

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



ADVOCATING FOR THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT



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We Value Your Input!

Once you've had a chance to read this booklet, we'd love to hear how it has helped you. Please take a moment to complete a brief survey and share your success story about inclusive education. Your feedback will help us continue improving resources to better support families and advocates like you!



<https://bit.ly/4qd44qA>

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Introduction



Inclusion is the practice of educating students with disabilities alongside their peers without disabilities. The main goal of inclusion is to create learning environments where all students are valued and experience a sense of belonging. Inclusion makes learning valuable and beneficial for everyone when students are not just present in the classroom, but also meaningfully involved.

Many families struggle to include their children in general education classrooms, especially when they require more support. Families who do not speak English face additional barriers due to language differences, inexperienced translators in meetings, and limited inclusion resources written in their language.

The purpose of this booklet is to provide the most up-to-date and accurate information on inclusive education to families living in California. After reading this booklet, families will be able to assess the quality of education their children receive to better advocate for their educational rights. We hope this booklet encourages families to shape future legislation by sharing their cultural perspective, successes, and struggles with inclusive education.

What Does the Research Say?

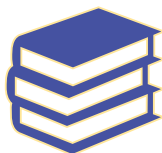


Over the past 40 years, a lot of evidence has shown that children with disabilities, including those with extensive support needs, benefit the most from instruction in general education classrooms. Students with extensive support needs require the most support in school and other areas of life. This can include children who are eligible for special education services under the categories of multiple disabilities, intellectual disability, and autism. When provided with appropriate special education services and resources in inclusive settings, students with extensive support needs demonstrate higher levels of academic achievement, improved social skills, and greater self-confidence.¹ Inclusion fosters a sense of belonging, which is critical for the emotional and social development of students with disabilities.

Research consistently shows that when inclusion is done correctly, there are no negative effects on students with or without disabilities. In fact, inclusion benefits all students by promoting diversity, empathy, and collaborative learning. No research supports the idea that segregated classrooms or schools are more effective than inclusive settings. In contrast, segregated environments often limit opportunities for students with disabilities to interact with their peers and access the full range of learning experiences available in general education classrooms. Therefore, inclusion is not only a legal and ethical obligation but also a proven educational best practice that maximizes the potential of all students.

¹ Bakken, J. P., & Obiakor, F. E. (Eds.). (2016). *General and special education inclusion in an age of change: Impact on students with disabilities*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

<https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/calibrary/reader.action?docID=4717072>



Here are three research studies that have examined the impact of inclusion in education. These studies show how inclusive practices benefit students with disabilities as well as their peers:

1. A 2016 report reviewed 280 studies conducted in 25 different countries, including the U.S., and found consistent evidence that inclusive education leads to cognitive and social development benefits. Most studies showed significant benefits for students with disabilities who are included, and at worst, other studies showed no difference between students.²

The research also highlights positive outcomes for students without disabilities as well. The studies explain that inclusive classrooms promote greater empathy, social awareness, and collaboration among all students.

2. A study in a California school district published in 2020 found 15 pairs of students that were matched based on having the same disability, age, and skill level when entering a school district. One student in each pair was in an inclusive placement and the other was in a special education class or special school. All students had extensive support needs.³ The study found that:
 - Children in general education classes showed significantly greater progress in communication, literacy, and math compared to children in separate placements. Students in inclusive settings not only got better test scores, but also had more ambitious IEP goals and were more likely to meet those goals.

² Hehir, T., Schifter, L. A., Grindal, T., Ng, M., & Eidelman, H. (2016). *A summary of the evidence on inclusive education*. ERIC, Abt Associates. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED596134>

³ Gee, K., Gonzalez, M., & Cooper, C. (2020). Outcomes of inclusive versus separate placements: A matched pairs comparison study. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 45(4), 223–240. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1274190>

- In separate classrooms, 73% of students made no progress in communication and literacy, while 67% made no progress in math.
 - Levels of engaged learning, social interactions, and involvement in curriculum-based activities were significantly higher during the school day for students in general education classes. Children in inclusive classrooms interacted more frequently with their peers and the general education teacher.
 - Students in separate classrooms were often engaged in age-inappropriate activities not commonly found in general education classrooms. The observers went into the classroom at regular intervals during the day and were asked to note what activity the children were engaged in and with who. In many cases, researchers were not able to identify the activity children in special education classrooms were engaged in.
3. Another research study reviewed 9 articles written between 1997 and 2018 to examine the impact of inclusive education on postsecondary outcomes for people with Intellectual and developmental disabilities. The study found that 8 articles reported positive relationships between inclusive education and improved postsecondary outcomes in employment and further education.⁴

Studies reported that having an inclusive education during childhood was a strong predictor of employment after high school graduation. Additionally, there was a strong relationship between students with intellectual disability who were included in school and their success in obtaining community-integrated employment as adults.

⁴ Taylor, J. P., Smith, J. D., & Doe, R. A. (2020). Inclusion of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and postsecondary outcomes: A systematic literature review. *Inclusion, 8*(4), 303–319.
<https://doi.org/10.1352/2326-6988-8.4.303>

Having explored the strong evidence supporting inclusion, it is important to take a step back and examine the history of education. This will help us understand the systemic challenges and barriers that many families face today when advocating for their child's educational rights.

The History of Education in the U.S.



To fully grasp the concept of inclusion, it's important to examine key moments in history where the practice of separating students in educational settings was challenged. Let's start by highlighting significant events that impacted students across the United States:

- **1946, Mendez v. Westminster:** This case challenged the segregation of Mexican American and Latino students in Orange County, California. School districts claimed that “Mexican schools” were necessary to teach Latino students English and help them become “Americanized” before they could attend mainstream schools for White children. However, many Mexican American students were already bilingual or spoke English when they were placed in these segregated schools. The education in “Mexican schools” was of lower quality compared to that in schools for White children and focused on vocational skills training for low-wage jobs, such as fieldwork and domestic work.

During the court trials, social science evidence demonstrated that the segregation of Latino students caused them to feel inferior to White students. This segregation led many students to believe they were less valuable as individuals, resulting in low self-esteem. The court ruled that it is unconstitutional to segregate Americans based on their heritage, leading California to become the first state to pass a bill outlawing all forms of public-school segregation.⁵

- **1954, Brown v. Board of Education:** the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that racial segregation in public schools is unconstitutional, even if the schools are “separate but equal.” Before this case, school children were segregated depending on their race and ethnicity. Different states had laws requiring the separate education of racial minority children; this included African American, Native American, Latino, Asian, and other students. Federal law, which applies to the entire U.S., stated that racial segregation was legal if schools were “separate but equal.” However, the separation of students based on race is a denial of equal protection under the law because it harms racial minority children.⁶ Like the California case mentioned above, this case also used social science evidence to show that segregation causes feelings of inferiority in African American children, affecting their ability to learn.⁷

⁵ United States Courts. (2011). Background - Mendez v. Westminster re-enactment. *United States Courts*. <https://www.uscourts.gov/educational-resources/educational-activities/background-mendez-v-westminster-re-enactment>

⁶ U.S. Const. amend. XIV, § 2

⁷ McBride, A. (2006, December). The Supreme Court. Expanding civil rights. Landmark cases: *Brown v. Board of Education (1954)*. PBS. https://www.thirteen.org/wnet/supremecourt/rights/landmark_brown.html

- **1968, LA Walkouts:** An estimated 22,000 students, mostly Mexican American, walked out of their classrooms at seven East Los Angeles schools to protest discrimination and educational inequalities. During this time, teachers placed low expectations on Chicano students, and often promoted vocational careers instead of college. Many Latino students dropped out because of the hostile environments. Students were punished, sometimes physically, for speaking Spanish. This made students feel rejected because of their cultural differences.⁸

These events inspired and motivated parents of children with disabilities to also advocate for their family's educational rights. In the early 1900s, only students with disabilities who were labeled "educable" were accepted into public schools but were kept segregated. Students with significant disabilities were seen as "uneducable" by school districts and were often expelled or rejected from public schools altogether.⁹ Parents of children with disabilities across the U.S. questioned the existing practices and challenged school districts in the court. These groups won their cases, with each court ruling that children with disabilities held the right to be educated in public schools. However, the rulings only applied to the areas where the cases were filed, not the rest of the country. Nevertheless, the parent movement grew strong, and continued organizing to demand rights for their children in civil courts. The parent movement eventually led to the passing of the following federal law:

- **1975, Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA):** This law guaranteed a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for all children with disabilities in every state across the country. Schools had to create special education service plans for each child, also known as Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).¹⁰

⁸ Partida, M. G. (2020, August 17). Research guides: A Latinx resource guide: Civil rights cases and events in the United States: 1968: East Los Angeles walkouts. *Guides.loc.gov*. <https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/east-la-walkouts>

⁹ Dudley-Marling, C., & Burns, M. B. (2014). Two perspectives on inclusion in the United States. *Global Education Review*. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1055208.pdf>

¹⁰ Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Pub. L. No. 94-142, 89 Stat. 773 (1975).

As you can see below, each reauthorization of the law promotes the inclusion of children with disabilities inside general education classrooms.

