

Chapter 17

Setting a Framework of Inclusive Support for Students With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance to parents, teachers, and school administrators, as it relates to the various elements and considerations to implementing inclusion programming in schools. The author introduces the implementation of inclusion in terms of a multidimensional framework needed to support the inclusion of students with disabilities (SWD) in general education classroom settings. Inclusive settings allow access to the general education curriculum, ensuring compliance with federal law, and enhanced academic and social opportunities for students with disabilities. A discussion of key stakeholders in inclusion, as well as preparation, implementation, and sustainability of inclusion efforts are also reviewed.

INTRODUCTION

Across the nation, there has been an increase in the number of students identified as having with disabilities (LeDoux, Graves, & Burt, 2012; US Department of Education, 2005). A student with a disability is defined as a student with an emotional, intellectual, or physical disabling condition, which requires assistance to access the educational environment. For years, educational leaders have been responsible for providing inclusive educational opportunities for SWD, by building programs that acknowledge them as an integral part of the educational community. Despite this, many districts continue to struggle to find balance between the provision of quality academic programming for SWDs and building a more inclusive educational community. This has highlighted the importance and relevance of bridging the gap between SWDs and their general education peers. In fact, researchers suggest that there is both social and educational value in educating students with disabilities along with their non-disabled peers (Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013).

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The purpose of this chapter is to provide guidance to parents, teachers, and school administrators, as it relates to the various elements and considerations to implementing inclusion programming in schools. Such guidance will further extend the current efforts of educators, in hopes of cultivating a more expansive environment of inclusion options for students with disabilities. This will equip all stakeholders with a better understanding of inclusion and its relevancy.

BACKGROUND

Educating students with disabilities within a more inclusive educational setting, continues to be a priority in education (de Boer, Pijl, & Minnaert, 2010; Forlin, Loreman, Sharma, & Earle, 2009; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2013). Inclusion allows students with disabilities access and opportunity to participate in general education curricula, along with their age appropriate peers (Katzman, 2007). In support of this, many laws have been adopted to ensure the protections, equity, and inclusion of these students. Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), a law that is fundamental to the rights of SWDs, states that students must be provided the opportunity to participate with their general education peers, to the extent possible (McGovern, 2015). This law further mandates that a multidisciplinary team make placement decisions and that a continuum of service delivery options be available (Horracks, White, & Roberts, 2008). Similar to IDEA, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) encourages the involvement of all students in the general curriculum, prompting states to create a more direct pathway for a high school diploma (Gewertz, 2017). This approach to education breakdowns the barriers of exclusionary practices, and prepares students for a more inclusive future (Kirby, 2017).

BUILDING INCLUSIVE FRAMEWORKS TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Many leaders have embraced the concept of inclusion in education. However, several leaders continue to struggle with the idea that students with disabilities can benefit from a general education environment, while others find it difficult to pinpoint a proper design and balance to accommodate the varied educational needs. Having a better understanding of the basic framework of inclusion assists in building the capacity and competency needed to effectively implement and guide the development of a quality instructional design. This includes being cognizant of all stakeholders involved, as well as their role, perceptions, and apprehensions when preparing to lead in this environment.

Stakeholders in Inclusion

As previously noted, inclusion of SWDs in the general education setting has been in existence for quite some time. Despite this, the concept of inclusion is often met with conflicting views and ideologies. This has not been unexpected, due to the fact that inclusion involves the careful coordination of roles and perspectives of a variety of stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, administrators, and other pertinent staff members. Nonetheless, as educators approach the development of more inclusive frameworks, it is important to consider the perspective and relevance of each stakeholder group.

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