

# Inclusive Classrooms

## Do You Believe, or Are You Checking the Box?

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### PRINCIPAL EVALUATION CRITERIA

*Creating a Culture, Improving Instruction,  
Planning with Data, Engaging Families and  
Communities, Closing the Gap*



Our state has increased its focus on inclusive teaching practices and ensuring students have a rich educational experience in all of our classrooms. It is critical that we, as school leaders, provide the necessary support to make inclusive education beneficial for all students and staff. To do that we need to have a clear “why” established within and through our systems, we need to be intentional in preparation and planning, and we need to keep the students’ needs at the forefront.

You do not have to look hard or far to find primary source literature for the support of inclusive classrooms.

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The research is clear that the least restrictive environment (LRE) best serves students in their education. Providing classrooms that accept diversity and differences helps all learners grow. In addition, placing our most highly qualified teachers, and specialized content, in front of all students is good practice. Lastly, promoting positive peer relationships between all students facilitates social and emotional development.

### INCLUSION IN THE HIGH SCHOOL

Lakeside High is a comprehensive high school of approximately 450 students with 15% special education. We engaged in professional growth on trauma-informed teaching practices, special education modifications and accommodations, and have an MTSS model for student intervention. In our school, 75% of students are in LRE level 1, 15% LRE level 2, and 10% LRE level 3.

A whole-school inclusion model requires an intentional investment in teacher professional growth. Either before or alongside your walk toward inclusion, we would strongly recommend work on trauma-informed teaching practices and continued work with your teams on successful strategies through your MTSS intervention model. Investing focused time helping staff understand high leverage strategies in modifications and accommodations and the differences between them.

An accommodation changes how a student learns, and a modification changes what is taught or what they are expected to understand. This is where you can incorporate both teacher leaders and special education teachers in showing quality examples of what personalized education can look like with only small changes in practice. When partnership is done

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well between special education staff and general education teachers, a teacher’s workload does not change. This work very easily mirrors most all schools’ professional growth plans and school improvement processes. It is important this work be intentional and well planned, and all teachers engage in the process. Inclusive classrooms require supports for students and staff; take care of your adults, as well.

### A TEAM APPROACH

Bring everyone to the table as you increase your classroom inclusion. It starts with involving all stakeholders in your school leadership structure. For example, at Lakeside, we would

have some professional growth time with our Teacher Leadership team to build the “why,” which would lead to development of a professional growth plan for all staff, both certified and classified. We would then work with the special education team on directed learning and student needs. Next, we would work side-by-side with counseling on master schedule development to facilitate classroom inclusion. Finally, and most importantly, we would engage in meaningful conversation with families around student IEPs and how we can partner in providing a quality inclusive education for their students.

Remember why we are promoting inclusive education — it is about individual student success. Do not sacrifice what is best for a student for a higher percentage of LRE level 1 (full inclusion). Each student’s plan should be created for their success. If LRE level 2 is a better option for their growth, then that is what it needs to be in that moment. Inclusion is the goal and is our goal for all of our students, but be fluid and evaluative of your program. Evaluate your program on a student-by-student basis, not a percentage. ■

## STEPS TO QUALITY CLASSROOM INCLUSION

- 1. Establish a clear “why” with your staff? for your staff? Provide professional learning time on the importance of the work.**
- 2. Be intentional with your professional growth opportunities.**
  - a. Use teacher leaders and special education leaders together.**
  - b. Make sure it’s well planned and teachers have continued supports.**
  - c. Partner your learning with trauma education and your MTSS model.**
- 3. Involve your stakeholders. Don’t forget the families!**
- 4. Keep the focus on the individual students, not overall numbers.**