



Back-to-School Readiness Toolkit

A Practical Guide for Educators

PREPARED TEAMS

CONSISTENT SUPPORT.
STRONGER STAFF.
BETTER STUDENT
OUTCOMES.



Welcome

As schools and district teams prepare for the upcoming school year, many educators continue to navigate increasing student needs, staffing challenges, evolving behavioral supports, and the ongoing importance of creating inclusive learning environments for all students.

We recognize the tremendous work school teams are doing each day to support students, families, and staff — often while balancing limited time, resources, and capacity. As districts begin planning summer and back-to-school professional development opportunities, our goal is to provide practical tools, strategies, and support that can help staff feel more prepared and confident heading into the new school year.

This toolkit was created to offer actionable resources and planning supports for special education teams, administrators, paraeducators, and school staff across Washington. Inside, you'll find readiness checklists, professional development planning tools, behavior support strategies, collaboration reminders, and practical considerations districts may find helpful during summer planning and fall preparation.

We believe effective professional development should be:

- practical and immediately usable
- supportive of real classroom environments
- collaborative and staff-centered
- tailored to the unique needs of each district and school community

We hope these resources help support meaningful conversations, strengthen staff confidence, and contribute to a successful start to the school year.

Thank you for the continued work you do in supporting students and school communities.

Sincerely,

Anne Oswald
Burgio Educational Consulting Services



What District Teams Are Currently Navigating

As districts continue preparing for the upcoming school year, many school teams are balancing increasing student needs alongside ongoing staffing, behavioral, and instructional challenges. While every district's experience is unique, several common themes continue to emerge across schools and support teams.

Staffing & Retention Challenges

Many districts continue to experience:

- paraeducator shortages and turnover
- onboarding needs for new staff
- limited time for collaborative planning and training
- increased demands on existing staff teams

Providing practical, accessible professional development can help strengthen staff confidence, consistency, and long-term support systems.

Increasing Student Support Needs

School teams are navigating a growing range of student needs, including:

- behavioral and emotional regulation challenges
- executive functioning and organization support
- communication and social skill development
- increased need for individualized supports and accommodations

Staff often benefit most from strategies that are practical, proactive, and immediately applicable in classroom settings.

Inclusion & Collaboration

As schools continue strengthening inclusive practices, many teams are working to improve:

- collaboration between general and special education staff
- consistency of accommodations and supports
- co-teaching and shared instructional practices
- meaningful student participation across settings

Creating consistent systems and shared language across teams can improve both staff confidence and student outcomes.

Staff Wellness & Sustainability

Educators and support staff continue to manage high levels of responsibility while supporting increasingly complex student needs. Many districts are prioritizing:

- sustainable support systems for staff
- practical professional development
- opportunities for collaboration and problem-solving
- strategies that reduce burnout and improve team consistency

Supporting staff well-being and preparedness is an important part of creating stable, effective learning environments for students.



Reflection Questions for District Teams

- Where are staff currently needing the most support?
- Which teams would benefit from additional training or collaboration opportunities?
- What systems or strategies could improve consistency across classrooms and programs?
- How can professional development better support day-to-day implementation for staff?



Back-to-School Readiness Checklist

Preparing staff, systems, and supports before the school year begins can help create stronger consistency, clearer communication, and more effective student support across classrooms and programs.

Use the checklist below as a starting point for team planning conversations and fall preparation.

Classroom & Learning Environment

- ☐ Visual schedules and classroom supports are prepared
- ☐ Sensory and calming supports are accessible to students
- ☐ Classroom expectations and routines are clearly established
- ☐ Student accommodations and modifications have been reviewed
- ☐ Transition supports and schedules are planned
- ☐ Staff understand emergency and safety procedures

Student Support Planning

- ☐ IEPs and support plans have been reviewed
- ☐ Student communication needs and supports are identified
- ☐ Behavior support plans are updated and accessible
- ☐ Reinforcement systems and proactive supports are prepared
- ☐ Individual student health, sensory, or safety considerations are reviewed
- ☐ Transition information between grade levels/programs has been communicated

Team Communication & Collaboration

- ☐ Staff roles and responsibilities are clearly defined
- ☐ Communication systems between team members are established
- ☐ Collaboration time for general education and special education staff is scheduled
- ☐ Paraeducators understand classroom expectations and support systems
- ☐ Teams have identified key contacts and support resources
- ☐ Family communication plans are prepared

Paraeducator Support & Preparedness

- ☐ Paraeducators have received classroom/program orientation
- ☐ Expectations for student support are clearly communicated
- ☐ Staff understand prompting and support strategies
- ☐ Confidentiality and professionalism expectations are reviewed
- ☐ Opportunities for questions, collaboration, and feedback are built into team routines

Staff Wellness & Sustainability

- ☐ Teams have identified systems for ongoing collaboration and support
- ☐ Staff know where to access resources or assistance when challenges arise
- ☐ Expectations are realistic and sustainable
- ☐ Teams have opportunities to problem-solve collaboratively
- ☐ Staff wellness and workload considerations are part of planning conversations



Planning Reminder

Strong systems are built through consistency, collaboration, and proactive preparation — not perfection. Small adjustments in communication, planning, and support can significantly improve both staff confidence and student success throughout the school year.



