

>> Ann: Welcome. Thank you for joining us today for this webinar. I'm Ann Ainkson-Herrmann, and with me is my colleague Jacqui DiDomenico. And Jacqui and I our consultants with the Bureau of Special Education's Training and Technical Assistance Network known as PaTTAN. And Jacqui also brings a real unique perspective to our webinar. She is the parent of a child with a disability, Michael, who has Down's syndrome. And we'd ask you to come along with us on this conversation to explore why we believe students with disabilities can have fulfilling and robust lives. And in particular, we truly believe that students with disabilities should be included in the general education curriculum and have access to the PA core standards, and then they'll have the strongest opportunity for success when they graduate.

>> Jacqui: Ann, I wanted to mention to the people that are watching and participating in the webinar today that we've developed a companion piece. It's for note taking, it has some guided questions. It should be located where you located the webinar. If you want to pause the webinar for a minute and go and download that document, feel free to do so.

>> Ann: And PaTTAN is the Technical Assistance and Training Network, and we support the efforts and initiatives of the Bureau of Special Education to build the capacity of our local education agencies and to serve students who receive special education services. And it is also a commitment of the Department of Education to the least restrictive environment; and that is that IEP teams begin with the general Ed setting, the use of supplementary aids and services before considering a more restrictive environment for students.

>> Jacqui: And, Ann, this is a good time to mention that as members of the IEP team, parents play an important role on that team, and they need to realize that they bring the child's strengths and interests as well as knowing what their learning styles are. We like to make sure parents are aware of their important nature in the team.

>> Ann: Absolutely, Jacqui. So let's take a look at our three objectives for this webinar. And we want to talk about why students can benefit from having challenging academic instruction; and we'll define what the general ed curriculum is and what we mean by grade-level academic standards; and we'll also describe what we mean by access and meaningful participation in general education; and lastly, we'll describe how we can all work together to improve the performance of students with disabilities, including those with complex needs. So let's tackle our first objective and think about why students with disabilities need to have this challenging academic instruction. And remember, this means students with complex instructional needs. I don't know about you, Jacqui, but when I think about people having rich and fulfilling lives, I think about things like having a job, enjoying the community, having friends, being involved in recreational activities, and participating in family functions, and being as independent as possible regardless of how significant that disability might be.

>> Jacqui: Ann, when I think about my son, Michael, and what I want for him when he grows up and leaves school, it's pretty much what I want for all my children, my two daughters and Michael as well: To have jobs they enjoy, fulfilling lives, and be active members in the community. As Michael goes through school, I hope that his curriculum, his particular IEP are feeding into that.

>> Ann: Right. Well, we want all students to have those kind of wonderful opportunities in life, Jacqui, when they graduate. And, you know, the world is rapidly changing, and it's crucial that all students have access to the general ed curriculum and PA core standards in order to make that a reality. And having all students, including those with disabilities, accessing the PA core standards is going to be a change for everyone. The way we taught students in the past just simply does not prepare them for the higher demands of college and careers today and in the future. And for parents watching this video, I think you're going to find that your district and districts throughout Pennsylvania are working to improve teaching and learning to ensure that all children will graduate high school with the skills they need to be successful. The first question we posed at the start of this webinar said, well, why do students with disabilities benefit from having challenging academics. And with Jacqui, it comes down to the same reason that students without disabilities need challenging academics: We want all children to be ready for the world when they graduate. And for students with more significant disabilities that we sometimes refer to as have complex instructional needs, it means raising the bar for those students as well. All means all, and our schools in Pennsylvania are ready to make this happen through the PA core standards so that every student has the knowledge and skills needed for their future.

>> Jacqui: So, Ann, this is a time where we're going to stop and take a moment to think of why is challenging academic instruction important for your child. This is the first question on your guided notes page, and it makes you take time to pause about we've spoken about already, and think what do you envision for your child once they graduate from school. As a parent, I wanted my son to have challenging academic instruction. I knew he might struggle with it, I knew he might have difficulty and need support, but I didn't think that should eliminate him from that the general curriculum. I think when he is exposed to it, he gains a lot of insight and information. He tends to surprise me with what he gains from being in those general ed classrooms and gaining from those environments. I'm looking forward to see once he has completed his education with the general ed curriculum, with those supports and services, what type of individual he's going to be, and what he's going to bring to his community.

