

# **School Leadership for Students with Disabilities**

## **What is inclusion, why is it important?**

### **Overview for Facilitators**

The CEEDAR Center is pleased to provide this presentation that addresses background information regarding inclusion for school leaders. The materials are designed for a preservice course or for professional development. Consistent with the Common Core Standards, this resource is designed to increase school leaders' abilities to improve student readiness for college and careers.

### **Speaker Notes**

The speaker notes are what the facilitator can say, verbatim, to explain each slide and the activities. The notes are provided as a guide that speakers will modify as needed. Directions and notes for the facilitator, not to be said aloud, are in italics.

Handout 1: This handout includes discussion questions for the video *Including Samuel*. The video is available for sale at <http://www.includingsamuel.com/store.aspx>.

Handout 2: This handout provides information regarding an optional activity related to what high quality instruction for students with disabilities in separate settings should look like. This activity is intended to enrich information provided in Slide 23, and will be useful to help principals and other leaders identify the characteristics of high quality instruction for students with disabilities.

### **Objectives**

1. What does inclusion mean to you?
2. How is inclusion defined?
3. How often are students with disabilities included in general education classrooms?
4. What is the basis for inclusion in federal law?
5. What are qualities of effective inclusive schools?

### **Outline of Session with Activities and Approximate Time**

The session is designed for approximately 3.5 hours

Topic	Slides	Activity	Time in minutes
Introduction	1-4	Introduction and objectives	10
Discussion—What does inclusion mean to	5-7		15

you?			
What is inclusion?	8-12		20
Inclusion and federal law	13-15		15
Inclusion in schools	16		15
Video—Including Samuel	17		30 (first half)
BREAK			15
Video—Including Samuel			30 (second half)
Discussion—Including Samuel	18-20	Handout 1—Discussion and debriefing	30
Effective inclusive schools	21		5
Qualities of effective inclusive schools	22-25		15
Conclusion	26	Discussion of effective inclusive schools	10

### **Suggested Follow-Up Professional Learning Opportunities**

In professional learning communities, study a select of the following:

#### **Books & Monographs:**

1. Billingsley, B., McLeskey, J., & Crockett, J. B. (2014). *Principal leadership: Moving toward inclusive and high-achieving schools for students with disabilities* (Document No. IC-8). Retrieved from University of Florida, Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability, and Reform Center website: <http://cedar.education.ufl.edu/tools/innovation-configurations/>
2. Crockett, J., Billingsley, B., & Boscardin, M. (2012). *Handbook of leadership and administration for special education*. New York: Routledge.
3. McLeskey, J., Waldron, N., Spooner, F., & Algozzine, B. (2014). *Effective Inclusive Schools: Research and Practice*. New York: Routledge.
4. Theoharis, G., & Brooks, J.S. (Eds.) (2012). *What every principal needs to know to create equitable and excellent schools*. New York: Teachers College Press.

#### **Articles & Book Chapters:**

1. Jorgensen, C. (2005). The least dangerous assumption. *Disability Solutions*, 6(3), 1, 5-9, 15. Retrieved from <http://www.includingsamuel.com/resources/educators>.
2. McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. (2007). Making differences ordinary in inclusive classrooms. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42(3), 162-168.
3. McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. (2011). Educational programs for elementary students with learning disabilities: Can they be both effective and inclusive? *Learning Disabilities Research and Practice*, 26(1), 48-57. (See Handout 2).
4. Salisbury, C. (2006). Principals' perspectives on inclusive elementary schools. *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31(1), 70-82.

## **Speaker Notes**

### **Slide 1—School Leadership for Students with Disabilities**

In the first CEM PowerPoint an overview of School Leadership for Students with Disabilities was provided. In the next two CEM PowerPoints we will address inclusion and facilitating an inclusive culture. In this session, we address what is meant by inclusion and why it is important.

### **Slide 2—Inclusive Leadership for Students with Disabilities**

In this two part CEM, we will examine inclusive leadership.

### **Slide 3—What is inclusion, why is it important?**

Today we examine what it means to truly include students with disabilities as a valued part of the school community. We address both including students as part of the academic or learning community of the school, as well as in the social community of the school (that is, in all non-classroom activities in which other students participate).

### **Slide 4—Objectives**

We'll begin with a discussion of your experiences related to inclusion, and what inclusion means to you. This will be followed by a review of a definition of inclusion (one among many), followed by the presentation of data regarding the extent to which students with disabilities are currently included in general education classroom nationwide. We'll then move to a discussion of the basis for inclusion in federal law, followed by a review of a video that addresses the implications of inclusion and exclusion in the lives of several individuals with disabilities in the video *Including Samuel*. We then will conclude with a review of the qualities of schools that are effective and inclusive for all students.

