

## First Year of Reverse Inclusion at the Quincy Special Day Preschool



When the Quincy Special Day Preschool (QSDP) was located at Feather River College, the preschoolers with moderate to severe disabilities were able to regularly engage with their typically developing peers that were located next door at FRC's Child Development Center. However, when the preschool program relocated to the Pioneer campus, the QSDP preschoolers became the only preschoolers on campus. Linda Gay, the current Special Education Preschool teacher, has been working to remedy this problem over the last few years. She shared, "Although we are still working with Head Start to move them to our facility, it's been a lengthy process, and our students deserve to have typically developing peers to engage with on a daily basis." When Head Start was not able to join the campus for this school year, Laura Blesse, the Special Education Director, and Linda Gay began having conversations about implementing a Reverse Inclusion program. These conversations continued to receive support at the district and school board level leading to implementation.

This 2017/18 school year marks the first year of the new Reverse Inclusion program, where typically developing peers are enrolled into the Quincy Special Day Preschool. These students are equally divided between the morning and afternoon sessions. Currently, there are three typically developing children in each session learning side by side with the preschoolers with moderate to severe disabilities.

Teacher Linda Gay shared that while the methods and strategies of teaching can differ between the groups of students, the expectations are the same. “Both groups are very capable”, Gay explained. “My job is to assess the students’ needs and determine how to individually and specifically challenge each student within their ability so they can continue to grow in a positive and encouraging climate. It’s been really fun to see the kids work together and learn from one another.”

There are benefits for both groups of kids in this inclusive classroom. They each have an opportunity to be exposed to one another, interact, and learn how to work together in a safe and nurturing space. Kids and adults are most afraid of what they don’t understand, Gay explained, having this exposure to learn how to interact with one another and understand each other’s differences teaches acceptance and understanding, removing fear and creating bonds and lasting friendships. It also provides opportunities to increase their social-emotional and communication skills.

“The year has gone really well so far, it’s honestly been my favorite year of teaching yet”, Gay shared. “Having the opportunity to watch the students’ progress, whether big or small as they master skills, overcome behavioral challenges through learned strategies, and create meaningful relationships, makes every day worthwhile. It’s a constant reminder of the passion I have for my job. I like to view my students as pieces of a puzzle; all unique and different in their own individual ways; however, when they come together as one, they create an amazing and beautiful picture.”