

Snapshots

RESEARCH REPORT

Flexible Grouping for Inclusivity

Inclusivity is necessary for all students to feel as though they have the opportunity to succeed.

This is the focus of the new *Forward Together: School Leader's Guide to Creating Inclusive Schools*, which offers tips to administrators needing to help teachers implement essential strategies such as flexible grouping, collaboration, and culturally responsive teaching to support inclusivity.

What Is Flexible Grouping?

Inclusive classrooms work on the assumption that students come with varying levels of strengths and needs, which shift constantly depending on the content area, the objective, or even the time of day. Flexible grouping supports these varying levels of learning ability.

Why It's Important

Flexible grouping allows the 1 student in 5 with a disability to get the right support, in the right way, at the right time. It not only allows for inclusion in the general education classroom, but also tailors support and intervention to the areas each student needs the most.

When flexible grouping is a daily routine, "needing" to meet with the teacher for small-group work becomes the expectation. And since groups change frequently, flexible



grouping avoids the static nature of grouping students based on ability level alone—something that can increase the stigma that the 1 in 5 often feel in fixed school groupings.

Steps for Teachers

As the school leader, you can support teachers as they implement flexible grouping practices in classrooms. The *School Leader's Guide to Creating Inclusive Schools* focuses on a four-step approach:

1. Clearly define the learning objective for each lesson. The clearer teachers are on what students need to master by the end of the lesson, the more intentional they can be about the groups created.

2. Determine what type of group is necessary to meet the objective. In flexible grouping, groups stay together for only the length of time necessary for students to develop an identified skill, master a specific concept, or accomplish a task.
3. Review data to consider the grouping strategies specific students might need. It's common to see a variety of grouping strategies and sizes. In elementary grades, students might rotate among different learning stations. In upper elementary and middle levels, students might engage in collaborative learning structures with clearly defined roles.
4. Plan a whole-group debrief. At the end of a lesson, students return to connect their learning and the learning target. They also engage in debriefs of the group learning process itself.

Principal Support of Flexible Grouping

The *School Leader's Guide to Creating Inclusive Schools* consolidates key practices, steps, and resources to get schools started on flexible grouping—or to build upon efforts they already have underway. An Inventory for Action helps principals identify their schools' attributes of flexible

MYTWOCENTS

What's the No. 1 thing you do every day to let your students know you care?



Stacey Green (@usd271sgs): I am fully present—present when they share a joy [or] concern, ask for a shoe tie, lean in for a hug, or put up a wall that is a request for attention. All words and actions communicate.



Steven Smith (@EdenHalleU): [My] favorite part of the day is spending time in the cafeteria, sitting and connecting with kids. [It's] so important to be in their environment and listening to them. Hearing is caring!

Fast Fact: Whom do American adults really trust? School principals. Some **84 percent** think principals care about the students they serve some, most, or all of the time. — *Pew Research Center, “Why Americans Don’t Fully Trust Many Who Hold Positions of Power and Responsibility”*

grouping and where they might focus and prioritize the school’s efforts next.

- If your school has a policy against ability tracking, establish and communicate a policy for effective grouping. Flexible grouping is designed to avoid having students “tracked” into one group for the year or semester.
- If teachers create a learning environment that is responsive to student needs, establish a community of learners in which taking academic risks is normal and expected.
- If your teachers understand and communicate about student learning needs, establish weekly or monthly data meetings for grade-level teams.
- If teachers frequently assess student learning, establish routines for collecting and analyzing formative assessment data and create a common assessment calendar that includes data analysis meetings.
- If teachers provide rigorous instruction aligned to student needs, help them establish routines for providing remediation and enrichment during instruction.

Download the full report—which includes information, resources, and tools for action on 10 mindsets and strategies—from the National Center for Learning Disabilities at www.nclد. org/forwardtogether-schoolleaders. 

Inside the Principal-Teacher Relationship

Principals, have you ever wondered how teachers view you? The Education Week Research Center’s “Inside the Principal-Teacher Relationship” report reveals striking gaps between how principals rate the effects of their leadership and how teachers do.

Differences of Opinion

The most drastic differences of opinion centered on empowerment and support. According to the survey, 69 percent of principals “completely agree” that teachers at their school feel empowered to bring problems to them. But teachers feel differently, with only 25 percent of those surveyed saying they completely agree they feel empowered to bring problems to their school principal.

When it comes to principals supporting teachers who start innovative work or new initiatives, 86 percent of principals surveyed said they completely agree that they support these new endeavors, despite only 45 percent of teachers feeling the same way.

The survey showed other stark differences as well:

- 52 percent of teachers say student discipline is the top source of friction, compared to only 24 percent of principals.
- 77 percent of principals said their contributions to the school’s working and learning environment were completely positive, yet only 37 percent of teachers surveyed felt the same way.
- 19 percent of principals said they should give each teacher formal or informal feedback on instruction “a few times a year,” whereas 56 percent of teachers chose this answer.

Common Ground

One thing principals and teachers did agree on: 87 percent of principals and 81 percent of teachers said they consider it “very important” for principals and teachers to have a positive relationship with each other.

To read the report, visit www.edweek.org/ew/section/multimedia/principals-heres-how-teachers-view-you.html. 



Tiffany Lewis (@Tiffanylewis618): *As often as I can, I call them by their name.*



Seth Daub (@PrincipalDaub): *Every morning, I tell them I believe in them.*



James Harrison (@jhhesTigers): *My goal was to greet each student by name each day last quarter. My goal for second quarter is to provide students with positive feedback related to performance or good character: “I love how you helped your friend.” “You made the most growth from the pre- to post-tests!”*

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