



Transcript- Episode 67

Steal This Script: How Leaders Talk About Inclusive Education

Today we are diving into the power of communication and specifically how is it that school leaders can very clearly, confidently, and compassionately talk about inclusive education with families and with staff. So whether you're shifting outdated Special Ed practices or strengthening your co-teaching or your universal design for learning or just starting this journey, this episode is all about how do we change our script. So let's get right into it.

Yeah. So there's a couple of things you did, Julie, that I loved out of the gate. Like A, I love a good alliteration.

So clear, confident, and compassionate. Like I want to go work there. And then I love that you said there's a script for change because sometimes for me, just even if the script sucks, to be honest, it's a great learning tool or it's a great way for me to feel confident that I can do it.

Even if I throw it out, you know what I mean? Well, it starts you someplace, Kristie. And I think for school leaders, your heads are pulled in so many directions. Your heart is pulled in so many directions.

Your mind is pulled in so many directions and literally coming up with exactly how to say the stuff that you need to say can feel really taxing on your nervous system. And so what we want to do is give you something today that will just help in many, many situations, give you a starting point about how to have these incredibly important conversations.

Yeah.

And these scripts that we're going to share in the download for this episode are really for people who have managed change successfully. And so, but I would say they're adaptable. I think families could use them in advocating for inclusion.

I think teachers can use them as they justify their efforts to really push for inclusion and to close specialized programs. So like it's really reusable content. So at inclusiveschooling.com/download67, you'll get the scripts that Julie and I are going to talk through today, but just know that you can always adapt them for your situation or your role. We're going to speak from like those guiding systems level change, but know that you can always use these as a starting point in different ways.

That's really helpful, Kristie. So just to reiterate, we're going to speak to the school administrator and yet anybody in any role can take this and use it in new ways.

Yeah. Anybody who's kind of facing pushback or maybe even just being proactive, right, Julie, we don't have to use my negativity bias of a mind, but these could be very proactive before everybody gets all twitchy and worried. This could be a way to set the stage as well. So that everybody is excited and confident.

Yeah. Yeah.

Okay, good. So I'm just going to kind of explain what this is so that people can know that you want this download. Like, honestly, if you turn this podcast off and go grab this download and read it to yourself and start to use it, you're going to be super jazzed about it.

But I want to just kind of share with, I want both of us to share with folks, with leaders who are doing this work, a little bit of the behind the scenes, the tips and tricks that you can use when you're using these particular scripts and why we put it together. So what you'll see is that there's an opening statement and it's really to ground any meeting or conversation. And, um, I'm going to read the opening statement, Kristie, so people can kind of hear what it might sound like to create one of these.

Yeah. And when Julie ever does a read aloud, sometimes I like to close my eyes for those of you on a treadmill or, um, driving don't do it, but if you can just kind of sit back and notice the words kind of like in the opening statement, when I noticed that alliteration, uh, notice what words kind of strike you as important or how these sort of set the stage for what's possible.

Yeah. And so picture in this particular case that you're a school leader and you're really committed to more inclusive practices and you are saying this out loud to the entire staff. So it might be like this, we're shifting toward more inclusive practices because research shows students learn better when they have access to the full curriculum, access to meaningful peer interactions and access to tailored support within the classroom. Students will continue receiving all of their services, accommodations, and individualized support as outlined in their IEP.

So that statement does a lot of things, Kristie. What does it do in your mind?

Well, the first thing you go first, Julie, because my negativity bias must be on high alert today. I had a thought about what if I have a crappy IEP? So you go first, because you're trying to talk about possibilities and setting the stage.

Okay. We'll just, we'll just shut that part of you down. We'll come back to it.

Okay. So for me, what I liked is that it, it explains some of the worries away, which is that a lot of people think that, oh, inclusion means that they don't get any services anymore, or they don't get accommodations, or we're not thinking individualized any longer. We're just putting all the kids together and they're getting the same thing. And in reality, inclusion is not that at all. It continues to be, every student will continue to receive all those services, accommodations, and supports.

And so, you know, Julie, that does make me think. One time when I was learning, like, you know, in 1992, I was learning how to teach adults. One of the things that our facilitator said is that sometimes non-examples are as helpful as examples.

So you just said it, you said what inclusion is not. So on this download or in the download on the last page, there is a section of what inclusion is not. So if you go to [inclusiveschooling.com/download67](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download67) to get the handout Julie and I are talking about, it does have five bullets that talk about what Julie just mentioned about what it's not.

And sometimes I think naming that or saying it is helpful for people. I also liked the word in what you read, Julie, that said tailored, because sometimes I think we say individualized, personalized, and then people think different or hard or expensive or someplace else. So tailored sort of sounded like custom fit, like right there where you are.

Yeah. And it really is Kristie. And I think part of this, especially if you're a leader that hasn't experienced a lot of good examples of incredible inclusion, sometimes we have a lack of creativity or even a lack of a model, what is it going to look like or be like? And so it's tricky to lead a group of people towards something you've not seen yourself fully.

