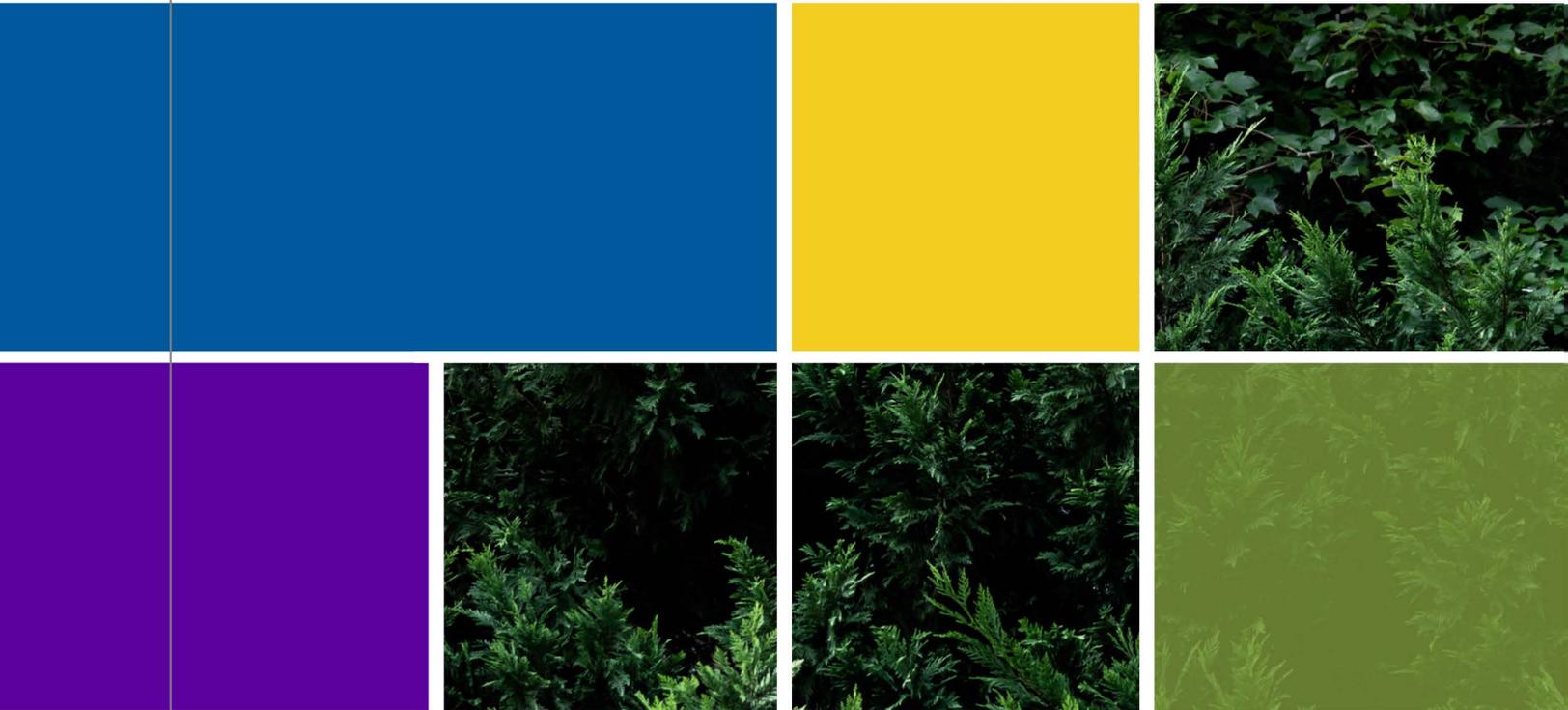**AN ECOSYSTEM OF SUPPORT:**

A Guide to Meaningful Consultation

BC CAISE

British Columbia Council of Administrators of
Inclusive Support in Education

Land Acknowledgement

We acknowledge with respect the territories of the First Peoples of what is now known as British Columbia. We honour the many First Nations people who have lived on and cared for these lands for thousands of years and continue to do so today. We recognize the importance of their cultural heritage, laws, and relationships with the land that continue to shape, sustain, and enrich British Columbia. We are committed to learning, understanding, and respecting these connections and fostering meaningful relationships based on mutual respect and reconciliation.

