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Florida
Inclusion Network

# Peers as Partners in Learning
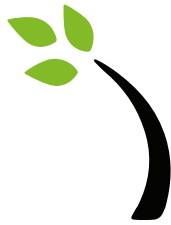## Program Planning and Curricula Guide

# Peers as Partners in Learning
## Program Planning and Curricula Guide

The Florida Inclusion Network
Updated 2020

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# Acknowledgments

# Preface

Throughout this guide reference is made to the Peers as Partners in Learning (PPL) course, the PPL program, and the Peers as Partners in Learning Curriculum and Program Planning Guide (PPL Guide).  In 2015, the Florida Department of Education (FDOE) approved a new high school course called Peers as Partners in Learning (#1400340), and in 2019, a new middle school course of the same name (#1400025) was approved. These elective courses are designed to provide peer supports for students with disabilities.  Students with and without disabilities who are partners in the PPL course comprise the PPL program at their school.  This guide, updated to reflect an added focus for middle school  programs, includes specific information on how to plan and implement the course and program schoolwide as well as grades 6-8 and 9-12 units and lesson plans.  It is recommended that school teams use this PPL Program Planning and Curricula Guide (PPL Guide) as a step-by-step "how to" manual to begin and manage a formal peer support program, along with assistance and support from their local Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) facilitator.

**Part One** of this guide is helpful to a wide audience, providing introductory information and background research regarding peer support programs.  This narrative provides a foundational understanding of the benefits of the PPL Program from a variety of viewpoints.  This part concludes with examples of supports and more information about the courses.

As a school team begins their own program, **Part Two** delivers essential, detailed, step-by-step information for starting and promoting a peer support program.  Forms, ideas, and examples from established programs are included to help new teams get started.

Finally, **Parts Three** and **Four** provide the Exceptional Student Education (ESE) Teacher of Record at the middle or high school levels with a complete set of lessons that are aligned with the course standards at that level. Each lesson includes all materials, handouts, assessments, management strategies and other items that are necessary to implement activities that will allow students to practice and apply content and skills from course standards and reap the many benefits of participation in the PPL Program.

The Peers as Partners in Learning courses are designed to provide reciprocal academic, social, and interpersonal benefits to students with and without disabilities, in an inclusive setting. Inclusion means that students with disabilities are in general education classrooms and settings with their same age peers without disabilities.  A full definition of inclusion also requires that the special education instruction, supports, and services follow the student so that students with disabilities are full members of the school community and have the chance to participate fully in school activities.

# Part One:
# Peers as Partners in Inclusive Schools

## Introduction & Background

The PPL course was developed from a FIN program called The Power of Peers, which was outlined in a guidebook published in conjunction with the FDOE in 2005. Based in part on the "Yes, I Can" program from the University of Minnesota (Abery, et. al., 1997), The Power of Peers was developed to provide structure and implementation ideas to secondary schools in developing peer support programs for students with disabilities (SWD). Originally, students in this program were scheduled in the Peer Counseling course. Over time, however, the program was implemented in other places, including Michigan, New Jersey, and New Mexico, and as far away as New Zealand. In Florida, the growth and positive impact of The Power of Peers led Orange County Public Schools (OCPS) to formally request that the FDOE create a new high school course specifically designed for peer supports for SWD, which was approved in 2015. Following this process, OCPS and FIN collaborated to develop a high school course curriculum that includes standards aligned to the expectations of students enrolled in PPL. Because of the impact of the high school programs, Seminole County Public Schools (SCPS) requested that a companion middle school course be added, which was approved in 2019. Course standards at both levels may be found on CPALMS, and specific lessons developed for teaching the standards in these courses are found in Part Three of this guide. Based on the course standards, PPL has a unique framework that benefits students with and without disabilities.

There are many different peer support programs that have been implemented through the years in order to provide for inclusion and increased socialization of students with disabilities. From peer-mediated support strategies ranging from Classwide Peer Tutoring (Delquadri, Greenwood, Whorton, Carta, & Hall, 1986) (Maheady & Gard, 2010), peer support arrangements, and lunch bunches (Bell and Carter, 2013) to Peer-Mediated Intervention (Harris, Pretti-Frontczak, & Brown, 2009) and other programs such as Peer Assisted Learning Strategies (Maheady, Mallette, and Harper, 2006), (Saenz, Fuchs, & Fuchs, 2005), Circle of Friends (Whitaker, Barratt, Potter and Thomas, 1998), and Best Buddies (Copeland, McCall, Williams, Guth, Carter, Presley, Fowler, and Hughes, 2002), a large body of research supports the benefits of implementing peer support programs. However, there are few detailed procedures for starting peer support programs, and many schools have no peer supports for SWD, even though they have special education programs. Zascavage, Schroeder-Steward, Masten, & Armstrong (2007) found that the number of special education teachers and the number of students in special education on the campus were the two factors that mostly influenced the absence or presence of peer support programs.

The best way to learn about peer supports is to understand how students with disabilities have benefited from peer supports. The following examples show how two students, Jamilah and Derek, have been positively impacted through the support of their peers.

## Meet Jamilah

Jamilah is a tenth-grader who has a learning disability and is enrolled in general education classes to learn core academic content, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment. She is currently struggling in her Algebra I class, which she is taking for the second time. She needs help with understanding algebraic equations, organizing her work and time, note-taking, and staying on task. Jamilah is very well liked and sociable, but has a low grade point average and is falling behind on the course credits needed for graduation. Her self-described math phobia and poor attendance is beginning to negatively impact all her subjects.

Jamilah lives with her grandmother, who is also her legal guardian. While Jamilah's grandmother is very caring, she works two jobs and has limited opportunities or resources to be more involved in Jamilah's education. Jamilah has many household responsibilities, including caring for a younger brother, which is most likely affecting her attendance.

## Meet Derek

Derek is a seventh-grade middle school student who cannot speak and uses a laptop computer or iPad for communication. Because he was in a self-contained class with only students who have intellectual disabilities and limited communication, he had few opportunities to use or practice his communication skills. And because there were so many students who needed extensive support from adults in the classroom, Derek often spent his time waiting for teachers and paraprofessionals to assist and engage him during the academic tasks.

Derek's parents and teachers believed that, with the right support, he could make progress toward meeting the state standards, as measured by the Florida Standards Assessment, in general education classes. They also believed that he would benefit from having authentic social interactions and practice his communication skills in the same classes and other places, like lunch and football games, where all the other students in the school spent their time.

## Meet Jamilah and Derek's Teachers

Jamilah and Derek's teachers wondered how they could ensure all of the academic and other supports were in place for these and every other student throughout the day and week. General education teachers shared concerns about how they could teach all the other students in their classes plus give Jamilah and Derek the extra attention they required.

While Jamilah and Derek's exceptional student education (ESE) teachers provide instruction and support, as noted on each student's IEP, they must also be available for many other students with IEPs in other general education classrooms at their schools. They often wish they could be in three places at once in case students like Jamilah or Derek need extra support.

All the teachers make wide-ranging efforts to provide instruction and support to Jamilah and Derek, but they often feel overextended and pressed for time. In addition, they understand the social implications of having an adult in the classroom specifically to provide students with assistance like note-taking, explaining directions, using technology, transitioning from class to class, or other specific supports. They question how they can maintain support for students like Jamilah and Derek in ways that will impact their learning in a positive way, without having an adult right by their side.

The teachers found the solution for providing needed supports in the use of peers. Scheduling and enrolling students in the PPL courses enabled teachers to match Derek and Jamilah with peers in classes where additional supports were needed, along with the regularly scheduled support from their ESE teachers. The peers provided support for reading, note-taking, staying on task, and following directions. They also used technology and other tools and strategies to support re-teaching and learning of concepts.

