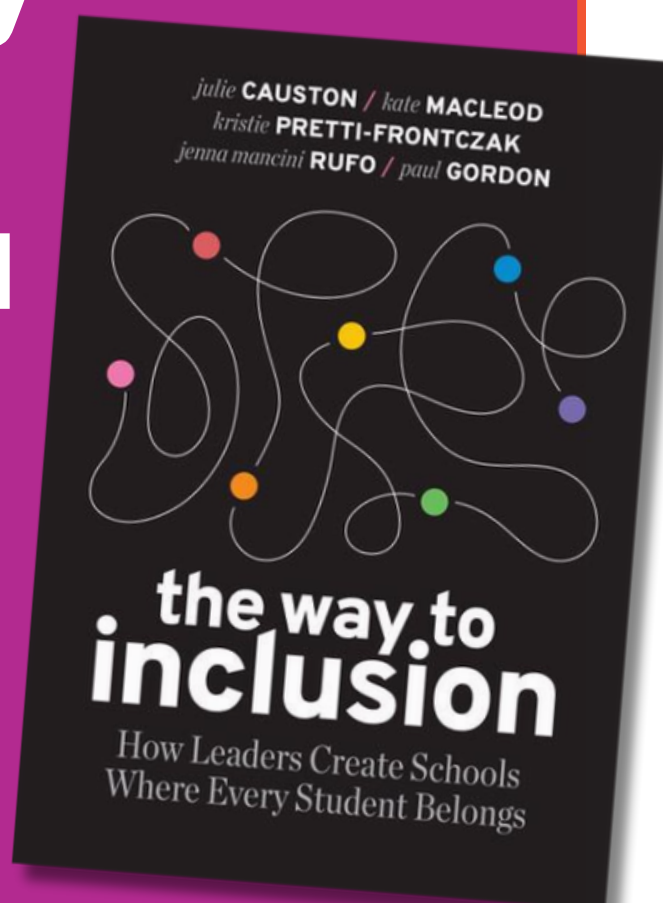


# A Self-Study Guide for Leaders and Educators:

Building clarity,  
readiness,  
and momentum  
for inclusive  
systems change



# Welcome

*The Way to Inclusion: How Leaders Create Schools Where Every Student Belongs* is written for leaders willing to engage in the important and often uncomfortable work of systems change. This self-study guide is designed to support that work independently, without a formal facilitator, training series, or fixed timeline.

This is not a workbook to complete or a checklist to follow. It is a thinking guide — one that helps you slow down, notice patterns, and lead more intentionally.

The goal of self-study is not completion.  
The goal is clarity and readiness.

## WHO THIS SELF-STUDY IS FOR

This guide is designed for:

- Leaders preparing for team-based or district-wide work
- Instructional coaches and consultants
- Educators leading change in their classrooms and buildings

You may be:

- **New** to inclusive systems thinking
- **Revisiting** this work with fresh eyes
- **Looking** for a different path (i.e., to engage without adding another initiative)
- **Continuing** a journey to create inclusive schools for all

All of that is okay.

## HOW THIS SELF-STUDY IS DIFFERENT

This self-study is intentionally different from traditional book studies or PD guides.

It does **not**:

- Ask you to read the book cover to cover and in order
- Push you toward immediate implementation
- Assume unlimited time or authority
- Treat inclusion as a compliance task

Instead, it focuses on:

- Seeing systems clearly
- Understanding what must come before action
- Strengthening leadership decision-making
- Honoring the emotional and structural realities of change

You will not be asked to do everything.

You will be invited to think carefully.

## HOW THE BOOK AND THIS GUIDE WORK TOGETHER

The Way to Inclusion outlines seven milestones along an Inclusive System Change Path, including key leadership questions, skills, and actions. This self-study guide is not organized strictly by chapter or milestone. Instead, it is organized around **how leaders actually learn and lead change**.

You may move back and forth between chapters.

What matters most is:

- **Sequence, not speed**
- **Understanding before action**
- **Systems before solutions**

There is no “right pace.” There is only the next right step.

