

# ***Myths & Facts*** ***about*** ***Inclusive Education***



# Myths & Facts about Inclusive Education

After a statewide survey in March 2024, the Sacramento County Office of Education worked with the TIES Center at the University of Minnesota to identify common myths and misperceptions about inclusive education as it relates to learners with disabilities. Five overarching topic areas for myths emerged:

- (a) Academic performance
- (b) Specially designed instruction
- (c) Healthcare needs
- (d) Behavior support needs
- (e) Fiscal feasibility of inclusion

These topic areas became individual components of this Myths and Facts document.

**Myth 1:** A student with a disability cannot be educated in a general education classroom unless they are academically at or near grade level.

**Myth 2:** Only teachers holding specialized credentials to serve students with disabilities, (i.e., Ed Specialists) can provide specially designed instruction (SDI) to a student with an Individualized Education Program (IEP).

**Myth 3:** If a student has complex health or self-care needs, they cannot be included in a general education classroom.

**Myth 4:** Students with extensive behavioral support needs should be educated in separate specialized settings alongside peers with similar needs.

**Myth 5:** It is more expensive to include students with extensive support needs in general education classrooms due to a need for increased staffing.

All references and related resources are accessible through the *Myths and Facts About Inclusive Education Padlet* via each page's QR code or at <https://tinyurl.com/CAInclusionMythBusting>

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# Myths & Facts about Inclusive Education

## Myth 1:

A student with a disability cannot be educated in a general education classroom unless they are academically at or near grade level.

## Fact:

A student with a disability does not need to meet specific academic requirements or demonstrate grade-level proficiency to participate or to be included in a general education classroom.

### Research and Evidence Says:

- [D.R. v. Redondo Beach Unified School District](#) ruled that a child does not have to prove that they can benefit from a general education placement.
- The U.S. Supreme Court Ruled in [Endrew F. v. Douglas County](#) that “every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives” (Endrew, 2017, p. 1,000).
- Research demonstrates students are more likely to have access to a standards-based curriculum when they are educated in general education classrooms (Lansey et al., 2024; Taub et al., 2020).
- Studies show when students with disabilities are served inclusively compared to peers who are served in separate settings, all students have increased academic skills and attendance rates. This is true for both students with mild-moderate support needs (Cole et al., 2022) and students with extensive support needs (Gee et al., 2020).



### The Truth Is:

- According to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004), students are not required to meet any benchmark or exhibit any particular skill to receive instruction in a general education classroom.
- Disability labels should never determine placement (IDEA, 2004).
- [Guide to California Alternative Pathway to a High School Diploma for Students with Extensive Support Needs \(Alt Pathway\)](#) requires students who previously would have received Certificates of Completion to now have access to earning a high school diploma.

### Addressing the Myth:

- Ensure interest holders have resources that show how students with extensive support needs can engage in general education lessons (e.g., [Inclusive Science Lesson: Newton's Law video](#)).
- Model presuming competence for all students to ensure that every student in a school is on a general education teacher's roster and has a desk in the classroom, no matter how much time they spend there (see [Using the Least Dangerous Assumption in Educational Decisions](#)).
- Equip general educators and education specialists with the necessary skills and time to co-plan for students with and without disabilities, collaboratively addressing, minimizing and/or reducing barriers to learning (see [Lessons for All: 5-15-45 Tool](#)).



#### Resources



# Myths & Facts about Inclusive Education

## Myth 2:

Only teachers holding special education credentials can provide specially designed instruction (SDI) to a student with an IEP.

## Fact:

SDI can also be delivered by general education teachers or related service providers in any environment, as long as the SDI is designed in collaboration with an Education Specialist and is aligned with the student's IEP.

