# Paths for Change: The Systemic Change Framework and Inclusive Schools

BY ELIZABETH KOZLESKI, DIANNE FERGUSON, and ANNE SMITH

## The Legacy of Inclusion

The mission and activities of TASH members over the past 30 years have sought to achieve inclusive school and community living for children and adults with disabilities in the United States and around the world. Together, we have learned that children and youth with disabilities, including those with significant disabilities, can participate and learn in general education classrooms. We have learned that general and special educators can adjust their roles and reorganize their practice to provide all students with ongoing supports for learning through inclusive education. These efforts have helped many families ensure that their sons and daughters go to neighborhood schools with their nondisabled peers. We have learned that access, participation, and progress in the general education curriculum improve the lite chances of students with disabilities to Live and work in the community

Unfortunately, we have also learned that some of these gains erode over time. School improvement activities may fade when the external support from government grant initiatives or private foundation funding ends. In other cases, when students move on to a new school, the sometimes hard won gains disappear or fail to transfer to other students. Teachers and school administrators who have been advocates of inclusive schooling may move on, and their legacies gradually fade and are forgotten.

The cycle of change may need to be renewed and invigorated by parents who might not have the social, economic or cultural capital to demand inclusive educational experiences with the same urgency and passion as the parents who came before. Ultimately, parents should not need to shoulder this burden, but they must do it again and again because their children's lives depend on it.

In contrast, we have also learned that while some gains have limited impact on individual students, they grow in their importance by influencing policy changes in the larger school or district organization to make further change and improvement possible in the future. These scenarios include improved ways of providing professional development to helping special and general education teachers collaborate. These structural strategies improve the professional culture of a school and, over time, improve results for children because the adults learn to work in teams, blending their expertise.

Still other strategies, like legal remedies, may have lasting impact on a set of students and their families, but fail to be sustained because they complicate or over-regulate the relationship between families and professionals. So families and professionals meet and become acquainted using processes designed to ensure collaboration. But the processes can create strained relationships, with more attention to the form than function.

At the same time, families have little time. Third grade (or first, or tenth) happens once for any single child. Unacceptable educational options for any student cannot await the slow evolutions many substantive change efforts must take. Individual advocacy on behalf of a single student can succeed for that student, we know, but leave little in its wake.

Legal decisions produce unintended as well as intended results. *Brown v. the Board of Education* is an example. Although the original decision was designed to provide equitable educational opportunities for students of color, *Brown's* school desegregation orders created many unexpected and unintended consequences.

Private schools sprang up in many areas. "White flight" to the suburbs created another way of segregating students. Tracking and the overrepresentation of minority students in special education were other vehicles for segregation.

We have also learned that change in school districts toward more inclusive practices has occurred unevenly across the United States. From 1987 to 2000, twenty-four states received statewide systems change grants to move students with disabilities from segregated schools to integrated schools, from separate classrooms to integrated school experiences, and to inclusive classrooms.

Despite the statewide emphasis, many of the most successful examples occurred in rural or suburban school systems, or in communities where the collective efforts of educators and family members created a focus on changing the educational experiences of students with disabilities. The magnitude of this discrepancy in implementation of inclusive education practices is illustrated in the *Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA.*

Consider that, by the late 1990s, roughly half of the students in a "typical" school receiving special education services spend at least 80% of their time in general education classrooms. This means that of the approximately six million students who receive special education services, about three million still spend at least half of their school time in special education classrooms and schools. However, in our 100 largest, urban districts more than 80% place the largest percentage of their students with IEPs in resource rooms, separate classes, and separate schools. Furthermore, students from ethnic and cultural minorities and living in poverty continue to be significantly

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overrepresented in special education. There is much work to be done to make inclusive schools the norm rather than extraordinary -- especially in urban schools.

Educational alignment, systemic change, and sustainabilitv of research-based practice coexist in a dynamic state — stirred by individual fervor and occasional champions, liven the best examples of multi-level, coherent, and orchestrated change are vulnerable in the face of goliath school systems that operate in the context of highly public debate concerning accountability, safety concerns, management of human resources, and use of public funds.