The impact of peer support on Jamilah and Derek was tremendous. For Jamilah, the impact of peer support was subtle, but noteworthy. Jamilah's ESE teacher skillfully paired her with a peer, Samantha, who was a whiz at math, had already "aced" Algebra I, and had a knack for simplifying abstract concepts. As a result of having Samantha explain and model algebraic thinking during classroom assignments, Jamilah passed all of her weekly Algebra I quizzes and completed her end of course exam with flying colors. Samantha became so involved in her role as a peer that she also helped Jamilah complete her homework assignments outside of class, which had a huge impact on Jamilah's final passing grade. Because of their trusting relationship, Samantha was also able to teach Jamilah strategies to advocate for her own needs – a great skill for her to carry through life. During the course of their working together, Jamilah and Samantha became very close friends in and out of school.

With assistance from Antoine, his peer partner, Derek started using his laptop regularly to communicate with classmates and to take part in class discussions. Antoine helped him keep up with in-class assignments and study for weekly quizzes. As a result of Antoine's support, Derek made great academic gains and met all of his IEP goals during the year.

Another picture of success was seen in Derek's relationships with others. As he moved in his wheelchair through the noisy throng of students in the school hallway, a peer by his side, friends leaned over to share a fist bump or a piece of sports news.

His social life outside of school was so busy, his Mom reported that she was exhausted from chauffeuring him to and from movies, games, and club activities. From relative obscurity, Derek joined the life of his school and community.

The PPL program benefits for Jamilah and Derek extended well beyond students with disabilities. The peers learned valuable life lessons from their involvement in the PPL courses and programs at their respective schools. Those enrolled in the PPL elective classes learned about disability issues, civil and human rights, and ways to foster reciprocal relationships with others. They also learned what it means to be servant leaders and outspoken advocates of social justice. They didn't learn all these things from classroom or homework assignments alone – the greatest lessons learned resulted from their engagement with others in the role of a peer.

To hear about the value of the PPL program from students, view these short video clips.

# Benefits for Students

For all students with disabilities to be fully valued and contributing members of the classroom, school, and community they must have opportunities to develop reciprocal relationships with students their same age, in the same places, at the same times, and during the same activities. The PPL course and program embeds such opportunities within the naturally occurring learning structures and environments, across the school day and week.

Decades of research show that classroom structures like cooperative learning (Johnson & Johnson, 2016), and peer mediated instruction and intervention (PMII) (Sperry, Neitzel, & Englehardt-Wells, 2010) lead to increased time on task, better student engagement, and improved social skills among learners in the classroom and other natural environments. These benefits, and more, are especially pronounced when peers support their classmates with severe disabilities (Carter & Kennedy, 2006).

Peer supports aren't just a good idea. Years of research shows students with and without disabilities at all ages benefit in the following ways from a formal peer support system:

- higher student achievement in inclusive classrooms, (Carter & Kennedy, 2006), (Maheady & Gard, 2010)

- greater opportunities for cooperative and collaborative learning, (Smith, 2015)

- higher levels of academic engagement, (Brock & Carter, 2016), (Reister, 2015)

- deeper cognitive processing, (Smith, 2015)

- increased self-esteem,  (Carter & Kennedy, 2006)

- higher expectations, (Reister, 2015)

- improved positive behavior, (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010)

- awareness and sensitivity to human needs, differences and diversity,and social justice, (Carter & Kennedy, 2006), (Reister-Wood, 2015), and (Rossetti, 2011)

- increased attendance, (Bui, Quirk, Almazan, & Valenti, 2010)

- development of positive relationships between students with and without disabilities in the school and community, (Carter & Kennedy, 2006), (Brock & Carter, 2016), (Asmus, Carter, Moss, Born, Vincent, Lloyd, Chung, 2016) and

- leave school better prepared to be successful lifelong learners, employees, employers, parents, and neighbors in an inclusive community.

> "My peer is a very strong-willed person. Although he uses a wheelchair, he can also walk with the help of a walker. He has this way of cheering me up when I'm having a bad day. He is not only my friend, but my hero."
>
> *Erica -- 8th grade peer support*

> "People who judge a student by their disability alone are biased...Interaction is key to everyone's life."
>
> *Jasmine -- 12th grade peer support*

Additionally, social success can be dependent upon one's ability to understand the school culture and unspoken norms of classmates.  This "hidden curriculum" of learning for all students goes far beyond the general education curriculum, and deals with attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors.  These include some important social skills that vary across age groups and only students can teach each other, such as:

• current fashion trends,

• the latest in music, artists, and technology,

• social interaction rules, and

• different teacher rules and expectations (classroom survival skills).

Peer relationships that begin in a classroom often evolve into a more complex relationship between students. Peers with and without disabilities support each other in learning academics and other important concepts like problem-solving and self-advocacy. Both groups build rapport and trust through their everyday interactions in a variety of contexts and alongside other students without disabilities.  They build relationships beyond common interests, not pity or obligation.  Rossetti (2015) found that peers with and without disabilities who develop deeper friendships will work to make slight adjustments needed to invest in maintaining that friendship.  For example, a SWD will make extra efforts to communicate effectively with a friend, and students without disabilities will consider actions such as sitting down to have a conversation with a friend who uses a wheelchair, instead of standing.  Goodstein (2013) finds that these essential friendships serve to prevent abuse, defend against bullying, and provide comfort and support to bullied children.  Friendships play a very important role in decreasing social isolation of students, and are a vital part in preventing bullying for all students, not just those with disabilities.  The PPL program can help facilitate the formation of friendships.

Understanding and using social skills in context with peers and friends can also lead to benefits such as an increase in social acceptance for students who have not previously been perceived in a positive manner by their peers (O'Connor, 2016).  This finding is true for students with and without identified disabilities.  In addition, programs with a focus on serving others, such as the PPL program, have shown increases in social competency, responsibility, self-esteem, empathy, problem-solving skills, respect, and acceptance of more diverse populations (Goodstein, 2013).  Clearly, the intervention of peers in teaching the rules of the "hidden curriculum" is beneficial.

Peers who complete the PPL course gain more than just a grade or credit toward graduation. By participating in PPL course lessons throughout the year, students will be more likely to have adopted both a growth mindset and use a servant leadership approach to working with other students. Reflection and examination of self in relation to others are both essential skills that are built throughout the course. "In a growth mindset, students understand that their talents and abilities can be developed through effort, good teaching and persistence" (Dweck, 2012). Through the concept of servant leadership, when students make a conscious choice to serve, then leading others in serving follows naturally. The changes occur beyond those students participating in the course and program: perceptions about students with disabilities are changed across the school.

# Benefits for Teachers & Staff

The PPL course and program have benefits for teachers, too. Based on feedback from current PPL teachers, general education teachers say they spend less time assisting students with routine tasks, such as locating materials, following directions, staying on task, and writing homework assignments.

ESE teachers and paraprofessionals say the peer support program lets them use time more effectively to provide instructional supports to students with disabilities throughout the day.  Since there are peers assisting students with disabilities in many classes, ESE teachers report that they now have more time to collaborate, plan, and teach with their general education colleagues.  Teachers are also discovering that it is often the students who come up with the most creative ideas to make accommodations for their peers with disabilities. One example is shown in the graphic below.

When students see learning through the lens of partnership, they have equal stakes in the learning process, better understand human relationships, and come to view the world in new ways. All students need support from time to time, regardless of whether or not they have a disability. As peers with and without disabilities support one another, they strengthen the entire culture of inclusive schools.

