Is your child’s school inclusive?

Inclusion is a way of thinking and acting that allows every individual to feel accepted, valued, and safe.

“If educators want students with disabilities to become full, contributing members of the community, then they must ensure that these students are part of the community from the beginning by allowing them access to the core curriculum and opportunities to develop relationships with their peers without disabilities.” Grenot-Scheyer, et al., 2001.

So, how do inclusive schools work to ensure that all students belong and are successful together?

How would your child’s school rate on effective inclusive practices?

What areas might they need to improve upon?

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<th><strong>In an effective inclusive school...</strong></th>
<th><strong>In my child’s school...</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>1. The school principal considers the needs of students with disabilities and their families as a typical part of his or her responsibilities.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>2. General and special education teachers teach as teams in classrooms.</td>
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<td>3. General and special education teachers share high expectations for all students with disabilities.</td>
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<td>4. Teachers are involved in a continuous process of assessing all students in a class.</td>
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<td>5. The school welcomes families of special education students and includes them in discussions about how to create a good learning environment for all students.</td>
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<td>6. All students with disabilities take part in meaningful ways in classroom activities alongside their typical peers.</td>
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<td>7. Students with disabilities have respectful, fun, and meaningful friendships with typical peers (both in and out of school).</td>
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✔ If you responded Yes to most of the items above, your child’s school is probably doing a good job of including students with disabilities; however, if you responded No to most items, your child’s school may need help in planning for and developing inclusive practices.

✔ If the majority of your responses are in the Not Sure column, perhaps a visit to the school can help you determine if your child has opportunities to learn alongside typical peers.

Spending time in your child’s school, talking to the people who work there, and observing how students interact are good ways to identify inclusive practices and share your views on inclusive education for your child.

Our Mission Statement

The Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) collaborates with all districts and schools to provide customized services and supports ensuring all students with disabilities have the same educational, social, and future opportunities as their peers.
A Visit to an Inclusive School

The parents of DeShawn Griffin are nervous. The school year is almost over and DeShawn will be leaving Central Middle School. DeShawn is an active young man with a great sense of humor and many friends. But he has a severe learning disability and has struggled academically. In another school, he might have been placed in a special classroom, which would have limited both his academic achievements and his social life. But Central is a school that believes in inclusion. The teachers worked closely with DeShawn and his parents to see that DeShawn had the help he needed to meet all his IEP goals, and even more. The IEP team holds high expectations that DeShawn will graduate with a regular diploma and pursue his interest in a career related to computer technology.

But the move to high school has raised many questions for the Griffins: Will he be able to stay in the regular education classes or will he be put in special education classes? Can he get the help he needs to pass the FCAT and his college entrance exams? Will he be able to keep the social confidence he has? The Griffins know that DeShawn’s future depends on what happens in school over the next four years.

Encouraged by a teacher at Central Middle School, the Griffins decide to visit West High School, where DeShawn will go in the fall. When they call to make an appointment with the principal, the secretary suggests allowing enough time for touring the campus and visiting classes in session. When they arrive at West High School the following week, DeShawn and his parents are greeted by courteous staff who offer them coffee and show them to the principal’s office. DeShawn’s first thought is “This isn’t bad!”

An hour later, the Griffin’s talk in the car about their impressions of the school principal, Mrs. Sierra. They noticed that she:

- Spoke of her commitment to making sure each student has the same opportunities for learning in the general education high school classes.
- Asked DeShawn about the things that helped him be successful at Central Middle School.
- Invited the Griffins to schedule another meeting with the special education teacher to review DeShawn’s IEP goals and discuss ways to support him in his transition to high school.
- Promised to support the special and general education teachers as they worked together to teach DeShawn and the other students in his classes.
- Discussed how they could all work in partnership to meet new challenges.

