

# **ADVOCACY AND ALLYSHIP**

Creating Positive Learning Environments for Students with Autism



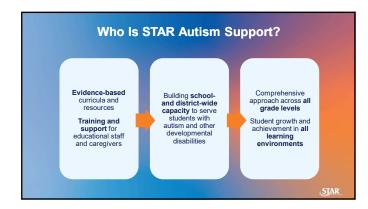
**ROOM L026** Friday March 3rd, 2023 10:30 AM – 11:30 AM



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# What Is an Ally?

#### Allyship involves:

- \* Supporting others to promote a common interest
- ★ Recognizing prejudice and discrimination
- ★ Being willing to act with and for others to pursue equity and inclusion



# **Group Discussion**

#### Share out:

\* What comes to mind when you think of **allyship** in relation to individuals with autism and other developmental disabilities?



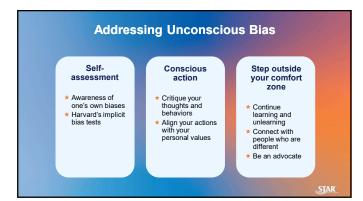


# **Attitude Affects Behavior**

- Self-awareness is a crucial first step to being an ally or advocate!
- ★ Being aware of one's own thoughts, actions, beliefs, attitudes—and whether they align with your personal values.









# Allyship Practice: Battling Microaggressions

#### What is a microaggression?

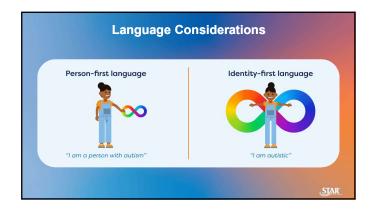
- \* Brief, everyday indignities that people experience from generally well-intentioned individuals
- ★ These are often indicators of implicit bias

# **Microaggression Scenario**

- ★ A father is at the grocery store with his teenaged son when he runs into his coworker.
- The coworker says hello while giving a sidelong look at the teenager, who is rocking and clapping his hands. The dad says, "This is my son Adam. He has autism."
- \* "Oh, I LOVE the movie *Rainman*!" says the coworker, "What's your kid's superpower? Is he a math genius?"

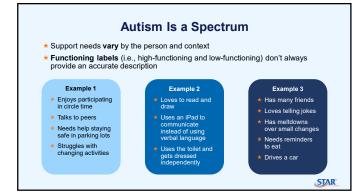
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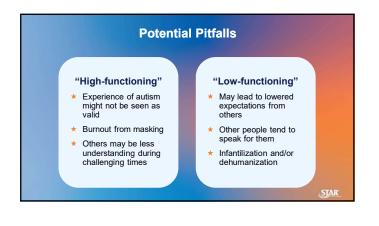


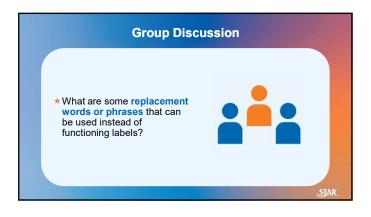


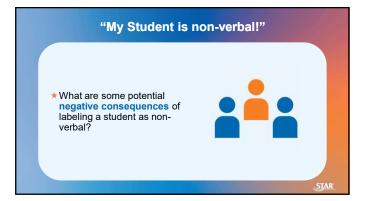












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# **Everybody Communicates!**

★ Non-verbal ≠ the student doesn't communicate

★ Non-verbal ≠ the student can't understand you

- ★ Non-verbal  $\neq$  the student is unable to learn
- ★ Non-verbal  $\neq$  we lower our expectations

Communication is crucial for independence and agency over one's life!

# **Communication Is a Right**

Not every autistic person can talk, but we all have important things to say. Autistic Self-Advocacy Network (ASAN)

n j c National Joint Committee for the Communication Needs of Persons With Severe Disabilities (NJC)		
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6. The right to make comments and share openions	_	
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<ol> <li>The right to have clear, meaningful, and culturally and imputatioally appropriate communications</li> </ol>		
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# Alternative and Augmentative Communication

- ★ Many individuals with autism or developmental disabilities use **AAC** to communicate.
- Model and encourage the use of AAC in the classroom—all day long!
- Partner with families and caregivers to consider which options are accessible and how to incorporate communication opportunities in multiple settings.

