

Supporting Preschool Families Through Inclusion

Treshawn Anderson: Hi, everyone, and welcome to “Teacher Time.” I’m Treshawn Anderson.

Gail Joseph: And I’m Gail Joseph. We are here from the National Center on Early Childhood Development, Teaching, and Learning, or DTL as we like to say. And we’re so excited to have you here with us today for our final episode of the season. Where has the time gone?

Treshawn: I don’t know.

Gail: In this episode we’ll be talking about supporting preschool families through inclusion. This season we’ve been exploring the concepts of inclusion and belonging. We think about inclusion as the practice or the things we do, like individualizing learning opportunities for preschoolers, providing books that represent the children and families in our learning spaces, and making sure that materials we’re using are accessible to all children. Belonging is a feeling, and it’s a feeling that your whole, authentic self is welcomed and celebrated, valued, respected so you can thrive. You can be yourself and see yourself reflected in the classroom.

Each month we have talked about inclusion and belonging in the learning environment and making learning materials accessible. Now this month we will include families too because we all understand that families are a child’s first and best teachers and that many parents we know are doing a lot more with their children now, especially if they are in a virtual environment or learning remotely. I know that I’m doing a lot more. You’re doing a lot more. I know our viewers are doing a lot more.

Later in the episode, we’ll have a very special guest expert to talk with us on the ways to support our preschool families, so really be sure to hang on to that, so excited about that. Now, this season we’ve had three episodes that have been dedicated to infants and toddlers and three for preschoolers, so visit the “Teacher Time” community on MyPeers or the Push Play DTL on-demand webisode to see a replay of any episodes you may have missed or would like to rewatch. If you’ve been with us this season on “Teacher Time,” you know that we always encourage you, and sometimes more than once, to download the Viewer’s Guide and use it to follow along during the episode.

You can use the Viewer’s Guide to reflect on the content that we’re covering, to write down any new strategies or ideas that you want to remember or share with your colleagues. We also have a take-home activity that is in each Viewer’s Guide, which is really great because it’s something that you can use in your learning environment today. We have many, many, many resources. If you want to dive deeper into the topic that we’re covering today or the former topics, you can find that in that Viewer’s Guide.

Treshawn: When we think about inclusive learning environments, these are places where children, with and without disabilities, and their families experience a sense of belonging, positive social relationships, and development to reach their full potential. All children,

regardless of their ability, really have the right to fully engage in learning opportunities and typical activities and routines across home, educational, and community environments. In quality inclusive environments, educators like yourselves create spaces that bring people together and promote this sense of belonging for all children.

Gail: This includes families too. Families and educators can work together to create continuity across children's learning environments and support children's development in ways that are meaningful and relevant to the child and family's cultural beliefs and practices. As we include children of all types of abilities in our group care, partnering with families becomes increasingly more important. Partnering with families is especially important for children in virtual or remote learning environments where teachers and families are working to adapt teaching strategies and learning activities so that children can fully participate.

Research suggests that when parents are involved in their child's early childhood program, everyone benefits. For example, children experience greater opportunities for learning, both at home and at school and in other community spaces. Parents develop knowledge and skills while also building connections and self-confidence. Early childhood programs are better able to meet the needs of the children, families, and communities that they serve. Let's look at each of these individually.

Treshawn: Yeah. When families are included and they feel like they belong in their child's learning environment, they might make more or take more ownership over their child's learning. For example, they may check in with their teacher a little bit more often, maybe their family child care provider, or even their service provider to discuss what goals their child is working on and how to support them as they transition into kindergarten and what that process may look like.

I know when my daughter was going into kindergarten, I toured the program. I asked about what they should be preparing for over the summer. They said maybe we can practice some letter and number recognitions. That would help. We did some practicing on our own over the summer. And her preschool teachers agreed to offer some of those activities in the learning environment as well. That's a way that, because we were involved, we were able to take more ownership over her learning and really help her transition into kindergarten with a smooth transition. It was wonderful.

Also when families are included in their child's learning environment, they start to understand some of that child development language that we use to describe children's actions and to understand the reasons for doing certain activities, like circle time. They may also get to know other parents and families which is great. This enhances their support system. This is also an opportunity for education staff to learn from the families about the child and build that collaborative relationship. All of these things really build parents' confidence in their ability to create change and be an advocate for their child.