Supporting Paraeducators & Strengthening Team Consistency

Paraeducators play an essential role in supporting student success across classrooms, programs, and school environments. As districts continue navigating staffing shortages, onboarding needs, and increasing student support demands, providing clear systems and practical guidance for paraeducators remains an important area of focus.

Strong support systems help create greater consistency for both staff and students.

Common Challenges Teams Experience

Many school teams report challenges such as:

- unclear staff roles and expectations
- inconsistent communication between team members
- varying support approaches across classrooms
- limited onboarding or training opportunities
- uncertainty around prompting, accommodations, and behavior support strategies

When systems and expectations vary significantly, staff often feel less confident and students may experience inconsistent support throughout the day.

Practical Strategies for Supporting Paraeducators

Establish Clear Roles & Responsibilities

Ensure staff understand:

- classroom expectations
- student support responsibilities
- communication protocols
- when and how to seek additional support

Clarity helps reduce confusion and improves team consistency.

Prioritize Ongoing Communication

Regular check-ins can help teams:

- problem-solve proactively
- clarify expectations
- strengthen collaboration
- identify support needs early

Even brief communication routines can significantly improve consistency across settings.

Create Consistent Support Systems

Whenever possible:

- use shared language and expectations
- align prompting strategies
- maintain predictable routines
- clarify behavior support approaches across team members

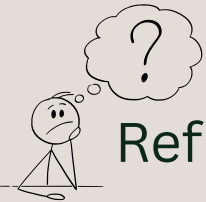
Consistency supports both staff confidence and student success.

Include Paraeducators in Planning Conversations

Paraeducators often spend significant time supporting students throughout the school day and can provide valuable insight into:

- student strengths
- successful strategies
- behavioral patterns
- classroom support needs

Including paraeducators in appropriate planning discussions can strengthen collaboration and improve implementation.



Reflection Questions for Teams

- Do staff clearly understand their roles and responsibilities?
- Are communication systems consistent across classrooms and teams?
- Have paraeducators received practical training and support?
- Are behavior and instructional supports implemented consistently?
- What additional systems could improve collaboration and staff confidence?



Planning Reminder

Effective support systems are built through clarity, collaboration, consistency, and ongoing communication. Small improvements in team systems can create meaningful impacts for both staff and students throughout the school year.



Proactive Behavior Support & De-Escalation Strategies

School teams continue to support students with a wide range of behavioral, emotional, communication, and regulation needs. While every student and situation is unique, proactive systems and consistent team responses can help create safer, more supportive learning environments for both students and staff.

Practical, preventative strategies are often the most effective tools for reducing escalation and increasing student success throughout the school day.

Building Proactive Support Systems

Create Predictable Routines

Consistent routines help students:

- understand expectations
- reduce anxiety and uncertainty
- increase independence
- transition more successfully between activities

Visual schedules, transition warnings, and consistent classroom structures can provide additional support for students who benefit from predictability.

Use Clear & Consistent Expectations

Students often respond best when expectations are:

- clearly taught
- visually reinforced
- consistently implemented
- communicated using simple, supportive language

Consistency across staff members can significantly improve student understanding and reduce confusion.

Focus on Prevention Before Escalation

Proactive supports may include:

- scheduled movement or sensory breaks
- choice-making opportunities
- access to calming supports
- frequent positive reinforcement
- identifying triggers and early warning signs

Recognizing signs of dysregulation early can help staff intervene before behaviors escalate.

De-Escalation Reminders for Staff

During moments of escalation, supportive responses may include:

- maintaining a calm and regulated tone
- reducing verbal demands when appropriate
- allowing processing time and space
- avoiding power struggles or confrontational language
- using concise and supportive communication
- prioritizing safety and emotional regulation

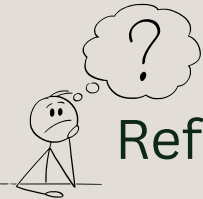
Co-regulation and calm staff responses often play an important role in helping students regain regulation.

