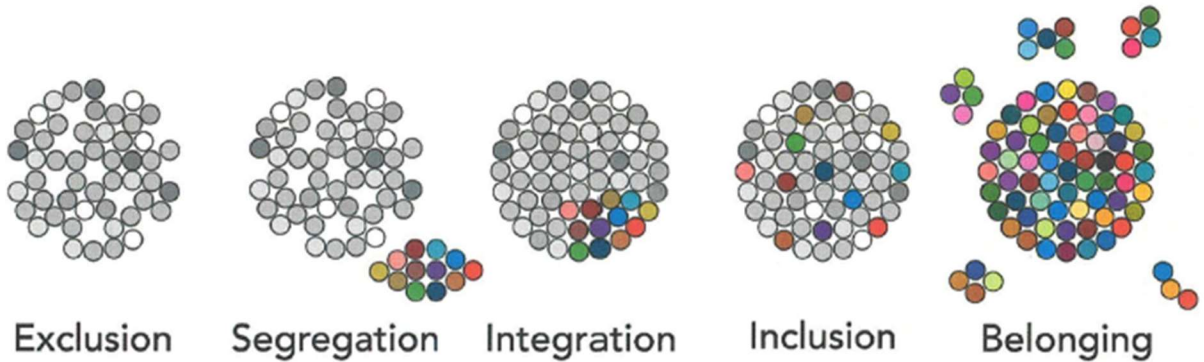


# Inclusion Makes Us Better

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Inclusion is embracing our students and their differences in whatever we do. It creates opportunities to raise disability awareness and empathy. It allows our students to share their gifts. It helps our families make new friends. It makes us better.

Inclusion is not diversity, and it is not tolerance. Groups may have disabled people on their roster, yet their participation is limited. This diagram from erikwcarter.com illustrates it well.



*Imagine the day when we reach the Belonging stage.*

## **Inclusion in a typical program without a buddy.**

Students in this environment enjoy being with their peers, have mild behaviors, and participate in activities well. Keep these students on your “radar” and consider not identifying them as part of the special needs program. To help them succeed, arrange for a few friends to interact intentionally.

## **Inclusion in a typical program with a buddy**

Students in this environment need assistance to participate and interact. Buddies help them learn, socialize, and communicate. Encourage the buddy to build a relationship and coach them to help the student achieve goals such as sitting with their peers and answering questions. The student may need a buddy to walk them to class and get them situated. Provide tools such as fidgets, noise-canceling headphones, and table-top activities. Allow the student to retreat to the contained classroom if feeling overwhelmed.

## **Contained Classroom**

Students in this environment need a calm, secure, and adapted environment. Bring inclusion into the class by having visitors. Keep practicing skills used to participate in a typical environment. Take small steps, such as walking down the hall toward the room or sitting outside a classroom and listening to what is happening inside.

## **Inclusion in the church.**

Coach your church leaders to welcome those with all abilities into every program. Encourage your special needs families to serve and participate in typical events together. Maximize reverse inclusion by encouraging typical families to join your special needs events.

*Be a Special Needs Church, more than a church with a special needs ministry.*