Then when parents are included in the planning of their preschooler's learning experiences, this includes routines and schedules, the program staff are really better able to help meet children's

and the family's needs. If a young preschooler is potty training, the family can share the words that they use to remind or ask the child when they need to go to the restroom or that the educators can use these in the classroom setting as well. There's that home-school connection there. This way the child hears a consistent phrase or reminder and is more likely to generalize this activity. Another example of that is, if a teacher is talking to young children about the classroom rules, he can engage with families in an activity where they describe the rules they have at home and then in the class and can talk about which rules at home are the same as the rules in the classroom, really helping to build that connection for both children and families.

Gail: In addition to the positive outcomes for children when parents are involved in their early childhood program, the Division of Early Childhood of the Council for Exceptional Children, which is a mouthful, we like to just call it DEC, has several recommended practices in their recommended practices for family engagement section. That includes specific outcomes for families of children with disabilities. Some of these outcomes for families include being able to, for example, identify, access, and use formal and informal sources of support. I think about this as maybe making sure they're aware of a special equipment lending library or a parent education and support group for parents of children with disabilities, maybe available respite care in their community that they can take advantage of when they need that.

Another practice is being able to better know and understand their rights and their child's rights to a free and appropriate public education. We've been talking in each episode about IDEA. That might look like practices like sharing information about the family's rights in a format and in language that the family is most comfortable with, and that could be a phone call, a text, a newsletter, et cetera.

Then third is that the family might be excited about participating in leadership and advocacy skill-building, so if they're interested. This could be, for example, a teacher brainstorming with a group of families to identify types of information they'd like to receive to help them advocate for their child and then arrange opportunities for the family to receive that information so gathering that information from families as leaders. And teacher might also invite families to help present professional development to other educators about their child and their disability. Often families learn a lot about supporting their child with a disability and learn a lot about a specific disability and become a real resource to provide some professional development for other staff members.

Then also most schools, most elementary schools, have actually special education PTAs, so in addition to a PTA they have a special education PTA. When a parent is involved in leadership opportunities in Head Start, such as maybe being on a Policy Council, they might feel more comfortable and interested in serving on special education PTA when their child transitions into elementary school, and this allows them to advocate on behalf of all families in their school community who have a child with a disability. These are just a few of the outcomes from recommended practices.

Now let's watch a video of parents as they discuss what it means to feel included in the learning environment and the benefit of the inclusive environment. This is a great opportunity to use your Viewer's Guide to add your reflections, and after this video we'll take a deeper dive.

[Video begins]

Ivonne Perez: Well, inclusion to us means that we are welcome to be part of a particular group, which in this case we are more than welcome to be here at Valley View School. We feel very happy to participate with the program that they provide here for the kids. I think we have many benefits. The ones that come to my mind right now are that, first of all, we meet new people, new people that are super friendly. They've been helping us with things that we might need, classes, equipment. And we also find that it's a really nice benefit to find out about other services that we probably didn't know they exist until being part of the community at school. And we also make friendships. My son has been really good with his friends. In the last couple weeks I've been meeting their parents, and they all feel that Alonso is a great kid, and we've just been building that friendship as well. So new benefits, services, friendships, and that's all I can think of right now.

[Video ends]

Treshawn: That's such a great video and love hearing from parents too. I also like the idea of the special education PTA. I'm on the PTA of my children's school, and I've never heard of that before, so that's something good to look into. The DEC and NAEYC, the National Association for the Education of Young Children, have written a joint position statement on early childhood inclusion. They've stated that "The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high-quality early childhood programs and services are access, participation, and supports." If you want to see this full joint position statement, go ahead and check that Viewer's Guide because you know that it's in there for you.

When we think about access, this is when educators provide children with access to a wide range of learning opportunities, activities, and settings, and even the environment. And participation is where education staff have individualized supports in place that allow children to participate fully in play and learning activities with their peers and meeting developmental goals for children. And supports at the program level include support system for education staff to help them implement high-quality inclusive practices, and these supports include resources, trainings, like you're here today, and other professional development opportunities. In our previous episodes, we talked access and participation. For this episode, we're going to focus on supports.

Gail: Absolutely. What do we mean by supports? We can think of supports in two ways. We can think about supports for education staff and supports for the families in our learning environment. Supports for the education staff at the program level might come in the form of professional development, training, coursework, "Teacher Time." But support for education staff might also include coaching that you're receiving and engaging in reflective practices to help create and maintain positive goal-oriented relationships with families.