## THE LEARNING RHYTHM USED THROUGHOUT THIS GUIDE

Every phase of the self-study follows the same rhythm:

**Read** ➔ **Notice** ➔ **Reflect** ➔ **Try** ➔ **Self-Check**

This rhythm is designed to:

- Move learning beyond reflection
- Keep actions small and intentional
- Prevent premature problem-solving
- Support leadership growth over time

You'll see this rhythm repeated throughout.

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# Choose Your Depth

Inclusive systems change does not require everyone to engage in the same way or at the same pace. Leaders bring different roles, authority, and capacity to the work.

Choose the depth that fits your context right now. You can move between levels at any time.

**Depth is about readiness, not commitment.**

**Level 1: LIGHT**  
Build Awareness &  
Shared Language

**Level 2: MODERATE**  
Build Clarity &  
Leadership  
Readiness

**Level 3: DEEP**  
Build System  
Insight & Change  
Readiness

## LEVEL 1: LIGHT — BUILD AWARENESS & SHARED LANGUAGE

**Best for:** Busy leaders and educators, first exposure, limited time, early exploration

**Time commitment:** 30–45 minutes per phase

**Primary goal:** Conceptual clarity and awareness

### What This Level Emphasizes

- Clear definitions
- Noticing patterns
- Language shifts

**If you only do one thing at this level:** Focus on noticing patterns without feeling like you need to fix them all at once. Awareness is key!

## LEVEL 2: MODERATE — BUILD CLARITY & LEADERSHIP READINESS

**Best for:** School/district leaders, coaches, leaders preparing for teams to engage in the work

**Time commitment:** 60–90 minutes per phase

**Primary goal:** Leadership clarity and system awareness

### What This Level Emphasizes

- Honest reflection
- Connecting vision to systems
- Early structural awareness
- Low-risk leadership moves

**If you only do one thing at this level:** Focus on aligning vision with system realities.

## LEVEL 3: DEEP — BUILD SYSTEM INSIGHT & CHANGE READINESS

**Best for:** Leadership teams, system-level leaders, facilitators, change agents

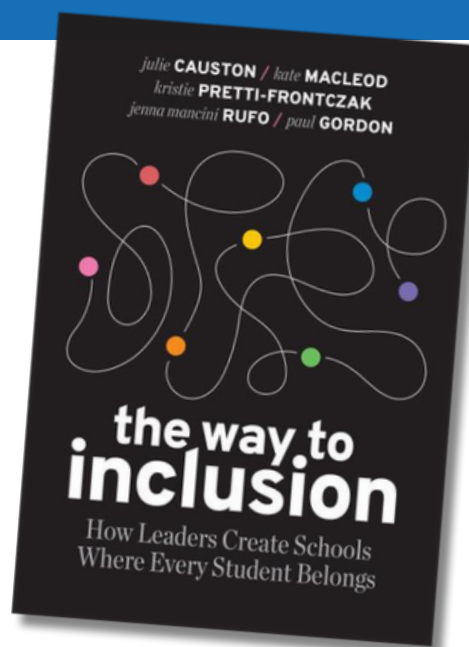
**Time commitment:** Flexible; often multi-week sessions with time for reflection and discussion

**Primary goal:** Strategic readiness for systems change

### What This Level Emphasizes

- Pattern analysis
- Structural diagnosis
- Leadership self-reflection
- Preparing for redesign and sustainability

**If you only do one thing at this level:** Focus on structural alignment.



# Self-Study Phases

Now that you have identified your depth level, begin to make your way through **5 phases**. You may move through these phases in order or return to them as needed.

## PHASE 1: CLARIFYING THE WHY AND THE MEANING OF INCLUSION

### Read

Chapter 1: Understand Why Inclusive Education Is the Way

### Notice

- How inclusion is described in meetings, emails, and policies
- When inclusion is framed as a place, program, or person
- Whose voices are centered and whose are missing

### Reflect

- How do I define inclusive education?
- How is that definition reflected (or contradicted) in our system?
- Why does inclusion matter to me as a leader right now?

