



# Inclusion Tools for After School Professionals

SPECIAL NEEDS INCLUSION PROJECT, SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES  
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## SNIPPET #11 - Access, Participation and Support: Inclusion in OST Programs

SNIP is dedicated to creating inclusive environments for all children in out of school time programs. We thought it would be useful to clarify **what we mean by the term inclusion**, and why it is important for **children with special needs to be a part of the out of school time world**. Inclusion can mean different things to different people, therefore it is important to have a shared definition of inclusive practices as we undertake efforts to improve the quality of programming for all children. Several San Francisco citywide entities, including the Early Education Department of SFUSD, are using the definition that was developed by the Division for Early Childhood (DEC) and the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). The version that follows was adopted by the San Francisco Child Care Planning and Advisory Committee (CPAC) and is a **part of the newly developed Citywide OST and Child Care Plan**.

*Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every child and his or her family, regardless of ability, to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of families, communities, and society. The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with and without disabilities and their families include a sense of belonging and*

*membership, positive social relationships and friendships, and development and learning to reach their full potential. The defining features of inclusion that can be used to identify high quality programs and services are access, participation, and supports.*

**Access** – means providing a **wide range of activities and environments** for every child by removing physical barriers and offering multiple ways to promote learning and development.

**Participation** – means using a **range of instructional approaches** to promote engagement in play and learning activities, and a sense of belonging for every child.

**Supports** – refer to **broader aspects of the system** such as professional development, incentives for inclusion, and opportunities for communication and collaboration among families and professionals to assure high quality inclusion.

### **The Importance of Including Youth with Special Needs in OST Programs**

The following excerpt from the After School Alliance Issue Brief, "Afterschool Benefits Kids with Special Needs (2008)" outlines the ways participating in after school programs provides positive outcomes for children with disabilities. Read the entire article go to [www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue\\_34\\_specialneeds.cfm](http://www.afterschoolalliance.org/issue_34_specialneeds.cfm).

“Afterschool programs provide students with special needs opportunities to **increase their skills while building on their potential**. Studies show that students with special needs who participate in afterschool have:

- Improved school attendance
- Higher aspirations
- Improved social competence
- Improved behavior

Sadly, students with special needs, especially learning disabilities, typically hold positions of lower social status than their non-disabled peers. However, when these students participate in afterschool programs, they **gain many social benefits** that can't be achieved anywhere else.

- The opportunity to assume leadership responsibilities and demonstrate talents that are not always apparent during the regular day.
- A place to truly integrate with peers and friends, even after they have been mainstreamed in educational classrooms.
- Improved relationships with children of all abilities.
- The chance to be included in a wide variety of activities with their non-disabled peers.

#### **Afterschool provides access to physical activity and play.**

Ten percent of children have a disability that prevents them from using most public playgrounds. It is vitally important that these children remain engaged and active and afterschool **provides a safe environment for children with special needs to physically explore their world, learn and play**. Play is vital for normal growth, development and health for children of all abilities. Further, deprivation of sufficient activity and recreation often leads to the development of secondary disabilities and conditions.

#### **Afterschool supports families.**

Beyond the many benefits the programs provide the children and their families, many children with special needs cannot be left unattended, so being home alone is not an option. Afterschool also provides a comfortable setting for family involvement, critical to the success of all students, and especially beneficial to students with special needs

#### **Conclusion**

While all children benefit from high quality afterschool programs, afterschool gives children with special needs the chance to experience meaningful and authentic belonging. Beyond the benefits of providing learning and enrichment activities, afterschool offers children with special needs the chance to engage with their non-disabled peers in a way often not possible during the regular school day. Afterschool provides a safe haven where children with special needs can learn, play and succeed side-by-side with children of all abilities.”