

Most inclusive schools share commitment from students to administrators in ending segregation

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Schools that focus on a positive culture and use effective inclusive practices can lead the way in providing an education that brings all students together to enhance outcomes and end segregation based on labels. A study from the University of Kansas shows that such schools recognize that educating students in an inclusive manner benefits all students and can provide a blueprint for minimizing the need for separate educational environments.

KU's Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation, or SWIFT Center, identified six schools across the country as leaders in the field of inclusive education. These schools, which address the needs of all [students](#) in inclusive classrooms instead of separating students with disabilities for [special education](#) classes, were nominated for the study, and SWIFT project staff visited the schools three times to conduct in-depth analyses of their implementation of inclusive education. Karrie Shogren, Amy McCart and Wayne Sailor, professors of special education at KU, and Kristin Lyon of Illinois State University detailed their findings in a study published in the journal *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, one of the top publications in the field.

"Essentially we went through a process of identifying exemplars of best practices in the implementation of inclusive education and gathered multiple sources of data," said Shogren, who guest-edited the journal

issue. "Our goal was to learn from the successes and struggles of the schools as they navigated a path to create an inclusive culture and built multi-tiered systems of supports that enabled all students to experience success."

The researchers developed deep understanding of the schools' inclusive practices by examining the following:

- Classroom practices, teacher and administrator perspectives
- Student perspectives
- Family and community perspectives
- Support for students with the most extensive support needs.

An important finding was that the schools all shared a culture that valued inclusion of all students and these values were reflected in the perspectives of all members of the school community, including the students.

"The students, with and without disabilities, described themselves as equals in interviews," Shogren said. "The students believed that all students should get the supports they needed to be successful and that it was not necessary to separate kids based on labels to achieve that. This was consistent across each of our six sites."

Teachers and administrators, as well as family and community members, shared that school leadership was also highly important in leading the way in inclusion. School personnel regularly reported the value of their school's leadership and commitment to inclusion. Several reported that a commitment to inclusion was even part of their hiring practices as candidates were asked their views of the inclusive philosophy before joining the school. Others reported developing sustainability plans so inclusive practices could continue in the case of a dedicated leader leaving the school.

Each of the six sites looked to their local community for help to provide needed resources to promote inclusive practices. For example, some schools showed strong commitment to encouraging family participation, and others were highly successful in securing community engagement and capitalizing on local resources.

The approach to classroom instruction varied as well, although all schools focused on co-teaching models, where general and special educators shared responsibility for educating all students in inclusive classrooms.

"Teachers can implement effective inclusive practices and co-teaching models, and this is enhanced by support in the school, such as co-planning time," Shogren said of inclusive teaching. "The question becomes, 'How can school policies and practices be organized to encourage and provide that support?' That's something SWIFT is helping districts and schools to figure out."

SWIFT works with 64 schools in five states to put into place a model of education that includes and supports all students in the general education setting and curriculum in the local [school](#). The SWIFT model includes five domains to ensure inclusion:

- Administrative leadership
- Multi-tiered system of support
- Integrated educational framework
- Family and community engagement
- Inclusive policy structure and practice.

Schools in the study demonstrated excellence in one or more of the domains. The study findings, in which schools that were leading the way in implementing inclusion, combined with the ongoing work with schools implementing the SWIFT model, will help guide future research

into how best to implement an inclusive framework and reduce segregation in schools across the country.

SWIFT Center was founded in 2012 as a five-year, \$24.5 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs. More information on SWIFT Center and the five domains, including videos demonstrating each, is available [online](#).

Previous research has shown that when all students are included, educational achievement improves for all student groups. Research consistently shows that including students with disabilities in general education classrooms benefits all the students in the classroom in various ways, Shogren said. And students with and without disabilities, teachers and family members in the current study reported firsthand the benefits of inclusive education.

"The students with and without disabilities included in this study consistently talked about how they appreciated having opportunities to learn content in their classroom in multiple ways and that they benefited from having both general and special educators in their classrooms," Shogren said. "They knew that not everyone learns in the same way and recognized that addressing this led to greater benefits for all."

Provided by University of Kansas

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