



A Family Guide to Inclusion

What is Inclusive Education?

The learning style of the student, the subject matter being taught, the teaching style of the teacher, and the “culture” of the school all influence how a student with an intellectual and/or developmental disability (ID/DD) is included in general education. However, there are at least seven common features that characterize good inclusive education. Parents should look for them when evaluating proposed educational plans for their children.

- ✪ Parents, regular and special education teachers, and other school personnel work together to promote quality education for all students. There is consistent monitoring of instruction and student progress to ensure that short-term and long-term goals are met.
- ✪ Students with ID/DD attend the same schools as their siblings and neighborhood friends.
- ✪ Students with ID/DD are included in regular school routines (in natural proportions) participating with their similar-age peers in a variety of activities as a natural part of their day.
- ✪ To help students become active participants in every-day life, teaching maximizes the use of technology, includes various groupings ranging from individual to small or large group instruction, and takes place in regular classrooms and beyond the school building.

- ★ The focus is on the capabilities and strengths of the student, and not limitations. Partial participation is a valid educational goal. Students are included in activities, even if they are not able to do them independently.
- ★ Because interdependence in academic and non-academic activities is a priority, and planned for, friendships occur naturally.
- ★ General education teachers collaborate with special education teachers, related services specialists, and teacher assistants. Teachers receive training and support and have scheduled time for planning and consultation.



What Should be the Goals of Inclusive Education?

For students with ID/DD, special education services must be based upon the needs of the whole student. Students with ID/DD should receive their in-school, special education services in the general education classrooms, with appropriate in-class support. This should be complemented with community-based instruction that provides opportunities for students to learn a variety of life and employment skills in typical community settings. Every IEP should include goals to help the student become included in typical community settings.

- ✦ **SHARING ORDINARY PLACES:** Learning how to interact with students without disabilities while using the same buses, classes, and facilities.
- ✦ **BUILDING POSITIVE RELATIONSHIPS:** Participating in both academic and non-academic school activities with typical students removes any stigma associated with separate settings.
- ✦ **ENCOURAGING FRIENDSHIPS:** Increasing the number and kinds of social interactions with typical students.
- ✦ **BUILDING COMPETENCIES:** Developing and improving real-life skills alongside students without disabilities.
- ✦ **MAKING CHOICES:** Fostering the development of real-life decision making.

Experience in inclusive schools helps students with ID/DD learn to be more capable in community settings. Included students learn how to better deal with social situations and how to find help in their community. Research shows that students in inclusive schools reach more IEP goals. Educators are finding that students with disabilities, after graduating from inclusive schools, are more likely to be successful in finding and keeping a job after graduation and in functioning more independently in their community.



Common Questions

It is natural to question what will be different when a student with an intellectual and/or developmental disability enters a typical classroom. This information has been compiled from both research and experience to explain some of the issues around inclusive education. You may be surprised to learn how barriers may be overcome and that there are benefits to everyone involved in the process.

What is an intellectual disability?

Intellectual disability is characterized by significant difficulty with reasoning, learning, and problem solving. There is also difficulty with adaptive behavior, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. The disability begins before the age of 18.

What is a developmental disability?

Developmental disabilities are severe, ongoing disabilities that can affect thinking, movement, or both. The disabilities appear before the age of 22 and are likely to be lifelong.

Is intellectual disability the same as developmental disability?

Developmental disabilities include intellectual disability but also include other disabilities that are acknowledged during early childhood. Some developmental disabilities are largely physical issues, such as Cerebral Palsy or Epilepsy. Some individuals may have a condition that includes a physical and an intellectual disability, for example Down Syndrome or Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

How will students with disabilities be accepted by their peers?

Teachers and administrators set the tone for students to accept others who may have different appearances or abilities. Children learn to see their classmates as able when they are given opportunities to contribute in meaningful ways.

How can a student with a disability participate in a general education class?

First, it is the legal right of every student to be educated in the “least restrictive environment,” whenever possible. Research shows that when the supports required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are present, students who have ID/DD can meet more of their own goals among students who have no disabilities than they can in full-time, self-contained settings. It makes sense to include students with ID/DD in regular classrooms in their neighborhood schools, because other students provide good role models in terms of social skills. Regular classrooms are also full of rich language and varied life experiences. These things help students with special needs to achieve more in both school and community.

Will the exceptional needs of one student take extra time away from the others?

