

Sustaining Progress Toward Inclusive Schools

Educators and parents agree that the initial work required to create inclusive schools often involves a shift in philosophy and changes in instructional practice. This work is not easy and the timeframe for successful change from limited knowledge of inclusive practices to a smooth system of services and supports usually requires at least two to five years to accomplish. While a school that reaches this milestone has much to celebrate, it is necessary to *maintain* or even *continuously improve* the status of inclusive education.

This Tip of the Month provides a list of sustaining practices that should be in place in schools that want to protect the progress they have made toward inclusive practices.

Sustaining Practice	Our Grade				Action Steps Needed?	
	A	B	C	0 Not in place	No	Yes. Describe.
1. Our school maintains a clear and consistent definition of inclusive education.						
2. Our faculty understands and believes in this definition of inclusion.						
3. The parents of new students are provided clear information describing our school as an inclusive school.						
4. Applicants for positions within our school are asked to respond to questions relative to their position on inclusive education and are provided information about our commitment to inclusive practices.						
5. As new members are added to our faculty, we have a process for education them regarding our inclusive practices and expectations for its implementation.						
6. We have successfully maintained the practice of assigning staff and other resources on the basis of student need versus label or setting.						
7. On-going professional development opportunities are provided to the entire faculty to update and enhance instructional skills in working with diverse students and collaborative skills in working with each other.						
8. It is a clear 'non-negotiable' in our school that all faculty share responsibility for all students.						
9. Either a common planning period or a 'protected' planning period is provided to each faculty member responsible for cooperatively teaching general and special education students						
10. We have coordinated with both sending and receiving schools in our district to ensure a smooth transition from level to level, with a consistent view of inclusive practices and supports.						

*Source: Blankstein, A. (2004). Failure is not an option. Simon & Schuster.

As Richard DeLorenzo, Superintendent of Chugach School District, Anchorage, Alaska, suggests, "...the progress never ends. There is no single mountain to climb. At the top of one peak is just another beyond."

The sustaining practices listed above are essential to maintain hard-won advances in inclusive practices. This additional practice is needed to ensure that we remain open to continuous improvement opportunities.

Sustaining Practice	Our Grade				Action Steps Needed?	
	A	B	C	0 Not in place	No	Yes. Describe.
11. Our school explores new and emerging research-based practices that would improve the impact of inclusive education and outcomes for all students. We also freely share information regarding 'lessons learned' with other schools to promote the practice throughout the district, state and beyond.						