

# **NASET**

# Special Educator e-Journal

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**February 2024**

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## Special Education Legal Alert

Perry A. Zirkel

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This month's update identifies recent court decisions that illustrate issues arising from (a) proficiency testing and (b) substantive FAPE, including the IDEA's statute of limitations. For related publications and earlier monthly updates, see [perryzirkel.com](http://perryzirkel.com).

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| <p><b>On November 16, 2023, a state appellate court in Texas issued an officially published decision in <i>Klein Independent School District v. Sisk</i> that addressed the termination of a tenured special education teacher for unauthorized assistance in proctoring the state proficiency tests for fifth grade students who were allowed to take the tests orally based on evidence of reading deficiencies, limited English proficiency, or “Section 504 or Special Education accommodations.” The allowed accommodations included a whisper phone and reminders to stay on task. The testing procedural manual prohibited proctors from reinforcing, reviewing, or distributing testing strategies. Subsequently investigating possible testing irregularities, the designated district administrators interviewed the teacher. She admitted giving students looks and handing them the whisper phone without saying anything if she thought they were not using the allowed strategies. The administrators concluded that these actions constituted an indirect method of violating the prohibition against reinforcing testing strategies. They placed the teacher on administrative leave and recommended termination for good cause. Upon her request, the state education agency provided an independent hearing examiner to review the case and advise the district’s board of education. The examiner’s report concluded that the evidence did not establish the requisite good cause. However, the school board unanimously voted to terminate the teacher. She appealed to the state commissioner of education, who upheld the school board’s decision. She then appealed to the state trial court, which reversed the decision. The school board and state commissioner appealed.</b></p> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <p>The appealing parties argued that, although state law required them to limit the record to the independent examiner’s factual findings, the judicial standard of review was deferential to school authorities.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>The state appellate court agreed that the standard was substantial evidence, which is defined as more than a scintilla of evidence, and prior rulings in Texas have established that judicial review under this standard is highly deferential—“the issue is not whether the agency’s decision is correct, but whether the record demonstrates a reasonable basis for it.”</p> |

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| They also observed that “good cause” in this context is the failure to meet the accepted standards of conduct for the profession (a) as generally recognized in federal or state law or (b) as generally applied in similarly situated school districts in this state.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | The court agreed with this definition but concluded that the school authorities (a) relied solely on the testing manual, which is not a state statute or regulation and which was not internally consistent as to whether a whisper phone is an accommodation, an accessibility feature, or a testing strategy, and (b) the only testimony about other districts was specific to a single district without any evidence that it met the requisite of being similarly situated. |
| The state commissioner argued that school districts have wide latitude in determining good cause.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | The court decision responded to this argument by differentiating the latitude for school district’s termination of nontenured and tenured teachers, with “good cause” requiring more for terminating a tenured teacher.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| The court’s decision is not necessarily a complete win for the teacher, because its order was to remand the case to the state commissioner of education for further action according to the applicable state law, which provides the alternatives of reinstatement with backpay or one year’s salary from the date the teacher would be been reinstated. Nevertheless, the case illustrates one of the unintended consequences of high states testing and exceptions from standardized administration. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |

**On September 29, 2023, a federal district court issued an officially published decision in *Edward M.-R. v. District of Columbia* that addressed the parents’ challenge to the IEPs for grades 4, 5, 6, and 7 for their seventh grader with autism and ADHD. The various alleged defects of the IEPs included the measurability of the goals, the IDEA’s peer-reviewed research (PRR) provision, and the decrease in the extent of services. They filed for a due process hearing at the end of grade 7, in June 2020. The hearing officer ruled that the date that the parents “knew or should have known” (KOSHK) of the alleged FAPE violations was at the time of the development of each IEP, thus the IDEA’s two-year statute of limitations barred consideration of the IEPs prior to grades 6 and 7. Next, the the hearing officer concluded that each of these two IEPs met the substantive standard for FAPE under *Endrew F.* and did not violate the IDEA’s requirement that the specified special education and related services be based on PRR to the extent practicable. The parents filed an appeal with the federal district court of the District of Columbia.**

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| For the statute of limitations, the parents did not challenge the hearing officer's KOSHK ruling but argued that the annual IEP developed in November of grade 5 should not have been time-barred because it extended into the first 3 months of grade 6.                       | The court rejected this argument, concluding that for the grade 5 IEP, the two-year period started to run on the KOSHK date and, thus, expired before they filed for the hearing. The court reasoned that "the triggering incident here is the creation of the IEP, not any failure to revise the IEP at the beginning of [the next school year]." The court observed that the parents did not argue a "continuing violation" exception but, in any event, it would not apply to "claims that have a specific [triggering] date." |
| The parents claimed that the various goals in these two IEPs were not measurable, which the IDEA specifically requires.                                                                                                                                                         | The court concluded that they were reasonably measurable without being precisely quantifiable or objective and, even if they were not measurable, this procedural violation did not result in the requisite harm to the child or the parents.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| The parents argued that the IEPs did not specify the research-based instruction that the child would receive.                                                                                                                                                                   | The court concluded that the PRR provision does not require specification of a particular methodology and even if it did, it was a procedural violation for which the parents' failed to prove resulting substantive harm.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| The parents alleged various other procedural violations, such as the absence of a general education teacher at the grade 7 IEP meeting.                                                                                                                                         | The court dismissed these procedural FAPE claims based on the exhaustion doctrine, i.e., that the parents had failed to raise these claims at the due process hearing and, thus, they were not part of the hearing officer's decision under review.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| Pointing to the repetition in the grade 7 IEP of many of the goals from the grade 6 IEP, the parents argued that the child's limited progress showed the failure to meet the <i>Endrew F.</i> standard.                                                                         | Pointing to rather extensive case law, the court concluded that in light of the snapshot approach, they key to <i>Endrew F.</i> is the reasonable calculation of appropriate progress at the time of formulating the IEP, not whether the child subsequently obtained only limited progress.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
| This various rulings in this case follow the prevailing but not uniform trend in the case law. Nevertheless, as a reminder of the ponderous adjudicative process under the IDEA, the parents filed for a hearing 3.5 years ago and its currently on appeal to the D.C. Circuit. |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |

## **The Impact of Social Stories Interventions in Children of Diverse Developmental Needs, With an Emphasis on Family Collaboration: A Review of Literature**

**By Janet Del Corro**

### **Abstract**

This review explores the impact of social stories interventions on the behavioral and social skills development of children with diverse developmental needs, highlighting the crucial role of family collaboration. Covering 2015-2020, it focuses on three themes: targeting social skills, assessing behavior influences, and efficacy through family collaboration. Studies by Bardhoshi et al. (2020) and Golzari et al. (2015) reveal positive social skills outcomes in kindergarten students and those with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). O'Connor and Hayes (2019), and Khantreejitranon (2018) show social stories' value for children facing behavior and communication challenges. Acar et al. (2017) and Olçay-Gül and Tekin-Iftar (2016) emphasize family-delivered interventions, indicating the potential of parent collaboration in enhancing social skills and behaviors. The research consistently supports social stories' effectiveness in diverse populations, suggesting their incorporation into educational and therapeutic settings for tailored support.

*Keywords:* social stories, intervention, social skills, behavioral difficulties, family collaboration

### **The Impact of Social Stories Interventions in Children of Diverse Developmental Needs, With an Emphasis on Family Collaboration: A Review of Literature**

The complicated fabric of childhood development has led to a growing focus on interventions aimed at improving social skills and addressing behavioral issues. This literature review navigates the landscape of social stories—a unique narrative approach designed to foster improved social skills in diverse populations. The exploration unfolds across three pivotal themes: the efficacy at targeting social skills, the multifaceted impact on behavioral difficulties, and the promising collaboration between parents and educators. Through an analysis of compelling studies, this review aims to provide an understanding of the versatility and potential impact of social stories interventions in nurturing positive behavioral outcomes for children facing diverse challenges.

#### **Targeting Social Skills Development through Social Stories**

In recent years, a growing body of research has suggested that the implementation of social stories interventions holds promise as an effective means to enhance and cultivate improved social skills in various populations. The usefulness of an app-based counseling intervention known as Social-Behavioral Stories (SOBE Stories) for enhancing social skills and lowering

problematic behaviors in kindergarten pupils is investigated in a study conducted by Bardhoshi et al. (2020). With two groups—an intervention group that received the SOBE Stories lessons and a control group that received the current social-emotional learning (SEL) curriculum—the study is set up as a randomized controlled trial. An app-based game and digital social stories that teach particular social skills and behaviors in the classroom make up the SOBE Stories intervention. The researchers wrote and illustrated the stories on their own.

The participants in the study by Bardhoshi et al. (2020) are kindergarten pupils from a public elementary school in the Midwest of the United States that has a prominent level of poverty. In total, there are 39 participants: 16 are in the control group and 22 are in the intervention group. Students from racial/ethnic minorities (REM) who have high rates of poverty make up most of the sample. The control group's average age is 5.19 years, while the intervention group's average age is 5.36 years. The two educators were White women with five to ten years of elementary school teaching experience.

Using the Social Skills Improvement System (SSIS) Scale, which was completed by the students' classroom teachers, researchers gathered information on problem behaviors and social skills (Bardhoshi et al., 2020). The findings demonstrated that, in comparison to students who just received the current SEL curriculum, students who received the SOBE Stories intervention had improved social skills and a decrease in problematic behaviors. The promising findings of this pilot study imply that SOBE Stories is a potentially useful intervention for kindergarten pupils to improve their social skills and reduce harmful behaviors.

A study by Golzari et al. (2015) investigated how well social storytelling intervention works to help male students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) develop their social skills. Thirty male students with ASD were enrolled in the study and were randomized to either the experimental group (15) or the control group (15). The Stone and Colleagues Social Abilities Scale was used to evaluate the social abilities of both groups both before and after the test. The control group did not get any social storytelling training, whereas the experimental group attended 16 sessions. PowerPoint software and printed materials with colorful visuals were used to present the social stories. Over the course of two months, there were two sessions per week.

In comparison to the control group, the results of the study demonstrated that the social storytelling intervention enhanced the social abilities of the ASD children in the experimental group (Golzari et al., 2015). The subscales measuring comprehension/perspective-taking, establishing and maintaining interactions with others, and understanding, were where the social storytelling intervention's impacts were most noticeable. The subscale measuring one's capacity for interpersonal response was unaffected by the social stories intervention. The results of the study highlight how well the social storytelling intervention, which may be employed by educators, parents, or other professionals who work with children with ASD, helps these kids develop their social skills.