- **1990, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):** This law revised EHA mentioned above and renamed it to IDEA. The law added early childhood education services, high school transition services to work or college, and promoted the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms.¹¹
- **1997, IDEA:** This law introduced several changes and additions to the existing IDEA, including the requirement for behavioral intervention plans, increased parental involvement in creating IEPs, ensuring that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, and requiring students with disabilities to participate in district-wide assessments.¹²
- **2004, Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA):** This law revised IDEA and added a mandate to provide special education and related services and supports inside general education classrooms. It also states that the severity of a student's disability must not exclude them from participating in general education settings.¹³

¹¹ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (1990).

¹² Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, Pub. L. No. 105-17, 111 Stat. 37 (1997).

¹³ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1400 (2004).

By the time IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, there had been nearly three decades of research showing that children with disabilities benefit significantly from being included in general education settings. This information is written within IDEA itself:

20 U.S.C. §1400(c)

(5) Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by—

(A) having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible...¹⁴

Social movements have always advocated for equity and inclusion, but many struggles to achieve these goals continue today. Let's take a look at the current data for inclusion in California:

- **2022-23, most current California statistics:** the U.S. Department of Education keeps track of the number of children with disabilities spending their day in general education classrooms and in separate special education placements. Include CA, a non-profit organization that provides inclusion information and resources to families and educators, has tracked the data for the past five years and has found that:

California ranks as the 4th worst performing state in the nation for including children with disabilities.

¹⁴ 20 U.S.C. § 1400(c) (2004).

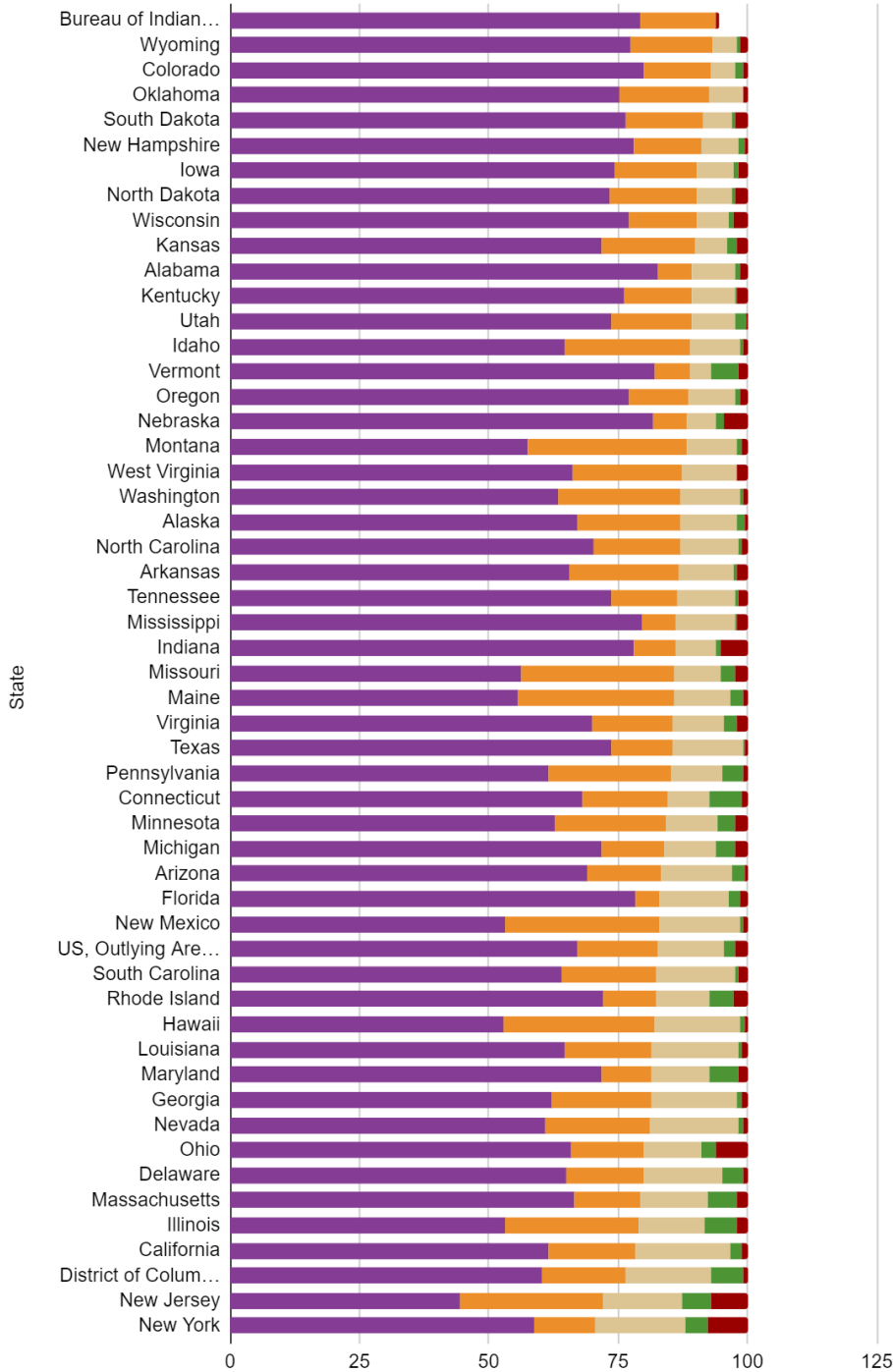
This can be seen in the chart below which ranks the states by the number of students with IEPs inside general education classrooms:

- Purple shows the number of students spending their school day inside general education classrooms 80% or more of the time.
- Orange shows the number of students spending their school day inside general education classrooms 40%-79% of the time.
- Tan, green, and red categories represent separate placements.

Please keep in mind that the tan category (less than 40% of time spent inside a general education classroom) includes 0% of the time, which is why it is counted as a separate placement. Other data might show California with higher inclusion numbers because they count students in the "less than 40%" category as included, even though this can mean 0% of a student's day is spent with their general education peers. The fact that some students experience 0% inclusion shows how segregated they are, emphasizing the need for more inclusive practices. While other data might suggest higher inclusion rates, this chart accurately shows how much time students spend inside general education classrooms.

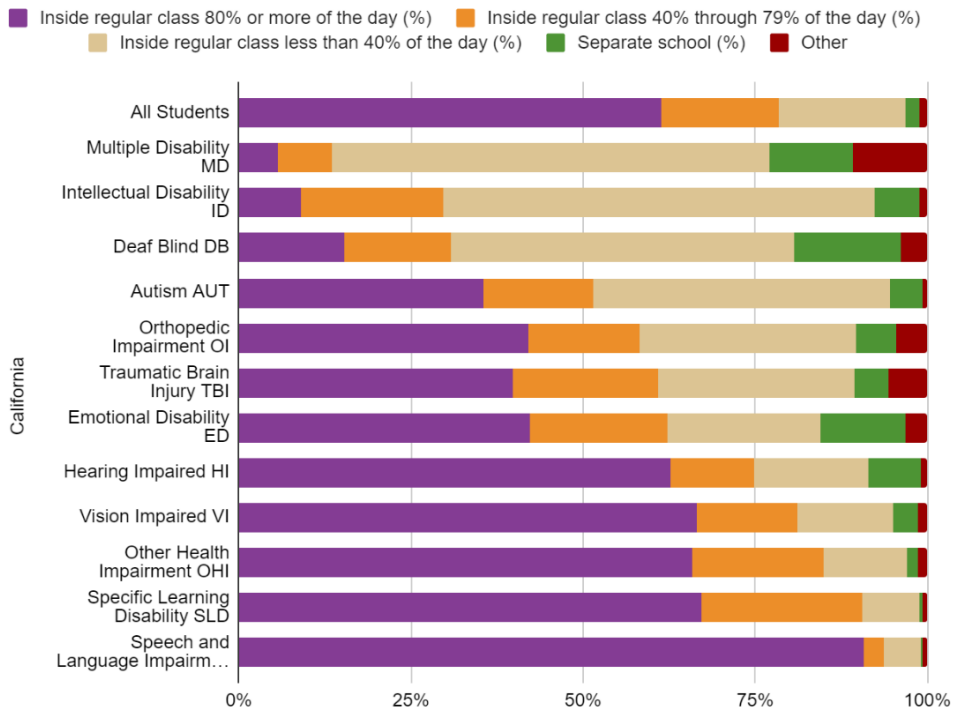
Percent of school age students (ages 5 (Kindergarten) through 21) served under IDEA, Part B, by educational environment and state: 2022-23

- Inside regular class 80% or more of the day (%)
- Inside regular class 40% through 79% of the day (%)
- Inside regular class less than 40% of the day (%)
- Separate school (%)
- Other



Additionally, if we focus on California’s data for inclusion, we can see that those numbers are mostly made up by children who have Speech and Language Impairments (SLI) or a Specific Learning Disability (SLD). Children with Intellectual Disabilities (ID) and Multiple Disabilities (MD) are the most excluded group of students in California.

