

Being in  
School..  
Like  
Everyone  
Else



A BOOKLET ABOUT FULL INCLUSION

# Being In School...Like Everyone Else

Going to school in your neighborhood with children your own age is an essential part of growing up. It's not only where you learn to read and write, it's also where you learn to make friends and get along with people. You learn how to be part of a group, your community and society.

Developing academic and social skills is every bit as important for the child with special needs as it is for children without disabilities. That's why, more and more, we are encouraging inclusion of the child with special needs into the regular neighborhood school classroom. It takes commitment, work and planning on the part of parents, teachers and administrators. But we're finding that the results – for everyone concerned – are more than worth the extra effort.

Full inclusion is not simply another program, it's a value. And it's also an option that you may choose for your child.

If you think that inclusion – in other words being an included member of the community, starting with the classroom – is something you might want for your child, this booklet is designed to give you information about what it is, how it works, and its potential benefits, as well as some of the challenges.

Our aim is to help you decide if you want to pursue full inclusion for your child, and if you do, how to go about it. This guide is based on the real-life experiences of parents like you who want the best possible school experience for all their children.



*Amy...*

“I can hardly wait for fall when I go to seventh grade and start my new life.”

*Amy Barraza*

“I knew inclusion was a success when she attended her first dance, danced all evening and went out afterwards to eat with a group of friends.”

*Marilyn Barraza,  
Amy's Mom*

## WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion means that individuals with special needs of all ages, have the opportunity to participate equally in typical community activities together with people without disabilities. The philosophy of inclusion assumes that each person has the same basic rights as all other members of the community.

Inclusion also means giving students in special education the opportunity to go to school with children their own age in regular classrooms in



their neighborhood school. It is one option to meet the goals and objectives outlined in the Individual Education Plan (IEP). It also means providing these students and their classroom teachers the supports necessary to be successful.

## WHAT IS “FULL INCLUSION?”

The term Full Inclusion is used in the school setting when children with special needs receive all of their educational services and supports in a regular classroom alongside their peers without special needs.

## IS THERE A LEGAL BASIS FOR INCLUSION IN EDUCATION?

Both Federal law and California state law require that children with disabilities be provided a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, and “to the maximum extent appropriate” with children who

are not disabled. In several court cases (for example *Holland v Board of Education Sacramento City Unified School District*), judges have interpreted the law to include the regular classroom with support services as the “starting point” for children with disabilities.

## AS A PARENT, DO I HAVE A CHOICE?

Yes. Parents are essential collaborators in the inclusion process. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) gives parents the opportunity to decide, together with other members of the IEP team, the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) for meeting their child’s education needs. Your choices may include:

- Full Inclusion – with no Special Day Class
- Partial inclusion – Special Day Class with some mainstreaming



*Erica...*

“**O**ne of the most impacting results of full inclusion is not only the inclusion of our daughter, but the inclusion of our family into the neighborhood and the new opportunities for friendships of families with non-disabled children. She is invited to many birthday parties and, finally, has friends to invite to her own.”

“Full inclusion is not always wonderful at the beginning. There are many details to be worked out. Establishing and maintaining good communication between all parties involved, including parents, is key to successful problem-solving and finally success.”

*Eileen Haden,  
Erica's Mom*

- Integrated campus with Special Day Class
- Segregated school campus
- Other options and services as identified for your child

It is up to you to decide whether or not full or partial inclusion is the option you prefer for your child. This booklet is intended to help you learn about these options so that you can make an informed decision.

### **DOES THIS MEAN THAT THERE IS NO LONGER SPECIAL EDUCATION?**

No. Special education is a service, not a place. There will always be a support system to meet the needs of your child. Individual Education Plans (IEPs) will still be written and individual goals will still be developed.

### **WHY WOULD I CHOOSE INCLUSION FOR MY CHILD?**

Our school years are not just for the purpose of academic learning; we also learn the social and cultural behaviors that teach us how to be a regular part of our communities. In fact, much of what we learn in school is social and life skills. Learning from others is a powerful tool and can be applied to all aspects of life.

