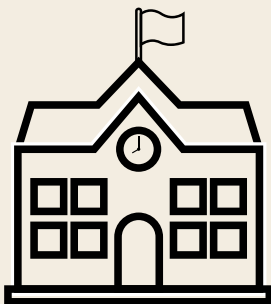


What Are Best Practices at School for Including Students with Disabilities?

What Data is Available?

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 requires that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) team for a student with a disability consider the percentage of time that students with disabilities spend with their peers without disabilities. The team determines what the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) is for each student. The LRE allows them to be with their peers for instruction and learning, while receiving specially designed instruction to meet their needs.

The Florida Department of Education collects State and District LRE data and other information about students with disabilities. An annual report on this data is available in the State and Local Education Agency Annual Performance Report, found at <http://www.fldoe.org/academics/exceptional-student-edu/data/>. School LRE data is available from your school district or your child's school. As a rule of thumb, the higher the LRE percentage in the regular class setting, the more likely that a school has practices in place to provide effective in-class supports. It is always a good idea to ask questions and examine the data!



How Does Your Child's School Assess Best Practices?

Since 2013, Florida Statutes have required each school and district to complete the BPIE self-assessment process at least once every three years (section 1003.57, Florida Statutes). The school BPIE includes 34 indicators of the best practices for including students with disabilities based on peer-reviewed research, current literature, and best practices across Florida and internationally. School teams, made up of various stakeholders (including families), rate themselves on the level of implementation on these indicators, and then select priorities for targeted activities, which should guide the planning for short and long-term improvement efforts.

School leaders know that there are a multitude of variables that affect student outcomes. They also know that change takes time. The BPIE process is designed to result in the development of goals that improve student outcomes over the long term. Your school's administrator can share with you the results and priorities of the most recent school BPIE, as well as specific activities that the school has planned for focused improvement over time.

Spending time in your child's school, talking to the people who work there, and observing how students interact are good ways to identify the best practices.

For more information on the school and district BPIE, please visit the [FIN website](#).

A School Visit - Family Perspective

The parents of Amanda Griffin are nervous. The school year is almost over and Amanda will be leaving Central Middle School. Amanda is an active young lady with a great sense of humor and many friends. She has a learning disability and has struggled academically.

The move to high school has raised many questions for the Griffins: Will Amanda be successful in her regular education classes or will she need additional special education classes? Can she get the help she needs to pass the state assessment and her college entrance exams? Will she be able to keep the social confidence she has? The Griffins know that Amanda's future depends on what happens in high school.

The Griffins decide to bring Amanda to visit West High School, where she will go in the fall. When they call to make an appointment with the principal, the secretary suggests allowing enough time for touring the campus.

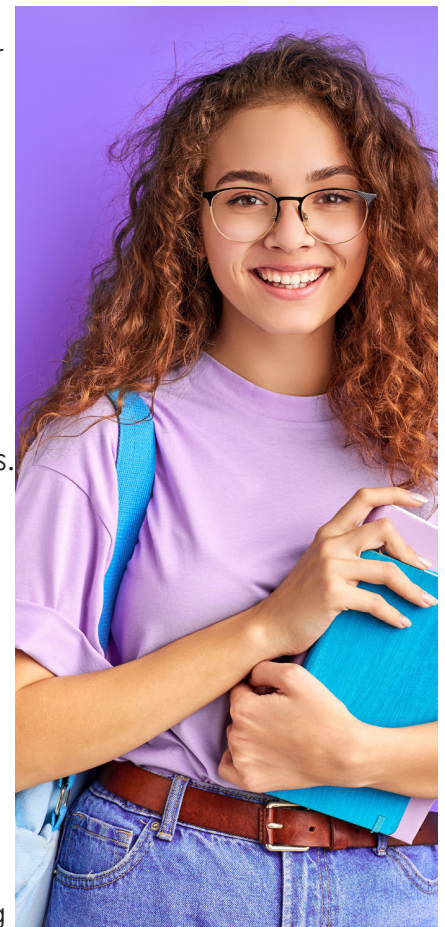
After their tour, the Griffins and Amanda talk in the car about their impressions of the school. The principal, Mrs. Sierra, did several things they liked. She:

- Spoke of her commitment to making sure each student has the same opportunities for learning in the general education high school classes.
- Asked Amanda about the things that helped her be successful at Central Middle School.
- Invited the Griffins to schedule another meeting with the special education teacher to review Amanda's IEP goals and discuss ways to support her in her transition to high school.
- Committed to supporting the special and general education teachers as they worked together to teach Amanda and the other students in her classes.
- Discussed how they could all work in partnership to meet new challenges.
- Shared her view of students with disabilities as general education students first.

