



**MA Public Adult Education
Professional Development System**
A PUBLIC ADULT EDUCATION OF MA PROGRAM

Disability Inclusion Program Models: Notre Dame Education Center - Lawrence (NDEC-L)

This feature is one in a series of four program features that showcase how adult education programs in MA have used program-based coaching and the [Basic Disability Screening for Adult Educators](#) to make their programs more disability inclusive. To read the additional features, visit the [Disability Inclusion Coaching: Four Program Experiences resource page](#), and to learn more about SABES Program Support offerings related to ADA & Disability Inclusion, visit the [SABES ADA & Disability Inclusion website page](#).

About

Notre Dame Education Center-Lawrence (NDEC-L) is a large ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) community-based program serving a diverse population of around 376 students. Founded and sponsored by the Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur, NDEC-L describes itself as "an inclusive community of learning where diverse, underserved adults enrich their lives through education and gain the tools necessary for enhanced professional opportunity and community engagement." The program provides English language and citizenship classes, skills training, and leadership development — tuition-free or low-cost — in a learning environment that is welcoming, respectful, and dignified.

Goals

NDEC-L's goals were oriented toward fulfilling their core mission of meeting students where they are by better understanding barriers to learning that could be addressed through accommodations. In addition, the program articulated a goal to better distinguish between language learning and learning disabilities.

Summary of the Work

NDEC-L staff participated in a three-session coaching pathway that included an initial goal identification session, followed by longer interactive Q&A sessions involving both full-time and part-time staff. As a result, the program integrated BDSAE screening questions directly into its initial intake process. It also instituted program-wide student surveys, established targeted instructional support methods (both "push-in" volunteer aides and "pull-out" literacy groups), and tested a separate classroom model for struggling students.

Lessons Learned

Two years into their disability inclusion work, the program identified three major takeaways:

- First, singling out individual students for private conversations about their learning can set the wrong tone. Surveying the entire student body universally normalizes check-ins and makes the accommodation process feel far less isolating.
- Second, forms translated into students' native languages are rarely necessary, because screening works best as an organic conversation. Multilingual advisors who understand the BDSAE criteria can seamlessly ask screening questions during intake conversations.
- Third, due to instructor turnover, it is essential for leadership to advocate for new staff to engage with SABES professional development focused on disability inclusion.

Conclusion

NDEC-L took a broad, whole-program approach to identifying and supporting students with learning barriers, moving away from singling out individuals and toward system-wide screening. The program learned that universal check-ins, natural conversation over paperwork, and consistent staff training are what make disability inclusion feel normal rather than isolating.