The inclusive classroom is a natural place to foster friendships and acceptance of children with disabilities as they share the school experience with their peers. Not only is it important for children with special needs to interact with the “typical” population – the reverse is also true. Interaction leads to understanding, and understanding leads to acceptance. We all benefit.

### **CAN ALL CHILDREN BE INCLUDED?**

Yes. The fundamental goal of inclusion is that each child with a developmental disability have the opportunity to be educated with his/her non-disabled peers. But it’s important to remember that each child, family, teacher and school is unique. There is no one ideal setting or one right way to accomplish inclusion. There are no skills required or behaviors necessary to be in the inclusive classroom – just a willingness to try.

Every class has students who excel and students who need extra help. Full inclusion widens that spectrum to include students with special needs, but the concept is still the same. The success of inclusion doesn’t depend on the characteristics of the student, but rather on the vision, commitment and creativity of families, educators and communities.



*Robin...*

“I realized a long time ago that my greatest sin as a parent would be to give up hope, settling for less for my son, and not providing a challenging environment that can bring the best out of him.”

“I want my son, Robin, to live among us. It’s important, therefore, to place him in the ordinary setting where he can learn the rules and values of our society and develop necessary social skills by observing, imitating and interacting with a variety of children of his age.”

*U-Sang Kim,  
Robin’s Dad*

## WHAT ABOUT PEER ACCEPTANCE, TEACHERS AND THE ATTITUDE OF OTHER PARENTS?

Some parents are uncomfortable placing their child in an environment that is not specially structured for children with special needs, and where students and teachers are probably not used to working with children with special needs. Some parents and teachers worry that the child with special needs might not fit in socially, or that other children simply won't know how to interact with their child.

But we've found that peers have little trouble accepting and working with students in special education, especially if the children are included from early childhood. There are also techniques that foster interaction and encourage friendships among classmates which can be implemented at any age. *Circle of Friends* is one example of such a program. Disability



awareness programs for all ages help to make students more sensitive not only to children with special needs, but to all students.

Some teachers have been hesitant about inclusion because they are unsure of how to deal with the specific challenges of educating children with special needs, and fear their workloads may increase. Others worry that the teacher won't be able to give the proper attention to both the child with special needs and the other stu-

dents. Training materials are available for teachers – in the form of books, videos or curriculum – to guide them in adapting their classroom approach to include children with special needs. Some of these materials are already available at your Family Resource Center, school district resource library and the like. If proper planning and supports are built in, most teachers are enthusiastic about inclusion once they learn how it works – and how successful it can be for all students.

The same holds true for parents. Once informed of the facts of inclusion-based strategies and the benefits to all students, they usually end up embracing the idea. For parents, teachers and students, information and preparation are the first steps to acceptance.



*Tyler...*

“T

here are no ‘special’ malls or restaurants. When it comes to education, how can we expect our children to learn how to interact with their peers if all they know is a ‘special,’ separate classroom?”

*Pam & Scott Hunt,  
Tyler’s Parents*

## HOW DOES THE NON-DISABLED STUDENT BENEFIT BY BEING IN AN INCLUSIVE CLASSROOM?

As non-disabled students interact with the child with special needs, they not only develop friendships, but they also begin to understand and accept differences in all people. In addition, innovative approaches to teaching and new understandings of how we all learn come together in the inclusive school to benefit everyone. All students learn how to help each other in an environment that values diversity.

## WHAT KINDS OF SUPPORT ARE AVAILABLE FOR MY CHILD AND THE CLASSROOM TEACHER?

The range of supports may include training, adapted curriculum, positive behavior intervention and use of technologies. Any service that is provided in a special day class can be provided in the general education classroom.

Classmates also fill an important role as a support to the included student. Peer interaction and tutoring can be most effective teaching tools, as well as self-esteem builders for both the student with – and the student without – special needs.

The creative, innovative approaches used to implement full inclusion make it much more likely that all children, not simply students with special needs, will get the extra help they need in the classroom.