### Research and Evidence Says:

- [California's Standards for the Teaching Profession \(2024\)](#) Element 3c indicates that "Teachers design and implement content and resources that enable equitable access for every learner, including those with more complex needs, to essential academic and social-emotional concepts, to promote each learner's growth."
- The goal of an IEP is to provide access to and progress in the general education curriculum for students with disabilities (IDEA, 2004). If the Ed Specialist is thought to be the only one who can provide SDI, a team may be unintentionally limiting a child's access to educators with specific expertise in the grade-level general education curriculum.
- The IEP Team is responsible for determining what special education and related services are needed to address the unique needs of the individual child with a disability. Some of those services may already be a part of the general education setting, which does not preclude them from meeting the definition of "special education" or "related services" and being included in the child's IEP (see [U.S. Department of Education Policy Letter, May 9, 2012](#)).



### The Truth Is:

- Students with disabilities can receive SDI in a general education setting, as long as the instruction includes accessible content, methodology, or delivery to address their individualized needs to access the general education curriculum (IDEA, 2004).
- SDI is important for students' education no matter who provides it. IEP service minutes should include SDI provided by any school staff in any setting.
- Ed Specialists who design SDI for Multilingual-English Learners with disabilities should consider their language learning needs, as well as their reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in both English and any other language used for instruction.

### Addressing the Myth:

- Provide training and coaching on how the IEP can be written to promote a student's access to and progress in the general education curriculum, especially for students with extensive support needs (see [High Quality IEPs website](#)).
- Ed Specialists can schedule time in general education classrooms to provide job-embedded modeling and professional learning to general education teachers on how to provide SDI to students with disabilities.
- Provide regularly scheduled time for teacher collaboration so that all educators can co-plan, co-design, and co-assess instruction for students with disabilities, utilizing their diverse skill sets.



### Resources





# Myths & Facts about Inclusive Education

## Myth 3:

If a student has complex health or self-care needs, they cannot be included in a general education classroom.

## Fact:

Students with disabilities have the right to participate alongside their peers without disabilities through individualized specialized care and support, regardless of the extent of their support needs.

### Research and Evidence Says:

- Sometimes when supplementary aids and services are written in Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), staff use them to justify that the student needs a separate setting ([Ballard & Dymond, 2018](#), [Kurth et al., 2019](#)). The intent of the law is to promote access to inclusive settings through the provision of supplementary aids and services.
- The U.S. Supreme Court has provided precedent for students dependent on medical technology to attend school and receive needed related services from school district personnel ([Cedar Rapids Community School Dist. v. Garret F., 1999](#)).



### The Truth Is:

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) enables students to receive Supplementary Aids and Services to support participation in a general education setting to the greatest extent possible. These include supports for complex health care needs, e.g., toileting, tube feeding, or other medical needs (see [PROGRESS Center Tip Sheet - What are Supplementary Aids and Services?](#)).
- There are no health or toileting prerequisites in current law for what a student must meet to be educated in a general education classroom.



### Addressing the Myth:

- Special education services can be provided anywhere that the student with a disability receives their education.
- IEP teams determine students' educational needs, including medical and physical considerations and then what supplementary aids and services will enable the student to be educated in general education settings with nondisabled students to the maximum extent appropriate.
- Medical and self-care supports for all students should be treated with privacy and respect and worked into the daily schedule without requiring a student to be educated in alternate or segregated settings.

#### Resources



# Myths & Facts about Inclusive Education

## Myth 4:

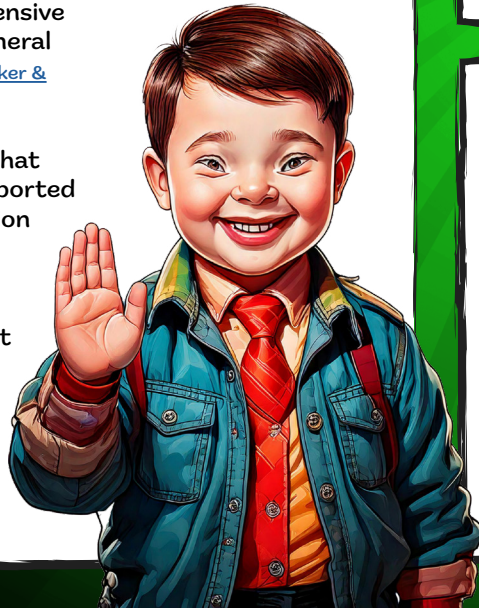
Students with extensive behavioral support needs should be educated in separate specialized settings alongside peers with similar needs.

