



Arizona's 2026 IDEA Conference

Stronger Systems, Better Outcomes—for Every Student

Thursday, August 20, 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

7:00–10:30 a.m. | Registration and Breakfast

7:00–8:00 a.m. Registration

Arizona Ballroom Foyer

7:00–8:00 a.m. Breakfast Buffet

8:00–9:15 a.m. | Concurrent Sessions*First Floor***High Probability Strategies for Responding to Escalating Student Behavior**

Despite high probability prevention and early responses to misbehavior, there will still be times when certain students continue misbehavior and teachers must handle escalating behaviors. This session focuses on understanding the cycle of escalation and how adults should respond to maximize the probability of de-escalation.

Presenter(s): Dr. Terrance Scott

Room: Vaquero ABC

Level Up After High School: Your Future. Your Choices. Your Move. 🌵

This session helps students prepare for life after graduation by exploring differences between high school and postsecondary education, understanding accommodations and self-advocacy, and examining options such as community college, universities, and trade schools.

Presenter(s): Stephanie Moller

Room: Vaquero E1–E2

When Parents, Students, Schools, and a City Unite for TSW Workforce Training 🌵🏠

This session highlights the partnership between Agua Fria Union High School District's Transition School to Work program and the City of Goodyear. Attendees will learn how schools, families, and local government collaborate to create meaningful workforce pathways and employment opportunities for students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Nick Swanson, Patrick Becker, Sasha Lysy, Noah Salas, Andrea Salas, and Luke Parker

Room: Vaquero F1–F2

Starting Early, Aiming High: Transition Planning for Students with Complex Needs 🏠

This session explores how early, intentional transition planning can support students with complex needs. Participants will learn strategies that move beyond compliance-driven planning and support competitive integrated employment outcomes.

Presenter(s): Dr. Makenzie Allison and Dr. Brianna Soares

Room: Vaquero G1–G2

Second Floor

Programmatic Monitoring Data and Compliance Pitfalls 🕒

This session will cover trends of noncompliance for the 25-26 school year. Presenters will also focus on common pitfalls that lead to noncompliance as well as resources available to support compliant practices.

Presenter(s): Scott Dobkovsky and Heidi Putnam

Room: Arroyo C–E

AAC is Not a Last Resort: Strengthening Systems to Ensure FAPE for Students with Complex Communication Needs 🕒

This session examines how districts can strengthen systems that support timely and sustainable implementation of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC). Attendees will explore system barriers, funding pathways, staff training, and scalable practices that improve outcomes for students with complex communication needs.

Presenter(s): Danielle Reed

Room: Dunes AB

Arizona's Inclusion Initiative (AZII) for Early Childhood Successes and Continued Focus on Improvement of High-Quality Inclusive Early Childhood Programs 🌱🕒

Participants will analyze statewide inclusion data, review successes and ongoing challenges, and explore opportunities to strengthen and expand high-quality inclusive early childhood programs throughout Arizona.

Presenter(s): Tami Philips, Kathy Eustace, Nicole Valentino, Kathy Gray Mangerson, and Angela Edington

Room: Hyatt

Building Community Partnerships for Effective Transition Programs

This session provides practical strategies for creating and sustaining community partnerships that support transition programming, work-based learning, and positive postsecondary outcomes for students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Jennifer Munoz and Heidi Sinkovic

Room: Markland

Inclusive By Design: Strengthen Inclusive Practices by Applying High-Leverage Practices (HLPs) to Reduce Cognitive Load

Participants will learn how High-Leverage Practices, predictable routines, explicit instruction, and strategic scaffolds can reduce cognitive load and improve access to grade-level content for all learners.

Presenter(s): Chelsey Branham and Qiana Harris

Room: Sonoran AB

9:15–9:30 a.m. | Break

9:30–10:45 a.m. | Concurrent Sessions

First Floor

Supported Decision-Making and Alternatives to Guardianship—Young Adults 

Young adults will learn about guardianship, Supported Decision-Making, and alternatives that support independence while preserving personal choice and self-determination.

Presenter(s): Audra Paletta, Isaac Zwinger-Nathanson, and Savanna Palafox

Room: Vaquero E1–E2

Supported Decision-Making and Alternatives to Guardianship—Educators, Professionals, Parents 🏠

This session provides families and professionals with practical information about guardianship, Supported Decision-Making, and less restrictive alternatives that support independence while protecting rights.

Presenter(s): Melanie Mills and Sey In

Room: Vaquero F1–F2

Strengthening Community Partnerships Through Interagency Collaboration

Participants will explore strategies for building and sustaining local interagency partnerships through formal and informal resource mapping, improving coordination, and strengthening transition services.

