

PATHWAY TO INCLUSION:

A Central Valley School District and Central Valley Early Learning Center's Story

BACKGROUND

Central Valley Early Learning Center (CVELC) and Central Valley School District joined as an IPTN Demonstration Site District in 2024. Their work focuses on schoolwide inclusion, highlighting universal supports and interventions, collaborative teaming and family partnerships, and social-emotional learning and resilience building as core strategies—all aimed at ensuring every student has access, support, and a sense of belonging.

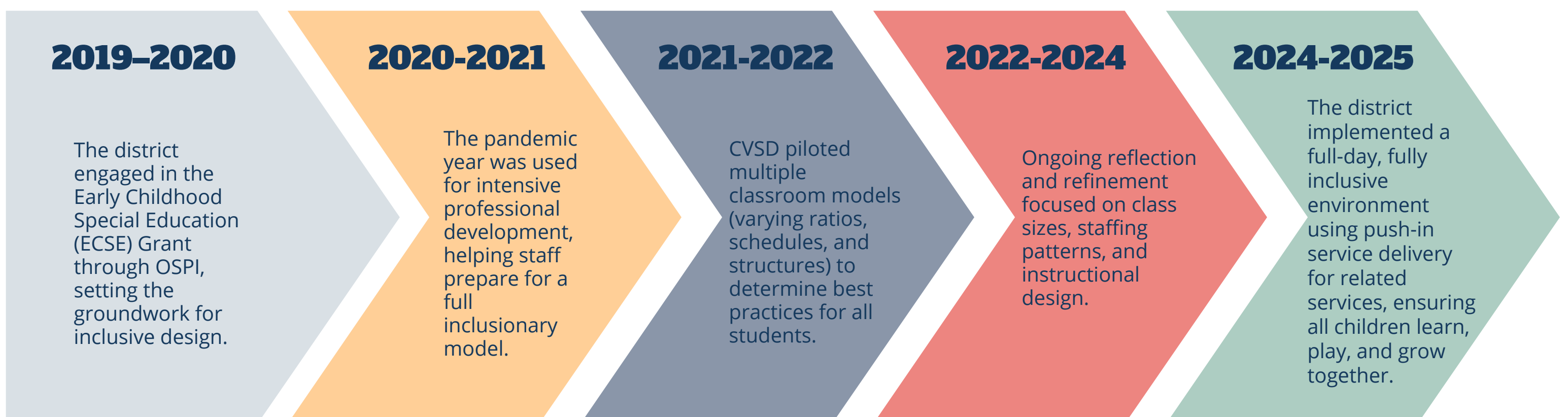
Central Valley ELC serves 590 funded student spots across 23 classrooms at the main site and 8 satellite classrooms in neighborhood schools. The center is all-inclusive. Each classroom includes 18 students (6 students receive IEP services) with push-in related services from speech, occupational, and physical therapists. The program employs 150 staff members, including 14 social workers, and maintains an all-inclusive model.

MISSION & VISION

Central Valley's vision is to ensure high-quality early learning environments for all students, where every child is valued, supported, and provided equitable opportunities to grow. The mission is rooted in creating inclusive classrooms that celebrate diversity, foster independence, and build foundational academic and social-emotional skills. The guiding belief is clear: "Inclusion is not about fitting students into classrooms—it's about ensuring classrooms fit every student."

CENTRAL VALLEY ELC TIMELINE

The district's inclusive journey began with one parent's question: "Why?"— "why should one twin with a disability be separated from their sibling and peers?" That moment sparked a systemic shift toward full inclusion in early childhood.



Through these intentional moves, CVSD transformed its early learning system into one where access, equity, and excellence are foundational to every child's experience.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICE: UNIVERSAL SUPPORTS AND INTERVENTIONS



CVELC ensures that every classroom has the same universal supports—from environmental design to instructional resources—so that inclusion is consistent across all settings.

Universal strategies include visual schedules at child eye level, predictable routines, and embedded visuals to make abstract concepts concrete. Staff use the Pyramid Model framework to promote healthy social-emotional development and the TPOT observation tool to identify and strengthen effective classroom practices.

An aligned Student Study Team (SST) process supports early intervention, bringing together interdisciplinary staff to collaborate on data-driven decisions and targeted supports. The focus is always on the strengths of the child and the responsiveness of the environment, not deficits.

INCLUSIVE PRACTICE: COLLABORATIVE TEAMING AND FAMILY PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration forms the backbone of CVSD's inclusive success. Interdisciplinary teams—including general educators, special educators, social workers, therapists, and family support specialists—meet regularly to problem-solve, plan, and co-teach.

Family engagement is equally central. Thirteen Family Support Specialists maintain active caseloads of approximately 40 families each, ensuring consistent communication, access to community resources, and advocacy support. Parents are integral to decision-making, reinforcing a shared sense of ownership and belonging.

This collaborative model has strengthened relationships between early intervention, early childhood education, and family systems—anchoring the belief that “inclusion only feels hard for the adults; for children, it’s natural.”

INCLUSIVE PRACTICE: SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING AND RESILIENCE BUILDING

CVELC emphasizes social-emotional learning (SEL) as the foundation for readiness and inclusion. Classrooms teach skills like friendship-building, emotional regulation, sharing, and problem-solving using visual aids and explicit modeling.

1. The Second Step curriculum and Pyramid Model practices help students internalize social-emotional skills through play and interaction. Teachers embed “schedules within schedules” so students understand routines and transitions, reducing anxiety and promoting independence.

The program's data shows measurable impact:

- Among 4-year-olds, students below standards decreased by 32% in SEL, 42% in math, and 38% in literacy from fall to spring.
- Among 3-year-olds, similar gains were seen—reductions of 26% in SEL, 28% in math, and 32% in literacy.

These outcomes demonstrate that when inclusion is intentional and supported, every student benefits.



NEXT STEPS

The Central Valley Early Learning Center continues to grow and refine its inclusive practices with a focus on sustainability and alignment. Next steps include:

- Aligning staffing, curriculum, and calendar with the district's kindergarten programs for smoother transitions.
- Exploring the development of a Transitional Kindergarten (TK) program that builds on inclusive early learning foundations.
- Scaling inclusive classrooms to additional elementary sites as enrollment grows and space allows.
- Continuing to build capacity through professional development, coaching, and reflective practice.

Through these next steps, Central Valley School District reaffirms its commitment to inclusion as both a practice and a promise—ensuring every child begins their educational journey surrounded by community, care, and possibility.

To learn more about Central Valley ELC use QR code below

