SOCIALLY INCLUSIVE SCHOOL DISTRICTS
Seven Characteristics

Characteristic 1:
Inclusive Youth Leadership:

The district values inclusive youth leadership as a priority, and youth representing the diversity of the student body are engaged in leadership positions.

Attributes:

- All students, regardless of ability or achievement level, are given opportunities to make meaningful change in their classrooms, school and community.
- Youth of every ability level are given opportunities, training and means to execute their decisions and to be leaders and agents of change in their communities.
- There is access, opportunity, training and encouragement for all youth of any ability to fulfill leadership positions.
- The district models and encourages their schools to develop opportunities for students of all abilities to be formal leaders.
- Adults model the attitudes, skills and efforts required of leadership and provide opportunities to empower youth to be leaders.

Talking Points

1. Which students, if any, influence school decisions, and how are they involved?
   - Communications (e.g., school newspaper, announcements)
   - Student government
   - Surveys
   - Class discussions
   - Events/assemblies (i.e., leading/ determining focus, not just attending)
   - Principal Advisory Committee
2. In what ways are students of different abilities involved in improving the inclusiveness of the school?
   - Decisions about class scheduling
   - Development of inclusive events
   - Creation of communications supporting inclusion (e.g., posters, newspaper , media)
   - Participation in inclusive clubs or sports
3. Which students serve as youth leaders in school (e.g., through sports teams, classroom discussions, service opportunities)?
4. Which students, if any, receive instruction in social-emotional skills (e.g., decision making, collaboration, self-management, conflict resolution)?
5. In what social-emotional learning (SEL) areas, if any, do students receive instruction?

Characteristic 2:
Creating and Sustaining Relationships

A commitment exists to bring youth with and without disabilities together through programs focused on their development and solving social problems.

Attributes

- District support exists to ensure each student is connected and feels they belong to the school community.
- District support for inclusion of all students in classroom, extra-curricular and community activities.
- District support for socially inclusive school climate (the quality and character of schools emphasizing integration of students with and without intellectual disabilities).
- District supports curricular options to support preferred diverse learning styles such as visual, auditory, tactile, etc.
- District provides guidance and effective strategies for school schedules and building arrangements to support needs of all students.
- Staff provides regular and frequent activities in which adults and youth work together to solve problems and learn together, promoting a collaborative climate.
- Staff ensures that all students in the school receive instruction that meets their individual skill levels, learning styles and engagement levels.
- Staff creates opportunities for building relationships developed in classrooms and in social and after-school settings.

Talking Points

Where do students with intellectual disabilities interact with students without intellectual disabilities?

Which members of the school community are formally involved in efforts to include students with intellectual disabilities in school programs or activities?

Where do students without intellectual disabilities demonstrate their friendships with students with intellectual disabilities?

Where do parents of students without intellectual disabilities interact with parents of students with intellectual disabilities?

Characteristic 3:
Unifying Programming

A commitment exists to bring diverse programs together, focusing on student development.

Attributes

- District support for high-quality programs for students of all abilities in schools.
- District support for Unified Sports, inclusive sports, and inclusive leadership programming.
- District supports, encourages, and rewards unifying programs
- Access and opportunities are provided regularly for students with and without intellectual disabilities to participate together in sports and other engagement activities.
- School leaders create an inclusive culture, showcasing the work and achievements of all, creating unified programs, and eliminating boundaries between students.
- Student clubs and activities consistently work toward being inclusive and welcoming for all students.

Talking Points

Which resources, if any, does the district provide for unifying programming?

Which students regularly participate in school athletic programs?

Which students regularly participate in extracurricular opportunities?

For which clubs and sports does the school celebrate accomplishments?

Characteristic 4:
School-Community Collaborations

Sustainable collaborations exist to benefit youth, school, and community; and they are supported by commitments, high levels of trust, funding, measurable deliverables and formal policies.

