

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION SUPPORT GUIDE

For Pre-school and Kindergarten

EDUCATION WHERE ALL STUDENTS LEARN TOGETHER



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1. Introduction: I believe all students no matter his or her ability is entitled to a quality education. All children should learn together in heterogeneous classes including students with mild to severe disabilities, gifted students, students from a wide range of racial and cultural backgrounds and more. Each child is a unique learner and schooling should be tailored to his or her needs. Teachers, parents, administrators, students, and the whole community need to work together creatively to assure that each student learns. Inclusion is a way of being and not a program and should become a part of the culture of the school. Students of all abilities need to feel part of a community and learn skills that will enable them to contribute to communities and in workplaces.

The type of school is an all-inclusive elementary school grades pre-school through fifth grades. It is a setting in which all children are learning together including children with mild to severe disabilities, gifted students, and students from a wide range of racial and cultural backgrounds. Any services that a child may need such as speech therapy are provided to them in their daily classroom as this school does not believe in the "pull out" model. This inclusion guide will specifically deal with the grade levels pre-kindergarten to kindergarten. In this school the teachers engage in collaborate teaching in that the special education teacher teaches in conjunction with the general education teacher. Both are seen as the "classroom teachers" and share equal responsibility in teaching and assisting all children. The teachers may engage in station teaching, alternate teaching, teaching together, or one teach, one drift.

2. School-wide supports: a.) Child study and support teams will be composed of at least one special education teacher and at least one general education teacher. Appropriate specialists must also be involved including speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapist, or social worker. Other individuals who could be a part of the support team are custodians, lunch aids, and secretaries as these people see students from a different perspective and can offer assistance to children at different situations throughout the day. Parents should also be a large part of the child support team. b.) Teachers will team teach or co-teach so that one special education and one general education teacher will in teach concurrently in one classroom. Supports such as paraprofessionals will be assigned to specific rooms strictly on a need basis. Other support professionals such as speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, and social workers will come into the classrooms to work with students in large or small groups. Teacher consultants may fulfill several roles including observing classrooms and consulting with teachers to suggest teaching strategies and curriculum adaptations. c.) The way in which support will be planned with teachers is in a collaborative planning time. Each week the students will have early dismissal on Wednesdays in order to allow time for teachers to plan supports collaboratively. On Wednesday the school will dismiss students at 1:30 pm in order to provide this collaborative planning time. This time on Wednesday will be mandatory for all teachers to attend and the teachers will be assigned to teams by grade level and the teams will meet to plan the supports together. Other times such as lunch periods, in the mornings before school starts, during specials, and after school are other times in which teachers and support staff and meet to plan together.

| Common Planning Time for Teachers and Support Staff |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Early Student dismissal every Wednesday at 1:30 pm.✓ Common lunch periods✓ Before/after school✓ Common special periods |

d.) Interactions with the community will be frequent for all children including at least two trips per month where the children will have community based instruction. All students will benefit from getting out into the community and going into stores, restaurants, banks etc. as they will practice social skills, daily living skills and academic skills. Also several community events will be planned such as ice cream socials, family fun nights, movie nights in the gym, family game nights, park beautification projects within the community, etc. Also teachers must gather information about the community resources that are available and make connections with people in the community. The key is to connect community resources and people in the community to the school. For example teachers can go to community meetings about parks and clubs or build relationships with people of different professions in the community. In doing this teachers can begin to connect families and students to these resources as well as connect families to families. e.) The decisions about which classes students will be placed in will be a combined effort between teachers (general and special), support staff, families of the students, and the student where appropriate. The students learning style and personality will be “matched” to a teachers teaching style and personality. Also the relationship among the children will also be taken into consideration. Student’s strengths will be focused on and these students will be placed with teachers who compliment these strengths.

3. **Support staff roles:** Support staff roles in an exemplary inclusive school would be very involved in all aspects of the school and particularly the classrooms. The support staff should always come into the classrooms and work with the students in this natural environment and should never take specific students out of the classroom for instruction. The support staff should also make a point to work with all students not just the students identified on their “case load.” This is to assure that no student is singled out and segregated from the classroom community and in addition all students can benefit from additional instruction. Support staff should also work openly and closely with the teachers in the classroom. They should keep open lines of communication and should always be thinking of ways to make the instruction better for all children. The classrooms will be taught collaboratively by a special education teacher and a general education teacher. Both teachers will be responsible for the planning and delivery of instruction to all students. Other support staff such as the social worker, occupational therapist, speech therapist, paraprofessional, and physical therapist will come into the classrooms and work with the class as a whole or in small groups. As these support staff persons come into the classroom this is a good opportunity for the teachers to utilize them in an effective manner such as separating the class into small groups and

having each support staff hold a workshop with a group of students and the students can rotate to the different workshops. To ensure that this collaborative teaching is successful it is necessary that each teacher has equal decision-making power and is equally valued in the classroom. Furthermore, both teachers must share responsibilities, resources and accountability. Other important support staff who should not be forgotten about is the custodian, office staff, and lunch staff. These people can be important because they see the students in different environments and can work collaboratively with teachers to help students achieve specific goals.