While paraprofessionals may provide necessary services, like physical and health-related supports, many are also required to provide instructional supports to students with the most extensive and unique learning needs. Support from adults in school is by nature a temporary service. A primary goal of education for students with and without disabilities is to become independent, successful, and contributing members of society, which by definition includes relationships with peers. (For more extensive information regarding the use of paraprofessionals, please see Appendix A.)



LA COMIDA - Food

VOCABULARIO
*Vocabulary*

la hamburguesa — los espaguetis — la pizza — los frijoles — el pescado

el pollo — el arroz — la sopa — el pan — la ensalada — el postre

Nombre: _____

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*When Jacob's peer partner added illustrations that were universally designed on our weekly Spanish vocabulary, ALL the students did better on their quizzes!*

*Mrs. L -- Spanish Teacher*

When peer supports are in place, educators find ways to use paraprofessional resources more effectively, such as...

• supporting a broader range and number of students across the school day,

• assisting general education teachers during whole or small group instructional activities,

• collecting progress monitoring and behavior data, and

• maintaining student records for special education teachers.

## CONSIDER THIS...

Are students with and without disabilities...

**1** Present in the **same places?**

**2** Present at the **same times?**

**3** Engaged in the **same activities?**

As schools reallocate adult resources, they are turning to peers as an effective means of support for the educational and social needs of students with disabilities in general education settings. Throughout the day's instructional and non-instructional activities, peers prove to be less intrusive and stigmatizing, especially for secondary school students. In their research with students with significant disabilities, Carter, Lynn, Sisco, Melekoglu, & Kurkowski (2007) found that interactions between SWDs and peers occurred on a much more frequent basis than with paraprofessionals, and task-related interactions led to higher levels of academic engagement for all students.

To hear more about the benefits of PPL from parents, students, and teachers, view these video clips.

## Providing Support

Before implementing the PPL program, it is very important to understand the concepts that form the foundation of the course. This program is intended to have a strong focus on service to others. In order for peer relationships to develop, all participants should understand not only the benefits but also the principles behind implementing the PPL program. Take a close look at the following graphic for a quick explanation of the concepts that are, and aren't, part of the PPL program.

*"There's a different culture in the school now from when I was a teacher here. Kids with and without disabilities are actually hanging out together, which you don't see in other schools."*

*Mr. "C", Principal and former teacher of a Florida high school.*

Peer supports are typically provided to those students who would benefit from additional support to learn, make progress, and be engaged with same-age peers in general education classrooms and other regular school environments. This includes students with more significant disabilities who often need one-to-one verbal, visual, physical or other kinds of support related to academic, communication, and social skill development. Formal peer supports are provided in the context of the general education curriculum, classrooms, and natural school environments.

Since peers may only enroll in one section of the PPL per year, each student with a disability may have different peers assigned to provide support in the SWD's general education classes throughout the day. For example, Jason has a different peer in his English Language Arts (ELA), Algebra I, American History, Biology, Art, and Physical Education classes, for a total of six peers throughout the day. Each of his core academic classes is taught by a highly qualified general education teacher and has a certified ESE teacher who provides support facilitation services to him and other students with IEPs in the same class.

Peers are closely matched to each student with a disability in each general education classroom. It is important to consider the unique strengths and challenges of both students when matching a peer with a student with a disability. More tips and strategies for pairing students in academic and non-academic classes is provided in Part Two.

Peer supports are designed to reduce barriers to learning and facilitate opportunities for social/emotional development among students with and without disabilities. Students with disabilities simply do better when same-age peers are there to provide direct support during learning and other activities across the school day. The following are a few examples of how peers can support students with disabilities:

## What are Peer Supports?

| ✓ | ✗ |
|---|---|
| SERVANT LEADERSHIP | SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION |
| INSTRUCTIONAL AND SOCIAL SUPPORT FROM TRAINED PEERS | PHYSICAL AND HEALTH RELATED SUPPORTS |
| PROBLEM-SOLVING | A BUDDY OR PEER MEDIATION PROGRAM |
| RELATIONSHIP OR RAPPORT BUILDING | TUTORING |
| STUDENT-CENTERED | PARAPROFESSIONAL SUPPORT |
| SUPPORTIVE OF SELF-DETERMINATION | A TEACHER ASSISTANT |

# Examples of Peer Supports

**Note-taking:**
- Scribe notes using a carbonless notebook or electronic tool
- Obtain a copy of the teacher's learning tools, e.g., PPT slides
- Support the use of notes, graphic organizers, and other visual tools

**Tools and Resources:**
- Model use of manipulatives
- Use cell phone to photograph documents, charts, slides, etc.
- Assist with organization of digital tools and resources such as electronic calendar and schedules
- Provide support in the use of multi-media or assistive technology for learning
- Assist in use of headsets and switches

**Communication:**
- Assist with using assistive communication device
- Assist with using software programs such as text-to-speech, word prediction, etc.
- Model and encourage communication and self-advocacy between students and adults, in and out of the classroom
- Encourage others to use age appropriate language when talking to the student
- Prompt student to contribute to and initiate classroom discussions and cooperative group tasks
- Engage student in conversations about shared interests or hobbies

**Academic and Social Engagement:**
- Check in with student for attendance in class
- Report attendance and performance issues to ESE teacher of record
- Facilitate interactions between students in social activities such as lunch, pep rally, dances, and clubs
- Provide prompts or cues, such as physical gestures and verbal prompts for staying on-task or following directions
- Assist the student in completing tasks and checking his or her work
- Look for opportunities for the student to take the lead in activities

**Behavior:**
- Encourage student with examples of positive replacement behaviors
- Give prompts to student to re-direct when off task
- Provide verbal support with "cool down" directions
- Remind the student about classroom routines

**Physical:**
- Locate and organize materials for a student with physical support needs
- Assist with mobility in and out of the classroom – ensure accessibility and proximity for cooperative group and other classroom tasks

Peer partners also play a key role in advocating for disability rights and the needs of students with disabilities. This can include educating other students on social justice issues and the overall idea that those with disabilities are more alike than different from other students. They may be more likely to report incidences of bullying and exclusion than a student with a disability.  Additionally, peers work with teachers and paraprofessionals to communicate and identify interventions and student supports that can work for an individual student with a disability.

As Derek and Jamilah's stories earlier in this part of the guide illustrate, there are significant day-to-day differences in the types of activities that are needed for individual students.  Samantha and Antoine each played a vital role in the success of these students, yet their activities in the classroom were different.

To understand more about how these types of support can lead to success for all, read about Jason and Erika (see Appendix B, Jason's Vignette).

To hear peer support students talk about what they do, click here for short video clips.

# Starting Your Program

In order to start a PPL program at your school with the support of your local FIN facilitator, you will need information about the course, in addition to the information in this guide.

