Strategies for Creating Socially Inclusive School Communities for ALL Students

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Today’s Game Plan…

• Identify Challenges that can be Strategically Addressed through Social Inclusion
• Recognize the Importance of and Strategies for Effective School Climate & Policy Reform
• Learn About the Project UNIFY Model
• Top 10 Strategies for Creating Socially Inclusive Schools for ALL Students

Student with Intellectual Disabilities face many challenges including…

• Lack of Leadership Role Opportunities
• Lack of Opportunities to Demonstrate Knowledge and Skills
• Social Exclusion
• Bullying
• Lack of Recognition or Acceptance in School Community
According to the most recent Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of IDEA,

- **53%** of all students with disabilities spend 80% or more of their day with their nondisabled classmates.
- Even less encouraging, only **16%** of students with intellectual disabilities spend 80% or more of their day in the general education setting.


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Challenges Faced in Our Nation’s Schools:

- **33%** of public school students acknowledge having a classmate with an Intellectual Disability.
- **10%** of public school students acknowledge having a friend with an Intellectual Disability.
- Students without ID face challenges as well...
  - **28%** of students say they were bullied within the last 6 months.
  - **10%** of high school students say they have seriously contemplated suicide within the past year.
  - Only **55%** of high school students feel they are important in their school community.


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Socially Inclusive School Climates Successfully...

- promote Inclusion for ALL Students.
- promote Social Justice for ALL Students.
- promote the Engagement of ALL Students.
School Connectedness
Create schools where every student feels a sense of belonging

School Connectedness: “the belief held by students that adults and peers in the school care about their learning as well as about them as individuals”

- Without School Connectedness
  Students are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors


SC Youth Activation Committee for Project UNIFY Leadership Retreat
Four Factors That Increase School Connectedness

- Adult Support from School Staff
- Commitment to Education
- Belonging to a Positive Peer Group
- Physical and Psychosocial Environment of the School

Two Overarching Conditions

Essential to ensure that each student is educated in a supportive, responsive environment. These should be considered non-negotiable by the school’s stakeholders.

1) Conditions for Learning

2) Diverse Population Responsiveness
"Practices and policies in many U.S. schools fail to recognize, support, and sustain high-quality social inclusion. When social inclusion is not present, the opportunity gap between special and general education students increases. In contrast, when social inclusion is successfully integrated into schools, all students benefit from a strong sense of belonging in their school and community."

A Policy Guide for Socially Inclusive Schools
Project UNIFY-July 2013

The Importance of Policy…

How Does Policy Support Inclusive Schools?

- Establish mandates requiring social inclusion as part of a school’s accountability system
- Provides incentives for schools to become more socially inclusive
- Builds school capacity to integrate and sustain social inclusion
- Changes the education system to focus on social inclusion (practices, policies and collaboration)

How Will Increasing Policy Support Affect Inclusive Schools?

- Social inclusion through curricula, teaching and learning, sports, and social interactions
- All students engaged as leaders
- All students develop knowledge, skills, and attitudes for success
- School climates will be safe, engaging, equitable, and democratically informed
- Mutually beneficial school-community partnerships
- Schools use data about inclusion for continuous improvement
“To what extent does our school foster physical and social interaction of diverse students through purposeful actions?”

Develop Socially Inclusive School Climate Checklist...

- Students from self-contained classes are included in social opportunities during lunch period
- Special Ed students recognized at Awards Ceremonies
- Unified sports teams recognized during pep rallies
- Students with ID engaged in student clubs and in leadership roles for the school
- Students in self-contained classes are recognized by their peers in general education
- Students from diverse backgrounds interact and connect successfully

What is Project UNIFY and how does it Promote and Support Social Inclusion?
Project UNIFY in South Carolina

• During 2012-2013 School Year:
  – 112 schools from 32 school districts;
  – Nearly 5,000 youth with and without ID participated in inclusive sports programs
  – Education initiatives and awareness campaigns reached 73,000 students

• This Year (2013-2014):
  – 128 schools in 38 school districts
  – Goal to engage 5,500 youth in inclusive sports and other social inclusion opportunities
  – Impacting 80,000 youth through education initiatives aimed at raising awareness, acceptance, and respect for all students

What Does Project UNIFY Entail?

• Inclusive Sports
• Youth Leadership & Advocacy
• Whole-School Engagement
Seven Characteristics, or elements, of Socially Inclusive Learning Environments

1. Youth Leadership
2. Creating & Sustaining Relationships
3. Unifying Programming
4. School/Community Collaborations
5. Communication
6. Professional Development
7. Continuous Improvement

TOP 10 Strategies for Social Inclusion

1) COLLABORATION!!!

2) Reverse Mainstreaming

3) Inclusive Related Arts and/or PE

4) Inclusive Student Clubs/Organizations
TOP 10 Strategies for Social Inclusion

5) Awareness/Advocacy Campaigns

6) Inclusive Language

7) Youth Leadership

TOP 10 Strategies for Social Inclusion

8) Celebrating Achievements of Character

9) Connection through Service

10) Youth Voice & Democracy

For More Information about Social Inclusion Initiatives through Project UNIFY in South Carolina, contact:

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