

K-12 Inclusive Practices Guide

*Virginia Department of Education
Department of Special Education and Student Services,
Office of Special Education Instruction*



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Preface

As educators, finding methods to meet the academic needs of students with disabilities can be challenging, particularly in school divisions and regions with limited resources. Inclusive education has proven effective in promoting positive student outcomes through strategies that focus on fully engaging all students regardless of their disabilities or other learning challenges. Inclusive education, as required in federal and state regulations, encompasses practices that concentrate on creating meaningful access to instruction for all students across academic, social, and physical environments.

At the heart of this guide is the premise that all children can and deserve the right to learn and reach their highest academic potential. According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004), extensive research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective with maintaining high expectations for students while ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom as appropriate. For many children with disabilities, this means receiving individualized educational and behavioral supports to address students' specific learning differences and needs.

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) and its Department of Special Education and Student Services is committed to ensuring that the public education system is positioned to advance equitable academic outcomes by providing access to learning environments that meet the needs of its diverse student population. This guide aligns with those efforts as it illustrates what inclusive education looks like in practice and offers support to school divisions and parents seeking to improve outcomes for students with disabilities. It also serves as a reference to professional development and technical assistance from the VDOE.



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Introduction

Purpose

To enhance inclusive practices for students with disabilities in Virginia public schools and to assist in meeting the goals of Virginia's [Statewide Inclusion Action Plan](#), the *K-12 Inclusive Practices Guide* was developed. It is an informational resource to support school divisions and parents looking to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by meeting their needs to the maximum extent possible in general education settings. Each section of the guide provides user-friendly information and resources based on guiding principles related to inclusive practices in the K-12 school setting. In addition, there is a supplement to this guide that addresses inclusive practices in early childhood preschool programs called Virginia Early Childhood Inclusion [Guidance Document](#). Both guides offer an overview of best practices for educating children and youth with disabilities in more inclusive educational settings. These guides should be used in conjunction with the [Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia](#), as well as other VDOE's [special education guidance documents and resources](#).

Background

The Virginia Department of Education (VDOE), [The State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report](#) includes baseline data, targets, and improvement activities for special education indicators developed by the United States Department of Education as required by the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA). [The State Performance Plan/Annual Performance Report](#) and [Reports to the Public by Division](#) provide state and division level information on the performance of students with disabilities on all federal indicators, including achievement, graduation, and Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and are available to the public for review. At the time of the publication, Virginia has not shown expected progress in meeting the established LRE Indicators 5 and 6 targets (school-age and preschool placement in the regular class) for students with disabilities.

School divisions are required to report the percentage of "time spent in regular education" for students with disabilities. This figure represents

the total time at school from initial arrival to end of the day dismissal and includes all instructional time plus lunch, recess, study periods, as well as instruction in community-based educational and work settings outside of school. Review of national LRE data reflected varying levels of participation in the regular classroom by students with varying disabilities. The U. S. Department of Education [39th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 2017](#) reported that 62.7 percent of students, ages 6 through 21, served under IDEA, Part B, were spending 80 percent or more of the day in regular education. About 14 percent were spending less than 40 percent in regular education. However, almost one-half of students with intellectual disabilities (49.7%) and with multiple disabilities (46.2%), and one-third of students with autism (33.2%), were spending less than 40 percent of the school day in regular education (USDOE, 2017).

The percentages for time spent in regular education for students with disabilities in Virginia are comparable to federal trends. According to the annual report to Congress, in 2016-2017, 64.23 percent of Virginia's students with disabilities, ages 6 through 21, served under IDEA, Part B, were spending 80 percent or more of the day in regular education. About 11.42 percent were spending less than 40 percent in regular education. The report also noted that in Virginia, over one-half of students with intellectual disabilities (52.91%) and with multiple disabilities (52.45%), and slightly less than one-third of students with autism (28.15%), were spending less than 40 percent of the school day in regular education. The students who spend less than 40 percent of their day in the general classroom may only be participating in the general classroom with their peers for non-academic activities, such as lunch and recess.

The updated report on the implementation of IDEA is completed annually and can be found at [OSEP's Annual Reports to Congress on the Implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act \(IDEA\)](#). The report provides information on all 13 different disability categories, including autism, deaf-blindness, deafness, emotional disabilities, hearing impairment, intellectual disability, multiple disabilities, orthopedic impairment, other health impairment, specific learning disability, speech or language impairment, traumatic brain injury, or visual impairment and Virginia's additional category of developmental delay.

Inclusion

Defining Inclusion

Currently, there is not one universally accepted definition of inclusion; the definition varies in the context of theory and practice. In the 2017 Annual Report to the Governor by the Virginia Board for People with Disabilities (VBPD), the Board acknowledged the difficulty of defining inclusion. Nonetheless, the VBPD shared that within the context of the LRE, IDEA creates “a statutory preference for the provision of educational services to students with disabilities in the regular education classroom. This statutory preference can only be overridden when education cannot be satisfactorily provided in that setting, even with the use of supplementary aids and services” (VBPD, 2017, p. 1). In addition, the VBPD’s report, [Assessment of Virginia’s Disability Services System: Education](#), noted that inclusion “is often used to refer not only to the physical presence of a child with a disability in a regular education classroom, but also to the effective delivery of services in that classroom in a way that allows the child with a disability to be an active participant of the classroom community.” (2017, p. 1)

For some in the field, inclusive education represents a vision for schools where educational services support the academic and social/emotional/behavioral success of all students. [A Guide to Planning an Inclusion Project](#), developed by Virginia youth with disabilities, defines inclusion as “being part of a group or a part of something and as learning to live together, treasuring diversity; and sharing gifts and abilities.” This definition primarily considers the societal aspect of inclusion. This document narrows that definition by addressing inclusion within the context of the educational community.

Experts in the field, Villa and Thousand (2016), describe inclusive education as “both a vision and a practice” (p. 18). The vision of inclusive education presumes that inclusion goes beyond physical presence or access to general education settings. The vision presumes that all students are competent and belong as “full and accepted members of their school community, in which their educational setting is the same as their nondisabled peers, whenever appropriate” (Stetson & Associates, 2017).

Table 1: Recognizing Inclusion:
What inclusion is and is not in a public school.

Inclusion is...

Students with disabilities attending their neighborhood school in chronologically age-appropriate general education classrooms.

Students with disabilities having individualized and relevant learning objectives aligned to state standards.

Students with disabilities provided with the specially designed instruction, related services, and supports needed to succeed academically and socially, and to participate fully in school routines with their classmates.

Collaboratively developing and implementing an IEP with a team that includes the student, family, classroom teachers, and special educators (results-oriented approach). The IEP serves as a living document that guides daily, weekly, and monthly planning to support successful academic and functional outcomes in a general education setting.

A schoolwide and systemwide commitment to structures and practices integrated into the overall mission of educating all children.

Inclusion is not...

Students with disabilities included only in grade-level cluster classrooms or disability-specific regional programs.

Students with disabilities spending every minute in the general education classroom focusing solely on grade-level academic objectives.

Students with disabilities being “mainstreamed” when seen as “ready,” and left to “sink or swim” when outside of the separate special education classroom.

Developing and implementing an IEP that meets minimum compliance required under law, (a process-oriented approach), but is not developed collaboratively, and does little to advance a student academically or functionally in the general education setting (results-oriented approach).

A proposition provided for certain students and certain schools or school settings (e.g., “the inclusion student” or “the inclusion classroom/school”).

Federal and State Special Education Regulations and Inclusion

The IDEA and the *Virginia Regulations Governing Programs for Students with Disabilities* do not use or define the term “inclusion.” However, the regulations address LRE. According to the regulations, LRE means that school divisions should educate students with disabilities in the regular classroom in the school they would attend if not disabled. School divisions must provide appropriate aids and supports (referred to as “supplementary aids and services”) and educate students with disabilities with their nondisabled peers unless a student’s IEP requires some other arrangement. The mandate is for “the maximum extent appropriate,” which means school divisions must make every effort to achieve this goal. This calls for a systematic, personalized and thorough inquiry into the unique educational needs of each student with a disability. This information will be used to determine the possible range of aids and supports needed to facilitate the student’s success in the regular educational environment before a more restrictive placement is considered.