Disability Affirming Language

Language is dynamic and evolves with societal beliefs and our increasing commitment to inclusion. In this document, we use the term "disability" intentionally to affirm that it is a valued social identity, not a negative label. Throughout this document, we prioritize ability-first language to emphasize the strengths inherent within the disability community.

Disabled people are not a homogeneous group, and preferences for self-identification can vary widely. Therefore, we wholeheartedly uphold the right of students and families to choose the terminology that best resonates with their own experiences and sense of identity. Remember that two people with the same disability can use different languages. Our stance regarding language is deeply rooted in fostering inclusivity and respect, acknowledging the rich tapestry of narratives that constitute the disability community.

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Creating this Resource

This report is a testament to the collaborative spirit and collective effort that characterizes our work at British Columbia Council of Administrators of Inclusive Support (BC CAISE), in partnership with local and provincial stakeholders and rightsholders. Guided by a commitment to listening deeply and fostering a mutual understanding of students' diverse needs, ideas, and challenges, we've embarked on a journey of inclusive and meaningful engagement. Our efforts have been rooted in ensuring a broad spectrum of voices were heard and valued, reflecting the rich tapestry of our communities.

Frameworks Guiding Our Work

The Whole Child Approach

In British Columbia's education system, we are committed to nurturing the growth and well-being of each student by embracing their voice and lived experience within a holistic approach. We recognize that every child possesses unique strengths, gifts, and potential. We see disability as a valued identity to be celebrated within our schools and is not an instructional 'problem' to be 'fixed.'

We are dedicated to fostering educational environments that not only acknowledge but celebrate the individual qualities of all students.

Diversity in School Framework

British Columbia's schools are enriched by diversity, embraced and celebrated as essential components of high-quality learning environments. Our approach considers each student's unique cultural background, language, beliefs, and identity. By instituting inclusive consultation processes, we foster mutual respect and understanding, ensuring our school programs and environments are equitable and support every child's full potential (Diversity in BC Schools Policy, 2017).

Schools strive to create and maintain conditions that foster success for all students and that promote fair and equitable treatment for all. These conditions include:

1. equitable access to and equitable participation in quality education for all students;
2. school cultures that value diversity and respond to the diverse social and cultural needs of the communities they serve;
3. school cultures that promote understanding of others and respect for all;
4. learning and working environments that are safe and welcoming, and free from discrimination, harassment and violence;
5. decision-making processes that give a voice to all members of the school community; and
6. policies and practices that promote fair and equitable treatment.

Meaningful consultation ensures that the diversity represented in our communities is honoured and respected, and promotes mutual respect and strength-based thinking.

Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is an evidence-based inclusive educational framework that aims to respect and build from the identities of diverse learners and improve and optimize teaching and learning for all students (CAST, 2024). UDL guides the development of flexible learning environments that can respond to diverse students' learning identities and differences, recognizing the importance of offering multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression. UDL recognizes the individual needs of students and initially plans with these needs in mind with the goal of having all students learn together. By incorporating UDL in classrooms, educators can help dismantle practices of ableism, creating a learning environment that celebrates and utilizes the diversity of all learners, including those with disabilities (Safir, et al., 2025). UDL principles can help steer teaching and learning towards greater inclusivity.

ENGAGEMENT

- Centering, affirming, and sustaining learners' interests and identities
- Emphasizing the role of belonging in teaching and learning
- Promoting the role of joy and play for learners and educators alike
- Cultivating empathy and repairing harm with restorative practices

REPRESENTATION

- Authentically representing a diversity of identities, perspectives, and narratives as they relate to learners
- Considering perceptions of people, cultures, and languages
- Valuing multiple ways of knowing and making meaning

ACTION & EXPRESSION

- Honoring and valuing a wide variety of forms of communication
- Centering and valuing forms of expression that have been overlooked or ignored by addressing biases
- Challenging exclusionary practices to build more accessible, inclusive spaces and system

First Peoples Principles of Learning

The First Peoples Principles of Learning are learning principles that were articulated by Indigenous elders, scholars and knowledge keepers.

