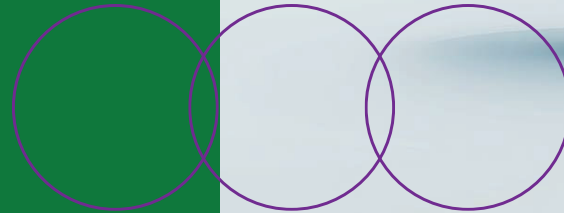


LAKE ELSINORE UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Location, Not Designation: Supporting Students in General Education Through Integrated Mental Health

Mireya Escalante, PhD, PPS
Felipe Flores, EdD, MSW

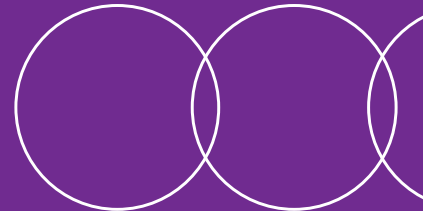


Why This Conversation Matters

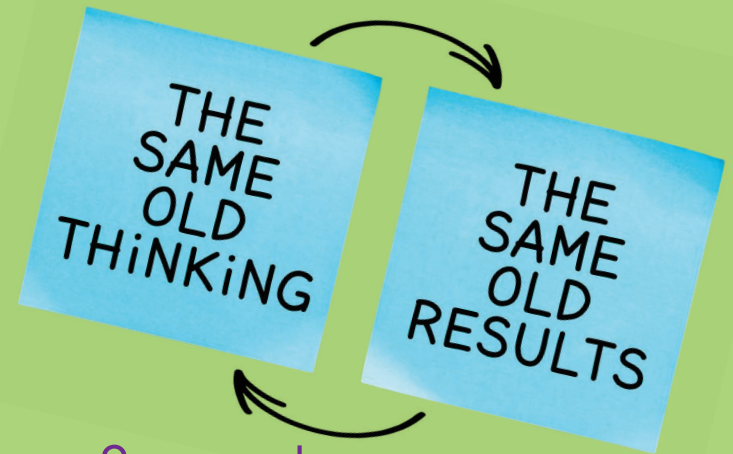
- Students are showing increased behavioral and emotional needs
- Systems often respond after escalation
- Over-reliance on identification vs. early support



- Key question:
- 👉 What if support came before designation?



The Shift in Thinking

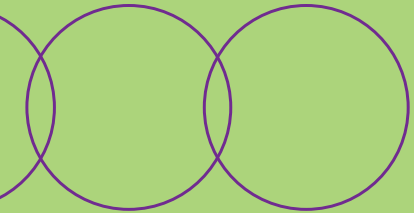


Old Model:

Wait → Refer → Assess → Qualify → Support

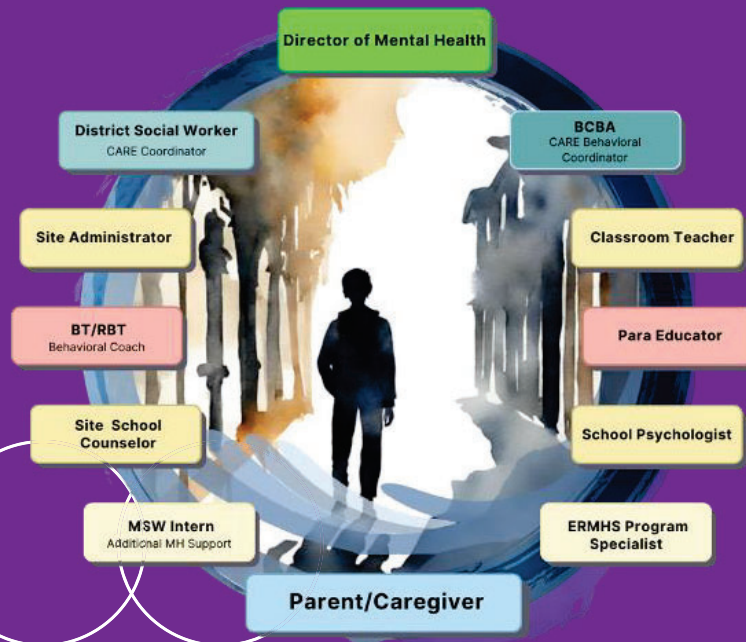
LEUSD Emerging Model:

Recognize → Support → Adjust → Strengthen → (Assess if needed)



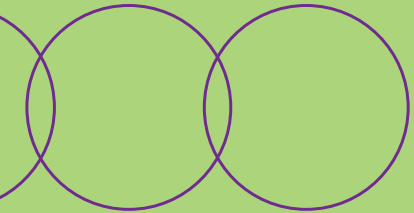
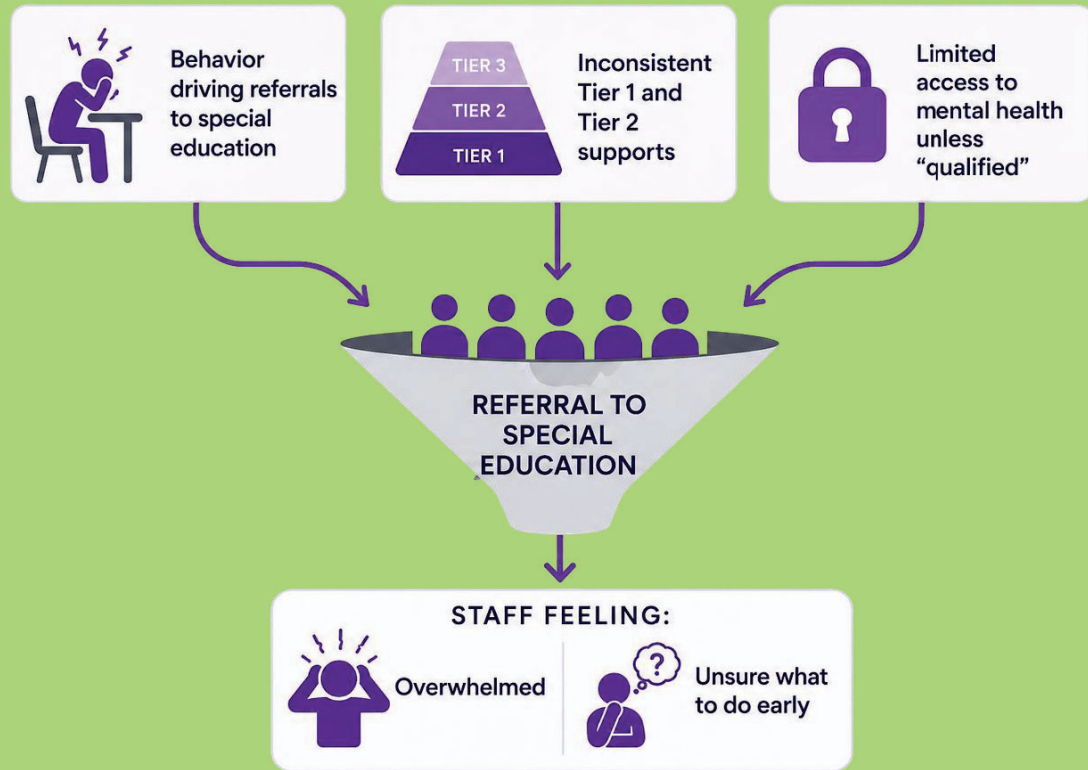
Support is not reserved for eligibility

What We Mean by “Location, Not Designation”



- Services based on student need, not label
- Support happens in general education first
- Mental health is:
 - Proactive
 - Integrated
 - Accessible

The Problem We Were Seeing



Our Guiding Beliefs

Every student can build resilience



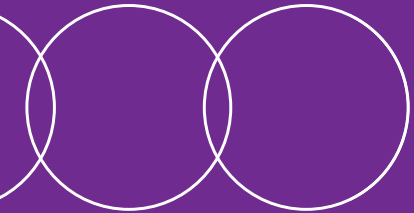
Early support prevents escalation



General education is the primary environment for growth

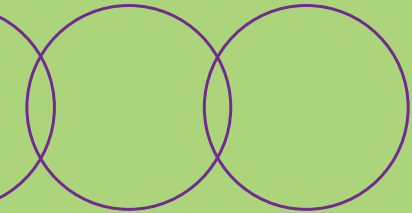


Collaboration strengthens outcomes



System Overview

LEUSD Model



 **Not separate systems—connected support**

Multi-Tiered Support in Action

Tier 1:

- SEL, classroom strategies, relationship building

Tier 2:

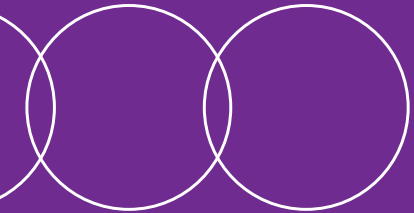
- Check-ins, small groups, targeted interventions

Tier 3:

- Intensive support, risk assessments, individualized plans



All tiers accessible without designation first



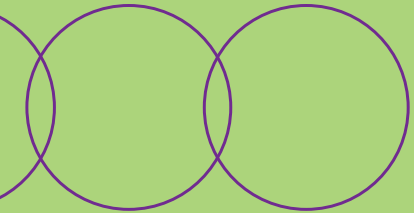
What Integration Looks Like

Traditional Approach

- Pull-out only
- Delayed support
- Isolated services
- Staff unsure

Integrated Support Model

- Push-in supports
- Real-time collaboration
- Shared problem-solving
- Mental health visible & normalized



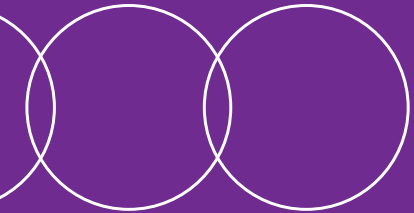
Example in Practice

Student Scenario:

- Escalating behavior in class

Traditional Path:

Referral → Discipline → Consider assessment



Integrated

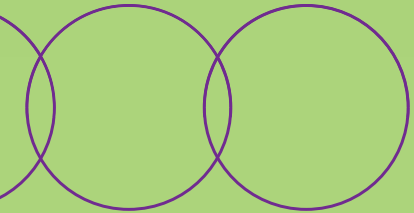
Approach:

- ✓ Teacher consult
 - ✓ Check-in support
 - ✓ Strategy
 - ✓ alignment
 - ✓ Family connection
- Monitor progress

Progress Over Perfection

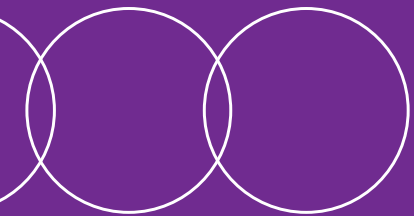


- Focus on:
 - Small gains
 - Increased regulation
 - Reduced reliance on adult support
- Data is:
 - Goal Driven
 - Student-centered
 - Not one-size-fits-all



Building Resilience Early

- Teach:
 - Emotional awareness
 - Regulation strategies
 - Problem-solving
- Normalize:
 - Asking for help
 - Resetting
 - Trying again



 **Resilience is built, not assigned**

Role of Staff

Personal Growth and Enhanced Well-being Through Team Support

Admin: Systems alignment

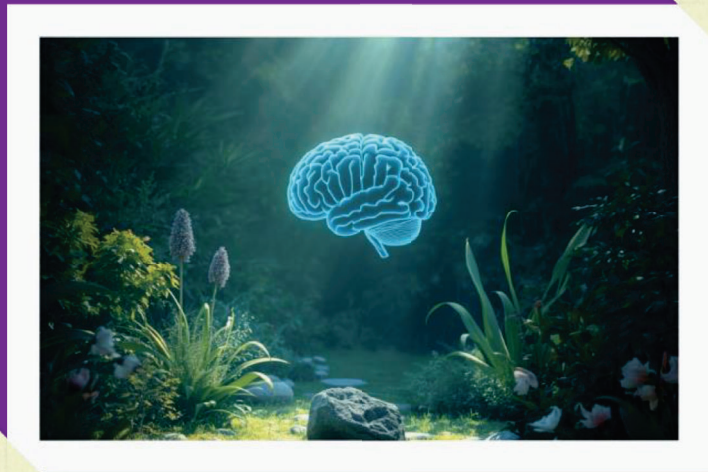
All staff: Part of the support network

Counselors, Social Workers, BCBA, & Psychologist: Specialized support

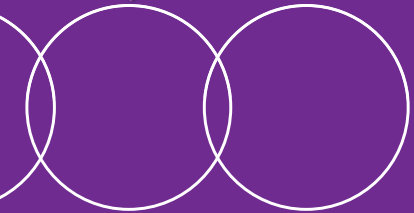
Teachers: First responders to student needs



What We Learned



- Access matters more than placement
- Early support reduces escalation
- Systems only work when they are followed
- Processes must be executable
- Clear lines between levels of support are important
- Staff need:
 - Clear systems
 - Practical tools
- Consistency across sites is critical



“Mental health is not a destination, but a process. It's about how you drive, not where you're going.”

