

JULY 2026
BUFFALO, NEW YORK

View from the Middle: Lessons Learned from Both Sides of the IEP Table

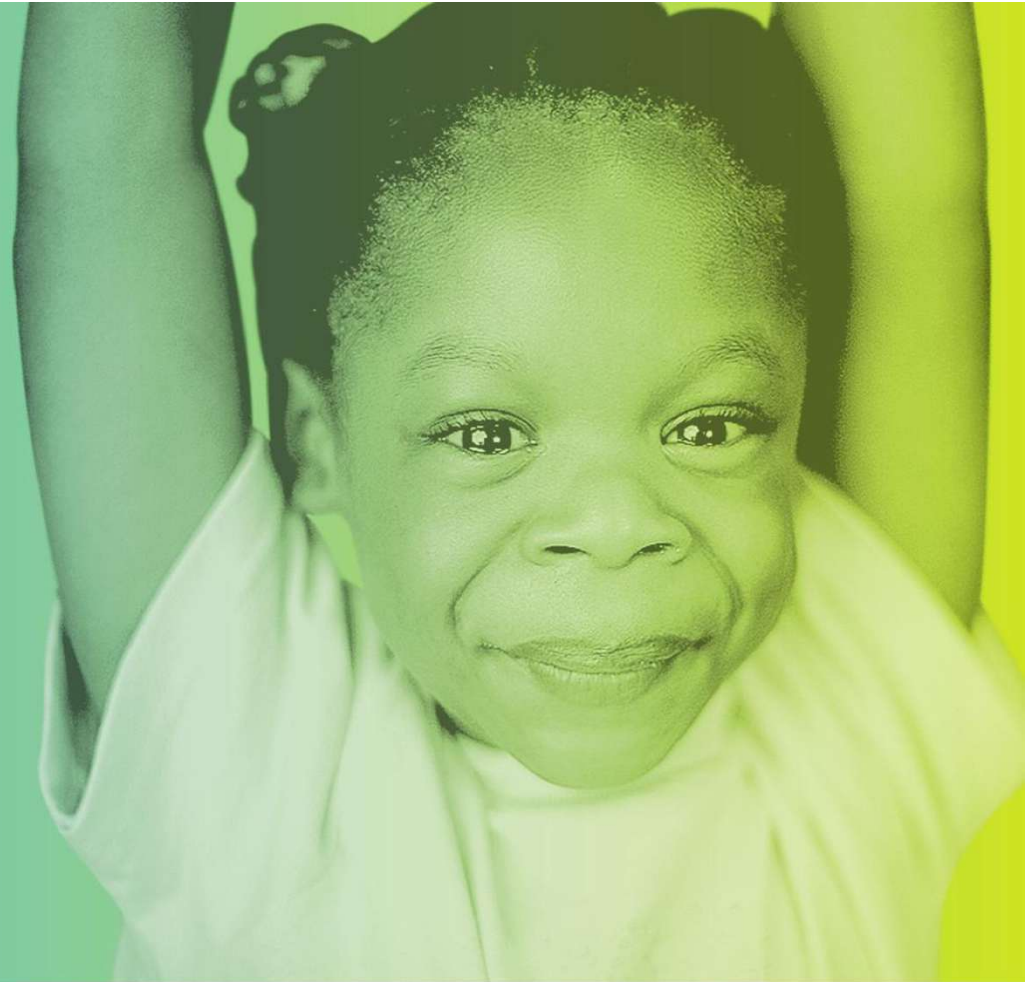
PRESENTED BY

Erin Putman

Special Education Teacher M.S.Ed

Inclusive Education Specialist

Parent



Presented by **INNERSENSE**
ORGANIC BEAUTY

WSA 2026 
CONVENTION

Good Afternoon! 🙌

I'm so glad you are here!

If you feel comfortable, please share:

- ★ Name
- ★ Where you are from
- ★ What brought you to this session

Take a moment.

“Acknowledge what
it took to get you to
this room today.”

-Laurie McIntosh
@mrsmacskinders

Our Agenda

- ★ Who am I?
- ★ My purpose
- ★ Objectives for Presentation
- ★ Explore Objectives and Share Resources
- ★ Questions?



