

A photograph of a classroom with several young students sitting at desks. In the foreground, a girl with brown hair and a black headband is raising her right hand. To her left, a girl with blonde hair is also raising her hand. To her right, a girl with dark hair is raising her hand. They are all looking towards the camera. In the background, there is a map of the United States on the wall.

Frequently Asked Questions About Inclusive Education

Stetson & Associates, Inc.



Inclusive Education

Questions and Answers



1. What is inclusion?

Inclusion is a belief system that all students are general education students attending their neighborhood school with their chronologically age-appropriate peers. The general education curriculum and classroom is the starting point for planning for all students and is based on the premise that necessary supports and services for students with disabilities can be provided in the general education classroom. Inclusion is one of many placement options for students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs). Special education is viewed as a support service to general education and not as a place where students go to get remediated. Effective inclusive education requires a high level of collaboration among general education and special education staff and their services are viewed as seamless.

2. What is the difference between mainstreaming and inclusion?

The practice of mainstreaming directs the decision-making process beginning in special education with students earning their way to visit general education classes by meeting specified criteria. In contrast, the belief system of inclusion is that all students are general education students and that special education is a service of support to the general education curriculum and classroom. Thus with inclusion, the decision making process for a student begins with the general education curriculum and classroom and special education services are provided based on the individual student's needs to make progress in the general education curriculum.

3. What are the legal mandates regarding inclusion?

The word inclusion is an educational term and does not appear in the law. However, the law speaks directly to the "least restrictive environment." The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), reauthorized in 2004, defines the "least restrictive environment" as the following: "To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities... are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily."

4. Why is inclusion important?

The general education curriculum is taught within the general education classroom. This is the most logical place for all students to be educated. In addition, some students may receive special education services. Student access and involvement in the general education curriculum is the most appropriate way to respond to meeting the standards of progress dictated by: the Individuals with Disabilities Implementation Education Act (IDIEA 2004), No Child Left Behind, and the Adequate Yearly Progress provision found therein.

5. If I add more diversity to the classroom, how will I meet all the student's needs?

By implementing best practice instructional strategies for all students such as: multi-level instruction, differentiated instruction, cooperative learning, activity-based instruction, peer support and tutoring, and instructional technology. In addition, if it is determined that a student needs some level of in-class support during a particular subject, class or period, then that service of support will be provided to the student.

6. Is there a program or a kit for implementing inclusive education?

No. Inclusion is a belief system that embodies shared ownership for all students progressing in the general education curriculum. This requires a highly individualized student decision-making process that is not conducive to a “one size fits all” program or kit.

7. Who benefits from inclusion?

When validated instructional practices are utilized in the general education classroom, research and evaluation data on inclusion indicate that all students (disabled and non-disabled) experience improved student outcomes. These outcomes are academically, socially, and behaviorally based. Currently, there is little evidence that segregated environments promote superior learning. By providing additional support in the context of the general education classroom, both students and teachers benefit from this collaborative effort.

8. What will an inclusive classroom look like?

Although not every inclusive classroom will look the same, there are some common elements that will be consistent across the district. One might expect to see students with a wider range of abilities and needs. To assist in meeting the greater diversity, there will be additional support personnel in the classroom. These additional staff members might include special educators, paraprofessionals, speech and language pathologists, reading and math specialists and a variety of other special populations teachers. This additional support will be directly reflective of the unique needs of students in any given classroom.

9. Will every child be in the general education classroom?

In accordance with the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) provision of the law, it is the goal of the district to offer inclusive education, with necessary supports, to all students. However, decisions must be based on the individual and unique needs of each student. While some students might need additional, specialized support outside of the general education classroom, general education will always be the starting point of consideration for any student.

10. What are the criteria for inclusion?

Educational and planning decisions for students with disabilities are made on an individual basis. These unique “criteria” are discussed during the ARD meeting at which educators, parents, and the student, when appropriate, participate. Since placement options are based on the individual and unique learning goals and objectives for each student, it is not possible for the district to have a blanket set of criteria for the district.

