

Inclusion in the Classroom

TIPS AND RESOURCES



Why is it important to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms?

- **Inclusion Is a Legal Right**

In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act was passed to ensure that children with disabilities are given the opportunity to receive a public education. In 1990, 1997, and 2004, reauthorizations of this Act took place, and the law came to be known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). IDEA mandates that not only should individuals with disabilities be provided a public education, they also should have the right to learn in the least restrictive environment. This means that students with disabilities, both in public and in private schools, are, to the maximum extent possible, to be educated in classrooms alongside students without disabilities.

- **Inclusion Is a Moral and an Ethical Right**

Children with disabilities are first and foremost children. They will benefit from the same experiences that are desirable for all children, for the same reasons. They also will benefit from avoidance of the same undesirable experiences, for the same reasons. Inclusion provides opportunities for socialization and friendships to develop. It provides a sense of belonging and appropriate modeling of social, behavioral, and academic skills. Including children with disabilities in general education classes models acceptance of diversity. It teaches children how to relate with others of different abilities.

- **Inclusion Is a Civil Right**

Separate is not equal. If something is offered to all children, it must be accessible to all children. Access should not be denied based on disability or any one characteristic. Children with disabilities have a right to go to the same schools and classes as their friends, neighbors, brothers and sisters. They have a right to be afforded equal opportunities.

- **Inclusion Works**

Some research has shown that inclusion may improve learning and academic performance for all students. Children also have an opportunity to learn to accept individual differences and to overcome misconceptions about disabilities.

What are some of the practices that promote inclusion?

- Appropriate supports and services are available in general education classes.
- Individualized education programs are well-designed.
- Students with disabilities are considered in decisions that affect all students.
- Teacher preparation adequately addresses inclusion of students with disabilities.
- Disability is considered when teaching about diversity.

What are some of the barriers to effective inclusion practices?

- Funding is used as a reason for not identifying and appropriately supporting a student's needs.
- There is a separation between general and special education—two systems.
- There is lack of accountability and a failure to collect data objectively.
- There are low or no expectations for students with disabilities.
- There is a fear that general education classrooms will be disrupted if students with disabilities are included.

What can be done to address these barriers?

- **Get involved in the schools.** Work with the PTO to promote inclusion and share information. Ask to join the district's strategic planning committee and/or action teams. Start an inclusive education committee. Create a loaner library with inclusion information and materials. Meet regularly with whomever in the district will listen—superintendent, teacher, guidance counselor, and others.
- **Write, call and/or visit your local, state, and federal legislators regularly.** Let them hear your personal stories. Thank them for their help and let them know you are a voter! If they receive as little as 20 or more contacts about an issue, it will get attention. Your experience is expertise, and you can provide relevant information to policymakers.

Please see reverse for resources.



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RESOURCES

- **Share inclusion success stories with parents and professionals** Talk at early intervention meetings and help them envision possibilities for schools. Attend conferences, network, and join planning committees. Start an inclusion support group.
- **Support people with disabilities in sharing their own experiences and stories.** Provide opportunities for students with disabilities to speak for themselves. Help involve adults with disabilities in the schools and legislature. Speak or suggest speakers to other organizations such as Rotary Clubs, PTO's, and faith groups to spread the word about inclusion.
- **Enlist others.** This is not a disability issue. It is a societal and an educational issue. Get family, friends, and neighbors involved. Ask your congregation or community group to become active. Work with other groups interested in improving education for all children. Work with other groups interested in children's issues.

The content of this Tips and Resources fact sheet was made possible by Kids Together, Inc.™ www.kidstogether.org

Who We Are and Who We Serve

The **Vanderbilt Kennedy Center (VKC)** works with and for people with disabilities and their family members, educators and service providers, researchers, students, and policy makers. Faculty and staff engage in interdisciplinary research, training, service, and information dissemination and work in collaboration with local, state and national networks and partners. (615) 322-8240, toll-free (866) 936-8852, vkc.vumc.org

Tennessee Disability Pathfinder

Provides free information, referral sources, and help with navigating services via phone, email, and website. Assistance is available to individuals of all ages, all types of disabilities, and all languages spoken. Its website includes a directory of more than 3,000 agencies searchable by Tennessee county, topic of interest, and other filters. Pathfinder is a project of the VKC and is partially funded by Tennessee Council on Developmental Disabilities and other state agencies. (615) 322-8529, toll-free (800) 640-4636, TNPathfinder.org

The Susan Gray School

Serves children with developmental disabilities and children who are at risk for developmental delay. This preschool has the distinction of being the first nationally recognized early intervention program to include typically developing children in educational settings with children with disabilities. (615) 322-8200

Tennessee Resources

- **The Arc of Tennessee**
www.thearctn.org
- **The IRIS Center**
iris.peabody.vanderbilt.edu
- **Support & Training for Exceptional Parents**
www.tnstep.org/training
- **Tennessee Developmental Disabilities Network**
www.tennddnetwork.org
- **Tennessee Department of Education, Special Education**
www.state.tn.us/education/special
- **Tennessee Disability Coalition**
www.tndisability.org

National Resources

- **Administration for Community Living**
acl.gov
- **Association of University Centers for Disabilities**
www.aucd.org
- **National Council on Disability**
www.ncd.gov
- **National Dissemination Center for Children With Disabilities—A student guide to the IEP**
<http://nichcy.org/publications/st1script>
- **U.S. Dept. of Education, Office of Special Education**
www.ed.gov/about/offices/list/osep/index.html
- **Wrightslaw**
www.wrightslaw.com

Print Resource

- Karagiannis, A., Stainback, S., & Stainback, W. (1996). *Historical Overview of Inclusion*. In S. Stainback & W. Stainback (Eds.), *Inclusion: A Guide for Educators* (pp. 17-28). Baltimore: Brookes Publishing.

