



Arizona's 2026 IDEA Conference

Stronger Systems, Better Outcomes—for Every Student

Wednesday, August 19, 2026

Individualized Session Tracks

We are excited to offer conference attendees six session tracks. If you are not sure which session to attend, our key can assist you.

Sessions marked with:



Saguaro: Youth/young adults



Pathway: Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS)



Adobe Home: Parents and family members



Desert Wildflower: Early Childhood Special Education professionals



Compass: Special Education Directors



Arizona Sun: Academic and inclusionary practices

7:00–9:00 a.m. | Registration, Opening Remarks and Awards

7:00–8:30 a.m. Registration
 Arizona Ballroom Foyer

7:00–8:30 a.m. Breakfast Buffet
 Arizona Ballroom Foyer

8:30–8:45 a.m. Opening Remarks

Arizona Ballroom

8:45–9:00 a.m. Presentation of Secondary Transition Services Awards

Arizona Ballroom

9:00–9:15 a.m. | Break, Vendor/Exhibitor Hall Open

9:15–10:30 a.m. | Keynote Addresses

Professional Keynote Address

Special Education Year in Review: Key Case Trends in the Law 🕒

Join Attorney Brandon K. Wright to hear about recent updates and trends in special education cases from around the country that are important for all educators: Child Find, discipline and behavior, compliant IEPs, Section 504, and other vital special education issues. Brandon will share his tips and strategies for avoiding legal missteps while offering an overview of important recent IDEA decisions. By using case law from around the U.S., filtered through the lens of an experienced special education attorney, you will walk away with a renewed clarity about your legal obligations – and the confidence to keep focused on ensuring your district’s actions are legal, efficient, and effective!

Presenter: Brandon K. Wright

Room: Arizona Ballroom

Youth and Family Keynote Address

Self-Advocacy That Works, Speak Up with Confidence 🌵 🏠 🗨️

A practical keynote that teaches youth how to communicate needs, set boundaries, and advocate for accommodations without apology.

Key themes:

- The difference between “asking” and “advocating”

- Language that builds respect and clarity
- How to handle pushbacks and stay grounded
- What should youth know before college, training, or employment?

Presenter: Winston Clements

Room: Vaquero ABC

Early Childhood Special Education Keynote Address

You're the Inspiration

For too many children, struggling to read can shape the course of their future, impacting academic success, career opportunities, and overall quality of life. Malcolm Mitchell understands this reality on a deeply personal level. What once felt like a barrier became a bridge to opportunity, confidence, and endless possibility. Through determination and resilience, Malcolm transformed a lifelong struggle into a powerful strength, paving the way for extraordinary achievements as a college graduate, bestselling author, entrepreneur, literacy advocate, and Super Bowl champion.

In this inspiring and empowering presentation, Malcolm weaves together themes of perseverance, self-empowerment, cultural relevance, and the belief that reading is a true superpower. He challenges audiences to imagine what is possible when every child has the tools to succeed.

At the heart of Malcolm's message is a powerful reminder for educators: you matter more than you know. Teachers are often the spark that helps a child discover their potential, the steady voice that builds confidence, and the caring adult who refuses to give up when learning feels difficult. Every lesson taught, every relationship built, and every word of encouragement offered can influence a student's future in ways that last a lifetime.

Malcolm's call to action is clear: continue believing in every child, create opportunities for meaningful literacy experiences, and recognize the extraordinary impact you have on student success. Educators leave renewed in purpose, energized by possibility, and reminded that they are not simply teaching children to read; they are opening doors, shaping futures, and helping write stories of success that extend far beyond the classroom.

Presenter: Malcolm Mitchell

Room: Arroyo C-E

10:30–10:45 a.m. | Break, Vendor/Exhibitor Hall Open

*First Floor***After the MDR: Problem Solving for Behavior and Discipline Issues Under the IDEA** 🕒

What happens when behavior is a manifestation of a student's disability? What are the next steps to meet the student's needs when returning to the placement identified in the IEP? What steps should a district take when behavior continues to occur? What documentation is needed at that point in time? This session will review the key implications of MDR decisions, required next steps related to behavior and discipline including FBAs and BIPs, and how the IDEA shapes school decisions related to discipline.

Presenter: Brandon K. Wright

Room: Arizona Ballroom

Accessible Tech Habits for School and Independence 🌵🏡🏠

A tactical session that helps youth build habits and workflows that reduce friction in school and digital spaces.

