THE SPECIAL EDge

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IMPROVING OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES THROUGH SPECIAL EDUCATION/ GENERAL EDUCATION COLLABORATION

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Special Insert: LRE White Paper

Using LRE Supports and Services

For Improved Results for Students with Disabilities

By Judy Schrag, Ed.D.

The term *least restrictive environment* (LRE) has undergone a continued evolution in meaning and practice over the past 30 years. In 1975, LRE was included within Public Law 94-142 to require that students with and without disabilities be educated together to the greatest extent possible. During this period, many students with disabilities were being excluded from school; the LRE concept was intended to provide physical access. The federal regulations defined LRE as a placement within a continuum of options, or places to send students, to receive special education and related services.

Various early writers depicted LRE options as a cascade of placements ranging from most restrictive (e.g., special schools, out-of-district placements, and home-hospital placements) to least restrictive (general education, resource rooms, and part-time special education placements).

The emphasis on physical access shifted in the 1980s, when LRE was thought of in terms of integration and mainstreaming. This focus changed understandings from the guarantee of physical access to the schools to that of program access. The concept of LRE further evolved during the latter 1980s and 1990s, with an emphasis on expanded access for students with disabilities to general education classrooms and neighborhood schools through inclusion. During the middle to latter 1990s, access to the general curriculum crystallized as a priority. This evolution of LRE corresponded with the education reform priorities for higher expectations, state and district

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Collaboration: Five Core Messages

Developed by Colleen Shea Stump, Ph.D., San Francisco State University and the California Department of Education, Special Education Division

- All individuals bring expertise and talents to collaborative efforts: professional competence, cultural competence, communication skills, and conflict resolution skills.
- Sustainable collaborative efforts involve stakeholders who share a commitment to common goals and who work cooperatively as equal partners, clearly articulating the goals of their effort and making a commitment to following through with assigned responsibilities.
- Administrative support, time to collaborate, and ongoing professional development opportunities are integral components of successful collaborative efforts.
- Early intervention, data-informed decision-making, intensive academic intervention, and the use of the general education curriculum as the basis for making curricular and instructional decisions are central to effective collaborative efforts.
- Teaming among general education, special education, and service providers; communication; on-going dialogue among stakeholders; and the shared belief that all stakeholders are accountable for all learners are necessary for collaborative efforts to be sustainable.
- Collaborative efforts are developmental in nature and move through stages: (a) sharing information about the needs of students identified as having disabilities and found eligible for special education; (b) discussing adaptations and modifications; (c) providing supports in the classroom; (d) sharing instruction in the classroom; and (e) jointly providing instruction in the classroom.

For the complete text of the goals, go to the following website:
http://www.calstat.org/transitionmessages.html

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Director, Special Education Division California Department of Education	Alice Parker
Contract Monitor and Project Liaison	Janet Canning
Editor	Mary C. Grady
Editorial Assistant	Joyce Rau
Project Managers	Linda Blong Anne Davin Geri West
Guest Editors	Linda Landry
Contributors	Ann Carr Alychia Chu Mary Falvey Kevin Feldman Ann Halvorsen Pam Hunt Judy Schrag Colleen Shea Stump

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Informing and supporting parents, educators, and other service providers on special education topics, with a focus on research-based practices, legislation, technical support, and current resources

LETTER FROM THE STATE DIRECTOR

Dr. Alice Parker, Director of the Special Education Division of the California Department of Education

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) holds out a clear vision for children with disabilities and their families. We all must understand and advocate for this vision becoming one and the same for every child:

- Living independently
- Enjoying self determination
- Making choices
- Pursuing meaningful careers
- Fully participating in the economic, political, social, cultural, and educational fabric of American society

IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) tells us that each public agency shall ensure that, to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities are educated with children who are nondisabled. In addition, it ensures that children with disabilities are only placed in special education classes or special schools, or anywhere else that is separate from the general education environment, if the nature or severity of the disability is such that it is impossible for that child to experience success in the general education classroom with the use of supplementary aids and services.