>> Ann: And so we understand why rigorous instruction is important for all students. Let's talk a bit more about the specifics of the general ed curriculum in the PA core standards. When we think of the general education curriculum, it looks a bit different in various districts, but essentially, curriculum specifies what is to be taught at each subject. Think of it as social studies, science, world languages, music, reading, math, and so on. IEP teams will make the decision about how a student with disabilities will participate in the general ed curriculum. And that IEP team means the parents are part of it. And a critical aspect of the PA core standards is that they serve as a guide to what students should know and be able to do. It is not to be confused with the curriculum. That's designed by a school district. The PA core standards let districts know what kids should know and do at each grade level. They ensure consistency across our state. And think about a student who's in third grade in one district and they move across the county line to a new district. It's reassuring to know that the learning that will take place is consistent from the school where they came from. The PA core standards help make this happen by ensuring a consistent expectation of what students should know and do at each grade level. You know a nice way to think about this, Jacqui, is that the curriculum and standards -- and we can relate it to an example from construction. We know that contractors have building codes they must

follow when building any home; in other words, those of the standards they must adhere to for electric, plumbing, heating. Yet when they build their homes, they can look very different in appearance and features, just like these pictures. Yet no matter how different those homes are, they still follow the basic code in building them. Well, the PA standards are very much like that building code. They give districts the "what" students need to know and do for each subject at each grade level. Then, the districts have the latitude to develop or build their curricula based on those standards. Some districts have curriculum that looks very similar to the standards, and others have things placed into the curricula for students that they feel need to be exposed to or learn in addition to the standards.

>> Jacqui: Ann, thanks for using the building code as an analogy to show how what students are taught across Pennsylvania will be consistent. And also, with all this discussion about the new rigor behind English Language Arts and math, is there more you can tell me about that?

>> Ann: Sure. Let's take a look at this English Language Arts area of reading, writing, speaking, and listening. And we're also to talk about math, but let's start in the area of English Language Arts. Three's five areas we're going to highlight. First, in the subject of reading; balancing information and literary text. You know, everyone loves a good story. You know, children of all ages love a great fiction book, and here's some examples in this picture. "Goodnight Moon," "If You Give a Mouse a Cookie," "Curious George," "Boxcar Children," right up through those teenage years of reading books like "Twilight" or "Lord of the Rings." But what the PA core standards promote is that we have children reading nonfiction books; in other words, books that provide information. A book about sea turtles would be an example of this at the early age, and a book about immigrants or maybe the autobiography of Jackie Robinson might be examples for high school age students. Close and careful reading is another aspect of reading. It means that once students have read their text, they need to go back into the text to find the answers; in other words, they're looking for the evidence. And also, a staircase of complexity is what we talk about. And by that, Jacqui, we mean we start with easier books, and as students acquire reading skills, we move into more and more difficult text. We have two other ideas, and one is in the area of writing. And we are supporting that students will write and have the evidence from stories that they have read from. So it's not all about narrative stories, but it's about being a technical writer; again, supporting the writing with evidence. And lastly, we need students to have robust vocabulary instruction. We want students with disabilities to learn critical vocabulary that helps them transfer ideas and knowledge to various areas of the curriculum; in other words, being strategic about what vocabulary we teach and why so that it has high utility for students. And, Jacqui, let's look at the area of math. Teachers will concentrate on teaching a more focused set of major math concepts and skills, and this will allow students time to master important ideas and skills in a more organized way from year to year, from one grade to level to the next. It will also call for teachers to use rich and challenging math content and to engage students in solving real-world problems in order to inspire a greater interest in mathematics.

>> Jacqui: And, Ann, I know it's not all about just math and language arts. They are important parts of the school day, but I think it's those students having access to all areas of general ed curriculum, science, social studies; any of the specials, gym, art, music. I think those environments offer great opportunity for students to have meaningful participation. And a big question that I have as a parent, and probably

other parents are thinking this, too, what Michael can't reach those grade level standards? What can we do that?

>> Ann: Well, Jacqui, that's an excellent question. And when you look at this slide, it really speaks to what we believe. You know, not every student with disabilities will meet grade-level academic standards, but that is not a reason to stop providing supports to help them achieve high levels of learning. We can support students to be with their grade level peers, engaged in grade level appropriate learning to achieve to their fullest potential.

