

The Power of Peers:

Supporting Students with Significant Disabilities through
Peer Networks and *Peer Support Arrangements*

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	Peer Networks	Peer Support Arrangements
<i>What is the focus?</i>	Social interactions and friendships	Classroom engagement, learning and social interactions
<i>How many peers?</i>	3-6 peers	2-3 peers
<i>Who facilitates?</i>	Any school staff, or a community member	Paraprofessional, special educator, classroom teacher
<i>When do they meet?</i>	Weekly for about 30 minutes – during lunch, advisory, club, or other non-instructional time	Every period for the entire class in a general education classroom

What is a Peer Network?

A *social-focused group* established around a student with a significant disability that:

1. Meets weekly to:
 - a. Talk
 - b. Participate in shared activities
 - c. Plan interactions outside the group
2. Encourages students to:
 - a. Become more involved in everyday school life
 - b. Connect to other school activities
3. Provides the students with regular feedback and guidance (by an adult facilitator).



What is a Peer Support Arrangement?

One or more peers without disabilities working together with a classmate with a disability as a community of learners, supporting each other academically and socially. Peers:

1. Support participation in class activities
2. Provide frequent feedback and encouragement
3. Model communication and other skills
4. Support learning by assisting with understanding of task directions and work completion
5. Promote interaction with other classmates.



The Kentucky Peer Support Network Project

Fostering friendships, learning, and inclusion for students with significant disabilities in Kentucky. Funded by the Commonwealth Council on Developmental Disabilities.

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Why do this?

- IDEA Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) requirements
- Predictor of positive post-school outcomes
- Low cost/no cost
- Evidence based practice

Research has shown that:

- Non-disabled peers who participate in peer support arrangements
 - who typically make A's & B's in class continue to do so
 - who typically make C's, D's, and F's show an increase of a 1 to 1½ letter grades
- Students with disabilities who participate in peer interventions substantially increase their interactions with peers, develop new friendships and increase achievement of IEP goals.

Relationship to IDEA Requirements: Peer Mediated Strategies Promote:

- Free, appropriate public education
- Access to the Least Restrictive Environment
- Greater access to the general curriculum
- Increased achievement of IEP goals
- Friendships/interactions with peers
- Peer role models – behavior / academic goals

For More Information

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Contact the Low Incidence Consultant at your regional Special Education Cooperative for support in implementing Peer Support Arrangements and Peer Networks in your school!

<https://education.ky.gov/specialed/excep/advgroup/Pages/Kentucky's-Educational-Cooperatives-Special-Education-Services.aspx>



Important Elements for Inclusion (The “Building Blocks” of Friendships)

- Shared Activities
- Common Interests
- Proximity to Peers
- Reliable Modes of Communication
- Valued Roles and Self-Determination
- Informed Peers
- Just Enough Adult Support

What Have Stakeholders Said?

- *“The students are enjoying class more and picking up more information.”* ~ Teacher
- *“Students are identifying each other as ‘friends’ more frequently.”* ~ Teacher
- *“I like having fun and hanging out.”* ~ Student
- *“She is happy to go to school and says that she now feels like she has a lot of friends.”* ~ Parent
- *“We have observed more interaction among students... during transitional times (in the classroom, hallways, etc.)”* ~ Teacher
- *“The (focus) students have more interaction with their peers in the classes. The relationships are stronger.”* ~ Teacher
- *“I enjoyed quality time and memorable moments with the group.”* ~ Student

Friendships matter. However, friendships and a sense of belonging are often elusive for youth with disabilities.

Our school and community are better when EVERYONE has an opportunity to participate.

