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The Ins and Outs of Inclusion

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Inclusion is the act of educating students with disabilities in the general education environment. With the passage of the 1975 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and its subsequent amendments, more students with disabilities have moved into general education classrooms from segregated special education classrooms. It is now the law, not a choice, to “include” students with disabilities by educating them in the least restrictive environment possible.

This change signifies the need for more general educators to better prepare themselves to work with students with disabilities. The best resource general educators have available to them are the special educators located in their schools. Special educators are available to help plan academic modifications in the general education setting. Communication, support, and training are the keys to facilitating successful inclusion practices.



Collaboration

When collaborating on modifications in the general education setting, it is crucial for the general and special educator to communicate what the student’s strengths and weaknesses are, both academically and socially. It is also vital to consider the nature of instruction in the general education setting; the academic skill level; the student’s level of achievement in each subject; whether the student is performing at, above, or below grade level; the materials used for instruction; assignments and the amount of independent work the student will have to do. To make inclusion successful, team members must also keep parents well informed.

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Accommodations vs. Modifications

When planning for the inclusion of students with disabilities, one must often make accommodations and modifications. Accommodations refer to altering the method, delivery, product, or assessment of a concept without lowering or changing the standard. For example, allowing a student with a disability in written expression to dictate responses on a science test, instead of writing them, is an accommodation.

Modifications refer to lowering or changing the standard to better meet the instructional needs of a student with a documented disability. For example, allowing a student with a learning disability in math to take an assessment in math on a lower grade level than he is in, is a modification. The standard the child must meet in this area of math is lower since he is not taking his math test on grade level.



Support

Support of the education team by administration (both school-wide and district-wide) and parents is also

crucial to successful inclusion. Support takes on many different appearances: allotted time for group planning, preference for scheduling, and appropriate grouping of students. The success of inclusion will depend largely on staff and parents' attitudes. Everyone must make a commitment to make it work.



Training

Ongoing inclusion training for general educators, special educators, paraprofessionals, and parents will contribute to the success of the inclusion program in each school. Amendments to the law regarding students with disabilities are frequent. It is necessary for educators and parents to remain knowledgeable regarding the specifics of current law. In addition, holding training sessions regarding the best practices in teaching students with disabilities will enable general educators to meet the specific needs of students with special needs. Special educators, well-informed in this area, need to commit to sharing their knowledge of ways to accommodate students with disabilities.

References

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