Fundamental change in social institutions (and inclusive education in inclusive systems *is* fundamental change) is complex, difficult work and requires significant time to install and become sell-sustaining. More than 100 years of educational history provide a context tor deeply embedded assumptions about schooling, disability, and learning. Rearranging those assumptions is difficult work, and requires systemic approaches.

### A New Call to Action

Despite nearly 30 years of effort, we have not vet succeeded in creating inclusive schooling experiences for everybody, everywhere, all the time. This must be our most urgent agenda. How should we proceed?

### A Framework for School Systems

We need a common framework for understanding the change work that we do. The framework must be grounded in the system that we seek to change: public education, For the last seven years, the National Institute has used the Systemic Change Framework to guide its practice in schools (see Figure 1). It helps our district, school, family and practitioner partners understand what part of the system a particular strategy may target. It reminds us all that the core of our work must be successful learning results for students. The

framework reminds us that schools' systems are products of the communities and the families that live there. In the framework, family and community involvement are embedded actions at the district, school and professional levels.

Each element of the framework defines the arenas in which leadership needs to emerge at that level. For instance, districts need to ensure that policies are developed and implemented that help individual schools make the best use of all the resources in a particular building. Schools need to be organized in ways that create space for teachers to have time to plan and learn together. Professionals need to understand and implement robust processes for assessing and teaching their students. Different types of activities and different roles for people are highlighted in each of the levels of the framework. Such complex contexts require that strategies are differentiated, complementary, and coherent in order to leverage continuous change and improvement.

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### The Need for Systemic Change

Changing complex systems, sustaining, and scaling the change up are vital if inclusive schooling is to become the benchmark tor practice. Thus, our work must be systemic, strategic, and networked. It our efforts are successful, we can point to large, urban school systems where students with disabilities are welcomed into all buildings in a district and offered a rich and engaging curriculum with their non-disabled peers. An innovation becomes systemic when incorporated into ongoing school policy and practice by school personnel without external intervention.

# SYSTEMIC CHANGE FRAMEWORK
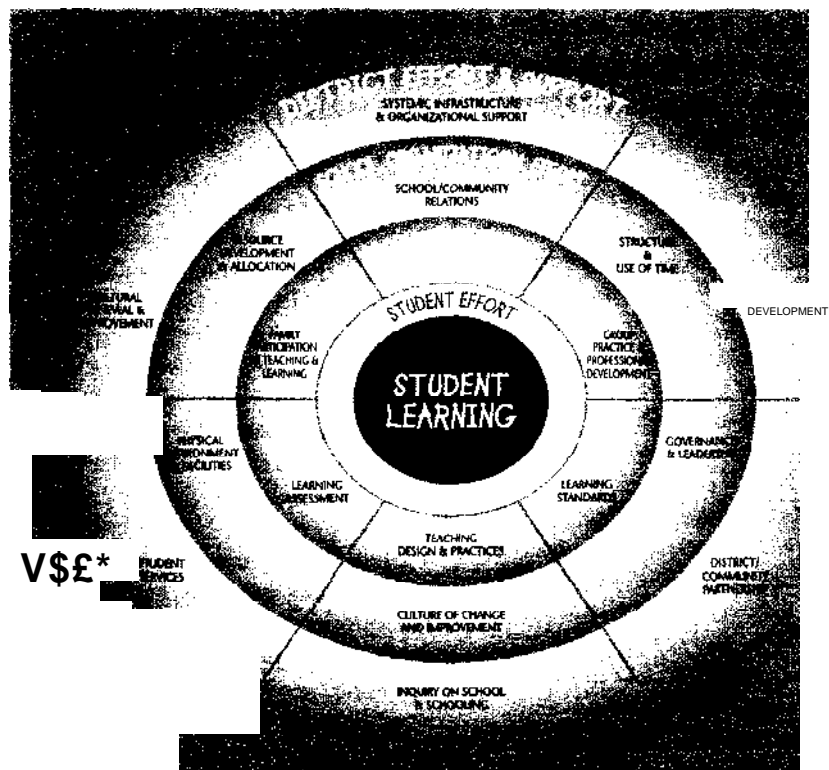
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Currently, we have families that are confronted with the need to educate their schools about inclusive policy and practice when they request educational services that are mandated by law (e.g, the IDEA provisions regarding least restrictive environment, comprehensive systems of personnel development, use of supplementary aides and services, incidental benefit - permissive use of funds, etc.). School improvement and change efforts in these districts are often disjointed and reactive, rather than thoughtful, strategic and coherent. As long as we have families that need to educate their schools and demand services that are guaranteed by law, and teach teachers to teach their children, we do not have systemic change.