And so it's just to remind yourself that all of this is very, very possible. And at the top of that particular piece that I wrote or that I read, it's about that research shows that students learn better. And it's like, we're not going to debate the research here, but we want you to know that this is not just a whim.

This is not just for fun. This is a meaningful, well-researched foray into something very important for our school system.

Yeah. And I think that the research is such an important place to begin. And we'll put some links in the show notes for those of you who feel like you need it at your fingertips, credible and vetted research that Julie and I have either conducted and/or combined for you. I think on top of that, Julie, we can't discount the lived experiences of our students, not just students who tell their stories about when they were in school and the harm that outdated practices caused, but noticing in the moment what is actually working.

So we're not just doing this without, you know, observing the effect, but we want to say, look at what happens when this student is with their peers or has access or we presume competence or we remove barriers. Like, don't just sit there and focus on where is the student, how many minutes, who got their minutes in and all of the gnashing of teeth, but just kind of notice what starts happening in the life of the student. And noticing that, naming it, celebrating it, seeing it, those things are the things that keep school systems moving forward in this important work.

Because as anyone who's listening knows, it's not the easiest of work, but I'll tell you it is work that is so worth it.

Right. Yeah. And so let's Julie, let's go ahead and go to page three because you wanted to talk about IEPs and I brought up IEPs. So again, at the download for

this episode at [inclusiveschooling.com/download67](https://www.inclusiveschooling.com/download67), Julie's going to go down to the third page. And so at the end of the, the kind of phrase that she read, she said, you know, your, your child, the student is still going to get what's outlined in their IEP.

And my, you know, snarky self said, I've studied IEPs for a long time, and I know there are problems with them. Like Julie, you and I know in this work, oftentimes the IEP becomes the barrier because as we try to move towards LRE, or we try to be more universally designed and differentiate, people are like, but the IEP says as if it has its own, you know, persona, yeah, persona, and is quite, you know, authoritative. So what could we do at IEP meetings? Or what could we, what kind of scripts or sentence starters can we use to help people understand that maybe even the IEP needs to be written differently?

Well, Kristie, two things. I want to talk, I want to talk about the, I feel like that's another podcast, right? There's another podcast here called why IEPs suck and why they're getting in the way of inclusion. And it is really important.

Okay.

But what we mean is often this is a revealing tab to people. When we start to do inclusive work, we start to say, oh, for example, this student is supposed to sort silverware. And instead of spoons, there is no silverware in the eighth grade LRE period.

And so what do we do? And the answer is we rewrite the IEP because you can learn to sort silverware in a different place and space and time. So all that to be said, that is another conversation. And for this though, when we think about this key words to say, it's like, it's reaffirming to people that, uh, let's say you're talking to families.

You'll say your child still gets everything that's in their IEP, supports are delivered right where your child learns. Um, we're using co-teaching and universal design for learning and small group instruction. And we're often using paraprofessional support.

Um, we're going to collaborate with you every step of the way, like we always have. I think the trick about these scripts is that when you're becoming a more inclusive school, we're often explaining to families at the same time that we're working with staff, that things are going to change. And it's reassuring them that we're still using the law.

We're still using best practice, and we're still going to be working as a team together to get your child closer to what's the spirit of least restrictive environment.

Yeah. And again, I'll link to other podcasts where we talk about least restrictive environment.

Um, when Julie said, uh, work together, I was thinking there's another part of these talking points in the script. It says inclusion is not about one teacher or one classroom. It's a coordinated team effort.

So I feel like that's part of like, pulling back and showing people like, oh, we're all in this, even if you don't see it or it doesn't look the way it has in the past, we're still working towards, um, access, participation, and progress as a team.

Yeah. Yeah. That's really important. And it doesn't look the same. So it's very easy to calculate that the occupational therapist took your child down the hall for 33 minutes on a Tuesday, like they were supposed to, and then they returned them because we can track those minutes.

But when that same occupational therapist has worked very closely with the General Ed teacher, and has worked on pencil grips, scissor grasp, all the different things, and they're just putting that in the day and they're making sure that, that the child gets about 32 minutes. Also, it's like, it looks different.

So sometimes people think maybe they're not getting as much. And when we've studied this, we've found that kids get more support in inclusive settings, not less support. And I would say even, uh, more instruction.

Yeah. So, you know, depending on how you define support, you could say more specially designed instruction, more access, more friendship, more, you know, it goes on and on. Um, I think I've told the story before Julie, but when I was doing my dissertation again, back in 1992, um, I was talking to a parent trying to, uh, get them to participate in the study and well, their child, you know, allow their child to study.

And so I was explaining the purpose of the study was to, um, look at the effects of embedding instruction around children's IEP goals within the daily routine. So I had to explain what embedding was and the poor dad just kept looking at me. It's like, you know, I of course kept talking and trying to explain embedding.

And then finally he said, I just don't understand. I was like, gosh, I have no other way to explain embedding. And he's like, what else would they be doing?

Right.

Like, Oh, sorry, friend. So usually they'll pull your kid out over her side for X number of minutes and do some drill and kill, and then they'll go back to play and daily activities. So we're going to see if we can change that.