The U. S. Department of Education (USDOE), Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), [Questions and Answers on Least Restrictive Environment \(LRE\) Requirements of the IDEA](#) provide the following clarification and guidance when implementing LRE provisions of IDEA:

- The regular classroom in the school the student would attend if not disabled is the first placement option considered for each disabled student before a more restrictive placement is considered.
- If the IEP of a student with a disability can be implemented satisfactorily with the provision of supplementary aids and services in the regular classroom in the school the student would attend if not disabled, that placement is the LRE placement for that student.
- If the student’s IEP cannot be implemented satisfactorily in that environment, even with the provision of supplementary aids and services, the regular classroom in the school the student would attend if not disabled is not the LRE placement for that student.

According to the Virginia regulations, the LRE requirements are as follows:

1. Each local educational agency shall ensure: (34 CFR 300.114)
 - a. that to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, aged two to 21, inclusive, including those in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children without disabilities; and
 - b. that special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.
2. In providing or arranging for the provision of nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, including meals, recess periods, and other nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities provided for children without disabilities, each local educational agency shall ensure that each child with a disability participates with children without disabilities in those services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child with a disability. The local educational agency shall ensure that each child with a disability has the supplementary aids and services determined by the child's IEP team to be appropriate and necessary for the child to participate in nonacademic settings. (See also [8VAC20-81-100 H](#)) (34 CFR 300.117)

In addition, the regulations require a continuum of placements options. These provisions state in [§ 22.1-213](#) of the *Code of Virginia*; 34 CFR 300.115 that the continuum shall:

1. Include the alternative placements listed in the term "special education" at [8VAC20-81-10](#), including instruction in regular classes, special classes, special schools, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions; and
2. Make provision for supplementary services (e.g., resource room or itinerant instruction) to be provided in conjunction with regular education class placement. The continuum includes integrated

service delivery, which occurs when some or all goals of the student's IEP, including benchmarks and objectives if required, are met in the general education setting with age-appropriate peers.

3. No single model for the delivery of services to any specific population or category of children with disabilities is acceptable for meeting the requirement for a continuum of alternative placements. All placement decisions shall be based on the individual needs of each child.
4. Local educational agencies shall document all alternatives considered and the rationale for choosing the selected placement.
5. Children with disabilities shall be served in a program with age-appropriate peers unless it can be shown that for a particular child with a disability, the alternative placement is appropriate as documented by the IEP.

The Role of the IEP Team

The *Individuals with Disabilities Act* (IDEA) requires that each student who receives special education and related services have an IEP. The IEP specifies the student's individual educational needs, goals, and the special education and related services necessary to meet those needs. The regulations require that the IEP Team make placement decisions. The required IEP Team includes the parents, general and special education teachers, administrators, the student, and other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise about the child.

The IEP Team must first consider educating a student in an inclusive setting within their neighborhood school, and removal from this setting should not be the result of challenges associated with modifying and accommodating student needs within the general curriculum. According to the regulations ([8VAC20-131](#)), in determining the educational placement of a child with a disability, including a preschool child with a disability, each local educational agency shall ensure that:

1. The placement decision is made by the IEP Team in conformity with the LRE provisions.

2. The child's placement is:
 - a. determined at least annually;
 - b. based on the child's IEP; and
 - c. as close as possible to the child's home.
3. Unless the IEP of a child with a disability requires some other arrangement, the child is educated in the school that the child would attend if a child without a disability.
4. In selecting the LRE, consideration is given to any potential harmful effect on the child or on the quality of services the child needs.
5. A child with a disability is not removed from education in age-appropriate regular classrooms solely because of needed modifications in the general curriculum.

If the IEP Team determines that the "least restrictive environment" appropriate for a particular child is not the regular education classroom for all or part of the IEP, the IEP Team must include an explanation in the IEP as to why the regular education classroom is not appropriate. If the IEP Team is unable to agree on an appropriate placement, information on dispute resolution can be found on the VDOE website. Additional resources to assist parents in the IEP process include the [Virginia Family Special Education Connection](#) and the [Parent's Guide to Special Education](#).

Benefits of Inclusive Practices

The overall benefit of including students in the regular classroom and the school environment is the opportunity to teach all students to understand and embrace human diversity. Inclusive practices create meaningful opportunities for students with disabilities to contribute to the school community and be included in the same academic, social, and extracurricular opportunities as their peers without disabilities. Additional benefits of inclusion include:

- increased reading achievement for students with mild disabilities when given specially designed instruction in an inclusive setting with additional targeted pull-out services compared to results from instruction in a resource room alone (Marston, 1996),

- less student reliance on adults and greater utilization of peer supports (Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson -Saul, 1998; Katz & Mirenda, 2002),
- more direct instruction, improved attendance and behavior, and increased student independence after high school (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, & Levine, 2006),
- more growth on yearly state tests in reading and math in comparison to other non-inclusive schools (Choi et al., 2017; Waldron, Cole, & Majd, 2001),
- no significant difference in academic performance or report card behavior ratings when compared to students without disabilities in non-inclusive general education classes (Kalambouka, 2007; Sharpe, York, & Knight, 1994), and
- opportunities for peer tutoring and support, and increased student participation and spelling performance (Carter, Cushing, Clark, & Kennedy, 2005; Dawson et al., 1999).

Research shows that students with disabilities included in the regular classroom who participate in rigorous and challenging content area instruction with appropriate services, supports and specially designed instruction make the greatest gains in academic learning (Vaughn, Danielson, Zumeta & Holdheide, 2015).



Inclusive Education in Practice

Common Characteristics of Inclusive Schools

The practice of inclusive education within the general education setting combines physical togetherness, social belonging, and high-quality teaching (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012). Over the last 20 years, numerous researchers and advocacy organizations have examined data to determine the essential characteristics exhibited by schools that successfully implement inclusive practices (Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000; Janney & Snell, 2013; Kluth, 2017; Kurth, Lyon & Shogren, 2015; Villa & Thousand, 2003; 2016). Listed below are the characteristics repeatedly identified as essential to develop and sustain inclusive schools.

- The school community (school personnel, families, students) has a common understanding of disability and inclusive education, creating a culture that values openness, acceptance, respect, equality, collaboration, and a celebration of diversity.
- Democratic schooling is the core of a school's approach to planning, instruction, learning, and discipline. Self-determination skills are valued and promoted, with the expectation that both school personnel and students are responsible for the welfare of the school.
- Leaders (administrators/teacher leaders) within the school are change agents, valuing inclusion and taking an active and accountable role in creating an inclusive climate that is collaborative, open, and supportive of risk-taking, building a professional learning community within the school.
- Teachers and support personnel have accountable and collaborative roles, frequently within non-traditional teaching arrangements (co-teaching), that maximize student success through the implementation of an engaging, challenging, and age-appropriate curriculum.
- Instruction is engaging, evidence-based, and data driven, using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Differentiation, and Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) to teach academic and social/behavioral skills to all students.

Accommodations, modifications, technology, and an array of related services are incorporated within the general education setting to meet the learning and social/emotional/physical needs of students.

- Students are taught to be self-determined and are held to high expectations for learning defined through clearly outlined educational outcomes. Student learning experiences are flexible, authentic, meaningful, accessible, and developmentally appropriate (Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000; Janney & Snell, 2013; Kluth, 2017; Kurth, Lyon & Shogren, 2015; Villa & Thousand, 2003; 2016).

Quality Standards for Inclusive Schools

In the following self-assessment tool, [Stetson and Associates](#) identify nine key quality indicators for inclusive schools. The instrument was developed to reflect evidence-based inclusive practices and is intended to be conducted through a team process to guide a review of current practices regarding inclusive education. A description of each indicator is listed below.

1. **A Clear and Consistent Vision and Vocabulary for Inclusive Schools:** Without a systemwide understanding of the division's vision for and plans to achieve inclusion for diverse students, success is limited and progress is difficult. In addition, without a clear vision and set of expectations for every school, school divisions risk a lack of consistency from school to school and the potential for inequitable opportunities for students.
2. **Legislative and Accountability Standard:** States receive federal funds for serving students with disabilities and must submit and be measured against established standards and indicators.
3. **Strong Tier One Instruction:** Instruction in every general education classroom must offer rich, engaging and evidence-based instruction focused on grade level standards.
4. **Student-Centered Decisions/Staffing and Scheduling:** The standard for making decisions about a student with disabilities follows the same continuum from least to more restrictive settings and there is a clear model for ensuring that each decision is based on the needs and capabilities of the student.

