

## A Classroom Where Everyone Belongs

### *What does it mean to be inclusive?*

Four standards must be in place in order for a school to practice inclusion or have an inclusive environment:

- All children attend the same classroom
- All children with disabilities follow the same schedule, and participate in the same activities
- All children with disabilities receive support and encouragement to develop
- All children with disabilities should participate actively in natural settings

With the cooperation of the parent, and suggestions from the treating physician or specialist, the teacher should develop an Individual Education Plan that includes specific and clear behavioral objectives, the positive/negative consequences, and the purpose of each strategy.

The classroom teacher should make adjustments that create a more “even” level of stimulation with time to adjust between high excitement activities and calm activities. Rules should be clear for all students with regular discussions about rules and consequences.

There must be flexibility and interest in the classroom. Distractions should be limited and additional support may be necessary on days when excitement is high and distractions frequent.

Programs that have an inclusion philosophy do not look any different from a program that provides high quality, developmentally appropriate care to all children.

- All children participate in the same routines and play experiences
- Children are recognized as individuals with special strengths and needs
- Educators make creative modifications to routines and activities so all children benefit from participation

Inclusive programs include children with and without disabilities. Working with all children at their developmental level, recognizing their strengths and areas of need, then modifying wherever needed is a characteristic of high quality care.

Inclusion benefits not only the individual child with special needs, but also the children who are that child’s peers. Children in inclusive programs:

- Make friends
- Learn to interact appropriately in diverse relationships
- Learn by modeling to others
- Show more pride in achievements

- Learn to deal with obstacles
- Develop interpersonal skills
- Learn acceptance
- Learn help skills

Families of children are given positive encouragement to continue developing interpersonal relationships with their child's peers and other families. Inclusion also helps families to:

- Go to work
- Help accept child's strengths and weaknesses
- Discover ways to include children
- Share common experiences with other families

Teachers and schools additionally have benefits of being in an inclusive environment which include:

- Teachers can develop networks where new information and services can be shared and passed on to the parents
- Teachers realize and appreciate differences
- Develop empathy and understanding of diverse populations
- Take advantage of tax credits/deductions. There are many financial incentives and programs available to schools that practice inclusion.

As a professional educator, it is your responsibility to provide quality care and instruction to all children in your classroom regardless of whether they have special needs or are typically developed. To do so, you must:

- Identify goals for children
- Create learning opportunities
- Use helping strategies
- Reinforce children's learning
- Monitor progress

This is what teaching is all about. Meeting children where they are and helping them move forward. For more information about working with children with special needs, visit the Early Childhood Intervention (ECI) website at [www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/index.shtml](http://www.dars.state.tx.us/ecis/index.shtml), or you can visit the Collaborative for Children online training site at [www.collabforchildren.tamu](http://www.collabforchildren.tamu) to take a one-hour training in inclusive care titled "A Classroom Where Everyone Belongs."

#### References:

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