

WHAT IT MEANS TO HAVE AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM

What Makes a Classroom Inclusive?

Children with disabilities have a right to a public education and to be part of the general education classroom. Federal legislation makes it clear that students with disabilities are included as general education students. This means that they are an important part of their general education class.

The benefits of inclusion are clear. We know that being included means students with disabilities spend more time on academics and achieve more. They participate in non-academic activities and develop broader social relationships when they have opportunities to interact with peers without disabilities. Students without disabilities also benefit from the variety of instructional strategies and accommodations used by teachers. They learn to help and value each other.

Inclusion is not just being **in** a general education class. Inclusion only works when your child is learning and applying meaningful content and meeting IEP goals **with** same-age classmates without disabilities. So, how do you know if your child is included **in** the classroom? Here are some observations you might make about the surroundings in an inclusive classroom:

- Desks are arranged in groups around the classroom. This allows for peer learning, engagement, and socialization among students. Students who collaborate productively will have more positive outcomes.
- Visual learning aids are used, such as daily schedules, timers, posters, and charts. Many students are visual learners, and even those that aren't can benefit from this support.
- Leveled books, manipulatives and centers with hands-on activities are available, providing a variety of learning materials for **all**.
- A class-wide behavior program supports positive social skills and behaviors in students. Even if there is a school-wide program, students benefit from supports tailored to their specific needs within the classroom.
- Technology (including assistive technology) is available to support students. These items can be simple, such as pencil grips, reading guides, or sticky notes; or complex, such as text-to-speech software, tablets, or web-based applications.



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* Adapted from <http://www.theinclusiveclass.com/2016/04/5-signs-that-classroom-is-inclusive.html>

Other Elements of an Inclusive Classroom

You can find out more about these topics by contacting your local FIN.

Person First Language – This is the practice of using language that refers to the person before the disability or label. For example, it is more respectful and honors the person to say “The child has special needs” instead of “The special needs child.” Address the person first!

Presumed Competence – Also known as “the least dangerous assumption,” presumed competence is about having high expectations for learning, thinking, and understanding. You can always make things simpler, but no one is harmed by aiming high to start with.

Growth Mindset – According to Carol Dweck (2015), people with growth mindsets believe that they can improve basic abilities like intelligence and talent through hard work and effort. This is opposite of a fixed mindset, where the belief is that those basic qualities are fixed traits.



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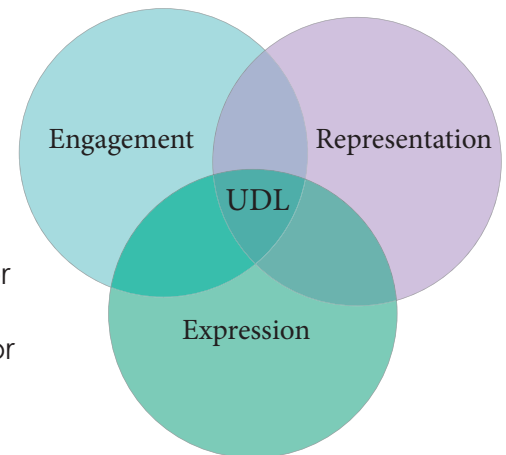
Universal Design for Learning (UDL) – Like wheelchair ramps, curb cuts, and raised lettering in elevators, which everyone can use, UDL in the classroom is a way of designing lesson plans that accounts for learner variability and context, and eliminates barriers to learning for all students.

Differentiation – Lessons can be changed, or differentiated, using their content, the process of teaching the content, or the product used to measure learning, based on frequent assessment of student learning.

Accommodations and Modifications – Both of these are components that can be written in an IEP to meet a student's needs, and they must be provided if they are included. Accommodations are changes to how something is taught or assessed, and are often just part of good teaching for all students. Modifications change the content that is taught. Only students with significant cognitive disabilities can have modifications.

Co-Teaching or Support Facilitation – Inclusive classrooms often have multiple adults as part of their schedule. When two teachers who meet certification requirements are teaching at the same time, every day, for the whole time, it is called co-teaching. Support facilitation is two certified teachers teaching on a regular schedule, but not every day for the whole instructional period.

Collaboration – Many adults work together to meet the needs of students in inclusive classrooms. They must plan, implement, assess lessons, and decide what is needed for all students to learn.



How Can You Tell If Inclusion Is Working For Your Child?

✓	When you visit the classroom, you see your child participate in learning activities with same-age peers that do not have disabilities.
✓	When you attend parent-teacher conferences or IEP meetings, the general education teacher knows your child well and has high expectations.
✓	When you visit the classroom, you see your child's classmates helping each other in academic and other activities.
✓	Your child uses technology to support learning and communicating with classmates who do not have disabilities.
✓	Your child brings home a variety of work that gives him or her a chance to demonstrate strengths and interests.
✓	Your child is usually able to do homework assignments independently.
✓	Your child's seat in the classroom does not separate him or her from peers without disabilities.
✓	Your child's daily schedule is mostly in the general education classroom.
✓	Your child participates in extracurricular activities, such as sports or clubs, with students who do not have disabilities.
✓	The teacher shows commitment to meeting the needs of diverse learners in the class.
✓	The teacher celebrates the accomplishments of all students throughout the year.
✓	Your child speaks positively about other students in the class.
✓	Your child is greeted by other students in his or her classes.
✓	Your child likes going to school.

Although your child's classroom may not have all of these inclusive qualities, the checklist above can help you start a conversation about what you'd like to see happen for your child. Sharing your thoughts and wishes with teachers can often help them think of ways to increase participation and learning for your child. There are many other resources available for you to share with your child's teachers. Check out the resources on the next page for more information.



It is important to remember that the things you see happening in inclusive classrooms can benefit ALL students, not just your child!

What Can You Do To Support Effective Inclusive Practices In Your Child's Classroom?

Ask your child's teacher what you can do at home to make it easier for your child to be included, such as helping with special homework projects or practicing vocabulary and communication skills.

Stay on top of what your child is learning at school. Ask your child's teacher to share the results of his or her weekly progress.

Read stories to your child about friendship and belonging. Talk about how to make friends at school. Ask your child to draw a picture or write about the meaning of friendship.

- How do friends help each other?
- What are some things friends do together?
- How can you make new friends?

Share ideas with the school about what is helping your child at home with learning, communication, or social/behavioral difficulties. Open communication between home and school will help support your child's routine and learning.

Be a school citizen. Participate in activities, such as the Parent Teacher Organization, or the School Advisory Committee. Volunteer for field trips and other activities where family members are needed.

Help support other families, especially those of students with disabilities. Even a small gesture such as a phone call or kind word can mean a lot when a family is struggling.

Thank teachers for efforts to include your child. Send thank you notes. Celebrate successes, no matter how small. Let the principal, superintendent, and school board members know how teachers are helping to include your child.



Scan the QR code to check out our other F.A.C.T. Folios for a deeper look into inclusion!

Check out the following websites for more ideas to support inclusion for your child:

Inclusive Schools Network:

www.inclusiveschools.org

Center for Parent Information & Resources:

www.parentcenterhub.org

Institute on Disability:

www.iod.unh.edu



Find your nearest FIN facilitator on our website:

www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com

or call toll-free 1-888-232-0421