5. **Effective Use of Resources:** Many educators believe that inclusive practices are more costly than traditional services offered in ‘pull-out’ settings. Actually, according to Stetson, when staffing and other costs are determined on the basis of student needs, staffing requirements typically decrease.
6. **Collaboration among Educators:** Effective collaboration among general and special educators, related service personnel, and parents represents the hallmark of inclusive schools. Time and support must be provided to increase the success of inclusion.
7. **Specialized Support:** In truly inclusive schools the needs of each student determine the setting in which he or she is educated. While there is a strong emphasis on providing the supports needed to enable each student to be successful in the general education classroom, if all options have been explored and services need to be provided outside of the general education classroom for part or all of the day, those services must meet quality standards.
8. **Social Inclusion:** While physical and academic inclusion are critical for the success of students with disabilities, each school must also focus on providing social inclusion opportunities with same-age peers. This addresses the needs of the ‘whole child’ and has a significant impact on well-being, academic achievement, and post-school success.
9. **Family and Community Engagement:** As families, educators and community members recognize the importance of inclusive practices, new and authentic partnerships must be formed.

Local schools and/or divisions are encouraged to complete the self-assessment of quality indicators and use the information gleaned from the document to develop the school’s action plan for inclusive practices. After completing the self-assessment, count the total number of Xs and use the rubric below to determine the level of implementation.

Phase	Description of Stage	Characteristics of Stage
<p><i>Excellence: Advanced Phase (36 or more points)</i></p>	<p><i>At this stage, practices reflect high levels of effectiveness and impact for all students in inclusive environments.</i></p>	<p><i>Collaboration. Faculty members view themselves as members of a “seamless system” working together on behalf of all students.</i></p> <p><i>Instruction. Students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum through the quality of what is taught and how it is taught.</i></p> <p><i>Outcomes. Participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments is five percent above the state average.</i></p>
<p><i>Implementation Phase (15-35 points)</i></p>	<p><i>At this stage, practices are generally associated with schools that have invested time and effort toward inclusive education, are experiencing some success, but still have more sophisticated or more complex practices to add.</i></p>	<p><i>Collaboration. Faculties possess collaborative planning skills and use structured formats to guide their meetings.</i></p> <p><i>Instruction. Differentiated Instruction techniques are increasingly implemented for all learners.</i></p> <p><i>Outcomes. Teachers routinely modify classroom assessments to meet the needs of individual students.</i></p>
<p><i>Initiation Phase (0-14 points)</i></p>	<p><i>At this stage, practices are generally associated with an early stage of inclusive education.</i></p>	<p><i>Collaboration. Faculties possess basic communication and team building skills.</i></p> <p><i>Instruction. Faculty members are increasing their use of differentiated instruction techniques.</i></p> <p><i>Outcomes. Post-school education, employment and independent living measures are tracked annually.</i></p>

Quality Standards for Inclusive School Self Assessment

Place a X in each box on the matrix that best describes inclusive practices in your school today.

	1. Clear and Consistent Vocabulary for Inclusive Schools	2. Legislative and Accountability Standards	3. Strong Tier 1 Instruction in All Classrooms
3-Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Stakeholders were involved in creating a clear and consistent vision for the school. <input type="checkbox"/> A continuum of services is maintained to eliminate confusion over inclusive options. <input type="checkbox"/> School leadership and faculty can articulate the division vision regarding inclusive support. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff members feel a strong sense of shared responsibility for all students. <input type="checkbox"/> Organizational structure reflects shared ownership (e.g. there are no silos, no separate departments, separate wings, etc.) <input type="checkbox"/> Inclusive practices are not dependent on a single individual or group of individuals for continuation as a belief and practice. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The percentage of students enrolled in special education reflects national and state incidence rates (8% - 12%). <input type="checkbox"/> Students with disabilities are educated with non-disabled peers at least 80percent of the time. <input type="checkbox"/> Students with disabilities are educated on their home campus. <input type="checkbox"/> The achievement gap, if present, has closed measurably. <input type="checkbox"/> Facilities used by students with disabilities (when specialized services are required) are not stigmatizing with regard to location, appearance or design. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Instruction is differentiated to accommodate diverse learner needs in every classroom. <input type="checkbox"/> A schoolwide behavioral support system is in place and results in a positive and respectful learning environment for all students. <input type="checkbox"/> Flexible grouping is evident in every classroom, thus whole group instruction is not the predominant method of instruction. <input type="checkbox"/> Tier II and Tier III interventions support the core curriculum. <input type="checkbox"/> Clear criterion exists for entering and exiting interventions within MTSS.
2-Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff members can articulate the main points of the school vision regarding inclusive support. <input type="checkbox"/> Staff members can articulate the benefit of inclusive support. <input type="checkbox"/> General and Special Ed teachers have an opportunity to participate in collaborative planning sessions where student-centered planning is conducted. <input type="checkbox"/> School climate supports a shared responsibility for every student. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Progress is realized in aligning the percentage of students receiving special education services with regard to national and state figures (LRE). <input type="checkbox"/> Movement of students with disabilities to their neighborhood school is planned and in progress. <input type="checkbox"/> The percentage of time students with disabilities are educated in the general setting is increasing. <input type="checkbox"/> Formal steps are implemented to close the achievement gap between general education students and students with disabilities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Differentiated instruction techniques are implemented for all learners in at least two-thirds of our classrooms. <input type="checkbox"/> Scaffolds, accommodations and modifications are used to support learning. <input type="checkbox"/> Universal screening tools are used to identify and support targeted needs for students. <input type="checkbox"/> Instruction is student centered and promotes student voice to enhance academic rigor and relevance. <input type="checkbox"/> The school team uses data-based decision making with ongoing progress monitoring.
1-Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Staff members share a common understanding of the meaning of inclusive support. <input type="checkbox"/> Misconceptions about inclusion have been identified and dispelled. <input type="checkbox"/> All staff members understand the importance of student-centered planning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Students with disabilities who are currently not being educated at their home school are identified. <input type="checkbox"/> The percentage of time each eligible student spends in the general class is determined. <input type="checkbox"/> Actions are begun to implement in-class support options. <input type="checkbox"/> School personnel can articulate student performance on the state assessment and are aware of any achievement gaps that exist. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers recognize and accept that learning outcomes will vary for the students they serve. <input type="checkbox"/> Teachers understand that they are responsible for implementing instructional accommodations and modifications as needed. <input type="checkbox"/> Teacher training supports the need for differentiation.

Quality Standards for Inclusive School Self Assessment *continued*

	4. Staffing & Scheduling	5. Effective Use of Resources	6. Collaboration Among Educators	
3-Excellence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q Staffing and scheduling decisions are based solely on the needs of individual students through an objective, student-centered process. Decisions are not made on the basis of labels, places or available services. q Administrators and teachers know that schedules must be flexible as students move in and out of the school and as individual student’s needs change over time. q The times when high needs subjects are scheduled (such as ELA) are varied throughout the day in order to provide needed services to all students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q Hiring methods are aligned with the vision of the school. q Practices are in place to recruit and retain highly qualified educators who are skilled in implementing services for students with disabilities. q All teachers have access to Teacher’s Editions of texts and professional development opportunities relative to the division curriculum. q When one-to-one paraprofessional support is needed, it is reviewed at least annually and a plan is developed to fade that level of support as the student becomes more independent. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q Faculty members view themselves as members of a “seamless” system working together on behalf of all students. q General and special education co-teachers use a variety of instructional strategies and collaborative teaching approaches. q General and special education teachers providing in-class support equally share roles as appropriate. q Special education teachers are welcomed in the general classroom and are recognized as professionals of equal status. q Faculty members are comfortable with and use teacher-to-teacher coaching models. 	
	2-Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q The natural proportion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms (8% - 12%) is maintained if special education support is not provided for the whole class period or every day. q Scheduling for students with disabilities is completed at the beginning of the master scheduling process. q Special education teachers and paraprofessionals are incorporated into the schedule to minimize duplication of services and increase the pool of in-class support providers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q Each paraprofessional’s schedule reflects a minimum of 90 percent of their day is devoted to instructional support (as opposed to cafeteria monitor, playground monitor, clerical tasks). q Regularly scheduled transition meetings are held between sending and receiving schools to provide for smooth transition of services for students. q Teachers and paraprofessionals recognize that natural peer supports are preferable to adult support when this is sufficient to meet the needs of individual students. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q Staff members accept role sharing. Teachers possess collaborative planning skills and use structured formats to guide their meetings. q The roles and responsibilities for each teaching partner (whether advance, in-class, or specialized support) are clearly defined. q Collaborative teaching/in-class support options (i.e., co-teaching, consulting teacher) are increasing in amount and quality. q Scheduling of collaborative teaching partners is based on the needs of students – not on the needs of the system.
		1-Initiation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q The first consideration for placement for students with disabilities is the general education class with their age/grade peers. q Individual student needs are determined prior to creating the master schedule. q Hand vs. computer scheduling is used to accommodate support needs of individual students. q Special populations teachers recognize that they may serve multiple roles throughout the day on the basis of student needs. Their roles are no longer defined by location or disability category. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> q A clear and objective criterion is used for providing one-to-one paraprofessional services. This practice is only considered when the health, safety, or participation of the student requires it. q Training is provided for paraprofessionals to enable them to assume their instructional roles with competence. q Protected planning time is provided to coordinate planning, information sharing and service delivery for students with disabilities.