The First Peoples Principles of Learning are consistent with and reaffirm the foundation of meaningful consultations.

Incorporating Indigenous peoples in decision-making processes at all levels—from the ministry to school districts and individual schools—marks an important act of reconciliation. This inclusive approach has contributed to a consistent rise in the Dogwood Completion rates for Indigenous students over the past decade.

Learning ultimately supports the well-being of the self, the families/caregivers, the community, the land, the spirits, and the ancestors.

Learning is holistic, reflexive, reflective, experiential, and relational (focused on connectedness, on reciprocal relationships, and a sense of place).

Learning involves recognizing the consequences of one's actions.

Learning involves generational roles and responsibilities.

Learning recognizes the role of Indigenous knowledge.

Learning is embedded in memory, history, and story.

Learning involves patience and time.

Learning requires exploration of one's identity.

Learning involves recognizing that some knowledge is sacred and only shared with permission and/or in certain situations.

What is Meaningful Consultation?

Meaningful consultation is an ongoing, collaborative effort involving students, families/caregivers, and educational staff, focused on open dialogue and joint decision-making for educational matters. This inclusive process works towards ensuring all voices are heard and decisions are well-informed and clearly communicated. All parties work together towards a balanced outcome, emphasizing recurring dialogue rather than consultations being a single event.

When done well, meaningful consultation ensures families/caregivers feel that the school team listens to them and that their experience, knowledge and ideas have been considered.

Meaningful consultation is also a process where families, along with the child, are key decision-makers in their child's education, engaging in continuous conversations with school teams. During these conversations, schools and families collaborate to review options and make informed choices, striving for the best outcomes for the student. Communication is transparent, and when handled effectively, families feel valued, acknowledged, and confident that their insights significantly influence their child's educational path.

✓ What Meaningful consultation IS:	✗ What meaningful consultation IS NOT:
INCLUSIVE PARTICIPATION: Actively involves families/caregivers in their child's educational choices through continuous engagement and planning with school teams.	**NOT PRE-DETERMINED:** Meaningful consultation isn't simply delivering a decision that's already been made; it's not about persuading others to agree with a pre-set plan.
OPEN DIALOGUE: Encourages honest discussions about educational options, fostering a cooperative approach between schools and families.	**NOT A FORMALITY:** It isn't just including families and caregivers as a tick-box exercise to show that 'consultation' has occurred.
TRANSPARENT COMMUNICATION: Clearly communicates decisions and their justifications to everyone involved, ensuring understanding.	**NOT ABOUT OVERPOWERING:** Meaningful consultation doesn't allow any one party to override others or require everyone to agree on the outcome.
ONGOING PROCESS: Establishes consultation as a recurring practice that values family/caregiver input and acknowledges their insights.	

Guiding Principles for Meaningful Consultation

Student Voice & Participation

We empower students with agency and meaningful opportunities to advocate for their needs. We foster self-determination and an asset-focused approach, promoting a space where students actively voice their perspectives and engage in their educational journey.

Valuing the Expertise of the families/caregivers

We recognize the importance of families being the primary experts when understanding and nurturing their children, and their insights are highly valued. School teams bring expertise on curriculum, educational programming, and knowledge of the student's interaction in the school setting to the decision-making process; families bring an in-depth understanding of the needs of their child. The unique insights and experiences that families/caregivers bring play a pivotal role in shaping the overall well-being and development of the child. By fostering a partnership that respects and integrates families/caregivers insights, we can shape a comprehensive and effective educational plan tailored to each child's unique needs and potential.

Everyone Participates as a Valuable Partner

This process entails creating an inclusive atmosphere where all participants feel empowered to express their viewpoints, knowing their opinions and input are deeply valued and respected. It also involves recognizing that participants may bring diverse backgrounds, values, and practical constraints such as transportation and time availability. Valuing partnerships means fostering a safe and welcoming environment that acknowledges past traumas and varying school experiences. Collaboratively coming together reflects our shared responsibility for the student's well-being, acknowledging the potential impact of trauma on their educational journey.

