

# **INCLUSIVE SCHOOLING ANALYSIS AND RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT**

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## **Group Roles**

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Our group consisted of four people: Jenny Balogh, Lynnaire Barnett, Curtis Dracka, and Ty Stevenson. In the beginning, each member contacted different schools to see who participated in inclusion, and also to find out which schools would be willing to share their time and ideas with us. Our group decided to visit a Middle School, which Jenny was responsible for contacting and a High School, where Lynnaire took care of scheduling visitation days and times. It turned out that Lynnaire and Ty visited the High School twice, and Curtis and Jenny visited the Middle School and High School, once each. This allowed everyone to see diverse teaching methods from several different classrooms, and schools. As a group, we discussed the different methods we had seen and learned, and were able to write our final paper based on these observations. Individual observations and recommendations were put onto paper and e-mailed to Jenny who combined information to produce the final report. Everyone participated equally and enthusiastically!

## **Contacts**

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This portion was deleted to protect confidentiality. They had listed the names of schools, teachers, and students who conducted observations in each school.

## **Inclusive Teaching and Schooling: The Good and the Bad**

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After doing our observations of school districts that practice inclusive teaching, we came to some interesting conclusions. From a social perspective, we believe that the inclusion approach to teaching promotes healthy relationships among diverse children as they learn to accept and respect each other's differences. We have also come to believe that this form of schooling is an excellent way to enhance the learning experience and academic performance of all students. However, on the road to inclusive perfection, there are unexpected roadblocks and bad practices that schools and educators develop. The following is an inventory of positive and negative practices we have developed based on our observations of inclusive teaching.

### ***The Good:***

When most of us were in high school, our school did not participate in any of the activities, such as inclusion, that we have been talking about. We were never even aware that team teaching was practiced in the high school level. It is amazing what can be accomplished when two teachers work together in the classroom.

The process of a successful classroom that practices inclusion is truly amazing. It is a team effort by the teachers where both must give and take equally in order to allow for the most success out of their students. One example of this occurred when the regular teacher was doing example math problems on the overhead, and the special education teacher walked around the classroom making sure all the students were doing the problems, as well as understanding the problems. The special education teacher helped all the students, not just the special need ones. This creates more of a classroom community, rather than splitting the class in two categories: special education students vs. regular education students. The special education teacher, by walking around the classroom and helping students, creates a lot of noise and disturbance. This means the regular education teacher must be able to tolerate the noise, be patient with interruptions, and still keep everyone's attention. Both teachers in this class were very cooperative, and the students were able to understand the material, and everyone was very attentive.

Another positive example occurred in a machine shop class where team teaching was being implemented. In this particular class the special education teacher had to be taught by the regular teacher on how to use the shop equipment. This means the special education teacher had to go through a role reversal and be the student. This is truly a sacrifice for someone holding a professional position, but the sacrifice was made. The students respond to both teachers with equal enthusiasm and know that both teachers will be able to help them with their work. In this class the grading system is somewhat different than in traditional classes. Here the students receive a shop grade, book grade, and attitude grade. This means that if a student does not do so well on tests but if they have a good attitude and put forth an effort, then they can still do well in the class. Also, a student that was in special education was getting the highest grade in the class. This shows that with this type of effort, goals can be achieved.

We feel that inclusion offers children with disabilities and labels the opportunity to experience the social atmosphere of a general education facility. If children with labels such as ADHD, EI, or LD are constantly scurried off to resource rooms where their sole interaction is with paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and other students with similar labels, we feel that these students are at a disadvantage because they aren't (for the most part) learning to interact socially with the general education students, which is going to be a major setback once they get out into the real world. Therefore, when kids with labels and disabilities are included in "everyday" classes, it provides them with the social atmosphere needed to develop interpersonal communication skills. Besides, more often than not, it is rather difficult to tell which kids actually *have* the disabilities when they are in general education classrooms. During our observations, teachers were asked on at least three occasions, which students were the ones that actually needed special help. Each time, the teacher would point out 8 or 9 students with labels—and each time, they seemed to fit in extremely well with the non-labeled students. I think this supports the assumption that not only is inclusion effective, it is simple and easy to do—it just requires a little effort.

Based upon our observations, we feel that inclusion helps build maturity and a sense of responsibility in the general education students. More than once we witnessed

general education students going out of their way to assist labeled kids with their homework or every day classroom activities. This is a very positive thing because a big part of being a successful employee in the real world depends upon a person's ability to work with others and be a part of a team. Because they are relied upon to help other disadvantaged kids, general education students feel a sense of worth and accomplishment by assisting their contemporaries. There are really no losers when this happens: the general education kids develop team working skills, and the labeled kids get the necessary assistance required to be successful in the classroom. On top of this, inclusion also helps teachers to develop team-working skills. Each classroom we observed had a general and a special education teacher who teamed up to instruct the class. If not handled properly, this team teaching situation could lead to some edginess; however, we feel that it likely helps teachers to work together to develop a positive working environment for kids of many different abilities.

