Understanding Inclusion
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Introduction to Inclusion
Like most things in life, the definition of inclusion (also known as mainstreaming) has changed over the years. In the early 1990’s, I was at the beginning of my 20 year career as a special education teacher and inclusion generally meant that a school had a self-contained classroom located in the general education school. This was a significant shift from special education programs being located outside of general education schools and was the precursor for the models and approaches of inclusion that we will be discussing in this blog.

What is Inclusion?
In order to ensure compliance and providing the best services possible for all students, it is important to understand the legal requirements for inclusion according to IDEA 2004 and the least restrictive environment (LRE) provisions found at §§300.114 through 300.117.

"Each public agency must ensure that:
(i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and
(ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. [§300.114(a)]"

Out of necessity, the law is written to allow teachers, parents, and districts to determine (and provide) the best educational services possible for each student. This leaves a lot of “gray area” for interpretation of the law and we’re going to discuss a few models or interpretations on how some schools are applying this law. This article is not meant to endorse any specific model or approach, but rather to bring attention to some of the models and approaches for inclusion that are currently being used in schools across the country.

Two Inclusion Models Used by Schools
1. Full Inclusion – In this model, the school includes all students with special needs in regular education classrooms and does not have any self-contained classrooms. Students with special needs receive support services from the special education staff (including resource teachers), para professionals, parents, and other teachers based on their needs.

2. Self-Contained Classrooms, Resource Rooms, and Mainstreaming - In this model, students with special needs will either receive services in a self-contained classroom(s), a resource room(s), and/or will be included in general education classes as determined by the student’s needs and his/her I.E.P. goals. Students with special needs who participate (are mainstreamed) in general education classes for all and/or a portion of the school day would receive support from the special education staff (including resource teachers), para professionals, parents, and other teachers based on their needs.

Federal Settings and Student Inclusion
Below you will find an explanation of the three main approaches to student inclusion used by schools in the "self-contained classroom, resource room, and mainstreaming model”.

1. Federal Setting I – This approach is for students with special needs who are included in general education classes/setting 95 to 100% of the school day with special education supports as needed.

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Students in Federal Setting I cannot receive Special education services outside the regular education classroom more than 21% of the school day (1 period out of a 6 period day at the secondary level).

2. **Federal Setting II** – This approach is for students with special needs, who are included in general education classes/setting for part of the school day (50% to 95%) with special education supports as needed. Students in Federal Setting II receive Special education services outside the regular education classroom at least 21% of the school day, but no more than 60% of the school day (2 to 4 periods out of a 6 period day at the secondary level).

3. **Federal Setting III** – This approach is for students with special needs who qualify for a Level III setting, but are able to be included in general education settings like lunch, recess, and possibly special classes like art, music, and gym with special education supports as needed. Students in Federal Setting III require special education services outside the regular education classroom 61% to 100% of the school day (5 or more periods out of a 6 period day at the secondary level).

**10 Characteristics of Inclusion Success**

Unfortunately there are myths about inclusion, which have negatively affected the understanding and perception about inclusion for some people. Based on my experiences, research, and feedback from other educators and parents; inclusion benefits the entire school community, especially all the students. Also, schools that succeed in inclusion share 10 common characteristics including:

- A school administration that is supportive of inclusion to meet the needs of each student (based on the student’s I.E.P. – [Click here](#) for a free PDF download of IEP annual goal components)
- A positive inclusive school environment where students, staff, and parents appreciate diversity and value each student as part of the school community
- Providing students with positive and supportive opportunities to interact with each other
- Teachers, administrators, and staff who think of each student as “our student”
- A genuine interest and effort from staff members to collaborate and support each other
- Adequate planning time between special education staff and general education staff
- General education staff and special education staff partnering together and sharing responsibilities for student success including – lesson planning, teaching, communicating with parents, etc.
- Varying types of instruction and assessment to accommodate the various needs and learning styles of all students
- Having expectations and standards for their students while holding each to do their personal best
- Continuous effort to improve the knowledge of staff members on effective ways to reach, educate, and include students

Even though educators and parents may have differing opinions about which model or approach to inclusion is best for students, we all share one common interest which is the desire to provide the best education possible for them. I hope that you’ll continue to look for great inclusion resources and share this information with your staff, because doing so will improve the inclusion process and the educational experience of your students.