The Role of Mutual Respect

When people work together to make decisions about a child, it's important to respect each other's ideas. Families and school representatives might have different needs and skills, but everyone's input is valuable. If we listen to each other and communicate openly, we can create a positive school environment where everyone feels included and supported.

Meaningful consultation encourages open dialogue; it does not mean all parties will agree.

The meaningful consultation process does not suggest a right of veto or assume that, at times, a mutual agreement may not be possible. Instead, it is a way to work through situations towards a decision or action that includes assessing the effectiveness of the consultation and providing follow-up. Meaningful consultation is a process that ensures everyone's voice is heard and considered. It doesn't mean having the power to say 'no' or expecting that everyone will always agree. Instead, it's about working together to make decisions or take actions. This process includes evaluating how effective the consultation was and providing follow-up. It's a way to navigate complex situations, find solutions together, and stay connected to assess the impact of those solutions.

When a mutual agreement is not possible, the school team will provide a rationale for their decision-making with regard to the educational programming of the child and ensure ongoing consultation and follow-up.
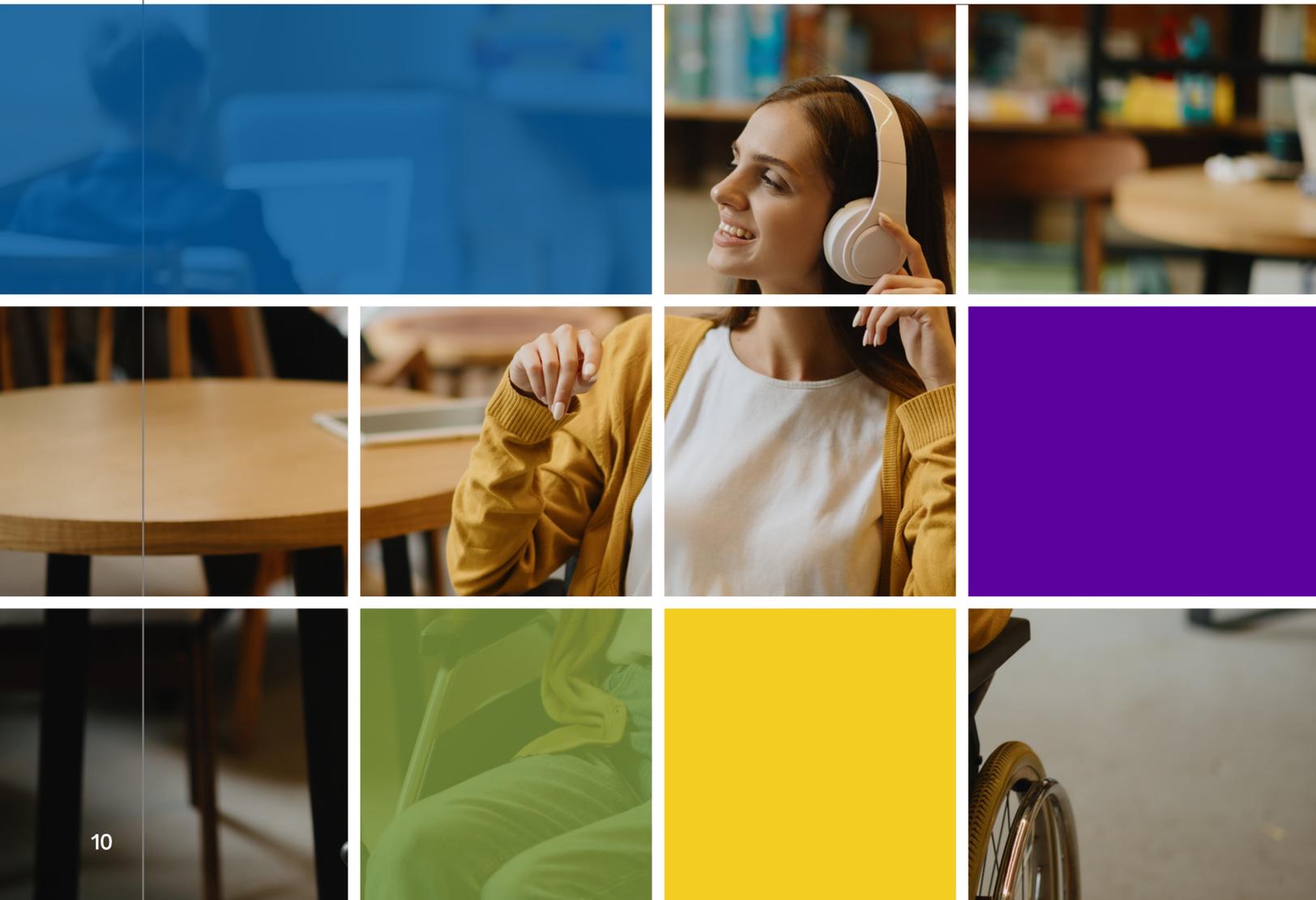
Valuing Language and Cultural Differences