## WHAT IS “ADAPTED” CURRICULUM?

Adapted curriculum focuses on teaching in a way that will include the student with special needs to the fullest extent possible. In essence, the same subject is being taught but it is modified to ensure the child’s participation in the instruction. Curriculum adaptations may include one-on-one

instruction, cooperative learning groups, adaptive materials or special equipment (for example, books on tape or a computer keyboard may substitute for reading and written language).

The included students may be given more time to complete a task or the task itself may be shortened or modified. You and your IEP team will discuss ways of adapting to use the same basic curriculum as the rest of your child’s class.

The goal of inclusion is that the student is considered a member of – not a visitor in – the class.





*Ryan...*

“**R**yan is thriving in a full inclusion environment at a regular pre-school with speech and physical therapies continuing...My child learns best from other children.”

“We need to own all children in the sense that it is our responsibility to embrace and include them in the education process and in the community at large.”

“We know if he’s segregated...he’ll be less prepared to handle the difficult road that he must travel if he isn’t fully included in the pre-school environment now.”

*Bill Wilson,  
Ryan’s Dad*



## WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF INCLUSION?

Research indicates that many positive things happen in the inclusive school setting, for example:

- All students experience increased motivation and learning.
- Students learn to appreciate each other's unique strengths and abilities.
- Students are encouraged to help each other.

- Students with disabilities are able to foster friendships in a natural way and in a natural environment.
- Non-disabled students get a chance to develop positive attitudes toward people with differences.
- The sense of belonging helps build self-esteem and a feeling of achievement.
- Students often learn desirable social behaviors best from each other, in a typical environment.

In short, full inclusion makes sense.

## I'M INTERESTED IN INCLUSION FOR MY CHILD. WHAT IS THE FIRST STEP?

The first step is to talk to your school district Director of Special Education and let the district know that you want to consider placing your child in a general education classroom. Don't wait until the IEP meeting; the sooner

you let your school district know that you are interested, the sooner preparation can begin. If possible, allow at least six months planning time.

During this planning time, it's a good idea to contact your regional center counselor to assist you in gathering information, setting strategies, and enlisting his or her help on the IEP team. You and your IEP team will determine what supplemental aid and services your child will need to succeed in the general education classroom. As a member of that team, your input, goals and priorities are vital. Prepare by writing down what's important to you and your child, and what your vision for your child's future is – both short-term and long-term. And remember, it's okay to bring your counselor, or a friend who is familiar with inclusion, to the IEP meeting for support.



A well-prepared IEP team is key to the success of full inclusion for your child. It's very important that your team work well together. Don't be afraid to ask about terms you don't understand. Success involves advance planning and a commitment to building bridges between people. Enthusiasm helps, too.

Whatever educational environment you choose for your child, whether it be full or partial inclusion, or special day class, team planning is at the core of every good special education program.



## WHAT CAN I DO TO ENCOURAGE INCLUSIVE PROGRAMS IN MY CHILD'S SCHOOL?

First, become informed yourself. Learn all you can. Visit inclusive programs. Perhaps you may want to volunteer to work on teams that plan inclusive programs. Find other parents with similar values and meet with them. Make your wishes known to the decision-makers in your community.

Then, visit the school. Let the staff know you support your child's integration into the school. Get involved – volunteers are always welcome. Get to know other families in your neighborhood who may have children in the same school. Successful inclusion takes a team approach, and the commitment of everyone involved: parents, teachers, administrators, students. All must focus on what the child can do.

And don't forget, successful inclusion begins at home. Work with your child to increase his/her independence, self-help and social skills. Participate in outside activities such as scouts, recreation classes, sports or church. Work with your child's current teacher to help prepare your child for the new school.

Full inclusion is a positive, attainable option for your child. Working as partners with your IEP team, school and teacher, you can do it.

*Harbor Regional Center thanks the members of the H.R.C. Full Inclusion Support Group, Robert Farran-Director of Southwest Special Education Local Planning Area, Mariano Sanz-School Counselor, Long Beach Unified School District, Parent, and Board Member, and all of the children on these pages for their valuable contributions and advice in the development of this booklet.*



HARBOR DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES FOUNDATION, INC.

21231 Hawthorne Boulevard, Torrance, California 90503

(310) 540-1711 (888) 540-1711

<http://www.hddf.com>