

Promoting the Independence of Special Needs Pupils

Or:

What Do We Do When There is Less SEA/PA Time???

1. Remember some general principles by which we work in special education, and try to be as faithful as possible to them, even (especially!) in difficult times:
 - ✓ promotion of meaningful inclusion for all children;
 - ✓ provision of the least restrictive/most enabling environment for all children;
 - ✓ cooperative planning and sharing of skills and strategies among all adults, to promote success of all kids;
 - ✓ involvement of special needs pupils with typical peers and with all adults in the building;
 - ✓ promotion of meaningful participation of special needs children in the life of the classroom and the school.
2. Think of general strategies and work formats that promote the independence of special needs pupils. These strategies and formats will be *more important* when there is less direct 1:1 adult supervision. For example, the use of a visual schedule; the use of task cards or work folders with step by step instructions and visual prompts; the use of a basket system for getting and putting away work; worksheet formats with visual and verbal prompts that promote a high level of success, self-correction, error monitoring and the like.
3. The special education assistant and/or special education teacher will need to spend time on a regular basis organizing independent 'work packages' (worksheets in a 'To Do' folder; task cards in a work basket, free time activities; etc.), to be completed later by the special needs student in her/his classroom.
4. Make sure the classroom teacher and other adults who interact with the student are familiar with the student's visual schedule and with other formats and systems for promoting independence. ***All adults are teachers of all students.***
5. Train the special needs pupil in problem solving strategies: When I have a problem where can I go? Whom can I talk to? Use visual supports, theme boards, etc. to support the problem solving strategies and routines. Make sure key adults know what the problem solving strategies and routines are.
6. If there is more than one SEA in the building: vary the start and finish times of SEA's so that at least one person is available to assist special needs pupils during school hours.
7. Pull-out and group special needs pupils for small group instruction at various times during the day, particularly when SEA support is 'thin'.
8. Use peer tutors (same age peers or older children) to assist the special needs pupil with academic tasks. Use 'social tutors' or a 'Circle of Friends' to help involve special needs pupils at times such as assemblies, lunch time, bus line up, PE.
9. Think about the characteristics of the special needs child. What does she/he find it easiest to do without assistance? What are highly preferred activities? Which activities need most adult assistance? What are the times during the day, or the activities, during which problems most often (and least often) occur? Try to arrange the schedule to account for these variables as much as possible.

10. Think about the schedule of the special needs child and of the adults in the building. When will the SEA not be available to the special needs child (e.g. first 30 minutes in the morning? last 30 minutes in the afternoon? Just before or after lunch?). What independent activities can be scheduled for the special needs youngster during this time? Can other activities be scheduled for the special needs pupil during this time (e.g., special education teacher pull-out time? speech and language time? classroom PE?)
11. Ensure issues of risk management, risk reduction, the safety of the special needs pupil, the learning environment for the special needs pupil and all pupils in the classroom are carefully, honestly and thoughtfully discussed and considered. Discuss procedures for reducing and managing risks and for dealing with emergencies with the school-based team, and with the parents/guardians of the special needs pupil. Document the procedures in the IEP. (For example: Establish clear areas of the school or playground where the student may and may not be during recess, during lunch, before and after school. Explicitly teach, monitor and reinforce the rules. Provide visual supports.)

After careful consideration of all of the above:

12. Some children may not be able to be in school without adult supervision. Discuss issues related to part-time programs with parents/guardians with due regard to provincial legislation, school district policies, procedural fairness and mutual respect.

Remember:

All adults are teachers of all students.

John Barth
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