Expanding on the understandings from the research conducted by Bardhoshi et al. (2020) and Golzari et al. (2015), a more comprehensive viewpoint is presented about the effectiveness of social stories as a useful instrument for improving social skills in a variety of demographic groups. The consistent positive outcomes observed in these studies underscore the potential of

social stories interventions in fostering social development, not only in kindergarten pupils but also in specific groups such as children with ASD. Social stories are adaptable to a variety of educational settings, as evidenced by the app-based interventions like SOBE Stories and the classic methods that use visual aids and storytelling sessions. The promising results of these interventions suggest that incorporating social stories into educational curricula, whether through technology-driven platforms or traditional means, could serve as a beneficial strategy for educators, parents, and professionals working with children.

### **Assessing Social Stories' Influence on Behavior Difficulties**

As we delve into the multifaceted impact of social stories interventions, we examine the evidence suggesting that these interventions not only exhibit efficacy in enhancing social skills but also emerge as promising strategies for mitigating behavioral difficulties across diverse populations. The usefulness of social stories as an intervention for kids who struggle with behavior and communication is examined in a study conducted by O'Connor and Hayes (2019). In this study, baseline data on the target behavior were gathered as part of the multiple-baseline across-participants study design. Creating and implementing social stories—short stories that depict social events and suitable reactions to them—was the intervention's main task.

Participants in this study came from South-West London, England's two mainstream primary schools (O'Connor & Hayes, 2019). Four Key Stage 2 participants in the study were identified as having a specific educational need, related to behavior. The member of staff responsible for coordination with The United Kingdom's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice identified the participants and utilized a screening checklist to find children with communication difficulties who could benefit from the intervention.

Researchers O'Connor and Hayes (2019) collaborated with the participants and their professors to develop the social stories. The stories targeted specific target behaviors and were customized to meet the unique needs of each participant. Just prior to the target situation, in a calm and quiet environment, the participants were read the stories by the researchers, or they read them on their own. To guarantee intervention fidelity, the researchers also created a checklist of actions to cover during the delivery of social stories and offered continuous support to school staff throughout the intervention phase.

The study's findings demonstrated the efficacy of the Social Story intervention in enhancing children's pragmatic language abilities and lowering behavioral issues (O'Connor & Hayes, 2019). According to the researchers' interpretation of the study, social stories are a useful intervention for children who struggle with behavior and communication issues.

A study by Khantreejitranon (2018) aimed to investigate the effectiveness of social stories in decreasing inappropriate behaviors in preschool children with autism. An A-B-A-B single-subject design was used in the study, with four phases: baseline phase A1, intervention, baseline phase A2, and intervention. From preschool classrooms, five children diagnosed with ASD between the ages of 6 and 10 were chosen. The children who were part of the study were autistic, and as such, they had social skill deficiencies, such as inappropriate social interactions and social behavior issues.

The social stories used in this study by Khantreejitranon (2018) were created in two forms: books and electronic books, with five different stories (one story per child). The social stories were read to the participants prior to observation sessions, and then the participants were left to access them independently. In the second intervention phase, the teacher reviewed the social story with the student before the observation session. The social story intervention was performed over 6 weeks, five times per week with a total of 30 times. The study used a 15-s cues partial interval recording system during 20-minute daily observations to record the behavior of each participant over 6 weeks.

The results showed that the social story intervention was effective in decreasing inappropriate behavior (Khantreejitranon, 2018). The social story intervention was successful in reducing target behaviors, according to the data. The five students displayed levels of inappropriate behavior that were significantly lower than their baseline performance following the intervention performance, according to the maintenance data. The research showed that the social story intervention could be an effective way to reduce inappropriate behaviors in children with autism when used as the only intervention.

When we examine the compelling studies by Khantreejitranon (2018) and O'Connor and Hayes (2019), we begin to see a more nuanced picture of the general usefulness of social stories interventions in treating behavioral difficulties in children with a variety of exceptionalities. The research outcomes demonstrate that social stories can effectively improve pragmatic language skills and lessen behavioral problems in children who struggle with communication (O'Connor & Hayes, 2019). They also show that social stories can successfully reduce inappropriate behaviors in preschool-aged children who have been diagnosed with autism (Khantreejitranon, 2018). This data points to the idea that social stories interventions are a flexible and useful means of resolving behavioral difficulties. Because the stories are customized to target behaviors and the individual needs of each participant, they meet the varying needs of children with a range of exceptionalities. Social stories interventions have proven to be a valuable and widely applicable strategy in the field of behavioral interventions for children with diverse exceptionalities, as evidenced by their success in a variety of settings. Further exploration and integration of social stories into educational and therapeutic settings may hold significant promise for fostering positive behavioral outcomes in children facing a range of behavioral challenges.

### **Efficacy of Social Stories Interventions Provided Through Family Collaboration**

As we continue our exploration of social stories intervention research, this literature review probes the compelling research suggesting that collaborative efforts between parents and educators in implementing these interventions may constitute a promising avenue for enhancing their effectiveness in addressing various challenges faced by children. A study conducted by Acar et al. (2017) explores the use of social stories and video modeling as interventions provided by mothers to teach children with ASD social skills. The participants were three male third graders in the multiple-baseline-across-individuals study design.

The social stories intervention consisted of the mother reading a story to the child that included information about the target social skill, followed by comprehension questions and social reinforcement for correct responses (Acar et al., 2017). If the child responded incorrectly, the mother provided the correct response and took the child to the setting where the target behaviors

were supposed to occur. After the criterion was met, a three-step fading hierarchy was initiated.

