

## **SEAC Subcommittee on Inclusive Practices**

One of the subcommittees of the Special Education Advisory Committee has focused on “Inclusive Practices”. As a part of this focus, a survey was completed to develop a conceptual framework of items that needed to be address. A randomized survey sampled responses from administrators, general educators and special educators. A proportional representation of Loudoun County Public Schools was sampled. The group included seven elementary schools, two middle schools, and one high school. Elementary representatives included one “small” school, four “medium size” and two “large” schools.

Questions from the survey included: How do you define inclusive practices at your school? What resources and/or supports would facilitate inclusive practices in your school?

An analysis of the responses to the question of the definition of inclusive practices revealed that there is a varied understanding of inclusive practices across staff at all levels. Inclusion and the necessary resources identified to support inclusive practices is largely defined by the unique needs and individual perspectives of each school along with staff’s previous experience with inclusion.

For example, a small elementary school utilizes a small number of special education staff (sometimes only one teacher) to cover multiple grade levels. Another example is that the size of the school and total number of students enrolled may lead to challenges in having enough physical space available to successfully implement inclusive practices, as evident in Leesburg area schools that were surveyed. Staff philosophy on all levels (administrators, general educators and special education staff), as well as comfort level with current teaching roles and the potential for adapting to changes in roles, play an additional pivotal part in the foundation for inclusive practices. The most frequently occurring responses to define inclusive practices included.

### *Administrative Staff Responses (Principal or Assistant Principal)*

- Special ed team taught/co-teaching
- All students included in all activities with philosophy to keep students in the least restrictive environment (LRE) as much as possible
- All staff need to know learning styles of all students, not just special ed

### *General Education Staff Responses*

- Teachers team teach, plan, and review for all students each day

### *Special Education Staff Responses*

- Special education provides support in general education classroom with some pull-out for testing and small group reinforcement/instruction
- Use of a variety of co-teaching models
- Differentiated instruction

In response to the question of needed resources and supports to facilitate inclusive practices, the responses included a high frequency pattern of the following themes.

- Training for all staff in the following areas
  - Co-teaching models
  - General education staff – identifying and understanding learning styles of all students
  - Best practices for serving all children
  - Behavior management
- Additional special education staff
- All staff involved in common planning time with additional planning when possible
- Opportunities to observe successful co-teaching models

In addition, to the themes summarized above, the respondents shared other items for consideration in defining inclusive practices.

### *Administrative Staff Responses (Principal or Assistant Principal)*

- Special ed team taught/co-teaching
- Shared lesson plans
- General knowledge of IEP
- Open communication
- All students included in all activities with philosophy to keep students in as much as possible (LRE)
- Smaller number of general education students in inclusion classes
- Support from general education staff who volunteer to be the inclusion classroom
- Improve staff knowledge and attitude towards special education
- Culture of inclusion present from the top down
- All staff need to know learning styles of all students, not just special education
- Special education staff working with general education students to provide modifications
- General education staff develop lesson plans and special education adapts

- Assisting all students in class so that the special education students do not stand out
- Planning/assessing together
- General education and special education staff are matched and agree to co-team (if staffing considerations are not made in this regard, inclusion is not predictable nor thoughtfully implemented)

*General Education Staff Responses:*

- Special education staff is brain specialist, general education staff is content specialist
- Joint planning
- Teachers team teach, plan, and review for all students each day
- Teachers and teaching assistants are equal partners
- General education students earn opportunities to work with/assist special education students (peer buddy)
- Determine who takes the lead in the classroom and who collaborates/supports
- Change attitudes amongst teachers when working together (just because you have taught one way does not mean you cannot change to meet current needs)
- All teachers working together to help children be part of the school community
- Good communication between teachers

*Special Education Staff Responses:*

- More than one grade level
- Teaching assistants provide support skills
- Knowing curriculum very well
- Special education staff provide support in general education classroom with some pull-out for testing and small group reinforcement/instruction
- Differentiated instruction
- Work with all students (not yours/mine)
- Can't tell general education and special education students apart
- Accept that all students are different and they get what they need
- Use of a variety of co-teaching models
- Supportive general education staff
- Flexible schedules
- Supporting or giving instruction in general education setting when possible

In addition to the summary of comments to the question of what resources and supports would facilitate inclusive practices in your school, the following comments were made:

*Administrative Staff Responses (Principal or Assistant Principal)*

- Additional special education staff

- Smaller class size
- General education staff participate in training with special education staff
- Lots of administrative support (central office: CTs/supervisors)
- All staff totally involved in planning; additional planning time; common planning time
- Co-teaching training
- Opportunities to observe good co-teaching models
- Model different inclusion approaches
- Additional space in the building
- General education staff needs a better understanding of different learning styles so they don't write off special education students as not understanding the curriculum
- Scheduling support from central office
- In-service training on best practices for serving all children (i.e. RtI)
- Evaluation tools to monitor teacher performance related to inclusive practices

*General Education Staff Responses:*

- Bigger classroom (including computer lab)
- Master schedule to support flexibility with specials (music, art, PE)
- Staffing to address challenges presented by diverse range of ability in one class
- Common planning time
- Training to meet all students' needs in inclusive setting
- Parent education on the inclusive classroom
- Observation of co-teaching in other schools
- Knowledge of resources available within the county (social workers, behavior specialists, etc.)

*Special Education Staff Responses:*

- Smaller class size in order to know more about each student with less tending to the masses
- Additional special education staff
- More physical space
- "Cool down" room for students with behavior problems
- Behavior management training and support
- Good vision of what inclusion could look like (roles of general education and special education staff)
- Use of inclusion specialists (like FCPS does)
- General education staff training
- Observe programs that show good co-teaching
- Training on different co-teaching models
- Gen education assist with IEP development
- Joint planning time

Next Steps:

1. Need to develop a shared vision with Special Education Advisory Committee on what we want to achieve together that is reasonable. As a part of this, identify
  - a. Short-term goals (year 1) – initiate
  - b. Medium-term goals (years 2-4) – implementation
  - c. Long-term goals (years 5+) - institutionalization
  
2. Use the upcoming Stetson training to address some of the themes outlined from the survey.