

Features of an Inclusive School in an Inclusive Education System :

Family Advocacy believes in and works for inclusive education. Inclusive education is an approach that seeks to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalization and exclusion. The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the Salamanca World Conference (UNESCO 1994) where inclusive education was viewed as a human rights issue and as a means of bringing about personal development and building relationships among individuals, groups and nations. This was stated clearly in Article 2: "Regular schools with an inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discrimination, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all." An inclusive school can be identified by its approach to a number of key variables including those noted below.

A welcoming attitude :

In an inclusive school, all children and young people from the local community are welcomed to participate in the full curricular and co-curricular life of the school. Everyone who is engaged with students –teachers, school leaders, parents –have high expectations for all learners. The school's welcoming attitude is underpinned by a system that believes all children and young people belong and should be welcomed and educated in the regular class of their local neighbourhood school. The system recognises and promotes the benefits of inclusion to schools, school boards, parents and the general community.

Policies:

In an inclusive school, whole school policies create a culture that welcomes all students and celebrates diversity. All students feel culturally safe and are valued members of the school community. School policies are underpinned by systemic policies that promote and assist schools to achieve full school participation, cultural safety and celebrate diversity.

Attitude to parents:

In an inclusive school, parents are partners in their child's learning and the school facilitates and invites parental participation through regular meetings to plan and monitor their child's participation and progress at

school. The system demonstrates the critical value of parental involvement in all material.

Classroom teachers:

In an inclusive school, classroom teachers have core competencies to teach mixed ability classes. The core competencies are achieved through teacher training that adequately prepares teachers for the mixed ability classes they will teach and ongoing professional development opportunities to build greater competence. In an inclusive school, classroom teachers are supported by trained staff with the expertise to plan and adjust curriculum and teaching strategies. The system ensures the availability of such staff in a timely fashion. In an inclusive school, classroom teachers draw on curricula frameworks that address the learning needs of all students. Systemically, State and National Curriculum Bodies develop inclusive curricula and material to support their implementation. In an inclusive school, classroom teachers have resources at their disposal to facilitate inclusive practice. The system provides training and materials to assist schools to welcome and educate all students.

Principals:

In an inclusive school, principals are school leaders who promote and support inclusion. They are trained and supported systemically in this endeavor.

Assessment:

In an inclusive school, functional, non categorical assessments identify strengths and areas for attention in students. The system analyses student need to arrive at both funding and appropriate approaches to enable students to learn.

Curriculum:

In an inclusive school, the teacher and school use inclusive curricula that enable students to meet their real learning goals in the context of the regular curriculum. This is underpinned by State and National curricular frameworks that address the learning needs of all students.

Funding:

In an inclusive school the budget is distributed equitably and targeted towards meeting the student’s additional learning needs. The system allocates funding equitably in ways that promote inclusion.

Support:

In an inclusive school, support for students is provided in seamless ways that promote participation and inclusion and strengthen natural support. The system guides schools in their use of support resources.

Built environment:

In an inclusive school, the built environment enables students with challenges in mobility to remain with their cohort. Simultaneously, the system removes barriers in the built environment.

Inclusive School Characteristics

The inclusive school characteristics listed below were derived from Lipsky and Gartner’s *Quality Indicators of an Inclusive Environment* (2008)—a tool that will be introduced later in this module.

| Inclusive School Characteristics | |
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| School Climate | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility for all students is <i>shared</i> among all staff. • The school environment supports teachers in working <i>collaboratively</i> (e.g., common planning time, co-teaching). |
| Curriculum, instruction, and assessment | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students with special learning needs may receive instruction in the <i>general education classroom</i> and participate in extracurricular activities with necessary supports. • All students participate in state and district assessments with needed or approved |

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| | <p>adaptations and modifications and their data are used for accountability purposes and subsequent decision making.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All staff participate in developing and implementing a school-wide behavior plan. • A team approach ensures that each student receives the appropriate help when needed. |
| Staff development | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development activities are aimed at building capacity by enhancing the skills of all staff to promote students' access to the general education curriculum. |
| Support services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clinical and support staff are integral members of the school community. |
| Parent involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School personnel actively involve parents, including those of students with disabilities and those from diverse backgrounds, in all school activities. • Staff use multiple approaches to reach different subsets of parents. |
| Community involvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School personnel make a concerted effort to reach out to all community members, leaders, and organizations. |
| Resources | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resources are available throughout the school, not just in specialized settings or classrooms. • School personnel collaborate and serve as resources for each other. |
| School self-evaluation | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School personnel measure their school's progress toward addressing the needs of all students. |
| Comprehensive education plan | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School's planning documents and processes address the needs of all students in the areas listed above. |

- **Effective Practices in Inclusive Elementary School Programs :**

Multilevel Instruction- Today's classrooms include children with many different abilities. Students of the same age are clearly not alike in how they learn or their rate of

learning so teachers must use multilevel instruction in which multiple teaching approaches within the same curriculum are adapted to individual functioning level.

Universal Design for Learning- goes one step beyond multilevel instruction, creating instructional programs and environments for all students without the need for adaptation or specialized design.

Direct Instruction- This requires the explicit teaching of basic, adaptive, and functional life-skills.

Assistive Technology- Is any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of a child with disabilities.

Curriculum Based Assessment-In this era of accountability, developing assessments that will reliably monitor student learning is an essential component of instruction.

Characteristics of Effective Inclusive Schools-

There seems to be considerable agreement that schools are most successful in promoting student achievement and valued post-school outcomes when they:

- Establish high expectations for learning that are linked with a clear and focused mission
- Establish strong instructional leadership with frequent monitoring of student progress
- Promote the values of diversity, acceptance, and belonging
- Ensure the availability of formal and natural supports within the general education setting
- Provide services and supports in age appropriate classrooms in neighborhood schools
- Ensure access to the general curriculum while meeting the individualized needs of each student
- Provide a school-wide support system to meet the needs of all students