

Understanding what an Inclusive School Community is



“At the core of inclusion is the concept of making differences ordinary so that all students have a place, feel valued and welcomed, and are equipped for success.” (Setting the Direction – Action on Inclusion, 2010)



In order for school leaders to create learning environments that are inclusive of all students, it is important to first build an understanding of what characterizes an inclusive school community. This tip sheet will identify key elements for school leaders to consider when building inclusive learning environments.

Inclusive school environments:

- take responsibility for all students
 - School staff commit to meeting the needs of all students, regardless of their abilities, life circumstances or challenges.
- emphasize high expectations for all students
 - All students receive the support they require to be successful.
- take a strength-based approach towards meeting the needs of all students
 - Programming and instruction focuses on what students can do and capitalizes on students' interests and background knowledge.
- are characterized by collaboration, caring and respect
 - Staff, students and community partners work together to create a welcoming and inclusive learning environment.

Tips for building Inclusive Learning Environments:

Create opportunities for getting to know students

- Identifying students' strengths and challenges is critical in building inclusive learning environments.
- Developing student learning profiles at the beginning of the school year, and continually adding new information and ideas throughout the year may help with this work.
- Students should also have a clear understanding of their own strengths and learning needs so they are able to be more active learners, effectively advocate for themselves, and celebrate their successes.

Create opportunities to include students in the learning process

- Students who clearly understand the learning tasks they are participating in are better able to develop a deeper understanding of the related learning outcomes.
- Providing students with choice and flexibility can make learning opportunities more engaging and relevant to students' everyday experiences.
- Create opportunities for students to participate in the development of rubrics and the assessment of their own learning.

Use multiple means of teaching

- Students have a range of strengths and needs and will benefit from a range of ways to engage in learning.
- All students require different entry points and flexibility in how they demonstrate their understanding of learning outcomes.
- Consider providing course content in multiple formats (text, audio, visual, etc.) and allowing students to choose how they will demonstrate what they have learned.

