

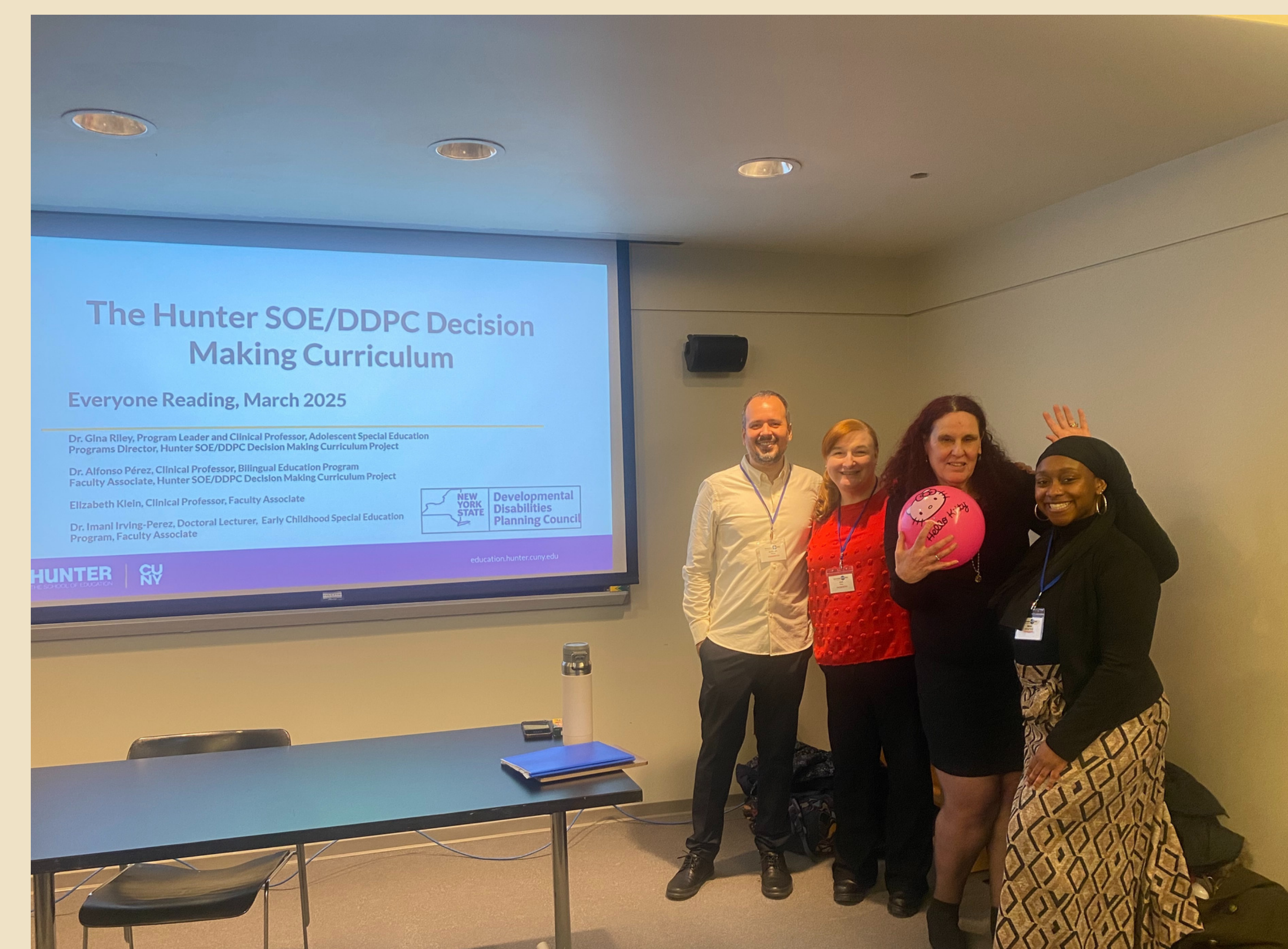
THE FUTURE OF SDM: HUNTER COLLEGE CONTINUES THE WORK



As we approach the “handover” of our pilot project to the statewide entity that OPWDD will be funding, (Good News 5/2/25), we are excited that our colleagues at the Hunter College School of Education (SoE) continue to advance SDM through their groundbreaking work in curriculum development for students with I/DD. Our Founding Director, Kris Glen, was recently asked what, after SDMNY’s amazing nine years, she saw as the future for SDM in New York and elsewhere. Her response echoed what we have learned over those nine years:

While our facilitation process and SDMA legislation are critical now, the real future lies in educating young people with I/DD about decision-making and the use of supports beginning early in their school careers, and continuing through high school graduation. If they learn, over time, and in age-appropriate ways, what decisions are, what goes into making them, what they are good at and where they may need support, and how to ask for and utilize that support, by the time they are 18 they won’t need SDMNY facilitation. Within 10–15 years a new generation will come of age already confidently employing a “less restrictive alternative to guardianship” to make decisions about their own lives. (Of course, providing support to those previously placed under guardianship or who have not come through the new educational paradigm will still be necessary, but at a much-reduced level.)

We began this work on a modest scale four years ago, with Associate Director Joan Cornachio and Faculty Associate Professor Gina Riley piloting a 10-week course at the Cooke School (Good News 10/22/21). DDPC saw the promise in what we were doing and issued an RFP for a 3-year project to develop scenario-based decision-making curricula for early childhood, middle school, and transition-age students with I/DD; not surprisingly, Hunter's SoE was the successful applicant, with Gina as Project Director. (Good News 11/4/22) Now in its third year, Hunter SOE/CDD-NYS Decision Making Curriculum has achieved a great deal, with fully developed curricula and materials free for download through the project website. As the Project's Parent Guide explains:



Gina (second from left) and part of her project team

The aim of this class is to prepare children to not only understand how to make decisions, but to think critically, to become more aware of their choices, to understand the nature of consequences—both good and bad—and to understand cause and effect. This class will help children explore themselves and listen well to others. They will understand more about who they are and how they think.

Thus far, over 300 schools across NYS are using the curriculum, impacting 3,500+ students. Many have been using the curriculum since Year 1; almost 60 percent are repeat users from schools/districts across NYC and NY State. In July alone, the curricula were downloaded by the Otto Specht School, the IDEAL School, District 75 in NYC, Capital Region BOCES, People's ARC of Suffolk County, and districts across Sullivan and Delaware Counties. There were also downloads from two community colleges in the Southwestern U.S., as well as Switzerland, Norway, and Finland.



Artwork of SDMNY Decision-Makers Emma and Noa

In order of use, the curricula are: adolescent – 48%; childhood and childhood bilingual combined – 51%; the remainder are early childhood/daycare center. Importantly, they have been translated into Spanish and Chinese, and by the end of summer will be translated into Bengali as well. The Project’s 2025–2026 updates (including new dual-language curriculum and video short integration) are scheduled to be completed by the end of this week. (for one of the Project’s videos on decision-making, [click here](#).)

The design, breadth, and approachability of the curriculum materials are beyond impressive. We wish we could share them all here, but instead provide these links ([click here](#) for the Project website, and access to the curricula and materials.) While this is only the beginning of a longer, larger project to integrate decision-making and support across the special education curriculum and experience, it is an extraordinary start, as the enthusiastic reception it has received powerfully demonstrates. We have always acknowledged that there are many ways to “do” SDM. We are proud of the continued leadership of Hunter College, our home from the outset, in advancing the human right of legal capacity and proud also to have had a part in this important new effort (in addition to Joan’s direct participation and SDMNY representation on the Advisory Council, we were surprised and delighted to discover that the artwork on the Project’s website, was created by two of our SDMNY Decision-Makers! [Good News 1/22/21])

CONGRATULATIONS TO GINA AND HER TEAM AT THE HUNTER SOE/CDD-NYS DECISION-MAKING CURRICULUM PROJECT, AND THANKS TO HUNTER FOR ITS CONTINUING COMMITMENT TO SDM!