Specific PPL course information for the middle and high school courses, including the course description, concepts, and standards can be found on the CPALMS website under the Course Descriptions and Directory tab. A snapshot of the CPALMS web page for PPL can be seen in the illustration below.  More information about the course can also be found online in the FDOE Course Code Directory under the subject area of Peer Counseling, course #1400340, for grades 9 – 12 and course #1400025 for grades 6-8.  Students enrolled in the PPL course can earn one full credit per year.  The course may be repeated, with a minimum of one year required. Detailed information can be found in Appendix C of this guide, PPL Course Requirements. Schools must follow district procedures for obtaining approval to use this course.
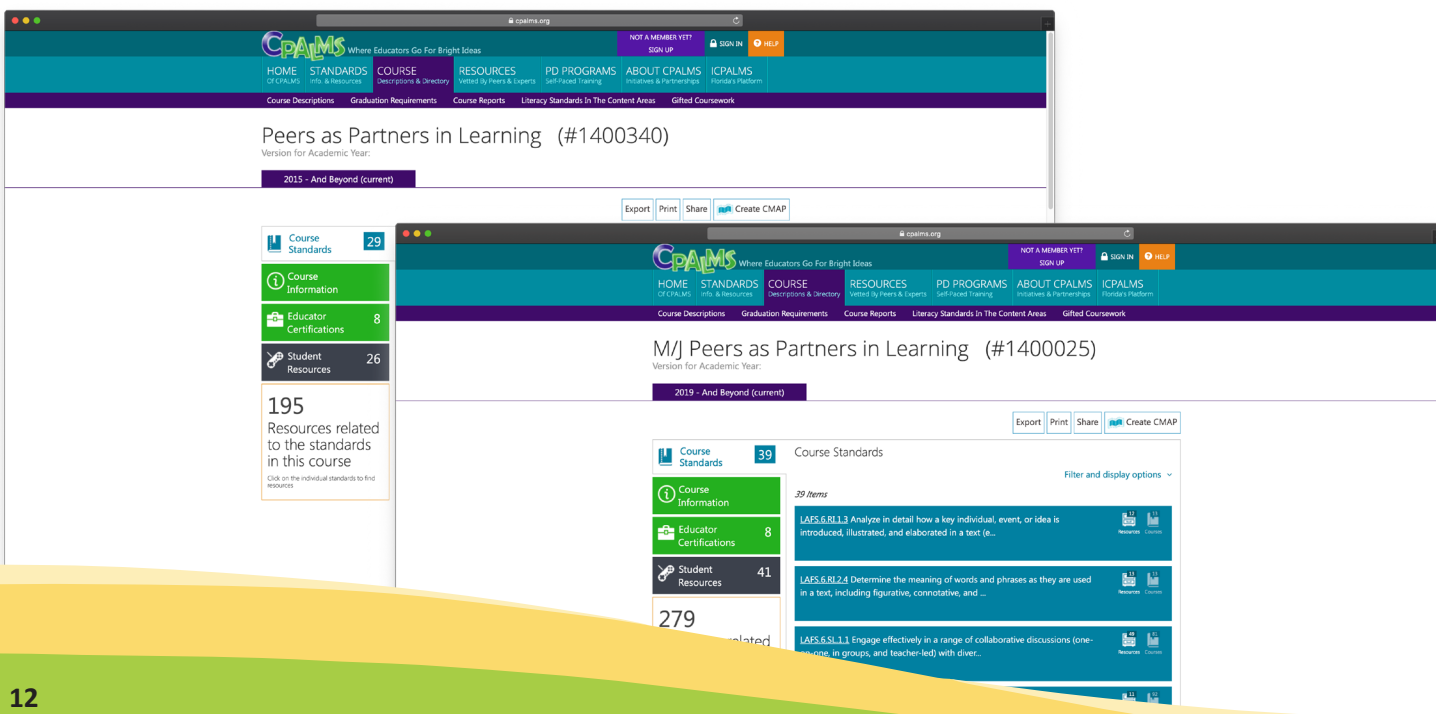
*Peers as Partners in Learning Planning and Curricula Guide* is designed to assist secondary level teachers and teams who are in the process of planning or implementing a formal peer support program on their campus. Peer supports are founded on the belief that peers with and without disabilities can rely on one another, creating cooperative classrooms and school communities where all students reach their highest potential, have value and belong. This guide aligns with the FDOE elective courses #1400340 and #1400025 with the same title: Peers as Partners in Learning, and M/J Peers as Partners in Learning, respectively. The course titles and content were developed in collaboration with the Florida Inclusion Network, Orange County Public Schools and Seminole County Public Schools, and reflect the reciprocal academic and social benefits of peer partnerships for students with and without disabilities.

The PPL curricula contained in this guide includes content and learning activities guided by the following core principles of inclusive education:

# CORE
## Principles

- Humanity is our most essential common and connecting quality.
- Differences are accepted, respected, and celebrated.
- Inclusion is a civil and human right.
- Including everyone benefits everyone.
- Inclusion is a systemic change dependent upon concerted efforts of all stakeholders.
- Students educated in inclusive environments are more independent and participate more fully in all aspects of life.
- Meaningful inclusion moves beyond physical access and ensures full involvement and progress with learning goals.

This part of the PPL Guide has presented a broad overview of the program, examples of the supports that can be provided, and the benefits to students with and without disabilities. Part Two will provide many more details about planning and implementing a new PPL program, including developing a team, their roles, getting the word out, and plenty of samples and ideas that you can use to get started. Parts Three and Four of the PPL guide provide units and lesson plans, learning activities, supplemental materials, and assessments to meet middle and high school course standards.
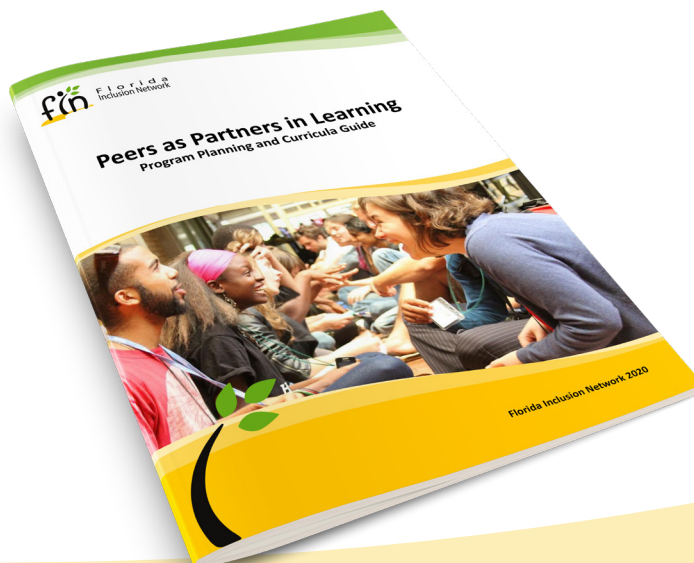


*Peers as Partners in Learning Planning and Curricula Guide* refers to this publication, which includes the information, tools, and curriculum content needed for schools to plan and implement a schoolwide peer support program aligned with the PPL elective course description, content, and standards.

# Part Two:
# Planning and Implementation

This part of the guide describes the steps schools should take to plan and implement the Peers as Partners in Learning program to support students with disabilities in general education settings. Important foundational steps, such as administrative support and building an implementation team, are included. Part Two also provides the nuts and bolts of getting the program started, from matching peers with students identified as needing support to scheduling peers in a PPL course so they can provide academic and other supports in inclusive classrooms. A brief overview of the process can also be seen in the video, Getting Started with PPL, which can be found at www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com.

This guide takes you through the process of developing a peer support program independently. However, we strongly encourage you to make use of the Florida Inclusion Network in the process. Your local FIN facilitator can help you organize your team and provide valuable resources to help you get started. FIN can arrange for visits to schools with successful PPL programs, and can provide professional development, technical assistance and support to begin and sustain the program.

# Essential Roles and Responsibilities

Before establishing a PPL program for your school, it is important to understand that there are three essential positions that must be part of every school's team. The Administrator, ESE Teacher and General Education teacher provide the core support for the program. A school can have more than one person serving in any of these essential roles (for example, there may be multiple general education teachers on the team) but the team must take care that the roles and responsibilities are fully covered. More information about duties during each step of planning and implementation of the program is provided later in this part of the PPL Guide.

*Please note that many of the responsibilities (e.g., marketing, application reviews) listed below should be completed in collaboration with other team members, faculty and staff.*

Let's take a look at the roles and responsibilities for these three specific team members.

## Administrator Roles and Responsibilities

An administrator's understanding of the benefits of the PPL program and their support for implementation with fidelity is crucial in developing a successful program. While an administrator may not have a direct day-to-day role in running the program, the direction and oversight that they provide throughout the year is invaluable. The next section provides an explanation for the roles of an administrator that are shown in the graphic on the next page.

