

Starting a Statewide or Local Inclusion Task Force Including Me in Virginia



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Who We Are

- **Including Me in Virginia (statewide task force)**
 - Formed in Spring 2015
 - Statewide focus
 - 7-member Steering Group (Down Syndrome Association of Greater Richmond, Arc of Virginia, Virginia TASH, university professors, special education teachers, parents)
 - 60 on email distribution list, 330+ likes on Facebook page
- **Arlington (VA) Inclusion Task Force (local task force)**
 - Formed in June 2014
 - Local focus (25,000 student, 36-school district)
 - 135 members (parents, educators, community members)



Why We Formed

- **Statewide Task Force**
 - Desire to coordinate efforts of individuals working on inclusive education across Virginia
- **Local Task Force**
 - Parents on local Special Education PTA (SEPTA) listserve lamenting potential loss of only formal inclusion program in county
 - Recognition of pockets of excellence, but inconsistency across county (“we don’t do inclusion here”)
 - Number of segregated, self-contained classrooms for students with significant support needs



Our Goals

- **Statewide Task Force**
 - Create greater awareness across state of legal rights, research, and benefits of inclusive education
 - Disseminate strategies and tools for implementation
 - Effect systems change at state and local levels
- **Local Task Force**
 - Long-term: Work with district to transition to inclusive educational paradigm (broad and comprehensive systems change effort)
 - Short-term: Promote more inclusive practices in meantime through greater awareness of research, benefits, and tools for implementation



Our Strategy and Tactics

- **Statewide Task Force**
 - Systems advocacy at state and local levels
 - Grassroots advocacy through parent and educator awareness and technical support
- **Local Task Force**
 - Top-down, systems change focus (School Board, senior administration, principals)
 - But information-sharing campaign has had broad, bottom-up impacts
 - Collaborative and positive tone
 - Focus on strengths and champions in district
 - Focus on benefits to district
 - Establish trust through regular, open, and honest dialogue
 - Focus on how goals fit into existing priorities, policy framework, and strategic plan
 - Make their job as easy as possible
 - Civil rights/social justice angle



Our Activities

- **Statewide Task Force**
 - Information/Education Campaign
 - Webpage and social media presence (Facebook and email)
 - Marketing materials (logo and informational flyer)
 - Regional Education Advisory Groups being established by Arc of Virginia
 - Speaker panel
 - Webinar series for both parents and educators (e.g., Barb Trader)
 - Resources for families
 - Advocacy
 - State Special Education Advisory Committee and local SEACs
 - Virginia General Assembly

Our Activities (cont.)



- **Local Task Force**

- Information/Education Campaign

- Original work product to convey goals and rationales and to serve to introduce group, meeting leave-behinds
 - Talking points document (identify issue, goals, rationale) (appendices with bibliography)
 - About the Inclusion Task Force one-pager
 - 17 Reasons
 - Anonymous stories of inclusion in district – both good and bad (what is our baseline situation; give human face to issue; save time in meetings)
 - Webpage and social media presence (Facebook, Twitter)
 - Emails on SEPTA listserv; Inclusion Task Force list
 - Public speakers
 - Peer-to-peer meetings with district leadership (administrators from inclusive districts)
 - Professional development workshop

Our Activities (cont.)



- **Local Task Force (cont.)**

- Advocacy

- Meetings with School Board members, administration, principals, community leaders – gauging reactions, concerns, asking advice
- Establish district Work Group on Inclusive Practices to develop strategic plan
- Work through Special Education Advisory Committee to make recommendations to School Board
 - Adopt policy statement and policy implementation procedure
 - Set-aside one-time two-year funding to engage an external subject matter expert to coach visioning and strategic/action planning process



If you are thinking of doing something like this



Factors to Consider

- How well-organized is your special education community?
 - Do you have a SEPTA? a SEAC?
 - Partner with other groups (e.g., local Arc, local TASH, local NAACP)?
 - How much bandwidth do you have? What are realistic goals? What is a realistic timeframe for achieving those goals?
- How receptive is your special education community to inclusion?
 - Develop consensus first?
 - Develop nuanced position on the goal?
 - Just start with information campaign?
- What are the local political sensitivities? What are the district's values and biggest concerns and how do your goals align?