According to Acar et al. (2017), the video modeling intervention involved the mother showing the child a video of a peer or adult modeling the target social skill, followed by the child imitating the behavior and receiving social reinforcement for correct responses. The video was shown multiple times until the child demonstrated mastery of the target behavior. The mothers received training and feedback from the researchers to ensure treatment integrity prior to commencing the interventions. The interventions were implemented in the homes of the participants and were tailored to the specific social skills targeted for each child.

The study's findings demonstrated that social stories and video modeling were successful in teaching participants social skills, as seen by the improvements in target behaviors (Acar et al., 2017). Mothers who reported that the target behaviors were important, and the procedures were simple to follow provided further evidence for the effectiveness of the interventions in the form of social validation data. According to the study's findings overall, social stories and video modeling can help children with autism spectrum disorders learn social skills through effective interventions.

In a study by Olçay-Gül and Tekin-Iftar (2016), the use of family-generated and delivered social story interventions to teach social skills to children with ASD is examined. The research design of the study was a single-subject design with various baselines for each participant. The intervention involved creating social stories with the help of family members and delivering them to the participants in natural settings.

According to Olçay-Gül and Tekin-Iftar (2016), six children with ASD, two females and four males ages 6 to 12, in grades 1 through 6, made up the participants. Through direct observation and feedback from parents and teachers, the researchers gathered information on the participants' social abilities. Direct observation and feedback from parents and teachers demonstrated that the intervention was successful in enhancing the participants' social skills. Additionally, the intervention was successful in encouraging the retention and application of the learned abilities.

Interpretation of the study suggests that teaching social skills to children with ASD through the Family Generated and Delivered Social Story Intervention can be both practical and effective (Olçay-Gül & Tekin-Iftar, 2016). Including family members in the intervention can also help to support the maintenance and generalization of the skills that the youths learn.

As we analyze the findings of studies conducted by Acar et al. (2017) and Olçay-Gül and Tekin-Iftar (2016), a compelling narrative unfolds, underscoring the pivotal role of collaborative efforts between parents and educators in the implementation of social stories interventions. The study by Acar et al. (2017) highlights the effectiveness of social stories and video modeling interventions initiated by mothers to teach social skills to children with ASD. Notably, the success of these interventions in enhancing target behaviors not only underscores their efficacy but also emphasizes the importance of involving parents as active agents in the intervention process. Similarly, the research by Olçay-Gül and Tekin-Iftar (2016) expands this collaborative paradigm by examining the impact of family-generated and delivered social story interventions in teaching social skills to children with ASD. The involvement of family members not only proves practical

but also contributes to the sustained application and retention of learned abilities. This collective evidence underlines the potential of parent and family collaboration as a powerful catalyst in the success of social stories interventions, not only in improving behaviors but also in nurturing essential social skills among children. Integrating family members into the intervention process emerges as a promising approach for fostering the generalization and long-term maintenance of acquired skills, emphasizing the broader implications of collaborative efforts in maximizing the efficacy of social stories interventions for children facing diverse challenges.

### **Conclusion**

The examined research features the effectiveness of social stories interventions in promoting the development of social skills and reducing behavioral difficulties in a variety of populations. Studies by Bardhoshi et al. (2020), Golzari et al. (2015), O'Connor and Hayes (2019), Acar et al. (2017), Olçay-Gül and Tekin-Iftar (2016), and others have shown promising results, demonstrating the adaptability and usefulness of social stories in a variety of contexts, from family homes to kindergarten classrooms. The results show a constant decrease in problematic behaviors and an increase in social skills, highlighting the potential of social stories to address children's diverse needs, including those with ASD. and other exceptionalities.

In addition, studies on family-generated interventions (Acar et al., 2017; Olçay-Gül & Tekin-Iftar, 2016) highlight the collaborative aspect, which emphasizes the need to include parents in the implementation process. The efficacy of social stories is supported by the success of interventions led by mothers and other family members, which also implies that parents and educators working together can have a positive overall influence on children's social development. Upon considering the wider ramifications, including social stories in educational programs and therapeutic environments appears to be a viable approach for both professionals and parents. In the end, supporting positive outcomes in social skill development and behavioral well-being, future study and continued incorporation of social stories interventions show significant promise in offering customized and efficient help for children demonstrating a variety of developmental needs.

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## **How to Share Data Effectively: Tips for Administrators, Teachers, and Families**

This set of tip sheets from the Harvard Family Research Project helps administrators, teachers, and families determine the best ways to share student data in meaningful ways, on a regular basis, to strengthen family–school partnerships and promote student learning. The tip sheets include examples of data-sharing practices that illustrate how administrators, teachers, and families can adopt a data-driven approach to supporting student learning. Designed to be used either individually or as a set, the tip sheets allow educators and families to approach conversations about student data with shared expectations about what each of them is prepared to discuss. This understanding helps increase their ability to work together to improve children’s educational outcomes.

<https://archive.globalfrp.org/publications-resources/browse-our-publications/tips-for-administrators-teachers-and-families-how-to-share-data-effectively>

## **Case Study: RTI: Data-Based Decision Making**

The IRIS Center's Case Study Units provide faculty with realistic teaching scenarios for students to use, and they are designed to strengthen a student's understanding of the topic, as well as enhance their problem-solving skills while exploring new content. This case study provides information about how to examine a student's progress monitoring data to determine if the student is responding adequately or if the student would benefit from more intense intervention.

