

Pilot Butte School Promotes Inclusive Learning

Junior's Story

Pilot Butte is a rapidly growing community located about 18 km northeast of Regina. As the community transforms, so do the needs of the more than 400 PreK-8 students at Pilot Butte School. Julie Stiglitz, a learning support teacher and vice principal, says that with the growth, the school now has more special needs students who have complex medical conditions and/or learning disabilities. She says Pilot Butte School is working hard to meet these needs and to create inclusive classroom environments that welcome all students, regardless of individual challenges. Through a combination of academics, Life Skills programming, Inclusion and Intervention Plans (IIPs) and diverse needs plans, students are encouraged to participate in regular classes with their peers. It takes a lot of resources to properly support an inclusion program. Inclusion students work with a team of teachers – a learning support teacher, a classroom teacher and educational assistants. Sometimes medical professionals and community supports are needed as well. An IIP or diverse needs plan is developed, highlighting any special needs students have, their strengths and weaknesses, medical or other assessments that have been completed, three goals for the student and plans for achieving those, and a list of support people. Stiglitz says inclusive learning benefits all students in the class.

[View Junior's #theteacherproject video.](#)

Read more about what Julie and the other teachers at Pilot Butte School are doing to promote inclusive learning in their classes.

1. Why does Pilot Butte School support inclusive learning?

About 10 years ago, Pilot Butte used to have an integrated learning centre. Students with special learning needs were placed in one classroom. Funding was cut and everything changed. Inclusion practices and the way we view special needs students also changed. Now, we would never think of isolating them in a room on their own unless there was a serious medical or safety reason to do so. For us at Pilot Butte School, it's kind of a "why not?" This is an educational institution and all students have a right to be educated. For students who can function in a regular classroom, why wouldn't we do that? Students need to

learn how to function in society. One day, they're all going to be adults and will have to interact with people who are different than them. If they're going to live successfully in the world, we need to teach all students how to accept each other's differences.

Inclusion teaches all our students important lessons about tolerance, acceptance and compassion. And we're seeing other students whose lives are being enriched by having special needs students in their class. We have one student who has a gift for working with students with diverse needs. It's his calling, but we would never know that if we didn't have inclusion in our classes.

2. How does Pilot Butte School support inclusive learning?

I've always worked in learning support and so have the other learning support teachers here. You get into this work because you want to help people. We're motivated by the work we do. All students – typical and atypical learners – are learning social skills and how to get along with people who are different than them. And of course, all students are learning academic skills of all kinds. The Life Skills program is specifically for students who are on an Intervention and Inclusion Plan or students who have a diverse needs plan.

We have four learning support teachers who run two Life Skills groups. The two groups offer different skills based on student needs. One group includes lower functioning students. For them, Life Skills includes very basic things such as how to have a conversation and greet a stranger and how to follow picture guidelines and use other visual communications. The other Life Skills group is bigger and includes students who can read a little, but not necessarily at grade level. These students regularly go on tours, like visiting the RCMP in White City, and they learn skills to enhance their confidence and independence like how to do laundry and cook for themselves. Some students, such as Junior, are gaining work experience in the community through the Life Skills program.

3. What do you do in your role, and how do you and the other teachers work together?

I am the coordinator of the Inclusion and Intervention Plans. I work alongside the classroom teacher who is responsible for what happens daily in that class. We want students to feel included in a regular classroom as much as possible so whenever we're planning something, inclusion is at the forefront. The classroom teacher will find a way for that student to work with the group that allows him to contribute in his own way. We have special areas within the classroom that inclusion students consider "their home," where they can keep all their things. I

come in with specific plans to support the student. Sometimes, that's as simple as sitting next to them in class. I also coordinate meetings and communication with parents so the teacher can focus on teaching.

We have the IIPs to guide us and the people in place to support these plans, but we really have to operate on the fly. School looks different every single day so it takes a lot of communication and planning. When all the Grade 8 students went to the high school for transition day, that took a team effort. At least five students required medication, so we need to include the nurse who packages all the medication in envelopes so we can easily identify who gets what and when.