### Try

- Share one clear sentence about why inclusion matters with a colleague
- Replace vague language with precise language about belonging and access



Click image to download

**Tired of confusion, pushback, or slow progress around inclusion? Take the clear, actionable step your school needs right now to create truly inclusive classrooms!**

**Cut through the confusion with a clear definition to create schools where every student achieves the desired outcomes.**

### Self-Check

- Can I describe inclusion as a system, not a placement?
- Am I grounding this work in values or compliance?

## PHASE 2: SEEING THE SYSTEM CLEARLY

### Read

#### Chapter 2: See the System

### Notice

- Where students spend most of their day
- What happens when students struggle
- Which students receive the most adult support (and why)

### Reflect

- Who is included, where, and with whom?
- What patterns of access and participation stand out?
- What inequities feel hardest to name?

### Try

- Ask one systems-level question in a meeting
- Sketch a rough picture of how services are currently organized

### Self-Check

- Am I seeing patterns or isolated cases?
- Am I naming inequities without blame?



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**Gain a clear understanding of the foundational laws and protections that support students with disabilities in schools.**

## INCLUSION RESEARCH FAST FACTS

(CLICK TO ACCESS DRIVE DOC)

Get clear, research-backed data you can use to confidently support inclusive practices in conversations, meetings, and presentations.

This resource helps you:

- Speak about inclusion with confidence and clarity
- Back up your decisions with credible, research-based evidence
- Advocate more effectively in meetings, trainings, and conversations
- Shift discussions from opinion to data-driven understanding
- Save time by having key research organized and ready to use

## PHASE 3: SETTING DIRECTION AND VISION

### Read

Chapter 3: Develop Your Inclusive Vision

### Notice

- Where your vision is visible (and where it disappears)
- How decisions are made under pressure

### Reflect

- What about our system conflicts with inclusive values?
- Who would be surprised by our stated vision?

### Try

- Draft or revise a short inclusive vision statement
- Test it: does it guide real decisions?

### Self-Check

- Is our vision clear enough to guide difficult choices?
- Am I willing to reference it publicly?



### THE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION COMPASS

([click to access](#))

**Move From  
Vision to Action**

**"OUR  
DIFFERENCES  
ARE OUR  
STRENGTH.  
EVERY  
STUDENT  
BELONGS."**



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### LEAD WITH PURPOSE—EVEN WHEN DECISIONS ARE HARD

([CLICK TO ACCESS](#))

**From staffing requests to last-minute schedule changes, school leaders make hundreds of decisions every week.**

## PHASE 4: UNDERSTANDING WHAT INCLUSION LOOKS LIKE IN PRACTICE

### Read

Chapter 6: Use Powerful Inclusive Classroom Practices

### Notice

- How students access grade-level learning
- How adults collaborate
- Where supports are embedded and where students are removed

### Reflect

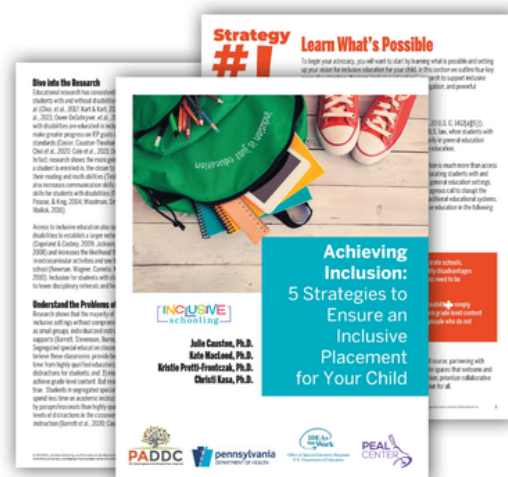
- What do inclusive classrooms actually look like?
- Where do structures help or hinder these practices?

### Try

- Observe a classroom with a learning lens
- Ask an educator what makes inclusion possible in their setting

### Self-Check

- Could I recognize strong inclusive practice?
- Am I asking educators to change practice without changing conditions?



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## ACHIEVING INCLUSION: STRATEGIES FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS FOR ALL STUDENTS

(Click to access)

- AN INCREDIBLE LEGAL RESOURCE TO HELP YOU ADVOCATE FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR YOUR CHILD
- A SUMMARY OF CRITICAL INCLUSION LEGAL CASES



Inclusive Structural and Instructional Practices Self-Assessment  
Where are we, and how are we doing?

