

2024 Inclusion Academy

Sequence 1: Accessibility & Belonging in Public Education



Class 1 – What Kids Need to Thrive: The Research Basis for Inclusive Learning

An overview & vocabulary list

“Inclusion is about creating a better world for everyone.”

-Diane Richler, past president of Inclusion International

An overview of what we learned: Inclusion means different things to different people. In the educational context, it means learning is designed to support ALL students in age-appropriate classes, alongside their peers with and without disabilities. It is intentional and supported. In the early learning setting, emphasis may be placed on membership, relationships, and early skill development. In a K-12 setting, access to high quality instruction in the general education – or core curriculum – is emphasized.

Inclusive schools have a collaborative and respectful culture where students with disabilities, students experiencing trauma, and students with diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds are presumed to be competent, develop positive social relationships with peers, and are fully participating members of the school community. Inclusive education occurs best when there is ongoing advocacy, planning, support, leadership, and commitment.

Research shows that when children with and without disabilities are included, they learn more. When students with different support needs learn together, they experience better academic and behavioral outcomes, social relationships, high school graduation rates, and post-school success. Inclusive education is an evidence-based practice for educating all children and preparing them for life after school.

Inclusion has a legal basis in several federal laws: Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act; the Americans with Disabilities Act; and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. It is also called out in federally funded childcare programs (“Working Connections” in Washington) and in Head Start. This means children with disabilities

have civil rights protections in private settings as well as public settings. It also means IDEA is not the only law at play. It is one; it is a big one. But there are more.

Finally, inclusive early learning aligns with the science of child development. It promotes lifelong health and well-being. The absence of inclusion has negative effects on development and school outcomes.

- *Ramona Hattendorf*

Vocabulary

Access: A means of approaching, entering, exiting, communicating with, or making use of.

Accessibility: The degree to which a product, device, service, or environment is available to as many people as possible. Accessibility can be viewed as the "ability to access" and benefit from some system or entity.

Accommodations: An alteration of environment, curriculum format, or equipment that allows an individual with a disability to gain access to content and/or complete assigned tasks. They allow students with disabilities to pursue a regular course of study.

ADA: The Americans with Disabilities Act is a civil rights law that prohibits discrimination against individuals with disabilities in all areas of public life, including jobs, schools, transportation, and all public and private places that are open to the general public. It covers public and private settings, but not religious settings.

Belonging: Being accepted as a member or part of a group

Co-teaching: The practice of pairing teachers together in a classroom to share the responsibilities of planning, instructing, and assessing students. Co-teaching is often implemented with general and special education teachers paired together as part of an initiative to create a more inclusive classroom.

Exclusion: Students with disabilities were not allowed to attend school

IDEA: Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, the law that guarantees eligible children a free appropriate public education. Children must have a qualifying disability and must require specialized instruction.

Inclusion: Intentionally building a community in which each individual is recognized, has access, and participates and belongs as a valued member

Integration: Placing persons with disabilities in existing mainstream education without changing the system of education delivery.

Segregation: Students with disabilities are educated in separate settings from typical students.

Section 504: The section of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 that prohibits discrimination based upon disability. It applies to any entity that receives federal funding. A “504 plan” in education details what accommodations a student with a disability requires to access their education. Any student with a disability in a public school is covered by Section 504.

Special Education: A service not a place

Supplementary aids and services: Supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children to the maximum extent appropriate.

Universal Design for Learning: UDL is a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people. The UDL framework starts with the belief that every student is different and that’s the norm. In UDL, variability is embraced. When students face barriers to learning, it’s the curriculum that’s disabled, not the students. All students have assets and strengths and goals and interests. In a UDL classroom, educators offer students options and choices to create personalized pathways to meet rigorous goals.