**What is systemic change?**
In general, systemic change requires catalysts that create a situation that requires response. Catalysts can be families, children, advocates, researchers, court orders, new laws or other events that disturb the flow of events within a system. Sometimes a catalyst provides an opportunity to repackage an idea and make it more palatable to a system.

*Stasis.* Systems thrive because of stasis. Where statis occurs, a cyclical process is installed, perpetuates itself, and the energy to maintain the process is stasis. Because systems seek stasis, they also resist elements that may cause the process to reinvent or transform itself. This is true of ecological systems and it is true in human systems. Think about the flow of drivers on the highway or the flow of customers in a grocery line. When unusual events occur, gridlock ensues until someone figures how to work around the problem to get things back to the way they were. And the process can continue to cycle until an innovation is introduced like self-checkout at the grocery store or the use of traffic circles to keep traffic flowing at a crossroads instead of traffic lights that cause traffic to come to a stand still, Capital. Human, social, and economic

capital is essential fuel for any human system. The capacities that families and professionals bring to their work or their advocacy, their knowledge base, their own understanding of systems and how to access them, all these resources can benefit or impede the ability of individuals to receive services or make change. The freedom with which capital is exchanged can also compromise or accelerate change.

*Power.* Individuals hold and exercise power when they make decisions that impact the lives of others. In most social systems, there are some individuals who are advantaged when they exercise power. They typically have achieved greater social status because of some mix of factors that in the U.S. include socioeconomic, ethnic, linguistic, religious, intellectual or athletic assets along with appearance and social skills. In the United States, there are some individuals that gain access to many environments simply because of assumptions based on their appearance. Power permits certain kinds of activities and it allows some families to gain access and others to be marginalized.

*Networks.* Systems that are networked have stronger potential to change. That is, people who operate at different rings within the system have an advantage in moving an agenda forward if they communicate and maintain solidarity.

*Delivery-* How innovation is delivered — in what form and to whom — is critical for innovation to be effective. The clearest examples of this are found in community medicine. For instance, preventing deaths on the highway as a result of drunk driving is a large social and safety problem in the U. S. Prohibiting drinking would be very difficult to achieve. The dilemma for public health and safety policy is to determine what can be done to change behavior.

One recent idea that has caught on through media, marketing and public health announcements is that of the "designated driver." This emphasis on ensuring that the driver doesn't drink is thought to have reduced the incidence of drunk driving, along with stiffer penalties, including jail sentences. Some solutions may be reasonable but not

feasible because they are almost impossible to implement. The same solution, abstinence, repackaged as a designated driver, offers a more palatable option. Thus, the delivery of a message is critical to its success.

One of our more influential leaders of change, Michael Fullan, is fond of saving that change is bottom-up and top-down. For us, that means work the systemic change framework from the outside-in and the inside-out, making sure that students, families, teachers, school leaders and district administrators work together on the simultaneous transformation of all levels of the system. The accompanying articles provide examples or change efforts that are occurring on multiple levels of the systemic change system.

