

## **Inclusion:**

### **What is it?**

- According to the least restrictive environment provisions of IDEA, students with disabilities, to the maximum extent appropriate, should be educated with their typically developing peers.
- Students who are included still receive the special education and related services that they need to meet their IEP goals; they just receive them in the regular education classroom.
- When children with disabilities are included, they learn in a regular education classroom with their same-age peers and friends, some who have disabilities and some who don't.

### **Why is it important?**

- Students who are included display higher levels of engagement and social interaction
- Students who are included give and receive higher levels of social support
- Students who are included have larger friendship networks
- Students who are included are exposed to more diverse and challenging information and have a higher rate of independence in adulthood.
- Students who are included gain important role models in learning skills like behaving appropriately and communicating with their peers and adults.
- Students without disabilities learn about disabilities and how to accept people who are different than they are.

### **Some strategies to support inclusion in your classroom:**

**Peer Training.** One effective strategy to support the inclusion of students with autism in your classroom is to educate the general education students about autism through a peer training. Educating the general education students about autism and some of the unique behavioral characteristics inherent to the disorder can better prepare students to interact with and support the student with autism in your classroom. The overall goal of the training should be acceptance. Therefore, it is important to emphasize the numerous ways all students are alike and not just focus on how the student with autism is different. Students should be encouraged to talk to and work with the student with autism in your classroom.

**Peer Tutoring.** Peer tutoring is an instructional strategy in which two students are paired together to work on a task, with one student providing assistance, instruction, and feedback to the other (DuPaul & Eckert, 1998). In Classwide peer tutoring all children in the class are paired and work simultaneously. Both strategies are particularly beneficial for students with autism, as they require high levels of interaction and therefore provide abundant opportunities to practice appropriate social skills (Kamps, Barbetta, Leonard & Delquadri, 1994).

**Peer Supports.** Recruiting typically developing students to serve as peer supports for students with autism (Haring & Breen, 1992; Odom & Strain, 1986) is another strategy that can support inclusion in your classroom. Peers can be recruited to assist with a myriad of challenges faced by students with autism such as hallway etiquette, practicing social interaction skills, staying on task, lunch room behavior, changing classes, and many more.

**Cooperative Learning Groups.** A cooperative learning group is a teaching arrangement that refers to a small group of students working together to complete a task (Kagan, 1994). Cooperative groups have shown to be effective in teaching social and academic skills to students with autism (Kamps et al., 1992; Kohler et al., 1995).