We were very impressed with how several teachers are structuring their teaching so as to reach students of multiple level abilities. In these inclusive classrooms, students were being challenged at their own levels of learning through the use of varied techniques. Team teachers at the high school would call each other at night and bounce ideas for lessons back and forth. The general education teacher would come up with a new game and the special education teacher would make changes that are necessary to allow all students to participate. This class had notebook and assignment logs that all children are required to keep and turn in. The special education teacher keeps herself available to students who may struggle with these daily assignments, but refuses to change assignments and curriculum. To accommodate the children who may be struggling, she keeps a folder with all the class notes that students can look at for extra help. Also, she is in the process of changing the formats of test to make them user-friendlier for her students, without changing the content or amount. She also gives all students the option to have their test read aloud. Along these lines, she has put all final exams on tapes so that the students can have these tests read aloud, also. This team-teacher pair was very successful at involving their students in collaborative groups where the students, and teachers really drew on each other's strengths and ability differences.

### ***The Bad:***

With changes such as inclusion becoming more and more common in school districts, some negativity will certainly arise in areas where there is not full cooperation or understanding. For example, in order for inclusion and team teaching to be effective both teachers must participate in the practice equally. In an 8<sup>th</sup> grade science class the regular teacher gave an interactive discussion on friction while students took notes. There were a couple of students sitting in the back who were involved in the special education program that didn't say too much, unless they were extremely interested in a particular example, and half of them didn't bring their books to class. During the lecture, the general education teacher not once involved his resource teacher, but instead asked him to do remedial tasks like close the door and hand out papers. He was unable to help students

during class, being “Shushed” by the general education teacher when he quietly talked. At one point, the resource teacher’s face turned red with embarrassment when the teacher ordered him to stop helping a student because it was distracting to the class and interrupting his lecture. He said, “Just stop, student X doesn’t need to understand it this very minute.” Resource teacher A left to go to the other classroom after that incident. Unfortunately, the child’s question was important because if a student does not understand one concept then he or she will not understand the next concept that is built from the first. This is especially true in a science class where the information builds on each other. These two teachers did not agree on teaching methods, nor did the regular teacher seem like he was interested in having another professional in the room. When the teachers do not see eye to eye the practice of inclusion falls apart. All parties must be involved.

We feel that many times inclusion makes a “mountain out of a molehill.” In other words, we think school districts are too extreme in certain cases regarding the handing out of labels for kids with behavioral problems. For instance, if a kid is acting rowdy or not paying attention in class, teachers give him an ADHD label; if a kid is lousy in math and can’t seem to ever get a grip on his multiplication tables, than he is given a LD label. Our fear is that soon, every kid will have a label, no matter how untrue it is. The point is this—many kids are labeled who have nothing wrong with them. Sometimes, old-fashioned discipline would do some of these kids more good than a “label”, “special attention” or a “detention.” Let’s face it, we’re dealing with kids here, and sometimes they just need to be straightened out; there’s nothing wrong with them, they just need some stern discipline once in a while. Unfortunately, with today’s “feel good” liberal society, any type of physical discipline would be grounds for some over-protective parent to file a lawsuit. Therefore, labels are given to kids who don’t necessarily need them. This is also unfortunate because it can mentally scar a student. We would much rather have our hind ends hurt for a few seconds from a beating than have our psyche hurt for our entire K-12 career with a label like ADD. Some children with labels subconsciously think that there was something wrong with them, and are hurt by it. Therefore, we think people in the educational system sometimes get carried away with handing out labels for behavior problems when a better solution would be some simple discipline.

Inclusive classrooms must be equipped with teachers who are able to provide the students with safe, secure and caring environments full of positive reinforcements. We believe that most teachers have what it takes to work with almost all students. Nevertheless, we observed one inclusive classroom in which the general education teacher had absolutely no patience with the special education students and seemed to be void of any empathy for them. What message is this sending to the other children in the classroom? This behavior on the teachers part is not forming a community in the classroom and he is teaching that patience doesn’t apply to those that need extra time and help and that the feelings, needs, and ideas of those who are “different” are of little importance. This teaching practice is extremely dangerous to each little sponge sitting at his or her desk. We feel that if general education teachers are to incorporate inclusive

teaching into their classroom structure, they must develop the skills necessary to work effectively with students with special needs.

### **Recommendations for Improvements**

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Like all teaching methods, none are perfect. There are some ways to change gears, or make improvements to systems that are already successful. Our recommendations to improve the inclusion methods and practices in districts seem to fall under three broad categories, structure, education, and communication. Simple changes under each of these groups could make a world of difference in the atmosphere of classroom community and make for a more successful program.

#### ***High School...***

Under structure, we would like to see some severely impaired students involved somehow in the regular classroom. With the technology of today, there is no way of telling what these students are capable of. One of the greatest physicists of all time is a paraplegic. One of the students in one of these districts could have an exceptional mind like him.

In regards to the category of education, not only should students be learning and benefiting from inclusion, but so should the teachers, parents and staff involved. If special education students are to be placed in the classrooms of general education teachers, those general education teachers must have knowledge of the mental, social, emotional, and/or physical conditions of the special needs students. This could be accomplished through educational workshops addressing the needs of special education students, or by in-service training with special and general education teachers, school social workers, psychiatrist, administrators, principals, teacher consultants, and paraprofessionals. This could only enhance the ability of those attempting to help students to learn and to meet the challenges they are faced with on a daily basis.

