

Keys to successful inclusion

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that a continuum of placement options be available to meet the needs of students with disabilities. The law also requires that: "to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities ... are educated with children who are not disabled, and that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular environment occur only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be attained satisfactorily. IDEA Sec. 612 (5) (B)."

One of the educational options that is receiving increasing attention is meeting the needs of students with disabilities in the regular classroom. This digest is written for the practitioner who is working in the regular class environment with students who have disabilities. Years of research have contributed to our knowledge of how to successfully include students with disabilities in general education classes. Listed below are the activities and support systems commonly found where successful inclusion has occurred.

Attitudes and Beliefs

- The regular teacher believes that the student can succeed.
- School personnel are committed to accepting responsibility for the learning outcomes of students with disabilities.
- School personnel and the students in the class have been prepared to receive a student with disabilities.
- Parents are informed and support program goals.
- Special education staff are committed to collaborative practice in general education classrooms.

Services and Physical Accommodations

- Services needed by the student are available (e.g., health, physical, occupational, or speech therapy).
- Accommodations to the physical plant and equipment are adequate to meet the student's needs (e.g., toys, building and playground facilities, learning materials, assistive devices).

School Support

- The principal understands the needs of students with disabilities.
- Adequate numbers of personnel, including aides and support personnel, are available.
- Adequate staff development and technical assistance, based on the needs of the school personnel, are being provided (e.g., information on disabilities, instructional methods, awareness and acceptance activities for students, and team-building skills).
- Appropriate policies and procedures for monitoring individual student progress, including grading and testing, are in place.

Collaboration

- Special educators are part of the instructional or planning team.
- Teaming approaches are used for problem-solving and program implementation.
- Regular teachers, special education teachers, and other specialists collaborate (e.g., co-teaching, team teaching, teacher assistance teams).

Instructional Methods

- Teachers have the knowledge and skills needed to select and adapt curricula and instructional methods according to individual student needs.
- A variety of instructional arrangements are available (e.g., team teaching, cross-grade grouping, peer tutoring, teacher assistance teams).
- Teachers foster a cooperative learning environment and promote socialization.

Making It Work: A Sample Scenario

Classrooms that successfully include students with disabilities are designed to welcome diversity and to address the individual needs of all students, whether they have disabilities or not. The composite scenario below is based on reports from several teachers. It provides a brief description of how regular and special education teachers work together to address the individual needs of all of their students.

Jane Smith teaches third grade at Lincoln Elementary School. Three days a week, she co-teaches the class with Lynn Vogel, a special education teacher. Their 25 students include 4 who have special needs due to disabilities and 2 others who currently need special help in specific curriculum areas. Each of the students with a disability has an IEP that was developed by a team that included both teachers. The teachers, paraprofessionals, and the school principal believe that these students have a great deal to contribute to the class and that they will achieve their best in the environment of a general education classroom.

All of the school personnel have attended in-service training designed to develop collaborative skills for teaming and problem-solving. Mrs Smith and the two paraprofessionals who work in the classroom also received special training on disabilities and how to create an inclusive classroom environment. The school principal, Ben Parks, had worked in special education many years ago and has received training on the impact of new special education developments and instructional arrangements on school administration. Each year, Mr Parks works with the building staff to identify areas in which new training is needed. For specific questions that may arise, technical assistance is available through a regional special education cooperative. Mrs Smith and Miss Vogel share responsibility for teaching and for supervising their two paraprofessionals. In addition to the time they spend together in the classroom, they spend 1 to 4 hours per week planning instruction, plus additional planning time with other teachers and support personnel who work with their students.

The teachers use their joint planning time to problem-solve and discuss the use of special instructional techniques for all students who need special assistance. Monitoring and adapting instruction for individual students is an ongoing activity. The teachers use curriculum-based measurement to systematically assess their students' learning progress. They adapt curricula so that lessons begin at the edge of the student's knowledge, adding new material at the student's pace, and presenting it in a style consistent with the student's learning style. For some students, pre-organizers or chapter previews are used to bring out the most important points of the material to be learned; for other students, new vocabulary words may need to be highlighted or reduced reading levels may be required. Some students may use special activity worksheets, while others may learn best by using media or computer-assisted instruction.

In the classroom, the teacher groups students differently for different activities. Sometimes, the teachers and paraprofessionals divide the class, each teaching a small group or tutoring individuals. They use cooperative learning projects to help the students learn to work together and develop social relationships. Peer tutors provide extra help to students who need it. Students without disabilities are more than willing to help their friends who have disabilities, and vice versa.

While the regular classroom may not be the best learning environment for every child with a disability, it is highly desirable for all who can benefit. It provides contact with age peers and prepares all students for the diversity of the world beyond the classroom.

Source:2021



Resources

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