By understanding how individuals engage with their environment, we foster a culture of inclusivity and enrich our collective knowledge base throughout the meaningful consultation process. Embracing different abilities allows us to approach challenges with a broader perspective, leading to more innovative solutions. We're committing to an environment where valuing the spectrum of language and cultural differences is a source of strength and insight.

(1) Disability and Anti-Ableism

- Ableism is discrimination or prejudice against people with disabilities, based on the belief that non-disabled ways of being are better or more valuable. In schools, ableism can show up in many ways, including stereotyping, invisibility in the curriculum, paternalistic attitudes, accessibility issues, medicalization, discrimination in policies and practices, and harmful language.

- An anti-ableist approach prioritizes the empowerment of disabled students, ensuring their full participation and representation in educational decision-making processes. It means advocating for disabled students' right to inclusive, accessible, and equitable learning environments.

What does ableism look like in education?

STEREOTYPING

INVISIBILITY IN CURRICULUM

PATERNALISTIC ATTITUDES

ACCESSIBILITY ISSUES

MEDICALIZATION

DISCRIMINATION IN POLICIES & PRACTICES

HARMFUL LANGUAGE

2 Cultural Safety and Responsiveness

- Cultural safety and responsiveness ensure that children's learning environments are respectful and appreciative of diverse cultural backgrounds. Cultural safety creates inclusive settings where children are valued and feel a strong sense of belonging, free from the impact of biases or prejudices.
- Cultural responsiveness involves tailoring educational methods to accommodate the varied cultural experiences and perspectives of children, ensuring their distinct cultural identities are recognized and integrated within the learning experience.

3 Indigenous Perspectives on Knowledge and Existence

- Indigenous perspectives commonly encompass a holistic understanding of the world that honours the diversity of Indigenous cultures and their unique worldviews. These perspectives consider the complete person — encompassing physical, emotional, spiritual, and intellectual aspects — as deeply connected to the land and in a dynamic relationship with families/caregivers, community, and nation.
- These worldviews emphasize the importance of land, language, culture, and ancestral knowledge, underscoring the profound relationships between community, environment, and the web of life, thereby highlighting the interconnectedness of all entities.

Approaches & Practices to Support Meaningful Consultation

Effective meaningful consultation requires thoughtful approaches and practices. This section provides a practical framework for engaging in consultation before, during, and after meetings. By considering these practices, we create a respectful and productive consultation environment that values each participant's contribution.

1 **BEFORE: Building Trust & Understanding**

- Ensure flexibility in planning, consider diverse families/caregivers backgrounds, and create a safe space for open communication.
- Provide a clear meeting overview/agenda, focus on interventions and celebrating the child's strengths, and value families/caregivers' insights.
- Ensure all participants who need to be present have been invited and confirmed attendance; consider possible decisions that need to be made and ensure appropriate personnel are present to allow the decision-making process to move forward.
- Invite families to bring support people with them to meetings, to help them feel more comfortable and confident being engaged in discussions.
- Use direct communication methods to build personal connections, be sensitive to families/caregivers concerns, and encourage advocate presence for added support.
- Consider having water, snacks, and toys available. Families sometimes bring children to meetings, and preparing for this beforehand will help families feel comfortable.

