Inclusion is More Than Just Being In
Tips & Advice from 13 Inclusion All-Stars
6 authors of our popular inclusion guides + 7 fantastic teachers share their best insights on authentic inclusion!
“First, think about what participation looks like for typical students. Then ask yourself, ‘What supports will this student need to participate fully in this lesson?’” ~ Cheryl Jorgensen
Advice
from Cheryl Jorgensen
for teachers new to inclusion

1) Because “it takes a village,” establish a cohesive team (including students’ parents) and work with your principal to make sure that the team has common planning time every week.

2) Make differences ordinary in your classroom. Inclusion isn’t, at the end of the day, about disability (as Mara Sapon-Shevin says). It’s about acknowledging everyone’s gifts, talents, strengths, and needs.

3) Make sure every student has a way to communicate about all the same things that children without disabilities do.

4) Presume all students’ competence!

Cheryl Jorgensen, Ph.D., is an inclusive education consultant and the author of multiple books on inclusion, including *It’s More Than “Just Being In.”*
Inclusion isn't the opposite of excluding one child; it's building a place for all children.”

~ Amanda Morin
Inclusion isn’t a place or a lofty idea. It’s simply making space for all students and using teaching techniques that include everyone, such as universal design for learning (UDL). Inclusion isn’t something we can create specific parameters for and then put those parameters into place, expecting inclusion to happen. It’s a feeling of community. It’s a sense of belonging and when it’s there, you don’t even notice it.

In my career, you’ll hear the word “inclusion” often and it will mean different things to different people. Inclusion is a hard concept to think about, let alone talk about and define. But keep in mind that the word “inclusion” implies that there is exclusion. Without exclusion, we wouldn’t have to talk about inclusion because it would simply exist. The way to define inclusion isn’t by first defining exclusion. Inclusion isn’t the opposite of excluding one child; it’s building a place for all children.
There is no strategy or list of strategies that will work every time. The effectiveness of a strategy depends on the individual student’s strengths, needs, and context.”

~ Whitney Rapp
Q&A with Whitney Rapp

Q. What’s one thing you do to encourage educators to ensure that students with disabilities are more than just physically “in”?

A. As a teacher educator, I teach the importance of building a strong classroom community where students can share personal experiences and interests, where they can make mistakes without shame or blame. I also encourage teacher candidates to think critically about what they read and what they see in classrooms, and to be aware of and speak up against ableist assumptions.

Q. What advice do you have for educators new to inclusion?

A. The more strategies you have in your toolkit, the better. That said, none of them will work unless you have the foundational belief that all students are valuable to your classroom community, all students are capable and competent. The most complex, challenging needs will help you grow the most as a teacher.

Whitney Rapp, Ph.D., is the author of Brookes books *Universal Design for Learning in Action* and *Teaching Everyone* (coauthored with Katrina L. Arndt).
Respect for each other is the foundation for what we do, how we feel, and how we learn.

~ Angela Dieker

Once you successfully establish a good collaborative relationship, inclusion practices will be easier to implement.

~ Kelsey Stolt
**Words of Wisdom from Angela Dieker & Kelsey Stolt**

*Co-teachers at West Middle School*

**From Kelsey Stolt**
A positive, collaborative relationship between the special educator and the general educator is important. The goal of the educators is to work together to create a learning environment for the students, which encourages them to recognize and accept differences and enables them to work together to include all members of the classroom. If students see a strong working relationship between adults in the room, it can encourage them to form strong relationships with peers.

**From Angela Dieker**
We currently have a seventh-grade inclusive science class in which we have created a culture where our students help each other every step of the way. Our students who act as peer supports have essentially eliminated the need for paraprofessional support in our classroom. Students work together in small groups where everyone has an important individual contribution to the success of the team. It is through this collaborative effort and team mentality that we have a classroom where everyone is ‘in’ and is able to fully participate.

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- **December 2**
- **December 3**: Hanukkah, Begins at Sunset
- **December 16**: First Day of Winter
- **December 23**: Christmas Eve
- **December 24**: Christmas Day
- **December 25**: Kwanzaa Begins
- **December 31**: New Year’s Eve
"Educators and other adults must truly believe that everyone has a right to be there and be provided the appropriate supports to be successful."

~ Eva Horn
Inclusion Thoughts
from Eva Horn

My first steps in the journey occurred as an early educator teaching young children with disabilities in a segregated setting. I quickly became frustrated with the limitations and low expectations that I encountered for my students and then advocated for change. Since that time many years ago, I have engaged in ongoing learning and work in partnership with families and other early educators towards ensuring that as a field we continue to every day increase our understanding of how to make inclusion work for all young children and their families.

My advice for new inclusive educators is to embrace a strengths-based approach in which you presume that all children can be successful. Success is just a matter of problem-solving together as a team of educators to ensure that the right supports, instruction, and opportunities are in place.

Eva Horn, Ph.D., a professor and early childhood education expert, is the coauthor of *Six Steps to Inclusive Preschool Curriculum.*
“I believe that everyone has something important to offer and that we can all learn from each other.”

~ Amy Standridge
Words of Wisdom
from Amy Standridge

Inclusive music therapist at Oak Song Music Therapy and Consulting Services

An inclusive music classroom must have accessible materials. This would include large print music and colorful, socially valuable instruments that are easy to play and to grip. An inclusive music classroom would also greatly benefit from consultation with a board-certified music therapist (MT-BC) to help make the classroom as inclusive as possible. Most importantly, an inclusive music classroom absolutely must have a teacher who genuinely sees the best in students and has a passion to include everyone.