Interactive elements:

- Everyday accessibility habits for documents, communication, and collaboration
- Tools and settings that support reading, writing, attention, and executive functioning
- Optional segment: Responsible AI support for learning and communication

Outcomes

Participants can expect to leave with:

- Clear strategies to speak up, set boundaries, and request accommodation with confidence.
- Practical tools to navigate school and transition moments (recent programs, college, training, employment).
- A strengths-based mindset to stay resilient through setbacks, feedback, and change.
- Everyday tech and AI habits that remove barriers and support reading, writing, focus, and communication

Presenter(s): Winston Clements

Room: Vaquero ABC

Your Roadmap to High-Quality IDEA Data: Leveraging the PEA Data Processes Toolkit



Are your PEA's data processes clearly documented and consistently followed? Ensuring IDEA data is timely, accurate, valid, and reliable is essential—and the PEA Data Processes Toolkit can help. This customizable toolkit guides PEAs in defining, strengthening, and documenting data processes, improving data quality, and supporting better outcomes for students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Peggy Staples, Mark Vite, Heidi Sinkovic, and Devon Rothlisberger

Room: Vaquero F1–F2

Assistive Technology in Action: A Hands-On Lab

This highly interactive session invites participants into a hands-on Assistive Technology Lab where they rotate through exploration stations focused on routines across the school day. Attendees will discover practical low-tech, mid-tech, and high-tech assistive technology solutions that increase student access and independence.

Presenter(s): Doug Cutler, Emily Gaylord, Laura Wooten-LaFranier, and Mitch Galbraith

Room: Vaquero G1–G2

Second Floor

Determining Eligibility for Alternate Assessment: A Collaborative Decision



This session explores how collaborative IEP teams can make sound alternate assessment decisions aligned with federal guidance and student needs. Participants will examine eligibility criteria, common misconceptions, compliance risks, and strategies that strengthen team decision-making.

Presenter(s): Bethany Spangenberg

Room: Arroyo C–E

Turning 18 Legal Options 🏠🌵🕒

This workshop provides families and professionals with an overview of guardianship, Supported Decision-Making, Social Security, Selective Service requirements, and educational rights transfers that occur at age 18. Participants will learn how to evaluate options that support independence and informed decision-making.

Presenter(s): Kathy Gray-Mangerson and Sarah Dorman

Room: Dunes AB

The Pyramid Model Big 5 Preschool Strategies #3: Routines within Routines 🌱

Participants will learn how breaking daily activities into predictable, intentional routines can reduce challenging behavior and increase positive outcomes, growth, and independence for preschool learners.

Presenter(s): Christine Burnett and Kristen Quenelle

Room: Hyatt

Adolescent Literacy Supports for All Content Areas (Grades 6–12) ☀️

This session provides evidence-based literacy supports for reading, writing, discussion, and vocabulary development across content areas. Participants will leave with practical tools and routines that increase access, engagement, and achievement for students with disabilities and all learners.

Presenter(s): Jill Scott and Lauren Spenceley

Room: Markland

Inclusive by Design: High Expectations ☀️

Grounded in High-Leverage Practice 16, this session explores how explicit instruction, scaffolded supports, and active engagement routines help students with disabilities access grade-level content and achieve success in inclusive settings.

Presenter(s): Jodi Walker and Chelsey Branham

Room: Sonoran AB

12:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m. | Lunch

1:00–2:15 p.m. | Concurrent Sessions

First Floor

High Probability Strategies for Prevention Student Misbehavior in the Classroom

This session focuses on teacher-based strategies for developing and maintaining classroom environments that increase the probability of student success with academics and behavior. Participants will learn practical approaches related to instruction, classroom management, and teacher-student interactions.

Presenter(s): Dr. Terrance Scott

Room: Vaquero ABC

Partnering with Encircle Families, Arizona’s Parent Training and Information Center

(PTI) 

This presentation introduces Encircle Families and its Parent Training and Information Center services. Participants will learn how the PTI supports families, educators, districts, and charters through technical assistance, family engagement strategies, and collaborative approaches that strengthen special education partnerships.

Presenter(s): Christopher Tiffany and Todd Liolios

Room: Vaquero F1–F2

Level Up Your Future: Building Your Support Team for Success

Using a gaming-inspired framework, this interactive session helps students and families identify and build transition support teams. Participants explore the roles of schools, Vocational Rehabilitation, DDD, families, and community partners while developing tools to lead their own transition planning.

