

Connect Charter School:

Inclusive Education



Abby Saadeh, Inclusive Practices Coordinator

“I don’t want my child to stand out.” According to Abby Saadeh, the Inclusive Practices Coordinator at Connect Charter School, most parents can be hesitant to disclose that their child has any sort of learning disability, or social-emotional needs, for fear that they would stand out from their fellow classmates. “What we want is for every child to stand out,” explains Saadeh, “We want to see each child’s individual strengths, and areas of need in order to support them in the best possible way.” At Connect Charter School, every student is eligible to receive support.

Saadeh’s position at Connect Charter School is very diverse. On any given day as the Inclusive Practices Coordinator, she works alongside students, teachers, administrators and parents. She works one-on-one with students to help develop skills, with teachers planning inclusive lessons for students, with parents to connect them with resources, and often creates an individualized learning environment for students based on their strengths and areas of growth.

At Connect Charter School, programming is inclusive by nature. Inquiry-based, experiential learning gives students the opportunity to explore their community, while solidifying the learning done in the classroom. By learning through inquiry, experience, and exploration every student achieves success as an engaged learner. This learning is enhanced through the school’s exemplary outdoor education and one-to-one technology programs.



Leanne Riley, Education Assistant

Even with these multiple strategies, staff at the school still find that traditional methods such as direct teaching and memorization, can



Jessica James, Education

Assistant

support student learning. Combining both traditional and modern strategies leads to best practices for Connect Charter School students, which creates an environment in which each student's learning needs are met.

To help support this individualized learning are Connect Charter School's four talented educational assistants: Leane Riley, Jessica James, Stephanie Horsman and Dawn Davis. The Connect Charter Schools EAs are assigned to different grades and are aware of each student who has an Individualized Program Plan. They schedule times throughout the day to work one-on-one and in small groups with students and make themselves available to any students who require support. They also lead specialized math and reading learning groups, develop new individualized strategies as they spend more time with students and work in partnership with teachers to provide support in the classroom.

"The education assistants provide emotional support and a reason to enjoy school and learning," explains a boy from grade 8.

"They are like second teachers that you can actually get to know and trust," expresses a girl in grade 6.



Stephanie Horsman,
Education Assistant



Dawn Davis, Education
Assistant

Hyacinth Schaeffer, Principal at Hyxpectations Educational Consulting and Sessional Instructor at Werklund School of Education explains that inclusive education means "knowing our students and planning instruction and assessment that allows them to flourish as learners and contributors to the school community." After asking whether or not it is essential to emphasize the importance of inclusive education for new teachers?, Schaeffer replied that "school leaders must reinforce and support new teachers in creating learning environments that are welcoming to all students." She speaks to the importance of new teachers and their understanding that education does not exist in isolation, but is instead rooted in the values and aspirations of a democratic society.



Connect Charter School has the same diverse population as other public schools, but doesn't receive any inclusive practices funding from the government. The school supports students who have various needs including: learning disabilities, social-emotional needs, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and English as a secondary language. Even with no funding support from the government, Connect Charter School is committed to providing appropriate programs so that the school is accessible to all. Since moving to its current location in

2002, Connect Charter School has put in a wheelchair lift, made the first floor bathroom wheelchair accessible, and has created spaces for collaborative learning to take place. Connect Charter's model of inclusive education demonstrates the school's true commitment to all students.