California - Percent of school age students (ages 5 (Kindergarten) through 21) served under IDEA, Part B, by educational environment and eligibility category: 2022-23



To read more about inclusion data and research, please visit Include CA at <https://www.include-ca.org/>

These visuals highlight California as one of the poorest performing states in terms of inclusive education. Research shows that students needing more extensive supports benefit the most from inclusion, yet they remain the most segregated group of students.¹⁵

¹⁵ National Council on Disability. (2018). *National Council on Disability IDEA series: The segregation of students with disabilities*. National Council on Disability. <https://www.ncd.gov/publications/2018/2018-segregation-students-disabilities>

This section gave an overview of inclusion, the brief history of special education, and a breakdown on California's current inclusion data. The next section explains what the law says about inclusion and how the IEP process can lead to a placement in a general education classroom.

Breaking Down the Law



IDEA is the current federal law that requires states to provide a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). While the word “inclusion” is not mentioned in the law, the concept is understood when we break down LRE.

Least Restrictive Environment

34 C.F.R. §300.114

- (i) 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 nondisabled; and
 - (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.¹⁶
-

This means that a child with a disability must be educated in a general education classroom as much as possible. Assuming that all students will be in general education is incorrect; every case is unique and what might be right for one child may not be right for another. LRE, however, indicates that students need to start in a general education setting and only be moved to a more restrictive setting when it has been determined that an education in the general education classroom cannot be achieved satisfactorily even with aids and supports.

The more restrictive environments mentioned above are clarified in the next section. The Continuum of Alternative Placements lists all the different places where a child can be educated. Let's take a closer look at what the law says:

¹⁶ U.S. Department of Education. (2024). *Assistance to states for the education of children with disabilities*. 34 C.F.R. § 300.114. Retrieved from <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-300/subpart-B/subject-group-ECFRce691c806652b84/section-300.114>

Continuum Of Alternative Placements

34 C.F.R. §300.115

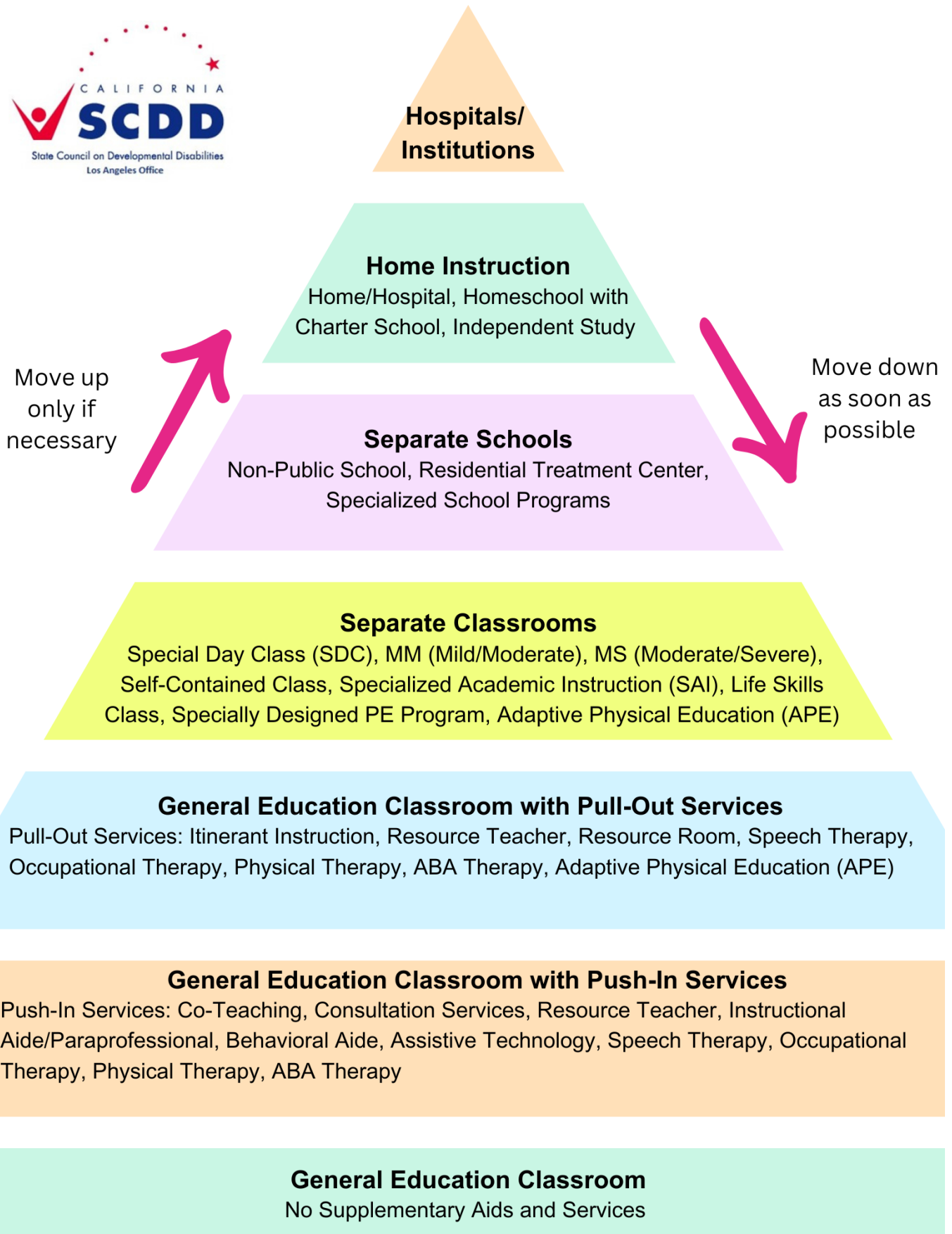
(a) Each public agency must ensure that a continuum of alternative placements is available to meet the needs of children with disabilities for special education and related services.

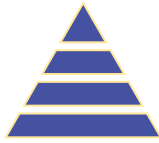
(b) The continuum required in paragraph (a) of this section must—(1) Include the alternative placements listed in the definition of special education under §300.39 (instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions); and

(2) Make provision for supplementary services (such as resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular class placement.¹⁷

This concept is easier explained with a visual, which you can see on the next page.

¹⁷ U.S. Department of Education. (2024). *Assistance to states for the education of children with disabilities*. 34 C.F.R. § 300.115. Retrieved from <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-34/subtitle-B/chapter-III/part-300/subpart-B/subject-group-ECFRce691c806652b84/section-300.115>





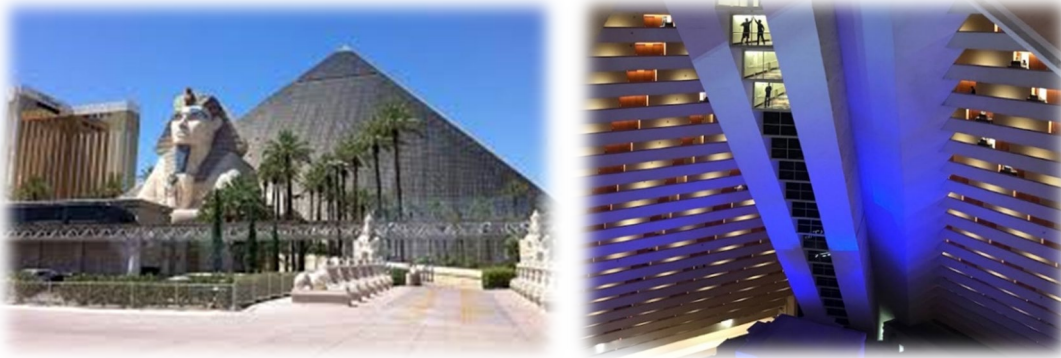
The visual is in the shape of a pyramid to demonstrate that general education is the starting point and the least restrictive option at the bottom. As the student moves up the pyramid, the placement becomes more restrictive. Moving to a more restrictive placement should only happen after the IEP team has tried adding more aids and supports, and the student is still not making minimal progress. The goal should always aim to move the student back to a less restrictive setting as soon as possible. The visual also shows that there are more options than simply placing a student in a general education classroom or a special day classroom.

If we look at each level, we can see the type of services that can possibly exist inside a general education classroom. *Push-in* services are services provided in the classroom and the student does not go to another room to get them. *Pull-out* services are services available for the student in separate rooms within the school; once the service is done, the student returns to the general education classroom. An example of a pull-out service is a resource room where a student placed in a general education classroom goes to another room for 30 minutes to work on their math goals with a resource teacher (usually a special education teacher).

More importantly, placement can be divided among special education and general education classrooms. This means that students do not have to be in one type of classroom 100% of their school day. For example, a student can be in a general education class for 60% of their day and in a special day class the other 40% of their day.

The Elevator Example

Here is an example to better understand the concept of LRE:



Let's pretend the Luxor hotel in Las Vegas is the real-life Continuum of Alternative Placements. Each floor at the Luxor hotel is an educational setting, and students use the slanted elevator to travel between placements.

One day Juan arrives at the Luxor hotel holding a **box** filled with items to help him get through the day (supplementary aids, services, modifications, and accommodations). Standing next to him is a group of **cheerleaders** (IEP team) who are cheering him on and making note of how his day is going. The cheer team keeps putting things in his box, taking them away, and making changes to what is already in there to ensure Juan succeeds in a room located on the **1st floor**. After some conversations, the cheer team decides to move Juan to the **2nd floor** (a more restrictive setting) for a few hours and then return to the 1st floor for the last part of his day. Juan and his box go back and forth between these floors a few days. After some time, the cheer team agrees it will be more appropriate for Juan to spend the entire day on the 2nd floor. This process repeats for floors **3, 4, and 5** until Juan eventually reaches the **6th floor** (the most restrictive setting). However, just as elevators return to the 1st floor, Juan and his box also go down. Each day Juan spends less time on the 6th floor, then the 5th floor, then the 4th floor, until eventually returning to the 1st floor.