Quality Standards for Inclusive School Self Assessment *continued*

	7. Specialized Support	8. Social Inclusion	9. Family and Community Engagement
3-Excellence	q Individual decisions about specialized support reflect student needs rather than what is available on the campus.	q Students with disabilities are viewed as members of the general education classroom.	q Families are encouraged to assist in training other parents.
	q Special education and general education teachers routinely communicate with one another and coordinate efforts to align the work in the special education classroom with the general education classroom.	q Formalized systems are in place and effective in promoting accepting relationships among all students.	q Families are fully informed of the results of studies regarding the quality of services for students with disabilities.
	q Placement in a specialized support setting is only recommended after other options are considered and deemed not appropriate to address the student's needs.	q Periodic evaluations document the success of the school's efforts toward increased social opportunities and relationships for students with disabilities.	q Decisions about placement location are made on an individual student basis and not on the basis of labels.
	q The need for services outside of the general classroom is reviewed often and objectively and when appropriate, students are returned to the general education classroom.	q Teachers are skilled in enhancing student-to-student interactions.	q Family members assist the school in evaluating the success of its efforts toward inclusive schools.
2-Implementation	q The need for services outside of the general classroom is reviewed often and objectively and when appropriate, students are returned to the general education classroom.	q All school activities include opportunities for all students.	q The school team provides opportunities to celebrate positive student outcomes with family, staff and school partners.
	q Community-based instruction, when appropriate for the student, especially for transition aged students, is provided and the community is viewed as an inclusive setting.	q Teachers are developing the skills to enhance student-to-student interactions.	q The team recognizes that needs and capacity vary from family to family.
	q Research-based instructional practices are used to support learning and improve outcomes for students with disabilities.	q A formal peer-tutoring program is initiated.	q Parents are provided with varied opportunities to develop skills and expertise in advocacy.
	q The general education curriculum is the standard for each student. Unique or non-standard curricula are only used when necessary for the student.	q Peer interaction initiatives are initiated as appropriate (such as Circle of Friends, Peer Buddies).	q Family members are selected and prepared for a role as parent trainer/parent facilitator so that they can develop their own expertise and confidence.
1-Initiation	q The general education curriculum is the standard for each student. Unique or non-standard curricula are only used when necessary for the student.	q Students with disabilities participate with nondisabled peers in planning for increased peer interactions at school.	
	q Specialized support settings provide instruction to small groups of students who are working on the same, or closely related, learner objectives.	q Students with disabilities are viewed as members of the school community.	q Families are included as active partners in educational decision-making.
	q Teachers understand the importance of academic learning time. Instructional time is not wasted or students left idle.	q There are more "shared" versus "separate" activities for students with disabilities.	q The team recognizes the importance of key family members (e.g., siblings and grandparents) in planning for meaningful family involvement.
	q Instructional tasks are age and grade appropriate.	q General education students serve in the role of peer assistant as appropriate.	q Families are provided with information about access to the general curriculum, including examples related to their child's own program.
	q Assistive technology is used effectively based on the individual needs of students.	q Teachers recognize the importance of their role in creating a positive climate for increased peer interactions.	q The school team expands community partnerships to help align resources for students based on data across all levels of support.

Components of Inclusive Education

Best practice in inclusive education requires simultaneous access to and implementation of three major components: academic inclusion, social inclusion, physical inclusion (Obiakor et al., 2012). Decision making begins by considering student strengths and needs. Once these strengths and needs are determined, support decisions can be made to determine how to include students. Devoting time to addressing all three of these components creates environments that foster a strong sense of belonging, higher quality of life in school, as well as higher levels of student engagement and achievement. Each component is discussed in more detail below.

Academic Inclusion

Academic inclusion involves engaging diverse students in the teaching - learning process of the general education classroom. It involves high expectations for success, age-appropriate and rigorous standards, evidence-based practices for planning and instruction, and IEPs written in a way that supports inclusionary practices and academic progress.

There are three ways to approach planning and instruction to foster academic inclusion: Understanding by Design (UbD), Universal Design for Learning (UDL), and Differentiation. A brief description of these planning and instructional approaches is provided below.

Understanding by Design (UbD)

- Understanding by Design (UbD) is a framework for planning that begins by thinking about the desired end goals of instruction in terms of the big conceptual ideas and essential questions in the curriculum that students need to know (McTighe & Brown, 2005; Wiggins & McTighe, 2005).
- Benefits to Inclusion: During the planning process, the teachers must consider the possible paths that students will take to learn the content and the level of learning expected of each student. This

recognizes the individual needs of students, making content more accessible and inclusive.

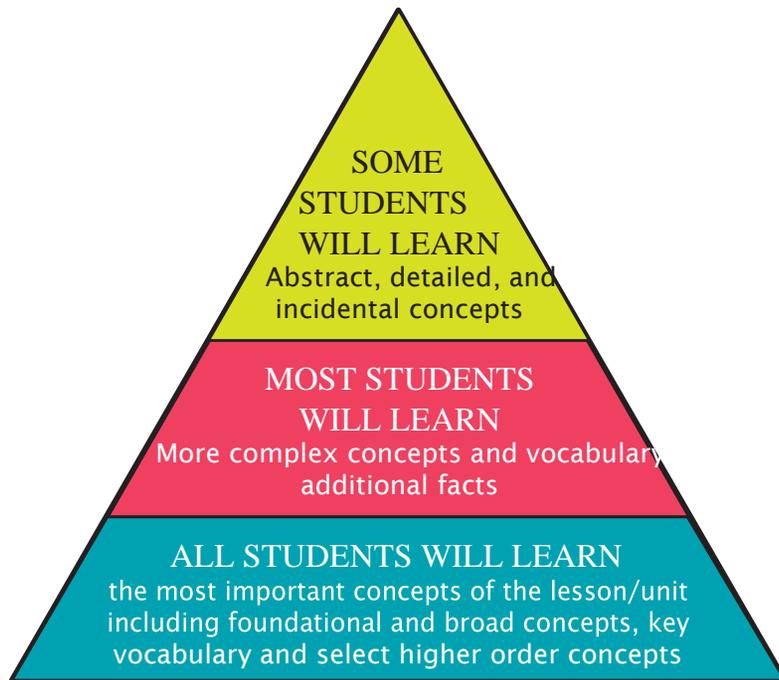
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)

- [Universal Design for Learning](#), (UDL) in planning, instruction and assessment is a proactive approach that addresses (a) multiple means for engaging student interest, motivation and investment in what is to be learned, (b) multiple means of representing the content to be learned, and (c) multiple means of student action and expression of what they know and are learning (Baglieri & Shapiro, 2012; CAST, 2017; Pisha & Coyne, 2001).
- Benefits to Inclusion: UDL provides cognitive and physical access to learning. This framework for designing curriculum enables “all individuals to gain knowledge, skills, and enthusiasm for learning. This is accomplished by simultaneously providing rich supports for learning and reducing barriers to the curriculum, while maintaining high achievement standards for all students” (CAST, 2017). UDL principles in lesson planning and assessment reduce the need for special accommodations and modifications for students with disabilities because the process proactively addresses potential student needs before anyone enters the classroom.

Differentiation

- [Differentiated instruction](#) is a set of beliefs about the classroom that recognizes the individualized needs of learners and encourages educators to react to individual needs and develop approaches to teaching that will positively impact student learning (Tomlinson, 2000).
- Benefits to Inclusion: Differentiation teaches students and teachers that different people need different things at different times to be successful and to feel supported as a learner and community member. Differentiation requires that teachers consider each learner’s instructional level, learning preferences and interests and learning environment needs and match learning goals, materials, instructional arrangements and means of assessment to those needs

(Tomlinson, 2000). When teachers use approaches to proactively build instruction to address diverse needs, the need for a more reactive differentiated approach is reduced.



