

Concept of Inclusion at the German International School Washington D.C.

1 Initial Situation and Goals

As a foreign school abroad, the German International School Washington D.C. is innately adept at promoting inclusivity. On a daily basis, our experienced teachers, staff and other GISW personnel enthusiastically face the challenge of integrating new students in the classrooms and the day-to-day activities at the school. Our student body arrives from different federal states of Germany as well as various countries with varying backgrounds and educational paths.

Our day-to-day efforts at integration offer a solid foundation and important prerequisites for inclusive instruction and differentiated learning. The German International School Washington D.C. is proud to develop and implement a concept of inclusion to enable and promote the simultaneous instruction of students with and without disabilities. Currently, the GISW is approved by the Maryland State Department of Education under COMAR 10A.09.09. This regulation has no provision for special education instruction. In order to be able to advertise as a program that can accommodate Special Education students, the school would be required to make many changes, including the following: use of the Maryland State curriculum; we would have to devise an *Individualized Education Program* for each student eligible for special education before providing service; monies between \$250,000 and \$500,000 would need to be available for a start-up program; our libraries would need to follow the guidelines of the *Department of Education*; our teachers would have to be certified for special education and our tuition approved by the *Maryland State Department of Education*; the average class size could not exceed six students per full-time certified teacher if there are any students with special needs in the classroom; and finally we would be required to have a Special Education Department under the supervision of both a full-time state-certified special education and general education director who would not be able to teach.

Taking these facts into account, we have created our first concept of inclusion, a revised version of which will follow below:

According to our guidelines of inclusion we understand that every student shall, within the possibilities given at the school, ...

- ☐ ... be seen and perceived as an individual person,
- ☐ ... be instructed in a homeroom setting,
- ☐ ... be encouraged and academically challenged according to their personal performance level, independently of any disability they may have,
- ☐ ... be a valuable part of the school community.

It is understood that ...

- ☐ ... a heterogeneous community fosters teaching and learning,
- ☐ ... there is no room for barriers for learning and participation at our school,
- ☐ ... without changing the fundamental nature of its program, the school adapts its culture, structures and practices in an ongoing fashion to meet the various individual needs of its students.

We think that a carefully formulated concept of inclusion can lead to improved work conditions and motivation for all employees and teachers and will consequently foster professional development.

As a first step in developing a comprehensive concept of inclusion, we have asked the input of all departments, from the Preschool to the Upper School, which provided us with a better insight into the prerequisites, viewpoints and experiences that will have to be considered.

The continued development of the concept of inclusion for the German International School Washington D.C. has shown that successful inclusion can only be achieved in a gradual manner. For this reason, continuous brainstorming on further strategies of inclusion and sensible inclusion measures will have to be an integral part of our school development and no finite outcome should be expected.

The main goals in developing this concept further should be as follows:

- ☐ The development and best possible implementation of strategies and measures that have been devised, and
- ☐ the continued and consistent documentation of the insights gained from ongoing evaluations.

In more detail, this means:

- Everyone is an equally valuable member of the school community and feels welcome at the GISW. The individual stakeholders work closely together.
- The GISW places high value on teaching independence and self-reliance to its students and this reflects in the lesson plans which aim to foster individual and differentiated learning.
- School culture, structure and practices are being developed in a way to optimally adapt to the varying student body. When extracurricular activities are planned, the needs of everyone attending are considered.
- The more students are involved in the school culture and common events, the more they each feel accepted and respected.
- Our teaching staff strives to continuously educate themselves on new teaching methodology to be able to meet the individual needs of our students.

2 Forms of Organization and Responsibilities

Our school is organized in a way that enables inclusion on different levels, in various departments and by the individual stakeholders. We aim to capitalize on this potential, especially in the areas of communication and cooperation. This responsibility will fall to our coordinator of inclusion, who is still to be elected, and who will closely work with our school counselors.