Factors to Consider (cont.)

- Is there a teacher union presence, and if so what are the sensitivities?
- Are schools “independent fiefdoms” or is there a lot of central office control?
- Do you want/need to leverage support of other segregated populations (gifted, ELLs)?
- Is there a history of prior attempts at inclusion in the area?
- Are there any legislative, regulatory, financial, or structural barriers that need to be addressed first?



Factors to Consider (cont.)

- Do you want to adopt a collaborative or more combative tone?
- How much legwork are you able to undertake to make the leadership's job easier?
- Do you want to take a top down or bottom up approach? Or both?
- Do you want to broadcast your time frame to make people more comfortable?
- Do you want to create a legal entity or an ad-hoc task force?



Some Lessons Learned

- 1. Your most active task force members should agree early on a common purpose, goals (including time frame), and broad strategy**
- 2. Spend a lot of time on information-sharing; don't expect results until people are on board philosophically**
- 3. Keep your personal situation out of it (in general)**
- 4. Be professional and don't waste people's time (have focused meetings, agendas, follow-ups)**



Some Lessons Learned (cont.)

5. **Be patient and kind – it takes time to change mindsets; think about your audience and what you are asking of them**
6. **Be nimble and informal (don't waste time and resources creating a legal entity unless you absolutely need to)**
 - **A well-organized SEPTA or SEAC can be a significant determinant of success**
7. **Know that you will not please everyone all the time**
8. **Develop open and trusting relationships with decision-makers; keep lines of communication open**
9. **Make their job as easy as possible**



How to Reach Us

- **Including Me In Virginia**

- <https://sites.google.com/site/includemeva/>
- Facebook: Including Me In Virginia
- Email: includingmeinva@gmail.com

- **Arlington Inclusion Task Force**

- <http://arlingtonsepta.org/inclusion-task-force>
- Facebook: Arlington Inclusion Task Force
- Twitter: @ArllInclusion
- Email: arlingtoninclusion@gmail.com



Additional Information



Sample “17 Reasons” Document

17 Reasons



Alignment with Existing APS Policy

1. Inclusion directly aligns with the APS Mission, Vision, and Core Values.
2. Inclusion directly aligns with four of the five APS Strategic Goals.
3. Inclusion directly aligns with all four of the FY2016 APS School Board Priorities.
4. Inclusion directly aligns with APS's instructional goals in Board Policy No. 20.
5. Inclusion was one of the top two recommendations of the January 2013 external evaluation of APS's special education programs endorsed by the School Board.

17 Reasons (cont.)



Alignment with State and Local Priorities

6. Inclusion directly aligns with ASEAC's Recommendation #1 (ATSS).
7. Inclusion is a top priority for members of Arlington's special education community, with well over 100 APS parents and students actively engaged in this issue.
8. Inclusion was a top recommendation of the Virginia Special Education Advisory Committee in 2015.
9. Inclusion is a deeply-held value in our progressive community.

17 Reasons (cont.)



Alignment with Federal Law and Policy

10. Inclusion is supported and endorsed by laws including the Americans with Disabilities Act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
11. Inclusion is otherwise supported and endorsed by the federal government, with recent policy statements, findings letters, guidance, and grants supporting inclusion by the U.S. Department of Justice, U.S. Department of Education, and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

17 Reasons (cont.)



Alignment with Evidence-Based Best Practice

12. Inclusion is research-based educational best practice, reflected in 35 years of consistent and overwhelming evidence. A segregated educational model for students with disabilities is not evidence-based.
13. Inclusion has been shown to narrow achievement gaps.
14. Inclusion will benefit all students in APS, both academically and socially.
15. Inclusion will not cost more in the long run, and may save APS money, as other school districts have found.
16. Inclusion will ensure segregated settings are phased out.
17. Inclusion promotes civil rights and social justice.