FIGURE 8.5 Seven Steps to Starting a Peer Buddy Program

Step 1: Develop a one-credit course.
- Incorporate into your school’s curriculum a peer tutoring course that allows peer buddies to spend at least one period each day with their partners with disabilities.
- Begin building a base of support with the administration, school counselors, and teachers in your school for the inclusion of students receiving special education services in general education activities.
- Follow the established procedures of the local and state educational agencies when you apply for the new course offering.

Step 2: Recruit peer buddies.
- Actively recruit peer buddies during the first year. After that, peer buddies will recruit for you.
- Include announcements, posters, articles in the school newspaper and PTA newsletter, videos on the school’s closed-circuit television, and peer buddies speaking in school clubs and classes.
- Present information about the new program at a faculty meeting.
- Start slowly while you establish the course expectations.

Step 3: Screen and match students.
- Have school counselors refer students who have interest, good attendance, and adequate grades.
- Arrange for students to interview with the special education teachers.
- Have students provide information regarding their past experience with students with diverse abilities and about clubs or activities that they are involved in that their partners could join.
- Allow students to observe in the classroom to learn about the role of a peer buddy and whether they would be an appropriate match for the class.

Step 4: Teach peer buddies to use instructional strategies.
- Model the use of prompting and reinforcement techniques.
- Conduct a peer buddy orientation that includes the concept of “people first,” disability awareness, communication strategies, and suggested activities.
- Communicate teachers’ expectations for the peer buddy course including attendance and grading policies.
- Provide suggestions for dealing with inappropriate behavior, setting limits, and modifying general education curricula.

Step 5: Evaluate the program.
- Schedule observations and feedback sessions with peer buddies to address their questions or concerns.
- Provide feedback on their interaction skills, time management, use of positive reinforcement, and activities engaged in with their partners.
- Have peer buddies keep a daily journal of their activities and reflections, which should be reviewed weekly by the classroom teacher.
- Establish a peer buddy club, which allows students to share experiences and ideas as well as gives the teacher an opportunity to offer ongoing training and feedback.

Step 6: Hold a Lunch Bunch.
- Invite peer buddies to join special education students for lunch in the cafeteria.
- Encourage the peer buddies to invite their general education friends to join the group, increasing social contacts for their partners.
- Remind general education students who, because of class conflicts, are unable to enroll in the course to join the Lunch Bunch.

Step 7: Establish an advisory board.
- Develop an advisory board that includes students (peer buddies and partners), students’ parents, participating general and special education teachers, administrators, and school counselors.
- Include community representatives to expand the peer buddy program to community-based activities, such as work experiences.
- Meet at least once each semester to obtain insight and suggestions for evaluating and improving the program. Thank all members for their participation.