



## ***Dispelling the Myths of Inclusive Education***

***Inclusive education means placing students with disabilities in general education classes without any extra support.***

Nothing could be further from the truth! Inclusive education is the practice of educating children with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside their classmates who don't have disabilities, *with supports provided so that each and every child feels a sense of belonging, meets high expectations, develops meaningful social relationships, and leaves school ready for post-secondary education and a career.* When we dig a little deeper into situations where people say "Inclusion doesn't work" we usually find that teachers haven't been trained and supplemental aids and services have not been provided as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Most high quality educational practices require preparation, training, leadership, vision, and the creative allocation of resources; inclusive education is no different.

***Students with the most significant disabilities do better when they are educated in separate classrooms.***

On the contrary, there have been no research studies done since the 1970's showing better outcomes for students with significant disabilities when they are educated in separate classrooms. In fact, many respected research studies have found that school achievement and quality post school outcomes are positively correlated with the amount of time children with disabilities spend in a general education classroom – *regardless of the severity of students' disabilities.* Students with significant disabilities have been found to have improved communication and social skills, behavior, reading and math skills, and fewer absences from school when they are included in general education with the appropriate supports. It used to be thought that the educational programs of students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities ought to focus primarily on their learning functional skills. With rising expectations and the use of assistive technology, we now understand that all students can develop literacy skills, all students can learn the essential elements of the general education curriculum, and all students learn the skills for responsible adult life by being fully included when they are in school.

In addition to the positive effects of inclusive education, we now know that there are many negative consequences of educating students with significant disabilities in separate settings including poorer quality IEPs, a lack of generalization of skills to regular environments, disruption of the opportunity for real friendships with classmates who don't have disabilities, a decrease in confidence by general education teachers for teaching diverse learners, the absence of appropriate role and behavior models, and a negative impact on all students' attitudes about disability and diversity. And the post-school outcomes of too many students with disabilities are still very disappointing.

### ***Inclusion has a negative impact on students without disabilities.***

Many research studies have found that the performance of students *without* disabilities is *not* compromised by the presence of students with disabilities in their classrooms. When schools embrace inclusive education as a whole school reform effort, they find that the achievement of all students improves. And in addition to improved academic outcomes, the presence of students with disabilities provides a catalyst for learning opportunities and experiences that might not otherwise be part of the curriculum, especially relating to appreciation for diversity and equity.

### ***Some children with disabilities are too disruptive to be included in a general education classroom.***

When children with disabilities are disruptive in class, the first thing we need to do is to see if they are getting the support that they need. Some children may need assistive technology to help them communicate so that they have a way to express their needs and show what they know. Other children may need help managing the sensory input of a busy classroom and school – just the kind of environment that they will experience when they leave school! Teachers certainly need training and time for collaboration with one another. Inclusion is not only about including children with disabilities in a general education classroom, it is about bringing in to the general education classroom special education personnel who share the teaching load and enrich the learning experience for all children.

### ***The law doesn't mandate inclusion.***

Although the 2004 amendments of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act do not mention the word inclusion, they do say:

“Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible.”

IDEA requires that “to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled” and “separate schooling or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular education environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.” Inclusion in a regular class is the presumptive placement and schools are required to demonstrate why students should not be included rather than parents having to argue why their children should be included.

### ***Students who can't keep up with the pace or difficulty of the general education curriculum should not be included.***

If schools can successfully educate a student in a general education classroom with peers who do not have disabilities, then the school must offer that educational experience. Students with disabilities do not need to keep up with students without disabilities in order to be educated in a general education classroom. Students with disabilities do not need to engage in the curriculum in the same way as students without disabilities in

order to justify their inclusion. Students with more significant disabilities may be learning academic content that is reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity from their general education classmates. Teachers find that using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is the best way to meet the needs not only of children with disabilities, but with children who come to school with vastly different life experiences, who speak many different languages, who have diverse strengths and needs, and who need create ways to “show what they know.”

### ***Inclusive education is more expensive than educating students in special education classrooms.***

The cost of inclusive education is best analyzed as a cost-benefit analysis. As stated previously, including students with significant disabilities in general education classes is correlated with improved educational outcomes. Furthermore, there have been no fiscal analyses showing that inclusive education is more expensive than educating students with disabilities in separate classrooms. At the preschool level, in fact, several models of inclusion have been shown to be somewhat *less* costly than traditional special education service models. Many communities have found that they save money when they educate all their students with disabilities within their home districts rather than funding transportation, overhead, and other non-instructional costs of out-of-district programs. These schools believe that enhancing the skills of their own teachers to educate an increasingly diverse student population is a good investment now and for the future. And when the benefits of inclusive schooling are balanced against the negative effects of segregation, the cost-benefit ratio is clearly on the side of inclusive education.

### ***Inclusion is just another educational fad.***

Just as civil rights for African Americans or equal rights for women is not a fad, neither is inclusive education. “Inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice... Inclusion demands that we ask, what kind of world do we want to create? ... What kinds of skills and commitment do people need to thrive in diverse society? By embracing inclusion as a model of social justice, we can create a world fit for all of us” (Sapon-Shevin, 2003, pp. 26, 28).

“Educating students with disabilities on an equal basis reflects the fundamental principle of modern democracy that all citizens deserve the right to claim a place in mainstream society. There are many options for inclusion available for Autistic students [and those with other disabilities]... Providing an inclusive educational program is not only the right thing to do from an ethical and long-term societal perspective; it is also considerably less expensive for the taxpayers than building new segregated facilities, as some school districts have done in recent years” (Retrieved on January 15, 2011 from <http://www.autisticadvocacy.org/modules/smartsection/category.php?categoryid=76>).

### ***Where can I learn more?***

There are many wonderful books on inclusive education written for the general public, for educators, and for policymakers. A few noteworthy examples are:

- *Teaching Everyone: An Introduction to Inclusive Education* by Rapp and Arndt
- *You're Going to Love This Kid! Teaching Students with Autism in the Inclusive Classroom* by Kluth
- *Reflections of Erin: The Importance of Belonging, Relationships, and Learning with Each Other* by McKenzie
- *Beyond the Wall: Personal Experiences with Autism and Asperger Syndrome* by Shore
- *My Pal, Victor/Mi Amigo, Victor* by Bertrand, Sweetland, and de la Vega

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