Scan Here For Slides →





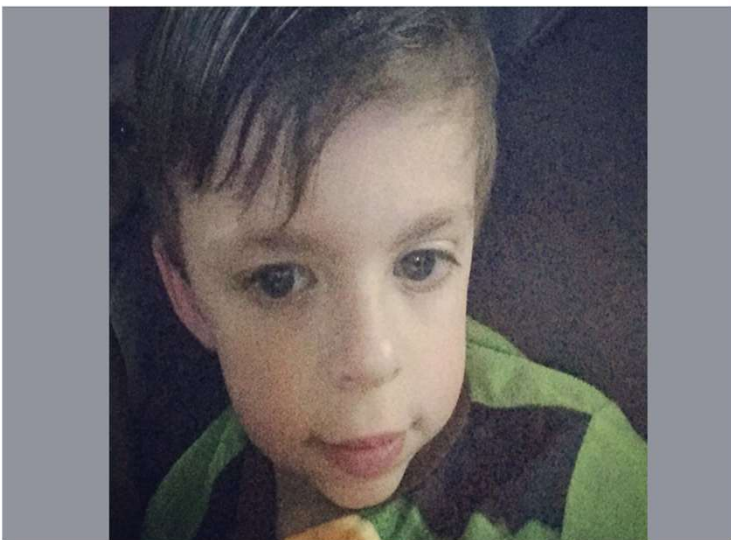
Who am I?

- ★ Parent of two children, 15 and 10.
 - 15 year old has a dual DX of Williams Syndrome and ASD and has been a part of the public special education system since he was 3.
 - 10 year old has had a 504 plan for two years.
- ★ Special Education Teacher since graduating college in 2000.
- ★ Masters Degree in Special Education and LDTC certified
- ★ NJEA Design Team Ambassador with the Consortium
- ★ 2021 Partners in Policymaking Graduate
- ★ Have taught in Resource Room, Co-Teaching, In Class Support, and Self Contained settings.
- ★ Most recently a 4th grade teacher in a co-teaching class for most of the day with one period in a self contained setting.

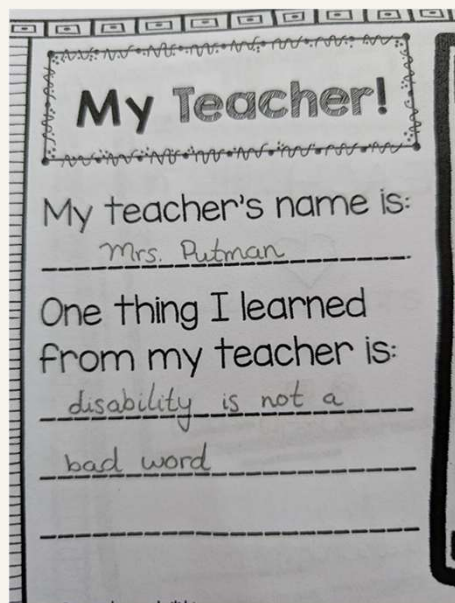


My Purpose

Today's afternoon school report: 87% noncompliance. In addition Evan sang a song from Frozen and made everyone cry. #williamssyndrome #complexdude #myheart



First Grade Communication Chart:
"Today's afternoon school report. 87% noncompliance. In addition, Evan sang a song from Frozen and made everyone cry."



End of the Year Booklet
completed by a student in my
fourth grade class



First party Evan attended
without adult support-
ALLYSHIP

Objectives:

ATTENDEES WILL LEARN HOW TO:

1. **Reframe Advocacy-** Move the focus from "checking boxes" to prioritizing your child's joy and authentic belonging in the school community.
1. **Speak and Leverage Your Lived Truth-** Learn to transform your daily "lived truth" as a parent into powerful advocacy for meaningful participation.
1. **Equip themselves and their team with valuable resources-** Identify, collect, and create your own resources that can transform an IEP meeting, a relationship, and a student's role in the classroom.

Focus on Objective 1:

Move from “Being Present” to “Being VALUED.”

