

Transcript - Episode 81

There’s No Such Thing as “Ready for Inclusion”

We're so glad you're here as we explore all things inclusion. So whether you're a school leader, an educator, a parent, or simply passionate about inclusion, this podcast is for you. In each episode, we go beyond the usual conversations, diving into what truly makes inclusive education work.

Together, let's make a difference, one conversation at a time. Here we go. One of the most common reasons students are excluded from general education is because someone believes they're, "just not ready".

It almost sounds thoughtful, right? It sounds responsible. But today we're going to challenge the assumption and explore why readiness isn't something students must achieve before inclusion. It's actually one of the things that will help create inclusion.

So Julie, as you said that, you know, I always have eight thoughts, so I wrote them down. Okay. And I was like, okay, so it sounds responsible.

Yeah. Oh, they're not ready. They just need more time with whatever the special ed teacher's name is, right? So I'm like, oh, people, you need to listen to our podcast on small groups.

Then I said, as I was listening to you, that, you know, it's not like it's something they have to achieve before they can be included. So I thought of our WTAF presentation for Kama and Otto. Yeah.

So let's come back to that. Sure. I'll put links to all this in the show notes, friends.

And then just as you said the word readiness, I just had like a visceral reaction to kindergarten readiness. And I was like, oh, my gosh, this is like such a big issue. But then I was like, okay, slow down.

You brought it all up. Podcast. It could be 15 minutes, Kristie.

We're trying. We're trying to get into a 15-minute podcast, but I really like that it brought up so much for you because if there is one thing Kristie and I have heard 100 times. 100 million.

Is that's great for most kids, but this kid isn't ready for inclusion. Yeah. Okay.

And you should start to think ready according to whom? What is readiness? Who gets to decide? Is there like a score or a checklist? And how do we know when someone's crossed that like line to be ready? Because here's what I have noticed is that we never ask students without disabilities that question. Like, are they ready to belong? We just assume it. Right.

But when disability enters the conversation, that's when all of a sudden there's this earning the right to be included. And that is where we've gone wrong in schools. I think the only other place, Julie, that we do it pretty globally is at kindergarten when you retain kids.

Yes. I mean, there are other grades where we definitely retain, but it's most common. Like they're just not ready.

They need one more year of doing the same thing repeatedly. And if you want to know the number one predictor or like, I don't know if it's the number one predictor, but I can predict graduation rates based on if you were retained. Yes.

And so if schools are all excited about increasing and improving their graduation rates, stop retaining kids in kindergarten by saying they're not ready yet. Yes. That was, I guess, another one I had to say.

It's okay. I'm really glad you're doing it because the parallels are the same. The parallels are exactly the same.

And so we have the cause and effect backwards. Right. What that means is people will say, oh, they need better communication.

They need more independence. They need regulation. They need to be able to go potty by themselves.

They need to have stronger academics. They need better behavior and they need stronger social skills before they get one of those. Like regulation.

How long is that going to take? When are they going to be ready? Take communication and channel auto please for me. Unpack these. Yes.

And so we say that stuff has to happen before you can be included. But here's the problem. Oh, friends.

Where do you think those things actually develop? Kristie, guess what? They don't develop in a room with an adult. They don't develop by pulling a kid out and working on friendships. They actually occur.

What? Yeah, they don't occur. Communication develops through communication. Do you know where self-regulation develops? Through co-regulation.

Do you know where confidence develops? Trying hard things. Do you want to know where belonging develops? Belonging. We've actually reversed the cause and effect of all this to say this kid has to prove to me that they can do this thing before we're going to allow them access to the environment with which this is the only environment where they can learn this thing.

So my old, old, old mentor who has passed away, Lou Brown, used to say pre equals never. Pre- reading equals never reading. It's pre-school even, I would argue.

Right? Sorry, but I'm just sorry, friends. Yes. And so all this to be said, we have to provide the environment where learning can occur, and we have to provide the supports in the general education experience, and that's where those things are learned.

So I have so many thoughts still. I hope everybody else is like, can you go back to WTAF? But anyway, the thing is, it's all the way back to what you said. It's well-intentioned, or it's the responsible.