### **Slide 5—What does inclusion mean to you?**

*The goals of this discussion are that the instructor better understands participant perspectives on inclusion, and to give participants the opportunity to voice and explore their perspectives with others. This activity will work best as a whole group discussion. Information in the remainder of this PPT will be useful in addressing concerns that participants raise about inclusion. It would also be useful for you to review the PPT in this CEM that addresses Developing Inclusive Schools, as this PPT also provides information that may be useful in this discussion. For example, descriptions of exclusion of students with disabilities often address inclusion program that are poorly planned and/or supported. Similarly, the most frequent reason most participants will have negative perspectives on inclusion will likely relate to poorly planned and executed inclusive programs. The Developing Inclusive Schools has information that will be useful in addressing these concerns related to the extensive changes that are needed to develop an effective inclusive school.*

### **Slide 6—What does inclusion mean to you (teacher perspectives)?**

*This slide provides further questions that should serve to deepen the discussion as participants address teachers' perspectives on inclusion. This is a critical area to address, in that teacher buy-in and support for inclusion are necessary if inclusive programs are to be successfully implemented and sustained. Research has shown that teachers who have positive experiences with inclusion are supportive, while those who have negative experiences are much less supportive. Information from the Developing Inclusive Schools PPT will be useful for you to review before this discussion, especially the section on Teacher Concerns Regarding Inclusive Schools.*

### **Slide 7—What does inclusion mean to you (principal and personal perspectives)?**

*This slide should further deepen discussion, as it brings the discussion to principals' perspectives on inclusion. Research has shown that inclusion of students with disabilities is not a high priority for many principals. However, principals who have had some experience with inclusive programs tend to be more supportive of inclusive programs. As with the previous slides that address this discussion, information from this entire PPT and the Developing Inclusive Schools PPT will provide you with useful background as you facilitate this discussion.*

### **Slide 8—What is inclusion?**

*Keep in mind--there are many definitions of inclusion, and a lack of consensus among professionals regarding this definition. Ryndak, Jackson, and Billingsley (2000) note that while "The term inclusion has many uses in the literature...researchers have begun to use the term without an explicit definition, leaving the reader to determine the meaning of the word" (p. 102). This is also the case in schools, as inclusion is*

*defined in many different ways. The definition we provide is very general and is an attempt to get at the core of what inclusion means. Controversy about inclusion often relates to how much emphasis is placed on inclusion vs. effective instruction. This definition is intended to strike a balance and place equal emphasis on both 'inclusion' and 'effective instruction.'*

At its core, inclusion is about how we value students, and how this value is reflected in the respect and support we show students in schools and classrooms. By walking through a school and observing typical students and those with disabilities, one can quickly determine the extent to which students with disabilities belong and participate in the school community, and receive supports that offer an opportunity for success. These supports may be as simple as ramps to provide access, or as complex as support in an advanced math class to ensure that a student with a severe reading problem has an opportunity to succeed.

### **Slide 9—Inclusion is defined as...**

*The definition presented on this slide gives participants an opportunity to examine and discuss this definition. Discussion should provide a deeper understanding regarding why the components of this definition are important. It's important to keep in mind that there is no generally accepted definition of inclusion—thus participants will have to either accept the definition provided, accept another definition, or come up with their own. Exploring critical concepts underlying inclusion thus becomes important, as participants are offered the opportunity to begin to figure out how they will define inclusion.*

What do we do for people we value in a school? We make sure they feel that they belong in school and are accepted by others. We make sure that they can actively participate in any activities whenever they choose to do this—just like everyone else. We provide supports that they need to be successful. What students with disabilities want from school is just what everyone else wants, but at times they many need different types of supports to ensure that this happens.

Why is 'valued' included in this definition? Is this a critical aspect of what we mean when we say inclusion? Is the meaning of this idea clear? What does it mean to value a student in a school, how would we recognize when this occurs? Do the words belong, accepted, (actively) participate, and supports get at the most important components of a definition of inclusion? If not, what are other words or concepts that might be included.

### **Slide 10—Inclusion is thus...**

What *everyone* wants. All students want to be a valued member of the school community, and feel that they belong and are accepted. Everyone wants to participate in academic activities in ways that are similar to their peers. The rhythm of the school day should thus be similar for students with disabilities and their typical peers. If students with disabilities are separated from typical peers for part of the school day for intensive instruction or other support, this should not be done in an area where students with disabilities are viewed as segregated from their

peers in a separate wing of a school building. Rather, this instruction or support should be provided in a well-integrated physical setting in the school. Similarly, everyone also wants to participate in non-academic social and extra-curricular activities. This includes school assemblies, pep rallies, school plays, after school sporting events, and so forth. Students with disabilities want to have the opportunity to participate in these activities, just like everyone else.