**Promote the Program:** Ensure district approval for the use of the Peers as Partners in Learning courses. Follow your district procedure for adding a new elective course. Administrators should use a variety of methods to build support and capacity at the school level to introduce the course to faculty, staff, students, and parents as appropriate. Planning and scheduling a stakeholder introduction to the program can be done through posting flyers and posters in the faculty lounge and workroom; sending informational email messages for questions and answers; conducting meetings for interested teachers on a planning day or at lunch; planning Professional Learning Communities (PLC) or facilitating or delivering presentations at faculty meetings.

**Identifying an ESE Teacher:** The administrator is responsible for identifying an ESE teacher of record (a selection tool is provided in Appendix D). The ESE teacher of record is vital to the success and sustainability of the program. Desirable qualities of the ESE teacher of record are discussed later in this section, and a short video clip from an administrator can be found at the end of this section. In the daily teacher schedule, time must be allocated for the ESE teacher of record to provide instruction and oversight to the peer support students. Depending on the structure and schedule of the school day, the instructional time could be conducted face-to-face, or this instructional time could be accomplished using an electronic program, with infrequent face-to-face meetings.

**Inclusive Scheduling:** The administrator should ensure that there is collaboration with the ESE teacher of record to ensure that peer supports and the students with disabilities are scheduled into the appropriate classes together. While schools may implement a schedule that works for them, it is a recommended best practice that the PPL course #1400340 or #1400025 is offered during each class period in the master schedule in order to make it possible to support students throughout the day. The students needing support will be enrolled in the general academic course, with the general education teacher as the teacher of record. The peer providing the support will be enrolled in the PPL course, with the ESE teacher as the teacher of record. The ESE teacher is responsible for developing the list of partners for peer supports and SWD. Communication between the person who enters the master schedules and ESE staff is essential.

Assistance with the Inclusive Scheduling process for all students is available through your local FIN facilitator, and more information about Inclusive Scheduling may be found at www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com.

**Problem Solving:** The administrative leadership team or the identified designee should establish a plan to provide initial and ongoing support for the ESE teacher of record and other involved teachers in successfully implementing and managing the PPL program.

To hear from an administrator for a well-established PPL program, click here.

# ESE Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

The ESE teacher of record has many levels of responsibility in implementing the PPL program, and is essential in problem-solving and collaboration with administration, staff, and students on a daily basis so that course standards are met. The next section provides an explanation for the roles of the ESE teacher that are shown in the graphic below.
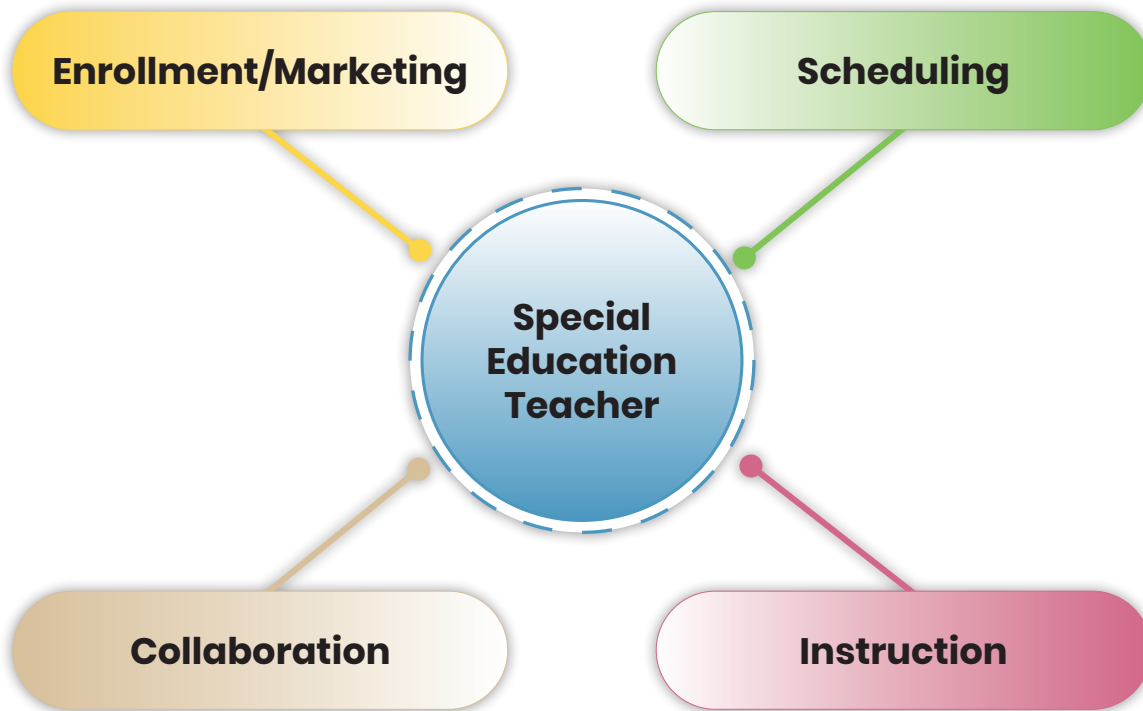


**Enrollment and Marketing:** The ESE teacher of record should collaborate with administration and the support team to establish the enrollment criteria, registration, and application process. Additional information about criteria, registration, and applications can be found under Step 3.

The ESE teacher of record should work with the team to market the course and program to recruit qualified students interested in taking the PPL elective course. Timelines should be determined to market the course in conjunction with the application process and master schedule timelines. Ideas and suggestions for marketing are provided under Step 3.

**Scheduling:** The ESE teacher of record takes the lead for matching peer partners with students for classroom support and creating a master schedule for peer supports. This process involves communicating and collaborating with other ESE and general education teachers to identify those students with disabilities who will benefit from peer support. The outcome of this collaboration process is the identification of subject areas in which each student with a disability will require support.

> **IMPORTANT:** *Peer support is not an ESE service, and is not to be included on the IEP. The scheduling team must ensure that each student with an IEP continues to receive the identified level of support and services from certified teachers and/or therapists as written on the IEP.*

**Collaboration:** One responsibility of the ESE teacher of record is setting up and managing attendance of peer support students. This process will vary based on school preferences, technology, and individuals involved. Some schools may prefer simple sign-in logs, while other, more-established programs may find that electronic formats, like quick response (QR) codes, are more convenient. Guides for developing electronic formats may be found in Appendix E, Taking Attendance Using QR Codes. A related task is to develop a method for peer partners to inform the ESE teacher of record and the classroom teacher of any daily absences or tardies. For instance, students may email both teachers, using district-approved technology or programs.

Another responsibility of the ESE teacher of record is to conduct classroom visits to ensure implementation and integrity of the program. Classroom visits will allow the ESE teacher of record to provide guidance on instructional/behavioral/communication strategies and conduct problem- solving related to the role of peers in the PPL course. Lastly, the ESE teacher of record will coordinate all peer support student activities and schedule face-to-face meetings.

**Instruction:** The ESE teacher of record will need to consider needs of both faculty members and peer support students. Prior to the start of school (or at the end of prior school year), bring in faculty members to provide an overview of the course. Topics to discuss include the purpose, vision, and common language for the course; benefits for all students; the course framework; information about student and peer support selection; and information about the role of the general education teacher. Sample presentations for the whole faculty and for teachers of SWD who have peer supports in their classes are included in Appendix F, Faculty Presentation Templates.

