

III. Inclusion

- What does the law say?
- What does it look like?

Least Restrictive Environment

“To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities including children in public or private institutions, or other care facilities are educated with children who are not disabled and special classes, separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that the education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aides and services still cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”

» From the 1997 Amendment of IDEA

Oberti Decision

“Inclusion is a right, not a privilege of a select few.”

Third Circuit Court of Appeals
1992



Oberti test

1. Can education in the regular classroom, with the use of ***supplementary aids and services***, be achieved satisfactorily?
2. If placement outside of a regular classroom is necessary for the child to benefit educationally, has the child been ***mainstreamed to the maximum extent appropriate***?

What does the law say about Inclusion?

Federal law – IDEIA – Individual Disabilities
Education Improvement Act – Reauthorized 2004
– Part A – General Provisions – Section 601 –
Findings 5 (c)

Coordinating this title with local education service
agency, state and federal school improvement
efforts – in order to insure that such children
benefit from such efforts and that special
education can become a service for such children
rather than a place where such children are sent.

Best Practices for Inclusion

1. Teaming is critical
2. Administrative Support
3. Welcome family involvement
4. Create a receptive atmosphere
5. Shared planning and collaboration time are a priority
6. Instructional activities and curriculum are varied
7. Varied models of service delivery
8. Adaptations for assessment and grading
9. Friendship building
10. Transition planning



Nick's Story

- Nick is a 13 year old young man who has Down syndrome. He is now a student in the seventh grade at Latrobe Junior High. He transitioned out of elementary sixth grade where for most of his elementary years he experienced a variety of inclusive settings. In preparation for Junior High he attended math and Spanish camps this past summer.

1. The Team Approach

A team from our local school district attended the Temple University Disability Institute's C2Pc training on 'Middle School Inclusion'. The team included; a parent, and administrative representative (Director of Pupil Services), a regular education teacher and a learning support teacher. Although it was a huge time commitment for all of us, (seven weekends from September through May), we always left knowing it was time well spent. The workshop provided us all with The Big Picture of what inclusion can really look like. This helped increase our confidence in our ability to make inclusion work.

Having gone through this inclusion process has heightened all of our awareness on how the school or parents feel. As a team, we are better equipped to offer encouragement and support to everyone involved in the inclusion process.

2. Administrative Support

The Director of Pupil Services was more than cooperative. When approached with the idea of attending the C2P2 workshops, she immediately gathered a team and realized that this training would benefit all students. Once the seven trainings were completed, the team trained 16 additional teachers and support personnel on information essential to a successful inclusion at the middle school level.

3. Family Involvement

My involvement was crucial to the success of my son's inclusion. I was definitely thought of as part of the inclusion team. We worked together as a cohesive group, whereas my suggestions were welcomed and not taken as a mere suggestion, but as a possible solution. We worked together for the success of not only my son, but for the success of many students. We got to know one another, became a real team and each of us became more than just our role as teacher, parent, and administrator, and that is, we became people to one another and realized we all have something to contribute.

4. Receptive Atmosphere

My son and I were part of the inclusion training of the additional educators by the team. The educators and support personnel had the opportunity to meet Nick informally and were able to put a face and personality to all the IEP verbiage. Some of the regular education teachers had never worked with an IEP, let alone have someone 'like Nick' in their classroom. This alleviated a lot of apprehension and created a much more relaxed and receptive atmosphere.

We worked as a team to ease Nick into an inclusive middle school setting by providing him with opportunities in the elementary school including having him 'ride the big bus' home from elementary school, and including him into the regular education social studies and science classes. This gave him an idea of what was going to happen at the middle school.

5. Shared Planning and Collaboration Time

This is the piece that is the MOST IMPORTANT to successful inclusion. If you have an open dialogue between teachers; learning support and regular educators, and involve the parent and student, your plan is much easier to implement. We continue to revamp and revise goals and needs as needed. I cannot emphasize enough what this has meant to my son's inclusion.

6. Instructional Activities and Curriculum

Just as all children learn differently, Nick has his own learning style. He is very visual as well as an auditory learner. The curriculum is presented in such a way that he is able to grasp the educational component. As well, the curriculum is presented so that it applies to life experiences for Nick. An example is the unit that Nick had on ancient Egypt in elementary school. He learned about hieroglyphics, oracles and mummies.

When we took him and a friend to see 'Raiders of the Lost Arc', he immediately recognized the writings on the wall and the mummy he identified as King Tut. Without the inclusion into the regular ed classroom, these things would have been just another part of the movie that he did not understand. He was very proud of himself and this experience reiterated to us why inclusion is vitally important.

7. Varied Models of Service Delivery

Nick's schedule is filled with a variety of situations. He is in learning support and regular education classrooms, co-teach classes, group and team instruction where he benefits from peer interaction, and of course life experiences as demonstrated above.

8. Adaptations for Assessment and Grading

Minimal modifications have been made for testing. If the test consists of 15 questions, Nick may only be responsible for 8 to 10 questions. We did receive the test prior, but slowly eliminated 'studying to the test'. Also, sometimes the test is given verbally and answered orally, other time the answers are written. The modifications are based on the lesson content and tests.