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[https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf\\_case\\_studies/ics\\_rtidm.pdf](https://iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf_case_studies/ics_rtidm.pdf)

## Equitable Access Toolkit

Every student deserves teachers and principals who can help them achieve their potential. Yet students from low-income families or rural backgrounds, students of color, students with special needs, and English language learners have less access to excellent educators than do other students, which hinders their ability to succeed in school and beyond. To help education leaders ensure that all students receive equitable access to excellent educators, the U.S. Department of Education announced the Excellent Educators for All Initiative, which requires each state, alongside stakeholders, to create a State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators.

Designed expressly to support states in this effort, the *Equitable Access Toolkit* includes resources and materials to guide state leaders through the most critical aspects of developing these plans—stakeholder engagement, root-cause analysis, and data review. A sample equity plan template is also included, as is a Sample State Plan to Ensure Equitable Access to Excellent Educators to assist with this process.

Find all these elements at the Center for Great Teachers and Leaders, at:

<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit>

Also find the individual elements and their supporting documents and tools:

- **Stakeholder Engagement Guide** | Brainstorm and implement effective methods for authentically engaging key stakeholder groups in the design and implementation of your state's equitable access plan.  
<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit/stakeholder-engagement-guide>
- **Data Review Tool** | When developing your state's equity plan, the important elements of data analysis must be examined thoroughly. This tool is designed specifically to help state leaders assess, analyze, and communicate their equitable access data.  
<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit/data-review-tool>
- **Root-Cause Analysis Workbook** | Conduct a comprehensive root-cause analysis to ensure that you state's equitable access strategies target the fundamental equity gaps facing your state.  
<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit/root-cause-analysis-workbook>
- **Moving Toward Equity Tool** | Discover resources and strategies you can implement to ensure that all students in your state have access to great teachers and leaders.  
<http://www.gtlcenter.org/learning-hub/equitable-access-toolkit>

## **Biden-Harris Administration Announces More Than \$6 Million in New Grants to Address Community Violence and its Impacts on Student Mental Health**

Vice President Kamala Harris announced \$6.4 million from the U.S. Department of Education (Department) to address community violence. The funding is being awarded to seven school districts across the country as part of the Project Prevent grant program. The Vice President will make the announcement in Charlotte, North Carolina, where she will be joined by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona to highlight the Biden-Harris Administration's efforts to reduce gun violence and expand access to mental health services for students.

"Every child deserves the freedom to live safe from gun violence in their school and throughout their community. President Biden and I are committed to protecting this freedom and continuing to address an epidemic of gun violence that has become the leading cause of death for children across America," said Vice President Harris. "With today's announcement, we are reaffirming our Administration's dedication to preventing this senseless violence and keeping our children, families, and communities safe. As we call on Congress to pass commonsense gun safety policies, we are proud to fund proven solutions like those supported by Project Prevent that help schools increase access to mental health and other resources for their students."

"The youth mental health crisis and the devastating impact of gun violence on our communities have been mounting for years, but thanks to President Biden's leadership, we are making historic investments that will reshape how our schools care for students and provide the safe learning environments they need to grow and succeed," said Secretary Cardona. "Today's announcement of another \$6.4 million in Project Prevent funding complements the Biden-Harris Administration's unprecedented \$2 billion investment secured through the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act to transform school-based mental health and create safer and more positive school climates. These investments mean that schools and communities will have more resources for the interventions that help keep students safe and healthy. The fact is, we cannot recover academically and Raise the Bar for education in this country unless we meet the needs of the whole child, and that starts with creating safe, welcoming schools where teaching and learning can truly thrive."

Project Prevent grants help build the capacity of local educational agencies (LEAs) that have been impacted by community violence to expand their capacity to implement community- and school-based strategies to prevent and mitigate the impacts of community violence, and to address the impacts of exposure to community violence. For fiscal year 2024, seven new grants, totaling approximately \$6.4 million, will focus on building connections between schools and community-based organizations to provide students with the resources to help break cycles of violence and trauma, including through the use of mental health services and supports.

These awards will allow school districts to identify and serve students exposed to community violence by helping them increase student access to mental health services, support conflict

management programs, and implement other community- and school-based strategies to help prevent community violence and to mitigate the impacts of exposure to community violence.

This announcement is the latest step that the Biden-Harris Administration has taken as part of its ongoing commitment to prevent and reduce the impact that community violence has in many of our country's school communities. These grants also support the Administration's goal of transforming how we address mental health in America, which is a core pillar in the Biden-Harris Administration's Unity Agenda for our nation. The historic Bipartisan Safer Communities Act has delivered unprecedented resources to support youth mental health, including for students impacted by gun violence.

The new Project Prevent awardees are listed below:

| <b>Grantee</b>                               | <b>State</b> | <b>Award Amount</b> |
|----------------------------------------------|--------------|---------------------|
| Savannah-Chatham County Public School System | GA           | \$1,013,113         |
| Osage County Interlocal Cooperative          | OK           | \$759,624           |
| Buffalo City School District                 | NY           | \$1,013,113         |
| Tahlequah Public Schools                     | OK           | \$954,196           |
| Mastery Charter Schools                      | PA           | \$698,584           |
| Norfolk Public Schools                       | VA           | \$949,264           |
| Educational Service District 105             | WA           | \$1,012,267         |
| Total                                        |              | \$6,400,161         |

## **U.S. Department of Education Announces Winners of the \$1 Million Future Finder Challenge to Support Adult Learners**

The U.S. Department of Education (Department) announced that Gladeo, a minority- and women-owned public benefit corporation based in Los Angeles, California, has been selected as the grand-prize winner of the Future Finder Challenge, a \$1 million challenge to reimagine career navigation for adult learners. Workbay, a woman-owned business based in Franklin, Tennessee, has been selected as the runner-up.