I'll appreciate that word, because I like to be responsible, as Julie knows. Yes, you do. What's the responsible thing to do here? And I've heard so many kindergarten teachers talk to so many families, and just out of the greatest compassion ever to retain this child, or to put the child, like I was just talking to a preschool group in Colorado, and they're like, we are working so hard to be inclusive in pre-K, sorry, the pre, in early childhood, that it's so disheartening because we know the minute they go to kindergarten, they're going to a self-contained program, because they're not ready for inclusion.

Even though we had inclusion for three years before this, we're not ready. And so then a bunch of early childhood people, we say, well, then kindergarten has to be ready for the kid. Well, what does that lead us to, right? What do we ask? What does that mean? Well, I think what that means is a worthy discussion.

But what we're kind of trying to get to, no matter what we're talking about around these concepts of readiness, is that skills don't develop in isolation. You don't learn to belong while you're being segregated, for example. Participation is part of learning, and we want to add partial participation, meaning what's the part you can do to be part of this thing? Growth isn't the prerequisite for belonging, and belonging helps create growth.

Again, it's this backwards way that we're looking at it in schools. Well, Julie, let's talk a little bit about this retention or this waiting until they have, because I think the download for this episode is on that theme of eventually we're thinking they're going to be ready. Eventually, we're going to read.

Eventually, we're going to be at grade-level. I think it's even like with the label developmental delay. It means they're going to catch up.

It's just a label. It doesn't predict anything. Readiness, like you said, is it a score? Is it a threshold? Is it a criteria? So this notion of that you belong by belonging. You grow by being challenged. You communicate through communication. Yes, but we're waiting until kids have skills to then use the skills, but you need to get the skills by, I don't know.

It's like cart, egg, chicken. I don't know, whatever. Apples, oranges, chicken, egg, whatever.

The download for this episode that I'm referring to in a long rambling rant way is at inclusiveschooling.com/download81, because I think that for me, we're waiting for the kid to have better something, better reading skills, better regulation, better communication, better something, and then they'll be ready. So Kristie, this waiting issue is the thing, and it's waiting is not neutral. So while I'm sitting over here waiting to develop these skills, to learn these skills, to grow, blah, blah, blah, we think it's harmless.

You're just going to wait until you're ready. But what happens is while we're waiting, we're missing language models. We're missing grade-level instruction.

We're missing friendships. We're missing authentic conversations. We're missing opportunities to solve problems, a chance to contribute.

We're actually missing this opportunity to create a community. And so what we're going to assume is third grade, they're ready to be included. Let's imagine just miraculously in third grade, they're ready to be included.

Well, now they're going to be included with a bunch of kids who don't know them. And so we've created or caused a problem. And every year we wait is another year students don't get to practice belonging.

So Kristie, share about this particular handout and why it might be useful, how they might use it. Yeah. So I feel like, and you hinted at it, but it's like, what's a prerequisite for inclusion? And if I were a leader listening to this, Julie, I might also apply this to my staff.

Because we also hear that staff aren't yet ready, right? We have to move at the pace of trust or whatever that saying is. Or like, we're not quite ready to go school-wide or building-wide or district-wide. Or we're not quite ready at the high school level.

Or we're not quite ready to get rid of self-contained classrooms. Like, you could take this far and wide. I'll try not to, but I feel like the handout, I would use it to really think about anytime we're using readiness as a prerequisite to a single child being included, to a group of children, children with a particular label, that sort of thing.

Yeah. Yeah, so what it is, it's called a readiness audit. And it's not what you think it is.

Like, here's a checklist to decide if this kid's ready for inclusion. No, it's actually a readiness audit, and there are 25 questions every inclusive team should ask before saying they're just not ready. And so what we've got is this part one is challenge your assumptions. So, for example, before saying they're not ready, ask ready according to whom? Ready for what? Would we ask this question if the student didn't have a disability? Those are the assumption challengers that we put in there. Second, we start to look for barriers. So instead of looking what's wrong with the student, we go, what barriers exist? What supports are currently missing? What access points could we add? And then the third is this big concept that Kristie brought up about waiting.