Attributes

- Formal relationships established between the district and diverse community partners.
- Opportunities for students to engage in community-based activities such as community service, community development projects and organizational leadership.
- School personnel work with community-based organizations such as Special Olympics to create and sustain collaborations and meaningful relationships that provide students with opportunities to contribute to content, design and implementation of projects and interactions.
- Students are given opportunities to collaborate with diverse community populations, reflecting ethnic, cultural, socio-economic and ability differences.
- School-community collaborations reflect a widespread belief that everyone is essential to the success of the community

Talking Points

Which individuals, if any, have an active voice developing and implementing an inclusive vision and goals for the school?

Which community organizations collaborate with the school on events or activities?

How do community organizations and agencies support your goals for inclusiveness and access to opportunities for all of your students?

Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools

Characteristic 5:
Communications

Clear, concise communications are essential to ensure program effectiveness and stakeholder understanding.

Attributes

- District ensures inclusive language included in communications with education and community stakeholders.
- District ensures curriculum and teaching and learning strategies include inclusive language.
- District monitors and models use of inclusive language at district, school and community level to ensure appropriate language is used in all communications.
- Mechanisms and systems are in place to articulate and demonstrate the characteristics of inclusive schools and the unique responsibilities of youth, teachers, administrators and community members.
- When the word "student" is used, it always refers to every student in the school, regardless of ability level, special needs, services or academic placement.
- The school community intentionally shares and celebrates the skills, practices and accomplishments of all students and adults.
- Lessons, class projects and school activities are conducted in ways that reach all types of learners by using music, videos, arts, interactive activities or team-based approach.

Talking Points

When do educators discuss the importance of inclusive language?

In what ways is inclusive language used when communicating with students, school staff, parents or community members?

With whom does the school share the accomplishments of special education students?

Who stops others from using language that is hurtful toward students with intellectual disabilities (e.g., terms such as: retard[ed], "those kids", slow class)?

Characteristic 6:
Professional Development

A variety of opportunities are established for stakeholders, community organizations, and leaders to acquire and enhance knowledge and skills to effectively implement and sustain inclusive schools.

Attributes

- District provides professional development to build inclusive knowledge, skills and dispositions
- District supports schools to ensure special and general education teachers and staff learn together through ongoing professional development, professional learning communities and collaborative planning and implementation.
- District engages students with and without intellectual disabilities in professional development.
- Multiple professional development strategies (e.g., simulations, small group conversation, guest speakers) are employed with students, teachers, administrators and community members to ensure diverse learning opportunities for all.
- Informational programs about inclusive schools, inclusive teaching strategies and the range of student abilities are provided for students and family members.
- Teachers engage in reflective practices and continuously monitor instruction and classroom management to identify opportunities for their classroom to become more inclusive.
- A comprehensive system of evaluation and ongoing improvement addresses school effectiveness, including issues of inclusion.

Talking Points

Who receives instruction from the school about addressing the needs of the special education student population and the use of inclusive teaching strategies?

When do special and general education teachers have opportunities to collaborate?

When do school personnel receive professional development training on promoting students' social-emotional skills (SEL)?

In what ways does the school integrate social-emotional learning (SEL) into the school?

Special Olympics
Unified Champion Schools

Characteristic 7:
Continuous Improvement

Structures and processes are put into place to ensure the development and ongoing support of an inclusive school climate and effective learning environment for all students.

Attributes

- Appropriate measures of school climate are supported by the district and corresponding data and analyses enhance social inclusiveness.
- Data is collected, analyzed and shared to monitor social inclusiveness and to inform new and enhanced practices.
- School data on attendance, discipline, graduation rates and participation in extra-curricular activities is disaggregated and analyzed and shared for trends and enhancement.

Talking Points

Aside from data on student achievement, what data collection processes do you use to support your school improvement efforts?

How is data collected regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities?

Is data are collected from: students, school personnel, parents, community members?

With whom do administrators share findings and strategies about inclusive practices?