In this example, each floor is a placement setting, starting with the bottom floor being the general education classroom and moving along until reaching the most restrictive setting on the top floor. The box represents his supplementary aids, services, modifications, and accommodations needed to meet his IEP goals. The cheerleaders are the IEP team, which includes parents and guardians. This example is important because:

1. It shows how all students need to start in a general education setting before moving on to a more restrictive setting.
2. A student can split their time in two different classrooms (example: 75% in a general education class and 25% in a special day class).
3. The IEP team tried different ideas (supplementary aids, services, modifications, and accommodations) before making the decision to move the student to a more restrictive setting.
4. Placement was not fixed; the IEP team continued discussing what the student's least restrictive environment was, with the ultimate goal of bringing the student back to a classroom with his non-disabled peers.

An inclusive placement may look different for each student, but the key factor for inclusion is that students spend most of their day with peers without disabilities. A common myth is that each child has their own "Least Restrictive Environment" (LRE), when in fact, LRE is always a general education setting with appropriate services and supports, allowing access to the general education curriculum—ideally at the child's neighborhood school. It's crucial to remember that special education is a service, not a place, and those services follow the student wherever they are, regardless of the placement.

This section covered important legal concepts that form the basis for inclusion. The Least Restrictive Environment and the Continuum of Alternative Placements are key parts of the law that explain why inclusion is necessary. With these ideas in mind, let's now move on to the next section of this booklet where we'll explain the IEP process in more detail.

How Do I Prepare for Inclusion before the IEP Meeting?



Advocacy for the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) begins well before the IEP meeting takes place. To maximize the likelihood that a child is placed in an inclusive educational setting, families need to have open communication with the IEP team from the start. Families can convey their wishes for their child to be educated in a general education setting with members of the IEP team.

This section covers two key aspects of the IEP process that take place before the actual meeting. The first involves completing assessment reports, which provide crucial insights into the student's needs. The second ensures that a general education teacher is included in the meeting to offer input on ways the student can participate in the general education environment. Let's start with the first step:

Assessments

The first step of the IEP process is completing an initial assessment to check if the child is eligible for special education services. Every 3 years after that, the school will reassess the student to verify that services are still needed (this is called Triennial Eligibility). In addition to determining eligibility, assessments must be performed to identify the educational needs of the student. Assessments can also be done as needed to identify additional suspected areas of disability. Over time, this information can inform the family of the progress made by the student.



The assessment reports play a critical role in writing a student's IEP. The language of the assessment should be in the language identified by the parent on the language card provided to the district upon enrollment. This language card can be changed by the parents at any time. The language identified on the card pertains to the student, not the family. Additionally, PECS (Picture Exchange Communication System) may be the primary language of some students with autism or other disabilities.

It is important to remember that no single evaluation or assessment should determine placement. Placement decisions should not be based on test scores or a diagnosis alone. The assessment reports and the child's present levels of performance will be used to identify strengths, challenges, and areas of need, which will inform the goals chosen by the team.


Parents and guardians should request copies of the assessment reports in their primary language to review and prepare for the IEP meeting. If they disagree with the results, they have the right to seek a second opinion through an independent assessment. Please continue reading to explore alternative ways to gather information about the student beyond the assessments done by the district.

Independent Educational Evaluations (IEEs)

IEEs are assessments conducted by professionals who are independent of the school district. If parents express disagreement with the district assessment and request an IEE, the school must provide one or take the family to due process to defend their evaluation. It is best for parents to ask for an IEE after the IEP meeting is done or in between meetings, but not during the actual meeting. Parents and guardians may consider this option for various reasons, including:

1. Disagreement with the school district's assessment results, whether it's the overall findings, specific conclusions, or how the assessment was done.
2. The need for a more thorough evaluation, especially if the district's assessment missed some areas of suspected disability.
3. Concerns regarding the accuracy or appropriateness of IQ tests used by the district.
4. Seeking specialized expertise that the district's evaluators may lack.
5. A preference for using different assessment tools, such as Dynamic Assessments, which the district may not provide.

Families can obtain and pay for their own evaluations without going through the school. If it is presented to the IEP team, and any part of it is used to develop the IEP, then the school must reimburse the family for the cost of the evaluation (keep your receipts). This is because all students who receive special education and related services are entitled to a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE).

 [For more information on IEEs, please read our IEP strategy guide here or contact your local SCDD Office.](#)

IQ Testing

Some assessments test a child's Intelligence Quotient (IQ) and can be part of an evaluation for special education services. Many families express concerns about IQ testing because of potential bias, cultural sensitivity, and the uncertainty of knowing how appropriate they are at identifying a child's needs. This is due to the historical bias and limitation of students with Intellectual Disabilities throughout the U.S. In fact, there has been a California Supreme Court case that found IQ testing of African American students was culturally biased and resulted in the increase of African American children in classes for students with intellectual disabilities.¹⁸

Although parents have the right to refuse the IQ testing of their child, the school district can initiate due process when they believe testing the child's IQ is necessary. Instead, families can gather data from an IEE to challenge the results of the IQ test.

Alternative Assessments

Many families who disagree with the assessment results from the school district, including IQ testing, look for a different type of assessment tool. Families can use different types of assessments to get more information about who the child is as a whole. These results give information on the student's potential rather than their deficits. An example of an alternative assessment is a Dynamic assessment, which is a method used to identify a child's ability to learn new skills. This assessment includes active teaching and observation of the child's problem-solving abilities. Dynamic assessments give a complete picture of a child's cognitive abilities, strengths and weaknesses, and their social and emotional characteristics, within a holistic picture of social and shared learning.¹⁹

- For a list of assessors, you may contact a reputable special education attorney.

¹⁸ Disability Rights California. (2022). *What is the Larry P. v. Riles case? How did it originate? – SERR – Special Education Rights and Responsibilities*. Special Education Rights and Responsibilities. <https://serr.disabilityrightsca.org/serr-manual/chapter-2-information-on-evaluations-assessments/2-45-what-is-the-larry-p-v-riles-case-how-did-it-originate/>

¹⁹ Lawrence, N., & Cahill, S. (2014). *The impact of dynamic assessment: an exploration of the views of children, parents and teachers*. British Journal of Special Education, 41(2), 191–211. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12060>

Meeting Attendees

Families can communicate with the district to make sure a general education teacher is invited and present at the IEP meeting. California's Education Code 56341(b)(2) states that the IEP meeting must include a general education teacher if the student is or may be in general education. This means that if the parent or guardian is pursuing a general education placement for their child, then they have the right to ask in writing for a general education teacher to be present at the IEP meeting.

It is important for a general education teacher to participate in an IEP meeting for a variety of reasons, including to:

- Give insight on what the general education class will be working on throughout the year.
- Help write inclusive goals.
- Give ideas on the type of supports they and the student will need throughout the year.

It has been reported that districts sometimes give reasons for general education teachers to not participate in meetings. Districts can say:

- The special education teacher knows enough about general education so there is no need for their participation.
- The general education teacher is not available.
- They do not have a general education teacher for that grade (more commonly heard in preschool years).

Please keep in mind that placement cannot be determined before an IEP meeting, so assuming that a general education teacher is not needed may signify a pre-determined placement. A member of an IEP team may be excused from an IEP meeting if the parent and school consent to the excusal in writing. There may be many reasons why you would choose not to excuse a member of the IEP team. For example, there may be issues that impact your child's education as a whole, such as behavioral or medical issues. You may wish for the appropriate personnel to be present for the entire IEP process and decline to excuse them.

How Do I Ask for Inclusion During the IEP Meeting?

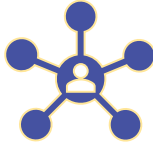


In this section, we'll share some tips for families to use during the IEP meeting. Being prepared for the meeting can make a big difference in how families explain their wishes for an inclusive placement.

The IEP meeting will generally follow the following format in order:

1. Parent Report
2. Present Levels of Performance (PLOPs)
3. Goals/Objectives
4. Accommodations, Modifications, Services
5. Placement

Each step in the IEP process leads to the next. Assessments explain the student's present levels of performance (PLOPs), identifying the needs. The student's needs will guide the goals to be developed. The goals will identify the accommodations, modifications, and services needed to implement those goals. The whole IEP document, including information presented by the parent or guardian, will be used to determine placement.



Parent Report

Once the IEP meeting begins, parents and guardians can present a parent report, which is information, thoughts, and concerns about their child.

- There is information online and in other trainings where they call the parent report different names such as a “parent vision” or “parent input.” However, it is important to note the difference in the names. The parent report is an evaluation of the child made by parents. The parent vision can be part of the parent report.

