

The logo for CTL (Center for Teacher Learning) is displayed in a large, bold, white serif font on a black rectangular background. The background of the entire page is a collage of various educational terms like 'students', 'teachers', 'education', 'learning', and 'what really works' in different fonts and orientations.

ON THE CUTTING EDGE

University and District Partnerships Bridge the Gaps Around Inclusive Practices by the Project I-PREP Team

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Despite strong evidence that students with moderate to severe disabilities learn best when educated alongside typical peers in general education settings, these students are often educated in self-contained settings with limited access to general education curriculum, responsive communication partners, or typical classroom routines. When preparing teachers to teach these students, university faculty in special education are left with a dilemma: do we prepare teachers for the self-contained settings where most students with significant disabilities are currently taught, or do we prepare them to teach in inclusive settings, acknowledging the mismatch between evidence-based practices and the reality of classrooms where they are likely to do their fieldwork? Project I-PREP (Preparing Resourceful and Effective Professionals with an emphasis on Inclusive education) is a personnel preparation grant funded through the U.S. Department of Education that is seeking to address this dilemma. Candidates prepared under this grant receive instruction in evidence-based assessment and instruction with a focus on inclusive practices. In order to develop sites where teacher candidates can implement these practices, an I-PREP leadership team was developed that includes university faculty as well as LAUSD teachers and administrators. Together, this team collaborates with LAUSD school sites at the elementary, middle, and high school levels to increase integration and inclusive opportunities for students at each site.

The focus of this work has been tri-fold. First is creating a positive and welcoming school climate in which all students are seen as valued and respected members of the school. A second focus is increasing time students with and without disabilities spend together in age-appropriate general education classes. The third focus is ensuring the integration experiences are of high *quality* so students benefit both academically and socially.

School reform efforts are not possible without buy-in from the faculty and staff at the school site. Thus, a critical component has been the creation of a school site *integration team*. While the make-up of this stakeholder team varies by site, membership must include an administrator, general and special education teachers, and related personnel. The integration team meets each month to plan, brainstorm solutions, and celebrate successes.

At the site level, we acknowledge and celebrate current efforts while also identifying areas for growth through the use of a needs assessment survey. Responses are analyzed to determine strengths, potential changes to practice, and areas for future professional development.

Project candidates learn about evidence-based practices through coursework and engage in fieldwork to implement strategies in actual school settings. When placed at a target school, candidates get to problem-solve as members of the onsite integration team. By doing this, they acquire important collaborative and team-building skills while concurrently helping to “bridge the gap” between research and practice.

Inclusive education is a process that involves problem-solving on a school-wide, class-wide, and individual basis. By envisioning inclusive school reform as a site-specific problem-solving practice, we recognize the expertise of all stakeholders, while contributing insights that align with the goals of each school’s integration team.

The Project I-PREP Team: Kathryn D. Peckham-Hardin, Project Director; Amy Hanreddy, Project Coordinator; Blanca Plascencia, Data Strategist; Geri Fuchigami and Maria Ricario, LAUSD administrators; and Kim Straaberg-Boscio and Elia Mahoney, LAUSD Integration Specialists.

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RESOURCES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

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