While the PPL program implementation, peer experience, and schedules will vary widely in school settings, it is ideal that the peer support students start in the regular education classroom with their SWD on the first day of school. However, it is a possibility that the ESE teacher of record might need the first two weeks of school to provide in-class instruction on the PPL standards to the peer support students. Due to time and schedule constraints, some schools may find it more beneficial to provide this in-class instruction to PPL students during pre-planning days before the school year begins.

Regardless of when the instruction is provided to peer support students, this time is critical to establishing the foundation for the program. Other important activities will include introducing students with disabilities to their peer support student(s) and providing opportunities for team building amongst the students (see Appendix G for Student Interest Profile). Peer support students must have an assigned location with a teacher (ESE teacher of

record) until they are scheduled with the SWD.  If student assignment is known, another suggestion is for peer support students to use the first 2-3 days for active observations in the SWD's classroom, and to  understand the flow of the class, the expectations/rules of the teacher, the overall environment, and to get to know the syllabus, materials, books, and resources.  Additional tips for planning and implementing instructional units to address course standards are included later in Parts Three and Four of this guide.

Information and overviews of the use of assistive technology should be provided for the peer  support student, as appropriate (invite your district AT specialist or school's SLP contact for  assistance with this training, if needed).  It should be made clear to the peer support student that they can ask for help with problem-solving at any time, and procedures for doing so must be established by the ESE teacher of record.

To hear from an ESE teacher of record for a well-established PPL program, click here.

# General Education Teacher Roles and Responsibilities

The main role of a general education teacher is providing quality instruction in the content area.  However, the general education teacher also has other important responsibilities toward inclusion of SWD that will contribute largely to the success of the PPL program. The next section provides a more detailed explanation of the roles of general education teachers that are shown in the graphic below.

Inclusive

Collaborative

General Education Teacher

Provide Quality Instruction

**Inclusive:**  The general education teacher should demonstrate characteristics of inclusiveness.  He or she must be willing to include peer supports for students with disabilities, and to  collaborate and communicate with ESE teachers to build relationships that support all students.  The role of the general education teacher in working with peer support students begins with  giving the peer a copy of the procedures, syllabus, course standards, and assignments. The  general education teacher also needs to make sure
that the peer has the tools needed to work with the

SWD, and that the physical setup of the class will be conducive to providing peer supports for students to work collaboratively. The general education teacher must have a clear understanding of the role of the peer support student and what their assigned responsibilities are. An overview presentation for general education teachers is located in Appendix F, Faculty Presentation Templates.

**Collaborative:** The general education teacher should communicate frequently with the ESE teacher of record, and collaborate as needed to problem solve. One commonly occurring topic is that of attendance. Teachers frequently ask: "What should I do when my peer support student is absent?" When peers are absent the general education teacher could decide to assign an alternate in the class to provide support to the SWD. However, it is critical that the general education and ESE teacher of record communicate regarding the best plan.

**Another Common Question Is:** "Can my peer support student work with other students?" The general education teacher may decide to utilize the peer support student in order to benefit all students. This may involve working with small groups of students, cooperative learning groups, or paired activities, and should be a flexible format. While these are options that can be considered, it should be prominent that the primary focus of peer supports should be for the SWDs. The general education teacher may find that collaborating with the peer support student will help to best meet student needs.

**Provide Quality Instruction:** Of course, the main role of the general education teacher is to provide quality instruction in the course content. Part One of this guide provides a framework for suggested supports that can be provided by the peer support student, and the ESE teacher of record can provide additional ideas through collaboration, if needed.

On a day that an assessment is given in the classroom, a frequently heard question from the general education teacher is: "What does my peer support student do during the test?" The answer to this question will vary. Depending on the SWD's classroom assessment accommodations identified on the student's IEP, the peer support student could provide those accommodations. Examples include reading the test, scribing the answers, assisting with provision of extended time, or other identified accommodations. In addition, this time could be utilized by the peer support student to complete assignments for the PPL course that have been assigned by the ESE teacher of record.

To hear from a general education teacher for a well-established PPL program, click here.

# Planning and Implementing a Schoolwide Peers as Partners in Learning Program

A brief framework for starting a PPL program is outlined in the chart on the following page. Since there are many specifics that will need to be considered in implementing the program, additional details and in-depth information are provided following the chart and in the Appendices.

# Framework for PPL

**Step 1:  Build the Program**

- Ensure district approval for Peers as Partners in Learning course

- Identify ESE teacher of record

- Build a team with administrative support

- Vision/Core Beliefs


**Step 2:  Clarify the Program**

- Establish structure of the elective course, specific to your school

- ESE teacher of record reviews standards, and plans for student supports


**Step 3:  Market the New Course**

- Inform faculty, staff, and community about the PPL course

- Establish enrollment criteria, registration timeline, and application process

- Review applications for PPL student selection


**Step 4:  Develop Schedules**

- Include FIN to facilitate the inclusive scheduling process, if needed

- Identify SWD(s) and subject area(s) that need support

- Facilitate the process of matching PPL students to SWD

- Follow up with the staff who enter student and master schedules


**Step 5:  Plan for Follow Up**

- Coordinate a professional learning community to support ongoing implementation

- Determine a system for communication with PPL community regarding events, problem-solving and opportunities for refinement

# Step 1: Build the Program

## A. Ensure district approval for Peers as Partners in Learning course

An important first step is to contact your local [Florida Inclusion Network (FIN) facilitator](). FIN can provide the following resources and support for your school team, including your school administrator:

- Ongoing support and technical assistance for program development, implementation, and evaluation
- Opportunities to observe and/or collaborate with established PPL program schools
- Professional development to school staff, families, and district personnel
- Assistance with scheduling for course implementation and ESE service delivery

The school or district administration must ensure that the appropriate level of the PPL course (M/J #1400025 or High School #140340) is adopted following district guidelines and procedures. The process of obtaining district approval for use of the Peers as Partners in Learning course varies from district to district. Follow your district's established procedures to ensure that you have approval to utilize the appropriate course.

An additional discussion can be held to consider providing community service hours for high school students enrolled in the PPL course, or in conjunction with middle school civics requirements. Students will likely inquire with their school's guidance department for information about community service requirements, and the team will need to be clear on their district and school's policies with using the PPL course in this way.

## B. Identify ESE teacher of record

The administrator is responsible for identifying the ESE teacher of record. While the ESE teacher is the official teacher of record for the PPL course at a specific school, she will continue to work collaboratively as a member of the stakeholder team as described below. The qualities of an ESE teacher of record should include, but are not limited to:

- Having experience working collaboratively with faculty and staff
- Taking initiative
- Exhibiting "with-it-ness"
- Advocating for students with disabilities
- Using Person First Language
- Organizational skills for coordinating student schedules and assignments

## C. Build a team with administrative support

After obtaining any necessary district-level approval for use of a Peers as Partners in Learning course, and likely in conjunction with selecting an ESE teacher of record, an initial step in planning a peer support program on your campus is to create a stakeholder team. People who might be involved include guidance counselors, special education teachers, general education teachers,

instructional coaches, paraprofessionals, support services personnel, vocational or electives teachers, administrators, and parents. Your team could be small, but should include multiple perspectives, such as a general education, special education, elective teachers, and administration. In general, it is better to have a small committed group than a larger one that may have difficulty with continued commitment.

Once the team members are established, the group should develop timelines and formats for meetings; establish a method of communication; decide methods and timelines for recruitment, selection and training; and decide responsibilities for each specific team member. A sample timeline for implementing a PPL program can be found in Appendix H. It is strongly recommended that the team consider visiting and observing an existing successful peer support program, which can be set up through your local FIN facilitator.

## D. Vision and Core Beliefs

As your team begins to plan for implementation, there are many aspects to consider. Each school will have to discuss and make decisions related to inclusive practices that will align with your school's vision and core beliefs statements. The vision and core beliefs statements for the PPL course may be exactly the same as your school's, or they can be developed specific to the team's perspective.

