

## 2024-2025 Outstanding Project Award Winner David Palmer



*Dr. David Palmer*

In the Humanities, Education, Business, and Social Sciences category, the 2024-25 Outstanding Project Award goes to Dr. David Palmer, for his work, [\*The Educational Imperative of INSPECT: A Trauma-Informed Neurodivergent-Affirming Classroom Culture Framework\*](#), written for his Master of Science in Special Education. An experienced educator and Neurodivergent Development Expert, Palmer developed INSPECT to help teachers create inclusive, engaging learning environments that work for all learners. His project advisor was Dr. Jemma Kim.

A dedicated educator and parent of neurodivergent children, Palmer recognized that the traditional classroom model of controlling student behavior through rewards and punishments simply wasn't working for many learners. Rather than correcting behavior and improving learning, it intensified student distress. It also increased teacher burnout, since so much energy was focused on controlling student behavior. He knew there must be a better way. His graduate project addresses these issues, offering INSPECT as a solution.

"I created INSPECT out of necessity," Palmer said. "Teachers were told to 'manage behavior,' but no one ever showed us how to manage our own nervous systems first. It became clear to me that regulation must come before education."

INSPECT is a trauma-informed, neurodivergent-affirming teaching model designed to support a wide range of learners and build more inclusive classrooms. Palmer says better understanding of students with ADHD and other types of neurodiversity, as well as a rise in students suffering from trauma and stress, calls for new teaching methods.

The INSPECT framework consists of seven interconnected components:

- **I First** emphasizes that teachers must regulate their own emotions before supporting students.
- **Nurturing Environment** creates emotional safety through personal greetings, predictable routines, and responding to mistakes with understanding.
- **Structure** provides dependable routines that reduce anxiety without rigid control.
- **Planning** uses Universal Design for Learning to make lessons accessible to all students.
- **Engagement** connects students to their learning through relevance and choice.
- **Consistency** builds trust through predictable and fair adult responses.
- **Time** recognizes that learning and regulation cannot be rushed.

While the seven components compliment one another, Palmer says the first component is vital. "Calm isn't a luxury in education—it's essential. When teachers regulate themselves first,

classrooms become safer, more connected, and more human—for both students and teachers.”

As a public speaker and educational consultant, Palmer is busy sharing his INSPECT framework at a variety of events, including an upcoming TED-X talk and his own weekly podcast. He’s also working on a parenting book based on the INSPECT principles. He is a special education lead/specialist at Desert Sands Unified School District and holds a doctorate in Special Education Curriculum and Instruction from Liberty University. Always moving forward, there’s no doubt that he will continue to make meaningful contributions to the field of education.