

Research on Inclusive Education

April 10, 2009

Inclusive education is characterized by presumed competence, authentic membership, full participation, reciprocal social relationships, and learning to high standards by all students with disabilities in age-appropriate general education classrooms with supports provided to students and teachers to enable them to be successful.



The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 states: “Congress finds the following:

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.

✚ Students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities educated in general education classrooms demonstrate better performance in reading and math (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004) and significantly higher gains in adaptive behavior when compared with students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities educated in separate settings.

✚ The largest, longitudinal study of education outcomes of 11,000 students with disabilities, the National Longitudinal Transition Study, showed that more time spent in a general education classroom was positively correlated with:

- Higher scores on standardized tests of reading and math
- Fewer absences from school
- Fewer referrals for disruptive behavior
- Better outcomes after high school in the areas of employment and independent living (Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Garza, 2006).

This positive correlation was found for all students with disabilities, regardless of their disability label, the severity of their disability, their gender, or their family's socio-economic status.

- No studies conducted since the late 1970s have shown an academic advantage for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities educated in separate settings (Falvey, 2004).
- Leaders in the field (e.g., Wehmeyer & Agran, 2006) identify the general education classroom as the optimal place where access to the general education curriculum occurs.
- A meta-analysis of research in inclusive education conducted by McGregor and Vogelsberg (1998) found:
 - Students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities in inclusive had a higher likelihood to be identified as a member of a social network by peers without disabilities.
 - There is a small-to-moderate beneficial effect of inclusive education on the academic and social outcomes of students with disabilities.
 - Students with disabilities demonstrate high levels of social interaction in settings with typical peers.
 - Social competence and communication skills improve when students with disabilities are educated in inclusive settings.

- Students with disabilities have demonstrated gains in other areas of development when they are educated in inclusive settings, such as level of engagement, involvement in integrated activities, affective demeanor, and social interaction.
- The performance of students without disabilities is not compromised by the presence of students with disabilities in their classrooms.
- Typical students derive benefits from their involvement and relationships with students with disabilities.
- 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 social justice, prejudice, equity, and so forth.
- Parent support for inclusion is positively impacted by actual experience with inclusion, although experience alone does not shape attitudes.
- Parents of students with disabilities are looking for positive attitudes, good educational experiences, and acceptance of their child among educators.
- Although many teachers are initially reluctant about inclusion, they become confident in their abilities with support and experience.
- Support from other teachers is a powerful and necessary resource to empower teachers to problem-solve new instructional challenges.
- The IEPs of students with disabilities who are included in general education classes are of higher quality; that is, they include goals and objectives that are more closely related to desired adult outcomes and roles than the IEPs of students with disabilities who are in segregated classes.

- There is evidence to suggest that while start-up costs may initially increase the cost of inclusive services, the costs over time decrease, and are likely to be less than segregated forms of service delivery.
 - There is an overall “added value” to the general education classroom of students with disabilities and their support resources.
- There are negative effects of educating students with disabilities in self-contained settings, including:
- Poorer quality IEPs (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992)
 - Lack of generalization to regular environments (Stokes & Baer, 1977)
 - Disruption of opportunities for sustained interactions and social relationships with typical students (Strully & Strully, 1992)
 - Decrease in the confidence that general class teachers have for teaching diverse learners (Giangreco et al., 1993)
 - Absence of appropriate role and behavior models (Lovett, 1996)
 - Negative impact on classroom climate and student attitudes about difference (Fisher, Sax, & Rodifer, 2000)