A strategy in supporting UbD, UDL, and differentiation is the use of planning pyramids when lesson planning. The planning pyramid approach assumes “all students can learn but all students may not be ready to learn all of the content covered” (Gould & Vaughn, p. 365). Teachers determine what content they expect all students to learn, what content most students may learn, and what content only a few students may learn. This approach is not designed to track students into one of these three levels. Rather, it creates benchmarks for the students to achieve regardless of what might be assumed about the learning capabilities of individual students. It demands that learning is individualized and maximized for every student in the classroom, taking into account any accommodations or modifications necessary to maximize learning opportunities.

Social/Emotional Inclusion

Social/emotional inclusion ensures that all students have the opportunity for the development of authentic friendships with a broad range of their peers in a variety of settings. Four strategies to support social/emotional inclusion are outlined below.

- Addressing Perceptions of Disability—Schools need to consider ways to address the culture of negative attitudes and perceptions about disability that lead to stigma, prejudice, and discrimination. Celebrating *Disability History and Awareness Month* or implementing an *Inclusion Day* creates awareness. Encouraging a person-centered approach to talking about disability that emphasizes strengths and talents rather than identifying people by labels helps address negative perceptions (Kapitan, 2017). Bullying prevention that explicitly examines the treatment of students with disabilities is beneficial. The VDOE has assembled a number of helpful strategies and created a guidance document, [Model Policy to Address Bullying in Virginia’s Public Schools](#), which can be found on the website.
- [Circle of Friends](#)—The Circle of Friends process is highly effective in enhancing the inclusion of students who are being included for the first time, or who experience difficulties in school due to disability or challenging behavior (Newton & Wilson, 2003). In this approach, the team first conducts a Circle of Friends Assessment and Analysis to see what relationships and supports are present in the child’s school and community circles, and then works to purposefully build relationships with peers across interests, connections, and activities.
- System of Peer Supports—Schools must build in daily opportunities for small groups and pairs of peers to learn together and support each other’s learning (Carter, et al., 2015). In this approach, school teams recruit, train, monitor and support a cadre of peer -tutors, and create a variety of tasks for tutoring so that it is not always students with disabilities being helped by students without disabilities. Cross-grade peer tutoring is also encouraged. Numerous workshops on how to build peer supports are available through the [Inclusive Schools Network](#).

- Self determination skills—Fostering self -determination supports the social and emotional well-being of students in addition to establishing a set of skills that will lead to better postsecondary outcomes and independence. Self -determination is defined as “volitional actions that enable one to act as the primary causal agent in one’s life and to maintain or improve one’s quality of life” (Wehmeyer, 2006, p. 117). More simply, it describes a person who is exercising the right to lead his or her own life. Many of the skills identified in self-determined behavior, such as choice-making, decision-making, problem solving, goal-setting, leadership, and advocacy are necessary to achieving healthy social and emotional inclusion in society (Field & Hoffman, 2002). The development of these skills helps students “validate who they are and feel good about being a person with a disability” (Ward, 1996, p.15). The [I’m determined](#) website developed by VDOE provides resources to assist teachers, students and parent in helping the students develop the necessary skills associated with self -determination. Also, VDOE provides additional resources including autism awareness resources at the [Autism Center of Excellence](#), as well as other disability specific resources on the VDOE’s website.

Physical Inclusion

Physical inclusion ensures all students have equitable access to all facilities, services and activities. Students with disabilities are members of their neighborhood, school, community, and general education classrooms. Leadership should ensure school facilities are in compliance with the requirements of *American with Disabilities Act* (ADA). The [ADA regulations](#) require that public entities be designed, constructed, or altered to be readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities. Section 504 and the ADA contain requirements related to the physical accessibility of facilities, including the removal of architectural barriers, such as providing curb cuts, ramps, and elevators. These laws have helped make educational settings more inclusive for students with disabilities.



In the classroom, teachers should consider the sounds, smells, lighting, and seating options to ensure a sensory friendly setting. In addition, for students with mobility or sensory impairments, schools must ensure access to physically friendly spaces, events and activities. Schools should consider the physical environment outside the classroom and how it impacts student participation in lunch, assemblies, or other school sponsored activities. Examples of ways to adapt the classroom environment to address the physical needs of students with disabilities might include offering alternative seating and classroom arrangements, limiting visual clutter on walls, playing soft music or reducing the noise level, or adjusting the lighting. [Getting Comfortable in the Inclusive Classroom](#) provides additional ideas for the classroom. Additional resources and videos can be found at the [VCU Autism Center for Excellence](#), including the following: [Environmental Supports](#), [How to: Environmental Considerations – Physical Structure](#), [How to: Environmental Considerations – Routines](#) and [“Classroom Architect.”](#)

Implementation Considerations in the Inclusive Setting

For participation of students with disabilities in the general education setting to increase, there are several important areas that must be considered and addressed. An implementation plan must develop systems and processes that take the following areas into consideration in the inclusive classroom.

Recognizing the Implementation Barriers

One of the biggest barriers to inclusive education is how school personnel inadvertently think and act in isolated ways rather than working together as collaborators who share responsibility for the outcomes of all students (Villa & Thousand, 2003). Teachers and principals express their own lack of knowledge and skills as a barrier. Many would like to do a better job of including students with disabilities but are unsure where to start or who to consult. Listed below are some common barriers to inclusive practices as identified from the literature, as well as from a 2017 survey of over 200 Virginia parents and teachers by Altieri and Minarik in 2017.

- Traditional ways of thinking about and delivering the curriculum, including “teach to the middle” and ability level tracking
- Traditional systems of behavior management and school discipline
- Resistance to trying new ways of serving students with disabilities in general education settings – administrators, teachers and parents who are unaware, reluctant, or unenthusiastic about the importance of including students with disabilities
- Lack of knowledge and training related to inclusive education practices, providing meaningful instructional, environmental and testing accommodations, and the need for providing supportive or adaptive text and materials

- Perceived rigidity of funding; financial incentives for school divisions placing students in most restrictive environments
- Low expectations for students with disabilities
- Administrative and organizational logistical issues such as scheduling and transportation

Suggested way to address these barriers includes the following.

- Universal Design for Learning (Israel, Ribuffo, & Smith, 2014); Content Enhancement Strategies (Bulgren, Deshler, & Lenz, 2007); differentiation strategies geared to individual learner needs (Lawrence -Brown, 2014); embedded enrichment and remediation strategies (Little, McCoach, & Reis, 2014)
- School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (Saugi & Horner, 2006); individualized Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (Goh & Bambara, 2010)
- Inclusion Day and other awareness raising activities (Lindsay & Edwards, 2013); creating an Inclusion Visioning team (William & Mary, 2015); Pilot Inclusion Projects to demonstrate success on a small scale first (William & Mary, 2015)
- Choosing the best professional development methods and materials from the plethora of information available to fit the needs of your school (Jordan, Schwatz, & McGee-Richmond, 2009); creating an ongoing professional learning community to support the implementation of inclusive practice. (Villa, Thousand, Nevin, & Liston, 2005)
- Visit/consult with schools and school divisions who have formulated a plan to be more creative with available funds (Grubb & Allen, 2011); advocate for removal of such incentives and to add incentives for inclusive placements (National Council on Disability, 2018)
- Adopt the Presume Competence philosophy (Biklen & Burke, 2006; Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2007); Inclusion Day and other awareness building activities including presentations

by students with disabilities (Lindsey & Edwards, 2011); videos for inspiration are widely available; using I'm Determined materials and resources

- Visit/consult with schools and school divisions who have implemented effective strategies; professional development for administrators on [school scheduling](#) may be necessary

Providing Specially Designed Instruction

Specially designed instruction for students with more significant educational and behavioral needs can be provided in the general education classroom as long as services and supports are consistent with what is described in the student's IEP. The only specification in IDEA is that specially designed instruction must be provided in the LRE. With the development of instructional technology and the implementation of universal design principles that include multiple options for access and expression during learning, the LRE for most students will be the general education environment. An additional benefit of this is the opportunity to prepare students with disabilities for transition to productive postsecondary life that reflects more accurately their schooling experiences.

