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## ABSTRACT

Joshua Intermediate School, in a rural community near Fort Worth, Texas, uses inclusion to address the needs of the special education student while allowing opportunities for success in the regular classroom through coteaching experiences between general and special staff. In the inclusion setting, the student must meet only the individual education plan (IEP) goals, not necessarily the grade level goals. The "ideal" inclusion student is one who is progressing according to his or her IEP, is not adversely affected by being in the regular classroom, and does not hinder other students as they learn together. A special education student who does not meet this criteria may need to receive most or all instruction from the special educator. Teachers build skills in inclusion through frequent team meetings and training programs. Inclusion has evolved gradually at Joshua Intermediate School, starting with one grade level and expanding. Students with more severe disabilities start by being included in nonacademic subjects, and gradually add content areas. Students with mild to moderate disabilities are evenly divided among the teams of teachers, who strive for flexibility, communication, cooperation, and collaboration. Each team develops their own inclusion schedule based on needs of students and preferences of the teachers. This school finds inclusion advantageous to teachers, students, and parents. (KS)

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## INCLUSION: THE KEY TO SUCCESS

Inclusion is what you make it! We have determined that, after talking to professionals across the state and reading an almost insurmountable amount of literature, inclusion can be defined in a variety of ways. Joshua Intermediate School, located in the midst of a rural community near Fort Worth, Texas, defines inclusion as a means of addressing the needs of the special education student while allowing opportunities for success in the regular classroom through coteaching experiences between general and specialty staff. Inclusion, as we see it, is the key to success!

The administrators of J.I.S. began the inclusion process by motivating a select group of general and special education teachers with newfound research advocating student success through regular class placements. Information about new legal developments and reform efforts to help students with challenging needs become successful in the home classroom provided the foundation for a movement toward restructuring. The responsibility of further motivation then fell on the selected teachers as first-hand advocates of the inclusion process. Personal experiences with academically disadvantaged students achieving success in their studies and acquiring socially accepted behaviors through positive role models made it easy for teachers to "sell" inclusion to prospective teammates.

It became as important for us to determine what inclusion IS as it did for us to determine what inclusion IS NOT. Inclusion is more than mainstreaming. Mainstreaming does not allow for a special education teacher to offer support services in the home classroom; inclusion does. When children are mainstreamed they must meet the essential elements of their grade level; whereas, when a pupil is classified as inclusion, the student must meet only the I.E.P. goals, which may or may not include the essential elements of his/her grade level. The I.E.P. goals and the support services of the special education teacher as coteacher contribute to the success of the inclusion process.

Inclusion IS NOT dumping. Dumping can prove harmful to the educational well-being of general and special education students. When a child's academic success is threatened by the inclusion setting or when a child does not develop the desired social behaviors conducive to the general classroom setting, then everyone involved must reevaluate the situation and make necessary changes. Placing a student in a regular classroom setting does not necessarily guarantee academic success. Neither will a student necessarily develop the desired social skills through exposure to good role models. Since inadequate support of special-needs students could be overwhelming to a teacher, dumping cannot be tolerated as part of the inclusion process.

We use preventative measures such as frequent meetings with administrators, training programs, and professional conferences to maintain an appropriate inclusive school focus. Aside from regularly scheduled meetings with the inclusion team, we have found it beneficial to communicate frequently with the principal of our school and our district's special education director. Teachers are notified when training programs are offered through our regional service center. The training we receive not only keeps us updated as to effective teaching methods for the inclusion classroom, but it also gives us the opportunity to meet with teachers from other districts and share experiences. Attending professional meetings such as "Inclusion Works!" and the Learning Disabilities Association of Texas Conference enables us to connect reform efforts with the inclusion process as we return to our school with valuable information and the motivation to succeed.

Upon being admitted to the regular classroom, a student with special needs is monitored carefully to determine how much time the student should spend in the home classroom and how much time, if any, he or she should spend in the supplementary resource room. The "ideal" inclusion student is one who is progressing according to his/her Individual Education Plan, is not adversely affected by being in the regular classroom, and does not hinder other students as they learn together. A special education student who does not meet this criteria may need to receive most or all of his/her instruction from the special educator.

The inclusion process continues to evolve at Joshua Intermediate School. Three years ago we had pull-out programs for students with learning disabilities and problem behaviors. Last year we progressed to including

all third grade students with special needs as much as possible in their home classrooms. Some of them were able to handle the same responsibilities as their classmates with modifications. Others were able to build their confidence through a partial pull-out program where the resource teacher expanded on basic instruction. As we follow these students into their second year of inclusion, it appears that they are experiencing more success with instruction on their grade level in their home classrooms. They continue to receive little or no modifications and enjoy the enrichment of working with their coteachers and peers. Our instructional innovations have expanded to include third, fourth, and fifth graders with little or no pull-out, depending on individual needs. We continue to serve a portion of our student population in a self-contained classroom with partial pull-in.

We begin the process of pulling in students with especially challenging needs or severe disabilities to the regular education program by first including them in physical education instruction, music instruction, and artistic education. It may not be long until that student is able and willing to receive instruction in Science and Social Studies from the regular classroom teacher, depending on individual assessment and teacher compliance. The ultimate goal is for this child eventually to receive all or most of his instruction from the regular classroom teacher, provided that appropriate support from personnel is available.