## Fact:

Students with extensive behavioral support needs have a right to be educated in the least restrictive environment, with the first consideration being the general education classroom at their neighborhood school.

### Research and Evidence Says:

- Challenging behavior may serve a variety of communication purposes for a student with a disability who is otherwise not able to express their wants, needs, ideas, or feelings (see [ASHA Challenging Behavior as Communication](#)).
- Accessible Tier 1 behavior strategies can reduce disruptive and aggressive behaviors for students with extensive support needs in a general education setting ([Walker & Conradi, 2023](#)).
- Research also shows that students who are supported within general education settings with positive behavioral supports show improved academic achievement (Horner et al., 2009; [Lassen, Steele, & Sailor, 2006](#); [Nelson et al., 2002](#)).



### The Truth Is:

- The law requires that the general education environment is the first placement consideration for a student with disabilities. Only after extensive supports and services have been put in place, and when a student still is not able to make progress, a more restrictive environment may be considered (see [OSEP Dear Colleague Letter from August 2016](#)).
- Students with complex communication needs should have access to skilled specialists who are trained to address communication, behavioral, and sensory needs within general education settings.
- Prior to placement decisions, a functional behavior assessment (FBA) and/or a behavioral intervention plan (BIP) should be included and updated regularly.
- Students should also have access to AAC/ AT communication equipment as necessary.

### Addressing the Myth:

- Ensure behavior support teams include both general education teachers and Ed specialists to ensure that school-wide behavior supports are accessible to all students in all settings.
- If the school is providing one-to-one aides to address behavioral challenges, ensure they are only one part of the solution, which should also include a robust schoolwide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS).





# Myths & Facts about Inclusive Education

## Myth 5:

It is more expensive to include students with extensive support needs in general education classrooms due to a need for increased staffing.

## Fact:

Inclusive schools and districts that embrace inclusion of students with disabilities have demonstrated less spending per student compared to districts and schools with more students in separate settings.

### Research and Evidence Says:

- Schools that use their resources flexibly, map out the resources they already have, and utilize available staff in collaborative and intentional ways to support each and every learner demonstrate positive academic, social, and behavioral outcomes for all students ([Theoharis et al, 2016](#), [Haines et al, 2022](#)).
- Peer-mediated interventions are evidence-based approaches to supporting students with disabilities, including those with extensive support needs, to supporting social, behavioral and academic outcomes without reliance on adult delivered supports ([Travers, H.E., & Carter, E.W., 2022](#)).



### The Truth Is:

- Research shows the more restrictive placement options a district provides, the higher their per special education student expenditure ([Jackson et al., 2022](#)).
- Creative master scheduling and staff resource deployment designed with inclusion in mind has been successful without prompting the need for additional staff support.
- When the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) are used as the basis of instructional planning in the general education classroom, students with and without disabilities experience fewer barriers to learning.
- If an individual student does happen to require some additional services that will incur additional costs, the student has the right to receive these supports and services.

### Addressing the Myth:

- Consider a peer engagement strategy that could be implemented in an inclusive general education classroom or other inclusive school environment (see [TIES Center Peer Engagement Implementation Guides](#)).
- Develop an Inclusive Leadership Team to consider inclusive reform efforts, including resource mapping and inclusive service delivery models.
- Offer training to all school personnel in inclusive practices so that they are able to fulfill their multifaceted roles and responsibilities within the entire school community.
- Include paraprofessionals in instructional teams (grade level, programatic, etc.) to be utilized across the school versus assigned one-on-one when possible.

