

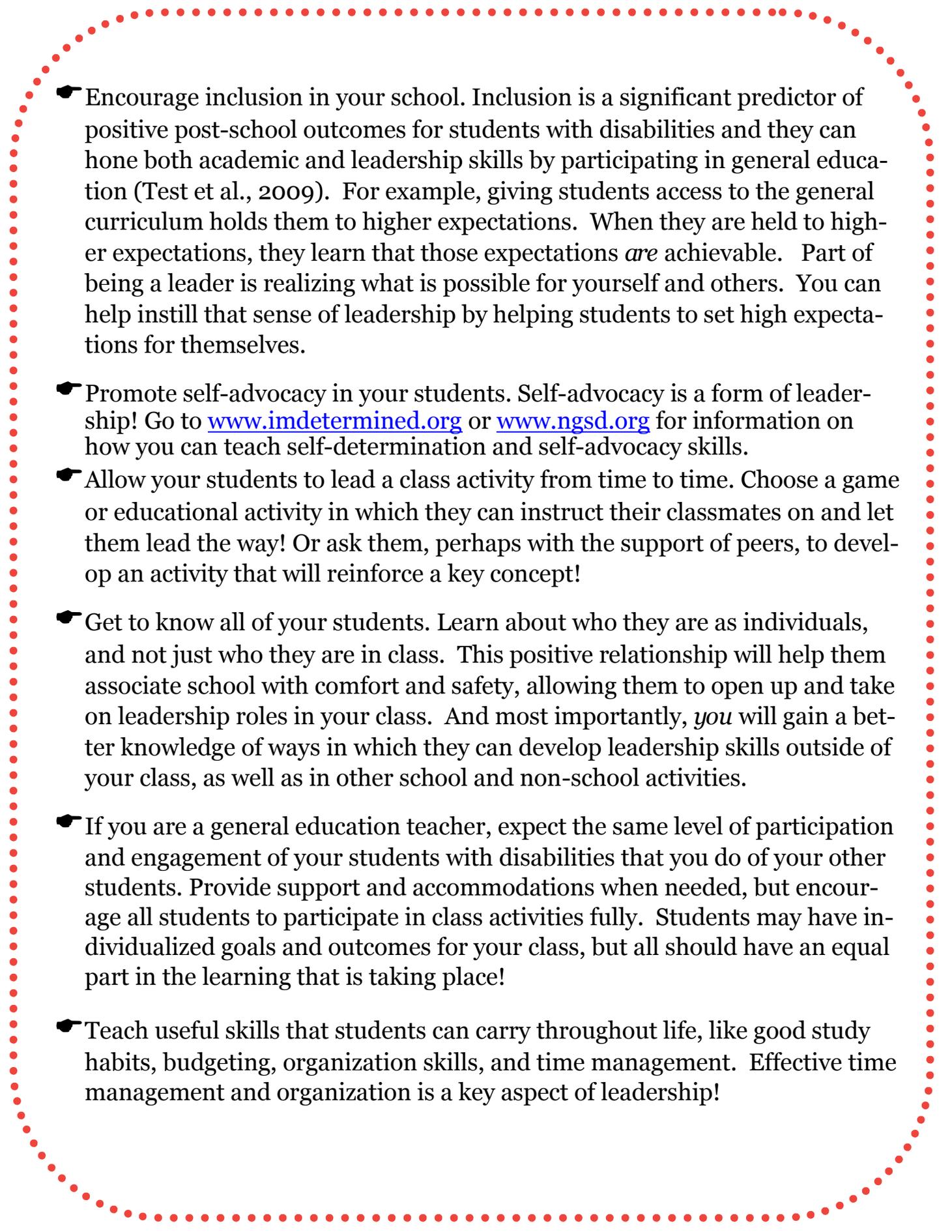
Ways Teachers can Support Leadership!

As your students grow into effective leaders, it is important to foster this growth and offer support when it is needed. Leadership skills represent an important part of a well-rounded education, just like algebra and grammar. But they aren't learned automatically.

Whether you teach an inclusive general education class or instruct students in a resource room, you can help students with disabilities gain leadership skills and experiences. These tips from the *Natural Supports Project* (Carter et al., 2010) are a great way to start facilitating leadership in your classroom.

- Look for opportunities that will allow success in the classroom. Sometimes students need more time on exams or may need a partner to help complete an assignment. Providing the resources they need to perform their best will boost confidence, making them feel capable and successful. Such feelings can encourage them to get more involved outside of the classroom.
- Professional development workshops can teach you new ways to help your students succeed, like the Kentucky Peer Support Network Project training!
- Involve students with disabilities in peer support networks. There are clear benefits for students with and without disabilities who participate in these social-focused groups. Students can learn important leadership skills, like communication, understanding others' needs, cooperation, and respect for others within the context of peer relationships.