11. Will “included” students do the same work and participate in the same assessments?

If necessary, decisions regarding the level and type of accommodations and modifications are made during the ARD meeting. By reviewing classroom materials, assessment measures, and individual student goals and objectives, decisions will be made on an individual student basis. Any modifications to curriculum or assessment will be stipulated in a student’s IEP. It is the goal of the district and state to have students participate as much as possible, when appropriate, in age appropriate curriculum and assessments.

Accommodations and Modifications

Questions and Answers



1. What is the difference between accommodations and modifications?

An accommodation is a change made in the teaching or testing procedures in order to provide a student with access to information and to create an equal opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills. An accommodation does not reduce the grade level standards or objectives. On the other hand, a modification is a change in what the student is expected to learn and/or demonstrate. A modification actually changes the grade level standards and objectives the student is expected to master.

2. How are modifications to the curriculum made and who makes the decision?

Since a modification actually reduces the grade level curriculum standards and objectives for a student, federal law states that this can only be done through the ARD/IEP decision making process. Ideally, participants in this process will be the individuals who know the educational needs of the student. With this in mind, it is important for a student's general education teacher or teachers to provide input to the accommodation decisions, even if they are not actual members of the IEP team.

3. How can I instruct a student needing a modified curriculum when there is a large discrepancy between grade level instruction and the student's present level of performance?

The student will have an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which specifies which specific learning objectives the student is held accountable for making progress. The student will receive educational benefit by being exposed to more of the general education curriculum than the student is being held accountable to master. The student may be working on below grade level objectives, but the subject area should be the same as the rest of the class. In addition, depending upon the nature and severity of the student's discrepancy, it may be that the student requires in-class support to be successful within the least restrictive environment.

4. Who makes the accommodations a student requires to be successful?

This would be a decision made among the collaborative staff that is supporting the student. Ideally, all staff working with a student forms a collaborative partnership and shared ownership for the student's success. In some schools, it is necessary to make campus wide decisions regarding which staff members perform which tasks. In this case, it would be a site based decision making team that dictates staff responsibilities.

5. How do I know which students can have accommodations and modified curriculum objectives?

The great news is that you can use your professional judgment to make accommodations for any student at any time. However, some students that receive special education services will have paperwork detailing specific accommodations that the student needs in order to be successful within that subject area. (These accommodations must be implemented as written and are not subject to professional judgment except through the ARD/IEP process.) You should have a copy of this paperwork and it should be reviewed with you. If a student has modified curriculum objectives, then they will have those specified on an IEP. The student is held accountable for learning each objective on his/her IEP to the level of mastery indicated for each objective. (This is how the student is graded and progress is measured.) You should have a copy of this paperwork and it should be reviewed with you.

6. Who is responsible for keeping progress data and reporting grades for students requiring modified curriculum objectives?

All staff that is indicated as implementers of the IEP within each subject area or course is responsible for progress data and grades.

7. When should accommodations be used?

Accommodations should be provided to ensure that a student's disability does not interfere with the learning process. Accommodations also allow us to measure a student's knowledge and skills, rather than the student's disabilities, when providing assessment measures.

8. Is it fair to provide accommodations for some students, but not others?

The purpose of providing accommodations is to "level the playing field" for those students who perhaps learn or process information differently. Since no changes are being made to the content or curriculum itself, it is appropriate to make accommodations for ANY student who might have a diverse learning need, including students without disabilities.

Recommended Links

The Access Center

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org>

Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST)

<http://www.cast.org>

The Council for Exceptional Children

<http://www.cec.sped.org>

Educational Resources Information Center Clearinghouse on Disabilities and Gifted Education (ERIC EC)

<http://www.ericec.org>

ERIC/OSEP Topical Brief: A curriculum every student can use: design principles for student access

<http://www.cec.sped.org/osep/udesign.html>

National center for Accessible Media

<http://ncam.wgbh.org/>

Abt Associates

<http://www.abtassociates.com>

Study of state and local implementation and impact of IDEA

<http://www.abt.sliides.org>

Guiding Principles for Assessment Accommodations

<http://www.teachervision.fen.com/teaching-methods/educational-testing/4134.html>