Presenter(s): Dr. Makenzie Allison and Dr. Brianna Soares

Room: Vaquero G1–G2

Second Floor

Meeting Mayhem—From Chaos to Collaboration 🕒

Participants will learn practical communication and collaboration strategies that help move IEP meetings from conflict and confusion toward positive, productive problem-solving.

Presenter(s): Carrie McCulloch

Room: Arroyo C–E

Understanding the Why: Strengthening District Systems for Safe Digital Learning 🕒

This session explores why districts vet digital tools and AI applications, examining student data privacy, instructional alignment, cybersecurity, and compliance responsibilities that support safe digital learning systems.

Presenter(s): Doug Cutler, Laura Wooten-LaFranier, Jon Castelhana, Joe Ferguson, Troy Harris, Diana Hawari, and Rae Mask

Room: Dunes AB

Engaging Medically Complex Learners: Strategies and Techniques for Maximizing Curriculum Access in Low-Incidence Disability Classrooms

This session shares practical and evidence-based approaches that support meaningful participation, communication, mobility, and curriculum access for medically complex learners.

Presenter(s): Danielle Benjamin and Lauren Jones

Room: Hyatt

Surrogate Parent—When, Why, & How 🕒

Participants will learn when surrogate parents are needed, who can serve, the appointment process, and how the Surrogate Parent Program protects the rights of students without available parents.

Presenter(s): Stefanie Sharkey

Room: Markland

Inclusive By Design: Metacognition ☀️

Participants will establish a shared understanding of metacognitive strategies, explore their connection to High-Leverage Practices, and learn practical approaches that support student independence and learning.

Presenter(s): Jodi Walker

Room: Sonoran AB

10:45–11:00 a.m. | Break

11:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m. | Concurrent Sessions

First Floor

From Philosophy to Results: Advancing Employment First in Arizona

This session highlights Arizona's Employment First Initiative and explores strategies for aligning policy, practice, and community partnerships to improve competitive integrated employment outcomes for people with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Gina Griffiths, Jessica Winchester, and Lisa Ayo

Room: Vaquero E1–E2

Building Futures: Transition From School to Work (TSW) and Ann E's Closet

This session showcases how Deer Valley Unified School District's Transition School to Work program uses community-based instruction and employment experiences through Ann E's Closet to build workplace readiness and independence.

Presenter(s): Dr. Jennifer Humpal and Tricia Graham

Room: Vaquero F1–F2

From Memo to Practice: Implementing the Graduation Pathways Guidance Through Strong Systems

Participants will examine Arizona's graduation guidance and explore system-level strategies that support graduation planning, reduce compliance risks, and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.

Presenter(s): Heidi Sinkovic and Lisa Livesay

Room: Vaquero G1–G2

The Proactive Classroom: Eliminating Behavioral Barriers Through UDL-Aligned Tier 1 Systems

This session explores how Universal Design for Learning can serve as a proactive Tier 1 strategy for reducing behavior barriers, increasing engagement, and improving academic and functional outcomes.

Presenter(s): Kim Moran, Heidi Edmondson, and Rob Wolf

Room: Arroyo C-E

Integrating Related Service Providers to Support and Build a Stronger Transition Program

Participants will learn how collaboration between transition teachers and related service providers can strengthen communication, workplace readiness, independent living skills, and overall transition outcomes.

Presenter(s): Tiffany MacKenzie, Elizabeth (Courtney) Baumer, and Michelle Hazelip

Room: Dunes AB

AZ ABLE Accounts: How to Protect Benefits and Save Money 🏠

This session explains how AZ ABLE accounts help individuals with disabilities save money, build financial security, and maintain eligibility for public benefits while planning for future goals.

Presenter(s): Brittaney Chipley

Room: Hyatt

One Classroom, Many Learners: How Flexible Grouping Supports Students with Hidden Disabilities

Participants will explore inclusive practices and flexible grouping strategies that support students with dyslexia, ADHD, autism, executive functioning challenges, and other hidden disabilities.

Presenter(s): Dr. Rebekah Dyer and DD Carr

Room: Markland

Beyond the Pull-Out Model: How Schoolwide Structures Transformed Math Learning for All Students

This session explores how one school used collaboration, inclusive co-teaching, and math language routines to improve instruction, strengthen inclusion, and increase student success in mathematics.

Presenter(s): Sladjana DeAngelo and Jacqueline Rios Ramirez

Room: Sonoran AB

12:15–1:00 p.m. | Lunch