Models of Inclusion

What is inclusion?

Inclusion is an educational practice in which children with disabilities are educated in classrooms with children without disabilities. The purpose of inclusion is to make sure that students with special needs are integrated in the general education setting for as much of the day as possible, with the supports they need to be successful. Inclusion strategies can include co-teaching, consultative services, paraprofessional support, modifications to curriculum or testing, accommodations for specific disabilities, and other services an individual student needs in order to access the district curriculum in a general education classroom.

Inclusion is sound educational policy. It is also mandated by New Jersey Code which requires, in part, that “Students with disabilities shall be educated in the least restrictive environment;” and “To the maximum extent appropriate, a student with a disability is educated with children who are not disabled.” (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-4.2)

What is an IEP?

“IEP” is short for “Individualized Education Program.” Each student classified as requiring special education services is guaranteed an IEP. The IEP identifies the specific supports that student needs to be able to access the curriculum. These supports vary considerably, depending on the needs of each individual student.

As defined in New Jersey Code: “‘Individualized education program’ (IEP) means a written plan which sets forth present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, measurable annual goals and short-term objectives or benchmarks and describes an integrated, sequential program of individually designed instructional activities and related services necessary to achieve the stated goals and objectives. This plan shall establish the rationale for the student’s educational placement, serve as the basis for program implementation and comply with the mandates set forth in this chapter.” (N.J.A.C. 6A:14-1.3)

What is “co-teaching?”

Co-teaching is one possible strategy to support students with disabilities in a general education setting. With co-teaching, two teachers are in the classroom – a general education teacher who is an expert in the curriculum, and a special education teacher who is an expert in making modifications and accommodations to help students access the curriculum. Co-teaching can be provided on a subject by subject basis, or for most of the school day. Co-teaching is not the only, or even the most common, strategy for supporting students with disabilities. Co-teaching has been very successful for some children, but is not always the best choice for every student.
What is “in class consultation?”

In class consultation is another possible strategy to support students with disabilities in a general education setting. In class consultation provides direct services to students during the times when they need support in developing or strengthening the skills required to be successful. In addition, in class consultation supports the general education teacher, by providing tools, strategies and materials for use with special needs students in their classes. This can be a very robust and effective approach for many students as it provides support to the main classroom teacher, and support to each student’s specific areas of challenges, while allowing for growth towards independence.

Is SOMSD reducing inclusion classes?

SOMSD is fully committed to the philosophy of inclusion and will continue to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, as defined in each child’s IEP and determined by their specific needs. For some students, the least restrictive environment is a general education setting with some modifications and accommodations to test taking, etc. Other students need the support of a paraprofessional to help them focus and stay on task. Some students need a second teacher with specialized training, for some or all of their classes, in order for them to access the curriculum effectively. Other students require an alternative placement, if they cannot be educated appropriately in a general education classroom even with support. SOMSD currently uses all of these techniques, depending on each student’s individual needs. SOMSD is committed to continuing to provide an inclusive educational setting to as many students as appropriate, and to providing excellent support to all students.

Is anything changing in the special education services provided to students with disabilities?

We are moving away from our approach of blanketing most students with mild to moderate disabilities with identical services (such as in-class support for all subjects). We are moving toward a more strategic and focused approach to inclusion by providing students with services which are specifically targeted to the challenges caused by their individual disabilities. We will continue to provide full-day co-teaching model of inclusion for students who require that level of support in order to be successful. We also will be expanding the use of the in class consultation model.

Is SOMSD reducing the number of classes using co-teaching strategies?

The number of classes which will use the co-teaching strategy for 2014-2015 is still being determined, as IEP teams work together to assess the needs of each individual student, and as new referrals are being processed. This is true every year as the number of each type of class in each grade fluctuates according to the number of students overall, the number of students with IEPs, and the needs of those specific students. One year there might be enough students whose special needs require co-teaching strategies to warrant 2 classrooms in 4th grade at a particular school, the next year’s cohort might require 1, or 3, or remain unchanged. These fluctuations happen every year.
How will general education teachers for inclusion classes be supported?

There are already general education teachers in every school who are successfully teaching inclusion classes without a special education co-teacher. Students’ needs vary considerably, so a single-teacher class might include students with disabilities who only need related services (such as Speech, Counseling or Occupational Therapy), students who require extra time on tests or other modifications, and/or students who need reading intervention. The supports provided are targeted to the needs of the individual students in each class. Depending on those needs, some classrooms will have a paraprofessional assigned to one or more students, some will have a special education teacher provide consultative services, others will have assistive technology or another support integrated into the program.

How will the effectiveness of the new approach be reported for special education students? If the new approach is not meeting a student’s needs, what will be done to adjust their services?

Individual students’ progress will be reported in their progress reports, IEP meetings, parent/teacher conferences and the present levels section of IEPs, as always. If an individual student is not making progress towards goals, or their current program is having a negative impact, then the IEP team will determine what changes need to be made to the student’s program and implement those changes.

Are you making adjustments to save money?

The primary reason for diversifying our approaches to inclusion is to better serve the needs of our students with disabilities. A secondary reason is to ensure that our programs are sustainable. By being more targeted in addressing the individual disabilities of our students and providing more support for our general education teachers, we can use our special education teachers more efficiently and effectively, thus adjusting the allocation of special education funding.

What can I do if I have questions?

The Department of Special Services encourages parents/guardians to contact their case manager with questions specific to their own child. Parents/guardians are also welcome to contact Dr. Patricia Barker, Director of Special Services, at 973-762-5600 ext. 1841 or pbarker@somsd.k12.nj.us.