The Griffins also reviewed some of the things they observed during their tour of the school:

- Teachers referred to students with disabilities as just “part of the class”.
- Many classrooms had two teachers working together in a variety of ways.
- Students with and without disabilities were learning together and working on projects in small groups.
- Students with and without disabilities were eating together and socializing during lunch activities.
- There were many posters around the campus encouraging students to respect each other and value differences.

The Griffins have scheduled a meeting with the special education teacher and are feeling good about the year ahead. And DeShawn is thinking he might even try out for the junior varsity basketball team.

“For my child, inclusion is a process of planning, doing, checking, and re-doing.”
Phyllis Guthman, parent
Inclusion in Action

Look and listen for the following signs:

Front office staff:
- Greet visitors in a courteous and friendly manner
- Offer help and be patient
- Show an awareness of cultural differences

Administrators:
- Are passionate about the achievement of ALL students
- Share a common belief in including ALL students with disabilities
- Refer to students using “person-first” language rather than labels, like SLD or TMH
- Support teachers and encourage them to take risks
- Model positive attitudes toward all staff and students
- Help families, students, and staff work through challenges together
- Maintain an “open-door” policy—everyone is welcome in the office
- Find outside resources to support inclusive practices

General and Special Education Teachers:
- Use “person-first” language such as “student with autism” rather than “autistic student”
- Teach together in mixed-ability classrooms
- Solve problems and learn together
- Seek and value the opinions and ideas of family members
- Believe that, side-by-side, students with and without disabilities can be successful learners
- Share responsibility for the success of all students

Students with Disabilities:
- Learn cooperatively with same-age, typical peers in every classroom
- Have access to the same classes and activities that students without disabilities have
- Receive the support they need to be successful in general education classrooms and settings
- Enjoy in-school social relationships with typical peers
- Enjoy opportunities to follow their interests and make plans for their future

Students without Disabilities:
- Refer to students with disabilities using “person-first” language
- Provide natural supports for students with disabilities in general education settings
- Socialize with students with disabilities at lunch, recess, and between classes
- Consider at least one student with a disability their friend
- Are provided instruction in disability and diversity awareness
- Advocate for the rights of students with disabilities

“The main thing I look for in an inclusive school is the attitude of administrators and teachers. Do they openly accept my child?”
Debbie Valdes, parent

For more information about “person-first” language, check out the FIN website’s Family Resources section. www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com
**Turn Around Conversations About Inclusion**

Research shows that your communication with school staff is very important to your child’s success in school. Not all schools or all teachers are committed to or skilled in implementing inclusion. Here are some respectful messages that can turn around common notions from school personnel and lead them in a positive direction for your child.

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<th>The teacher or principal says…</th>
<th>Respectful messages you could share…</th>
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<td>“We’ve never had a child like yours in our school before.”</td>
<td>Yes, although all students are unique, we know Susan will need specialized physical assistance during the school day. She has already experienced success in a variety of settings with the right support. We will certainly work with the education team in getting them the information and help they need to implement her IEP.</td>
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<td>“We don’t have an inclusion program here.”</td>
<td>Juan has been in inclusive classrooms ever since kindergarten and has made great progress. We’ll work closely with the education team to develop a program for Juan that includes supports for him and his teachers. His teacher from last year has already offered to help.</td>
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<tr>
<td>“First we’ll work on skills and then see if your child is ready for inclusion.”</td>
<td>Amy really needs to learn skills in the setting where she will use them, and she benefits from having good role models. She may not have all the skills that the other students have, but, with support, she can achieve important goals in the general education classroom.</td>
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<td>“Your child’s behaviors are disrupting the classroom.”</td>
<td>We understand how frustrating TuYen’s behaviors can be. But we’ve learned at home that when TuYen can communicate his wants and needs, his behavior is much better. We’ll work with you to develop a positive behavior plan that will improve his communication skills and make him less disruptive.</td>
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**Recommended reading:**


[www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com](http://www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com)

To locate your FIN Facilitator, click on “Meet the FINS” and select your county from the pull-down menu.

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