When a student with a ID/DD enters a regular classroom, it does not mean that s/he leaves all of the former supports behind. The law says that the additional help the student needs must be provided regardless of the setting. This may include the special educator or therapist consulting with the classroom teacher and explaining how s/he might use some activities in the classroom; for instance, the speech therapist might explain how to program a new word or phrase into a student’s electronic communication board so that s/he might better participate in

class. Or the classes might be team-taught by two or more professionals. Sometimes when a student has very intense needs, a classroom aide will assist with the most difficult activities.

Will the curriculum be changed in any way that will affect typical students?

Several studies carried out in various parts of the country show that the participation of students with ID/DD in regular classes does not limit typical student performance. The explanation for this is that when in-classroom support is provided to the student, that student participates in the same activity as classmates but may work toward a different goal. In a computer class, that student may work to recognize the letters on the keyboard, while the rest of the class's goal is to master the use of a word processing program. The teacher would teach the word processing lesson in the same way that s/he always has.

Can the entire curriculum be presented to a class that has a student whose learning rate is very different from the rest of the class?

Even though students with ID/DD often learn more slowly and less than their typical classmates, the pace of curriculum presentation to the class does not need to be slowed. Multi-level curricula used in inclusive classrooms make it possible for teachers to use the same themes for all students. Teachers in these classrooms adapt the kind and amount of material to be mastered, as well as the rate at which it is to be learned, to individual student's needs. The use of multilevel curricula makes it possible to individualize instruction for any student from the slowest to the fastest learner in the classroom. Beside assistance with curriculum modification, classroom teachers will need support and training as they master these new strategies.

Will typical students be required to serve as tutors in an inclusive classroom?

Students with disabilities can learn many things from typical students just by working and interacting with them. For example, cooperative learning is sometimes used to benefit all students. This practice groups students with differing abilities together on a single project. Each student is given a different role geared to his or her abilities or goals. Serving as part of a team in this way builds important skills for future adult roles. In addition to traditional classroom activities, peer tutoring and peer helping programs are sometimes offered. These programs are usually voluntary, and sometimes students who offer their services even earn credit for “community service learning.”



Inclusive Education Benefits All

Preparation for Life:

Inclusive education prepares all students, both those with and those without disabilities, for their adult life in a diverse society. Medical and technological advances, along with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other laws, now make it possible for people with significant disabilities to live longer and participate more fully in community life. As more people with ID/DD gain access to places of business and recreation, we learn to accept each other and work together in every aspect of the community. Students who have been educated in inclusive classrooms already know individuals who will be part of their community as adults.

Improved Learning:

In inclusive classrooms, teachers often use a wider variety of teaching styles to suit varied learning styles – for instance, more visual aids or more “hands on” experiences. They may introduce additional content, such as sign language, to the class. Teachers may also use proven techniques such as cooperative learning, in which students with diverse abilities work together on a project, each taking different roles in the group. By taking part in this process, students develop valuable thinking and teamwork skills. When students help each other to learn, their own learning is reinforced.

Personal Growth:

Many students in inclusive classes express respect for individual differences. In a world that values beauty, knowledge, strength, and speed, typical students may also learn to look beyond the apparent challenge of their classmates to appreciate other subtle qualities. Some students grow in self-esteem by serving as helpers and advocates for other students; they see themselves as partners in a community of learners and decision makers.

Effective Use of Resources:

It can be costly to educate students in special programs outside their community. Tuition and busing costs add to these expenses. School districts have found that it is no more expensive to educate students with disabilities in regular schools and classes. All students may benefit when general and special educators collaborate together in the same classroom. Having additional adults in the classroom as teaching assistants, special educators, therapists, etc., contributes to better behavior among students. This also encourages a sense of teamwork and camaraderie among staff members as they work together to help all students reach their potential.

Social Development:

Students who are educated in inclusive settings break down stereotypes and get to know each other as individuals. They also learn that their own feeling and needs are common to others who have disabilities. Sharing common places and experiences provides a basis for communication and makes it possible for friendships to develop among students of differing abilities.

Support of Positive Societal Values:

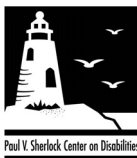
The 1954 landmark Supreme Court Case, *Brown vs. the Board of Education*, ruled that separate education could not be considered equal education. Students who are taught in inclusive settings have the chance to see the democratic values of equal access and equal opportunity practiced each day. Seeing these values in action bring them home in a more powerful way than any textbook or lecture might. Schools that actively promote a sense of belonging and self-worth among all students are in a better position to respond to societal needs and to form partnerships with parents.



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