The team will create the program's vision and core beliefs statements to share with all school stakeholders. Sample vision statements, core beliefs, and an explanation of the process for developing each of these may be found in Appendix I.

# Step 2: Clarify the Program

## A. Establish structure of the elective course, specific to your school

The implementation of the PPL program will vary at individual school sites. Factors that can affect the implementation include the size of the school population, the demographics of the school, the vision for the program, the school's schedule, or the course offerings. The team should consider how these factors will impact the PPL program.

## B. ESE teacher of record reviews standards, and plans for student support

The ESE teacher of record must familiarize themselves with the PPL course standards, End of Course rubric, and the essential concepts of the PPL curriculum. Sample lessons are provided in Parts Three and Four of this guide as a resource for the teacher, with the understanding that they were developed to be fluid enough to be implemented in a variety of situations.

# Step 3: Market the New Course

## A. Inform faculty, staff, and community about the PPL course

The administrator may have already taken steps toward informing faculty, staff and the community about the PPL course.   Collaboration by the team may result in the implementation of additional activities.  Again, a sample faculty PowerPoint presentation may be found in Appendix F. See the infographic on the next page to get a few ideas for marketing.

*A sample program advertisement flyer can be found in Appendix J

## B. Establish enrollment criteria, registration timeline, and application process

The team or a subgroup of the team should also establish the timeframe and procedures for students to select elective courses or make elective course changes for the upcoming school year.  For example, school counselors may provide information and an overview of course selections to include the PPL course, pre-approval activities, and the process for application.  Once applications have been submitted, a review must be conducted to select qualified PPL students.

The team determines enrollment criteria, which may include, but are not limited to: a minimum GPA, attendance record, positive behavior, and leadership skills.  Sample peer application forms can be found in Appendix K.  Student applications should include the following:

- Teacher recommendation (a sample form can be found in Appendix L)
- GPA, attendance, behavior approvals from school administration or counselors
- Questions such as those related to strengths (e.g., bilingual), talents, skills, past experiences, and reason for taking the course.
- Deadline date and where to return the application. Include the ESE teacher of record's email for further information or questions.
- Signed letter from parents (optional - sample letters can be found in Appendix M)

## C. Review applications for PPL student selection

The ESE teacher should plan with the team on how to conduct the application reviews and  interview process. One suggestion is for the team to first gather and review all applications to ensure criteria have been met. Separate the applications that meet established criteria from those that do not.  Applications that meet established criteria are then used to schedule student  interviews (It is suggested that those that do not meet established criteria be filed for future  reference, as needed).  The team should conduct individual student interviews.  Sample peer interview questions are  included in  Appendix N of this guide. The teacher should complete a separate interview form for each student during the interviews.  During student interviews,  consider individual student personality characteristics, in addition to application information, to match students with disabilities with an appropriate peer.

# IDEAS FOR MARKETING

## FLYERS/POSTERS
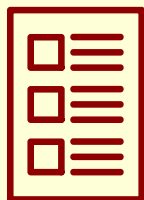
- Use posters to build interest in the course and program
- Students can distribute flyers at school events
- Ask general education teachers to share information
- Provide applications at multiple locations within school
- Include informational flyers on school website

## CLASSROOM PRESENTATIONS

- Distribute applications and give program overview
- Provide special recognition for participants
- Include evidence of service and leadership on post-secondary applications
- Explore options for community service hours

## EVENTS

- Create an entertaining event in the courtyard or at lunch
- Hold a disability awareness event
- Invite a speaker to a gathering

## TESTIMONIALS

- Add testimonials to a morning announcement
- Enlist students from prior year's PPL course to talk about their experiences

## MEDIA

- Include articles about PPL in electronic newsletters or email notices
- Include disability facts or awareness activities in audio announcements
- Host panel or interview about PPL program on school tv news
- Post school-approved information on social media about benefits of PPL program

## COLLABORATE

- Work with the yearbook sponsor to create a new section for students enrolled in the PPL program
- Create partnerships with community organizations
- Enlist other student organizations to share information

# Step 4:  Develop Schedules

## A. Include FIN to facilitate the Inclusive Scheduling process, if needed

The Florida Inclusion Network has developed a specialized Inclusive Scheduling process that allows schools to develop master schedules based on the needs of SWDs.  An additional benefit to using FIN's Inclusive Scheduling process is that it also allows schools to make sure that  necessary supports are available for SWDs through the PPL program throughout the day.  It is highly advised that teams include their local FIN to facilitate the Inclusive Scheduling process.

As the first step in the BEESS approved and vetted  Inclusive Scheduling process, the team looks at the data, discusses each student's IEP needs and places them according to where they fall on the continuum  of ESE services.



During the Inclusive Scheduling process, FIN facilitators can assist the team with grouping students, developing ESE teacher schedules, and looking at  utilizing school resources effectively.
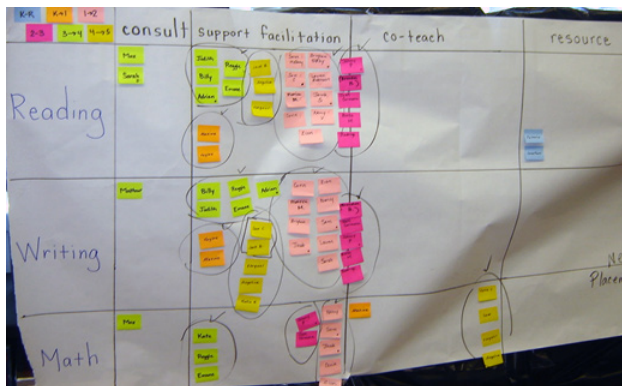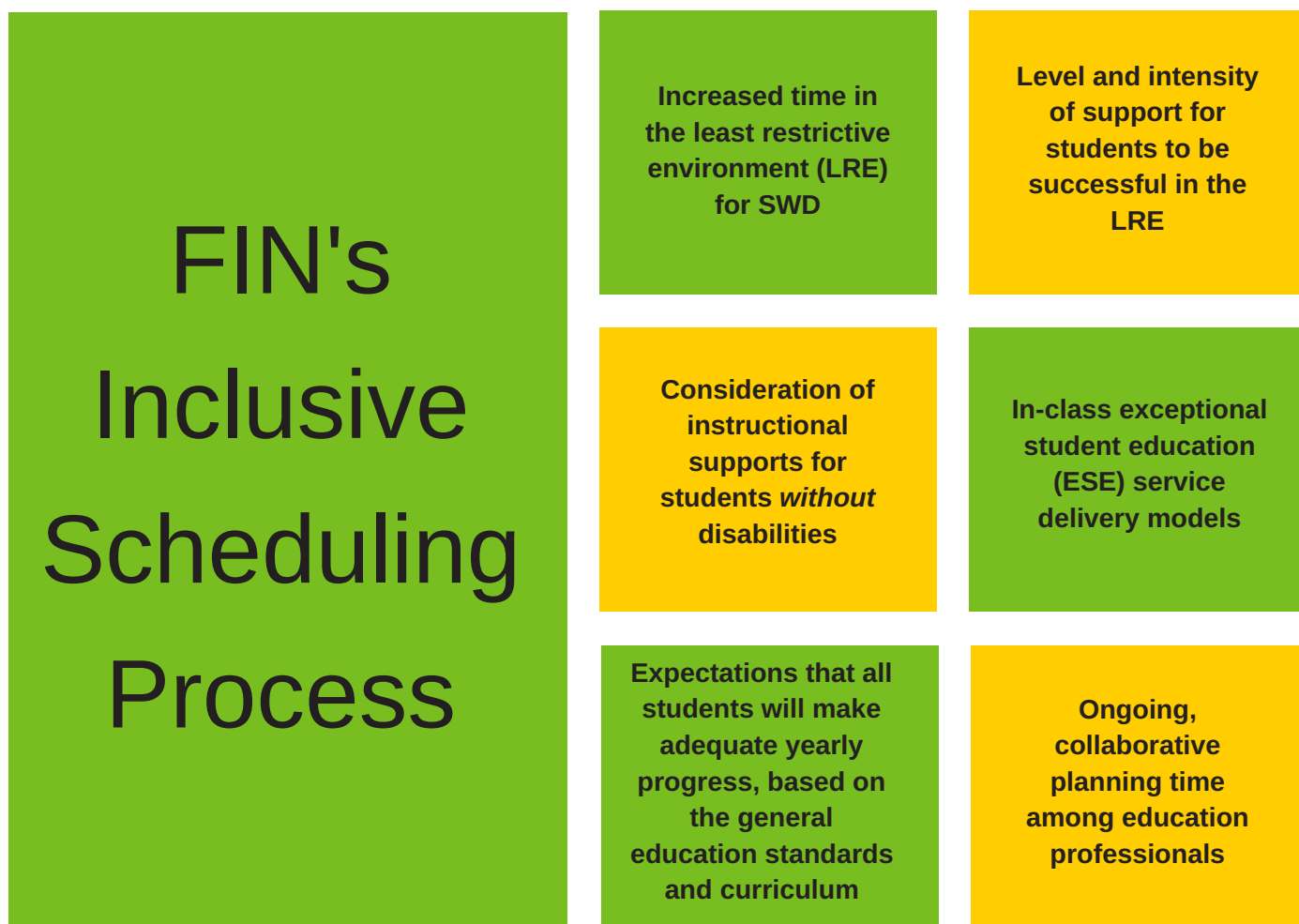