The Shift

	The Compliance Approach	The Joy & Belonging Approach
Primary Goal	Legal safety and minimum standards.	Meaningful participation and happiness.
Integration	Student is in the room (physical access).	Student is a contributor (social access).
IEP Success	Goals are met in isolation.	Skills translate to real-world belonging.
School Culture	"Accommodating" a disability. (tolerance)	"Celebrating" diversity through UDL and intentional discussion of disability



****Legal compliance is important and necessary. But it should be the **minimum** that is expected. Meaningful belonging and joy should be the end goal.****



Ask these questions:

- Would your child be missed if they were absent?
- Is their role in group work meaningful?
- Does their opinion matter to their peers? To their teacher?
- Do the people in your neighborhood know your child?
- Have you thought about [Social Capital?](#)

Focus on Objective 2:

Your Story is Indispensable;
Share your “Lived Truth” to Improve your Child’s
Experience



The Facts:

- You are an expert on your child.
- The only person who is more of an expert is your own child.
- You are a **KEY** member of your child's team.
In school, at doctor's appointments, at the dance studio, soccer field, anywhere your child takes up space.
- The time you spend with your child, the experiences you have together, the observations you make- they are all crucial pieces of information.



What is "Lived Truth"?

Data from Home

The nuanced understanding of your child's emotional regulation, sensory needs, and communicative intent seen outside the clinical school setting.

This is data that cannot be gained from a standardized test

The Bridge To Advocacy

Using these insights to build a bridge between home and school, ensuring the school team understands the *person* behind the IEP goals.

Turn the diagnosis into a human story.

☆ Remember: They see a “snapshot.” You see the whole album. ☆

How to Share While Being Collaborative

Example One:

The school team shares that your child is struggling with task completion in math.

You have shared that they love The Beatles and you use Beatles songs to help with mealtime struggles.

Ask the team, “How could music be incorporated into math class? How can The Beatles show up during independent math practice?”

Example Two:

Your child is struggling daily for the last 15 min of the day. They have outbursts or shutdown.

You share that your child is extroverted but trying to read social cues all day drains him. At home you discovered that using vacuum sounds and some time without demands results in regulation.

Talk with the team about that time block. Can he be finished with academic demands by then? Could a white noise machine be implemented with a quiet space before the transition out of school?



Don't Forget!

- Your child's teachers are also experts.
- They are experts on content knowledge, classroom management, creating accommodations, to name a few.
- They also want and deserve to be a part of making decisions.

BUT.....

- Don't dim your flame to brighten theirs. You are an equal member of the team. You do not need a background in education to share valuable information.



Focus on Objective 3:

Find Valuable Resources and Create Some of Your Own.

Create A One Page Profile

Bridge the Gap Instantly

IEP documents can be dozens of pages long. Busy teachers, paraprofessionals, and therapists need an immediate, actionable summary of your child's humanity.

Why a Parent-Created One-Pager Works:

- It introduces the **person**, not just the deficits.
- It puts your "lived truth" directly into their hands on Day 1.
- It establishes an immediate tone of trust and collaborative partnership.

Meet _____

(name of student)

"I learn best when _____"

(complete statement for your student)

What People Love About Me (list a minimum of 3 items)

•

Communication: How I Speak & Listen (list a minimum of 3 items)

•

How to Support Me Best (list a minimum of 3 items)

•

If I Get Upset or Overwhelmed... (complete the signs and three support options)

- **The Signs:** I might
- **What to Do:**

My Daily Essentials (list a minimum of 3 items that are non negotiable items/supports/activities)

•

Student Profile by Erin Putman 2026

Meet Leo!

"I learn best when I feel safe, the room is quiet, and I have my tech ready."

What People Love About Me

- I have a **contagious laugh**, especially when I hear funny sound effects.
- I am a **hard worker** and will keep trying a task if I'm encouraged.
- I am a **great listener** and love being included in group conversations.

Communication: How I Speak & Listen

- **My Voice:** I use an iPad with **Proloquo2Go**. Please make sure it is always within my reach.
- **Wait for Me:** It takes my brain a little longer to process what you said. Count to **10** in your head before repeating a question.
- **Body Language:** If I turn my head away, I might be overwhelmed or "visually tired," not ignoring you.

How to Support Me Best

- **High Contrast:** Use **bright yellow or red** objects against dark backgrounds so I can see them clearly.
- **Predictability:** Use my **visual schedule**. Tell me what is happening *next* before we transition.
- **Clear Workspace:** Keep my tray clear of extra items to help me focus and keep me safe (I sometimes put non-food items in my mouth).

If I Get Upset or Overwhelmed...

- **The Signs:** I might rock back and forth quickly, cover my ears, or make a humming sound.
- **What to Do:** 1. Reduce the noise in the room.
2. Offer me my **weighted lap pad**.
3. Don't ask too many questions; just give me space to breathe.

My Daily Essentials

- [] **AAC Device:** Charged and volume up.
- [] **Gait Trainer:** For 15 minutes of "walking time" at 10:00 AM.
- [] **Sensory Bin:** Accessible for "brain breaks."