We must be sure that educational decisions for students with disabilities are based on assessments of their individual needs; that these assessments then help determine appropriate services and sets of services; and that there is accountability for these services within the educational system.

The special education system must be held to high standards of accountability. Only in this way can we improve results for students with disabilities. To support this effort, we must provide school personnel and families with the knowledge and skills they need to effectively assist students with disabilities in their efforts to attain their own high standards.

Since 1974, a focus on developing quality programs has resulted in just that—programs for every category of disability we can name. With the reauthorization of IDEA, renewed focus is squarely where it started and—I add my belief—where it always should have been: on improving educational outcomes for children with disabilities.

This is why, whenever we come together on behalf of a child with disabilities, we need to carry a picture of that child and his needs and her wishes and a clear vision of how they can be fulfilled and realized.

Finally, we must tell our children with disabilities the stories, today and every day, of our dreams and aspirations for them. We must let our principals, teachers, superintendents, and legislators know where our children are going and what star we want them to reach. Children with disabilities can achieve high standards, and they can fully participate in general education, if they are given specific and appropriate interventions. This is the promise of LRE. This promise must and can be achieved.

Inclusive Schools That Work

"Community" Is What I Think Everyone Is Talking About

Integrating students with significant disabilities into general education is an effort driven by a civil rights argument: students with disabilities have the right to access general education contexts and curricula and to be fully integrated with schoolmates in those settings. In addition, numerous studies document the benefits of inclusive educational programs and practices for students with and without disabilities and their families. Finally, there is now available an ever-growing body of technology to support the administration, logistics, and curricular practices needed to accomplish full inclusion for students with severe disabilities.

Inclusive education is beginning to be viewed as part of a broader agenda to unify school resources and integrate programs in ways that benefit all students. While not yet common, it is not unheard of for schools to create a new model of service delivery that pools resources from existing categorical programs (e.g., special education, bilingual education, compensatory education, Title I, etc.) to provide services that benefit students not identified as eligible for those programs and to improve services to students who are.

Some of the common principles of reallocating resources include reducing the specialized pull-out programs to provide more individualized time for all students in heterogeneous groups; ensuring common planning time for staff; and revising descriptions of staff roles and work schedules to reflect educational goals for all students.

Thousand Oaks School, an elementary school in Berkeley, California, has made a concerted effort toward inclusion and all of the creative restructuring that it represents. This school has a unique history of collaboration, having started with its bilingual and general education programs. More recently, students with disabilities have been fully integrated into both bilingual and general education classrooms. Principal Kevin Wooldridge notes that "the mission for educational staff at our school is to unify our resources to promote the education and social development of all of our students." For Thousand Oaks, this is no small task: the population of the school is very ethnically diverse, 50 percent of the students qualify for free and reduced lunches, and 34 percent demonstrate limited English proficiency.

The teachers

Teachers are the driving force behind the unification of the general, bilingual, and special education programs. They have molded and continue to maintain the integrated education that supports students across the differences of culture, language, and ability. One teacher noted that "everybody in this has a pretty good sense of the community in the school . . . The struggle is against the sort of separating out of different groups of children, and the pressure from all of us is to create community rather than separating . . ."

"The struggle is . . . to create community"

The inclusion support teacher and the classroom teachers share the responsibility of educating all students in the classroom, working together to develop needed curricular adaptations and social supports, and implementing a social curriculum along with conflict-resolution procedures. Teachers communicate with each other, share ideas, and meld their expertise to create a classroom community that offers integrated activities, heterogeneous groupings, and cross-cultural and mixed language contexts for instruction. As one teacher explained: "We brought our best and shared it, and we packaged it and [made] it work for our kids. . . . We take the best of each other." And a parent noted that teachers "make these things work . . . actually making it appear not only to the kids, but to the parents [as well], that it is one program."

The presence in the classrooms of the inclusion teachers as teachers for all students was a key element in the unification of the special education and bilingual or regular education programs. As one teacher comments, "I think one of the strengths [the inclusion support teacher] brings to her position is not only her willingness, but a natural approach to looking at what works for . . . the class as a whole . . . I think she sees her job as helping to create success in the classroom, and not for one student, but for all students."