Support may be working with a service provider or a disability services coordinator in your program to help ensure your learning environment is inclusive. Support might even come from just receiving support from an administrator showing that inclusion is valued and that you have access to anything that you might need to support children and families.

When we think about supports for families, which we'll focus on today, we can think about the family-professional collaboration and how this collaboration builds opportunities for both relationship building and the active participation of parents and education staff in helping children to achieve developmental goals that are mutually agreed upon. When teachers and family child care providers work together with families, this builds the family's sense of inclusion and belonging and their capacity to support their child and also helps educational staff provide appropriate resources, supports, and services to ensure the inclusion of all children. Additionally, strengthening and increasing collaboration with other agencies and community partners is really critical during this time since we know families, especially those families who have children with disabilities, may be experiencing some increased feelings of isolation.

Treshawn: Yeah, absolutely. You want to connect with your community people. Although it's a great idea and it's even an evidence-based practice to include families in the conversation about their child's development and interests and to incorporate the ways of life at home, sometimes teachers and family child care providers need support when talking with families, especially when it comes to those sensitive topics.

If you look at this picture we have our friend Sonja. Sonja has a difficult time following simple instructions and often wanders off on her own. Based on your experience with preschool-aged children, you're concerned that Sonja may have a developmental delay. She just turned 4 years old, and she does not respond to peers wanting her to play, and she has a hard time with simple one-step directions. She does repeat what other people say, but she doesn't quite engage in this back-and-forth conversation or initiate interactions other than maybe grabbing your hand and pulling you to a toy that she wants to play with.

You've been documenting your observations with Sonja, and you would like to talk with her family about a referral for further evaluation. The only thing is, Sonja's family has not mentioned having these concerns about these behaviors, so you're a bit worried about how an initial conversation would go. I know I would be.

Lucky for you, we brought in our friend Dr. Enrica Hampton from Kinderling, which is in Washington State. I'm so mad that I can't see her way over in Washington State, but that's OK. I get to interview her here. But, Enrica, we had some tips for her. We asked her for some tips for teachers and family child care providers to begin this initial conversation with families on behavioral or developmental concerns that they're observing in the learning environment. Let's hear what she had to say about that.

[Video begins]

Dr. Enrica Hampton: Well, first, let me start by saying thank you so much for inviting me to join you on this topic of having sensitive conversations with families. That is a really great question for Sonja's teacher and family. As your example of Sonja reflects, an important job that early care and education professionals working with children ages 3 to 5 in child care centers and family home child care programs and other early care and education settings have is communicating concerns that they have about a child's development or behavior with families. These are often not easy conversations to have. These are very sensitive conversations.

As early care and education professionals, you might be the first one raising some questions about a child's development with a family. While you might be uncomfortable sharing your questions and concerns, it is an important part of your job to have these conversations. I hope that some of these ideas that I share with you might help support you both in preparing for and having an initial conversation with families.

Think about things such as meeting space, location, privacy, the time of day that works best for the family, and giving time to hold the discussion. Have your observation notes with you. Try to use an approach that encourages a conversation, so you might start by highlighting some strengths of the child before raising questions. You might consider using phrases such as "I've been wondering" or "I've noticed" as a way to bring up the topic.

For example, you might say, "I've noticed that Sonja doesn't use many words in the classroom. What are you hearing at home?" Or you might try, "I've been wondering why Sonja doesn't seem to look up when I call her name. Do you think she can hear me?" Other things, describe the behavior that you are seeing. Avoid labeling, you know, and find out what is happening at home. Ask if the pediatrician or the health care provider has ever expressed any concerns. And describe strategies that you have tried and learn what strategies are used at home. So you're really approaching this conversation as a team.

Make sure to have other resources available if you're recommending that a family consider having their child's skills looked at more closely. That way, the family is walking away knowing where to go for that additional support. And always suggest that they talk to their pediatrician and health care provider.

[Video ends]

Treshawn: That was such wonderful insight, and yes, we know these conversations can be very difficult to have with families, but with Dr. Hampton's tips, I hope that you all feel empowered and that you have enough information to have these conversations.

Now let's keep on with this scenario. After you've had the conversation with Sonja's family, let's say the family agrees to move forward with the Child Find process. This includes the evaluation. And they learn that Sonja is eligible for an IEP or an Individualized Education Plan. Dr. Hampton was gracious enough to tell us a little bit about the IEP meeting and maybe some tips for what teachers and family child care providers can do before, during, and after this meeting, so let's hear what she had to say.