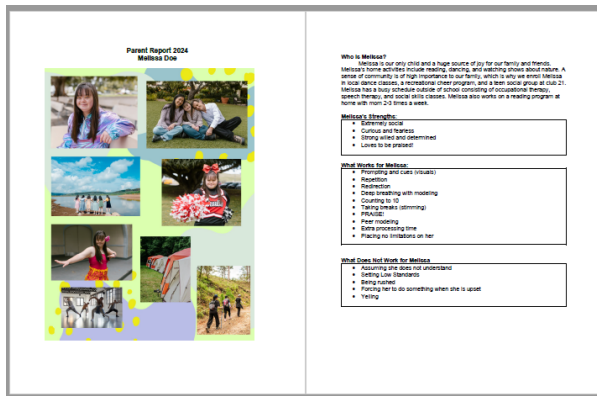
The IEP team must consider all reports submitted by parents; therefore, families must submit the information they present as a “parent report.”

The parent report is a great opportunity for families to request an inclusive education placement by setting the tone at the beginning of the meeting. It is best practice to share the parent report with meeting participants by printing copies or screen-sharing if the meeting is held virtually. The following are reasons why families have used the parent report:

1. To show who the child is, which is very important for new team members who have not worked with the child yet. Families can consider sharing photos of the child in the community, with family, on vacation trips, and during social activities. Visuals show the team how much the family values inclusion in all areas of the child’s life.

2. To share the family's vision for the child's future and work backwards to achieve life goals through current IEP goals. This can be higher education in college, obtaining a job, living independently, or building meaningful relationships.
3. To state the concerns for separate placements.
4. To share videos of the child's skills outside of school (reading, writing, following directions, socializing, etc.). This can be used as evidence of the child's ability to learn or follow instruction if they are not doing so during school hours.

Parents often share templates of their parent report amongst each other; however, many templates can also be found online with a quick search.



[Click here to view an example of a parent report.](#)

The “I” in IEP



After the parent report, the team will present results from any assessment that was done before the meeting. The results will identify the needs of the child and the type of goals that need to be developed.

Keep in mind that the “I” in IEP stands for “Individualized,” meaning each part of the IEP, including goals and services, should be custom-made for the student based on their deficits. Oftentimes, the IEP team will refer to deficits as “needs” or “things a person can’t do.” Families can use this opportunity to request goals and supports that will help with inclusion.

This section explains how writing good goals and proper accommodations, modifications, and services can lead to a general education placement. This part of the IEP document makes sure that that the student will have everything needed to thrive in the classroom and the teacher has enough support to make inclusion work.

IEP Goals

Let's begin with the goals. Inclusion is not only about placing a student with disabilities inside a general education classroom, but also about making sure that the student is engaged in the same activities as their peers. Everyone in the class, including the student with disabilities, needs to learn the same material. The difference is the level of work each student is expected to achieve.

This means that the IEP goals of all students, regardless of their placement, are based on California's grade-level standards. Inclusion gives students with disabilities the opportunity to access the state standards using the general education curriculum.



Preschool/ Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations and Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

The California Preschool/ Transitional Kindergarten Learning Foundations are a set of research-based guidelines developed by the California Department of Education to define key knowledge and skills that preschool children (ages 3 to 5) should acquire to be ready for kindergarten.

- Here is the link to volumes 1-3 of the Learning Foundations:
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/sp/cd/re/caplfvolumes1thru3.asp>

Similarly, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are a set of academic standards for what students, with and without disabilities, are expected to learn. Teachers use the CCSS for students in grades K-12 to teach the same reading, writing, and math skills across California. Here are the links to the Reading and Math standards:

- Reading Standards
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/finalelaccsstandards.pdf>
- Math Standards
<https://www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/documents/ccssmathstandardaug2013.pdf>

Please note that there are more lists of standards in different categories for English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Literacy. For a complete list of the standards, please visit: <https://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/>

All students are expected to work on either the California Preschool Learning Foundations or the Common Core State Standards, unless students have modifications or are being provided a modified curriculum as indicated in the IEP. Students with modifications will work on goals that are in line with the state standards.

Core Content Connectors

If the student cannot achieve the Common Core State Standards, the Core Content Connectors are designed to help them reach those Common Core State Standards.

The Core Content Connectors along with the Essential Understandings break down the standard into smaller, more achievable steps. The Core Content Connectors were primarily used with assessments for students with significant cognitive disabilities, but they are now being used as guides to write goals for students who need modifications. Both are a valuable resource because the IEP team can use them to quickly see how the standard can be simplified.

- The Core Content Connectors can be found here:
https://wiki.ncscpartners.org/index.php/Core_Content_Connectors

Core Content Connector Example:

Carla is entering kindergarten, and her parents are in an IEP meeting to prepare for the new school year. A general education kindergarten teacher in the meeting tells the team that her class will focus on the following CCSS:

- **RI.K.5 Identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book**

The IEP team knows Carla will not be able to meet that standard. The team wants to write a goal relating to the standard so that Carla can participate in class. The team visits the Core Content Connector webpage to locate the CCSS the teacher gave them. They find the CCSS on the right side of the table:

Progress Indicator: E.RI.b demonstrating basic concepts of print (e.g., follows words/pictures left-right, top-bottom; matches spoken words to print words; distinguishes words from sentences; book parts)		
Core Content Connectors: K	CCSS Anchor Standards	Common Core State Standard
K.RI.b1 Locate words and illustrations in informational texts.		No CCSS linked
K.RI.b2 Distinguish front of book from back of book.	Craft and Structure R5 Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.	RI.K.5 Identify the front cover, back cover, and title page of a book.

The left side of the table gives them the Core Content Connector:

- **K.RI.b2 Distinguish front of book from back of book.**

The team decides to write a goal for Carla to only distinguish the front of the book from the back of the book. This goal will be worked on while the rest of the class is asked to identify 3 features of a book.

IEP teams can use the Core Content Connectors to create inclusive goals for students who are not yet ready to meet state standards. The Connectors are designed to build upon one another, helping teams identify the next steps in a student's learning progression. If the Connectors for a student's current grade are too challenging, teams can refer to earlier grades. For example, a 5th-grade student may work on Core Content Connectors from the 2nd grade if those are more appropriate for their current skill level.

The Core Content Connectors are research-based, meaning they were developed by professionals through extensive research and collaboration. The Core Content Connectors make sure educational materials are in line with state standards, helping students engage in learning that meet those expectations.

- This information was presented by Dr. Caitlin Solone in a training with Undivided, an organization that provides resources for families to get the services they need. Undivided has written different articles on the use of Core Content Connectors and Essential Understandings for goal writing. For more information, please visit <https://undivided.io/resources/core-content-connectors-and-essential-understandings-311>

More Tips on Inclusive Goal Writing

If you read through the CCSS's, you probably noticed that each list is very long. It will be unwieldy to write goals for every single state standard; instead, have a discussion with the IEP team and choose a couple of standards to develop into goals in the general education environment. These can also be goals that are based on what the class will focus on throughout the year. Having a general education teacher present at the IEP meeting is important because they can explain what those focuses will be.



Another tip is to write goals using inclusive language to ensure activities occur with peers who do not have disabilities. Consider phrases and goals that would require their implementation in the general education environment or with typically developing peers. For example, many goals could be made more inclusive simply by adding phrases such as:

- “With typically developing peers.”
- “With a collaborative work group.”
- “Across multiple settings.”
- “During lunch and recess and other opportunities with typically developing peers.”

Some of these phrases, such as “across multiple settings”, may need further elaboration to ensure a common understanding of what this means.

Some students will be able to master their Common Core State Standards (CCSS)-based goals without any help, while others will need accommodations and/or modifications. The next section will break down these next two supports and explain how they are the real key to inclusion.

Accommodations

Students who need help with how they learn and how they get their work done will need accommodations. An accommodation can be defined as changes that give the student equal access to learning and an equal opportunity to show what they learned. The student is still expected to learn the same grade-level content in the class or answer the same questions on tests.

- Examples of accommodations: providing pictures and symbols with word instruction, recording lectures, taking more time to complete a project.
 - Testing accommodations: taking frequent breaks, extending exam time, using a calculator, taking tests in a separate room.

During the IEP meeting, take a look at each goal, then think about what type of accommodations the student might need to reach that goal. If the student has many accommodations but still struggles to make progress in the general education classroom, then the expectation of what the student is learning needs to change.

Modifications

Modifications are changes to what the student is learning in their class or the curriculum itself. They adjust the expectations of the student by changing requirements to better suit the student's abilities.

- Examples of modifications: completing shorter homework assignments, grading based on alternative achievement standards such as Core Content Connectors, using different books than peers.

Some students will need a modified curriculum to work within the state-standards. If a student is significantly below their grade level, the IEP team needs to write annual goals that are ambitious but still achievable. Please remember to use the Core Content Connectors to write modified goals.

Supports and Services that Promote Inclusion

The next part of the IEP identifies the type of help the student can receive so they can access the curriculum, make progress in their educational goals, and participate in class and school. There are many supports and services available to help the student and their teacher with inclusion.

The following list contains examples of the most common supports for students and their teachers. Please keep in mind that there are many more supports beyond what is listed below and that new supports can be created depending on the student's needs as well.

- **For teachers:**

- Inclusion Specialist: a person that provides assistance to teachers for students with disabilities inside general education classrooms.

Examples include:

- Providing consultation to general education teachers about effective ways to teach students with disabilities.
- Modifying the curriculum.
- Identifying accommodations.