My best piece of advice for educators new to inclusion is to assume competence! We are all different and have different strengths and skills. It is irresponsible to assume that a student with a disability or multiple disabilities is not also musical. I have seen a student with autism perform better than his peers on a xylophone, a student with multiple disabilities beautifully strum a guitar, and a student with Down syndrome following the music lesson intently when provided a peer model.
Inclusion is a process; if you can’t find a way, you may need to make a way.

~ Paula Kluth
Advice from Paula Kluth for teachers new to inclusion

Start with the students. Teachers may feel overwhelmed when teaching in an inclusive classroom for the first time. It may feel like there is a lot to know in terms of supports and services. There may be new strategies to learn or new materials to explore. There may even be new colleagues to meet and new connections to make. All of this can cause some confusion and inspire a lot of questions, but in these moments, it’s important to pause and consider the “why” and the “what” of our work: our students.

Get to the know your students using whatever tools work best for your group. You could use student surveys, meet with learners individually or in small groups, or engage in formal or informal classroom observations. For students with more complex needs, you may need a wider range of tools to learn more about them. Try home visits, video assessment, or personal portfolios to gather information.

Paula Kluth, Ph.D., is a renowned expert on autism and inclusion and the author of many books on inclusive education, including "You're Going to Love this Kid!"
There are many resources to provide support for inclusive teams. Always ask for help.

~ Christine Webster
Words of Wisdom
from Christine Webster

Special Education Coach for Instruction and Transition, Cecil County Public Schools

I am an instructional coach for special education. I have helped inclusive teams from elementary through high school working one-to-one with students, teachers, paraprofessionals, and administration. Recent successes include the inclusion of a student with significant disabilities in an English 9, Government, and Algebra high school classroom. Working with the team on co-planning, modifying the outcomes to meet the student’s needs, and differentiating questioning to include the student in classroom lessons has helped her membership lead to participation, which is now leading to her learning.

For general educators new to inclusion: Remember that the student with special needs is on your class roster. The general education teacher is just as accountable for the student’s education as the special education teacher. There are many resources available to provide support for inclusive teams. Always ask for help.
“I was trained and worked in a system that is fully inclusive. In an inclusive school system, every teacher is an inclusion teacher.”

~ Nicole Eredics
Advice from Nicole Eredics on the importance of modifications

One of the most important things you can do is learn how to modify your curriculum! Research has proven that modifications are necessary if students with disabilities are to achieve access to and make progress in the general education curriculum. Modifications change the learning outcomes of a lesson to suit the cognitive ability of the student.

Modification strategies can include:

1) Providing the student with a simplified version of the lesson
2) Expecting the student to master a reduced number or concepts or central themes
3) Providing the student with prompts

For a student who works below grade level, modifications to the curriculum give the student an opportunity to learn from and participate in the same curriculum as his or her peers.

Veteran educator Nicole Eredics is the creator of the popular blog The Inclusive Class and the author of Inclusion in Action. www.theinclusiveclass.com
Be kind. Be patient. Be flexible.
~ Jacqueline Giammarco
Words of Wisdom from Jacqueline Giammarco
Inclusion facilitator, North Penn High School

As an inclusion facilitator, I provide real-time job-embedded coaching one-on-one and in groups to teachers and administrators. Together we plan instruction, adapt materials, and determine what technology can be used to meet the needs of all learners. In my role, I have created an Inclusion Toolkit for teachers and administrators to utilize to have current research, materials, and ideas for the classroom at their fingertips.

I have been a special education teacher for 13 years, and I am still learning. I learn from the students and teachers around me each and every day. A new perspective, a goal met, or a new tool or strategy to try—these are what help me to continue to learn and grow. And it's exciting! I love trying new things in the classroom, figuring out how to make them work for the students in front of me, and sharing with other teachers.

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Teaching peers to support their peers with disabilities can be beneficial for all children in the classroom.

~ Erin Barton
Q&A with Erin Barton on the importance of modifications

Q. What’s one specific thing you encourage educators to do to ensure that students with disabilities are more than just physically “in” the classroom?

A. I ask educators to consider if children with disabilities are participating in the same activities and in the same way as their peers. Children with disabilities should be taught and supported to engage with their peers. Their participation should look the same as their peers.

Q. What is one thing that an inclusive classroom absolutely must have?

A. Systematic social skill instruction should be embedded throughout the day, in all activities, for all children. Peers with and without disabilities should be interacting with each other in meaningful ways.

Erin E. Barton, Ph.D., BCBA-D, is a special education professor and coauthor of The Preschool Inclusion Toolbox.
“Learn from your students! Understanding them is the best way to help them.”

~ Ranjana Ranganthan
Words of Wisdom
from Ranjana Ranganthan

Language Acquisition Teacher

My students don’t learn in the same way. Each one understands in a different way. The entry into their understanding is what is primary, and this gives me an insight into their lacking and need. I take it up from there on and try options, teaching them through varied methods. There are several ways to arrive at the answer. Paths may be different, but the destination is the same. Keep your students calm and happy and give them the feeling that they are important, wanted, and needed in your classroom. They should feel responsible and that they contribute, and that I (the teacher) am going to help them learn.
Explore the books in this calendar and discover more great resources on inclusive education

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