

Strategies for Educators to Create Inclusive and Accessible Community Schools

*You learn to talk by talking. You learn to read by reading.
You learn to write by writing. You learn to include by including.*

Inclusion: How To: Gary Bunch

Building an inclusive and accessible school will be achieved one step at a time. There will always be lessons to learn and new ways of thinking. The following strategies may be helpful to educators on their journey.

Building a Collaborative Team

- ❑ Recognize that collaboration and teamwork are the key to an inclusive school.
- ❑ Respect the roles, perspectives and contributions of each member of a student's team, including parents, resource consultants and professionals.
- ❑ Meet early in the school year with the student and the family to discuss appropriate and necessary accommodations that will help to facilitate inclusion within the classroom. Review the student's learning needs and discuss the kinds of accommodations that might be necessary to fulfill academic requirements, classroom participation and/or physical environment.
- ❑ If possible, provide the student and family with an outline of subject requirements and all assignment deadlines in advance.
- ❑ Work as a team with educational assistants, occupational therapists, communication specialists, the family and the student to set expectations and monitor progress. Establish a regular meeting schedule with team members.
- ❑ Stay in regular contact with parents. In addition to holding regular meetings at school, a helpful strategy may be to share a communication book with parents that can be sent home and back to school with the student.

Promoting Accessibility

- ❑ Ensure that entrances, school yard, classrooms and washrooms are barrier-free. Conduct an accessibility audit of the school and address accessibility issues.
- ❑ Determine the best place in the classroom to position a student who has a disability to promote interaction with the teacher and peers.
- ❑ Be familiar with the emergency evacuation procedures for students who have a disability and the expectations for teachers, school staff and students.
- ❑ Select field trip locations that are accessible for students who have a disability. If bus transportation is required, arrange for an accessible bus to enable all students to travel together.
- ❑ Ensure that computer technology and hardware required for supporting a student with a disability are up to date and are acquired in time for the start of the school year.

Exploring Academic Accommodation

- ❑ Set educational goals and expectations that motivate students to succeed.
- ❑ If possible, provide assignments in advance, with both oral and written instructions.
- ❑ Use a variety of approaches and create a resource bank of ideas and strategies that can be shared with other educators.
- ❑ Provide subject and test material in alternate formats if necessary to accommodate a student's learning needs (e.g., large print, audio-taped, multiple choice and/or oral questioning).
- ❑ Provide appropriate accommodations for tests and exams. For example, in some circumstances, a room with few distractions or additional time to complete the exam may be helpful.
- ❑ If you have a student who is visually impaired, describe your physical actions as you are making them.
- ❑ Ensure that during group work each student has a clearly defined role that truly contributes to the success of the group.

Creating an Inclusive Environment

- ❑ Encourage inclusion not just in the classroom but in all areas of school. For example, avoid clustering students who have disabilities at the same table over the lunch period.
- ❑ Encourage students to support each other through collaborative approaches such as peer tutoring, buddy system, cooperative learning and co-teaching.
- ❑ Explore the possibility of having assisted learning that is currently taking place in a separate resource room offered in a common area such as the library to further foster inclusion.
- ❑ Encourage students with a disability to become involved in school activities and sports. Just because a student with a physical disability may not be able to shoot a basketball, for example, doesn't mean he/she cannot share in the experience by assuming other roles such as keeping score.
- ❑ Encourage students with a disability to take an active role in school extracurricular activities. Ensure that groups such as the Student Council, Yearbook Committee and Drama Club promote the principles of inclusion.

Encouraging Relationships

- ❑ Increase student and teacher knowledge surrounding diversity by including diversity as a topic in class discussions and presentations. Help students to understand the similarities between people rather than perpetuating the negative stereotypes associated with disability.
- ❑ Explore ways to use the regular curriculum to teach values about diversity, equality and relationships.
- ❑ Foster respect by ensuring the use of person-centred and positive language in the portrayal of students who have disabilities. Discourage the use of terms such as "the disabled," "the retard" or "the cripple." Encourage the use of language that focuses on the person rather than on the disability.

- ❑ Structure classroom activities to encourage students to learn about each other by providing opportunities to share information. For example, if a student uses a communication board, consider making a copy for each student so that everyone can experience this communication approach.
- ❑ Where appropriate, consider implementing a buddy system that allows students the opportunity to spend one-on-one time with a student who has a disability. In some circumstances, a "circle of friends" may be a possible strategy. This circle meets to plan ways to include the student with a disability in the many social activities in the classroom and school.
- ❑ Provide opportunities for classmates to problem-solve ways to remove barriers to inclusion.



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Building Accessible and Inclusive Communities