### The Power of Peers:

Supporting Students with Significant Disabilities through

## Peer Networks and Peer Support Arrangements





	Peer Networks	Peer Support Arrangements
What is the focus?	Social interactions and friendships	Classroom engagement, learning and social interactions
How many peers?	3-6 peers	2-3 peers
Who facilitates?	Any school staff, or a community member	Paraprofessional, special educator, classroom teacher
When do they meet?	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 <u>community of learners</u>, 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.

# www.kypeersupport.org

#### 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:

- <u>Non-disabled peers</u> 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
- <u>Students with disabilities</u> who participate in peer interventions substantially increase their interactions with peers, develop new friendships and increase achievement of IEP goals.

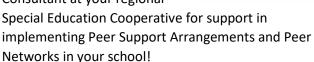
# Relationship to IDEA Requirements: Peer Mediated Strategies Promote:

- 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

#### www.kypeersupport.org

Contact the Low Incidence Consultant at your regional



https://education.ky.gov/specialed/excep/advgroup/Pages/Kentucky's-Edcuational-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.

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