### **Slide 11—Things to ponder...**

Let's think for a few minutes about a particular group of students who are often educated in separate settings. Students with intellectual disabilities are much more likely than most other students with disabilities to be educated in separate settings for much of the school day. While these students spend an average of about 40% of the school day in general education classes, all students with disabilities spend 71% of the school day in these settings. This occurs in spite of evidence revealing that these students with intellectual disabilities benefit academically and socially when they are included in general education classrooms.

*Discussion*—Why are fewer students with intellectual disabilities included in general education classrooms than other students with disabilities, in spite of research supporting the benefits of inclusion? Does this relate to lack of advocacy on the part of parents (a disproportionate number of students with intellectual disabilities come from high poverty backgrounds)? The low achievement level of these students, which make it very unlikely they will meet academic benchmarks? Or does this lack of inclusion relate to how much we value these students?

### **Slide 12—Things to ponder...**

Let's consider a student with an intellectual disability, and why he does not benefit from a separate setting...and would benefit from an inclusive setting. If this student spends most of the school day separated from most of his peers, it will obviously be difficult for him to feel that he belongs and has the opportunity to actively participate in school or be accepted by others. *Discussion*—Why does being educated in a segregated setting, removed from the 'real world' of school and typical peers, disadvantage students with disabilities when they leave school and have to succeed the 'real world'? How would inclusion prepare these students for the 'real world'? How does this separation disadvantage students when they are in school? How would inclusion provide benefits?

### **Slide 13—Inclusion and federal law (IDEA, 2004)**

Some have argued that inclusion is required by law, while others have argued that schools are not legally required to attend to inclusion. Recognizing that there are many nuances to these arguments, inclusion is not mandated by federal law, nor is this term used in the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004).

*Moving forward with addressing this topic, it's also important to recognize that while the IDEA doesn't mention other aspects of the definition we've provided for inclusion, it*

*is generally accepted that educators will ensure that all students are valued and actively participate in the school community, are accepted by peers, and are provided supports that given them an opportunity to succeed.*

#### **Slide 14—Inclusion and federal law**

This is the wording in current federal law (IDEA, 2004) that relates to student placements. One of those placements is the general education classroom. Thus, this is the most critical mandate related to inclusive placements. This mandate clearly recognizes that some students with disabilities will be educated, at least for some part of the school day, in settings other than the general education classroom. However....*(See the next slide).*

#### **Slide 15—Inclusion and federal law**

This mandate also clearly reflects a bias in favor of education students with disabilities alongside typical peers in general education classrooms whenever this can be achieved satisfactorily with supports (supplemental aids and services). All things being equal, students with disabilities should be educated in general education settings. From another perspective, students should not be removed from general education classrooms unless they are placed in settings that provide high quality instruction and improve their educational outcomes. LRE has been a component of federal law since IDEA was passed as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 (with some changes in wording), and the rationale for this mandate continues to be research related to the benefits of well-designed inclusive programs. As we discussed previously, this mandate is especially important for students who are often excluded (e.g., students with intellectual disabilities) from inclusive general education classroom placements.

#### **Slide 16—Inclusion in schools**

Inclusion is already a reality in all public school classrooms in the U.S., as almost all students with disabilities spend some part of the school day in general education classrooms. General education teachers spend more time with students with disabilities (on average, 71% of the school day) than any other teacher. The extent to which students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms continues to increase, from 58% of the school day in 1990 to 65% in 2000, to 71% currently. However, it is important to keep in mind that these data say nothing about the **quality** of these inclusive classrooms.

#### **Slide 16—Including Samuel**

We're going to watch a widely known video related to inclusion, 'Including Samuel.' This video provides a range of perspectives regarding the importance of inclusion, as well as the pain of exclusion. Let's watch, and then we'll discuss the video. *This video lasts about 1 hour, but moves quickly and is packed with information related to*

*several individuals with disabilities. The video has the most impact when shown in its entirety. As you'll see when you preview the video, there are several 'breaks' as the video moves from the story of one person to another, which can be used for taking a break. Some instructors may want to share the discussion questions we've provided in Handout 1 and have participants read these questions before viewing the video.*

### **Slides 18, 19, 20—Including Samuel discussion questions**

*The questions in Handout 1 are from the Including Samuel Screening Toolkit, which can be found at <http://www.includingsamuel.com/documents/ScreeningToolkit.pdf>. We would suggest a whole group discussion of this video. The video invariably creates some very interesting and useful discussion about inclusion and persons with disabilities. Although the discussion questions are useful and will provide good discussion, we would encourage you to follow the discussion threads that are spontaneously produced by participants. If our experience holds, there will be many of these threads that produce a deep discussion of issues that are important to participants.*

