



Promoting Inclusion for Students in Special Education During Hybrid and Remote Learning

Inclusion in LPS

The following document was created with significant input from the Community Input Team for Inclusion.

What Is Inclusion?

The CIT Inclusion has created the following working definition for inclusion in our schools. This is a draft and will be revised as part of our future work:

In the Lexington Public Schools, inclusion is a core philosophy where all students feel welcome, supported, and accepted in all aspects of their educational environment. Inclusion means giving every child access to and integration with the general education classes. All students must feel confident in their environment to learn, knowing that they first belong in general education settings. The curriculum must be adaptable and accessible in meaningful ways, and include specialized teaching and assessment practices, so that all students can learn with their peers rather than simply being physically present in a learning space. It is the school community's responsibility to meet each student's needs within the regular educational setting as often as possible through accommodations and modifications; the end result should be an environment where all students have equitable opportunities that are universally accessible by design where all learners participate, are challenged, and grow. Through these practices and processes, our school community values and respects diverse ways of knowing for all students, embracing difference to the benefit of each individual student. This vision of inclusion must become the way we operate naturally and intuitively; the inclusive way we approach learning becomes almost like the air we breathe.

Inclusion in the Pandemic

The CIT Inclusion identified that our current goal is to ensure our vision is the lived reality for students with disabilities, especially embracing the idea that all students benefit when students with disabilities are included with their general education peers. To achieve this, we must provide inclusion opportunities, especially since the current hybrid and remote learning environments prevent us from providing inclusion in the manner we did prior to the COVID pandemic. Staff will need to be innovative in providing these opportunities, and students and families will need to embrace these new ideas. Each school building and programming has slightly different circumstances in which they are operating during the pandemic, including at times when buildings are closed and the majority of students are engaging in remote learning.

Inclusion in remote learning is challenging for a variety of reasons. Staff and students are isolated via technology, social distancing, and masking. This has limited and changed the interactions between members of our school community, especially for certain special education services. Many students in district Special Education programming are attending school full-time, which changes the nature of inclusion since nearly all of their peers are either hybrid or full remote. Some families feel that they may choose either academics or inclusion in the current environment, but not both.

Ideas & Possibilities

The CIT Inclusion has created the following list of ideas for promoting inclusion in the current learning environment:

Technology

Rather than viewing the technology necessary to engage in learning during the pandemic as a deterrent to inclusion, we can use the universal accessibility features and other aspects of technology to achieve our inclusion goals. In some cases, this may require additional learning opportunities for both staff and parents/guardians. The National Center on Accessible Educational Materials has [this helpful webpage](#) that may be useful.

Consistent Monitoring

Staff should continue to monitor the progress toward inclusion for students with disabilities, both formally and informally asking for feedback from students, staff, and families.

In-Person Learning

When not already doing so, building leadership should consider allowing students attending in-person learning full-time to physically attend their classes rather than attend them remotely from within the building. Likewise, leadership should continue to identify students with disabilities who can benefit from in-person learning beyond the alternating weeks in the hybrid model when doing so would not compromise individual and community health during the pandemic.

Best Practices

Many of our staff have already created innovative opportunities to promote inclusion during pandemic learning, and many of these practices include the social-emotional inclusion of students with disabilities as well as the academic. We should identify these staff members and provide opportunities for them to share these practices with others. These opportunities can take place at the department, building, and system levels.

Social Opportunities

Staff can partner with community members and organizations to provide opportunities for social inclusion outside the general education academic setting. This might include outdoor activities that allow for social distancing or facilitated remote spaces. The current weekly schedules might also allow for these opportunities to take place during the school day, especially during “blue” weeks.