

Strategies for Transitioning to an Inclusive School Environment

By Judith Gross

For many students with disabilities, their school experience began or quickly became non-inclusive. As schools increasingly adopt inclusive practices, these students and their families may have questions or concerns. Following are some strategies, suggestions and resources for schools to help families understand and become a vital part of the process.

Support strategies for school staff to use with families

- 1) Allow the student and family to view the new classroom/school setting outside of normal school hours—a stress-free introduction to the new setting and new teachers/school staff.
- 2) Discuss behavior expectations in the inclusive school environment in positive terms, including information about how schoolwide, classroom, or individualized positive behavior interventions and supports (PBIS) are used. Let the family know the role it plays as a part of the school team in determining additional behavioral supports and services for their child.
- 3) Ask the family how best to communicate with them (e.g., phone, text, email, note home) regarding specific concerns. Assure them that you want to keep them informed and work to ensure a smooth transition for their child and that they are partners in this process.

Common questions families have regarding inclusive environments

- 1) Why is inclusion going to work now for my child? The school previously told me he/she needed a special separate environment.
 - We, as a school, are transforming the way we think about disability and special education services. We used to think that special education was a place where we did things differently and individualized the instruction. Now we think about special education in terms of meeting students' needs and providing them the support they need where they are—in the general education classroom of their neighborhood school. We think that ALL children should be included in their neighborhood school and are committed to providing the support needed across school settings to ensure that they are included.
- 2) My child struggles with meeting behavioral expectations in school. How is the

classroom teacher going to be able to manage my child in addition to all the other kids in the classroom?

- We have a proactive, schoolwide approach to addressing behavior concerns that reinforces and rewards appropriate behavior and prevents inappropriate behaviors. We teach all students schoolwide behavioral expectations, which are consistent across settings. When students struggle with behavior, they receive more support or specific instruction to address their behavior challenges. A few students with more intensive behavior needs will receive individualized supports, like opportunities for movement, break times when stressed, and check-in/check-out with a trusted adult. Your child will receive these type of wrap-around behavior supports throughout the school.
- 3) How are you going to keep me informed/work with me regarding what is happening at school concerning my child? In the past, the school didn't tell me what was happening with my child until it was too late for me to help, and they had already decided he/she needed to go to school somewhere else.
- We believe the family is an important ingredient for students' success, and we consider open and frequent communication with you as essential. We want to establish a strong family-school partnership with you. You are welcome in the school at any time. To keep you informed, we send home schoolwide information via ___ [email, paper newsletter, text messaging] and class-specific information via ___. In addition, we can set up an individualized form of communication with you, like a communication notebook or weekly progress charts. We want to ensure that you are aware of how your child is doing at school and share important information that may affect your child.

Resources to share with the family

SWIFT Talk Blog

Transitioning to an Inclusive Setting: Five strategies for districts, schools, and families – Mary Schuh ([click here](#))

SWIFT Why Inclusive Education? Handout

English ([click here](#))

Spanish ([click here](#))

SWIFT Unscripted podcast

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports

Podcast with Dr. Rob Horner: <http://www.swiftschools.org/unscripted>

Transcript ([click here](#))

Resources for staff

SWIFT Webinar

From Seemingly Impossible to Exceptional: How to Partner with “Hard to Reach” Families – Grace Francis and Shana Haines ([click here](#))

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