



Inclusion: Elementary School

What is inclusion?

Inclusion describes an approach toward education that allows children who require additional educational services to receive those supports in regular classrooms with typically developing peers. The goal of inclusion is for all children with disabilities to attend school in the least restrictive environment possible while receiving the support they need to be successful.

What is least restrictive environment?

Public law requires that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who do not have developmental disabilities. It also states that special classes, separate schools, or other educational placements that remove students with disabilities from the regular classroom occur only if the disability is such that education in regular classes with use of extra services cannot be satisfactorily achieved.

What factors should be considered?

- Special education is not a “place” but a coordinated offering of services. The most important part of learning is *effective instruction*, not location of the instruction. It is very important to look at your child’s needs, determine the content and method of teaching, and *then* identify the least restrictive setting where the program can be accomplished. Children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) frequently need specialized instruction; in other words, your child should have supports based on his needs.
- The most effective instruction for children with ASDs provides many opportunities for the child to practice targeted skills until he learns the skills. The most effective programs are those that measure your child’s progress by collecting data on the targeted (or desired) skills so that the professionals teaching the skills know if the method is effective for your child. Data-driven programs that provide your child structure and supports and focus on the development of communication skills are the most likely to lead to success.

- For some children, the least restrictive environment may involve a smaller classroom or specialized setting that provides fewer sensory distractions and is less dependent on language. You and your child’s educational team will need to examine your child’s needs to determine if instruction in a smaller learning environment is more comfortable for your child.
- It is important to consider how information is provided about working with students with ASDs to teachers and other personnel such as cafeteria aids, bus drivers, and administrators who will be involved in the program. A positive and welcoming attitude on the part of administration is an important component to successful inclusion of students with developmental disabilities in the typical school environment. It is also important to teach classmates without disabilities how to provide an inclusive environment and be a friend to children who may have developmental disabilities. This need for peer education extends through high school.
- Parents should be open to discussing questions and concerns that the school team may have in a nonjudgmental way. Open communication and following school suggestions at home are important for your child’s success.

How will I know if my child is ready for inclusion?

Children who have “getting ready to learn” skills are more successful in an inclusive setting. Your child may be ready if she

- Pays attention to what other people pay attention to (joint attention)
- Has a way to communicate wants and needs (a functional communication system)
- Knows and cares that others are listening when she speaks
- Shares the thoughts of her classmates
- Can pay attention to instruction
- Has adequate coping strategies to manage the challenges of a group setting
- Is not aggressive to herself or others
- Has self-help skills, such as being able to toilet herself appropriately

How do we keep the end goal in mind?

According to www.specialeducationadvisor.com/thoughtful-inclusion, “The bottom line is, does the inclusion of this child in the curriculum help him to learn social information about how to work well with others (e. g. problem solving, group participation, etc.) while also learning the academic information of the classroom to help the student develop functional skills for transitioning into the adult world? Because at the end of the day or the end of a child’s life as a student in public education what really counts is whether he has developed skills to help him be more successful as an adult.”

It is important for the family and educational team to target and teach skills that the student will need in social and academic areas to be successful with appropriate supports in the least restrictive environment. In turn, these skills are the building blocks for living and working in the community in the future.

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics HealthyChildren.org:
www.HealthyChildren.org

National Autism Center: Inclusion: www.nationalautismcenter.org/learning/inclusion.php

US Department of Education Building the Legacy: IDEA 2004: Least Restrictive Environment: <http://idea.ed.gov/explore/view/p/%2Croot%2Cstatute%2CI%2CB%2C612%2Ca%2C5%2C>

Winner MG. Thoughtful inclusion. Special Education Advisor: Special Education & IEP Advisor Web site. www.specialeducationadvisor.com/thoughtful-inclusion

The recommendations in this publication do not indicate an exclusive course of treatment or serve as a standard of medical care. Variations, taking into account individual circumstances, may be appropriate. Original document included as part of *Autism: Caring for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorders: A Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*, 2nd Edition. Copyright © 2013 American Academy of Pediatrics. All Rights Reserved. The American Academy of Pediatrics does not review or endorse any modifications made to this document and in no event shall the AAP be liable for any such changes.

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