[Video begins]

Dr. Hampton: For children who are 3 to 5 years old, families can contact their public school district Child Find. All school districts have a Child Find service. It is completely free of charge to families. When a family has concerns about their child's development, they can contact the school district and request that their child's skills be looked at more closely. When families contact Child Find, it is not uncommon for the school district to request that the family provide them with written reports or other documents from people who have had the opportunity to work with their child. This is where you can help the family by providing them with your notes, samples of the child's work, or other forms of documentation that the family can then share with the school district to help inform the evaluation process.

If after evaluation the child is determined eligible to receive special education services, then the next step is development of the IEP. An IEP stands for Individualized Education Program. This is the plan which outlines the services that a child will be receiving and the educational goals and objectives that have been generated by the team. As you have been invited to participate in the IEP meeting, you might be asked to share what you see as a child's strengths. So what does the child like to do? You might be asked to share what you see as areas where the child is needing support. You might also be asked to share a little bit about your program and the types of strategies that you have been using or have tried in the classroom to support the child. Do some reflection on that so you are prepared for these types of possible questions.

After the IEP meeting, continue keeping open communication with the family just like you've been doing all along. Ask the family if you can have a copy of the IEP. Again, these are just a few ideas. I hope that you've found this information helpful in your work as early care and education professionals.

[Video ends]

Treshawn: Yes, we certainly found this information helpful, and a huge thanks to Dr. Hampton for being a guest expert here on "Teacher Time" today. This was such great information, and guess what? There's even more information from Dr. Hampton. If you want to see the full video, we're going to post it on MyPeers for you to view. There's also a handout in your Viewer's Guide called "Preparing for Challenging Conversations with Families," and that has helpful tips for you for addressing challenging topics with families.

Gail: Just before we move on, fun fact is that I did my student teaching in Dr. Hampton's classroom. She was my mentor teacher when I first started out.

Treshawn: That's wonderful.

Gail: That was so great to see her again, such a leader in our work. Now let's talk a little bit about the role of the teacher or family child care provider when it comes to supporting children with an IEP. Education staff can provide important information to the process of developing an IEP. You often know I would say the child best in terms of in the education environment. You

know what the child can do. You know where their strengths are. You know what they might be struggling with. Sharing all of that information with the IEP team is really, really important.

You can also make sure that the goals that are developed for the child to work on, that you also gain a sense of how you're going to work on them in your learning environment and also how they're going to benefit children's growth and development. In some programs, education staff might only connect with the disability services coordinator, so be sure to check with your administrators to see who you or other teachers should be connecting with around the IEP and the IEP process.

Head Start teachers and family child care providers can also share information about Head Start's comprehensive services and all of the services that the child and family can access with the IEP team. Knowing all of the services and supports the child and family may access through Head Start will really help the Part B as we call them provider or the local education agency who might be providing the special education services. Providing that information to them, they'll be able to offer suggestions and strategies to help children and families participate in those services as well.

Now the IEP team might consist of the disabilities services coordinator from your program who helps to coordinate the disability services, what we call the Part B services coordinator who schedules the meetings with everyone. There could be therapists there or other specialists like a physical therapist or a speech-language therapist who help design that specialized instruction, problem solve, and review the child's screening and assessment information. There might be a translator that is there if needed, and of course the family is there, and you will be there. I'm actually curious if people can enter in the Q&A box if they've participated in an IEP meeting before. I think that'd be really interesting to understand what your experience was.

The IEP team may vary depending on the program type and the family's choice of who they would like to have there and be involved. Families can also always bring someone with them to be a support as well. One important goal of teachers and family child care providers is to make sure that parents know the roles and responsibilities of the people involved so that the family can understand who's responsible for certain tasks during that IEP process.

Treshawn: Yeah, there's a lot of people involved, so you want to know, you know, who to go to for what. Then, you know, teachers and family child care providers can implement the IEP goals once they're established. Everyone agrees on them, and this really helps the child make progress toward the learning goals through the daily routines and activities that you plan for the day. Sometimes a consulting teacher or a therapist from the school district who works with the Head Start teacher can help design specialized instructions and problem solve and maybe help review some child performance data, so you are not alone when it comes to working with children with an IEP.

