

Inclusive Education



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An Evening for Conversation and Connection: Listening to Families, Shaping the Future

On May 28, Aspire Richmond's Inclusive Education Committee hosted an evening of dialogue and learning in preparation for the 2026 Inclusive Education Think Tank, scheduled for the winter of 2026. Facilitated by Apostrophe, the event brought together 24 parents and educators to explore what true inclusion means in Richmond's public schools.

The evening began with featured presentations on inclusive education:

- Liz Hayes-Brown, Director of Instruction, Inclusive Learning & Equity, Richmond School District
- Dr. Erika Cedillo, Director of Policy & Programs, Inclusion BC

Together, they shared insights on inclusive practices, advocacy, and systemic change. But the heart of the evening was the conversation: "What do you want the Think Tank to know about what must happen for your child and you to feel safe, included, informed, and happy in your education journey?"

From these rich discussions, themes emerged each offering guidance for the Think Tank's planning and the broader work of inclusive education in Richmond:

Understand Behaviour Through a Neurodiversity Lens: Behaviour is communication. Families want educators to recognize neurodiversity as a difference, not a disorder, and respond with empathy and validation.

Inclusion Requires Real Commitment and a Culture Shift: Inclusion must go beyond accommodations. Schools should actively challenge stigma, educate peers, and foster belonging in all spaces.

Support Must Be Individualized and Consistent: High-functioning students with low communication skills are often overlooked. Consistency in staffing and transparency in support plans are essential.

High School Support Is Falling Short: Families reported lagging support at the high school level, with fragmented communication and unmet IEPs. Social isolation and anxiety about the future are growing concerns.

Collaboration with Families is Key: Parents want to be partners, not just recipients of updates. Advocacy tools and training are needed, especially for newcomers to the system.

Communication Needs to Be Clear, Timely, and Ongoing: Families need regular check-ins and clarity about who's supporting their child.

Prioritize Social Connection and Emotional Safety: Academic success is not enough. Schools must help students build friendships and feel emotionally safe, especially those with low social skills.

Celebrate Strengths and Interests: A strength-based approach unlocks confidence and motivation. Passion-led learning can transform a child's experience. Families want to hear success stories that prove inclusion is possible and share practical strategies that work.

Reach the Voices We're Missing: Language, access, and trust barriers silence many families. Intentional outreach is needed to ensure equity.

Build Parent and School Communities: Connection reduces isolation. Families value spaces to build relationships with educators and other parents.

As planning for the 2026 Think Tank continues, these themes will serve as a compass ensuring that the event reflects the lived experiences, hopes, and wisdom of Richmond's families. The Inclusive Education Committee is grateful to the parents that participated and looks forward to continuing this journey of listening, learning, and leading together.