Assessment and Rubric Tools

<http://school.discovery.com/schrockguide/assess.html>

Free Tool to Create Rubrics

<http://rubistar.4teachers.org/>

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory Assessment Site

<http://www.nwrel.org/assessment/>

Collaborative Partnerships

Questions and Answers



1. What is a collaborative professional partnership?

It will vary depending upon the needs of the student. A co-teacher partnership is a formal, year-long commitment between a general education teacher and a special populations teacher to jointly plan, deliver, and assess instruction for all students in the general education class. A support facilitator partnership is characterized by an individual who provides a variety of supports either to students and/or the general education teacher, which meets the needs identified through collaborative planning. A formal, co-teaching partnership is a daily commitment whereas support facilitation is usually a weekly endeavor, based on identified student need.

2. How do we increase the effectiveness of a collaborative partnership?

It is critical to have consistent and routine time to plan together. In addition, open and honest communications is critical to talk about predictable issues regarding compatibility, values, philosophy, division of responsibilities, etc. By talking about these issues in a non-confrontational manner in the beginning of the partnership you greatly reduce the risk of these issues simmering over time and sabotaging your collaborative efforts.

3. What are the roles and responsibilities commonly practiced in co-teaching partnerships?

In co-teaching partnerships, both teachers are jointly responsible for: planning and delivering instruction, providing behavior management, determining grades, and participating in parent conferences. Since there is equity and parity between the two teachers, both take the active teaching role in the classroom. Specific roles and responsibilities must be determined, in advance, by the two collaborative partners and will be determined, in part, by their areas of expertise.

4. What are the roles and responsibilities commonly practiced in support facilitation partnerships?

In a support facilitation partnership, there is joint preparation for instruction and the delivery of instructional responsibilities is determined by the students and/or the general education teachers' need for assistance. Some examples of various roles the support facilitator may take include: planning, materials preparation, training, in-class support to students and teachers, supervision of paraprofessionals, conduct and attend meetings and parent conferences, and teacher consultation. As with a more formal co-teaching partnership, specific roles and responsibilities must be determined by the individuals who will be collaborating with one another.

5. What are some teaching approaches used in a co-teaching and/or support facilitation setting?

This will vary depending upon the needs of the students and the comfort level of the staff. However, some examples are as follows.

- One teaches the class while the other observes;
- One teaches the class while the other moves about the students monitoring them;
- Students are divided into 3 groups working at stations. One small group of students works with one teacher at a station while another small group of students works with the other teacher at a station. The third group of students works independently;
- The students are divided into two equally sized groups. Each teacher works with one of the groups of students;
- One of the teachers can take a small group of students to another part of the classroom for brief pre-teach/re-teach, enrichment, specific skill training, etc. before returning them to the whole class instruction the other teacher is conducting;
- Both teachers provide instruction to all students at the same time, usually in large group instruction settings. The teachers develop a natural rhythm of sharing roles during the instruction.

6. How do we introduce our roles to students and to parents?

This will vary from campus to campus. However, it is important to impress upon students and parents that co-teaching and/or support facilitation provides the opportunity for all students within the class to achieve at higher standards. It allows for smaller instructional groups, increased feedback to students, and extended learning experiences beyond the minimum standards.

Recommended Links

<http://www.nea.org/teachexperience/spedk031113.html>

National Education Association – 6 Steps to Successful Co-Teaching

<http://712educators.about.com/cs/specialeducation/a/coteaching.htm>

About: Secondary School Educators – The Co-Teach Model (includes suggested readings and related articles)

<http://www.k8accesscenter.org/index.php/category/co-teaching/>

The Access Center – Improving Access to the General Curriculum for Students with Disabilities Through Collaborative Teaching – For Supervisors – For Teachers

<http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu/cgi-bin/cgiwrap/speconn/main.php?cat=collaboration§ion=main&subsection=coteaching/main>

Special Connections – An Introduction to Cooperative Teaching (includes teacher tools, research, case studies, journal articles with summary, and online collaboration)