The teachers find themselves constantly asking how to organize students in small groups while having the full inclusion children be challenged along with everyone else; and how to set things up so that everyone still has a way to help each other and work together. Teachers are convinced that it is responding to these very questions—the fact that there is so much peer tutoring and cooperative learning—that keeps the kids together and gives them a positive group identity, regardless of their abilities or their first language.

Teachers also express their commitment to the social aspects of the school and classroom and to conflict resolution. "It's a huge part of what we do," one teacher noted. "It's just the reality of being teachers [now]: conflict resolution and talking it out."

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The role of principals

As principal, Kevin Wooldridge supported, advocated for, and sought out the resources necessary to create a school community. He gave teachers both the mandate and the freedom to unify programs.

His associates see him as someone who is grounded in day-to-day classroom practice. One teacher described him as knowing the "kids as individuals; so in making decisions about the school, he has firsthand knowledge of what he's making a decision about."

Wooldridge is also viewed as a leader, with justification. He actively supports the unification of programs by ensuring a continuing and open discussion of the faculty's vision for creating this community. And he ensures that changes are made by consensus, not fiat. As one teacher commented, "I think it's been more than just leadership—it's really been [the principal] believing that things can happen." He provides a forum for developing ideas and building consensus. As one parent stated, the principal created a "flexible, open, comfortable environment for his teachers." This made possible the positive relationships between him and the teachers.

Support from parents

Parents were a powerful force behind establishing inclusive education at Thousand Oaks. They were partners with teachers, with the principal, and with other community members in designing the programs. At various school meetings and functions, as classroom volunteers, and consistently at home, they volunteered their positive attitude toward the integration of students across ability difference, culture, and language. According to the principal, "parents are the reason the inclusion program started here." In fact, one teacher reports that the parents of general education students were ready to go to the district to protest the suggestion that some boys with disabilities would not be able to move on to the middle school with their classmates. These parents believed that separating these boys from their classmates was "ridiculous."

The unified results

The staff and parents at Thousand Oaks wanted a united community, one where students, teachers, principals, family members, and staff all experience a sense of belonging and a feeling of being safe and of sharing responsibility for the education of all students. It seems that's what they got. One teacher observed that "people just embrace kids; there's just a lot of love and affection, and that is really a huge key to the whole thing." A parent stated that "It's like a family," and another noted that her son with disabilities "was just part of it. He grew with them, and he was always accepted."

Mutual encouragement

Teachers actively support each other, as well as the students. They share the responsibility for educating their diverse classes by willingly teaming, collaborating, trusting, and sharing with each other.

High expectations for the successful academic and social participation of all students are held not only by teachers, but also by students for their classmates. One teacher has "seen the incredible growth in the full inclusion students—socially, emotionally, and academically—from what they were predicted to be able to do to what they actually could do when they were put in a situation where they had to

Collaboration at Whittier High School

By Mary Falvey

Ricardo is a sophomore at his local high school and has qualified for special education services for four of the years he has spent in school in the United States. He lives at home with his older sister, mother, and stepfather. The family moved to Southern California from Mexico when Ricardo was eight years old. He has Down Syndrome and, by some people's standards, he has a severe disability.

Ricardo has good social skills and is able to initiate positive interactions with others using some verbal and mostly nonverbal skills. He has some skills in using and understanding both English and Spanish. He has difficulty learning when being lectured to. When reading and writing are the only forms of instruction, he also struggles to participate. At this time Ricardo is fully included at his neighborhood high school. His family is determined that he participate in school activities, both academic and social, and be provided with the supports he needs.

Ricardo is taking a math, science, English, world history, physical education, and study skills class. He receives support in all his classes from a support teacher (formerly known as a special education teacher) or from a paraprofessional from the special education department who works collaboratively with the classroom teacher. Ricardo is given materials on tape or video, highlighted materials from his textbooks, and computer-assisted instruction in order for him to understand the major content. In math, for example, he is provided with a calculator, a laminated copy of the formulas used, real life examples of when and how to use the math skills, hands-on manipulatives, and a multiplication chart to assist his meaningful participation.