Then lastly, we want to be sure to document. Take pictures. Write down notes, everything you can do to document the children's growth and development on a regular basis to help the team see and understand the child's progress and if there are any needs for adjustments. We're

going to listen to one teacher actually talks about a very cool strategy that she uses to gather information on children's growth and development using technology. I mean, it's in our world. Why not use it? As you watch, think about the ways that you can incorporate new ways of observing. I know people like to use sticky notes or other, you know, notepads, whatever, but this is going to help you use technology. Let's watch and see what she has to say.

[Video begins]

Whitney Sanders: I use a data system that I developed over the summer. There were some ideas that I gathered from other teachers, and then some of the ideas I came up with myself. I basically create a Google Form for each one of my students' goals. I make the Google Form accessible to all the classroom staff that I have so that they are able to understand what specific information I'm asking for and can give that input. I then take the Google Form and tie it to a QR code, and then I put the QR codes on small cards for my staff and myself to use. The way it's actually used is that the staff person would take a phone or an iPad and scan the QR code, and it would open up to the Google Form, and that's where they would input the data.

The benefit of using a system like this for me as a person who has lots of staff people working with the kids I work with is that I get a very clear picture of what's going on, when the data was taken, and it also automatically calculates that information for me. So reviewing data with my coworkers is very quick because I can pretty easily look and see that 50% of the time this child is completing this task, and so this is an area we need to work on. It doesn't take a lot of me going through my data and tallying and trying to understand the information. It's a very quick process, and it just really streamlines the interventions that we're trying to apply.

This system supports children by allowing us to provide really targeted interventions. In a lot of paper data, at least in my experience, I've had trouble catching up to collect the data, analyze the data, and then plan the intervention. But if the data is easier for me to look at, then the children benefit from the more targeted intervention.

As far as families, Google Forms actually automatically generates graphs that we can show families. When we're talking about progress reports, we can pull up a graph from their goal that looks at their latest data, and we can show them in visual form, which is perfect for families who maybe English is their second language, and all of the written English is a little bit overwhelming. So yeah, that's been one of the benefits that we've seen as far as families.

[Video ends]

Treshawn: Right.

Gail: I love the idea of the QR code and that she uses her whole staff in the classroom to collect data, and that's such a cool way to do that. Speaking of sharing information with the IT team, communication with children and families is one of the five key aspects of inclusive, high-quality early learning environments. We've covered safe and supportive physical environments, inviting materials, predictable schedules and routines, and engaging interactions in our last two

episodes, so be sure to check those out. Replay them on DTL Push Play or MyPeers. For this episode, we'll highlight some strategies for connecting and communicating with children and families in the learning environment.

Raising a child presents many, many, many joys but also challenges and can greatly affect family life. Parents, siblings, and education staff need to work together to problem solve and build resilience. Here are some everyday actions that education staff can do to communicate with the children and families in their learning environments.

Treshawn: Yeah, for preschoolers, we want to promote social interactions among the children and between you and the child. We know that children may not have had as many opportunities to engage with other children during this time when programs were not offering services, were not offering in-person services. However, education staff can facilitate children's social and emotional development and encourage social interaction when offering virtual services and as a transition back to in-person services, too.

These opportunities for social interaction should be identified with different activities throughout the day to provide practice and mastery of peer-related social skills. For example, when you're providing virtual services, education staff may discuss with the family about embedding social interactions into daily routines and opportunities for peer interactions within the home or maybe their local community that can be done safely. Also, when providing in-person services, a child can invite a peer to take his place after he's done with an activity instead of the adult inviting another child. For example, Angelo might as Blair if she wants to use the headset to listen to music now that he's all done with it.

Also, you want to be sure to have personal social conversations with each child during the day. We know that it's easy for preschoolers and us and families to get so wrapped up in our daily activities and in the learning environment or preparing to be consumed with life at home that sometimes we miss opportunities to connect with each child. If you have a tracking sheet like the teacher mentioned in the video, this will help make sure each child and family has gotten your attention in some way each day. And so, use routines such as mealtimes and arrival times to talk with children about the things that they're interested in. Encourage families to use mealtimes as a chance for social conversation at home.