>> Jacqui: So the next question that's on your guided notes pages is, who can I speak to in my district about educational curriculum that is used in my child's school? Ann, when I talk to parents, and I often have conversations around, who do you feel comfortable talking to -- is there a guidance counselor? a special ed teacher? a principal? Find that one person that you can speak with in your district or in your child setting that you can ask about. You know, what are the grade level things that the other third graders are learning, and is my third grader exposed to those?

>> Ann. Exactly, Jacqui. Well, you know, Jacqui, your last question about that is a very nice segue into our third aspect of this webinar, and that is, how can we help students with disabilities access and meaningfully participate in the general education curriculum. And the first bullet on this slide references IDEA. And that is our federal right that guarantees a free and appropriate public education for individuals with disabilities. And a critical part of IDEA that maybe not been addressed as clearly in the past as it maybe now, is the fact that supports and services need to help students with disabilities access general education. The aspect of individualizing for a student has always been an integral part of the IEP planning for many years, but truly examining general education and the supports necessary for accessing general education, may become a more focused part of the IEP discussion. And we know that a child's unique needs will still be met because we have adopted the PA core standard, and that doesn't mean that individual needs won't be addressed. You know, a good example of this might be a student who needs some functional skills, maybe in daily living or bathrooming or feeding. Those skills can still be met through the IEP as well. And along with the backing of those legal requirements, there are additional supports and services to help students with disabilities be successful. And this slide speaks to three of those, although there certainly are others. Let's read this slide and take a look at each one of these. The first bullet talks about Universal Design for Learning. We'll abbreviate that UDL and talk about that. The second is accommodations and modifications, which means changing materials or the procedures for instruction. And the third is alternative and augmentative communication, including assistive technology devices that enable access to the standards. So let's start with this first one, this idea of universal design for learning. We call it UDL, Jacqui. So I'm going to ask your question, Jacqui. Have you ever seen those curb cutouts on the sidewalks?

>> Jacqui: Yeah, absolutely.

>> Ann: Well, how have you seen people using those curb cutouts?

>> Jacqui: With baby strollers, bicycles, shopping carts, even kids with their scooters and/or other wheeled objects that they're probably not supposed to be using on the sidewalk.

>> Ann: Exactly. We both have used them and we've seen people using them. And they really were originally designed so that someone who couldn't use stairs and had the use of a wheelchair would be able to access that building. But what happened is, a lot of other people started using it for different reasons, and that's what universal design means -- something that started out for one purpose, maybe with one particular group of people, became used for -- by many different people for different purposes. So we just transfer that idea into learning. So universal design and learning is where a teacher may be making a plan with a very specific group, but what they plan for is that the things they may do for a student with disabilities may actually be good for many students in the classroom. So one of the things we are encouraging teachers to do and training them to do is universal design for learning where a special education teacher, the general education teacher get together and they plan their units of study together from the beginning to address all kinds of learners that are in their classroom. A second way we can support students is by using accommodations and modifications, Jacqui. And accommodations change the "how"; in other words, it may give a student a different avenue to demonstrate their knowledge. An example of this would be a student who is visually impaired and we change the font size on their print or maybe we enlarge the materials. We didn't really change what they were learning, we just simply changed the how they were learning so that they could access their information and demonstrate mastery a different way. Now, sometimes an accommodation is not enough and a modification is needed. A modification changes the "what"; in other words, it reduces the standard or maybe changes what the student has to learn compared to what their peers may learn. It's not so important to classify which is an accommodation, which is a modification, but it is important to try and start with the least intensive kind of accommodations and then move to the more significant modifications.

>> Jacqui: I know that Michael has used both accommodations and modifications in his access to the general ed curriculum, and I think he continues to keep him where his peers are at in their learning the content, maybe not at the same level but he enjoys the classroom and the activities.

>> Ann: Well, and, you know, our third area's assistive technology and alternative and augmentative communication. And, you know, everyone communicates their wants, thoughts, needs, desires, emotions in a variety of ways. And we can't assume that because a child is not verbal or communicates in a nontraditional manner that they don't have communication. We have to ensure that every child is considered a competent learner, and they have a right to an effective communication system. And it all starts with this assumption that everyone communicates. So how do you make certain that everyone has an effective communication system? Well, we make sure that alternative augmentative communication and assistive technology is available and considered for any student with a disability.