Ricardo is an active member of all of his classes, and he benefits from the accommodations and adaptations created collaboratively by his support teachers, paraprofessionals, and classroom teachers. He also benefits from the use of differentiated instructional procedures used by all his classroom teachers who share the disposition that all students can and should be learning meaningful, age-appropriate core curriculum in ways that make sense to them.

Ricardo attends Whittier High School (WHS), a large school located in east Los Angeles County. The school is using the Coalition of Essential Schools common principles in order to create a collaborative spirit and opportunity. The Coalition of Essential Schools is founded on the principle that the educational community must develop personalized and meaningful learning experiences so that all students can succeed.

Eliminating the "special education teacher" label was considered critical to changing the perception that only specialists can work with students with disabilities. Thus, the high school selected the term "support teacher" to

because the other kids just sort of expected them to."

Barriers

Limited financial resources are seen as a major barrier to school reform efforts to unify systems. The resources that are critical to supporting staff development, team planning meetings, and the individualized supports and adaptations so central to the success of inclusive efforts are too often simply not available. One of the inclusion teachers said, "I always feel like I can't give enough of what I want to give, whether it's time or information or training." Collaborative planning, the backbone of unifying educational programs, is, as another teacher stated, "pretty much done on everyone's own free time." There are few resources for regularly scheduled meetings to plan cooperative teaching or collaborative small-group instruction, to conduct joint assessments, to develop academic adaptations, and to identify positive behavioral support strategies for students with challenging behaviors.

The consensus among the staff is that students "need more support time. . . more services; and at the same time, kids who are technically general education students have tremendous needs and don't get any level of support."

Another significant challenge sited by a staff member has to do with lack of vision at their district level. Funding sources don't "quite know how [inclusive education] looks. They don't understand all these experiences we've had; so . . . they don't have a full understanding or vision of . . . inclusion."

Benefits

To those parents and staff members involved, the academic and social benefits of unifying programs and integrating students and staff members are clear. Students learn to accept the cultural, language, and ability differences among their schoolmates; and they develop positive, personal connections that cut through those differences. As one teacher commented, "Students assume that their friends can be everybody and anybody." Teachers and parents describe how students in inclusive classrooms learn to work together to plan and complete interactive educational tasks, despite the fact that members of the group present widely varying levels of academic ability, represent different cultures, or speak different languages.

According to the staff, the academic growth of the students with disabilities "has been tremendous." But there is also discussion of the academic benefits for other students when they have additional special education staff in the classroom who are providing small-group and individualized instruction and assisting in the development of academic adaptations for all students who need them. One parent commented that "a lot of [general education] kids really benefited from the smaller group or the one-to-one interaction that they would get working with the full inclusion child and the aide." Parents and teachers also point out that the students who were struggling academically appeared to master educational content by teaching other students during "buddy" activities (i.e., assigning students as partners across ability and age levels). In addition, being a member of an inclusive classroom promoted feelings of competency and self-esteem for both the students with and those without disabilities. One unforeseen advantage, according to a parent, is that "each person, regardless of

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identify staff who, in collaboration with classroom teachers, supported and coordinated services for students eligible for special education. These support teachers take on a variety of collaborative roles with classroom teachers: they co-teach or team teach with content area teachers within heterogeneous classrooms; and they function as a support to all students, not just those who qualify for special education services.

The all-to-frequent method of organizing students in secondary programs, referred to as tracking, has been intentionally decreased at this high school. What was called the "basic" track, the track identified for the students who were the least successful, has been eliminated entirely. All students, including those with disabilities, are now required to enroll, participate, and learn in core college preparatory courses throughout their high school years.