Gail: Well, for families, think ongoing communication. When we try to communicate with families in ways that work for them, we're showing that we value their insights. Research shows that when teachers and parents communicate on a regular basis, teachers and family child care providers feel happier and more competent as an educator, and we all want that. And parents are more likely to trust and appreciate education staff's efforts, so everyone wins, really, when we reach out and pursue ongoing communication with families.

Remember, ongoing communication is a two-way street. It's bidirectional. When education staff hear from, acknowledge, and confirm parents' points of view and take time to learn from and with families as partners in their child's development, it also builds trust and positive relationships.

There are lots of ways in which we can communicate with families, especially during these times when we may see families in person or virtually. The first and probably most important way to communicate with families is to figure out how they want to communicate with you, what times of day work best for them, what method of communication do they prefer, in what language do they feel most comfortable communicating. Talk with your education manager, your disability services coordinator, or your director to find ways to meet the needs of all the families for effective communication.

For example, you may be engaging in more virtual communication options with families now. I know that that's how educators of my children are communicating with me now. Video conference calls, emails, and text messages may be used a lot more frequently. This includes therapy services that might be offered virtually, allowing children and families to still participate and learn new strategies, which is so critical. Talk with your director or your education manager about virtual platforms and messaging systems that all parents can access for free. We don't want to have anything that's a charge.

Find out from parents what access they have to in terms of technology such as internet usage, mobile capacity. Do they have data on their phones? Meet families where they are. Families may also benefit from a support or a play group with other parents outside of school or with other families who will be attending the same kindergarten as we start thinking about transitioning to kindergarten. This can be done virtually, too, or in person as families might feel comfortable.

Treshawn: Yeah. If you have had the privilege of not operating in such a virtual world, you can communicate with families in, you know, using communication journals, that good old pencil and paper, and even "Getting to Know You" books. A communication journal is a journal or a book that comes and goes with the family. Each page might have a space for them to indicate, you know, if the child slept well or not, if they had something to eat, how they may be feeling, and then a space for any other notes.

Not every parent has a lot of time to write. They might just jot down some notes, so consider making these quick and easy to use as possible. For example, it could list sleep cycles or maybe three faces like happy, sad, neutral, you know, and they could just circle what the child is feeling like that day. This provides you with information about the child and may influence the way that you start your day with them. It may need to start in a quiet space for some time before you get into some free play activities.

Then also, the teacher responds with how the child's day went at the end of the day and then tucks it into the child's backpack for home. This back-and-forth communication really keeps parents involved in the happenings of their learning environment and keeps you up to date on what's occurring at home. This method is especially useful if, you know, we're limited to the amount of people that could pick up and drop off and how long you can spend in the classroom. Think about using that as a way to communicate.

Another idea is to create a “Getting to Know You” book. This booklet can be completed by the family or during the interview at a home visit or a virtual home visit. This book can include the child’s name and birthday but also include so much more, like what else? What do I like to play with? What are the names of my pets? It can also include things like a child’s favorite food, their favorite book, their favorite stuffy. One thing I really like about this is, you can customize it and maybe ask questions like, “What makes the child feel scared?” and “What makes children feel happy?” or “What makes them laugh?” or “How do they react when they’re tired or hungry or excited?”

Many preschoolers we know are very verbal and can tell you these things already, but some children may not be able to yet, or they may speak a different language than what you speak, so we partner with families to learn all that we can. You can customize these pages for the needs of the children and families in your program to help you meet these children’s needs. There’s also great books for supporting a child’s transition to another classroom or to kindergarten, and you can just send that book with them to their next teacher.

Gail: Such great ideas. This is our section that we call Small Changes – Big Impact. It’s about making a modification that is relatively simple but has a really big impact for children and, in this case, we’re thinking about families. I know this one might feel obvious to people, but I just want to emphasize that one modification you can make when we’re thinking about families is to make sure that we provide all materials in a language that they want to receive them in. It is ... our modification today is around making sure to have materials translated.

First, start by talking with families about what their preferred language of communication is. Don’t ever make an assumption. Make sure that you ask and understand. That can be done in, you know, one-to-one conversation. It can be done in virtual interactions. Maybe even it’s a survey that goes out to all parents or a survey that you kind of interview a parent around. Then work with your program leadership to have any materials that you provide to parents translated into those languages with the language in which a parent wants to receive them.

Many of you might already be doing this for languages like in English and in Spanish, but it might not be all of the families’ languages in your learning environment. Make sure you understand what those languages are and provide all materials translated in the language they want. I know that when sometimes teachers are thinking just about kind of the critical pieces or the more formal communications that go home, but really it should be anything that you’re communicating ... should be in the language in which they want to receive it.