4. Partnering with parents: It is important as a teacher to contact the students parents immediately after discovering he or she will be a student in your classroom. Successful communication is crucial in developing a community of learners. Communication with family members should begin before the school year and effectively continue throughout the year. It is important to build a rapport with the parents from the beginning. The teacher must let the parent know he or she is an important part of the team in planning their child's education. It is vital that teachers actually listen to what parents have to say and respect their feelings, as it is very difficult to have a child with a disability and a teacher has no idea what the families' background is. Parents should be viewed as partners with the school. The teacher should have an open door policy in which parents of students may come in to observe the class at any time and is free to contact the teacher for any reason at any time. In addition to make sure the communication is going the teacher should correspond daily with parents of individuals with academic, social-emotional, or sensory-physical challenges via written correspondence, e-mail, or telephone. Some times a daily correspondence is not necessary and this can be done on a weekly basis. It is important that the teacher knows what is going on with the child at home as it may effect his performance/behavior at school and it is also important for the parent to keep informed of how their child is doing in school as this could effect him at home. Also a teacher should make a point to contact parent be a letter or phone call when a student had a particularly good day, completed work that was his or her best work, or had any type of positive experience such as acting kind toward someone. Parents are often used to only hearing from the teacher when their child has had a behavior or academic problem in school and it helps to build a relationship if more positive phone calls or letters were occurring. Parents will be welcomed to volunteer in the classroom to engage in reading to the classroom, helping with special projects, sharing about their family or job, and various other activities. A variety of family orientated activities can act as a link between school, home and community. Activities such as "children and parents writing together and sharing in the classroom, family learning night, connecting learning to family activities

Parents As Partners

- ✓ Communicate effectively
- ✓ Listen reflectively
- ✓ Involve parents in the classroom
- ✓ Connect parents to community resources and connect families to families
- ✓ Positively communicate about children
- ✓ Plan family centered events

(grocery lists, etc)” can be implemented (Peterson & Hittie, 2002). Other family activities can be planned such as family fun nights at the school or parent seminar classes at the school. Furthermore things outside of the school can be planned including park improvement projects or community field trips. It is crucial to understand that in the above activities all families are involved. It is vital to make sure families of children with disabilities are fully included just as the children with disabilities are included.

5. Instruction: Teaching should be multi-level teaching in which the teaching is teaching to multiple levels at all times. This is necessary as all students are at different ability levels and have different learning styles. In multi-level teaching the goal is to challenge students at their own level of ability. It is important find each students ability level, provide support, and challenge them to move to the next level. Students should be given choices in assignments and activities and should be given opportunities to work in pairs as well as heterogeneous groupings. In designing instruction in a classroom teachers must look at Howard Gardner’s theory of multiple intelligences in which Gardner identified that there are eight forms of intelligences including linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, musical, interpersonal, intra-personal, and naturalist. It is the teacher’s job to observe students, recognize and build on the multiple strengths of students.

A useful tool in assuring a student is working at his or her ability level is the use of classroom workshops. One example of a workshop is a reading workshop in which students self select books to read that are at their own level. Students can be taught how to find a book that is at their reading level. Another workshop is writing workshop in which students select a topic of interest and write in various forms including poems, short stories, expository, etc. Math workshops are an additional type of workshop in which students use a variety of math manipulatives in which students engage in self-discovery and focus on the “why” and not the “how.” Students work on a variety of hands-on learning activities in which they will experience authentic instruction in the classroom and community. Authentic instruction in where teachers engage students in real and meaningful activities. For example have students write letters to the president and actually send them, instead of having them practice writing letters.

Best Practices in Instruction

- ✓ Take into consideration multiple intelligences
- ✓ Teach at multiple levels
- ✓ Include higher order thinking skills
- ✓ Use authentic instruction
- ✓ Use Classroom Workshops
- ✓ Group students heterogeneously for group activities
- ✓ Use hands on activities
- ✓ Give students choices in their learning

6. Social, emotional, and behavioral needs: Building classroom/school community is the key component to an inclusive classroom and school. “A good community exists when people feel a sense of belonging and valued as members of the group” (Peterson & Hittie, 2002).

| Characteristics of a Classroom That Functions as a Community |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ Kids helping each other and working together✓ Classroom meetings✓ Children work through problems with effective strategies✓ The teacher and students interact frequently✓ Every student is accepted and differences are celebrated |

Community building in the classroom should begin the first day of school. One way to start community building is to have the students come up with the classroom rules for the year. This should be an activity in which all students are involved and have a voice in the rules. Playing class games are another way to build classroom community for example non-verbal line up involving different topics or cooperative stories in which students take turns adding a line to a story so it makes sense. Students should also learn about each other and share about themselves. Students should be taught how to recognize when some one needs help and different ways to help people. Children should also be taught about conflict resolution and how to solve problems in a peaceful manner. Classroom meeting should occur occasionally to bring the class together and discuss any issues that may arise.