<http://www.ctserc.org/initiatives/teachandlearn/coteaching.shtml>

SERC – Teaching and Learning Initiative: Six Approaches to Co-Teaching (includes related articles)

http://www.wsd1.org/PC_LMS/pf/co-teaching.htm

Pathfinder – Co-Teaching (includes lists of books, journal articles and websites related to co-teaching)

<http://www.powerof2.org>

Power of 2 – (includes teacher vistas, online training, FAQs, forums, resources, links, articles, co-teaching survey)

<http://www.cise.missouri.edu/links/research-coteaching-links.html>

Center for Innovations in Education – Research-based Practices Related to Co-Teaching (includes information, training, links)

http://www.cec.sped.org/intl/stepbystep_coteaching.htm

The Division of International Special Education and Services (DISES) – Annotated Bibliography for Collaborative Teaching and Student Outcomes for Secondary Students (includes articles, presentations, video/audio, web resources)

Paraprofessionals in the Classroom

Questions and Answers



1. What are the roles and responsibilities of the paraprofessional in the classroom?

The role of a paraprofessional will vary depending upon the student needs within the classroom. Some common roles are as follows: planning with teachers; monitoring student progress and checking for understanding during initial teacher instruction; assisting students with guided practice and independent practice following initial instruction by the teacher; constructing accommodations necessary for instruction; assisting students with adaptive devices and health needs; etc.

2. Can the paraprofessional provide support to other students in the classroom?

Absolutely. Paraprofessionals, under teacher direction, can provide support to any struggling learner within the classroom.

3. What lesson plans does the paraprofessional follow?

The paraprofessional follows the lesson plan of the teacher he/she is working with at the time.

4. Does the paraprofessional get planning time?

This is a campus by campus decision. However, it is imperative that the paraprofessional have some time to plan with the teacher he/she will be working with in order for support facilitation to be effective. The amount of time needed for planning will vary depending upon the needs of the students, the training of the paraprofessional, and the working relationship of the teacher and the paraprofessional.

Recommended Links

Council for Exceptional Children (CEC): Improving Paraeducator Practices

www.cec.sped.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Search&template=/CM/HTMLDisplay.cfm&ContentID=1855

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (can purchase manual for \$25.00: *Strengthening and Supporting Teacher/Provider-Paraeducator Teams: Guidelines for Paraeducators Roles, Supervision, and Preparation*)

www.nrcpara.org

A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports (free download)

www.uvm.edu/~cdci/parasupport

Office of special Education Programs (OSEP) Technical Assistance center on Positive Behavioral Interventions & Support (USDOE) – can download brief “how-to-do” positive behavioral support practices

www.pbis.org

Practical Information & Examples for Supporting Students with Autism (physical structure, visual schedules, teaching methods)

www.specialed.us/autism/structure/str11.htm

The Access Center – Improving Outcomes for All Students K-8 (free download: *Working Together: Teacher-Paraeducator Collaboration*)

www.k8accesscenter.org/training_resources/documents/Tchr-ParaCollaboration_000.doc

Results and Development

Questions and Answers



1. How do I know if our inclusive education practice has been effective?

Effectiveness can be measured by monitoring the academic progress of all students. It is important to measure student progress on an individual basis beginning with the student's present level of performance. Focus on the academic gains each student is making using both formal and informal benchmarking tools on a frequent basis and adjust your instruction accordingly. You can also get information by surveying faculty, students, and parents regarding the effectiveness of the services provided and received. Formative and summative assessment can also assist in determining progress of students.

2. What if I don't have training in the student's area of difficulty?

Recognize the fact that from time to time most students in any classroom will need some level of accommodation or modification in order to be successful. Additionally, today's learners present with more diversity. Most teachers will admit that their pre-service education and training did not prepare them to reach all of their students. Thus, professional collaboration and on-going staff development is imperative to facilitate achievement for all learners.

3. Is the success of inclusive education determined by how many students are performing on grade level by the end of the school year?

No. Success is determined by measuring each individual student's progress in the general education curriculum. This will vary from student to student depending upon their present level of performance as measured from the beginning of the year to the end of the year.