

High Leverage Practices to Improve Inclusive Educational Environments for Students with IEPs

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Purpose

A significant body of research clearly indicates that when students with disabilities are meaningfully included in general education classrooms and schools, academic and social outcomes improve for students with and without disabilities (for an overview see Sailor, Satter, Woods, McLeskey, & Waldron, 2017). However, bringing this research to practice poses practical considerations for school leaders, including which practices are likely to make the largest impact on student experiences.

The authors investigated the relationship between the SWIFT-Fidelity of Implementation Tool (SWIFT-FIT) items and inclusive education environment for students with IEPs. Increases in the SWIFT-FIT item scores can predict increases in the proportion of students with IEPs who are engaging in learning at least 80% of the time within the general education environment. School leaders who prioritize and allocate resources toward implementing these practices are more likely to see students with IEPs more frequently included in general education classrooms and schools and achieve the associated improvements in academic and social outcomes.

Method

Participants

Data from 54 schools (from 17 school districts in 5 states) that consistently administered SWIFT-FIT and reported Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) data for the 3 SWIFT implementation years (i.e., between SY2013-14 and SY2015-16) were included in the analyses.

Dependent and Independent Variables

The proportion of students with IEPs spent at or more than 80% of instructional time in the general education environment at the school level served as a dependent variable. SWIFT-FIT item scores based on the four-point rating scale were independent variables predicting the dependent variable. Three years of data (i.e., total 162 cases = 54 schools x 3 years) were included in the analyses.

Analysis

A mixed-effect repeated measure modeling was employed to investigate unique relationship between each SWIFT-FIT item and inclusive education (i.e., proportion of students at or above 80% in general education) while effects of other items in the SWIFT feature and time were controlled (i.e., relationship that is not shared with other effects). The analyses were conducted separately for each SWIFT feature to identify positively associated items within the feature.

SWIFT feature, Inclusive Academic Instruction (i.e., academic MTSS) was divided into three separate focuses, which were (a) reading MTSS, (b) math MTSS, and (c) other MTSS including inclusive instructional strategies and general academic MTSS system.

Results

In total, 26 of the 51 items on SWIFT-FIT have a positive association with inclusive educational environments. Of these, eight have the highest leverage as indicated by their coefficient value above 0.02.

The coefficient value is associated with the magnitude of predicted increase in inclusive education. For example, the coefficient value is .02 can be interpreted as 'for 1 score increase in the item, the predicted proportion of students in 80% at/above general education setting increase by 2%. The eight practices with coefficient values above .02 are shown below from highest to lowest.

Table 1

Highest Leverage Practices for Improving Inclusive Education

Item	SWIFT Feature	Coefficient
<p>1. Paraeducator responsibilities in the school are designed to support grade level classrooms to enhance inclusive education.</p>	Fully Integrated Organizational Structure	0.039
<p>2. School personnel use research-based universal core math curricula and instruct with fidelity.</p>	Inclusive Academic Instruction (Math)	0.034
<p>3. School personnel use the Universal Design for Learning framework to provide multiple means of representation, action, expression, and engagement.</p>	Inclusive Academic Instruction (Other Academic MTSS)	0.034
<p>4. Principal and leadership team create a working environment that supports open, reciprocal communication and an exchange of ideas among all members of the school community.</p>	Strong Site Leadership	0.033
<p>5. Grade level and specialized educators work in teams to monitor student progress and to plan behavior intervention strategies across tiers.</p>	Inclusive Behavior Instruction	0.030
<p>6. Local education agency has a documented plan for linking multiple initiatives/practices to avoid conceptual and/or operational silos and duplication of effort.</p>	LEA Policy Framework	0.029

Item	SWIFT Feature	Coefficient
<p>7. All students, including students with IEPs and English Learners, participate in the grade level general education curriculum and schedule/activities as their grade level peers.</p>	Fully Integrated Organizational Structure	0.028
<p>8. Principal and Leadership Team support and promote school-wide focus on transforming systems and practices to improve teaching and learning and incorporate family partners in this focus.</p>	Strong Site Leadership	0.024

Conclusion

When schools consider what practices they may change to increase the participation of students with IEPs in the general educational environment, they would do well to consider these eight high leverage practices.

Suggested Citation

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Reference

Sailor, W., Satter, A., Woods, K., McLeskey, J., & Waldron, N. (2017). School improvement through inclusive education. Oxford Bibliographies in Education. New York: Oxford University Press. doi: 10.1093/obo/9780199756810-0191

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