School social workers can also play a part in meeting student's social, behavioral, and emotional needs. Social workers can come into the classrooms and teach students about conflict resolution. The social worker can do various activities about friendship, acceptance, differences, conflict, and other important topics. Books dealing with these issues can be read and discussed or students can learn songs about the subjects; the possibilities are endless.

When behavior issues arise in the classroom it is important for teachers to look at the function of the behavior. First teachers should investigate to see if all of the individual "Five needs of all human beings" are met including love and belonging, power, fun, freedom, and survival. If not the teacher needs to adjust the classroom to fulfill that need(s) which are unmet. The teacher needs to develop a sense of safety and trust between the teacher and the student, make the class fun and interesting, provide support to reduce frustration in the setting, teach alternative ways to communicate, and teach how to tolerate school. Students that have severe behavioral challenges a variety of things can be attempted including peer mediators, contracts and self-generated plans, circle of friends, and team planning.

7. Physical design of the classroom for diverse learners: First it is important to make sure that the school itself is accessible to students with different types of limitations. The school building will have ramps into the school building as well as motorized doors. Every stair way should have handrails to assist to support students in climbing the stairs. Inside the school there will be an elevator that can transport students to different levels of the school. Furthermore, it is also important that the doorways, hallways and classrooms provide ample room for students in wheel chair or other assistance can move throughout the school easily. The classroom will consist of tables in which students will be seated at for working. Also around the classroom will be

centers of different subjects (math, science, art, reading...). Using tables instead of individual desks will allow for group interaction as well as provide sufficient floor space for students who have mobility limitations. The centers will allow for further small group interaction. The materials in the classroom will be located on selves that are accessible to all students including the individuals who cannot stand up. There will be several different types of seats that the children can sit in including bean bags, chairs with arm rests, or cube chairs for students to sit and work in. The classroom will have a bathroom that is wheel chair accessible and has rails for students who need support. It will also have a training seat because the students are young (pre-school and kindergarten).

There will also be a variety of materials available to students. For example various writing utensils including large bodied crayons, markers, regular crayons, sponge paints, bingo dot markers, pencils, and various grips for writing utensils. This is necessary for students who have difficulty with small motor control.

| Keys to Physical Design of the School and Classroom  | |
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| 1. Ramps going into the school | 6. Use tables instead of desks |
| 2. Motorized doors | 7. Several different types of seats |
| 3. Elevators | 8. Toilet seats and rails |
| 4. Handrails throughout the school | 9. Wide doorways |
| 5. Adequate Floor Space | 10. Variety of materials available |

8. Accommodations and supports for students with physical and sensory challenges: Accommodations and adaptations will be made for any student who displays a need for in the classroom. Various options will be discussed to find the best accommodation or support that will enable the student to learn or perform a task that they could not do themselves. There are a variety of supports and accommodations that can be tried will different students depending on his or her need. Assistive technology (low tech and high tech) will be made available including things such as augmentative and alternative communications for individuals who have difficulty talking. Sign language or gesturing may be used and in this case it may be necessary to have a sign language interpreter for the student. Communication boards that involve no technology can be as simple as a display of pictures or words that the student can point to in order to communicate. Furthermore high technology electronic communication aids can be used in which they have voice output and are multi-dimensional. Adaptations can also be made on the computer to allow access to all students. A variety of things can be done such as using a “touch screen,” alternative key board (such as IntelliKeys), voice recognition, magnified screen images, or computer software programs. Interactive computer programs or hyper-linked programs can be used with students as a support.

| Communication Supports | |
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| Interpreters | Note takers |
| Augmentative communication devices | Readers/Writers |
| Computers | Sign Language |

There are also a variety of instructional formats as well as different grouping of students that may offer support for students with special needs. For example as discussed early having various learning centers for the students to work at. Other examples include one on one instruction, small groups, large group, individualized learning stations, and cooperative groups. Peer support should be a main part of the classroom. There can be class experts on certain subjects that students in the class know they can go to for help in that area. Peer mentors and buddies can also be effective in the classroom of same age students as well as cross-age peers.

In the area of students who are hearing impaired there are several devices that can be used to assist them in the classroom. These assistive devices include hearing aids, headphones, classroom amplification systems, and FM transmission systems.

Simple adaptations can be made for all students who need them. For example seating students close to any white boards or chalkboards that may be used frequently in class, using different colored paper or writing utensils, giving shorter assignments, increase the amount of time given to complete an assignment, and many more. It is important to explore all the options available to support any student's individual need and to try various routes until a proper adaptation is found. What works for one student may not work for another and therefore all cases should be taken on an individual basis.

References

Peterson, Michael and Hittie, Mishael. (Projected publication date 2002). Inclusive Teaching: Creating Effective Schools For All Learners. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.