Support teachers quickly realized that their old way of matching students and special education support was clearly categorical (e.g., students with learning disabilities were assigned to teachers labeled Resource Specialist teacher; students with more significant disabilities were assigned to Special Education Day Class teachers and rooms). In schools where inclusion is occurring, teachers might have two or three special educators interacting with them in their class to support students with various labels. This was an inefficient and confusing use of the special educator's time and expertise. As a result, WHS moved to a non-categorical system of support for students, in which each support teacher is assigned to classroom teachers and provides whatever support the students need to be successful in those core curriculum classes. Each support teacher works with a heterogeneous caseload of students consisting of those who qualify for Severely Handicapped (SH), Learning Handicapped (LH), or Resource (RSP) services.

Since all students are enrolled in core curriculum classes, this is where support is needed and provided. The additional support benefits not only those students identified as needing specialized services, but many other students as well who do not qualify for specialized services, but who experience their own unique challenges in learning. The amount and type of collaboration and in-class support provided is determined by the IEP/ITP (Individualized Education Program/Individualized Transition Program) team, which includes the student and his/her family.

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To visit the website for the Coalition of Essential Schools, go to **http://www.essentialschools.org/**

The Connections Training Project

Promoting Developmentally Appropriate Inclusive Settings for Preschoolers

By Helen Walka, Ph.D. California Institute on Human Services, Sonoma State University

The evidence is clear: preschoolers with disabilities benefit from inclusion in programs for typically developing children. Inclusion leads to increased social competence, higher level play behavior, and improved engagement in learning. Increased exposure to rich language experiences during a critical period of language and preliteracy development constitutes a particular benefit.

But just being present in programs for typically developing preschoolers is not enough. The intent of IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) is that children with disabilities be placed in the least restrictive environments so that they can participate in the "core curriculum," that is, the goals and activities for typically developing children. This means not only that a preschooler with disabilities should attend a community preschool with other children his or her age, but that the child should also be an active participant there. For example, the school would design art activities so that all children could access paints, paper, and brushes in a variety of sizes, allowing all children to hold them.

Facilitating active participation by preschoolers with disabilities in learning environments across California is the aim of the Connections Project: Learning Communities for All Children. This model of inservice training and organizational development, funded by the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, promotes developmentally appropriate inclusive classroom practices and collaborative, teaming strategies across teaching staff for all children. The long-term goal of this cross training is to foster the availability of lasting opportunities for high quality, early childhood services for young children with disabilities in the least restrictive environment.

Not all preschool educators are comfortable with or excited about inclusive and collaborative preschool settings. The developers of the project knew they had to plan the training to overcome various barriers, which include differing philosophies and backgrounds among staff about education in general and inclusion in particular, and lack of administrative support. Not surprisingly, the attitudes of the professionals responsible for working together to offer and maintain inclusive settings directly affects the potential for success of those programs. Both teachers and administrators can "say the right things" about inclusion, but privately feel that "it will not work."

The Connections Project training takes a unique approach to overcoming these barriers to inclusion. Classroom teams of teachers and parents from different kinds of preschool settings (state, special education, community-based, Head Start, and private) attend the training together. One major strand of content focuses on teaming strategies and learning to understand the beliefs and practices of other team members. Not only are administrators involved in the training, but they also attend seminars with other administrators. Nine days of training are then followed by six days of site visits, all designed to help the teams successfully implement the training material at their preschools.

One of the most important components of the Connections training, however, is its emphasis on building developmentally appropriate practices that promote active learning for all children. Early childhood teachers and administrators learn several aspects critical for the success of preschool inclusion efforts:

- A common understanding and knowledge of strategies of developmentally inclusive practices
- The ability to implement quality classroom environments that promote active learning
- The ability to evaluate and plan daily routines in a child-centered framework
- Strategies that promote problem-solving skills, higher levels of thinking, preliteracy, premath, and science skills in young children

Three years of data gathered on the effects of these training efforts show that they are working in the ways intended. The attitudes and practices of both teachers and administrators are changing, especially in the development of greater feelings of shared responsibilities for children with disabilities. The most concrete proof of success is from third-party observers who visit the classroom before and after the training: they rate the classrooms higher on a rating scale of quality early childhood environments. Evaluation staff report an increase in the number of both children with and without disabilities who are *engaged* while in the classroom, interacting in a developmentally and contextually appropriate manner with the social and nonsocial environment. This last result is most encouraging and most captures the intent of the Connections training.