As far as communication is concerned, the High School seems to be handling teacher, administration, and support staff communications and interactions quite successfully. However, we believe that in high schools, sometimes the parents become less concerned and involved with their teenager. Parental involvement in their child's educational plan also serves as an asset for inclusive teaching. We believe that teachers must draw parents in and make planning a joint effort. In actuality, the team does not consist of only the special education and general education teacher. Planned meetings with the parents of student in special education can help teachers to learn much about their students' strengths and weaknesses. Family dynamics are so important to teachers in identifying the root causes of certain behaviors exhibited in the classroom. If teachers convey the message to parents that their special education child is welcome in the regular classroom, parents may take a more active role in their child's educational plan. Family support is very crucial if the needs of the special education student are to be met with any success, and we would like to see more parental involvement with the teachers and students.

### ***Middle School...***

Since the Middle school is only three years old, we feel that the structure of inclusion could be greatly improved. It seems as if there is no consistency between the clusters in the school, and most importantly, within the same grade. We feel that the special education teacher should not be able to change the expectations of the students in the classroom. Sometimes the special need students would not have to answer certain questions on tests and homework because they were too hard. This should not be the case. In order for full inclusion to take place all students must be doing the same work. Nothing should be deleted and expectations should not be lowered for the special education students. Instead, the format in which tests and assignments are presented should be altered and the curriculum of the class should be presented in a multi-level fashion. These alterations should become standard and be used throughout the school to provide stability for students. This is also when the support staff comes into play, helping students to conquer everyday complications and problems.

Another thing that we would like to see changed is the amount of time students spends in the resource room. In some situations, students were even sent there because they were misbehaving in class. Ideally, the whole day should be spent in a regular classroom, but in reality, this does not work because these students do need some extra help. Maybe they could have a tutor before or after school for questions that can be answered or students can meet with there teachers at these times for clarifying information. It seems that at least four hours a day should be spent in regular classes. This will give these students the same opportunity to take all the classes that everyone else gets to take.

The community of the middle school would benefit greatly from the education of their parents and also their educators. Parents need to become more involved and aware of what their child is doing and how the schools are participating in regards to inclusion. As a result, they will be better prepared to help their child be successful. Sadly, parents are often aloof or unconcerned about their child's educational journey—they are content to leave it in the hands of the school. This type of mindset needs to be changed. We recommend school districts set up meetings once or twice a semester to talk to parents about what is expected of them in regards to the educational system. At these meetings, the school's progress report and plans for the future regarding full inclusion should be identified and discussed. If parents become more involved, we feel inclusion will be that much more successful. Also, as what was recommended for the High School, educators need to become more aware of special education labels and behavior and learning styles related to these labels. We feel that an educated teacher would be much more patient and willing to adjust their teaching styles if they knew how and why children were struggling and what they could do to help.

The last vastly important component in making inclusive schooling successful is communication. This communication not only applies to teacher-to-teacher relations, but to parent-teacher, administration-teacher, administration-parent, and support staff interaction. If inclusion is to work, general and special education teachers,

paraprofessionals, administrators, parents and all others involved must work together to assure that all children and youths are given an opportunity to learn together. In this case, inclusion can be viewed as a commitment. In shifting special education students into general education classrooms, strong support is of paramount importance. This is the only way we believe inclusion can be done effectively. In observing classrooms where inclusion is being used successfully, it is clear that teachers must accept their students differing abilities and incorporate them into their teaching design. It is only through the use of team-teaching and other means of classroom support that we believe any school of inclusion could make such progress. As a team, they must work together in designing a lesson that interests both the special and general education students. To assure that all students are receiving the necessary assistance, each teacher would not attend to the needs of his own students but rather, the teachers would work together, taking responsibility for all the students in the classroom.

The middle school has its goals in the right place, but need to find a different way of introducing inclusion into the classroom. Since not all teachers like and understanding the dynamics of multilevel teaching, forcing it into their classroom will only provide for a horrible experience on the part of the teacher, and the students. The school needs to engage only their staff that is *totally committed* to the inclusive way of teaching. We don't think it will work if there is only partial commitment by the teachers, parents, and administration. Teachers have to be willing to sacrifice for the better of the team (i.e. the kids) even if it isn't an easy thing to do or they are not in favor of it. A school and it's students have a very valuable asset if they have a teaching pair who work well together, has a good rapport, each individual carries his own weight, and are committed and honesty believes in the inclusive teaching concept. If the teachers and administration are on the "same page" in regards to inclusion, then the odds that it will be a success will be much higher. They may want to try asking which teachers would be willing to try team teaching, and then matching up general and special educators who can work well together.

All in all, we feel inclusion is a method of schooling that is right for districts if pursued carefully and enthusiastically. The success of the program weighs heavily on dedication and the willingness of people to sacrifice and compromise to make mainstreaming beneficial to all parties.