The Griffins and Amanda also reviewed some of the things they observed during their tour of the school:

- Many classrooms had two teachers working together in a variety of ways.
- All students were learning together and working on projects in small groups.
- All students were eating together and socializing during lunch activities.
- There were many posters around the campus encouraging students to respect each other and value differences.
- All students were invited to be involved in clubs.
- A Peers as Partners in Learning program was actively providing support for students with disabilities in general education classrooms.

The Griffins have scheduled a meeting with the exceptional education teacher and are all feeling good about the year ahead. Amanda is thinking she might even try out for the junior varsity softball team.



Best Practices in Action

So, how do schools work to ensure that they are implementing best practices for including students with disabilities? Look and listen for the following signs:

School Environment

- Do all students attend their neighborhood school?
- Is person-first language used school-wide?
- Do all students arrive and leave at the same times?
- Are most students with disabilities included in the general education setting 80% or more of the day?
- Are students with disabilities considered as general education students first?
- Is there a campus-wide behavioral support system in place at the school?
- Does the school plan for and conduct ongoing disability awareness activities and events?

Instruction and In-Class Supports

- Do all students have access to a variety of resources that allow them to access the curriculum?
- Do all teachers use a variety of strategies (small groups, differentiation, collaborative teaching, peer supports) to teach all students?
- Are the Florida Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking Standards the basis for instruction for all students?
- Are a variety of accessible instructional approaches used?
- Are paraprofessionals an important part of the school supports?
- Are services, including academic supports and therapies for students with disabilities, provided in varied locations?
- Do teachers understand the difference between accommodations and modifications?

Leadership and Collaboration

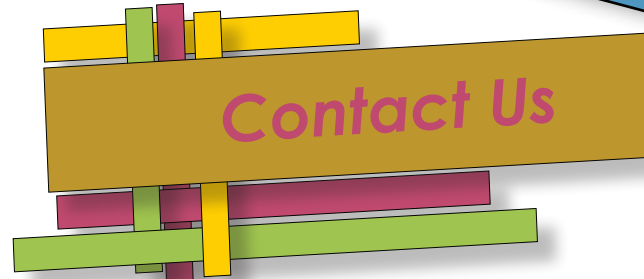
- Are decisions about instructional settings determined based on individual student needs rather than exceptionalities or available services?
- Does the school have a person who is an expert on the best practices for including students with disabilities?
- Does the school schedule students with disabilities based on needed supports?
 - Are teachers for special education part of grade/department teams?
 - Does the school use a problem-solving process to look at student progress?
- Are families part of decision making?
- Are families welcomed and valued partners at the school?
- Are families provided with resources for learning and supporting their child at home?
- Do school staff share an expectation for the high achievement of all students?
- Is there a vision of shared responsibility for the success of all students at the school?

Relationships

- Does the school have a focus on positive social relationships for all students?
- Do students solve problems and learn together?
- Are all students recognized for rewards and honors?
- Do all students receive the support they need to be successful?
- Are students with disabilities considered full members of the school community?
- Do all students enjoy opportunities to follow their interests and make plans for their future?
- Do all students have ways to socialize at lunch, recess, and between classes?



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Find your FIN facilitator on the [FIN website](#)

or call toll-free 1-888-232-0421

Sharing Best Practices

Scenario #1 - My child's school doesn't have a service delivery model that provides in-class supports for students with disabilities.

Consider this: Share your child's past success using in-class supports. Discuss ways that you can work closely with special and general education teachers to ensure that there are opportunities for providing services for your child in a variety of settings.

Scenario #2 - My child has a hard time learning skills to be ready for the general education classroom.

Consider this: Your child learns skills most effectively in the setting where they will use them, and will benefit from having good role models. With appropriate support, your child can achieve important goals in the general education classroom with their peers. Remember, a student does not have to earn their way to be educated in a general education class, and the individual education plan team can plan for specialized supports in the least restrictive environment.

Scenario #3 - I would like to work with my child at home, to support learning, participation and independence, but I need more information.

Consider this: Ask your child's school or the school district about workshops and research-based or evidence-based materials on educational and behavioral supports, communication, self-advocacy, or other topics of interest.