Both recipients of earlier funding as finalists, the Gladeo team will receive an additional \$500,000 and the Workbay team will receive an additional \$250,000 to support the continued development and deployment of their digital career navigation tools. These awards recognize that Gladeo's and Workbay's innovative solutions have demonstrated compelling evidence of their potential to support adult learners in developing the skills and knowledge to pursue their career interests. Throughout the remainder of 2023 and into 2024, the Future Finder Challenge will support the winning teams as they further refine and implement their digital career navigation tools across the adult education ecosystem.

While education remains vital to career success, it is often no longer enough to access high-quality jobs that pay well. Delivering digital career navigation tools to adult learners will be critical to unlocking the full economic potential of the CHIPS and Science Act, the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, and the Inflation Reduction Act, and to transforming the lives of millions of Americans with foundational skill needs.

"By centering the experience and unique needs of adult learners, the Future Finder Challenge has accelerated the development and deployment of urgently needed solutions to build a more equitable future," said Dr. Amy Loyd, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. "Gladeo's and Workbay's digital tools represent the forefront of technology innovation in adult education, and I'm thrilled that the adult learners we serve will benefit from their use as they build a brighter future for themselves, their families, and their communities."

Grand-prize winner Gladeo utilizes research-based design to help adult learners build skills and confidence for quality careers. Its multilingual interventions include digitized informational interviews, personalized resource recommendations, and an integrated program finder. Gladeo provides learners with career information through inclusive video storytelling and helps them identify trustworthy education and skill-building programs. Gladeo has built successful regional partnerships with workforce agencies and education providers to ensure that learners can access the resources they need to thrive.

Runner-up Workbay offers job seekers a community-specific mobile app and web-based platform that connects them to local resources as well as videos, learning content, and job postings. Workbay links recruitment with skill-building programs to help learners identify and successfully pursue local careers of interest. Throughout the Future Finder Challenge, Workbay

focused on expanding its platform to support adults currently and formerly incarcerated and worked with people who are incarcerated to test and refine its solution.

The Department launched the Future Finder Challenge in September 2022, inviting innovators — including educators, strategists, developers, and user-centered designers — to submit prototypes for digital career navigation tools that will help adult learners understand, choose, and prepare for career opportunities. The challenge received submissions from 76 teams in 29 states, including minority, women, veteran, LGBTQ+, and Native American-owned organizations. In March 2023, the Department announced five finalists. Each finalist received \$60,000 — a \$50,000 cash prize and an additional \$10,000 to support accelerator activities — and an invitation to join a six-month virtual accelerator. At Demo Day in Washington, D.C., the teams presented their refined tools before a live audience and answered questions from an independent panel of judges.

## **Book Review: Leaders of Learning**

**By Candace Joshnick**

### **Purpose and Thesis**

When we encounter the term "leader" within education, our immediate association tends to be with individuals in authoritative positions, such as administrators, principals, coaches, and other adults occupying leadership roles. Rarely do we pause to contemplate the concept of "students" as leaders, specifically "leaders of their learning" (Woodfin et al., 2014). The central thesis of "Leaders of Their Own Learning" challenges conventional thinking by putting students as "leaders" as opposed to teachers lecturing and students "Listen." It establishes a motivation and achievement framework involving students investing in their growth. The authors base their theories on student-engaged assessments, stating that they empower students to build critical thinking skills reflective understanding, and become self-advocates ready for college and careers. Student-engaged assessment through data notebooks allows parents to be involved in their child's learning and promotes accessibility, investment, and transparency, reassuring all stakeholders. Readers interested in "Leaders of Their Own Learning" will find this review a valuable resource for understanding how to guide adolescent learners to be their generation's future "leaders" by empowering them to take ownership and self-advocate for their education.

### **Main Themes**

According to (Woodfin et al., 2014, p. 21), learning targets are a daily part of the classroom routine; they allow the students to "become the main actor in assessing and improving their learning." When walking into a classroom in the 21st Century, it is expected to see the word "Learning Target" on the board, and you might not know why or what it means. They are pivotal in "student-based assessment"; learning targets are written in a way that students understand and can interpret what the goal of the lesson is. A teacher simply writing the learning targets on the board and never engaging the students to understand their purpose will not encourage learners to take ownership in the learning process. "The process of learning should not be a mystery." the teacher must create the I can statement with the students at the forefront, using student-friendly language that allows them to self-reflect and take ownership of their learning (pg. 21).

The authors shared some informative ways for teachers and students to work collaboratively towards the lesson's objective and check for understanding before, during, and after. Throughout the class, scholars should be able to identify where they are with the learning target, ready to let the teacher know when they are lost, confused, or might need something explained in more depth. Teachers need built-in checkpoints during the session to check for understanding without disrupting the lesson flow. Woodfin et al., 2021 make it clear that for the learning targets to be effective, the students must own the learning and be the ones to self-assess and be reflective.

If only the teacher had all the power and were the "leader," students would not be empowered to partner in their education. The best way to check for understanding is through transfer. Woodfin

et al. argue that students must understand the “why” and the “how” behind the content being taught. They need to know how it applies to their lives and when they will use it in the real world. Explicit instruction teaching students how to set goals and self-assess develops ownership. It allows them to translate the learning targets and relate them to personal experiences, giving the task more meaning. The book shares that checking for understanding throughout the lesson keeps the students engaged in the learning and a voice to say that they need more tools to be successful.