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- ☛ Encourage inclusion in your school. Inclusion is a significant predictor of positive post-school outcomes for students with disabilities and they can hone both academic and leadership skills by participating in general education (Test et al., 2009). For example, giving students access to the general curriculum holds them to higher expectations. When they are held to higher expectations, they learn that those expectations *are* achievable. Part of being a leader is realizing what is possible for yourself and others. You can help instill that sense of leadership by helping students to set high expectations for themselves.
 - ☛ Promote self-advocacy in your students. Self-advocacy is a form of leadership! Go to www.imdetermined.org or www.ngsd.org for information on how you can teach self-determination and self-advocacy skills.
 - ☛ Allow your students to lead a class activity from time to time. Choose a game or educational activity in which they can instruct their classmates on and let them lead the way! Or ask them, perhaps with the support of peers, to develop an activity that will reinforce a key concept!
 - ☛ Get to know all of your students. Learn about who they are as individuals, and not just who they are in class. This positive relationship will help them associate school with comfort and safety, allowing them to open up and take on leadership roles in your class. And most importantly, *you* will gain a better knowledge of ways in which they can develop leadership skills outside of your class, as well as in other school and non-school activities.
 - ☛ If you are a general education teacher, expect the same level of participation and engagement of your students with disabilities that you do of your other students. Provide support and accommodations when needed, but encourage all students to participate in class activities fully. Students may have individualized goals and outcomes for your class, but all should have an equal part in the learning that is taking place!
 - ☛ Teach useful skills that students can carry throughout life, like good study habits, budgeting, organization skills, and time management. Effective time management and organization is a key aspect of leadership!

Allow (and support) students to socialize during free time. This can be valuable time for building friendships, passing along information about school clubs, news of events, and other word of mouth about leadership opportunities around school. It can also make your students with disabilities.

Connect students to clubs, extracurricular programs, and other community activities in which leadership opportunities abound.

If you sponsor a club or student organization, periodically rotate leadership responsibilities so every student has an opportunity to be a leader and learn from others.

Use cooperative learning strategies in which leadership roles are assigned to students as they work together. Throughout the semester, vary the roles assigned to students with significant disabilities.

Connect your students to youth-focused leadership programs in the community that are designed to provide students with and without disabilities the knowledge, skills, and attitudes that enhance leadership and self-determination.

Elementary/Middle Activity

1. Have all the students in your class come up with something they are good at or have a special interest in; it can be something that others may not know about! Tell each student to write their quality or interest down on a small piece of paper, and put all the pieces in a bag or box.
2. Then go around the room, having one student at a time draw a paper out of the box and read it aloud. The rest of the class can guess (but only three guesses for each turn) who they think possesses each quality. If the student is not guessed within three tries, the student should identify him/herself.
3. When the student is identified (either by a good guess or by the student him/herself), the student should then elaborate on his or her special quality or interest for the class.
4. When all the slips of paper have been read, pair students up and have them discuss ways they can use their talent or interest in school activities or in the community. Have them write down their ideas from their paired discussion and turn these in.



Middle/High School Activity

- 👍 The goal of this activity is to bring out the leadership qualities in all your students while staying grounded in the curriculum you need to cover. At the beginning of the semester or quarter, break your class into groups of three. If you have a student with disabilities in your class who has a peer buddy/support, you may want to include them in the same group. Go through your curriculum and choose lessons for each group to lead. You can have one group present each week or set aside a week or two for all groups to present.
- 👍 The students will develop the lessons based on the skills/qualities of each group member, bringing out leadership qualities in each of them. Have them spend time in their groups discussing the skills and talents of each member and ways they can utilize all of the skills. One idea is a YouTube video lesson! If a student is particularly interested in film, he or she could record and edit the video. If a student is a strong writer, he or she could write out the script. They could all act in the video and even recruit more students if more actors are needed. Then another group member could lead the discussion of the video with the class, provided he or she enjoys talking to groups. Whatever the lesson is going to be, they need to make sure to include skills of every member of the group.
- 👍 Have them present their lessons and possibly organize a class activity based on the content. You can grade the groups based on creativity, inclusion of all group members, and curriculum material covered. Be sure to emphasize the importance of each group member's skills and contributions. This activity will help students realize what they are capable of and how their talents can be used in the classroom.



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Want to Learn More? For Further Reading...

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