Students with mild to moderate disabilities have been divided evenly among our teams of teachers. At the end of each year all of the teachers from each grade level, regular, inclusion, and special education teachers, meet to disperse students evenly into each classroom. We are able to get a well-balanced, heterogeneous group of learners by carefully placing them according to needs, academic performance, and behaviors. It is especially important that students with special needs be considered very carefully to prevent "stacking" one particular class with more demanding needs than another. Problems sometimes arise, however, when students are evaluated and assessed as having special needs after being placed in the regular, non-inclusive classroom or when arriving to register late in the school year after student assignments have already been made and inclusion classrooms are at their limit in student-teacher ratio.

We should like to encourage others by sharing our experiences, with the understanding that the best way to learn about inclusion is to experience it

for yourself.

The inclusion partnership of regular and special educators is often referred to as a marriage. Often, when a person marries, a friend or family member shares a favorite recipe with the intent of simplifying the cooking process or enhancing the creativity of preparing meals. The following is our recipe for implementation when considering inclusion:

**INGREDIENTS:**

Time & Flexibility	Collaboration
Communication	Cooperation
Hospitality	Preparation
Cooperative Learning	Support Networks

**DIRECTIONS:**

1. Begin with teacher preparation and hospitality toward the coteacher.
2. Combine cooperation, communication, and collaboration until firm.
3. Sprinkle with support networks and cooperative learning experiences.
4. Add flexibility and time as needed.

**YIELD:**

Serves any student as needed upon assessment of individual needs.

We would like to think that this is a no-fail recipe, but we recognize this as unrealistic. Teaching strategies sometimes must be altered. Learning opportunities may need to be broadened. Resource rooms might become more of a supplementary service. Thus, the key ingredients in the implementation of inclusion are time and flexibility.

Flexibility is the tool that equips our inclusion teachers with the power to meet the special needs of students as they arise. The third grade inclusion team, for example, has chosen an alternating schedule with partial pull-out in the morning and a rotating schedule in the afternoon. The special education teacher begins by dividing her time as evenly as possible among

her team of teachers. Once the degree of developmental needs per inclusion class is assessed, her time is used more effectively in each home classroom. The fourth grade inclusion team, on the other hand, prefers a more structured schedule, which allows the special education teacher to spend a forty-five to sixty minute period in each home classroom per day. In addition to coteaching with the regular education teacher, she is able to meet more challenging needs of individual students as required during two separate periods of the day. Finally, the fifth grade team of inclusion teachers uses a more structured pull-out schedule for the morning since, in their opinion, the lack of inclusive instruction last year left their students without the necessary skills to achieve success in the regular classroom. The special education teacher goes into a different home classroom every afternoon, with the exception of Friday afternoon, when she hosts a content mastery/study hall in her classroom. We are already preparing and looking forward to next year because the 1994-95 class of fifth graders will have successfully completed two full years of inclusion. We are confident that our willingness to be flexible contributes to the success of our students as they are nurtured through the inclusion process.

While we work together for the benefit of all students through the inclusion process, we find many advantages. The gap that once separated special education and regular education teachers has narrowed: The responsibility of meeting challenging needs students is no longer "theirs" or "mine," but it is "ours" together. The teachers bond through the experience of enabling a child to achieve success. J.I.S. teachers broaden their own horizons through the practice of inclusion. Special educators have become "regular" classroom teachers, team teachers, resource and consulting specialists, and facilitators of support networks. Regular educators have become "special" teachers, team teachers, collaborators with specialists and facilitators of support networks. Our teachers have been able to narrow the gap in their working relationship by sharing and reaching for a common goal: success for all students in the least restrictive environment.

J.I.S. students are also broadening their horizons as they undergo the inclusion process. Special education students have become more responsible, competent, and concerned citizens of their classroom. Regular education students have become more accepting of differences while building character qualities. Cooperative learning and peer tutoring are two of the elements we have found productive in strengthening the

groundwork for student success.

Since beginning the inclusion process, we have noticed that parent support is more prevalent than in previous years at J.I.S.. As we regularly report to parents, we find most of them quite supportive and pleased by the progress their child is making. J.I.S. parents are generally satisfied to know that their child is being encouraged to succeed in his/her home classroom. Frequent conferences allow us to monitor progress and reassess goals as necessary in order to ensure success at the student's most challenging level of learning.

We at J.I.S. will continue to reassess goals as our inclusion program evolves. We are constantly evaluating the inclusion process through observation of student progress and abilities while monitoring grades. We have found that some inclusion students are achieving the same or higher levels of mastery on non-modified work and/or projects when compared to the regular students in the home classroom. When students can achieve success at the required grade level with little or no modifications, the learning support network often decides to dismiss the child from the special education program. In order to continue monitoring the child's success after dismissal, the student may be placed in an inclusive classroom again the following year. The same inclusion students are finding it much easier to participate successfully in cooperative learning projects as their level of confidence increases. Serving children's needs is our primary focus as we strive to maintain a well-balanced program of services.

Barbara K. Keogh, a Professor of Educational Psychology in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California, sums it up best when she says, "Teachers are the central players in bringing about change in practice. It follows, then that our greatest and most pressing challenge is instruction at the classroom level. This is a formidable challenge that requires both creativity and hard work."

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