Strengthening Team Consistency

Behavior support systems are often most effective when teams:

- use shared language and expectations
- respond consistently across environments
- communicate proactively with one another
- understand individual student support plans
- regularly review strategies that are or are not working

Consistent implementation can help reduce confusion and increase student success across settings.



Reflection Questions for Teams

- Are proactive supports consistently available across classrooms?
- Do staff feel confident responding to escalation situations?
- Are support strategies clearly communicated among team members?
- What systems could improve consistency and collaboration?
- How are student regulation and emotional safety being prioritized?



Important Reminder

Challenging behavior is often a form of communication. Supportive, proactive, and relationship-centered approaches can help students build regulation skills while strengthening trust, consistency, and long-term success within the school environment.



Strengthening Inclusive Practices & Collaborative Support Systems

Inclusive learning environments are most successful when school teams work collaboratively to create consistent, supportive systems that help all students access instruction, participate meaningfully, and experience a sense of belonging within the school community.

As districts continue strengthening inclusive practices, many teams are prioritizing clearer collaboration structures, shared responsibilities, and practical classroom supports that can be implemented consistently across settings.

Building Effective Collaborative Teams

Strong collaboration between general education staff, special education staff, paraeducators, and support teams can help improve consistency and student outcomes.

Effective collaboration often includes:

- shared planning and communication systems
- clearly defined staff responsibilities
- collaborative problem-solving
- regular opportunities for team check-ins
- consistent implementation of accommodations and supports

When staff feel aligned and supported, students often experience greater consistency throughout the school day.

Supporting Meaningful Inclusion

Inclusive practices are most effective when students are provided with:

- access to grade-level instruction and peers
- appropriate accommodations and supports
- opportunities for participation and engagement
- consistent expectations across environments
- support that promotes independence whenever possible

Meaningful inclusion involves both access and belonging.

Practical Classroom Support Strategies

School teams may benefit from:

- visual supports and clear routines
- chunking tasks and directions
- flexible participation options
- organizational and executive functioning supports
- structured peer interaction opportunities
- proactive communication systems among staff

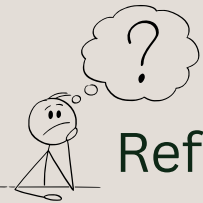
Small instructional and environmental adjustments can significantly improve student access and participation.

Creating Consistency Across Settings

Students often experience greater success when:

- expectations remain predictable
- accommodations are implemented consistently
- staff use shared language and strategies
- transitions between settings are well-supported
- communication systems are clear across team members

Consistency helps reduce confusion and supports stronger student regulation, engagement, and independence.



Reflection Questions for Teams

- Are collaboration systems consistent across staff teams?
- Do staff feel confident implementing accommodations and supports?
- How are inclusive practices being supported throughout the school day?
- What systems could improve communication and consistency?
- Are students experiencing meaningful participation and belonging across settings?



Planning Reminder

Inclusive practices are strengthened through collaboration, consistency, and shared responsibility. When teams work together proactively, schools are better positioned to support both student success and staff confidence throughout the school year.



Professional Development Planning Guide

Effective professional development is most impactful when it is practical, collaborative, and aligned with the real needs staff are experiencing within classrooms and school environments.

As districts plan for summer learning opportunities and back-to-school preparation, identifying priority areas and creating intentional support plans can help strengthen implementation, staff confidence, and long-term consistency across teams.

Identifying Priority Areas

District teams may consider:

- Where staff are currently needing the most support
- Which systems feel inconsistent across classrooms or programs
- Areas where staff confidence may need strengthening
- Student needs that are continuing to increase or evolve
- Opportunities to improve collaboration and communication across teams

Professional development is often most effective when it directly connects to day-to-day implementation and practical classroom application.

Common PD Focus Areas

District Need	Potential Professional Development Topics
Paraeducator support	Roles & responsibilities, prompting strategies, team communication
Student behavior support	Proactive strategies, de-escalation, regulation support
Inclusion practices	Co-teaching, accommodations, collaborative systems
Executive functioning needs	Organization, task initiation, classroom supports
Staff consistency	Shared systems, communication, implementation practices
Classroom support strategies	Visual supports, routines, engagement strategies
New staff onboarding	Foundational systems, expectations, student support practices
Team collaboration	Communication systems, problem-solving, role clarity

Questions to Consider During Planning

- What are the biggest barriers staff are currently experiencing?
- Which teams would benefit most from additional support or training?
- What systems could improve consistency across classrooms or programs?
- How will strategies be reinforced after initial training?
- What supports will help staff sustain implementation throughout the school year?

Supporting Long-Term Success

Professional development often has the greatest impact when districts prioritize:

- practical implementation strategies
- opportunities for collaboration and discussion
- ongoing support and follow-up
- alignment across staff teams
- realistic and sustainable expectations

Training is most effective when staff leave with tools, systems, and strategies they can confidently apply within their daily work.