– Noam Shpancer

Challenges We Faced

Role Clarity

- Hand off from one program to the other

Clear Communication

- Perceptions of support vs. Offered support

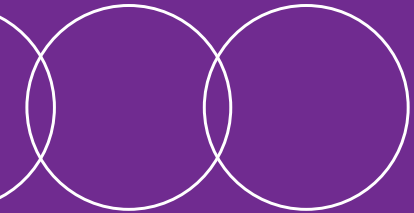
Balancing:

- Reactive vs. Proactive work

Time and capacity

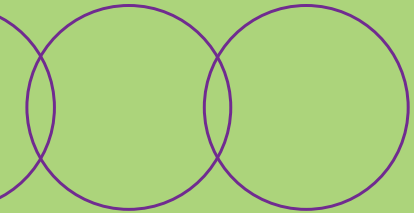
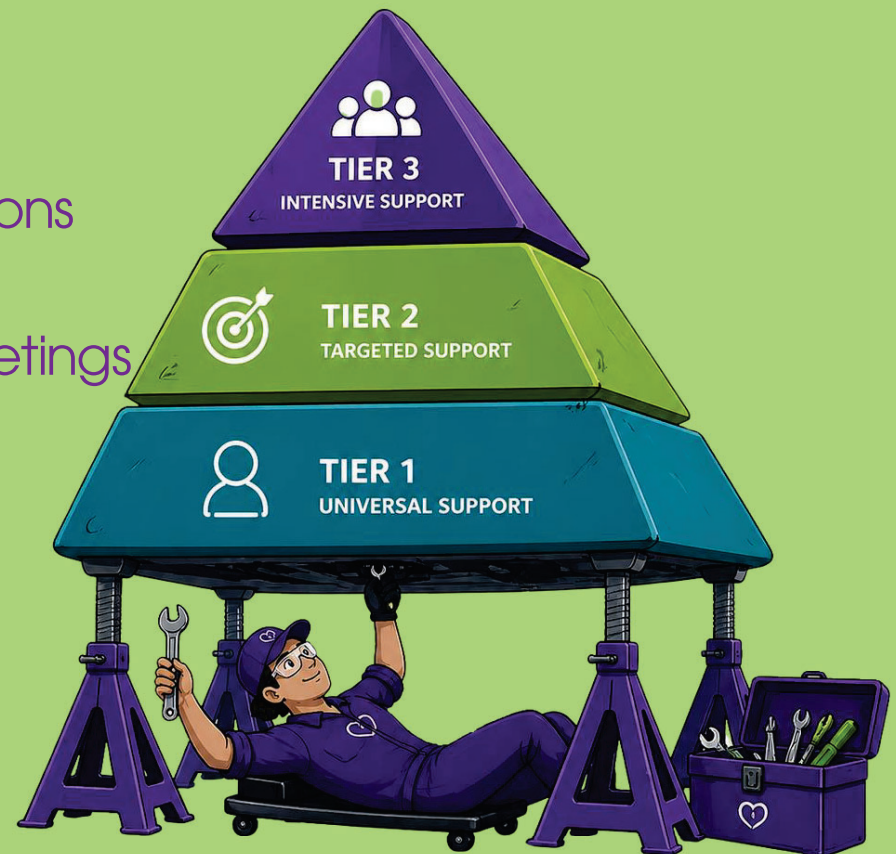
Changing

