

Start the Year Off Right



1. Build Alliances



The old saying, “There is strength in numbers,” is still true today. If challenges arise during the school year, it is helpful to know you have others you can turn to. Now is the time to nurture alliances with teachers, support staff, parents, students and others who impact you and your child. Call or send a thank you note to those who provided “bright spots” during the previous year. Mention how you appreciated their involvement and how you look forward to their future support. Contact others you would like to include among your supporters in the coming year and let them know the important impact they can have in your lives. Be sure to offer your support to others in return.

2. Review Your Child’s IEP



Many times, Individual Educational Plans (IEPs) are written during the previous school year so your child’s new teacher may not know which learning goals are priorities for the coming year. Before school starts, read through the IEP to refresh your own memory. Talk over the learning goals with your child, especially those old enough to advocate for themselves. Then make sure each classroom teacher working with your child has a copy and understands the IEP’s intent. An IEP’s strength lies in the parents’ and teachers’ understanding of it and active participation in implementing it.

3. Create a “What Works” Portfolio



All parents should consider creating a “What Works” portfolio. It can be used to smooth your child’s transition each new school year. The portfolio should contain descriptions of what works well for your child. Include a profile describing your child’s strengths, interests, favorite activities and learning priorities for the year. Include tips about physical assistance or communication with your child if these are needs. Describe behavioral supports that work or ways to structure situations to avoid behavior challenges. Make a list of tasks, roles, and responsibilities for a teacher’s assistant, if applicable. Describe classroom arrangements that help support your child e.g., seating and positioning needs, noise-level tolerance, or climate comfort levels. Include samples of your child’s work and describe any accommodations or modifications that were made to the original assignment. Share the names of students who are friends with your child and give tips on facilitating connections with other students. Finally, if possible, include a photo or brief video showing your child participating with other students and being supported successfully in the classroom.

4. Request a Meeting



Call your child's teacher and request a meeting to share insights and information about your child. This is your chance to begin developing a positive relationship with your child's teacher and to establish yourself as an active team member in your child's education. This is a great time to review your child's IEP and "What Works" portfolio. Most teachers will appreciate your involvement and the knowledge you can share about how your child learns best. End the meeting with plans for on-going communication with the teacher. Will you make contact daily, weekly, or only as needed? Will you communicate using notes, telephone, email, or in person? Establishing this routine reinforces your involvement.

5. Visit the Classroom(s)



It is a good idea to visit the classroom(s) that your child will be participating in. You will want to be familiar with the location of each classroom or learning space, the walkways connecting the classes, the layout or set-up for desks or learning stations, the materials available, and other learning aids such as technology or visuals in each area. You may want your child to visit the area(s) before starting school, so that you can have conversations with them about commonly familiar settings. You may also need to plan with support providers to address environmental needs resulting from your child's disability, such as accessibility supports, visual supports or high- and low-technology needs. Share your observations from classroom visits with your child's teacher so that they are aware of your thoughts.

6. Stay Involved



After laying the groundwork, you can help ensure your child's success by being involved at school throughout the year. Consider joining the Parent-Teacher Organization or School Advisory Committee, volunteering in the classroom, helping in the lunchroom or library, or assisting with special events. The more active you are, the more impact you can have on your child's school, the people who work there, and the education your child is receiving.

7. Continue Your Own Education



Because you are your child's most important ally, it is essential that you develop the skills to help your child create a rich and meaningful life. Maybe you would like to learn more about how you can support your child's developmental and educational needs, how to write and implement a good IEP, or how to advocate for your child.

Scan the QR code to view a variety of resources to assist parents to increase their knowledge and skills including our Family Folios and other products and tip sheets.

To find out how to contact your FIN Facilitator call 1-888-232-0421 or visit the FIN website at www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com.