Reach out to your networks, and see if you have someone that might be willing to help. For example, Part B providers or your local education agency partners might have translated materials that they would be willing to share. You can also reach out to your local child care resource and referral agency for support with this, local cultural centers, and a tip that I learned from you, Treshawn, is community college foreign language instructors that might be willing to provide some translation. I think they would actually love to do that type of community service. Inclusive learning environments support all families, and we want all of our families to be in the know about their child’s education.

Treshawn: Yeah. That's a great tip. I know community college people do need some community service stuff, so that would be good to reach out to them. Lastly, we love this section of "Teacher Time." Books are a great way to engage with children and families and even communicate children's needs with them. Having books in the learning environment that are some family favorites or maybe reflect the families in your learning environment is also important in bridging that home-school connection.

If you've been with us on "Teacher Time," you know that we've been exploring "The Bookcase," where CASE is ... For the C, we are connecting content of the books to the ELOF goals so we can support children's learning. For the A, we find ways to provide advanced vocabulary using our books. For the S, this is how teachers and family child care providers can support engagement during book reading. And then for the E, we're looking for ways to extend children's learning beyond the book. Let's take a look at a few books that are on Gail's Bookcase today.

Gail: Well, I'm so excited about this section. The first book that we have is "My Brother Charlie" by Holly Robinson Peete. This is a story about a boy who happens to have autism. Charlie has autism. His brain works in a special way. This is a quote from the book. It's harder for him to make some friends or show his true feelings or stay safe. He has a big sister, and she tells us everything about Charlie, what he can do well, all of these things that he can explore and do, and also some things that he might not be able to do so well. She knows some of the strengths that she pulls out, which I love. I like the names of the American presidents. Charlie knows all the names of the American presidents. He knows stuff about airplanes that maybe other people don't know, and he can even play the piano better than anyone else that she knows.

It's a really great story that talks about a child with a disability in a very active way, showing all the things they do just like us and things that they are doing well and things that they are learning, still learning to do. What I love about this is, it really emphasizes Charlie in the context of a family. Sometimes some of the children that are in our classrooms are siblings of children with disabilities, so it kind of highlights that, as well.

The second book is one that I love. There's actually two version of it. One is called "Families, Families, Families," and one is called "All Kinds of Families." It's actually the same book, but one is done in a board-book format, and I absolutely love this book. There's so many ways in which families are organized, and this takes a look at all kinds of structures of families. It celebrates all kinds of structures of family. It is super fun. It is a super accessible board book. It is done in a really fun, kind of, rhyme way, and kids will really love finding their own – how their own family is represented, no matter if they have two moms, one grandpa. Then I love this one part that says, "Or just a cousin named Doug," which is pretty fun.

It also talks about a family that just has a plant as a pet, which I also love. Use this simple book to talk with kids about the different kinds of families that they might encounter in the world. It is super silly, positive, fun. Children will absolutely love the drawings of the families in there, and it really increases that thought about open-mindedness about all kinds of families.

Then the third book is one that is called "We Are Family." I'm holding this one up, and we love this one. It's a great book with beautiful illustrations that show the diversity of families through shared experiences, things that all families experience even though the ways in which their families look might be different. Every family is different, but the love is all the same, is the message that is in here, which I really love. We are going to take a moment and explore "We Are Family" as our chosen kind of "Bookcase" feature here.

If we think about the exploring "The Bookcase" with this book, "We Are Family," we think about the connect part. As this book shares how families are all different, they're also the same in many ways. The representation of all kinds of families is a great way to increase a sense of belonging with every child and family staff member in your program. There's also representation of someone with disabilities and as an active participants in every daily routine and having fun. I absolutely love this.

The content in this book connects to the ELOF goals that we have. One is in social-emotional, which is the child developing a sense of belonging to a family, community, and other groups. That's absolutely something that you can reinforce with this book. Also the social-emotional goal seven, which the child expresses care and concern toward others. That's absolutely in here because there's a whole section on there about all families might have some bad days, bad times, and so it connects to that with a sense of empathy.

