What makes inclusive education successful? There are at least eight factors to success identified by the National Center on Education Restructuring and Inclusion National Study (1995).

1. **Visionary Leadership at All Levels**

A study of 32 inclusive schools in five U.S. states and one Canadian province by Villa, Thousand, Meyers and Nevin\(^{12}\) indicated that the degree of administrative support and vision is the most powerful predictor of the general educator’s attitude toward full inclusion. Although leadership is traditionally seen as emanating from the school superintendent or principal, this study found that the initial impetus for inclusive education and visionary leadership can come from many levels and sources -- educators, related services personnel (e.g. psychologists, occupational therapists), parents, students or university or state-level projects. Whoever initiates the change for inclusion, the vision must be clearly and broadly articulated, consensus must be built and all stakeholders must be involved for it to be successful.

2. **Educator Collaboration**

Reports from school districts across the United States clearly indicate that successful inclusive education does not require that every teacher have the expertise to meet the educational needs of every student. Rather, giving teachers (both regular and special education) the opportunity to collaborate and develop new skills is a prerequisite for success. In a study of more than 600 educators, Villa and colleagues found that the degree of collaboration was the only common variable indicating supportive attitudes toward inclusion. Successful collaboration strategies include building planning teams, scheduling time for teachers and other professionals to work together, recognizing teachers’ problem-solving skills and using teachers as front-line researchers\(^{12}\).

3. **Refocused Use of Assessment**

Historically, up to 50 percent of a special educator’s and sometimes a psychologist’s time has been spent on non-instructional assessment and administrative paperwork related to a student’s eligibility for special education
services. Inclusive schools and districts report that they are moving toward more authentic assessment approaches that are less about administration and more about how students learn and what their potential is. These assessments shift the focus to the student’s work and performance records, among other elements, to identify strengths, interests and communications preferences. The objective is to determine how the student is smart, rather than how smart the student is. This approach establishes a personal learning profile, revealing what the student has and has not yet learned.

4. Support for Students and Staff

Support resources, such as speech therapy, for students with disabilities may be integrated into the general education classroom. These are referred to as “pull in” services, versus “pull out” services that remove students from the general classroom. Peer support such as buddy systems or “circles of friends,” computer-assisted technology and part-time or full-time paraprofessional support are a few ways to integrate services. The approach used is “only as much support as needed” in order to avoid imposing too much or the wrong kind of help on these students. Thus, a paraprofessional may be part of a team, but won’t be assigned exclusively to a student with a disability. This “only as much as needed” principle recognizes that support services are supposed to be educationally necessary to enable a student to take full advantage of the curriculum and allows all students to benefit from additional support in the classroom.

5. Effective Parental Involvement

Meaningful parental participation is critical. Schools successfully practicing inclusion provide family-support services and opportunities for collaboration and communication. It is often the parents or caregivers who assume the role of advocate for a child. The 1997 reauthorization of the IDEA reinforced parental participation by requiring full engagement of parents in all decisions involving their child’s eligibility and placement. IDEA also requires that parents be informed of their child’s progress as frequently as parents of children without disabilities and according to district standards applying to all students.
6. Collaborative Teaching Models

National studies have identified at least five collaborative teaching models that have been successful in inclusion programs.

- **Co-Teaching.** In the co-teaching model a special educator co-teaches alongside the general education teacher.
- **Parallel Teaching.** Parallel teaching assigns a special educator (and other support personnel) to work with a sub-group of special education students in the general classroom.
- **Consultation.** Using the consultation model, a special educator, with a support person, helps the general educator teach students with disabilities in their regular classroom.
- **Teaming.** With the teaming model, a special educator teams up with a support person and one or more general education teachers to share responsibility for all students in the inclusive classroom.
- A **dually licensed teacher** with general and special education certification teaches all students in an inclusive classroom with assistance from other support personnel such as a speech and language therapist.

7. General Education “Best Practices”

Inclusion is successful for both typical and disabled students due to two important ideas. First, classroom adaptations designed for students with disabilities are often also helpful to students without disabilities. Second, the instructional strategies for inclusive education are the same good-teaching practices recommended by general educational reformers and researchers. Such strategies include cooperative group learning (i.e., a group of students with diverse skills and traits working together), students supporting other students, activity-based learning, paraprofessional support in the classroom, diversified instruction and the use of instructional technology.

When adaptations are necessary there are many options. Students can pursue the same curriculum but proceed at multiple levels and with different objectives. For example,
a math class in which some students do basic computation while others work on complex word problems. Or students can be taught the same lesson but the objectives might be different. For example, a team-based biology lab project including students with and without disabilities might stress science objectives for some students, while for others the lab is a lesson in communication and social skills.

8. Funding

In the past, funding formulas encouraged segregated placements for special education students. Under IDEA (as amended in 1997) funds must follow the student regardless of placement and must be sufficient to provide necessary services.

Lack of adequate personnel or resources cannot be used as an excuse by any school district to relieve them of their obligation to make a free appropriate public education available to students with disabilities in a least restrictive environment. Schools are responsible for ensuring that there are sufficient qualified teachers as well as appropriate support services in the general education program.

Inclusive education programs are usually no more expensive than segregated models. However, districts should anticipate one-time conversion costs, particularly for investments in planning and professional development.

Privacy Policy
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