

12 Steps to Closing Life Skills Rooms and Opening Possibilities for Students

LIFE SKILLS ROOMS ARE OUTDATED AND HARMFUL.

We used to think that some students with disabilities could not handle academics and needed to only practice “life skills” in a separate setting with other students with disabilities. We now know better! Here are 12 steps to shut down your life skills classrooms and other separate places and spaces. These 12 steps will help you create inclusive opportunities for ALL.

12 STEPS TO CLOSING LIFE SKILLS ROOMS AND OPENING POSSIBILITIES FOR STUDENTS

1. SHIFT MINDSETS.

How we think about, talk about, and write about disability impacts our decisions. Educators need to shift their mindsets, learn new strategies, and grow so they can educate ALL students together.

Grab our 10 ways to shift mindsets here

2. ANNOUNCE IT.

Share your intentions to be an inclusive school by creating a clear vision statement! Be specific and bold - tell everyone that having life skills classrooms is NOT best practice and that you are moving away from having harmful self-contained spaces and places.

3. SHARE THE WHY.

There are many reasons why we need to be inclusive. Differentiate your “why” by drawing from U.S. law, 50+ years of research, social justice directives, and everyone’s need to belong.

4. CREATE A TIMELINE.

A specific timeline that reflects the urgency of becoming more inclusive is critical. Ensure the timeline outlines steps for the leadership team, staff, AND families.

5. TRAIN EVERYONE.

Initial professional development on the what and why of inclusion and training on five powerful classroom practices (collaboration and co-teaching, universally designed and differentiated instruction, adaptations, prioritizing natural supports, and providing inclusive behavior supports) is necessary.

[Download this list of common PD needs by staff role](#)

6. MEET WITH INDIVIDUAL IEP TEAMS.

Ensure a culture of developing IEPs based on student strengths, interests, and individual needs. Think through what supports and services each student currently served in separate spaces and places will need to have full access to the general education curriculum. Here is our positive student profile resource to help!

7. INDIVIDUALIZE EACH STUDENT'S SCHEDULE.

Don't cohort students with disabilities into the same schedule. Instead, schedule students into inclusive classrooms that focus on their interests and preferences.

[Grab our Inclusive Systems Change Scheduling Process](#)

8. USE NATURAL PROPORTIONS.

When placing students across classrooms, follow the guideline of natural proportions. For example, if 14% of the students in your district have disability labels, you would want about 14% of students in any single classroom to have disability labels.

9. MOVE STAFF AND SERVICES...NOT STUDENTS.

Schedule students in general education settings with the most complex support needs first and then align staff and services to meet their needs.

10. REMEMBER SERVICES ARE PORTABLE.

Keep ALL existing supports and services identified in the IEP and then determine if more or different supports are needed now that the student is in an inclusive setting. Lastly, bring the support and services to the student. Check out our handy checklist of supplemental aids, supports and services.

11. PROVIDE ONGOING SUPPORT AND TRAINING.

Issues, road blocks, and challenges will arise over time. Create a problem-solving team to help with the implementation of inclusion and provide ongoing training and feedback.

12. CELEBRATE!

Take note of ALL student (and staff) successes - big and small.

BONUS STEP #13, Get the book and join our Leaders Book Club

The Way to Inclusion: How Leaders Create Schools Where Every Student Belong. You will use this book, with all of its research-based and practical resources to help you get rid of life skills classrooms. The book is full of tools and advice from other school leaders. This book will take you step-by-step through the inclusive change process, from crafting your inclusive vision to reimagining the roles of existing staff and everything in between.