Last, FIN can assist the school's team in establishing or revising a schoolwide master schedule.

FIN's Inclusive Scheduling is a team process to develop a schoolwide master schedule that includes support for students in inclusive classrooms and other general education settings. Inclusive Scheduling involves the scheduling team's development of a master schedule driven by:

- Increased time in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for SWD,
- Level and intensity of support for students to be successful in the LRE,
- Consideration of instructional supports for students without disabilities,
- In-class exceptional student education (ESE) service delivery models,
- Expectations that all students will make progress, based on the general education standards and curriculum, and
- Ongoing, collaborative planning time among education professionals.

## FIN's Inclusive Scheduling Process

**Increased time in the least restrictive environment (LRE) for SWD**

**Level and intensity of support for students to be successful in the LRE**

**Consideration of instructional supports for students *without* disabilities**

**In-class exceptional student education (ESE) service delivery models**

**Expectations that all students will make adequate yearly progress, based on the general education standards and curriculum**

**Ongoing, collaborative planning time among education professionals**

Inclusive scheduling is a decision-making process that addresses many aspects of inclusive education, including the use of the Peers as Partners in Learning program. Your FIN facilitator is available to facilitate the Inclusive Scheduling process at your school. More information about FIN's Inclusive Scheduling process can be found at www.FloridaInclusionNetwork.com.

It is up to the school administrator to make a decision regarding the intended daily schedule and assigned duties for the ESE teacher of record. In some cases, the size of the PPL program, the structure of the master schedule and availability of additional resources at the school will make

it possible for the ESE teacher of record to have responsibility solely for the PPL students and program implementation.  In other situations, the available resources for the number of students with disabilities at the school may require the ESE teacher of record to retain at least some duties typical of an ESE teacher, including IEP development, case management,  instruction of students and accompanying planning, preparation, and assessments.  This  decision should be made after considering all factors involved in implementing a new program, and efforts should be taken not to overload the ESE teacher of record.  In particular, it is  critical that time must be allocated in the ESE teacher's overall schedule for the PPL students to be instructed face-to-face.

## B. Identify SWDs and subject area(s) that need support

The ESE teacher of record takes the lead for identifying students with disabilities for additional classroom  peer support.  This process involves communicating and collaborating with other ESE and general education teachers to identify those students with disabilities who will need  the peer support and in what subject areas.  Considerations for placement of peer supports might include factors such as course passage rate, courses with EOC exams, courses required for graduation, or other individual circumstances.

## C. Facilitate the process of matching PPL students to SWDs

Schools can use a variety of strategies for matching peers with SWDs.  The selected peer support students will have already successfully completed the course in which they are assigned to serve.  During the matching process to identify students with disabilities in need of peer support, it is important to consider the following factors for the SWDs: current levels of support, student GPAs, attendance records, graduation credit deficits, behavior support needs, physical or  communication support needs, student preferences and personalities, and classroom dynamics.  The process of identifying and assigning peer partners to support each identified student with a disability is also based on peer interviews and class period availability.  Be aware of scheduling conflicts for those students who are enrolled in dual-enrollment, International Baccalaureate (IB),  Advanced Placement (AP), Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), music, art, or  other electives with pre-established course schedules.  The team should also consider peer support student strengths and preferences, as well as those of the SWD.  In conjunction with the team, the ESE teacher of record must collaborate with administration to ensure peer partners and the students with disabilities are scheduled into the appropriate classes together.

## D. Follow up with the staff who enter student and master schedules

Prior to the school's completion of a master schedule, the PPL student schedules (peers and ESE students) must be aligned with other course schedules (e.g., algebra supports, honors classes, band, and community-based instruction). After the master schedule is developed, the ESE  teacher must work with guidance to develop individual schedules and match student peers who will be enrolled during the appropriate class period.

It is important to provide a list of PPL course students and matched students with disabilities to guidance or  whomever creates student schedules so that the final schedule reflects the pre-determined student matches. As adjustments are made during the course of the year, it is essential for student accountability to communicate changes to all involved staff.

# Step 5:  Plan for Follow Up

### A. Coordinate a professional learning community to support ongoing implementation

As the team reflects on the implementation of the PPL program, the need for PLCs, problem-solving, communities of practice, and other types of professional development will surface.  Teachers, students, and the stakeholder team will benefit from continuing or ongoing support and further knowledge about the value of the PPL program.

In addition, the team may want to consider gathering data that will help guide them in making ongoing adjustments to the program.  Graduation data, GPA, LRE, behavior referrals, involvement levels for SWD across the school and community, or other school-specific data should be considered as sources.

### B. Determine a system for communication with PPL community regarding events, problem-solving and opportunities for refinement

In order to sustain and increase the positive impact of the PPL program, the team will need to consider how to communicate activities and involvement across a broad range of outlets. Social media, school based websites, media outlets, newsletter articles, announcements, school board meetings, and email are all possible ways to share positive outcomes and support  engagement throughout the community. Students are often very creative in thinking up ways to communicate their activities.

As the program develops, it is also important to continually self assess.  Reflection activities should be conducted, such as surveys, focused discussion, or other forms of ongoing feedback.  The team can use this information to problem-solve and refine the program for the specific school's needs.  Samples of surveys, as well as a format for problem-solving, can be found in Appendices O and P.

Part Two of this guide has provided procedural details and best practices for planning and implementing the PPL program. Strong, ongoing collaboration with FIN is recommended so that your program can demonstrate all the benefits that peer supports can provide.  Parts Three and Four of this guide will outline suggested lessons for both middle and high school programs and provide resources for the ESE teacher of record so that the course standards can successfully be met.

If you have viewed Parts One and Two of the PPL Guide from the FIN website, and wish to start a PPL program, view Parts Three or Four of the guide, or if you have any questions, please contact your local FIN Facilitator.