

Facilitator's Guide: 10 Reasons to Support Inclusive School Communities for ALL Students

Introduction

This facilitator's guide was developed to support reflection and discussion among general educators, special educators, families, administrators, and members of the greater community regarding the rationale for working to create and sustain inclusive school communities. As the introduction to the *10 Reasons to Support Inclusive School Communities for ALL Students Brief* indicates, the precedent for inclusive education was set in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) clause of Public Law 94:142 in 1975 and it has been more than 60 years since the Supreme Court declared that "separate is not equal" (Vandercook et al., 2018).

So, why are papers and discussions as to the rationale for creating and sustaining inclusive school communities still needed? Maybe the discussions have not occurred as widely as is needed? Perhaps the rationale has not been maintained and communicated over time?

Overall Questions to Consider Prior to Reading

Overall questions that might be considered prior to reading the *10 Reasons to Support Inclusive School Communities for ALL Students Brief*:

- 1) Schools talk about "diversity," but that term can be coded.
 - a. When your team, school, or community uses "diversity," what do they mean by that?
 - b. Who is included in their definition?
 - c. Who is excluded in their definition?
 - d. How does that impact your school and community?
- 2) Have you heard or been a part of discussions about inclusive school communities?
 - a. What are some concerns, worries, or myths you have heard about inclusive education in your school, family, or community?
 - b. What are some hopes, dreams, or expectations you have heard about inclusive education in your school, family, or community?
- 3) Are there any myths, worries, or concerns you used to believe in that you no longer believe? What changed your beliefs?
- 4) Are there any hopes, dreams, or expectations that you have now that are new to you as you engage in discussions with others or have some experience in a school striving to be inclusive? Can you identify any specific discussions or experiences that supported these hopes, dreams, or expectations?
- 5) Are there any factors in your school, family, or community that you think would make inclusive education difficult? What are some strengths your school, family, or community has that would support inclusive education?
 - a. Are there cultural beliefs or norms surrounding disability and people with disabilities?

- b. Is there a history of trying to implement inclusion unsuccessfully?
 - c. Are there a disproportionately large number of students with additional needs for support in the school community?
- 6) Thinking of students with and without disabilities, are there any historical or current forms of segregation that your school or community has grappled with? (For example, explicit or implicit racial segregation, exclusion of English Language Learners from certain classes, or uneven gender distribution in STEM classes?)
 - a. How does this influence where students are placed today?
 - b. How does this influence the beliefs that teachers have regarding the opportunities and capacities afforded to certain students?

Overall Questions to Consider After Reading

Overall questions that might be considered after reading the *10 Reasons to Support Inclusive School Communities for ALL Students* Brief:

- 7) Did any of the Reasons resonate with you? Which ones and why?
- 8) Did any of the Reasons surprise you? Which ones and why?
- 9) Do any of the Reasons conflict with community, school, or family norms, beliefs, or culture - that you know of? How might that tension be navigated?
- 10) How might this information be shared in your school community? With your greater community?
- 11) Which is/are the Reason(s) you want to learn more about?

Questions Specific to each of the 10 Reasons

Reason 1: Civil Rights

- The Supreme Court case *Brown v. Board of Education* determined in 1954 that segregation of students of color was unconstitutional and decreed that "separate is not equal." Why is it taking so long for this basic concept to be applied to students with significant cognitive disabilities?
- In many states a disproportionate number of students of color are identified as students with significant cognitive disabilities. How does the segregation of these students undermine *Brown v. Board of Education*?
- IDEA creates a presumption that the general education classroom is the Least Restrictive Environment and must be considered first for every child. Why is this provision so poorly implemented?

Reason 2: Integration in Community Life

- Most people agree that institutionalization of individuals with significant cognitive disabilities must no longer occur. However, how do we prepare students to live in the community if they are segregated from their peers in school?
- Typical peers will become the friends, co-workers, employers and neighbors of individuals with many different abilities. How does being educated in an inclusive environment help typical peers develop in these roles?

Reason 3: A Sense of Belonging and Acceptance of Differences

- Reflect on times in your life that you did not feel a sense of belonging or felt "different." How do you think being separated from peers impacts the self-esteem and sense of belonging for students with significant cognitive disabilities?
- Have there been times in your life where you felt included? What made you feel that way? How do you think being included impacts the self-esteem and sense of belonging for students with significant cognitive disabilities?
- How do you think typical peers benefit in dealing with their own insecurities when they are in an inclusive class where everyone is accepted?

Reason 4: Varied Learning Opportunities

- Studies show that students have the most access to and participation in the grade-level general education curriculum if they are educated in general education classes. What supports or training do you feel is needed to provide this opportunity to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?
- What were the most important "Functional Life Skills" you learned in school? Aren't independence, interdependence, problem-solving, social interactions, reading, and other critical "life skills" learned as part of the general education curriculum?

Reason 5: Use of Best Practices in Instruction

- What are some specific ways the [Universal Design for Learning guidelines](#) and checkpoints can help in designing lessons that reach the widest range of learners in a diverse inclusive classroom?
- What are some other best practices in instruction that would support high quality instruction in inclusive classrooms?

Reason 6: An Individualized Education in a Supportive Context

- Think about general education academic classes and other school-wide learning opportunities. What support does the student need in order to participate in those lessons and activities?
- If IEP goals are only worked on in a special education setting, how can the student be expected to generalize the skills for use in the community?

Reason 7: Relationships with Peers

- How do students with and without disabilities benefit from developing friendships in a diverse inclusive classroom?
- How does attending classes with other students from the neighborhood help support community engagement and participation in extracurricular activities?
- How can these friendships improve opportunities for integrated employment, meaningful community engagement, and independent living in the future?

Reason 8: Increased Instructional Support for All Students

- How would specialized instructional support personnel and collaboration with special educators improve instructional practices for students who need extra support or extra enrichment, but do not have a disability?
- How would the strategies used to support students with a disability (e.g. vocabulary support) also provide support to other students?

Reason 9: Team Building

- How does collaborating with a content trained general educator help support a special educator in ensuring students with disabilities make progress in the grade level curriculum?
- How does the specialized instruction expertise of a special educator support general educators in helping all their students make progress in the general education curriculum?
- How can school administrators help educators improve opportunities to collaborate with other team members, including family members?

Reason 10: Parental Involvement

- How does your school support and reduce barriers for families who may have difficulty accessing traditional ways that schools connect with families? (For example, how do you connect with parents who do not speak English fluently? How do you connect with parents who work during the school day?)
- What could your school do to support parents of students with disabilities to feel welcome and part of the school community? How difficult is it for family members to participate in their child's school if he/she does not attend the neighborhood school?
- How do you think it impacts the family when siblings have to attend different schools because the "special education" program is not in the neighborhood school?
- What experiences do parents of students with disabilities have that could make them especially helpful as volunteers in your school?

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