign language even if no one in the class uses it. The purpose is to broaden students' perspectives and understanding, and for everyone to realize there are many ways to communicate in addition to the spoken word. • Be cognizant of the leadership, hero and life stories that are shared and discussed. Make sure your lessons and examples include people with myriad abilities and backgrounds. |

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Additional Resources

To learn more about inclusive strategies and to hear from students themselves, check out the following:

Videos

Rollins College's 2022 Valedictorian, Elizabeth Bonker, who is affected by non-speaking autism and communicates solely by typing, urges her fellow graduates to use their voices, serve others, and see the value in everyone they meet in her valedictory address, [Be the Light](#).

[It's Just Respect](#) has been developed with input from persons with different types of disabilities and is rich with information and tips about communicating with and about persons with disabilities.

[LISTEN](#) is a short film made by and with nonspeaking autistic people.

[Tools to Support You in Having a Student with a Visual Impairment in Your K-6 General Education Classroom](#) is a series of 11 videos, each ranging in length from eight to 12 minutes, originally developed for general education teachers, but also appropriate for paraprofessionals, therapists, administrators, family members, and others who are seeking knowledge.

Websites

The mission of the [Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training](#) (ADCET) is to contribute to the improvement of the educational experiences and to the successful outcomes for students with disabilities in post-secondary education.

[CommunicationFIRST](#) is the only nonprofit organization dedicated to protecting and advancing the civil rights of the more than five million children and adults in the United States who, due to disability or other condition, cannot rely on speech alone to be heard and understood.

[Special Education Resources](#) is a Watson Institute 'catalog' of information for professionals and educators in special education classrooms teaching students with autism spectrum disorder and/or other special needs. The website provides instruction, teaching and classroom strategies, helpful tips, speech and language lessons, downloadable training manuals, useful downloadable PowerPoint documentation, and additional guidelines.

[Strategies for Success: A Guidebook for Supporting Students With Disabilities](#) is organized around four proven strategies for improving the academic achievement of students with disabilities. It is designed to provide principals and school system leaders with resources to create strong support plans.

[The Nora Project](#)'s mission is to promote disability inclusion by empowering educators and engaging students and communities. The Nora Project trains and coaches educators and offers a suite of SEL programs that dive deeply into the concepts of empathy and inclusion, explicitly addressing disability and difference as part of human diversity.

[This is Not About Me](#) includes Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) and autism resources, as well as a film about Jordyn Zimmerman who grew up in an educational system that didn't believe in her. At age 18, she finally met a team who provided her with AAC tools that allowed her to communicate and advocate for other students.

Looking for an organization or website to provide you with more information on a special education or disability topic? Start with this [Special Education Guide](#)!