Then I think it also connects to ... I could probably connect it to many other things, but I think it connects to math in a really fun way because you can understand a relationship of number, so how many, which family is bigger, which family is smaller, which family has more siblings, which family has fewer siblings. It really ... you can work some math in there. You can even work some science in here by comparing categories of observable phenomena, things that are the same, things that are different. Lots of ways that you can connect this to ELOF.

There are some great advanced vocabulary words in here, so words like rushing, backward and forward, the word eager, which is a nice, big vocabulary word, soothe, and I love the phrase "silver lining." Remember when you're introducing new vocabulary to provide a child-friendly definition. Always be thinking about what that vocabulary word might mean for a child, how you would explain it for a child, how you might link it to another word or concept that you know that they are already familiar with to start building those concepts and language development.

Now, the way in which you can support the engagement, well, first of all, lovely, beautiful, colorful illustrations. That alone helps with some illustration. Also engage with opportunities for where you might show the picture around while you're reading it or, if you're reading it online, holding it up online and encouraging children, with each page, I would do maybe something different. Like, you could shout out, "Just like me," so if you see a family that is like yours, you can say, "Just like me," or maybe you can say, "On this page, if you see a family that looks like your family, you can stand up. If this is a family that looks like your family, you can sit down." Lots of ways that you can actively engage and help children start to build that sense of belonging and seeing themselves in this book.

There's not a lot of text, but there are certainly a lot of opportunities to also ask engaging, open-ended questions. I wonder how they are feeling by lots of different scenarios in here. I wonder what the weather is like where they live. Lots of fun things, and how do you know that, right? So you might see some leaves on the ground, et cetera. What do you think this child is thinking? How would you feel if it happened to you?

Then I can also see the E extending the learning with this with doing a whole unit on families, bringing in photos of families. Maybe there is an art-and-craft activity where you make picture frames, and everyone brings in a picture of their family, and they're hung around the classroom. I can see that you could start doing some homeschool check-ins with this with ... There's photos of the families at home, and then you check into school. I can see you could make your home – your own class book on “We Are Families.”

You could have a staff member or family volunteer who is a good photographer, capture some of those photos or, even over Zoom, capturing those photos or maybe even giving children disposable cameras. Remember those? They can take photos of their family over a weekend, and then you can develop those and make a family book around that. Lots and lots of ways to celebrate and extend this book “We Are Family.” All right.

Treshawn: That's awesome. I have three new books to add to my Bookcase, so thank you for those, Gail. Just so you guys know, we do our best caregiving and teaching when we can feel calm and well ourselves. Engaging in self-care practices can help educators build better social-emotional capacity to deal with difficult times. Gail, I know this is one of your favorite sections, so can you give us one really quick strategy that you can use to get back into that calm space?

Gail: Yes. I'm going to give this one really fast. This one is called moving your telescope, and I have my telescope here. This is the idea that sometimes when we're learning of something new or something is happening, we fixate on just what is negative about that situation, and it's hard to imagine anything else. We just kind of focus and keep our telescope on all the bad things that are going to happen. Like, I'm sitting in traffic, and all I can think about is, I'm sitting in traffic, and I'm going to be late, and it just can go on and on and on.

The strategy is called moving your telescope. It's to think about, is there anything positive, any silver lining that you can see maybe by just moving your telescope a little bit? So I'm sitting in traffic, but I'm sitting in traffic with my child, and we can have a long conversation. When do I get this time that I can do that? Or I can maybe listen to a book or a podcast that I have not had time to listen to for a while. It's that idea of thinking about how I can move my telescope away from getting fixed in that negative, unhelpful thinking cycle. I have a great friend and colleague, and when I start to get a little bit negative, she says, “Telescope up. Telescope up.” It's a great way to remind us about doing some more positive thinking.

Treshawn: Yeah. That's awesome, and it's good to have a support person to remind you of when you need to move your telescope, too. Here's a few resources that will support you as you create quality, inclusive learning environments for the preschoolers that you work with. We've got MyPeers, Text4Teachers, ELOF2GO, Ready DLL, and the Head Start Resources app.

All these apps are free. They're available in English and Spanish, but go ahead and check your Viewer's Guide for more information on those and to get you connected with your teaching community.

Then there's also a website called the Center for Parent Information and Resources, and it's a wonderful website to have in your back pocket because it includes strategies for working with children with disabilities and their families. There is a link there in your Viewer's Guide, as well.

Gail: OK. Goodbye, everyone. We'll see you on MyPeers and next season.

Treshawn: Yeah, see you next time.