

Programming for an Inclusive Setting: Assessing the Individual Student

Each student placed in a regular education setting will have specific, individual needs that are different from any other student. There is no way to create an inclusive setting that will meet the needs of all children. However, there are strategies and methods that can increase the likelihood of the child experiencing success. Identifying the areas where the child may require help, and supporting the child and teacher with strategies and methods founded in research-based methods, can aid in creating a positive, inclusive environment. I hope the following suggestions will prove helpful to the teacher contemplating an inclusive program for students with autism. Many variables will interfere with this process, but it can be successful with proper planning and implementation,

Step One: Determine the strengths and weaknesses of the student

Academic

Is the child on grade level?

Does the child have adequate fine motor skills? What about pencil grips?
the student need a modified curriculum, and if yes, in what?

long will the child attend?

the student pick up verbal cues? (two- and three-step directions)

Does the child have independent working skills?

Social Skills

How does the child respond to other children?

Can the student work closely with others?

Does he or she share willingly?

Does the child make eye contact with adults and children?

Does he or she request help?

Does the student initiate conversation with other children?

Can he or she identify emotions in self or others?

Does the child have appropriate play skills?

Behavioral

How does the child express frustration?

Can the child calm himself down?

Is the child aggressive toward other children or adults?

Can the child stay on task?

How does the child handle free time?

Can the child sit for extended periods of time?

Does the child have disruptive behaviors?

Will the child tolerate classroom noise?

Step Two: Observe the regular education classroom the child will attend

While in the classroom look for:

Times the student will be independent and successful

Times the student will need assistance

Step Three: Review IEP goals

Determine how the goals can be taught in the classroom

What areas will require additional help?

What can be met within the natural activities of the day?

Who will be responsible for each goal?

What can be modeled by a peer? What must be taught one-on-one by the teacher?

Step Four: Determine the behavioral challenges the student will face

Conduct a behavioral checklist.

Determine what environmental changes are necessary to decrease problem behavior

Is there a behavior plan already in operation?

Determine natural consequences for when behavior does occur

Decide who will implement the procedures:

regular education teacher

special education teacher

regular education paraprofessional

special education paraprofessional

speech teacher, occupational therapist, or physical therapist

related teacher: p.E., music, art, etc.

Step Five: Determine which social skills will be targeted in the classroom

Run a social skills assessment

Determine the long-term and short-term goals

Determine the teaching methods you will use

Large group, small group

Games, puppets, role plays, rehearsal strategies

Decide who will be responsible for monitoring the goals (see list above)

Determine who will be responsible for tracking the generalization of objectives throughout the day.

Step Six: Conduct a reinforcer/motivational assessment

Keep a running list of objects and activities that reinforce the student and give all members of team access to it.

Periodically change the list as reinforcers change.

Step Seven: Set weekly or biweekly meetings with all people involved in the education of the student

Set time for meeting during nap time, recess, snack, P.E., music, before or after school, or during video time

Discuss successes, challenges, and what works and does not work

Include parents in the meetings occasionally to get their opinions and ideas

Step Eight: Conclusions

Can this child be immediately placed in regular education classes full-time?

If not, what transition process is needed? What is the projected timeframe?

How much paraprofessional support will be necessary to sustain this child successfully?

How quickly can the support be faded?

How much partial support will be needed on a permanent basis?

What is the bare minimum that will be needed to ensure success?

A successful inclusion program will face many challenges, often from sources other than that which the individual student with autism presents. Special education teachers must continually assess the inclusive setting for possible saboteurs. They must remain flexible and willing to cooperate with a variety of people in the school's administration. Also, enthusiasm must not waver, even in the face of disappointment, for many people will look to the teacher to provide the resources and encouragement that they will need for the inclusion program. Students with autism deserve the opportunity to have exposure to typical students in their schools. Careful planning and implementation will ensure the success of the program and be an encouragement for others to follow in their footsteps.

Step Five: Classroom assessment

How many children are in the classroom?

Have they reached maximum numbers, or do you project that more will be added?

Are there good role models for social development?

What are the traffic patterns like?

Are the students seated in individual desks or at tables?

Where would your student sit in the existing arrangement?

Can students share materials easily?

Will your student be facing a door or a window?

Is the schedule posted for all to see easily?

Are children identified by names on name tags, chairs, etc.?

How do the students progress from the room to other rooms?

where do the students sit during lunch? Is there room for your student(s)?

Are there any bullies in the room?

Is there a bathroom nearby?

How will you handle inappropriate behavior in this classroom?

Is there a quiet corner?

Is this a noisy classroom?

How will your student handle it if it is?

Step Six: Parent assessment

How involved are the student's parents?

Do they have the potential to "burn out" teachers?

Are your parents willing to have periodic meetings?

Would they agree to parent training sessions to aid in the generalization of skills?

Would the parents be available as parent-volunteers in the classroom?

How consistent is the follow-through in the home setting?

What are the expectations of the parents?

Are they realistic of your potential and their child's?

How supportive are they of you and the regular education teacher?

I hope these suggestions will provide the beginning questions that teachers must ask before conducting an inclusion program for students with autism. There are, most likely, many more that you will be able to consider for your own particular school, teacher, support, etc.