The supports provided by an inclusion specialist is a service, and therefore it must be requested at an IEP meeting. Not all districts have an inclusion specialist; however, in districts that do, the specialist may travel between different school sites within the district to provide services. Inclusion specialists with a teaching background in both general education and special education have the most knowledge about inclusive practices. Please keep in mind that there is no actual credential to work as an inclusion specialist. If the student's district does not have an inclusion specialist, families can request the school or district to contract with one. Families can also attend district board meetings and ask for an inclusion specialist to be hired.

 [For more information about talking to a board, please see our public testimony resources here](#)

- Additional Trainings: Families can send information to teachers for training opportunities relating to their child's disability. This can be workshops, conferences, and other training programs.

Club 21 has an Educational Partnership program where they teach inclusion practices for students with Down syndrome and other disabilities to teachers, therapists, and other professionals. This program will pay for a substitute teacher so that educators will not have to worry about coverage. For more information, please visit <https://clubtwentyone.org/programs/programs/educational-pathways/about.html>

- **For students:**
 - Front Loading: this is when a student is introduced to vocabulary, concepts, or classrooms materials earlier so that it is a familiar topic when it is presented in class. Front loading can be done during a pull-out session to a resource classroom, or as homework. For example, if the class is going to read a book about emotions in the upcoming week, parents can get the name of the book beforehand so they can read to the child at home. This can encourage and prepare the child to participate in the class discussion and related activities.
 - Teacher Communication Log: this is when the teacher (or aide with the teacher's supervision) writes in a notebook or fillable worksheet how the student's day went. Parents can see the type of behaviors experienced by the child or what type of services were provided that day. How often the log will be given to the parent is decided at the IEP meeting (daily, weekly, biweekly, or monthly).
 - Push-In/Pull-Out Services: this is when services are either pushed into the classroom for the student or the students is pulled out of class to receive the service elsewhere. For example, Occupational Therapy can be pushed into the classroom, so student remains with their peers instead of being taken to a separate room. The Occupational Therapist might work on fine motor skills during the class's writing time.
 - Resource Specialist: there is usually a resource classroom in the school where specialized instruction is provided for students. If the student needs additional help in a certain school subject, or specialized instruction, then the student can visit the resource classroom. This service can also be pushed into the classroom.

- One-on-One Aide: this is a staff member assigned to help a single student who needs extra support throughout the school day. This type of aide is usually given to students with significant needs due to their disabilities, behavioral or learning challenges, socialization, or medical conditions.

Also known as a 1:1 aide, personal aide, academic aide, or paraprofessional, they work closely with the student to help them access their education. If a student has more serious behavior challenges, a specially trained staff member, known as a Behavioral Intervention Implementation (BII) specialist, may provide more support.

- For strategies on how to request a 1:1 aide, you may read the following article:

<https://www.wrightslaw.com/info/relsvc.aide.steedman.htm>

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC): AAC devices help students with communication. There are many different types of AAC such as high-tech devices (an app on a tablet) and low-tech (picture boards). An assessment will be done to see what type of AAC will be most useful for the student. Parents can request AAC training for themselves, teachers, paraprofessionals, and classmates to promote socialization and belonging.
- Assistive Technology (AT): There are many apps and extensions that can support children who struggle with reading, writing, or communication. Parents should request an assistive technology assessment when their child is not able to participate in class activities because they are behind in reading, writing, or communication. The IEP team should ensure that the AT support includes not only the app or device but also training in using it for the student and the adults working with the students, including the parents.

As a reminder, the key to inclusion is obtaining proper accommodations, modifications, and services. This means that if a student has a lot of goals but little to no accommodations, modifications, and services, then the student does not have the supports needed for inclusion to be successful. Families need to make sure all the supports are written in the IEP document and that the goals are specific to the student's needs before discussing placement.

Placement

The final part of the IEP meeting is placement. Consistent with LRE, as defined on page 18 of this booklet, the team should begin by considering a general education placement at the school the child would attend if they did not have an IEP. If the team believes that the student will not be educated satisfactorily in a general education classroom, they should consider supplementary aides and services that might work first before moving within the continuum of alternative placements. There are three different scenarios that lead to a placement in general education (either fully or a percentage of the school day):

1. The student is placed in a general education class as requested by parents/guardians and determined by the IEP team. This can be full-time, or an agreed percentage of the school day. The IEP should specify where services take place, and whose responsibility it is to provide accommodations and modifications.
2. The district has a co-taught classroom and the IEP team agrees to place the student in that classroom.

Please note that some districts have "inclusion programs" where the district places student with and without disabilities together, most commonly seen in preschool years. However, it is important to remember that these are just programs in the district and anything other than the general education classroom is not inclusion.

3. The IEP team recommends a placement other than general education and parents/guardians disagree. The parents/guardians will have to go through Alternative Dispute Resolution/Informal Dispute Resolution or Due Process (mediation or hearing) to agree or obtain resolution on a placement with the district.

Placement Denials

As noted on page 13, California is the 4th worst state at including children with disabilities in general education classrooms. Parents/guardians may need additional support from an educational advocate and/or special education attorney.

- Special Education Advocate: can work in partnership with the family or work on the family's behalf to guide them through the educational process. They can attend IEP meetings with the family, review IEP documents, explain services and programs, and draft responses to the team. Regional centers, non-profits, and other programs can provide free or low-cost special education advocacy.

Advocate fees are typically lower than attorney fees. However, please note that school districts do not reimburse advocate fees, even if the family wins in a due process hearing. An exception applies if the advocate is employed by a special education attorney and the attorney represents the family in the hearing. In that case, if the family is successful, both the advocate's and attorney's fees will be reimbursed.

Caution: anyone can say they are an advocate since there is no official license or certification to work as one. Please be cautious of whom you work with. You may wish to consult with special education attorneys that have a good reputation for referrals of competent special education advocates.

- Special Education Attorney: a legal professional who represents the family. They give legal advice, communicate with the district attorney if needed, and represents the family in IEP meetings and due process. Regional centers and other community programs can provide free or low-cost legal help.

Consultations are usually free. Legal fees vary by attorney, but some provide free legal help to low-income families. Please note that the district must reimburse attorney fees if the family is successful in due process.

- To find an advocate or an attorney in your area, please visit:
<https://www.copaa.org/page/Direct>.

✚ For a list of attorneys in L.A. County, please contact our SCDD office.

Please understand that these are only lists of attorneys and advocates. You should check with others, such as parent support groups, concerning their reputation and performance.

High School Diplomas and Certifications



Students with disabilities obtain either a high school diploma or a certification of completion. These two pieces of paper are different from one another in that one gives more opportunities after graduation. The reality is that there are many barriers to employment and community inclusion for young adults with disabilities. Earning a high school diploma opens the door to university enrollment, job qualification, and higher income. This section explains how a high school diploma can be achieved and what to keep in mind as the child moves up in grades.

Diploma Requirements

Regardless of placement, students need to work on standard-based goals and curriculum to earn a diploma. California has several high school courses that need to be completed in order to qualify for a diploma. However, many local education agencies (LEAs), which includes school districts and charter schools, add their own courses to the list to ensure all their students meet the requirements for university enrollment.

Students who have a lot of accommodations written into their IEP can still meet course requirements and get a diploma. Students who have a lot of modifications may decrease their probability of meeting course work requirements on a typical pathway to a diploma. Keeping high expectations for students with disabilities increases their opportunity to graduate with a high school diploma. It is important that parents are aware of this in elementary school, where schools discuss using modified assignments and placing the child on the California Alternate Assessment (CAA).

- Families who would like to know if their child is eligible for CAA can use this tool:

[Alternate Assessment Participation Decision-Making Tool for California](#)

Alternative Pathway to a Diploma

On June 2022, California made the decision to join other states who had created a new pathway to a high school diploma through the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

- California's Alternative Pathway to a Diploma: - Eligible students with significant cognitive disabilities have the chance to earn a high school diploma by meeting only the state requirements and not the additional courses required by the school district. Students need to:
 - Take the state's alternate assessment aligned to alternative achievement standards in grade 11; and
 - Complete state coursework requirements specified in Education Code section 51225.3:
https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=51225.3.&nodeTreePath=2.3.4.3.3&lawCode=EDC



Only students who are eligible to be assessed on the CAA and who have the most significant cognitive disabilities (approximately 1% of students) are able to earn a diploma using the alternate pathway. They will likely need some accommodations to the curriculum in a general education high school class. However, they will still be learning the same content and will be assessed on alternate achievement standards aligned with the state standards for high school. This encourages schools to keep expectations high for such students.

Before the student starts 10th grade, parents and guardians should be included in a discussion about the student's eligibility for CAA and whether the alternate pathway is a good option for them. This means that not all students will be able to earn a high school diploma through this alternative pathway.

When students with IEPs earn a high school diploma, IDEA services will end with graduation. However, students who get a diploma through the new pathway can continue participating in school programs until age 22, like students who receive a certificate of completion. This time can be used to achieve academic and functional goals and transition to college or work.