9. Friendship Building

With Nick being included in the regular education setting, he is able to interact with his peers. He has many friends in the community and they have embraced Nick and have made his transition to middle school a lot more comfortable for him. We have given Nick the opportunity to 'work' as a library aide, which has given him the chance to see even more friends and in an uncompetitive environment. He loves this opportunity and relates to us at dinner who he saw during the library period. This makes him feel more like 'one of the guys'. Lunch is another opportunity for Nick to 'fit in' in a relaxed atmosphere.

10. Transition Planning

Nick is only 13, but we have identified a few goals for inclusion. His opportunity as a library aide has been one example of skill development, and he is also prompted to advocate for himself on many occasions. At school as well as home we keep reminding Nick about acceptable social skills so that they are age appropriate for him to be successful in school as well as the community.



Harper's Story

Harper is a 15 year old Sophomore at Windber Area High School. He has Cornelia de Lange Syndrome which presents social, communication, behavioral and intellectual challenges. He has been included in general education classes since starting at Windber schools as a kindergarten student. He attends general education classes for 77% of the school day.

1. Teaming is critical

Harper's inclusion in regular education would not be possible without a team approach. We (the "team" and I, as Harper's parent am included) meet monthly to talk about how things are going, problem solve, review strategies and see if we need to add/delete anything to his programming - it is a very fluid process.

2. Administrative support

Without the support of the administration within our district, success would not be possible. It has been the building principals who have ensured that the teachers have planning time to work together and collaborate regarding Harper's program. They have been vital in identifying peer supporters and facilitating that process. They worked with the team to identify a "core" team of teachers that would be trained and act as "guides" and leaders for other teachers and peer supporters to facilitate Harper's inclusion not only in the school day and general education classes, but also in extra-curricular activities.

3. Welcome family involvement

Again, I am a welcomed member of Harper's planning team. And, whenever we have encountered some stumbling block, the school staff routinely include me and my input into the problem solving so that we can move forward.

4. Create a receptive atmosphere

We have approached Harper's inclusion as something that IS going to happen - looking for solutions to barriers and problems with the understanding that they are just that - problems to be solved, that will be solved and we will move forward with Harper included.

5. Shared planning and collaboration time are a priority

This is crucial. It has been identified as one of the important threads to successful inclusion of a student with more significant disabilities. The teachers have the opportunity to collaborate and plan jointly. In addition, the district has identified and provided a "case manager" for Harper and his team. The case manager is employed by the district and is not tied to a classroom, therefore, has the ability to be available to help problem solve when needed - by Harper, or any member of the team. The case manager also assists in coordinating participation in extra-curricular activities, coordinates with other agencies that provide services - acts as the "glue" that keeps the programming moving forward in the right direction.

6. Instructional activities and curriculum are varied

Curricular modifications and varied instructional activities are not only necessary, they are vital to Harper's success and perception by his fellow classmates that he is a contributing member of the class. By varying what is happening in the classroom, Harper is able to participate with his peers and contribute to the activities of the class. One really nice example comes from a business class that he took. The class was talking about economics and the teacher was aware that Harper had visited a site where a company was constructing and operating windmills as an alternative energy source. Harper had prepared a PowerPoint presentation on wind energy for his science class. The business teacher was able to tie the use of alternative energy sources to the economics lesson occurring in the business class. The business teachers face glowed as he shared with the team the success of having Harper present his PowerPoint on wind energy to the business class and how Harper truly was teaching his classmates. How they were able to ask questions and Harper was able to answer and how valuable that was to all involved.

7. Varied models of service delivery

We have incorporated many varied models of service delivery into Harper's programming - direct instruction, group activities and team approaches, peer support, hand-on activities and direct life experiences to build the program and make education and participation in general education meaningful to Harper - and often, to make the content more meaningful for his classmates as well.

8. Adaptations for assessment and grading

We incorporate the use of alternative assessment to most of Harper's class work. He has the opportunity to present his knowledge to his teachers via PowerPoint presentations, alternative tests that are developed in collaboration with the case manager and special education teacher, via oral presentation, constructed models and/or whatever works to demonstrate knowledge and competency. The teachers have learned that "thinking outside the box" is crucial and have embraced doing so to measure Harper's success. They have found that by being creative, they are able to measure and see the real success and progress that Harper has made in class.

9. Friendship building

Peer support and facilitated friendship is crucial. Harper does require some sensory breaks throughout the course of the day. Instead of creating a separate, "sterile" place where he can access necessary sensory breaks, the school district dedicated a "room" to be available not only for sensory breaks, but for socialization and friendship building. The team has worked to make this a "cool" and inviting place that peers are interested in visiting as well - we always have snacks and other "comfort" things available. Harper and his peers are able to use the room (for example, during study hall) to play games, etc. The team is also working to expand the "circle of friends" that has been established and use these peer supporters to assist in facilitating Harper's participation in extra-curricular activities.