>> Jacqui: And, Ann, you're right. Communication is a really important factor for students. The following video shows how assistive technology can impact this particular student and how it helped with her participation both in school academically and socially. So let's go ahead and watch this video for the next three minutes. ( Music )

>> Elle (Computerized voice): Hi, my name is Elle O'Gorman. I am 14 years old. I like to go shopping at the mall. I have two brothers named Paul and Carter. ( Music )

>> Jill: Hi, my name is Jill O'Gorman and my daughter is Elle O'Gorman. She is 14 years old and diagnosed with cerebral palsy.

>> Elle: This is my DynaVox. I use it to talk.

>> Jill: DynaVox is an augmentative communication device that helps her communicate with us and her peers and at school.

>> Elle: When I look at a picture using my headmouse, the DynaVox talks for me.

>> Jill: Without the DynaVox, she was -- had a difficulty communicating what her needs were. People tend to underestimate her ability or what she understood and what she was able to express.

>> Elle: I like to write e-mails with my DynaVox. Before I had my DynaVox, I used a laptop.

>> Jill: We started out with just a simple book chart that was broken into categories and she would eye gaze towards the pictures that she wanted. From there we advanced to trying out a Pathfinder, which had too many buttons for her and was a little bit frustrating for her, so we went to a laptop with a communication software. From there we went to the DynaVox.

>> Elle: I am learning to use more buttons to tell people what I am thinking.

>> Jill: The school played a role in helping us find the DynaVox. The assistive technology specialist who has been helping the district who helps Elle was very instrumental in helping us. Elle's on an IEP, and so it was an IEP decision to determine what device would work best for her. So they help select the DynaVox Triolet, and then helped with funding. We contacted DynaVox first and did a -- I believe a six-week trial. During that trial period, we had to write extensive amount of monitoring to give detail about the trial. The speech pathologist along with the assistive technology specialist from the district helped in writing all of that up, and then we had to submit it to insurance to see if it would be approved.

>> Elle: My teachers help me with my DynaVox.

>> Jill: I've -- we've all had training from DynaVox. And, again, the assistive technology specialist has trained her IEP team, so modifications and additions, stuff were added by -- at school, and sometimes I add them at home as I think of things, so it's really a team approach.

>> Elle: At school I can chat with friends, interact with my teachers, and practice my letters and numbers.

>> Jill: The DynaVox has really opened up a lot of doors for Elle in terms of just being able to tell us everything that she wants and needs, and as well as helped with school and communicating with her peers and some social opportunities for her, and so we will continue to, you know, explore future technology options to see if there's anything new and improved and better, which I'm sure there will be in the future. ( Music )

>> Jacqui: So what really hit me when I was watching that video was how Elle was able to communicate herself as a teenager. You know, her activity level, e-mailing friends, talking to her mom about what happened at school that day. But the other part that really hit me was how Elle's mom talked about how people kind of assumed that Elle didn't have anything to add to the conversation. It brings me to the whole point of presuming competence. I know -- because Michael has Down's syndrome, it's a visible disability; people know right off the bat that he's going to have different communication issues or maybe not have the same ability to do things as others. But it's in the times when people have presumed him competent, have said, let's give him a try, let's let him participate to whatever level he can participate for, that's when he shines. So I know that there's a big piece of as educators, as parents, as members of the community that we need to not pigeonhole people and not necessarily say, oh, no, we can accommodate that; but to say, let's presume that competence and see where it leads.

>> Ann: Exactly. And on this video slide -- or this PowerPoint slide that we have here, we have a publication that we have made here at PaTTAN, and you'll notice that is called "Changing Actions and Attitudes Towards People with Disabilities." And what it really gets at is that heart of presuming competence and not having students have learned helplessness. We need to find the right balance for them being independent and presuming that they can learn. And this publication is actually available on the PaTTAN website. We have the link at the end of this presentation. It is free. It can be downloaded. Or you can do what we call "add to the cart," which means we'll be glad to send you a hardcopy if you would like.