Example Student Profile by Erin Putman 2026

Example of a Completed Template→→→→

Student Profile Template

Growth Year: _____

Name: _____

Who am I?


What do I love?

What am I good at?

How can I help others?

How do I want to grow this year?
 1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____

What helps me grow?

What makes it hard for me to grow?

Thank You For helping me GROW

My Seed Packet L.E. Pea

Dr. Shelley Moore, 2023

Growth Year: 2025-2026

Name: Charlotte Grade: 10

I am...

 Funny Likes People Nice nervous Hungry

I really like and/or what to learn more about:
 Kayaking Walking Soccer Cake Pops Listening to Music iPad Pools Dance Run Candy

I am really good at and/or could teach others:
 Clean Up Watch Videos ABC Talker Name Names

I want to grow in these areas: "drama"
 Art Performing Reading Be a Helper

I need this support to grow:
 Music and Movement Family Plans

I need this in my garden to grow:
 Making Friends Manipulatives Focusing

This is what makes it hard for me to grow:
 Typing Confused

Thank You For helping me GROW

Seed Packet L.E. Pea

Dr. Shelley Moore, 2023

[Dr. Shelley Moore's Seed Packets](#)

[Who Am I- Student Inventory](#)

(this can be given to individuals who know your child well to gather choices for them to fill in their seed packet)



EVAN PUTMAN

Typing whiz with a song in my heart

VISION STATEMENT

I will live a full life, with agency, enjoyment, and varied experiences. I will contribute to my community and be meaningfully included in every aspect of my life. I will have significant relationships and have gainful employment. I will work to achieve these things with support and belief in my competence.

STRENGTHS

- typing- I know my way around Google Classroom.
- spelling
- decoding
- making others smile and laugh
- word memory
- ear for musical patterns

I'M WORKING ON

- executive functioning skills
- becoming less dependent on my aide
- participating in school activities for longer chunks of time
- Using tools to solve math problems with less prompts
- expanding my ideas when I create a writing piece
- using different self regulatory strategies when I get frustrated or overwhelmed
- taking care of personal hygiene

I LOVE

- pizza
- Super Mario Brothers
- toys that light up and play music
- talking to people and asking questions

WHAT WORKS FOR ME

- schedules and task lists
- visuals, visuals, visuals
- preferred activities embedded throughout my daily schedule
- chunking activities
- talk less to me, let me talk or process
- funny voices, accents, whisper, lip sync
- sensory diet to improve focus before sitting down to do work
- having a "fresh face" engage with me if I am feeling "stuck"
- music- rhythms, tone, pitch- it is all instantly engaging
- Tell me my role. I do much better when I know what what is expected of me.

WHAT DOESN'T WORK FOR ME

- directions given only verbally
- materials that are too "busy" visually
- big negative reactions- I like the cause and effect of them too much.

MEDICAL INFO

- Radioulnar synostosis of my right hand and wrist. It makes it difficult for me to fully rotate my right hand. (my dominant hand) Typing instead of using paper and pencil as often as possible is recommended.
- Focal seizures- Symptoms- my head tilts to the side and I stare off. If you try to engage with me and say my name I will not interact with you at all and I will look almost "disconnected." They last between 3-10 seconds long typically. When I come out of it, I can be very hyperactive and agitated. I can also be very tired. "If you are concerned you may have observed a seizure, please record the time and approximate duration, in addition to what activity preceded the episode. Please alert the school nurse and my parents. I have a seizure action plan for seizures longer than 10 seconds that has been shared with the school nurse."

Intro to [Name] Grade [insert #]

My Strengths

- List here
- List here
- List here
- List here

What Works for Me

- List here
- List here
- List here
- List here
- List here

What I Like to Do

List here

List here

List here

List here

List here

List here

What I Want You to Know

As a person...

- List here
- List here
- List here

Academically...

- List here
- List here
- List here

Socially...

- List here
- List here
- List here

I have an IEP...

- List key feature here
- List key feature here
- List key feature here

I need your help with...

- List here
- List here
- List here

[Editable Template in Canva](#)- Just make a copy and edit

[KP Solutions & Consulting LLC - One Pager Template](#)

For your Child's School Team:

Map the student across three dimensions using the [Inclusion Participation Matrix](#).