### **Slide 21—If a school is truly inclusive, it also must be effective**

*The discussion related to Including Samuel should provide a good lead-in to a review of the qualities of effective inclusive schools. This slide emphasizes that schools that are truly inclusive are also effective, based on the previous definition of inclusion from slides 7 and 8. Can a school be truly inclusive if it doesn't meet the academic needs of students with disabilities, that is, if it isn't effective? Based on the definition of inclusion that we discussed previously, in inclusive schools students with disabilities as **valued** members of the school community, **belong** to the community and are **accepted** by others, **actively participate** in the academic and social communities of the school, and are **provided supports** that give them an opportunity to succeed. These are schools where teachers have high expectations for all students, and provide students with effective instruction. These qualities of inclusive schools lead to the logical conclusion that to be truly inclusive, schools must also be effective. What are the qualities that we should expect to see when observing in an effective inclusive school (*addressed in the next slide*)?*

### **Slide 22—What are the qualities of effective inclusive schools?**

The research that is available on effective inclusive schools suggests that there are several qualities that these schools share in common. Without exception, these are schools where school staff share responsibility and work collaboratively to meet the needs of all students. One key reason this is necessary is that no single staff member has the expertise to meet the needs of all students. Teachers and other staff members thus share expertise to meet the needs of all students. This works best in schools where 'opening the classroom door' and welcoming other professionals into the classroom is common and accepted practice. Furthermore, these are schools with a culture and structures that support collaboration among teachers to solve



problems. These are settings where teachers and other professionals work as part of a professional learning community to share expertise and meet the needs of all students.

### **Slide 23—What are the qualities of effective inclusive schools?**

Substantial changes are required in schools as they become inclusive and effective. For example, changes occur in the beliefs of teachers regarding where students should be educated, who should be responsible for their education, and so forth (*this topic is discussed further in the PPT related to the principal's role in developing inclusive schools*). Perhaps most important, teachers must believe that students with disabilities can learn, and that high expectations are important for these students. These substantial changes must also address the curriculum, instruction, school organization, and teacher roles. For example, many effective inclusive schools offer a multi-tiered approach to instruction, as the progress students make in learning academic content is monitored, and students that do not make sufficient progress are provided more intensive instruction using highly effective (or evidence-based) practices. Of course, given the dynamic nature of schools, teacher and student needs will change across the course of a school year, and from one year to the next. It is thus important that teachers and other school professionals recognize that the work to developing an effective inclusive school is a continual process. Finally, in effective inclusive schools, everyone in a school should be informed and engaged in supporting all students, to the maximum extent possible. This including office, lunchroom and janitorial staff, volunteers, and supports from local agencies and businesses.

### **Slide 24—What are the qualities of effective inclusive schools?**

Effective inclusive schools are settings where, as much as possible, differences become an ordinary part of the school day. This occurs when classrooms are highly effective in differentiating curriculum and instruction to meet student needs, and this differentiation occurs as the delivery of instruction is planned. This planning and support from teachers with a range of expertise results in classrooms that can support the needs of a diverse range of students, including those with disabilities, for much of the school day. Careful planning is also done with the LRE mandate (*discussed previously, see slides 3 and 4*) in mind. That is, students with disabilities are only removed from general education classrooms when supports and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily in these settings. To explain this differently, what this means is that these students are only removed from general education settings when they are provided more intensive, high quality instruction than they can be provided in a general education classroom. *For further information regarding the characteristics of this high quality, intensive instruction, see McLeskey and Waldron (2011). We've also provided a handout (Handout 2) that provides a brief synopsis of the qualities of this high quality instruction that may be used to further clarify and enrich the information provided in this slide.*

### **Slide 25—What are qualities of effective inclusive schools?**

This slide addresses areas we've discussed previously—students with disabilities are valued, accepted, and respected members of the school community. In schools where this occurs, diversity is valued, appreciated, and celebrated. Furthermore, many of the differences among students become an ordinary part of the school day. This includes the supports that are provided to students, as this should be done as an ordinary and typical part of the school day whenever possible.

### **Slide 26—Conclusion**

*We recommend concluding this session with a general discussion of several points related to effective inclusive schools. More information regarding these issues will be provided in the next PPT addressing the role of principals in developing effective inclusive schools. This discussion should thus provide a good lead-in to the next PPT.*

## References

- Causton, J., & Theoharis, G. (2014). *The principal's handbook for leading inclusive schools*. Baltimore: Brookes.
- Freeman, S. & Alkin, M. (2000). Academic and social attainments of children with mental retardation in general education and special education settings. *Remedial and Special Education, 21*(1), 3-18.
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