Planning Reminder

Meaningful professional development supports both staff well-being and student success. Small, intentional improvements in systems, collaboration, and staff preparedness can create lasting positive impacts throughout the school year.



Summer & Back-to-School Planning Worksheet

Use the planning prompts below to help identify priority areas, staff support needs, and professional development goals for the upcoming school year.

This worksheet may be used individually or during team planning conversations.

Identifying Current Needs

What are the biggest areas of need currently impacting staff or student support?

Which staff groups may benefit from additional support or training?

- ☐ General education staff
- ☐ Special education staff
- ☐ Paraeducators
- ☐ Related service providers
- ☐ Building administrators
- ☐ New staff members
- ☐ District-wide teams

Other: _____

Student Support Priorities

Which student support areas are currently creating the greatest challenges?

- ☐ Behavior regulation support
- ☐ Executive functioning support
- ☐ Inclusion & accommodations
- ☐ Communication/social skills
- ☐ Transition support
- ☐ Classroom engagement
- ☐ Staff consistency across settings
- ☐ Collaboration between teams

Other: _____

Professional Development Priorities

What professional development topics would be most beneficial for staff this year?

Preferred Training Format

- ☐ In-person training
- ☐ Virtual live training
- ☐ Hybrid format
- ☐ Ongoing coaching/support
- ☐ Short workshops
- ☐ Full-day training

Systems & Collaboration Reflection

What systems are currently working well within your teams? What areas could benefit from greater consistency or support?

Looking Ahead

What outcomes would you most like to see for staff and students this upcoming school year?



Planning Reminder

Strong systems are built through collaboration, consistency, and intentional planning. Identifying areas of need early can help teams create more proactive, sustainable support systems throughout the school year.



Additional Resources & Planning Supports

The following resources may support district teams as they prepare for the upcoming school year and continue strengthening systems for staff, students, and families.

Washington State Resources

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

Washington State OSPI provides guidance and resources related to:

- special education services
- inclusion practices
- student behavior support
- family engagement
- MTSS and intervention systems
- professional development planning

Resource Link:

<https://ospi.k12.wa.us/student-success/resources-subject-area>

Professional Development & Team Planning Resources

District teams may benefit from creating or reviewing:

- staff onboarding systems
- paraeducator support plans
- communication protocols
- classroom support frameworks
- collaboration structures between teams
- behavior response procedures
- accommodation implementation systems

Consider identifying:

- areas of strength currently in place
- systems needing additional consistency
- opportunities for ongoing staff support and coaching

Helpful Classroom Support Tools

Examples of practical supports that may benefit classrooms and programs include:

- visual schedules and routines
- calm-down or regulation spaces
- executive functioning supports
- reinforcement systems
- communication supports
- transition planning tools
- structured collaboration systems

Simple, consistent systems often create the greatest long-term impact for both students and staff.

Supporting Staff Wellness & Sustainability

Strong student support systems are built through supported staff teams. Districts may consider:

- creating time for collaboration
- providing practical implementation support
- prioritizing realistic expectations
- strengthening communication systems
- building ongoing opportunities for problem-solving and coaching

Supporting staff well-being can improve consistency, retention, and long-term success across programs and classrooms.



Supporting District Teams Through Practical Professional Development

At BECS, we partner with schools and districts to provide practical, collaborative professional development designed to support staff confidence, strengthen team consistency, and improve student outcomes.

We understand that every district has unique priorities, strengths, and challenges. Our approach focuses on providing meaningful, staff-centered support that is realistic, sustainable, and immediately applicable within classroom and school environments.

Areas of Professional Development Support

- Behavior support & de-escalation strategies
- Paraeducator training & team consistency
- Inclusive practices & accommodations
- Executive functioning & classroom supports
- Staff collaboration systems
- Classroom routines & proactive supports
- Communication & problem-solving strategies
- New staff onboarding support
- Customized district training opportunities

Our Approach

We believe professional development is most effective when it is:

- ✓ Practical & immediately usable
- ✓ Collaborative & supportive
- ✓ Tailored to district and staff needs
- ✓ Focused on sustainable implementation
- ✓ Centered around real classroom experiences

Connect With Us

We would love to learn more about your district's goals, priorities, and professional development needs as you prepare for the upcoming school year.

Website:

www.becswa.com

Phone:

(509) 415-9288

Professional Development Interest & Feedback Survey:

<https://forms.gle/L5Hu2T5ZFinv78vx7>

“Prepared Teams. Consistent Support. Successful School Years.”