

Designing for Inclusion: Measurable Growth in Guadalupe's Least Restrictive Environment

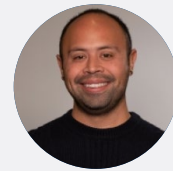


THE CHALLENGE

In April 2024, Guadalupe Union School District entered Step 4 of the CIM process to address academic achievement gaps amongst their students with disabilities. Guadalupe's data revealed that students with disabilities were performing significantly lower than their peers without disabilities in reading, with nearly a 23-point gap between the two groups. The data also showed that fewer than 60% of students with disabilities spent the majority of their school day learning in general education classrooms alongside their peers. District teams recognized that students were often placed in separate classrooms and that shared teaching between general and special education staff was not happening consistently.

Two areas were identified to address through the CIM process:

- Limited use of Tier 1 instructional strategies within general education classrooms.
- Weak collaboration across educators and school community partners.



“Thoughtful strategic planning in student placement ensures the right supports are delivered in the right setting at the right time, leading to better student outcomes.”

Nathan Moreno

*Director of of Special Education
Guadalupe Union School District*



THE SOLUTION

With support from their Technical Assistance partner, Open Access, the Guadalupe team conducted a systemwide review of student placement and least restrictive environment practices. Master schedules were redesigned to expand access to general education, and all self-contained Mild to Moderate classrooms were eliminated.

School leaders reviewed student placements and conducted progress check-ins within the first 30 days of the school year, while administrators met regularly to address emerging needs and maintain alignment.

Tier 1 instruction was strengthened through professional development in Universal Design for Learning (UDL), building educator capacity for inclusive instructional design and shared responsibility for all learners.

THE IMPACT

The percentage of students with disabilities spending 80% or more of the day in general education rose from 58% to nearly 90% over the past two school years.

English Language Arts proficiency increased from 0% in 2021–22 to nearly 24% proficient as access to general education increased.

As access increased, placements in more restrictive settings declined. These gains reflect district actions to reduce the number of self-contained classrooms when appropriate, strengthen co-teaching, and improve Tier 1 instruction through Universal Design for Learning (UDL).



LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES AND TOOLS

- 1 Gather Consistent Information to Inform Placement Decisions**
Collect student placement, instructional, and support data using a standardized [Google Form](#) to create a shared starting point for placement discussions, including academic needs, behavioral considerations, and current levels of independence.
- 2 Clarify How Support Is Provided in General Education Classrooms**
Use a [Co-Teaching Rubric](#) to clarify whether students are receiving light, moderate, or intensive support in general education classrooms and to distinguish between co-teaching models.
- 3 Align Instructional Supports to Individual Student Needs**
Use placement data and co-teaching information to design integrated support models—such as push-in supports or instructional groupings—aligned to each student’s IEP goals and instructional needs.
- 4 Review Placements Regularly and Adjust as Needed**
Monitor student placement and progress through scheduled leadership check-ins (i.e. monthly or quarterly placement data reviews with principals) to identify trends, address emerging needs, and ensure continued alignment between placement and instruction.