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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| <p><b>Directions</b></p> <p>Step 1: Print (click <a href="#">here</a> to download pdf) or make a copy of this DRIVE document.</p> <p>Step 2: Complete the self-assessment - Administrators and/or coaches rate your staff overall. Teachers and related service providers, rate yourself overall on a scale of 0-5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>0= no, not at all, never</li> <li>3= sometimes, moderately, or inconsistently</li> <li>5= yes, always, or strongly</li> </ul> <p>Step 3: Reflect upon your ratings and what this means for identifying strengths, priorities, and needs. Engage in deeper reflection by using the guiding questions from all or some of the <a href="#">Inclusive Systems Change Path</a> milestones (there are 7).</p> <p>Step 4: Share results with other decision-makers and identify goals and your next action step. At a minimum determine what you will accomplish as it relates to inclusive education in the next year, 3 months, within the next 30 days?</p> <p><b>Self-Assessment Key</b></p> <p><b>Beliefs</b> - Does your staff (or do you) hold this to be an important belief?</p> <p><b>Skills</b> - Does your staff (or do you) have the skills to implement this practice or idea?</p> <p><b>System</b> - Does the larger school district or system support the implementation of this practice or idea?</p> <p><b>Notes</b> - Add notes in the notes column to give more detail about your ratings.</p> | <p><b>Achieving Inclusion: Strategies for Creating Inclusive Classrooms for ALL Students</b></p> <p>Julie Cassino, Ph.D.<br/>Kate MacLeod, Ph.D.<br/>Kristin Preff-Frost, Ph.D.<br/>Christi Kase, Ph.D.</p> <p><a href="https://inclusiveschooling3.amazonaws.com/InclusiveClassroomStrategiesArticle.pdf">https://inclusiveschooling3.amazonaws.com/InclusiveClassroomStrategiesArticle.pdf</a></p> |
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## INCLUSIVE STRUCTURAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICES SELF-ASSESSMENT

Where are we, and how are we doing?



## PHASE 5: STRUCTURES AND SUSTAINABILITY

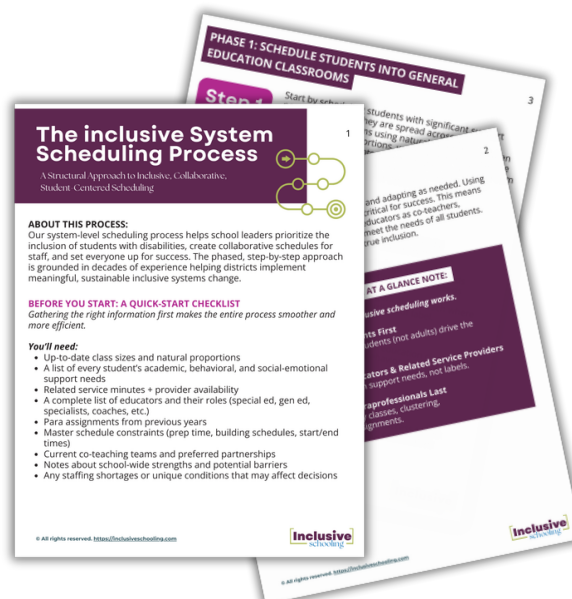
### Read

Chapters 4 & 5: Structures & Schedules

Chapter 7: Ongoing Support

### Notice

- How schedules shape access
- How roles are defined and used
- Where leadership attention fades over time



Click image to download

### Reflect

- Where are individuals compensating for weak systems?
- What would steady progress look like here?

### Try

- Identify one structural leverage point to explore further
- Ask: If nothing changes, what will this system continue to produce?

### Self-Check

- Am I fixing, defending, or leading?
- Am I protecting sequence, or rushing ahead?

## A FINAL REMINDER

Self-study is a powerful starting point—but it is not the end.

If this self-study leaves you with:

- More questions than answers
- Greater clarity about what matters
- Increased awareness of system patterns

You are exactly where you should be.

**Inclusive systems change begins with leaders willing to see clearly, slow down, and lead intentionally.**

Self-study builds readiness.  
Leadership builds momentum.