I think the thing about that specific story is this is a parent of a child who's not experienced school yet. And so that parent has no schema to understand, pull out, pull over, pull aside. And they're like, it makes perfect sense to do what you're suggesting called embedding.

So why are you studying it? And it's like, well, that's a great question.

Yeah.

Well, it's, it's to the point we always make, like, why are we still asking the question is inclusion effective? You know, and why are we always looking for the exception to that rule when it's been like, asked and answered a million times? All right,

Julie, as we wrap up this particular episode, and we think about these scripts for changing and for people to use, we've talked about, you know, this kind of opening statement.

We've talked about what inclusion is not. We've talked about how to use some of these scripts during an IEP meeting. What, what's like maybe your last tip for flipping the script or using this particular script?

Yeah. So my last tip is kind of reminding yourself that you might need key messages that are kind of embedded to use that good one. Thank you. But embedded throughout, which is why we're going to do this together.

Some of it is that research shows that this is better. Some of it is telling people like painting the picture. People say paint the picture done, meaning paint the picture.

So they understand that it's co-teaching, it's universal design for learning, it's small group instruction. It's still all the good things that we're talking about.

And that's what makes it actually work. Because sometimes you have to paint a picture for like, the example of your parent that you were talking to, or for an example of that administrator who hasn't seen it done beautifully yet. You have to be someone who can move ahead and paint that picture so other people can imagine what it's going to be when it's done well.

SHOW NOTES

What This Episode Is About

In this episode, Julie and Kristie share a ready-to-use communication framework to help school and district leaders clearly, confidently, and compassionately explain inclusive practices to families and staff.

Key Takeaways

- Clear messaging reduces fear during systems change.
- Inclusion must be framed as improving outcomes — not reducing support.
- Families need reassurance that IEP services, accommodations, and individualized supports continue.
- Staff need clear language that connects inclusion to research, equity, and student strengths.
- Leaders must “paint the picture” of what inclusive practice looks like in action.

Answering a Common Question

How should school leaders explain inclusive education to families and staff?

By grounding the conversation in research, reassurance, and shared values.

Effective inclusive communication:

- Starts with purpose
 - Clarifies misconceptions
 - Reinforces continued support
 - Emphasizes collaboration
 - Centers belonging, dignity, and access
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Episode Download / Handout

The Inclusive Education School Script

This ready-to-use communication template supports school and district leaders advancing inclusive, equitable, and evidence-based practices.

Inside the download, you'll find:

- A clear opening statement to ground any meeting
- Supporting phrases that reduce fear and defensiveness
- Key talking points for IEP meetings and family conversations
- Staff reflection questions for PLCs and student support teams
- Language for explaining how support works inside inclusive classrooms
- A powerful section clarifying what inclusion is *not*

Why download it?

Because when leaders hesitate, systems stall. This tool gives you steady, strengths-based language so you can lead change with clarity instead of scrambling for words.

👉 Download at: inclusiveschooling.com/download67

Practical Leadership Moves

- Use consistent language across meetings and communications
- Reinforce that inclusion improves academic and social outcomes
- Emphasize collaboration among general educators, special educators, related service providers, and paraprofessionals
- Highlight strengths-first planning
- Connect inclusion to equity, dignity, and belonging
- Share real examples of student growth in inclusive settings

Additional Resources

[Inclusion Podcast Episode 31- Understanding LRE and its Role in Supporting All Learners](#): This episode unpacks the concept of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and its essential role in fostering truly inclusive classrooms, emphasizing that students with disabilities should be educated alongside their non-disabled peers whenever possible. Through real stories and practical strategies, the hosts explore how schools can thoughtfully use supports and services before considering more restrictive placements, reframing challenging behaviors as opportunities for growth rather than exclusion. Listeners will come away with actionable insights for implementing LRE principles in their own educational settings and a free checklist of supplementary aids to support all learners.

[Least Restrictive Environment Family Resource Guide](#): This *Family Toolkit Resource Guide* from Early CHOICES equips families of young children with disabilities to understand and advocate for inclusion in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) within early childhood education settings. It bundles practical resources — from inclusion brochures and on-demand learning modules to checklists and federal guidance — with QR links and explanations to make navigating the system easier. The guide highlights the benefits of inclusive settings for all children, offers tools to prepare for IEP meetings, and clarifies families’ rights under federal law to support meaningful inclusion.

[Strategies Every Administrator Needs for Inclusive Education](#): This free interactive webinar with Dr. Julie Causton and Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak focuses on practical ways schools can move from talking about inclusion to actually making it happen. Participants will learn strategies to overcome resistance to change, shift mindsets among staff, and clarify key concepts like the Least Restrictive Environment and service delivery models. The session also highlights real examples of schools that have successfully transformed their practices to include all students. Educators and administrators will leave with actionable tools and ideas they can immediately use to build more inclusive classrooms and school communities.

[Inclusion Research Fast Facts](#): Dive into a comprehensive resource that highlights the transformative benefits of inclusive education for students, peers, staff, and the broader community. This downloadable PDF compiles key research findings and actionable insights, making it an essential tool for educators, advocates, and policymakers.

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