>> Jacqui: So, Ann, we talked about a lot of things in the last section with UDL, universal design for learning, the different aspects of assistive technology, accommodations and modifications. That's a lot for people to take in, too. So this is a time where you can pause, take out your accompanying document, and write down, you know, what supports do you think might help your student be successful when they're in that general ed setting; will they need accommodations and modifications; would assistive technology help; And, again, back to the question, who could you talk to about these options in your child's educational setting. So, Ann, now that we've talked about why it's important for students with disabilities to be provided challenging academics, and we've described what the general education curriculum and the PA standards look like, as well as how we can support students with disabilities in those challenging academic settings, I guess the question is, how can we make this possible for all students?

>> Ann: Well, Jacqui, that's a great question because we have a couple of exciting opportunities that are going on that will help make this become a reality. One of our new project areas is what's called Project MAX. I'm going to tell you a little about that in just a moment. But our second really great resource is our PaTTAN website. We have a wealth of resources and materials. And then a third wonderful resource for parents are our parent organizations, and we're going to talk a little bit about them as well. So let me tell you a little bit about Project MAX first. This is very exciting. And in Pennsylvania, we have a new project that's known as MAXimizing Access and Learning. And our hope is that students with complex instructional needs will have more opportunities to access and participate in general ed curriculum and the PA core standards. This may happen in the general ed setting or even in the special education setting. But regardless of the setting, we want all students to have a greater opportunity to be prepared

for the community, career, college; and we have six districts and intermediate units that are piloting this project with us. They are designing lesson plans with UDL in mind, they're making accommodations and modifications to the curriculum, and they're enhancing communication systems for students. And we'll be watching this exciting project closely because we're hoping to replicate it in more and more districts in the future.

>> Jacqui: So I can see by reading the Bureau of Special Education's vision statement and the PaTTAN commitment statement that there's a real commitment from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Bureau of Special Education to help all students with disabilities be a part of the general education and the PA core standards. I know as a parent of a student with a disability, that I am an important member of his IEP team; and as a member of that team, we have the ability to determine what's the best environment for him to receive his special education instruction.

>> Ann: Pennsylvania is also very fortunate, Jacqui, to have a number of federally funded parent centers to assist families. For this presentation, we've worked with three -- HUNE, PEN, and PEAL. And, Jacqui, I know you've worked with these centers. And can you speak to each of them for just a moment?

>> Jacqui: I sure can, Ann. I've worked with people who are part of PEN, PEAL, and HUNE. Each of these organizations serves members of families that have children that are being served in the special ed field. PEN is located in York, and they serve the southeastern and northsea -- northeastern parts of the state. PEAL is located in Pittsburgh, and they also serve the western and central portions of the state. HUNE is located in Philadelphia, and they are a great resource for families and individuals who don't necessarily have English as their first language. Often, regardless of where they are located in the state, we will direct them to HUNE because they do have the component of answering the phone in Spanish and can provide a lot of support for Spanish speaking families. They often are members of families themselves that have students that are -- have received special education or are still receiving special education services. So they do have a wonderful amount of information, they have fabulous websites, they offer trainings, and they have publications; all of these really assist parents that are navigating the special education system.

>> Ann: So we have their information right here in the contact information, Jacqui. So would you recommend as a parent that this is a wonderful resource they should tap into even when things are going smoothly?

>> Jacqui: Absolutely. They'll offer trainings that just kind of booster parents and their support of their students in advocating for, you know, what they need their student to know. Sometimes you have a young student, you don't know about transition, and they'll kind of prepare you for that when you're going to be going down that road. Oftentimes, when things are going well, parents can get more information just, you know, from parents who have been there, done that.

>> Ann: Great. Well, and lastly, we have some resources listed here that we mentioned. And the first is our PaTTAN website, and this has a great deal of information on just a variety of topics related to special education. You can find publications and videos and general information and training materials and so forth. So it's a great site to explore. And the second resource is what we call our SAS Portal, standards

aligned system it stands for. And that is where you can view all of the PA core standards for every subject and every grade level. And the last is our Family Center on Technology and Disability, and this has numerous videos related to serving students with disabilities, particularly those with communication needs and assistive technologies, so just a wealth of information there. And lastly, we'd really like to thank our federally funded parent centers, HUNE, PEN, and PEAL, because they were very strong partners in creating this webinar. And we thank you for joining us. And we just want to end by saying this work is a project that is supported from the Office of Special Education Programs at the Department of Education. Thank you for joining us.