Youth Driven Inclusion Project: Increasing Disability Awareness
Meet the Leaders
You Will Learn About the Inclusion Project: A Youth Led Initiative

- John Eisenberg, Assistant Superintendent of Special Education and Student Services with the Virginia DOE challenged youth leaders with disabilities with developing a proposal around a topic that they believed to be a key issue for youth with disabilities in Virginia.

- The youth leaders recognized that harassment is a major issue facing them and their peers and they developed The Inclusion Project as a way of increasing awareness of disabilities.

- The Inclusion Project Steering Committee was formed and the youth leaders divided into workgroups to develop a guide and toolkit for activities and to plan for two pilots.
What is the Issue?
The Youth Determine What is Important:

- Youth meet to discuss what is important to them
- Youth vote on a focus topic
- Youth develop The Inclusion Project proposal
Development of the Activities: Youth Led Workgroups

Additional Support:
Developed a worksheet to assist the youth leaders in developing activities for Elementary, Middle, and High School levels.

The Guide and Toolkit
Inclusion Project Guide and Toolkit

- **Guide includes:**
  - How to set up an Inclusion Project
  - Tips for including and working with youth during planning of the event
  - Resources for finding supplies and equipment for activities
  - Promotional videos to highlight the Inclusion Project

- **Toolkit includes:**
  - 45 hands-on-activities (15 elementary, 15 middle, and 15 high school)
  - Each activity has a goal, teacher preparation ideas, step-by-step description, and reflection questions
  - The youth kept in mind the Virginia Standards of Learning when developing the activities
Refining the Inclusion Project Guide and Toolkit
Youth Leadership Study

Youth Leaders

Agency Representatives

Parents/Supporters of the Youth Leaders
Building Leadership Skills:
Youth Leaders Perspective

Interviews and surveys of the 8 youth found:

- The youth saw the Inclusion Project Steering Committee and Inclusion Project work as being a very positive experience and contributing significantly to their leadership, team-building, and advocacy skills.

- Improvement areas were highest for youth:
  - Planning an important event
  - Advocating for people with disabilities
  - Feeling empowered
  - Setting goals
  - Voicing concerns
  - Making a difference in the community
A survey of the agency representatives found:

- All of the agency representatives were very supportive of the youth joining the Steering Committee.
- All of the agency representatives considered the Inclusion Project experience to be a positive (25%) or very positive experience (75%) for the youth.
- The agency representatives felt they shared the same goals for the Inclusion Project as the youth's goals for the project—to raise awareness in the community about youth with disabilities and give youth with disabilities an opportunity to have a voice.
Building Leadership Skills: Parents of Youth Leaders Perspective

A survey of all parents of the youth found:

- The parents saw Inclusion Project as an opportunity for youth to strengthen leadership, relationship, and planning skills and bridge relationships between "typical" youth and youth with disabilities.
- Parents felt that through the Inclusion Project work, youth most strongly improved in:
  - Self-confidence
  - Ability to express their own opinions
  - Group facilitation
  - Problem solving
  - Communicativeness
  - Loyalty
  - Flexibility
  - Patience
  - Positive attitude
The youth who participated in the Steering Committee strengthened leadership, relationship, and advocacy skills.

The experience was very positive from a parent, agency representative, youth, and school perspective.

The Inclusion Project was effective in strengthening disability awareness in the schools.
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