Some students can use the additional time to complete high school diploma requirements; however, it is important to note that even with the extended time, some students may still not meet diploma requirements. Keep in mind that a high school diploma is not needed to participate in many college programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

- You can check out those programs at Think College:
<https://thinkcollege.net/resources/whats-happening-in-your-state/states/california>

Certificates

A certificate of completion is available to students who completed their high school education but did not fulfill requirements for a high school diploma. Students who do not earn a diploma remain eligible for special education services until age 22. Students who receive certificates instead of traditional diplomas have several post-high school options, including:

- Attending community college
- Joining employment or transition programs
- Pursuing vocational training
- Earning a GED (General Education Diploma), which can open doors to further education or employment opportunities.

What Does Inclusion Look Like?



Universal Design for Learning and Co-teaching

If the district has an inclusion program, they are most likely using the following classroom models:

- Universal Design for Learning (UDL): This is a teaching approach that gives students the opportunity to learn in different ways. The goal is to change the environment, not change the learners. UDL uses different modalities to teach and for students to demonstrate their understanding. This style of teaching makes it easier to adapt a curriculum for students who need it.

- Co-teaching: This is a practice of pairing two teachers, usually a general education teacher and a special education teacher, to work together in a class that includes students with disabilities. Both teachers are equally responsible for planning, teaching, and assessing students.
- Inclusion Specialists: Some school districts provide inclusion support as a related service to a child in a general education classroom. The specialist can collaborate with the general education teacher to provide accommodations, modifications, visuals, and adapted materials on a consult basis (meaning they coach the teacher but provide no services directly to the student).

Children in these types of classrooms are very fortunate, as studies show these are the optimal ways of learning for students with and without disabilities.

The California Department of Education has a program called Supporting Inclusive Practices where grants are given to school districts to create inclusive programs with these learning models. Although much success has been gained, it has been a slow process to implement these changes in all school districts across California.

General Education Classrooms

There is a high possibility that the student will enter a general education classroom (or “gen ed classroom”) where the teacher has little to no experience teaching students with disabilities. It is very important for the IEP document to have all the necessary services and supports for both the student and the teacher before entering the classroom.

It is helpful to have good communication with the general education teacher as time goes by and offer help when needed. This may look like paying attention to communication logs, participating in parent-teacher conferences, asking questions in the school’s app, and sending emails about trainings and other resources.

Student Introduction

It is recommended that families print a shorter version of the Parent Report, commonly known as a Student Introduction, to give to the teacher, assistants, and aides on the first day of school. It is common for families to email the Student Introduction to the school principal and the rest of the IEP team (therapists, aides, inclusion specialists, teacher, etc.) before the first day of school. The Student Introduction gives a brief summary of the child to the team and provides a statement about the importance of inclusion to the family. It also gives information about the child's learning style, interests, and tips for challenging behaviors. Families can write a short list of activities that the child did over the summer so they can share about it with their new classmates.

Printing Student Introductions every school year is important because many changes can happen between the last IEP meeting and the first day of school. Oftentimes, especially when asking for inclusion, the teacher for the new school year may not have participated in the previous IEP meeting. There is a high probability that the new general education teacher will not have an opportunity to read the student's IEP report before the first day of school. The Student Introduction is a great way for families to present themselves to school professionals and help the child have a smooth transition into the new school year.

Student Introductions are also known as vision statements, brag sheets, and All About Me pages.

RONALDO RODRIGUEZ

My Summer Vacation

- Many trips to Disneyland
- Summer Soccer league
- Beach with friends
- Learned how to fish
- Listened to the Hot Dog song on repeat
- Watched Ms. Rachel, Blippi, and Finding Nemo

Strengths

- I love music!
- I'm curious and fearless
- I am strong-willed
- I love to be praised!

My most used signs:

Patty, More, All Done, Open, Eat/Drink, Thank You, Sorry, Friend, Play, Fish

Vision Statement

Our family firmly believes that an inclusive education will pave the way for John to be a valued member of society. We want opportunities for John to build genuine friendships with his peers and for him to be cherished and accepted within his class.

What Works For Me

- I am a visual learner (pictures and signing)
- Extra processing time
- Prompting, repetition, redirection
- Taking breaks for stimming
- Deep breathing with modeling
- counting to 10 when upset
- Placing no limitation on me

What Does Not Work For Me

- Assuming I do not understand
- Setting low standards
- Being rushed
- Forcing me to do something when upset
- yelling

 [Click here to view an example of a Student Introduction](#)

The 30-Day IEP

A good tip to keep in mind is asking for an IEP meeting during the first weeks of the school year so that it can be scheduled within the 30 days of asking (as mandated by the law). The 30-day IEP is for families who have concerns with the educational experience of their child. If everything is going well, there is no need to schedule an IEP meeting.

The 30-day IEP allows families to ask the IEP team, especially the general education teacher, how things are going. This is a great opportunity to talk about what is working and what changes need to be made to the IEP document at a sooner date rather than waiting for the annual IEP meeting.

Please note that staffing is still being finalized during the first 30 days of school. Depending on the circumstances, you may want to wait to hold the meeting during weeks 6-8, after school has started and once the team is fully in place.

Please note that “the 30-day IEP” is also a known term for students who move districts, and the new district has a legal obligation of holding an IEP meeting within 30 days.

Classroom Pace

Families often worry their child is not keeping up with the rest of the general education class. It is common for educators to express this concern too.

If the student is not making progress, the IEP team needs to make changes to the goals, try different methods of teaching, or add additional services and supports to help the student learn. One option is to ask the IEP team to contract with an independent inclusion specialist to observe the student in the classroom. The specialist may recommend additional supports and services that can help the student better access the curriculum.

Behavioral assessments can also be requested in order to identify any behaviors and triggers that the student is experiencing. The results of the behavioral assessment will allow the IEP team to plan for potential solutions.

➤ Please see the section on IEEs for more information.

Sometimes the issue is not with the student at all, but with the teacher lacking support. This can be resolved by adding or increasing service hours for additional professionals who can help modify class materials, give consultations, or provide specialized instruction.

The IEP team has the responsibility of taking several steps to help the student achieve an adequate education before deciding to move the student to a more restrictive setting. Remember, movement into a more restrictive setting happens only after other options have been attempted (e.g., increasing the percentage of time spent in a resource room) and an adequate education cannot be achieved satisfactorily.

Extended School Year (ESY)

ESY provides special education and related services beyond the regular school year to help students with disabilities maintain their progress and prevent skill loss. While ESY services can occur during any school break, they are most commonly offered over the summer.

In 2023, a court in Los Angeles ruled that districts need to offer inclusive placements during ESY to students with disabilities who are educated in general education settings during the regular school year.

If the school district does not have a general education summer program, it is required to look for other options that uphold the student's Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) rights. Here are a few examples of alternative ESY placements:

- Summer camps or programs offered by the student's district or other districts.
- A general education summer program at another district.
- A private summer program or camp offered at schools, with the district covering the associated costs.

This ruling helps ensure that students with disabilities continue to have meaningful educational experiences alongside their typically developing peers, even during extended school breaks.

- Disability Rights California wrote an article on the case, which you can find here: <https://www.disabilityrightsca.org/press-release/victory-for-special-education-students-in-federal-court>

Advocacy Strategies to Know



This section lists letters and documents written by state officials in support for inclusion. Families who would like to increase their advocacy skills can take some time to read through information. Many families, advocates, and attorneys have presented the following documents at IEP meetings and attached them to the IEP document itself. This gives evidence of the team's knowledge of the documents and that best practices for educating children with disabilities were discussed.

- **Dear Colleague Letters** by the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP): OSEP regularly issues letters to clarify legal requirements and best practices of special education to other state officials. Many of the letters emphasize the importance of LRE and recommend including children in early childhood programs.
 - To read the 2017 Dear Colleague Letters, please visit https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/policy_speced_guid_idea_memosdcltrs_preschool-lre-dcl-1-10-17.pdf

- **Policy Statement on Inclusion of Children with Disabilities in Early Childhood Programs** by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services in partnership with the U.S. Department of Education (2023): this policy statement builds upon the 2015 policy statement, echoing the urgency for inclusive early childhood programs.
 - To read the policy statement, please visit: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/policy-statement-on-inclusion-11-28-2023.pdf>

- **(IDEA Series) The Segregation of Students with Disabilities** by the National Council on Disability (2018): this report was submitted to the U.S. President and provides information on the legal and scientific basis for inclusive education.
 - To read the report, please visit: <https://www.ncd.gov/assets/uploads/docs/ncd-segregation-swd-508.pdf>

Options for Interpretation

Interpretation services are an important way to support non-English speaking parents to fully participate in IEP meetings. Here are two different type of interpretation styles that families can ask for, depending on what works best for them:

- Simultaneous interpretation allows families to hear the translation while someone is talking. This way, meetings run more smoothly, without needing to stop for translation. It can be done in-person using special equipment like headsets. They can also be done online through platforms like Zoom, which offer live audio translation or real-time captions.
- Consecutive interpretation means that the speaker pauses to give the interpreter time to translate. While this method may slow down the meeting, it can be helpful in smaller groups or when more detailed explanations are needed.

Both options make sure that language barriers do not get in the way of parents understanding and contributing to their child's IEP. Proper translation leads to better communication and collaboration between families and school teams. Some districts have certified interpreters, while others do not. For this reason, it is important for parents to ensure they receive accurate interpretation based on their own judgment; keeping in mind the dialects of their language, and the different words used between countries.