One of the primary strengths of *Leaders of their own learning* lies in its comprehensive examination of using data with students. The authors explored the idea of student-led conferences where teachers and students work together to analyze the student's data. This idea is a new age approach versus data being segregated by administrators in a room on a white wall, often called a “data wall.” Woodfin et al., 2014 examine how to introduce data to students and find ways to allow buy-in to the process. Just like teachers and administrators often need incentives, so do students. They state that the first step to successfully embedding data in classroom routines is to build a culture where students feel safe to make mistakes and learn to analyze their strengths and weaknesses. It is essential to ensure the students do not compete with one another and see that everyone has a unique way of learning. Having the students build their goals with teacher support is essential in owning what is attainable and challenging.

The book states that parents are powerful partners in the process and want to feel involved by sending letters and holding student-led conferences and portfolio presentations where the parents see what is happening at school. Learners feel more empowered and motivated to improve when their families are involved. The authors share concepts about how to set up student-led conferences where the child is the “leader.” This type of conference is solely led by the students, who share their progress with all stakeholders involved in their learning journey. Taking the lead in these conferences is a skill that students can use later in life in future careers and college. It allows them to take pride in their work quality, and they are not just silent partners who do not have a say; their voice becomes the guiding force of all decisions made.

The authors argue that descriptive feedback, models, and critiques are the backbone of building and fostering a growth mindset and that they guide students to critically analyze their work and track where they are and where they are headed. The feedback should be kind, specific, and helpful. Providing the students with rubrics that scaffold the learning target allows for a framework to follow, and the feedback should be specific to what the rubric outlines. When teachers model how to give feedback, students can apply that same skill set when providing peer-to-peer feedback.

The book builds upon the idea that once students have created a finished product over the year, they can present their accomplishments to the community. The idea is that students create a data notebook, which becomes a learning portfolio. This portfolio becomes a rite of passage to present as it demonstrates their achievements and growth. The authors argue that the portfolio is an archive and reflects their progress toward meeting grade-level standards. The authors believe that students can use them when applying to colleges and internships as a collection of high-quality work, thoughtful reflections, and evidence of rigorous learning.

It is evident that the authors of “*Leaders of their own Learning*” make it clear that putting students at the forefront of “Leadership” is how to prepare the future “leaders” of the next

generation. The authors argue that by giving students more responsibility in their education, educators can help them develop crucial skills such as self-motivation, critical thinking, problem-solving, and leadership skills. In summary, the book emphasizes the importance of fostering a classroom environment where students are actively engaged in setting goals, monitoring their progress, and reflecting on their learning. The authors of *Leaders of Their Own Learning* believe to better prepare students for the challenges they will face and enabling them to become leaders capable of taking initiative, making informed decisions, and driving positive change in their communities and the world.

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## **Book Review: Relentless**

**By Philip Garza**

### **Abstract**

A book review of accomplished principal, motivational speaker, and world traveler Hamish Brewer. This review explores the jagged path to success and the leadership style of a man who truly loves his students, staff, and community.

### **Review**

Dressed in a fitted suit, locked up in his office, and a conservative approach is the exact opposite of the leadership style of Hamish Brewer. Instead, he is the unconventional tattooed principal that is skateboarding through the school hallways thinking of ways to relate and inspire every single one of his staff and students. Brewer accomplishes this feat by telling his students every single day that he loves them and by allowing his teachers the freedom to take chances. His greatest key to success is simple, its relationships, which in his mind is being relentless in the pursuit of authenticity and empathy.

As a child, Brewer grew up in New Zealand in near poverty, was surrounded by drug and alcohol addicts, and had a mother who abandoned him. Although he had a less than perfect childhood, Hamish promised himself that he would not accept his circumstances and would make something out of himself. Brewer was drawn to the extreme sports of rock climbing, surfing, and skateboarding. His pursuit of these sports allowed him to travel the world and to experience life at its fullest. He compares traveling to learning when he states that we should incorporate the same sense of surprise, enthusiasm, and energy that we get from travel into the experiences we design in the classroom. Along the way, as we travel through the learning process, we and our students can investigate, solve problems, and consider many viewpoints (Brewer, 2019).

In 2003 Brewer hung up his backpack and began his career in education as a teacher in Virginia. Before long he was skateboarding through a middle school hallway as a principal to the shock of his students. Soon enough that shock turned into curiosity, and then into a passion. By capturing an out of the box mentality, his school was now ready to forget about the way things used to be, and for a new refreshed way of looking at education to take place. He was able to turn around two middle schools in less than 3 years by empowering his students to believe that they can achieve their goals. Brewer (2019) instilled this into his students by wanting every child he encountered to know that he will always have faith in them and that he will never give up on them. A promise that says, "I'd go through a brick wall and back for you," is the only type of mentality that can he consider acceptable.

### **Main Themes**

Brewer was guided by two different sets of guidelines; 9 habits of great educators and the lessons he learned from serving as a firefighter. He describes the people he surrounds himself with as game changers who are trying to build something improved than themselves. He believes that the best educators are the ones who leave a legacy.

