

SECTION 4

**inclusion
matters!**



Ongoing Professional Learning

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In order for schools and educators to design quality education for all students in the school, information and supports may need to be identified initially.

Where to Begin:

Before beginning to inform the members of a school community about Inclusive Education, it may be necessary to address their attitudes and beliefs about disabilities that are unfamiliar to them. The term “ability awareness” has been used to refer to the process of re-educating people to see persons in respect to their abilities and gifts instead of their disabilities. The emphasis is on the similarities of the human experience in contrast to highlighting differences. In addition, accurate descriptions of particular disabilities are provided to debunk some of the myths and stereotypes that exist in our society. Designing ability awareness may include “role-playing”, presentations by persons with disabilities, films, infusion into existing curriculum, etc. Depending on the needs of the school, ability awareness programs and information may be given to students, parents and educators either separately or as part of a large group.

a. Ability Awareness

On May, 2011, the Missouri legislature passed House Bill 555, which authorizes school boards to require the provision of disability history and awareness instruction in public schools during the month of October of each year. House Bill 555 further requires the month of October to be designated “Disability History and Awareness Month”.

The goals of disability history and awareness instruction in House Bill 555 are:

- (1) Instilling in students sensitivity for fellow students with disabilities and encouraging educational cultures that nurture safe and inclusive environments for students with disabilities in which bullying is discouraged and respect and appreciation for students with disabilities is encouraged;
- (2) An understanding that disability is a natural part of the human experience; we are all more alike than different; and regardless of disability, every citizen is afforded the same rights and responsibilities as that of any other;
- (3) The creation of a more inclusive school community, where students with disabilities are included in every aspect of society, and every student is acknowledged for their unique gifts, talents, and contributions; and
- (4) Reaffirmation of the local, state, and federal commitment to the full inclusion in society of, and the equal opportunity for, all individuals with disabilities.

As the goal of Disability Awareness Month is to increase awareness and promote independence, integration and inclusion of all people with disabilities it is a vital component of an inclusive school culture and program.

Disability education brings attitudes to the surface, where they can be examined consciously, rather than putting students together and hoping for the best. It’s not surprising that, despite the best of intentions, students with disabilities who participate in inclusion programs may continue to feel left out.

“Disability History and Awareness – A Resource Guide for Missouri”
<http://dese.mo.gov/se/documents/se-admin-modishistresguide.pdf>.

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b. Inclusive Schools Week

Inclusive Schools Week (ISW) is an annual event sponsored by the Inclusive Schools Network. Celebrated during the first week in December, ISW was created to commemorate the progress that schools have made in providing a quality education to an increasingly diverse student population including students who are marginalized due to disability, gender, socio-economic status, cultural heritage, language preference and other factors. ISW also provides an important opportunity for educators, students and parents to discuss what else needs to be done in to ensure that their schools continue to improve their ability to successfully educate all children.

<http://inclusiveschools.org/inclusive-schools-week>

c. Finding Resources for an Awareness Program

1. Special School District's Family and Community Resource Center

Located in the central office of Special School District of St. Louis County, the Family and Community Resource Center has a number of books, packets, handouts, DVD's and posters to help create an Awareness program. In addition, the Center also has lists of online resources and local presenters available to present.

http://www.ssdmo.org/cool_tools/fcrc.html

2. Special School District Staff

Special School District has a wide variety of staff that can support a school's Awareness program through either support in planning or presenting. They include:

Teachers

Social Workers

Facilitators

Assistive Technology Facilitators

Deaf/Hard of Hearing Itinerant Teachers

Blind/Vision Impaired Itinerant Teachers

Autism Effective Practice Specialists

Social/Emotional/Behavioral Effective Practice Specialists

Special Olympics Facilitator

1. How Does Inclusive Education Fit In?

After helping educators, parents, and students understand the abilities of all people, initial awareness level professional learning in Inclusive Education should be provided. An overview that includes the rationale, definition, and examples of Inclusive Education will give everyone a common knowledge base. Educators and parents who are already involved in Inclusive Education can relate their experiences and answer questions to respond to initial concerns.

2. Where Do I Go To Find Professional Learning and Resources on Inclusive Education?

Special School District has made a commitment through both our Board Policies and through our Comprehensive School Improvement Plan (CSIP) to make Inclusive Education a priority. In order to support both our staff, as well as Partner Districts, Parents and the Community, in a common vision of Inclusive Education, we offer the following professional learning and support:

- a) **Inclusion Matters!** – This document, housed on the SSD website, outlines Special School District’s philosophy, approach and resources to Inclusive Education.
- b) **Inclusive Education Online Course** – Online course available to both General Education and Special Education Administrators and Teachers, parents and community members to help develop understanding and provide tools to successfully provide Inclusive Education.
- c) **SSD Inclusion Video** - Created by SSD Facilitators, this video spotlights how Inclusion has worked for students receiving services through SSD.
- d) **Parent Education and Diversity Awareness Program**
- e) **Facilitators**

3. What are the Next Steps?

- a) **Student-Specific Planning Process Checklist:** Tool for the staff of a school to begin the planning process for Inclusive Education. This tool will assist staff in appreciating the way they will be able to support each other and collaborate as they implement new strategies.
- b) **Assess Ongoing Professional Learning Needs:** Professional learning for staff will continue; however, it will become more focused on the specific needs of the staff and student(s) being included. Moreover, some professional learning may only apply to specific staff members. It may be beneficial to assess the staff at this point to design the ongoing professional learning opportunities and locate additional resources. Finally, although professional learning before Inclusive Education begins is important, specific strategies may not seem relevant and useful to staff until they have “taken the plunge” into this new experience.