When making instructional decisions, the resource document, [Evidence - Based Practices for Students with Severe Disabilities](#), developed by The Collaboration for Effective Educator, Development, Accountability and Reform (CEEDAR) Center, summarizes current high-quality research on evidence-based practices for students with more severe disabilities in the areas of academics, daily living, social interaction, as well as in job and community skills. This USDOE funded document provides user-friendly examples of practices that can be implemented in a variety of settings, including the general classroom. In addition, The National Professional Develop Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder (NPDC) has identified 27 [evidence-based-practices](#) for supporting students with autism, but may be beneficial for all students with significant learning and/or behavior needs.

Identifying Appropriate Supplementary Aids and Services

An important component of special education is the provision of supplementary aids and services. Adequate supports should be provided so skill development is integrated into the general education classroom activities. These supports might include assistive technology, such as Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC), environmental modifications, visual supports, visual schedules, structured activities, small group instruction, and instruction in self-management strategies, as well as instructional assistant and/or paraprofessional support if necessary. These supports and supplementary aids are most often known as accommodations and modifications. These terms are often used interchangeably, but they are actually very different. A description of accommodations and modifications is provided below.

Accommodations

An accommodation makes learning accessible to the student and allows the student to demonstrate what they know. Accommodations are alterations in the way tasks are presented that allow children with a disability to complete the same assignments as other children. Accommodations do not alter the content of assignments, give students an unfair advantage, or in the case of assessments, change what a test measures or alter what the student is expected to learn.

There are four categories of accommodations: time/scheduling, setting, response and presentation. Examples of accommodations in each category can be found in the [VDOE Guideline for Special Test Accommodations](#)



Modifications

A modification is a change in the course of study, standards, test preparation, location, timing, scheduling, expectations, student response and/or other attributes which provide access for a student with a disability to participate in a course, standard, or test. It *does* fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectation of the course, standard, or test. Modifications are generally made in content for students with significant cognitive disabilities and/or physical disabilities. Modifications involve lowering the level of the materials presented and/or reducing the depth and complexity of the content. Examples of modifications include:

- Materials are adapted; texts are simplified by modifying the content areas—simplifying vocabulary, concepts, and principles.
- Grading is subject to different standards than general education, such as based on IEP goals.
- Assignments are changed using lower level reading materials, worksheets, and simplified vocabulary.
- Testing adaptations are used, such as lowering the reading level of the test.

Modifications to the curriculum for students with more significant learning and behavior needs can be made in the general education setting if the IEP team determines appropriate. The student will have an IEP which specifies which specific learning objectives will need modifications and will identify how the student will be held accountable for making progress. In some cases, the student will receive educational benefit by being exposed to more of the general education curriculum than the student is being held accountable for or required to master. The student may be working on objectives below grade level, but the subject should be the same as the rest of the class. In addition, depending upon the nature and severity of the student’s disability, it may be that the student requires in-class support to be successful within the LRE. Resources have been developed at [TTAC Online](#) to assist with implementing the aligned standards, making curriculum modifications, and addressing other instructional needs.

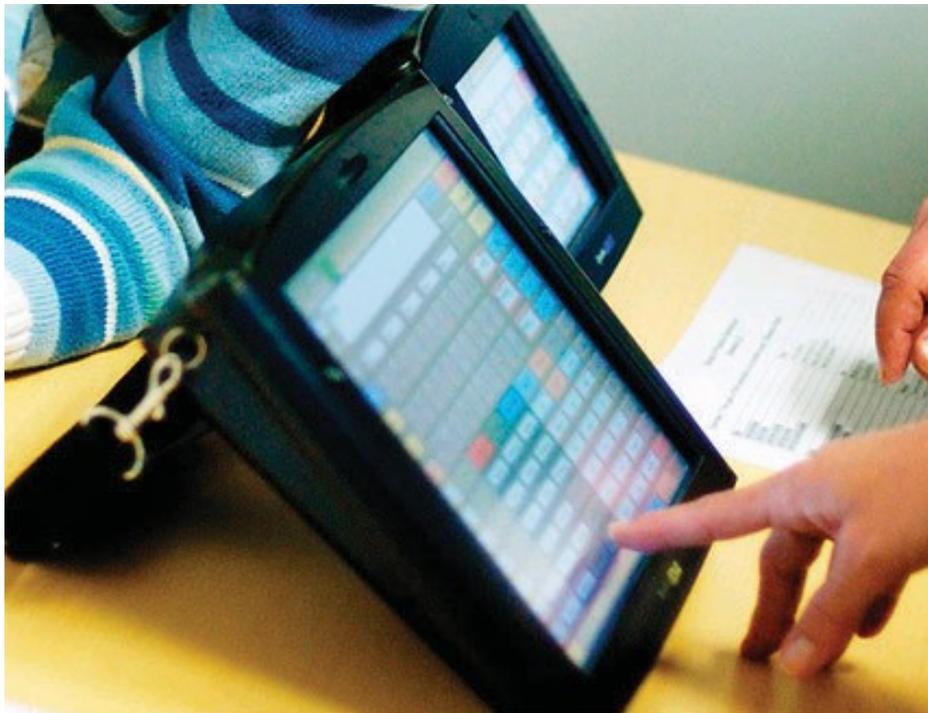
Addressing Behaviors

According to the regulation, in the case of a child whose behavior impedes the child’s learning or that of others, the IEP team must consider the use of positive behavioral interventions and supports, and other strategies, to address that behavior (34 CFR §§300.324(a)(2)(i) and (b)(2); and 300.320(a)(4)). The Virginia Regulations provide that a [“Functional Behavioral Assessment \(FBA\)”](#) process be used to determine the underlying cause or functions of a child’s behavior that impede the learning of the child with a disability or the learning of the child’s peers and a behavior intervention plan that utilizes positive behavioral interventions and support to address the behavior be implemented. A functional behavioral assessment may include a review of existing data or new testing data or evaluation as determined by the IEP team.” The US Department of Education has provided additional [discipline guidance](#) that encourages the use of positive behavior supports to create a safe environment for all students while addressing the needs of students with sufficient behavior needs. The document, [Supporting and Responding to Behavior: Evidence-Based Classroom Strategies for Teachers](#), summarizes evidence-based, positive, proactive, and responsive classroom behavior intervention and support strategies for teachers. These strategies should be used classroom -wide, intensified to support small group instruction, or amplified further for individual students.

The Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports (VTSS) is a data-driven decision-making framework for establishing the academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports needed for a school to be an effective learning environment for all students. The VTSS systemic approach allows divisions, schools, and communities to provide multiple levels of supports to students in a more effective, efficient, and clearly defined process. The VTSS aligns academics, behavior, and social-emotional wellness into a single decision-making framework to establish the supports needed for schools to be effective learning environments for all students. For additional information, visit [Virginia Tiered System of Support](#) and/or [Virginia Tiered Systems of Supports Research and Implementation Center](#). In addition, a series of modules that relate to 25 strategies of proven effectiveness are available at [PBIS of Virginia](#) as well as a series of interviews focused on [Functional Behavioral Assessments](#).

Utilizing Assistive Technology

In the regulations, an assistive technology (AT) device is defined as “any item, piece of equipment, or product system, whether acquired commercially off the shelf, modified, or customized, that is used to increase, maintain, or improve functional capabilities of a child with a disability.” To ensure FAPE, the need for AT must be included in the IEP and determined on a case-by-case basis, depending on the need of the student. Effective integration of technology within the academic, social and physical areas of instruction may enhance the outcomes of students with significant behavior and academic challenges and maximize their accessibility to the general education curriculum. When choosing assistive technology for students, there is a need to identify the technology that addresses the student’s area of identified need. It should support the goal of instruction and support student outcome. (McHatton, & Farmer, 2010; Englert, Wu, & Zhao, 2005; Marino & Beecher,



2010; Smith & Okolo, 2010).

According to the OSERS, if needed, AT must be provided by the school division at no cost to the family. If the IEP Team decides that AT is needed for home use in order for the child to access FAPE, it must be provided by the school division at no cost to the family as well.

To assist the IEP Team in the AT determination, the [AT Consideration Guide](#) provides a framework for identifying areas in which a student may benefit from assistive technology. [The Virginia Assistive Technology Resource Guide](#) provides information to educational teams when considering assistive technology as part of a student’s IEP. For more information on AT, refer to the [Virginia Assistive Technology System \(VATS\)](#) and/or to the [VDOE Assistive Technology Resources](#).



