

5 WAYS TO TURN LINE MAKERS INTO CIRCLE MAKERS

When supporting line makers to become circle makers, we first have to help them to understand why it is important to include all students. These 5 ways listed below here are intended to bolster the understanding of those who are ready to create more inclusive schools.

1. EXPLORE THE LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE) CLAUSE OF IDEA

It is important for people who are becoming circle makers to understand the legal underpinnings of inclusion.

- o The term that is used to support inclusion in the law is LRE. This term is explicitly cited in IDEA 2004, the federal law governing special education. IDEA 2004 stipulates that all students with disabilities have the legal right to be placed in the LRE.
- o LRE means that, to the maximum extent appropriate, a school district must educate any student with a disability in the regular classroom with appropriate aids and supports, referred to as supplementary aids and services, along with the student's peers without disabilities, in the school he or she would attend if the student did not have a disability (IDEA, 2004).
- o Under LRE, the general education classroom is the first place to be considered for placing a student with a disability before more restrictive options are considered.
- o One of the most significant changes in the 2004 update to IDEA concerns the requirement that students with disabilities receive access to the general curriculum. Specifically, the new Amendments require that students with disabilities:
 - (1) have access to the general curriculum;
 - (2) be involved in the general curriculum; and
 - (3) progress in the general curriculum.

2. SPEND EVEN MORE TIME WITH THE WHY.

When supporting line makers to become circle makers, we first have to help them to understand why it is important to include all students. We need to engage the mind to understand why we would go through all of the systemic and personal work it takes to make an inclusive shift. Discussing the why is also not a one time thing. Sufficient time and energy needs to be placed on learning and exploring why we need to think and act inclusively. Some of the reasons to explore in order to reimagine outdated exclusive line-making practices include:

- o THE PURPOSE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION— to give students access to general education. We can best do that in general education settings.
- o BROWN V. BOARD OF EDUCATION— in 1954 our supreme court determined that it is simply not acceptable to segregate human beings by race. It is also not appropriate to segregate human beings by ability.
- o SOCIAL JUSTICE— equitable education can only occur when we give all students access to the content and curriculum that helps to create the most likely success options in life.
- o PERSON SPECIFIC REASONS— often when a line maker becomes a circle maker it is due to knowing a person with significant support needs who is included and succeeding.

5 WAYS TO TURN LINE MAKERS INTO CIRCLE MAKERS

3. LEARN ABOUT THE RESEARCH

Research Based Reasons- Erasing the lines that separate students and drawing circles instead creates better outcomes for all students. Students with disabilities do better academically when included in general education settings and even have better post school outcomes.

- Inclusion in general education is a critical predictor of both school and post-school outcomes (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Carter & Hughes, 2005; Cimera, 2010; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; Hughes et al, 2013; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Test et al., 2009).
- Researchers (Kurth et al, 2018) found that when schools build capacity for effective instruction and service delivery in general education for all students, more students with disabilities succeed in general education and are exited from special education settings altogether.
- When compared to their peers in segregated students, students with disabilities who are included in the general education classroom make greater academic gains overall and increase their academic performance related to standards based curriculum (Agran, Alper, & Wehmeyer 2002; Doré, Dion, Wagner, & Brunet 2002; National Council on Disability, 2018; Ryndack et al, 2014).
- After analyzing thousands of students across hundreds of districts researchers have found more time in general education positively correlates to increased academic achievement (Cosier, 2010). And, the correlation is even stronger for students with the most significant disabilities.

Students with disabilities do better behaviorally and socially when included in general education settings.

- When provided with appropriate supports and services, inclusion in general education settings helps students feel a greater sense of belonging and can provide them with meaningful access to friendships and high expectations.
- Students with disabilities engage in significantly higher levels of communication, and with more frequency than their peers in segregated class settings (Foreman et al., 2004).
- After following a group of students with significant disabilities for two years in both inclusive settings and segregated class settings, Fisher and Meyer (2002) found the inclusive student group made more significant gains in social development measures, and had much higher social competence scores than the students in the segregated group.

Inclusive settings increase the positive social and emotional learning for students without disabilities, too.

- Studies indicate that peers without disabilities develop a deeper level of acceptance for diversity when educated alongside students with disabilities (Fisher, Pumpian, & Sax 1998; Krajewski & Hyde, 2000; Shogren et al, 2015).
- Finally, research shows that academic achievement increases or stays the same for students without disabilities in inclusive classrooms (Causton-Theoharis & Theoharis, 2008; Choi et al., 2016; Hunt, Staub, Alwell, & Goetz, 1994; McDonnell, Thorson, & McQuivey, 2000; Theoharis & Causton-Theoharis, 2010).

5 WAYS TO TURN LINE MAKERS INTO CIRCLE MAKERS

4. ENGAGE THE HEART.

When supporting line makers to become circle makers it is important to walk with them on the journey and help them to see the deeper, heartfelt meaning behind why this work is so important. This work matters because it gives all students more opportunities to succeed and make friends. To help with this process, you can watch or read these books and films together.

- o **From Behavior to Belonging** - this new inspirational and practical book by Causton and MacLeod can help people to understand both why and how to include the students that challenge us and the educational system most.
- o **Including Samuel**- this film by photojournalist Dan Habib chronicles how in his life before his son Samuel was diagnosed with cerebral palsy, he rarely thought about the inclusion of people with disabilities. Now he thinks about inclusion every day. Shot and produced over four years, Habib's award-winning documentary film, *Including Samuel*, chronicles the Habib family's efforts to include Samuel in every facet of their lives. The film honestly portrays his family's hopes and struggles, as well as the experiences of four other individuals with disabilities and their families.
- o **Intelligent Lives** — This film stars three pioneering young American adults with intellectual disabilities – Micah, Naieer, and Naomie – who challenge perceptions of intelligence as they navigate high school, college, and the workforce. A true catalyst to transform the label of intellectual disability from a life sentence of isolation into a life of possibility for the most systematically segregated people in America.
- o **Wretches and Jabberers** - in this documentary film, two men with autism embark on a global quest to change attitudes about disability and intelligence. Determined to put a new face on autism, Tracy Thresher, 42, and Larry Bissonnette, 52, travel to Sri Lanka, Japan and Finland. At each stop, they dissect public attitudes about autism and issue a hopeful challenge to reconsider competency and the future.
- o **Crip Camp**- in this film we learn about a groundbreaking summer camp that galvanizes a group of teens with disabilities to help build a movement, forging a new path toward greater equality.

5. BEGIN TO CREATE CIRCLES.

1. **CLEARLY SET A BOLD NEW VISION FOR YOUR SCHOOL.** How do we want to implement and envision inclusive values here? How will we create inclusive structures? How will our climate be inclusive? How will we meet the strengths and needs of all?
2. **EXAMINE WHAT IS HAPPENING NOW.** Closely and honestly examine your structures, processes and data. Compare that data with the new vision. Remember, current systems are perfectly designed for current outcomes. If the outcomes are not what you want, then you must change the system. Decide what systems need to change and begin.
3. **RETHINK THE LINES AND DRAW CIRCLES INSTEAD.** Use a team approach instead of a general and special education approach. What does it look like to blur the line between general and special education? What does it mean to see every student through strengths and not through deficits? What does it look like to give every student access to general education settings?