



Inclusion in School

What Inclusion Means for Students

Inclusion in school means students with disabilities learn and participate alongside their peers without disabilities. Inclusion may look different for each student. It should be guided by student needs and include supports, if needed, to promote success. Inclusion is not just about education in the classroom. It includes chances to be part of activities before, during, and after school with nondisabled peers. This may include clubs, committees, or sports teams. It is important to focus on the needs of the student and encourage inclusive chances in which she can be successful.

Understanding “Least Restrictive Environment”

Public law requires that children and youths with disabilities are educated with their nondisabled peers as much as possible. It also states that taking children out of a regular classroom and putting them in special classes is allowed only if they are not making good progress in the regular class.

Factors to Consider

Special education is not a “place” but a coordinated offering of services. The most important part of learning is *effective instruction*, not where it takes place. It is very important to look at your child’s needs, determine the content and method of teaching, and *then* find a place where the teaching should happen. A child with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) may need specialized instruction or support, which should be based on his individual needs.

The best instruction for a child with ASD gives many chances to practice targeted skills until he learns the skills. The best programs are those that measure your child’s progress by collecting data on the targeted (or desired) skills. This way the professionals teaching the skills know if the method is effective for your child. Data-driven programs that give your child structure and support the development of communication skills are the most likely to lead to success.

Middle School Versus High School

In middle and high school, the concept of inclusion is the same as in elementary school. However, because class schedules become more complicated in middle and high school, the way a child or youth is included may change as she transitions into higher grades. Some children and youths may be able to continue to participate in regular education classes, such as math, reading, science, and social studies. Others may be included for part of their school day in classes often referred to as *specials*, such as art, music, and physical education, but then move to a smaller setting for more focused teaching in academic areas. The student’s Individualized Education Program should address the most appropriate and least restrictive setting for the student to be successful. Inclusion should continue to be very individualized as children get older. Education may turn into job training. Families and students can and should help determine the settings in which the student can receive an appropriate education and support her success.

Although there may be more educational opportunities for inclusion in high school, it is important to also think about classes that support the development of social and life skills. Some students with ASD may do well academically, but having trouble with life skills can affect their ability to go to college, keep a job, and live independently. Working on life skills such as self-care, communication skills, job skills, safety, and advocating for themselves can help students with ASD. It is important to keep considering each year if inclusion is helping your child. It may depend on the class and the school. Some children with ASD are upset with changes and do better learning in a single special education class. Other children may be upset by or copy behavior of other students in a specialized class and do better with inclusion.



Focusing on the End Goal

According to a *Special Education Advisor* article on thoughtful inclusion, “The bottom line is, does the inclusion of this child... help him to learn...how to work well with others...while also learning the academic information of the classroom to help the student develop functional skills for transitioning into the adult world? Because at the end of the day or the end of a child’s life as a student in public education, what really counts is whether he has developed skills to help him be more successful as an adult.”

Resources

American Academy of Pediatrics HealthyChildren.org “Autism”:
www.healthychildren.org/English/health-issues/conditions/Autism

US Department of Education “Statute and Regulations”:
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/statuteregulations>

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



The information contained in this resource should not be used as a substitute for the medical care and advice of your pediatrician. There may be variations in treatment that your pediatrician may recommend based on individual facts and circumstances. Original resource included as part of *Caring for Children With Autism Spectrum Disorder: A Practical Resource Toolkit for Clinicians*, 3rd Edition.

Inclusion in this resource does not imply an endorsement by the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP). The AAP is not responsible for the content of the resources mentioned in this resource. Website addresses are as current as possible but may change at any time.

The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) does not review or endorse any modifications made to this resource and in no event shall the AAP be liable for any such changes.

© 2020 American Academy of Pediatrics. All rights reserved.