The following table presents an overview of the forms of organization and the responsible parties:

| Forms of Organization | Responsible Party |
|--|---|
| Structures of communication: Overview of procedures | Inclusion team to propose suggestions, then Counselor or Coordinator of Inclusion |
| Team meetings | Teams of teachers |

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|--|--|
| Transfer of student file to next school (preschool to SES, SES to ES etc.). Responsible party will attend and report at transfer conferences. | Counselor and/or homeroom teacher |
| Creation of development plans | Teachers in cooperation with Counselor or Coordinator of Inclusion |
| Cooperation with on-campus experts/consulting by external specialists | Counselor and/or Coordinator of Inclusion |
| Ongoing evaluation of the inclusion concept | Inclusion project group as subgroup of the steering committee |
| Digital filing and cataloging of decisions and minutes regarding inclusion procedures | Counselors |
| Consideration of prerequisites and consequences of inclusion at the lesson planning stage | Project groups on lesson development |

3 Derived Strategies and Mandatory Procedures (including Responsible Party and Timeline)

| Strategies/Procedures | Responsible Party | Timeline |
|--|--|-------------------|
| Language Development (German as a Second Language: „Hocus Lotus“ (preschool), „Deutsch Fit“, „Deutsch intensive“ (ES), concepts for Language Development (Upper School)) | Teaching staff at preschool, Coordinators for Language Development in ES and Upper School | Ongoing |
| Language Development English: „Hocus Lotus“ (preschool), English taught at differentiated levels at group level, „Englisch intensiv“ (ES), ELL (Upper School) | English Department: Teaching Staff at preschool, ES and Upper School | Ongoing |
| Accommodations in case of dyslexia or dyscalculia e. g. by granting more time to complete tasks, exams etc. (up to grade 10) | Doctors or medical institutions (medical certificate), written request by parents, approval by Head of School in accordance with the class faculty | Ongoing as needed |
| Adapting the learning environment: needs-based seating, therapeutic equipment (e. g. seat cushions, fidget toys) | Teaching staff | Ongoing as needed |
| Differentiated teaching by way of suitable lesson concepts (e.g. workshop instructions, weekly work schedules, work stations or individualized homework assignments) | Teaching staff | Always |

| | | |
|--|--|--------------------------|
| Tutoring in small groups, e.g. FuF and individual support in the areas of dyslexia and dyscalculia as well as perceptual difficulties. | Teaching staff | Ongoing |
| Learning aids in class (e. laptops, reading lamps in case of visual impairment, calculators, work assignments that are adapted to individual development or broken down into smaller tasks | Teaching staff in cooperation with the coordinator of the grade level in question | Ongoing as needed |
| In-class diagnostics: age-specific monitoring in preschool and SEL; spelling test in ES („Hamburger Rechtschreibprobe“); speech diagnostics by means of follow-up tests in Upper School (please see concept of language development) | Teaching staff | One to two times a year |
| Transfer conferences between grades, documentation on development and sitting in on peer classes as well as peer consulting in individual cases. | Transfer coordinator in cooperation with homeroom teacher and homeroom conferences, as well as teaching staff and department heads | Beginning of school year |
| Development of social skills | Counselors and counseling teachers | Ongoing |
| Speech therapy, additional one-on-one therapy, shadowing | External specialists | As needed |

4 Evaluation and Evaluation Projects

The Inclusion project group will be responsible for the evaluation of the strategies and measures implemented. This concept will be evaluated and optimized, should the need arise. The evaluation process will be initiated by the project group. Ongoing re-evaluations are key to take changing circumstances into account and incorporate new insights.

Listed below are a few ways to measure success:

- All students achieve the highest possible school-leaving qualification for their proficiency level.
- The school strives to achieve its set goals (e. g. personnel development, trainings, equipment purchases)
- Student observations and ongoing parent communication to confirm that goals are met.
- The responsible parties are noted in the organization chart. All staff members take their responsibilities seriously and welcome being involved.

This draft is a slightly modified of the original version of the inclusion concept drafted by the Inclusion project group. The project group is presently being tasked to finalize the concept.

Potomac, February 7nd, 2019