Before each article, we have provided a commentary that links the article back to the systemic change system. We invite you to link to the National Institute tor Urban School Improvement (www.inclusiveschools.org). National Inclusive Schools Week (which occurs the first full week in December) will be successful because people like you take the time to engage your communities and celebrate the work that has been done. Please be in touch. Let us know about your successes and your challenges. We have begun a new feature on our website to tell your stories.

*The National Institute for Urban School Improvement staff include Elizabeth B. Kozleski, Director and Co-Principal Investigator, University of Colorado, Denver; Dianne L. Ferguson, Director, Family/School Linkages, University of Oregon; and Anne Smith, Project Officer, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education.*

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# Systems Change in Los Angeles

## BY MARY A. FALVEY

*The experience of the LoS Angeles school system provides an example of how court mandated change can galvanize a system for change. To make changes in systems like Los Angeles is similar to piloting an ocean liner, Every tarn requires advanced preparation and precise implementation accomplished long before the actual results are observable. As Mary Falrey tells as here, once outcomes are established, multiple strategies at the district, school, practitioner and family levels are needed to achieve desired results. This story from Los Angeles reminds us that systemic change occurs as a result of simultaneous, aligned strategies.*

In 1995, a class action lawsuit on behalf of all students with disabilities, *Chanda Smith v. Los Angeles Unified School District,* challenged the special education system of the Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD). As a result of the lawsuit, ludge Laughlin Waters ordered the Chanda Smith Consent Decree in 1996, which was a negotiated settlement agreement by both the district and the parents.

The Chandra Smith consent decree is notable because of the scope of the decree and the size of the system that needs to respond. The I.AUSD is the second largest district in the United States, serving more than 1% of the nation's school students (i.e., 7 40,000 students) in more than 900 school buildings.

Approximately 80.000 LAUSD students, 11% of the total student population, have been identified as eligible for special education. The LAUSD employs approximately 36,000 teachers, 4,600 of them are special educators.

Changing practices in such a system is a monumental task. Yet, not making these changes is unaccceptable and unethical. Consent decrees can be an important tool that helps large systems insist on changes that they may have difficulty implementing through more conventional approaches. W hile systems may not welcome this kind of intrusive intervention initially, they are often able to use the requirements to leverage much needed changes.

Like many large, bureaucratic school systems, the LAUSD had an extensive history of non-compliance with federal and state regulations tor delivering special education services to students with disabilities. The United States Department of Education, the United States Office tor Civil Rights, and the California State Department of Education have all found the LAUSD out of compliance with current law. In addition, parents of students with disabilities often became exasperated and discouraged in their efforts to secure appropriate supports and services for their sons and daughters with disabilities. Teachers, both special and general education, expressed concerns about the lack of supports, resources and guidance they did not receive in order to effectively educate students with disabilities.

Eight years after the original decree was issued, a modified consent decree was agreed upon in 2003 and is currently being implemented. The modified consent decree is intended to be a vehicle to bring the District into compliance with federal and state laws governing the educational rights of students with disabilities. The modified consent decree must be achieved by |une, 2006, and includes outcomes that have both short and long term effects. The consent decree addresses assessment, outcomes, behavior, the identification and placement of students with disabilities, educational planning and delivery, parent involvement and an adequate supply of qualified teachers. The 17 specific outcomes are listed below.

### Assessment

1. All students with disabilities participate in the statewide assessment program
2. An increase in the performance of'' students with disabilities in the statewide assessment program

### Outcomes

3. An increase in the graduation rate for students with disabilities of at least 5% each year of the modified consent decree
4. An increase in the number of students that receive a certificate of completion or age out of school

### Behavior

5. Reduction of the long-term suspensions of students with disabilities
6. Ensure that for students whose behavior impedes their learning, positive behavior interventions and supports and other strategies are considered by their IEP teams to address such behaviors

### Identification and Placement of Students with Disabilities

7. Reduction in the percentage of students placed in specific learning disabilities and speech and language impaired categories
8. Reduction in the percentage of students identified in other disabilities categories
9. Increase the attendance of students with disabilities in their "Home School"
10. Increase the timely completion of evaluations for initial referrals to special education