As a learning support teacher, I'm there to support some of my students. Parents need to be involved because sometimes they need to make additional arrangements so their child can attend. And of course, the classroom teacher is very involved. The learning support teachers meet regularly and have afterschool meetings when needed. We do goal attainment sheets three times per year. We meet at the beginning of the year to plan the IIPs and at the end of the year to assess final goal attainment and to make plans for next year. That's the formal process, but we see each other in the hallways and collaborate all the time.

We also need to prep the other students in that class as well. Our students have been at this long enough that they know "how" to include students who are not typical learners. But teachers need to teach that. Other students need to understand that student's situation and be accommodating because lesson plans are based on the needs of that student, which might look different than the rest of the class.

4. What's included in an IIP and how does the communication book tie in?

IIPs look different depending on a student's needs. For example, transition goals are important for older students who are preparing to move on to high school. We've got four students on Inclusion and Intervention Plans in Grade 8 right now, so preparing them for that transition is huge this year. Independence goals are important for students. It identifies what they can do on their own without someone telling them what to do. It's important to have realistic but high expectations about independence. Safety and appropriate behaviour may be important depending on student needs. Some students are not able to make social decisions correctly as easily as other students. These students have to explicitly learn these things. Academic programming is part of the plan. We want students to have the functional skills they need so they'll be able to do things such as read signs, order off a menu or sign a contract if they're one day going to pay rent for themselves. Students learn math skills like how to tell time

and how to measure. The IIPs also include social and emotional skills to help students learn how to get along with their peers. That's not easy and doesn't come naturally for some students.

The communication book allows us to track progress on the goals within a student's IIP. For example, Junior's goals are related to making good choices and getting along with his peers. It is tracked in his communication book so we can go back to see how he's doing on his goals. It's also a great tool for communicating with mom and dad. Every day the communication book goes back and forth between school and home. Items are shown in green, yellow or red, depending on the choices Junior has made and whether or not he's earned his reward for making positive choices. It's also a good tool for tracking when other professionals or resources need to be pulled in. If we're seeing a student who is consistently unable to make positive choices, that's an indicator this isn't a one-off incident and something more serious might be going on. Knowing this is huge. If we miss that, we can't get that student the support he or she needs.

5. What's the biggest challenge in creating an inclusive learning environment?

Time is a huge challenge. You really have to be well planned. If you aren't, you're going to have a disaster on your hands and students will become frustrated with you and each other. You have to take things slowly and prep your students. You have to do some work ahead of time to educate students about fairness and equality, and the differences between those words. You have to help students develop a growth mindset and an understanding that they all learn differently. Sometimes, adaptations need to be made to accommodate learning in that class. You also need to teach students about invisible disabilities. Our class has gone through an in-service from our child and family support worker about what invisible disabilities are and how it affects people. We've done an activity where you take all the Grade 8's and sit them in a circle. You tell them to take a shoe off, put it in the circle and then we talk about other things. Then you tell them to go to the pile and take any shoe and put it on. The point is: "You all have exactly the same. You have two shoes. You're all equal. But do you have the shoe you need? No, you don't." Not every learner learns the same so we have to give people what they need. People might be equal but if they don't have what they need, it's still unfair.

6. What does success look like for atypical students in an inclusive environment?

Success breeds success. If you provide opportunities for success when kids are young and are able to help them feel good about something, they will want to do that and feel that way again. As long as you keep supplying things students can feel good about, they'll want to do that again. You have to be explicit with the positives and tell them, "You did a good job." We do a lot of positive reinforcement to encourage success. Students on IIPs get rewards at the end of every day if they make good choices. As long as they don't get three strikes, the student can choose a reward. Most students will choose 30 minutes in the morning or end of the school day. Many students like to play in the sensory room with their buddies who aren't part of their regular classes. Some students choose to play an iPad game, while others might want someone to play cards or a board game with them. It's important to let them choose the reward or it won't mean anything to them. For us, success is more long-term and depends on the individual student. It might be when an IIP student is able to become an independent adult able to live on her own. Junior will likely always need some kind of assisted living and won't be able to pay bills on his own, but he will be able to cook for himself and hold down a job. For him and us, that's success.