Consider the cost of waiting. Waiting isn't neutral. So what friendships are being delayed? What communication opportunities are being missed? What grade-level learning is being postponed? Because our assumption is all of a sudden they're going to, be magically "ready" to be included, and now they're going to be able to make up for all the lost time when they weren't part of that general education.

So it helps us to shift the question and design for belonging. And we give you a lot of supports for how to do that in this particular handout. And last is we've got some IEP.

Before your next IEP or team meeting, how do we handle this situation of readiness? Yeah, so again, you can get the download at inclusiveschooling.com/download81. And just as a teaser, what Julie was alluding to for the IEP meeting is, like, if people are like, are they really ready? Are they ready for the gen ed? Are they ready for a fourth grade? Are they ready for high school? Are they ready to go to the prom? We would say, what would make them successful today? Sort of like, instead of fixing the kid, how do we design the environment so that they are able to succeed? So that's kind of my kind of takeaway, Julie, is that if I heard people saying, you know, well, when they can, or let's wait until, or maybe next year, I'm going to say, but are we focusing on what will make them successful today? And are we thinking about, we're going to fix them, or are we going to change the environment, or change the schedule, or change the supports? I love that. So the final takeaways for today are really students don't become ready by waiting.

They become ready by belonging. And belonging isn't the reward for readiness. Belonging is what makes students ready.

So when you think about creating inclusive schools, we don't want to wait until every student is ready, because that's impossible. It's about building classrooms that are ready for every single student. So this week, remove one barrier, add a meaningful support, create one more opportunity for belonging, because students shouldn't have to earn their place because they already belong.

Our job is to create the conditions where every student can participate, contribute, and learn together. Thanks for listening. Find every episode, show notes, and free resources at inclusiveschooling.com/inclusion-podcast. If you're ready to take the next step, we would love to help. What is our day job? Well, we partner with schools,

districts, and education systems across the globe through engaging keynotes, practical professional learning, leadership coaching, and a comprehensive suite of on-demand PD. Ready to bring inclusive schooling to your team? Visit inclusiveschooling.com. Until next time, keep building schools where everyone belongs.

SHOW NOTES

"They're just not ready." It can sound thoughtful or responsible—but what opportunities do students lose when inclusion is delayed? In this episode, Julie and Kristie challenge readiness as a prerequisite for general education and ask a more useful question: What would make this student successful today?

Key Takeaways

- Why "ready according to whom?" is a question every team should ask.
- How communication, regulation, confidence, and relationships develop through participation—not isolation.
- What students miss while adults wait for better behavior, academics, or independence.
- How to shift from fixing the student to removing barriers and adding meaningful supports.
- Why the readiness conversation also matters for school teams, grade levels, and districtwide inclusion.

Episode Download / Handout
The Readiness Audit: 25 Questions Every Inclusive Team Should Ask...Before Saying..."They're Not Ready"

Use these prompts to challenge assumptions, identify barriers, consider the cost of waiting, shift the question, and design for belonging.

👉 Get the handout at: inclusiveschooling.com/download81

Try This Week

In your next IEP or team conversation, replace "*Is this student ready?*" with "*What would make this student successful today?*" Then remove one barrier, add one meaningful support, or create one more opportunity for participation and belonging.

Additional Resources

The Inclusion Podcast Episode 73: When "They Need a Small Group" Is Code for Exclusion: In this episode of *The Inclusion Podcast*, Dr. Julie Causton and Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak challenge the assumption that students who need small group instruction must be removed from general education classrooms. Discover how flexible grouping, student choice, and intentional instructional design can provide meaningful support without sacrificing access, belonging, or peer relationships. Includes practical strategies for creating inclusive small group learning opportunities that benefit all students.

WTAF?! The Five Fs Schools Need to Rethink About Autistic Students: Join Otto Lana, Dr. Julie Causton, and Dr. Kristie Pretti-Frontczak for a bold, engaging, and myth-busting exploration of autism through five essential lenses: Flexibility, Functionality, Freedom, Fairness, and Facts. Through lived experience, research, and practical insights, discover ways to challenge assumptions, remove barriers, and create more inclusive schools where autistic students truly belong and thrive.