2 **DURING: Fostering a Supportive & Respectful Environment**

- Begin the meeting with self-introductions, a positive note about the student, a clear message of support and appreciation for the collaboration, while acknowledging that trust-building may take time.
- Take time to discuss each members roles and responsibilities.
- Communicate clearly and simply, avoid jargon, and create a seating arrangement to foster a sense of equality and partnership.
- Remember that each member has a different and valuable perspective. Act professionally by focusing on strengths and areas for growth, being objective, admitting any errors, and actively listening to ensure a productive meeting.
- Ensure there is time for members to engage in interactive problem-solving (and encourage it!). Students are partners in learning, and giving students a voice ensures their perspectives are valued and respected.
- Check in to see if all meeting items have been covered. Sometimes additional meetings are needed as individuals reflect on and consider what has been discussed.

3 **AFTER: Ensuring Clarity & Continuity**

- Acknowledge everyone's participation and input.
- Review decisions and outline next steps.
- Formalizing a timeframe for communication can be helpful.
- Sharing a common set of notes can ensure everyone is clear on the decisions and next steps, which can be referred to at any future meetings.

Appendices

The following appendices have been crafted
to facilitate a meaningful consultation process:

- **Appendix 1: Family Support Institute of BC's Transitions Timeline** | Provides a comprehensive timeline and protocol for planning and supporting the transition of youth with support needs across various ministries in British Columbia.

- **Appendix 2: Inclusion BC Transition Planning** | Details the transition planning process for individuals with disabilities, focusing on inclusivity and preparing for adulthood with appropriate supports.

- **Appendix 3: Inclusive Education's Student and Parent Voice in IEPs (Video Resource)** | Explains the significance of including student and parent perspectives in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to enhance the educational experience and outcomes for students with disabilities.

APPENDIX 1

Family Support Institute of BC's Transitions Timeline

The following tools support families/caregivers in understanding a comprehensive timeline and protocol for planning and supporting the transition of youth with support needs across various ministries in British Columbia.

Scan the QR codes below to access the resources:

GOVERNMENT OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

Cross Ministry Transition Planning Protocol for Youth with Support Needs

READ MORE »

FAMILY SUPPORT INSTITUTE OF BC

Transitions Timeline | A tool to help you navigate through the various items to consider at different stages of life.

LEARN MORE »

APPENDIX 2

Inclusion BC Transition Planning

This resource developed by Inclusion BC details the transition planning process for individuals with disabilities, focusing on inclusivity and preparing for adulthood with appropriate supports.

Scan the QR codes below to access the resources:

APPENDIX 3

Student and Parent Voice in IEP's: Video Resource

Parents and students are critical partners for inclusive education and in creating IEPs (Individual Education Plans). This video resource explains the significance of including student and parent perspectives in Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) to enhance the educational experience and outcomes for students with disabilities.

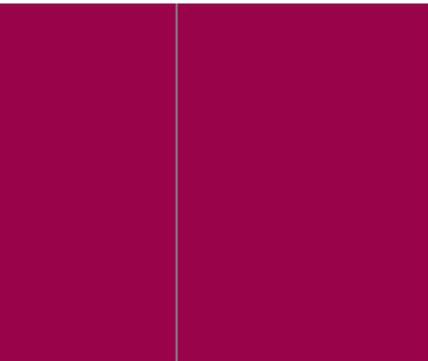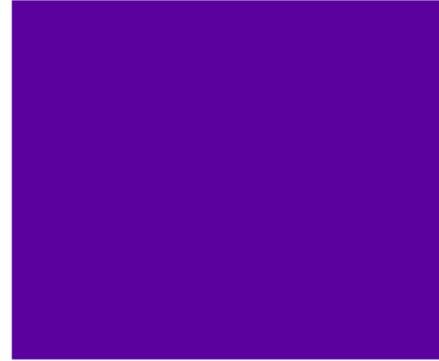**Scan the QR codes below to access the video:**

References

CAST (2024). Universal design for learning guidelines version 3.0. [graphic organizer]. https://udlguidelines.cast.org/

Safir, S., Bagsik, M., Jaber, S., & Watson, C. (2025). *Pedagogies of voice: Street data and the path to student agency.* Corwin.

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