Attitudes, habits, and abilities begin to form very early in life. Those first, formal experiences of school can benefit all children, leaving them with the belief that learning is exciting and fun, community means diversity, and humans are all different in wonderful and challenging ways. It is the intent of programs like the Connections Project to support these outcomes.

To find out more about the Connections Project Training, go online at **http://www.sonoma.edu/cihs/connect.html**; email: cindy.menghini@sonoma.edu; or phone 707/664-3218.

Summer Institutes for Inclusive School Teams

Professional Development That Works

By Ann T. Halvorsen Ed.D., Professor, CSU Hayward, Director CLEAR Project

Beginning in 1988, 75–100 people from schools statewide gathered each summer for intensive institutes entitled *School Site Team Collaboration for Inclusive Education.* Initially under the umbrella of the California Department of Education's (CDE) Special Education Innovation Institutes, these team workshops were designed, led, and sponsored by a series of federally funded systems change projects, starting with PEERS (Providing Education for Everyone in Regular Schools) and most recently with the California Confederation on Inclusive Education. Presenters have included school personnel, parents, and students from urban, rural, and suburban districts experienced with inclusive services.

These highly interactive, skill-building experiences utilized research-based professional development practices, adult learning principles, and the work of effective inclusive schools. Site-level teams of general and special education teachers, principals, parents, paraprofessionals, and related services/support staff worked together to assess their own needs and obtain specific strategies to facilitate inclusive services: the provision of specialized support to students with IEPs (Individualized Education Programs) within general education.

Here, as in the institutes, it is critical to define inclusive education, which means that ". . . students with disabilities are supported in chronologically age-appropriate general education classes in their home schools, and receive the specialized instruction delineated by their IEPs, within the context of the core curriculum and general class activities. . . students are full members of the general education class and do not belong to any other specialized environment based on characteristics of their disability." (Halvorsen & Neary, 2001,1).

These institutes contained a range of activities designed to assist teams with essential planning, curricular, and instructional processes through which student priorities are addressed with the level and range of supplementary aids and services needed to support their progress.

Two primary themes directed these activities: effective *differentiated instruction for all students,* and *resource structuring to support best practices.* These practices include teaming; multi-level, standards-based instructional design and modifications; collaborative and active learning with co-teaching and peer supports; positive classroom climate; and innovative service delivery or staffing approaches. These institutes provided valuable first steps and problem-solving strategies to core groups from each school, empowering teams from Lassen to San Diego with skills to support each other back home.

> ***"Good professional development has [changed] in favor of job-embedded forms."***

As the next step in the process, Leadership Institutes for experienced inclusive schools were initiated in 1999, with support from the CDE LRE (Least Restrictive Environment) Resources Project. McGregor, Halvorsen, Fisher, Pumpian, Bhaerman, and Salisbury (1998) note that good professional development has moved away from "sit and get" inservice in favor of job-embedded forms, such as participation in curricular planning or school reform groups, or coaching relationships among colleagues. Job-embedded development requires an ongoing relationship among the players involved within their working context.

Collaboration and Leadership Institutes brought teams of people together to facilitate opportunities for shared experiences. These opportunities capitalized on the peer-to-peer relationships in order to build and sustain change and innovations back at the school site. Components of the Leadership Institutes included team processes, planning, and problem-solving strategies; needs assessment; resource restructuring; school portrait development; the use of coaching, facilitation skills, and other forms of personnel development to support change; and networking.

Teaming proved to be key to the institutes' success, with teams of presenters including student peer teams and partners from innovative schools, along with the participant teams. Effective teaming was also extended by linking potential leadership schools with other experienced inclusive schools throughout the state to encourage their exchange of information, products, resources, and ideas to enhance the practices of each other. The goal of the CDE and these projects was to develop and support a network of schools with leadership teams that had the capacity to mentor newly inclusive school partners, and to build a bank of "practitioners-in-place" who are interested in working with schools and districts in their regions.