Participating in the Accountability System

All students in Virginia’s Public Schools, including students with disabilities and students who are Limited English Proficient (LEP) are required to participate in Virginia’s Assessment Program in tested grades and courses. Students with disabilities may take Standards of Learning tests with or without accommodations, or they may be assessed through alternate or substitute assessments. The Standards of Learning drive the curriculum for all Virginia students regardless of the means of assessment. The VDOE’s [Students with Disabilities: Guidelines for Assessment Participation](#) provides information on the assessment options for students with disabilities. Assessment decisions should not determine LRE. It should be noted that the IEP Team determines the appropriate assessment. If appropriate, evidence for alternate assessments, such as the [Virginia Alternate Assessment Program \(VAAP\)](#) which is based on the Aligned Standards of Learning (ASOL), can be collected in the general education classroom. However, in most cases, this will require significant modification of the curriculum. If an IEP Team determines that a student must take an alternate assessment, the IEP Team must provide the following:

- an explanation of why the student cannot participate in this regular assessment;
- a statement as to why the particular assessment selected is appropriate for the student, including that the student meets the criteria for the alternate assessment; and
- an explanation of how the student’s nonparticipation in the regular assessment will impact the child’s promotion, graduation with a modified standard, standard, or advanced studies diploma; or other matters is required.

For additional informational on how the ASOLs are aligned to the SOLs and activities and resources to support the implementation of these standards can be found at [TTAC Online](#), an online resource for parents and teachers sponsored by VDOE to support students with disabilities.

Facilitating Successful Transition

Transition planning should address academic achievement and functional performance that will facilitate movement from school to post-school activities such as postsecondary education, career and technical education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation. This planning process should include an understanding of graduation requirements, diploma options and the types of transition services that are needed.

Graduation Requirements and Diploma Options

There are three diploma options for all students entering the ninth grade in Virginia. Those options are the Advanced Studies Diploma, the Standard Diploma and Applied Studies Diploma. However, for students with disabilities, a particular diploma path should not dictate the amount of time spent in inclusive general education settings. It should be noted that in the regulations, the age of eligibility for special education services continues for students with a disabilities who have not graduated with a standard or advanced studies high school diploma until they have not reached their 22nd birthday. Additional information is available on the VDOE website related to [graduation requirements](#), diploma options, substitute assessments and [credit accommodations](#) which provide alternatives for students with disabilities in earning the standard and verified credits required to graduate with a Standard Diploma.

Transition Services

According to the regulations, students with disabilities should be involved in transition planning and have an individualized transition plan no later than age 14. Transition involves a “coordinated set of activities for a student with a disability that is designed within a results -oriented process” (34 CFR 300.43). To support greater independence and inclusion in postsecondary life, students need to be more directly involved in the transition process, providing input regarding their post-secondary goals in employment, education, training, and independent living. Students need to explore their

future goals and receive the necessary services and supports to foster skills that will help them reach desired postsecondary outcomes. Good transition planning should address academic achievement and functional performance that will facilitate movement from school to post-school activities such as postsecondary education, career and technical education, integrated employment, continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, and community participation. There are numerous opportunities to promote and support inclusive practices throughout the transition process (Field, Hoffman, and Spezia, 1998).

Promoting self-determination should be an important element of transition instruction. There are five components that inclusive schools can promote to help support successful transition and build needed self-determination skills: (1) Know Yourself, (2) Value Yourself, (3) Plan, (4) Act, and (5) Experience Outcomes and Learn (Field, Hoffman, & Spezia, 1998). Table 2 provides a breakdown of these components and how schools can support students through the transition process and promote the self-determination skills that foster greater independence in postsecondary life.

Table 2: Supporting Transition through Self Determination

<i>Self-Determination Components</i>	<i>Description</i>	<i>Suggested School Supports</i>
<i>Know Yourself</i>	<i>Awareness of needs and preferences</i>	<i>Encourage “out-loud” thinking during inclusive instructional activities to support problem-solving. Develop activities that help students learn their strengths, challenges, needs, and preferences. Include these in the Transition IEP</i>
<i>Value Yourself</i>	<i>Believing in your right to reach desired life goals</i>	<i>Create one-pagers and develop personal goals for employment, education, training, and independent living</i> <i>Create mentorship programs that help students meet others who have strong self-determination skills</i>
<i>Plan & Act</i>	<i>Creating an action plan to help achieve goals and dreams Assertively communicate wants, needs and beliefs, taking calculated risks and being persistent</i>	<i>Create Good Day Plans, one-pagers, or person-centered planning tools that map out goals and dreams for the future</i> <i>Involve students in determining needed transition activities and services. Have students self-advocate, share one-pagers with general education teachers, and support increased involvement in the IEP meeting</i>
<i>Experience Outcomes & Learn</i>	<i>Modeling self-determination by reflecting on and learning from experiences</i>	<i>Have students participate in school-based or community-based inclusive transition activities that allow them to learn and model self-determination skills</i> <i>Ask students to reflect on their positive and challenging experiences in school and then respond to those challenges</i>

Adapted from Field, Hoffman, and Spezia. (1998). *Self-determination strategies for adolescents in transition*. Austin, Texas: Pro-Ed. Resources for teachers who are responsible for supporting transition can be found at the following sites: [Transition Coalition](#), [Center on Transition](#),

[Transition IEP requirements](#), [VDOE transition resources](#) and [I'm determined](#).



Recommendations for Implementing Inclusive Practices

This section provides recommendations for implementing school and division-wide inclusive practices. These evidence-based recommendations are based on the review of literature on implementing inclusive practices.

Recommendation 1: Develop an Inclusive Practice Team

The inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms necessitates collaboration between administrators, general educators, special educators, parents, and related service providers in order to deliver quality services to all students. In a survey of experts in the field of severe disabilities, Jackson and colleagues reported that collaboration was often cited as a foundation to the implementation of inclusive education (Jackson, Ryndak, & Billingsley, 2000). In many schools, collaboration takes the form of co-teaching, where a general and special educator work together to deliver instruction to students with and without disabilities.

A collaborative inclusion team structure helps develop, as well as support, a shared vision of inclusion and agreement on the evidence-based practices and measures. These practices and measures are needed to implement and assess effective inclusive practices. The Team serves as a mechanism to support, encourage, and celebrate the hard work of implementing inclusive education (King -Sears, Janney, & Snell, 2015). Team members collaborate and support the inclusion opportunity, including parent involvement, parent-teacher conferences, homeschool communication book, team meetings, parent training, and paraprofessional training.

Recommendation 2: Assess the School's Current Inclusive Practices

There are a number of resources available to assess inclusive practices in schools. The Virginia Department of Education, Self-Assessment of Quality Indicators for Inclusive and Collaborative School Based Practices was designed to assist school teams in determining if their school buildings are inclusive with collaborative settings that meet the needs of diverse learners. After completing the self-assessment, the team is asked to identify the items that are priorities for change. These items then serve as the basis for the school improvement planning that outlines specific steps to improve collaborative and inclusive practices. It also provides useful information for requesting additional technical assistance. In addition, VDOE has made available to school divisions a [co-teaching self-assessment tool](#) based on the quality indicators of effective co-teaching. Co-teaching is an important collaborative service delivery model that exists in inclusive schools. It is recommended that the self-assessment be completed by administrators and co-teaching members. For additional information about co-teaching, contact the regional Training and Technical Assistance Center (TTAC).

Recommendation 3: Develop an Action Plan for Inclusion

The key to any successful action plan approach is to build capacity through school-community involvement and a strong collaborative team structure with professional development support. A path to addressing inclusion at the school and division level is to follow the following steps to action planning.

Step 1: Define the Problem

Create a collaborative inclusion team at the school level with an administrator, one or two general educators, a special educator, family members/parents of students with and without disabilities, and others based on the school structure as described in Recommendation 1. The Team does not have to be a new team; an existing leadership team may simply take on the function of an Inclusive Practices Leadership Team. This Team should identify a set of principles and beliefs that will govern a schoolwide inclusive focus. The main function of this team is to foster the implementation of inclusive practices schoolwide. The Team should review practices and

procedures to determine if they are consistent with the school’s mission and ensure that all staff members are in agreement relative to inclusive practices. The Leadership Team should help to establish policy regarding inclusive practices and identify actions the entire staff and faculty needs to take to ensure effective implementation of policy. As challenges arise, the Leadership Team should brainstorm possible solutions and support staff in meeting those challenges.