10. Transition planning

There is NO aspect that is more crucial than transition planning! For all the success that we have experienced in school, it is meaningless if it doesn't carry over to life outside of school - Some examples of things we have done and the carry-over success are: This past summer, the school district worked with our local recreation department to secure an opportunity for Harper to work as a junior camp counselor at the Recreation Department's Summer Day Camp. He was VERY successful (with supports in place to help him succeed) and was able to build relationships with the other counselors from the Camp. Peers with whom he has exchanged cell phone numbers and now stays in touch via calls and texting! He has plans to get together with these summer friends to meet at Starbucks for coffee and do other "regular" things in the community as a result of the relationships he built during his summer work experience. We are building both work skills as well as social skills that will carry on long after his school experience is completed.



Scott's Story

Scott is now 24 years old. He carries the labels of Down syndrome and PDD, NOS (Autism) and is considered to be non-verbal, although he can and does speak. His inclusion began when he was in the 3rd grade. He was part of the Gateway Project, which was the first inclusionary program to bring kids back to their home School Districts. Because of the challenges he presented with it was a very overwhelming time for us all! Scott was not included in academic areas, but he was included for all specials and throughout the day as the team determined it to be appropriate.

1. Teaming

Teachers were identified prior to Scott coming back to his home school and it continued each year through to completion at age 21. The first teachers that he had were the true pioneers, but became experts on Scott in the school setting. They were invaluable to the next teachers in line. Both my husband and I were also considered part of the team, as we were the true experts on Scott. At first we had monthly team meetings to discuss how it was going and anything that happened that they were concerned about.

2. Administrative Support

Success of an inclusive program must start at the top! If the administration doesn't support it then the rest of the team will have difficulty supporting it. The administrators were very beneficial in identifying supports and allocating the resources so the program was successful.

3. Welcome Family Involvement

I was welcomed as a FULL team member. If there was a problem I was asked for input in ways to resolve the issue. Of course when things went smoothly they took the credit, but that was ok because it was working for Scott!

4. Create a receptive atmosphere

Scott was there so it was going to happen. I remember going to open house and introducing myself to the foods teacher. She just gaped at me and took three giant steps back! She had never had a kid like Scott in her class and she asked me “What do you want me to teach him!” My response was I want you to take ownership and I want you to teach him the same things you are teaching the other students, how to be safe in the kitchen, how to prepare a simple snack, to work as part of a group and most importantly to hold him accountable. She took the bull by the horns and Scott blossomed in her class. I could always tell when he acted up in her class. He would clap his hands, throw his head back and announce “Mr. Leggens! it is my turn to talk!”

5. Shared planning and collaboration time are a priority

All through school the teacher all had a common planning time scheduled. It made it easy for the school team to get together and talk about progress and roadblocks. They also were able to talk about what worked and what didn't work. One teacher was identified as the "Team Leader" and was the go to person if there was a problem. It was a crucial component in the success of Scott's school program. It was so successful for Scott that the school adopted this as a guiding principal for ALL their students.

6. Instructional activities and curriculum are varied

Because Scott was not fully included in the academic vein this was a critical component in his programming. Teachers felt he had to do the same things the other students did to be in the class. What the team did was to pick components of the curriculum that we wanted to focus on for Scott.

7. Varied models of service delivery

Various models were used in Scott's programming. We had small group instruction and began to do a push in model for all his therapies. We felt it was important if you were going to teach him to use a communication device in Speech it was more important to teach him to use it in environments he would be using it. The most important model we implemented was the use of his peers. Scott was much more open to accepting things from his peers. They used a natural consequence approach when interacting with Scott. He VERY quickly learned what was cool and what wasn't cool!

8. Adaptations for assessment and grading

Scott always used alternative assessments in the school setting. He couldn't take the typical tests and he couldn't answer questions, so he had to SHOW them what he knew. Most times the teachers or aides would monitor him in the classroom setting doing a specific activity and they would determine from the data they were collecting whether or not he was making progress on his IEP goals.

9. Friendship building

Friendship is a very important component. I asked for peer support when Scott started back at his home school. Administration had some concerns with this. They told me they couldn't force the other kids to be his friends. The homeroom teacher decided to post a buddy chart in the class for the kids and allowed them to pick and choose when they wanted to help out. What happened blew us all away. All the kids signed up and there were so many that they had to change buddies for each activity. To be his buddy was a VERY coveted position. This continued throughout his school career. The support then spilt over into extra-curricular activities, such as pep rallies, bon fires, clubs, Special Olympics and trips to go tubing and to the amusement parks!

10. Transition planning

Transition planning is so important on so many different levels. In the school setting it was a critical part of planning from year to year. We identified the next year's teachers well in advance so they could observe Scott in class. They would observe him in class, greet him in the hall and then Scott would make trips to their classroom just to learn the new routine. It helped him make the leap with little or no upset. When at the High School level Scott was involved in job training activities and the teachers and peers were able to help him with this transition and it has continued to this day, as he still volunteers at the local food bank.