### Educational Planning and Delivery

1 1. Increase the number of students, ages 14 and older, who receive an individualized transition plan

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12. Decrease the complaint response time
13. Improve the delivery of services indicated on students' IEPs

*Parent Involvement*
14. Increase parent participation
15. Increase timely completion of translations of students' IEPS
16. Determine it the outstanding IEP translations are still requested by parents

*Adequate Numbers of Qualified Teachers*
17. Increase the number of qualified regular and special education teachers

Overarching these outcomes is the provision of tree and appropriate educational services for students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment (LRE). To address these 17 outcomes, the District has designed and implemented several strategies that provide concrete examples of the array of reform strategies that need to be implemented simultaneously: leadership, site coaching, professional development, model development, school improvement planning, and support for collaboration among general and special education teachers.

*New leadership in the Division of Special Education at the LAUSD.* Dr. Donalyn Anton is currently providing much needed leadership to the Division and is well integrated into the administrative structure in the District as a whole. Her work and leadership have brought the needs of students with disabilities to district level discussions and planning.

*Establishment of LRE Support Teams.* The teams consist of both special and general educators with successful experience at including students with disabilities in general education settings. These support teams provide guidance, technical assistance and support to individual schools in their provision of LRE.

*Awareness Level Training for all personnel.* In order to accomplish this, a training compact

disc (CD) was developed and distributed to each school in the district. The CD provided a brief overview of the federal laws governing the education of students with disabilities, focusing on the responsibilities of school personnel. In addition, the CD provided educators with research based strategies for effectively including students with disabilities. A series of vignettes describing students with a variety of different disabilities was included which provided opportunities for faculty to engage in dialogue and brainstorming on how to effectively include students with disabilities in general education settings.

*Integrate the needs of students with disabilities into all staff development activities throughout the district.* For example, rather than designing a reading staff development program, the staff in the Division of Special Education work closely with those in general education to design and implement staff development activities that address the reading needs of all students.

*Development of LRE Site Plans.* These plans require that each school site analyze the resources, services and provision of LRE at their school and design an action plan for improving the provision of LRE at their school site (the LRE Support Teams are available to assist schools when analyzing their existing service delivery models and when designing their action plans). Mini-grants were awarded to schools that initiated early steps to improve the provision of LRE in order to support their efforts.

*Establishment of collaborative models where special and general education teachers work together.* This has required staff development and arranging for team meetings with these collaborative teams.

*Educate and empower IEP teams to create solutions for students with disabilities rather than relying on "specialists" at the district level, not familiar with the expertise and resources at the school site level.* This does not mean specialists cannot consult with schools, but the outcome is to build capacity at the local school sites for LRE.

*Establish new schools that are committed to collaborative and inclusive models.* Several new schools have emerged that provide examples of such collaborative and inclusive models (e.g., MacArthur Park Primary Center, Otis Elementary, and CHIME Charter School).

The changes in LAUSD, although slow in coming and not always apparent, have made a difference in lives of students, parents, teachers and administrators. Some schools have embraced these changes, and have grown so that they can make positive differences in the lives of all their students, both with and without disabilities. Other schools have been slower to embrace such changes. However, since the consent decree has outcomes tied to timelines and a monitor assigned by the federal court, the changes are inevitable. Practices initiated by the LAUSD or instigated by the modified consent decree support a focused effort towards inclusive education that is grounded in sound educational practices as well as federal and state laws.

Moving toward more inclusive educational opportunities for students with disabilities involves complex change, particularly in a goliath system like the LAUSD. A tremendous amount of work remains to be done to bring the LAUSD into compliance with federal and state mandates. The Chanda Smith Modified Consent Decree provides a path for change in the LAUSD and other urban school districts. This path for change, combined with new leadership, skill development, resource allocation, accountability, and site-based planning, makes me hopeful that this will result in improved programs, services, and outcomes for students and their families.

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