Step 2: Collect and Analyze Data

Assess where the school is now with inclusion at the academic, social/emotional, and physical level, and then determine what is possible by using a variety of self-assessment tools as suggested in Recommendation 2. The Team should research other inclusion success stories and challenges. These include areas such as identifying student support needs, scheduling students with disabilities into general education classes, updating IEPs, lesson planning, planning time, caseloads and grading. Without adequately addressing each area and outlining procedures for each, implementation will not be effective.

Step 3: Develop a Plan

The Inclusion Team develops the action plan that may include activities and professional development opportunities to address negative perceptions and stereotypes that might exist about disability and inclusion (Inclusion Day activities; Disability History and Awareness Month activities; required schoolwide book study) or other areas identified in the needs assessment. The action plan outlines details of how a school will implement effective inclusive practices. It establishes timelines, roles of responsibility and methods/tools for monitoring and identifying success. Below is a sample of an action plan based on the Quality Indicators Self -Assessment.

Step 4: Implement the Plan

The next step in the action planning process requires the school team to implement the plan. Depending on the goal, the school team would be required to implement the activities or professional development for the entire division or an individual school, one grade level (K-12), one subject area (for grades 6-12), or one co-teaching team within a grade level. Follow up on the action plan regularly to ensure that members are accountable for the assigned task.

5. Effective Use of Resources

Many educators believe that inclusive practices are more costly than traditional services offered in ‘pull-out’ settings. Actually, when staffing and other costs are determined on the basis of student needs, staffing requirements typically decrease.

Practice	Current Status			Action Steps	Person responsible	Start	End	Evidence of Success
	In Place & Successful	Must be Improved	Not in Place					
5.1 During interviews for new faculty, the expectation of inclusive practices by all teachers and staff is clearly stated.	X							
5.2 Practices are in place to recruit and retain highly qualified educators who are skilled in implementing effective services for students with disabilities.	X							

Step 5: Evaluate the Plan

The team monitors and evaluates the effectiveness of the activities or professional development. Monitoring the process is critical to ensuring effective implementation of inclusive practices. Data must be collected in order to determine if maximum outcomes are being achieved as a result of implementing inclusive practices. Monitoring should be on-going and may include student achievement data, school performance scores, LRE data, results from implementation of instructional practices, student referral and student behavior data and/or change in stakeholder perspective data.

Step 6: Revise the Plan

Implementing inclusive practices is a dynamic and evolving process. Plans should be revised as needs change. As schools begin to experience success in implementing inclusive practices, goals will need to change. As each of these goals is achieved, new ones need to be written that reflect higher expectations relative to positive outcomes.

(This plan was based on Burstein et al., 2004; Dawson & Scott, 2013; Lindsay & Edwards, 2013; Soukakou et al., 2015; Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010)

Recommendation 4: Develop the IEP to Support Inclusion

The IEP is a tool that directly supports inclusive practices in a school by the way it is written and implemented. There are a number of ways that schools can use the IEP to promote inclusion:

1. Make sure special education teachers are writing a [Standards-based IEP](#) that includes goals tied to the Virginia Standards of Learning.
2. Complete a [Program Planning Matrix](#) for each student with an IEP. This tool serves as a way to map out how the student's goals are implemented in activities across the school day, and it also identifies specific information about what services and strategies are used by the team to address the goals within instruction (Causton & Tracy - Bronson, 2015).

3. Increase general educator involvement in the IEP process and active participation in the team meetings. General educators should participate in IEP Team meetings by sharing data about current student performance, advocating for the student by discussing strengths and needs, in addition to paying attention to the successes and challenges in other settings. This information is then brought back into the classroom to improve the inclusive environment. The resource, [General Educator Involvement in the IEP](#), can be helpful increasing the participation of general education teachers in the IEP process.
4. [Student Involvement in the IEP](#) is encouraged. Have the student develop a presentation that highlights strengths, interests, preferences, and needs. Develop a one-pager that is used to present this information, and then use the one-pager throughout the year as an advocacy tool. Have the student get involved with the IEP in other ways like sending out personal invitations to team members to attend the meeting, helping to write a section of the Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance, or becoming more directly involved with writing annual goals and postsecondary goals.

Recommendation 5: Provide Ongoing Professional Development

The first professional development activities needed in schools introducing inclusive practices are activities that help all members of the school team examine their personal perceptions and the school culture as they relate to disability and special education. Virginia survey participants (2017) cited co-teaching and collaborative practice as a major factor contributing to success where inclusion was working and most needed where inclusion was not being implemented or struggling in its implementation. Virginia's Excellence in Co-Teaching Initiative provides a professional development model that promotes access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities, recognizes effective co-teaching practices and supports teacher leaders. These model co-teachers have developed co-taught lesson plans and videos that are included as [Real Co-Teachers of Virginia](#) web shops, which are available at TTAC Online.

In addition, the [Inclusive Practices webpage](#) provides additional resources for developing more inclusive school settings, including the Inclusive Practice Partnership Projects. The Inclusive Practice Partnership Project was designed as a staff development initiative that recognizes outstanding schools and/or educators who have developed programs that could be used as a model to ensure students with disabilities, especially those with more significant academic and behavior needs, have access to inclusive education with their peers in general education settings. Selected school teams developed videos, guidance documents, blogs and websites that are available for use as part of a more comprehensive professional development activity.

Lawrence-Brown & Muschaweck (2013) describe the importance of professional development in small bursts within the team meetings geared specifically to tasks and goals the team is trying to accomplish. This allows teams to immediately apply what they learn. Instructional coaching is also necessary to prepare school personnel implementation of inclusive practices and long-term capacity building, as well as sustainability. Strong administrative support and visionary leadership is consistently identified as the number one factor in the success of school inclusion efforts (Villa & Thousand, 2003). School divisions need to make sure their school administrators also receive professional development and support in order to foster inclusive practices and monitor effective implementation.



Resources and References

Throughout this document, there are a number of resources and links. Although not an exhaustive list, these resources provide a good starting point for school divisions looking to educate themselves and develop a plan for implementing inclusive practices. In addition to these web resources, there is a brief list of user-friendly books that address inclusion. The references used to develop this guide, found at the end of this document, are excellent resources for a school division wanting to learn more about inclusive practices.

Books and Articles

Baglieri, S., & Shapiro, A. (2017) *Disability studies and the inclusive classroom: Critical perspectives for embracing diversity in education (2nd ed)*. New York: Routledge.

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Villa, R. A., & Thousand, J. S. (2016). *The inclusive education checklist: A self-assessment of best practices*. Naples, FL: Dude Publishing, a division of National Professional Resources.

Web Resources

[Is your school inclusive? Paula Kluth: Toward Inclusive Classrooms and Communities](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/iep_instruct_svcs/inclusive/index.shtml)

(http://www.doe.virginia.gov/special_ed/iep_instruct_svcs/inclusive/index.shtml)

[Cindy Pitonyak describes the inclusion story of Montgomery County Virginia, a school division that has been practicing full inclusion since 1990](https://vimeo.com/200213292)

(<https://vimeo.com/200213292>)

[Dr. Julie Causton from Syracuse University shares how to create inclusive schools for all](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVpVUEQmzxc)

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TVpVUEQmzxc>)

[Inclusive network by Stetson and Associates](https://inclusiveschools.org/about-isn/about-stetson-associates/)

(<https://inclusiveschools.org/about-isn/about-stetson-associates/>)

[Inclusion: What, Why, and How?](http://ttacwm.blogs.wm.edu/category/newsletter-articles/inclusion/)

(<http://ttacwm.blogs.wm.edu/category/newsletter-articles/inclusion/>)

[\(Webcast\) Inclusion: What does it mean and who is it for?](https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/webcasts/details.cfm?webcastID=386)

(<https://vcuautismcenter.org/te/webcasts/details.cfm?webcastID=386>)

[Disability Museum](http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html)

(<http://www.disabilitymuseum.org/dhm/index.html>)

[Museum of Disability History](http://museumofdisability.org/)

(<http://museumofdisability.org/>)

[I'm Determined Self-determination Youth Credo](http://youtu.be/wrNy_2ljVdo)

(http://youtu.be/wrNy_2ljVdo)

[I'm Tyler](https://youtu.be/2jSwCnuWcQ0)

(<https://youtu.be/2jSwCnuWcQ0>)

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