

## **CREATING INCLUSIVE SCHOOLS AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES**

### **INCLUSION IS NOT...**

Inclusion: it is not going away.

Unlike mainstreaming in the 70s, the inclusion movement was led by people with disabilities themselves, with ethical and legal vigilance.

Inclusion: is not a religion. It is a method of providing instruction and creating community.

Inclusion: is not geography, a place or program. It is a state of mind and a method of behaving.

Inclusion: does not mean that the child with disabilities has to act exactly like children without disabilities or do exactly what typical children do.

### **INCLUSION IS...**

Inclusion: is behavior that is modeled by adults and learned by children.

Inclusion is only true inclusion if everyone benefits and succeeds: the child with the disability, the teaching staff, the typical children, and the families.

Inclusion is only true inclusion if social relationships develop among the children with special needs and their typical peers.

The goal of inclusion is to create communities where EVERYONE is valued, belongs, and is able to contribute.

### **WHY INCLUSION?**

People want inclusion for different reasons.

Parents want their children to have rich educational experiences and opportunities to have friendships with children in their own neighborhoods. They want their child valued. They want their child to be able to work and contribute.

Special educators want the child to have typical role models and experiences.

Administrators want to provide a full array of services.

Program planners want services customized to individual needs during childhood to reduce dependence on public dollars in adulthood.

Classroom teachers want all children to have a successful educational experience and to build a community that does not EXCLUDE because of diagnosis or differences.

People with disabilities want inclusive educational experiences to create the groundwork for building inclusive communities. They KNOW that the only way to create inclusive communities in the future is to change educational experiences in the

present. They want inclusion to result in less financial dependency on public funds and less social isolation and loneliness.

## **INCLUSION FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS**

Inclusion for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is evolving.

Children with ASD have been historically placed apart from everyone and “housed” or “trained.”

In large numbers, that “apart-ness” continued into adult institutionalization, financial dependency and isolation.

Why should you embrace inclusion for children with autism? The incidence of autism spectrum disorders is increasing. What would you want for a child with ASD if the child was a member of your family? The child with Asperger Syndrome or any other autism spectrum disorder could be your child, your sister’s child or your child’s child.

## **INCLUSION BENEFITS EVERYONE**

### **How does inclusion benefit typical students?**

Typical children learn the concept of “different but able,” helping them not only with children with disabilities, but with the acceptance of themselves and their families.

Typical students will be prepared for the workplace of the future. The Americans with Disabilities Act is now like the Civil Rights was in the 1960s and 70s. The ADA requires that qualified people with disabilities be given access to jobs.

Students must learn to be comfortable and appropriate with people with autism and other disabilities who will later be in the workplace.

Students who do not learn how to be comfortable and appropriate with people with disabilities will not rise to the top of any corporate structure of the 21st century in a similar way that people who are racially uncomfortable or inappropriate are not doing so now.

Interacting with children with disabilities will develop exceptional communication skills in the typical children that will help the typical children communicate more effectively for the rest of their lives.

Typical students have an opportunity to become interested in helping others. This can lead to careers choices in professions such as medicine, research, teaching and nursing.

Typical children grow up to be the parents and family members of people with disabilities. Inclusion prepares us to accept and work effectively with a disabled family member.

### **How does inclusion benefit teaching staff?**

Staff have opportunities to learn more about how children with autism and other disabilities learn. This helps staff implement multiple methods of teaching all the children.

Staff have opportunities to work more closely with families and have an immediate and profound impact on the life of the child. (Imagine the impact of school experiences in the lives of children with ASD!)

Staff have opportunities to model behavior that leads to mutual acceptance and understanding of people who are different.

Staff have opportunities to prepare students to excel in the business and social world of the future.

Staff have opportunities to be creative, working outside standardized curricula and normal routines.

### **How does inclusion benefit the child with autism or related disorders?**

The child has an opportunity to develop relationships with children in their neighborhood. This can lead to a higher quality of life and greater safety.

The child is exposed to information and experiences that do not occur in special education classrooms.

The child can develop a sense of belonging, shared responsibility and the need to contribute.

Classroom experiences and interesting activities can lead to employment, recreation, friendships, volunteer work, etc.

The child is exposed as “different but able” to a local peer group who later will become employers, civic and social leaders, etc.

The child has peer models for behavior, communication and learning that are not available in the special education classroom.

### **INCLUSION TIPS**

1. Each inclusion opportunity has to be individualized. There is no one right way. Work closely with the families and the full educational team to create appropriate experiences and intervention strategies.

2. Teamwork is even more crucial in inclusion. Be sure you know who your team is and meet regularly, especially early in the year. Be sure you know who the child’s team leader or point person is. Meet informally with the parents as often as possible.

3. Goals and activities for the child with ASD who is included do not have to be the exact same goals and activities of the other children.

4. Any staff person working to provide an inclusive experience for a child with an autism spectrum disorder is entitled to ALL of the assistance needed to make the experience successful. ASK for help. ASK for training. ASK for technical assistance. ASK early. Do not wait until everyone has had many unpleasant experiences.

5. You can learn a lot about the child with special needs in your classroom by making a home visit as early in the year as possible. Go to the home as a LEARNER, and learn how the parents manage and understand their child.

6. YOU create a successful, inclusive classroom by your behavior. The students will emulate you. Try to:

- Speak respectfully to the child with special needs, avoiding a demanding tone.

- Speak on behalf of the child, interpreting the child's behavior to help make sense of the child's behavior to the other students.

- Stay calm when any child is having a problem.

- Help the typical children understand what the child with autism or other disabilities needs or intends to communicate. Help the children learn how to respond appropriately.

7. At the beginning of the year, cut two circles out of construction paper, one yellow and one, red. Put your name on each one and laminate them. Keep them in your classroom. If you are having some discomfort with the child with autism or other disabilities, ask one of the typical children to take the yellow circle to the lead special education support person or to a team member who will be able to respond to a request for assistance. You do not have to mention the child with special needs. Just say, "Amy, take this to Mrs. Smith." When the special education support person sees the yellow circle with your name on it, s/he comes to your classroom immediately, enters quietly, watches the situation and then provides information, intervention or technical assistance.

If you are having a very difficult time with your student with special needs, or you think things will deteriorate, you send the red circle to the special education support person. S/he comes immediately to the door, enters quietly and provides whatever intervention is necessary, including asking the child to come out of the classroom.

8. Talk to teachers who have had a successful time including children with special needs, including children with ASD. They will have many ideas and strategies to assist you.

9. If the educational experience is not proceeding successfully from your point of view, do not wait. Seek support right away. You are not expected or required to know everything! That is why every special needs child comes with a TEAM. The members of a child's team are the people whose names are signed on the IEP.

10. Remember that what you know about children DOES apply to this child too. When in doubt, opt for the most safe, kind and respectful intervention for the child.

11. Learn the rules about confidentiality and follow them. The privacy of the children with special needs and their families is protected by law. Ask for a copy of the confidentiality policy at your school.

### **SOME THINGS TO THINK ABOUT**

*“Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million centers of energy and daring, those ripples build a current that can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.”*

*Robert F. Kennedy*

*“I have come to the frightening conclusion that I am the decisive element in the classroom. It is my personal approach that creates the climate. It is my daily mood that makes the weather. As a teacher, I possess a tremendous power to make a child’s life miserable or joyous. I can be a tool of torture or an instrument of inspiration. I can humiliate or humor, hurt or heal. In all situations, it is **my response** that decides whether a crisis will be escalated or deescalated, and a child be humanized or dehumanized.”*

*Haim Ginott*