- Long-standing systems

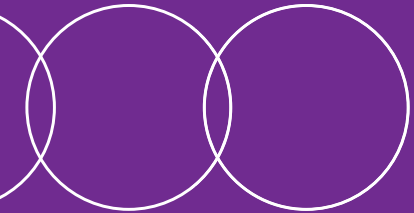


Adjustments We Made

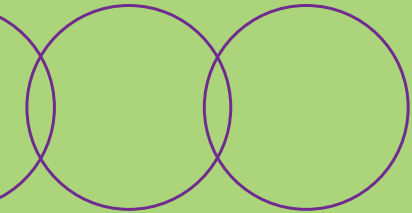
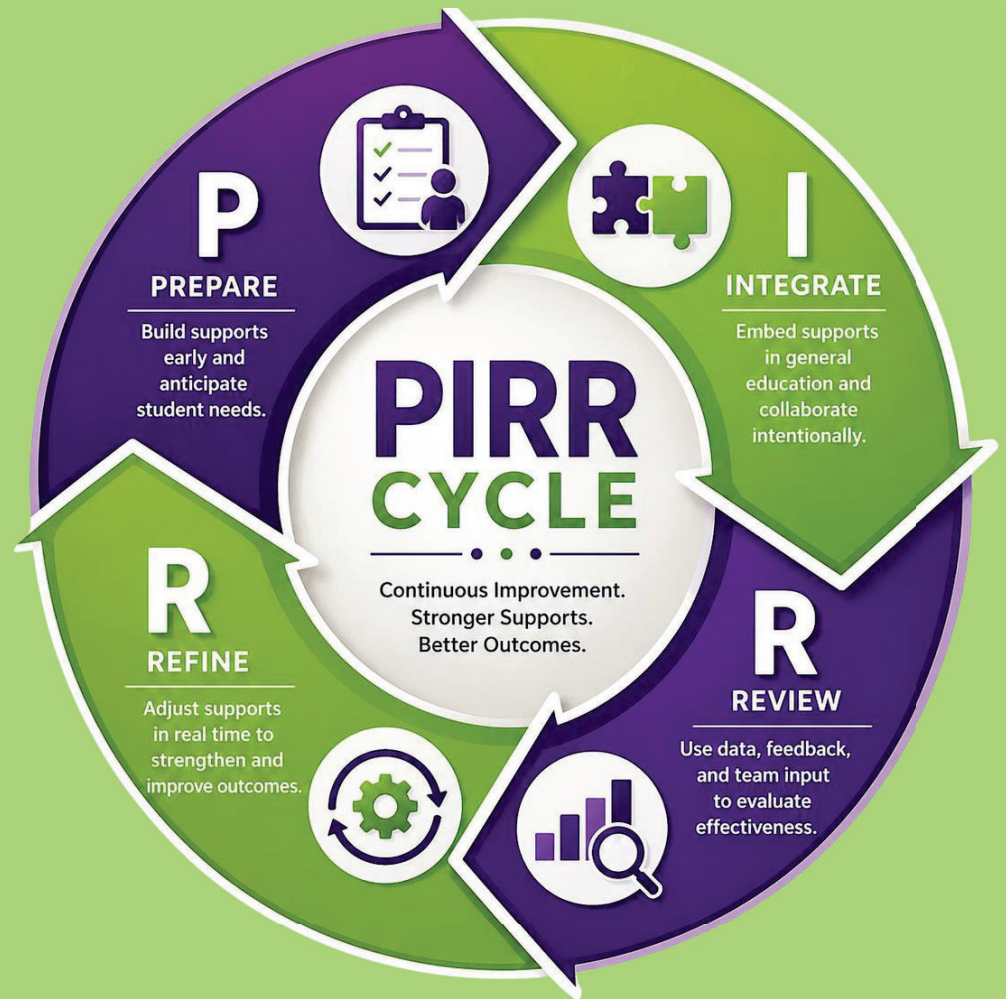
- Clarifying Tier 1 & 2 intervention expectations
- Built structured referral pathways
- Increased collaboration time & team meetings
- Clarified roles across teams
- Rewrite programs to ensure clarity



Impact We're Seeing



Systems-Level Takeaways



Practical Strategies to Take Back

Sustaining Progress and Meeting Evolving Mental Health Needs



- Start with one system shift:
 - Structured check-ins
 - Teacher consultation process
 - Clear Tier 2 supports
- Align teams around:
 - Shared language
 - Clear roles
- Flexibility to change as needed:
 - Adapt to the needs of the students, sites, and families
 - Review for areas that aren't working and make adjustments

Reflection



- Students don't need a label to be supported
- Systems can shift
- Small changes create meaningful impact



Location, Not Designation is about access—for every student, every day

Questions?