- **Joy & Interest Mapping:** What makes the student light up? How can these interests be the "hook" into the lesson?
- **Self-Advocacy:** What is one way this student can signal a need, make a choice, or express an opinion within a standard lesson?
- **The Contribution Role:** Instead of asking "How can they watch?", ask "What is their specific, valuable role in this group activity?" (e.g., the researcher, the timekeeper using a visual timer, the creative lead). If they were not present, would the group dynamic fundamentally change because their specific contribution is missing?

Dimension	The "What"	The "How"	The "Goal" (Student Outcome)
Joy & Interest	What makes them light up? <i>(e.g., sensory inputs, specific media, animals, rhythmic patterns)</i>	How can this be the "Hook"? <i>(e.g., Using a favorite song to transition; using themed stickers as math manipulatives)</i>	The student initiates engagement with the lesson within 60 seconds of the "hook" being presented.
Self-Advocacy	What is their "Signal"? <i>(e.g., AAC button, eye gaze, specific gesture, vocalization)</i>	The Choice Point <i>(e.g., Choosing the group's marker color; signaling "Stop" when a sensory activity is too much)</i>	The student will independently use their signal to express a preference or need at least twice per lesson.
Contribution Role	What is their unique job? <i>(e.g., The Timekeeper, The Materials Manager)</i>	Why is it essential? <i>(e.g., The group cannot finish the poster until the student selects the final image via eye-gaze)</i>	The group dynamic would be incomplete without the student's specific output/decision.

Unlocking Lesson Access

For The School Team:

Select one general education lesson (e.g., a 4th grade persuasive writing piece or a 7th grade social studies group project).

Then identify one "barrier to joy" and one "barrier to contribution."

Brainstorm strategies to remove the barrier.

Grade level and lesson topic	Barrier to Joy	Barrier to Contribution	Strategy to remove barrier

Final thoughts:

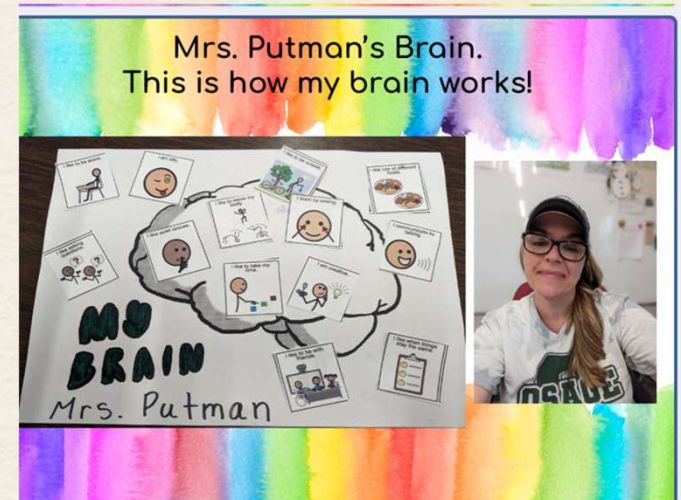
- ★ If we want our children to truly feel belonging, then disability language needs to be used regularly in our classrooms and our homes.
- ★ We need to use intention to teach children how to talk to peers with disabilities.
- ★ Reinforce that **Disability is An Expected Part of Human Diversity.** Like gender, race, culture.



Disability Resources for YOU, your Families, and your Schools

- [Disability Equality Education Website](#)- ready to use resources
- [Accessing Social Capital- Implications for Persons with Disabilities](#)
- [Coor Down](#)- videos that expose myths about disability
- [Friends of All Kinds: Diversity Includes Disability](#) booklet from [The Nora Project](#)
- [“How We Talk about Disability”](#) article from [The Nora Project](#)
- [Ted Talk by Asmani Huda](#) - 17 year old with a disability, very helpful for young people to watch
- [Be an Ally webinar](#)- Rich Hansen Foundation
- [All Students are Our Students poster](#)- hang everywhere!
- [One out of Five video playlist](#)- 6 videos of disabled young people sharing their lived experience. All videos under 5 minutes. from the “One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project”
- [Leveled Worksheets](#) to accompany video playlist from the “One Out of Five: Disability History and Pride Project”

Thank You for Choosing to Spend This Session With Me!



If you have any questions or want to share how your advocacy journey is going, I would love to hear from you!

Email me at putman@voorhees.k12.nj.us .

Thank You!

Thank you to our presenting sponsor for
supporting the Williams Syndrome Association

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