Presenter(s): Monica Romero

Room: Vaquero G1–G2

Second Floor

Work-Based Learning for All: Planning and Implementing High Quality Work

Experiences for Students with Disabilities

All students deserve meaningful work-based learning opportunities. This session shares best practices for planning school-based and community-based work experiences, engaging employers, and providing high-quality instruction and support to students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Dr. Magen Rooney-Kron, Dr. Hannah Brenner Nieto, and Dr. Emily Malouf

Room: Arroyo C–E

Partners in Progress: Owning Your Role in Special Education Meetings

This session empowers parents and students to better understand and participate in IEP meetings. Attendees learn practical strategies to prepare effectively, communicate confidently, and collaborate productively with the IEP team.

Presenter(s): Carrie McCulloch

Room: Dunes AB

The Pyramid Model Big 5 Preschool Strategies #4: Directly Teach Behavioral

Expectations

Participants learn why direct instruction of behavioral expectations is critical and how to design preschool environments that clearly teach and reinforce expected behaviors for all children.

Presenter(s): Priscilla Sachs and Christine Burnett

Room: Hyatt

A Local Community of Practice Team Working (Long-Term) Within a Community: Northern Arizona

Learn how a local Community of Practice Team collaborated with disability advocacy groups and stakeholders to improve accessibility, inclusion, and life-long outcomes for youth and young adults with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Vince D'Aliesio, Russ Randall, and Joseph Spence

Room: Markland

Inclusive by Design: DBI Basics for Stronger Intervention

Participants explore the fundamentals of Data-Based Individualization (DBI), learning how to use data to evaluate student response, adapt instruction, and provide intensive intervention for learners with persistent academic needs.

Presenter(s): Qiana Harris and Katie Lewis

Room: Sonoran AB

2:15–2:30 p.m. | Break, Vendor/Exhibitor Hall Open

2:30–3:45 p.m. | Concurrent Sessions

First Floor

High Probability Strategies for Responding to Misbehavior in the Classroom

This session focuses on teacher-based strategies for responding to typical student misbehavior. Participants will explore research-based approaches that maximize the probability of successful behavioral outcomes.

Presenter(s): Dr. Terrance Scott

Room: Vaquero ABC

Engaging Parents in the IEP Process

This interactive workshop focuses on building meaningful partnerships with families throughout the IEP process. Participants explore practical engagement strategies, hear family perspectives, and gain tools that strengthen collaboration and student outcomes.

Presenter(s): Michelle Henretta and Nicole Guysi

Room: Vaquero F1-F2

Discover Your Strengths: Uncovering Your Job Skills

Youth participants engage in hands-on vocational activities to identify strengths, interests, and career possibilities. Educators and professionals will also learn strategies for assessing vocational skills and supporting career exploration.

Presenter(s): Loretta Alvarez, Kelsey Montano, and Amy Leija

Room: Vaquero G1-G2

Second Floor

Bubble Wrap Not Included: Supporting Independence Through Dignity of Risk

This session explores how families and educators can help students with disabilities build independence through reasonable risk-taking while maintaining appropriate supports. Participants receive tools to support self-determination and meaningful transition planning.

Presenter(s): Dr. Magen Rooney-Kron, Dr. Hannah Brenner Nieto, and Dr. Emily Malouf

Room: Arroyo C-E

Opening Access to Science Learning: Using Science & Engineering Practices and High-Leverage Graphic Organizers to Support All Students

This session explores how Science and Engineering Practices and high-quality graphic organizers can improve accessibility, differentiation, and science learning for all students, including students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Johanna Kaiser and Sarah Sleasman

Room: Dunes AB

The Pyramid Model Big 5 Preschool Strategies #5: Directly Teach Positive Peer-Related Social Skills 🌱

Participants explore strategies for actively teaching social skills through peer interaction, peer-mediated interventions, cueing, prompting, and reinforcement within preschool environments and daily routines.

Presenter(s): Lenka Stogsdill and Tamara Rosario

Room: Hyatt

Partnerships to Know: Collaborating for Student Success in Your Community

Learn how ADE, Vocational Rehabilitation, and the Division of Developmental Disabilities collaborate with schools, families, and communities to strengthen transition planning, family engagement, and post-school outcomes.

Presenter(s): Nelly Sanchez, Traci Zweig, and Kelly Thomas

Room: Markland

Systems that Serve: Aligning Compliance and Outcomes for Impact 🕒☀️

This session explores a research-informed, data-driven framework that aligns IDEA compliance, inclusive practices, accountability indicators, and continuous improvement efforts to strengthen outcomes for students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Stacy Riccio and Angela Odom

Room: Sonoran AB

4:00–6:00 p.m. | Evening Event

Networking Reception and Raffle Drawing

Join us for a networking reception to connect with colleagues, build new relationships, and exchange ideas in a relaxed setting. The event will conclude with an exciting raffle drawing featuring great prizes and giveaways.

Room: Arizona Ballroom