Humility, attitude, accountability, sacrifice, focus, fear of failure, no excuses, character, and teaching kids to go one more round were the qualities of great educators. The first 8 of those habits are self-explanatory, but the 9<sup>th</sup>, teaching kids to go one more round is somewhat unique. Brewer (2019) mentioned that in each and every school he served as a principal of, he had "One More Round" painted on a mural of a boxing ring, to push his pupils to battle with their emotions, brains, and souls. His students were not average, they were relentless and always had one more round left in them despite any adversity they faced.

As a firefighter Brewer learned about teamwork and camaraderie, accountability and attention to details, leadership, decision making, and pride. He believes that change comes from within the entire community, and he looked for like-minded people to join him on the quest to put it all on the line for the students. He believes that success is the combination of hard work and careful planning. As a leader he leads by example and says that there is no place for ego, which is why he values the opinions of his staff. Brewer (2019), states that teachers must have the confidence to act on their own initiative and not wait for approval or permission before making decisions and should have the freedom to decide without his input. Pride is the final quality he learned as a firefighter. He understands that his staff is tasked with taking care of their students by being the absolute best at all times.

In addition to the strategies listed above, Brewer also had a unique view on disciplining students. He took the restorative justice approach. When applied faithfully and honorably, restorative justice discipline reduces or eliminates suspensions and expulsions while improving academic performance and safety for both teachers and students. It is an alternative to traditional punitive discipline systems (Claassen, 2008). He did not believe in suspending students, but rather allowing them the opportunity to give service back to the school. He created an after-school CrossFit program, let students participate in beautifying the school, and even had them gardening. Brewer believes that discipline should have the end goal of helping students.

### **Key Quotes**

"if somebody didn't tell you today that they love you. I love you, Mr. Brewer is telling you that he loves you. I love you!" (Pg. 85) – This quote sums up how much Brewer truly cares about his students. He understands the importance of every student needing to feel like they belong and that they are cared for.

"Just know when you look in the eyes of a student, don't assume you know; don't assume everything is okay and has been easy. So many of our students have lived such a full life that they make ours look pedestrian by comparison." (p. 6) – Brewer knows firsthand exactly what a life full of trauma can feel like. Having a trauma sensitive approach allows for empathy and compassion.

“It doesn’t matter...you must find ways to relate to them. You have to humble yourself and get on their level. When you do that, you open yourself up to make a huge impact in their lives. You can’t serve someone you believe you are better than or you don’t respect as a human being.” (p. 10) – Respect is one of the most important qualities that young people require of adults. They want to feel as if they matter and that they have something to offer to the world. When you can gain their respect then you can teach them the world.

“You get to choose your attitude every day. You are the sole person responsible for your attitude, and how you choose your attitude impacts everyone with whom you come into contact.” (p. 126) – Brewer’s a master at creating inviting and loving environments. He understands that positivity does not come from the brick and mortar of the building but from the people who walk the halls every day.

“Rather than focus on making more rules, my effort went into removing as many barriers as humanly possible, paving the way for teachers to have the green light and teach on fire again.” (p. 187) – Brewer mentions this type of thinking in several sections of his book. Trusting in his staff to do what is best for the students allows teachers to be creative and to have a burning passion to teach every single day.

### **Strengths and Weaknesses**

Hamish Brewer’s greatest strength is his ability to build relationships. His relationships with his students, his staff, the parents, and the community set him apart as an extraordinary leader. Brewer (2019) describes the importance of relationships when he states that every child is a chance for goodness and purpose. They are like sponges, waiting to absorb all of our love, inspiration, and hope. They are hungry for information, and it is our responsibility as educators to satiate their appetites. But all too frequently, kids are perceived as duties rather than as opportunities. Those kids are then condemned to mediocrity, defeat, or failure.

Despite Brewer’s critics, he has repeatedly improved the schools he has led. His approach of taking action, disposing of excuses, and standing up for all students has proven a recipe for success. His belief in differentiating curriculum to meet the needs of his students is simple and effective. He hires the right people for the job who in return buy into his vision and then flourish as teachers. Brewer’s attributes for turning around a school are well planned and include acquisition of basic skills, safe and orderly environment, high expectations, strong instructional leadership, pupil progress monitoring and planning, authentic, relevant learning experiences, and fun. He believes when those fundamentals are put in place, a school can thrive.

Brewer’s greatest strength just so happens to be his greatest weakness of his leadership style. It is not easy to create a how-to manual on how to lead like Brewer, because he is so great at building relationships and his passion for life is over the top grand. Those types of qualities are not easily learned, they are reflection of the type of person that Brewer is. Not all people can bring the type of motivational energy that is required to take on flipping an entire culture of a community. Brewer uses his life experiences as a guiding light on how to love his students, there is no book that is going to teach an inspiring leader that type of relentless attitude.

### **Comparison to Fullan**

Brewer's ideology of the importance of relationships is completely in line with Fullan's writings.

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### **Acknowledgements**

Portions of this or previous month's ***NASET's Special Educator e-Journal*** were excerpted from:

- Center for Parent Information and Resources
- Committee on Education and the Workforce
- FirstGov.gov-The Official U.S. Government Web Portal
- Journal of the American Academy of Special Education Professionals (JAASEP)
- National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth
- National Institute of Health
- National Organization on Disability
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
- U.S. Department of Education
- U.S. Department of Education-The Achiever
- U.S. Department of Education-The Education Innovator
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
- U.S. Department of Labor
- U.S. Food and Drug Administration
- U.S. Office of Special Education

The **National Association of Special Education Teachers** (NASET) thanks all of the above for the information provided for this or prior editions of the Special Educator e-Journal