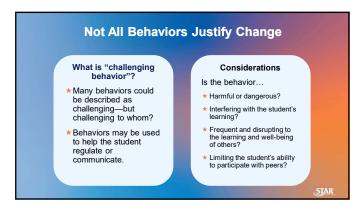


# Let's Talk About Behavior

"If only you knew how challenging **your** behavior is for **me**... wearing perfume, not saying what you mean."

> Dr. Wenn Lawson Autistic advocate, psychologist, researcher, writer, speaker

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#### **Interpreting Behavior as Communication**

When a concerning behavior occurs, ask yourself:

- ★ What is the student trying to **communicate**?
- ★ What is the **function**?
- \* Is this a **self-regulating** behavior?
- \* Is this a **meltdown** or a tantrum?
- How can I respond in a way that won't sacrifice my relationship with the student?

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# Keys to Success: Behavior

- \* Focus on teaching new, socially significant skills instead of behavior reduction and compliance.
- \* Make the **environment** fit the student—not the other way around!
- Behaviors are not a barrier to instruction—they are the purpose behind it.



### **The Assets-Based Approach**

- Focus on strengths (assets) instead of challenges (deficits)
- ★ Believe that all students are capable of learning maintain high expectations
- \* Embrace differences
- ★ Build **positive** relationships





# Meaningful Inclusion

"Diversity is being invited to the party, and inclusion is being asked to dance."

> Amy Gravino Award-winning writer, speaker, and autistic advocate

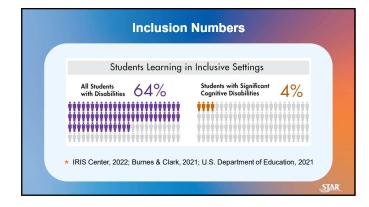
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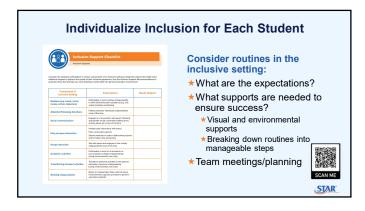
### What Is Inclusion?

#### **Inclusive Schools Network:**

"Simply stated, inclusive education means that all students are **full and accepted members of their school community**, in which their educational setting is the **same** as their non-disabled peers, whenever appropriate."













# Do With, Not For

- ★ Empowers students to be **active participants** in the classroom and gives **meaning** to daily activities
- ★ Provides opportunities for communication, preferences, decision-making, and self-determination
- Allows participation by all students at different levels (maximum independence)
- Decreases frustration and confusion—provides a sense of accomplishment

# Tips for Doing "With"



- Involve the student in all phases of a task
   Getting and arranging materials, doing the task, and cleaning up
- Keep materials in consistent and easily accessible locations
- ★ Follow the student's lead
  - ★ Set a pace that is appropriate for the student
     ★ Be a careful observer
- $\star$  Allow plenty of processing time (wait time)

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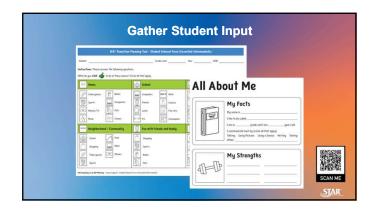
#### Advocacy Begets Self-Advocacy

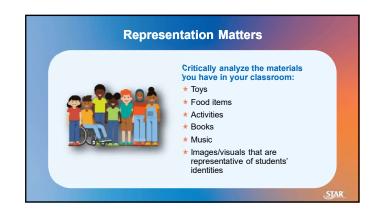
#### What is self-advocacy?

\* "An individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions." (VanReusen et al., 1994)

Be a voice—but not "their" voice!

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### Peer Modeling Is Powerful

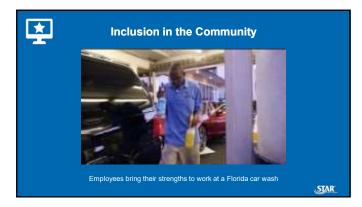
- ★ Train peers how to initiate and respond during social opportunities.
- \* Pair students with peers who are willing to participate, socially skilled, and regularly available.
- Teach in both structured and schoolwide settings.

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# Caregiver Collaboration

- ★ Develop partnerships with families—understand and navigate barriers
- \* Be respectful of cultural differences
- ★ Provide training and coaching to caregivers
- Provide supports for home use





# Wrapping Up

- ★ Being an ally or advocate begins with self-awareness and a willingness to challenge biases.
- \* We can be advocates by using respectful language, honoring communication as a right, and using an assets-based approach.
- Meaningful inclusion requires purposeful skill-building, teamwork, and community involvement.