Additional Resources



Parent Support

The following organizations offer trainings on inclusive education either online or throughout Los Angeles County. Some programs are free, and others can be paid for using regional center funds.

1. IEP Trainings

- State Council on Developmental Disabilities (SCDD) – our agency offers trainings on a variety of topics related to special education, including IEP strategies, inclusion, and evaluations.

📌 Please sign up to our newsletter to receive information on the latest available trainings:

<https://lp.constantcontactpages.com/su/kk9UFbd/SCDDLA>

You can also check with your local SCDD regional office for additional organizations that provide this support in your area.

- Regional Centers – families who are looking for more information on special education can check the calendar of events on their regional center’s website to see what trainings are being offered that month.
- Family Resource Center (FRC) – each regional center works in partnerships with an FRC that provides support, information, and trainings to regional center consumers and families. These centers offer

special education and IEP workshops, IEP binders, school supplies, advocacy information, and more.

- Community Advisory Committees (CAC) – each district and SELPA (Special Education Local Planning Area) has a CAC made up of parents, educators, and students with disabilities. The committee meets to ensure high quality special education services and to provide support for parents. CACs offer parent trainings on topics related to special education, including IEPs.
2. Learning Rights Law Center created the TIGER Program to teach families how to advocate for their children and navigate the special education system. Classes are taught by education advocates, attorneys, and professionals.
 - The program is free for qualifying families. For more information, please visit: <https://www.learningrights.org/tiger>
 3. Club 21 hosts an annual Educational Partnership Program to guide educators and families in creating meaningful educational opportunities for students with Down syndrome. The program consists of parent and educator trainings, which are taught separately. Money from the registrations pay for substitute teachers so that educators can attend workshops without worrying for coverage.
 - This program is vendored through regional center. For more information, please visit: <https://clubtwentyone.org/programs/programs/educational-pathways/about.html>
 4. Undivided is an online platform that offers help and support to families of children with disabilities. There is a free resource hub filled with articles and training videos on many special education related topics. Families can pay for additional services, including a parent navigator, research, boost calls, and planning.

Annual Conferences

Conferences are a great way to learn about inclusive education in a short amount of time. They offer the newest strategies in inclusive education for professionals. The following are some of the most well-known conferences on inclusion throughout the U.S.:

1. Supporting Inclusive Practices: at the time of this writing, this is a virtual conference completely free of cost and funded by the California Department of Education. The conference gives an opportunity for different school districts to present their inclusion programs after receiving grants from the state, which may serve as a model you can bring back to your district. Additionally, many leaders in the field are invited to speak to share their innovative ideas on inclusive education.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://www.sipinclusion.org/what-we-do/events/>

2. Inclusion Collaborative: this annual state conference gives an opportunity to interact with other professionals and learn evidence-based practices on education. The target audience for this conference is state and local administrators, educators, specialists, and other professionals in the field.
 - For more information, please visit: <http://www.inclusioncollaborative.org/conference.aspx>

3. Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates (COPAA): a nonprofit organization offers many resources to families, including a listing of advocates and attorneys, as well as their annual education conference. The annual COPAA conference offers high quality training and an opportunity to network with leaders in the field. The conference is geared towards parents, attorneys, advocates, and other professionals.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://copaa.org>

4. Cal-TASH: a nonprofit organization that works to advance inclusive communities of people with significant support needs through advocacy, research, professional development. Their annual conference unites self-advocates, providers, and allies to share resources, best practices, and success stories with one another.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://www.caltash.org/>

5. Tools for the Journey: This is an annual inclusion conference by Club 21 in Pasadena, CA. The conference is open to all educators and families of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. This is a vendored conference through regional center, meaning families can ask their regional center to pay for their attendance.
 - For more information, please visit: <https://clubtwentyone.org/club-21-event/events.html>

Conclusion



When discussing inclusion, it's important to recognize that the decision to educate a student with disabilities in a general education classroom is made by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team, which includes parents and guardians. Instead of focusing solely on who can be included, it's more beneficial to ask how a student can increase their time with non-disabled peers.

It is important to remember that each and every student is entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), appropriate meaning that they get a service that is right for their unique needs. For this reason, a general education placement may not be appropriate for all students. As a matter of fact, some students may require placements that can meet the unique needs associated with their diagnosis or conditions. For example, private schools may be designed for children with autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, or cerebral palsy. Families often seek legal help to ensure school districts cover the costs of the schools or programs. Ultimately, each family has unique circumstances, and their choices represent what they believe is best for their child.

We want families to feel empowered in making decisions about their child’s education by understanding all the options available to them. This booklet is designed to support families by providing clear information about the research and laws that back inclusive education. Some families may not be familiar with inclusion or may not see it as an option for their child. We hope this resource helps them recognize what’s possible and encourages them to explore new opportunities. Our main message is simple: with the right support and services, every student—including those with more significant needs—can receive a high-quality education.

Notes

Has this booklet been helpful to you? We'd love to hear from you!

Please take a moment to complete this brief survey and share your success story about inclusive education. Your feedback is invaluable!



<https://bit.ly/4gd44qA>



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Parent Report 2024
Marisa Garcia***



Who is Marisa?

Marisa is our only child and a huge source of joy for our family and friends. Marisa's home activities include reading, dancing, and watching shows about nature. A sense of community is of high importance to our family, which is why we enroll Marisa in local dance classes, a recreational cheer program, and a teen social group at Club 21. Marisa has a busy schedule outside of school consisting of occupational therapy, speech therapy, and social skills classes. Marisa also works on a reading program at home with mom 2-3 times a week.

Marisa's Strengths:

- Extremely social
- Curious and fearless
- Strong willed and determined
- Loves to be praised!

What Works for Marisa:

- Prompting and cues (visuals)
- Repetition
- Redirection
- Deep breathing with modeling
- Counting to 10
- Taking breaks (stimming)
- PRAISE!
- Peer modeling
- Extra processing time
- Placing no limitations on her

What Does Not Work for Marisa:

- Assuming she does not understand
- Setting low standards
- Being rushed
- Forcing her to do something when she is upset
- Yelling

Parents' Vision

Our vision for Marisa is much like any parent's vision for their child, regardless of their abilities. We want Marisa to be happy, healthy, confident, and have many opportunities to reach her full potential. We want Marisa to continue learning alongside her typically developing peers and have access to the general education curriculum. We want Marisa to have the opportunity to earn a high school diploma, not just a certificate. We envision Marisa attending college and being employed somewhere she enjoys. Based on her expressed wishes, this will be a local camping store. We do not have limits placed on her potential and believe that with high expectations, proper support, and equal opportunities, Marisa can become an active and valued member of society. We want Marisa and her peers to see her as a whole person - not defined by Down syndrome. Down syndrome is absolutely a part of Marisa and our family, but it does not define her or us.

We feel Marisa's least restrictive environment is an inclusive general education setting with proper supports. Under IDEA, we feel that the nature or severity of Marisa's disability is such that an education in a general education class with the use of supplementary aids and services can be achieved satisfactorily. We want Marisa to be included in every aspect of schooling, which means being with peers during lunch time, recess, and all school events. We want her support services directly brought to her and delivered seamlessly within the general education class.

Parents' Fears and Concerns:

- We do not want the misconceptions or dated information about Down syndrome to affect her teacher's or support staff's expectations or perceptions of her.
- We do not want Marisa in a class with low expectations or limited access to the general education curriculum.
- We do not want her to ever be physically restrained or placed in a secluded setting because of behavior. We do not want her to ever witness another student having to be restrained or secluded because of behavior. Additionally, we do not want Marisa excluded for any of the reasons stated above.
- We are concerned about bullying and teaching Marisa how to handle these types of situations.
- In recognition of Marisa's rights under the law, we do not want the district's budget dictating the services she receives and/or her educational placement.

Parents' Measurement for PLOPs

- Currently reading up to 200 sight words with no supports.
- Can compare (greater than, less than, or equal to) 2 numbers up to 100.
- Can use illustrations to answer WH questions.
- Has sufficient core strength to do physical exercise for 30 minutes.

***Marisa Garcia is a fictitious person created with stock photos. This is an example for illustrative purposes and no personable identifiable information has been used or disclosed.



RONALDO RODRIGUEZ



My Summer Vacation

- Many trips to Disneyland
- Summer Soccer league
- Beach with friends
- Learned how to fish
- Listened to the Hot Dog song on repeat
- Watched Ms. Rachel, Blippi, and Finding Nemo

Vision Statement

Our family firmly believes that an inclusive education will pave the way for Ronaldo to be a valued member of society. We want opportunities for Ronaldo to build genuine friendships with his peers and for him to be cherished and accepted within his class.

Strengths

- I love music!
- I'm curious and fearless
- I am strong-willed
- I love to be praised!

What Works For Me

- I am a visual learner (pictures and signing)
- Extra processing time
- Prompting, repetition, redirection
- Taking breaks for stimming
- Deep breathing with modeling
- counting to 10 when upset
- Placing no limitation on me

What Does Not Work For Me

- Assuming I do not understand
- Setting low standards
- Being rushed
- Forcing me to do something when upset
- yelling

My most used signs:

Potty, More, All Done, Open, Eat/Drink, Thank You, Sorry, Friend, Play, Fish