Time, the commodity we seem to lack most in today's schools, is the remaining critical ingredient to the success of any professional development effort. The value of time was even more apparent to teams involved in these institutes once they had experienced the luxury of working together. This realization led some schools to explore new ways to embed common collaborative periods within the school week.

Creative strategies are needed for our diverse schools to implement inclusive education, and summer institutes are

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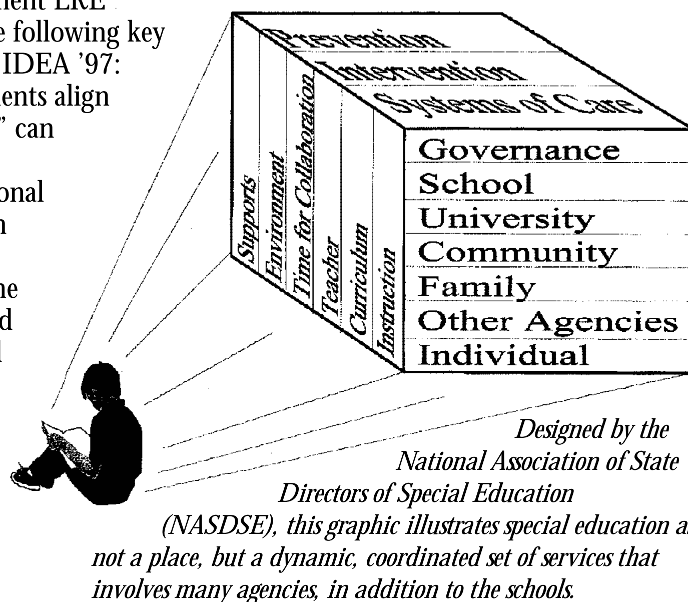
standards, and improved teaching and learning for all students.

It is within this construct of curriculum access and improving teaching and learning that LRE considerations must be made. This shift was made within the *1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97)*, which defines special education **not** as a place, but rather as those supports and services that help students access the general curriculum and address the unique needs caused by a disability.

Educators within California and other states must implement LRE within the context of the following key changes incorporated in IDEA '97:

- Educational improvements align with IDEA so that "all" can **mean** "all" students.
- State and local educational improvements focus on higher expectations, meaningful access to the general curriculum, and improved teaching and learning.
- State performance goals for children with disabilities are developed and monitored; these goals address key indicators of success and provide accountability for change.
- Children with disabilities are included within general state and district-wide assessment, with or without accommodations, or through alternate assessment.
- The emphasis on coordinated services planning expands the IEP team to include other agency partners, thus expanding the continuum of LRE programs and options.
- Parents are integral partners in their child's education; they provide functional information as a part of the evaluation process, are involved in making all decisions for their child, and receive regular reporting of their child's educational program.
- Parents and teachers are given training and staff development based on effective research and practice so that they have the knowledge and training to effectively support student learning with various LRE supports.
- Early interventions are strengthened to help ensure that every child starts school ready to learn, and supports are available to students as soon as they need them.

The above provisions help frame our concept of LRE, allowing it to go beyond physical access, program access, and placement. LRE is the array of services, accommodations, and supports needed to help students access and benefit from the general curriculum, taking into consideration each child's needs and abilities.



Designed by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE), this graphic illustrates special education as not a place, but a dynamic, coordinated set of services that involves many agencies, in addition to the schools.

In 1998, participants in "Continuum Revisited," sponsored by the National Association of State Directors of Special Education, proposed the following vision for LRE:

- An array of community, school, and cross-age supports and services, beginning with early intervention and early assistance and including intensive supports for students with complex, inter-agency needs
- Non-linear supports—to represent fluid, flexible, dynamic, responsive, and changing support, depending on the needs of the students
- Child- and family-centered—recognizing the totality of the child
- Staffed by trained teacher/providers and qualified leaders
- Integrated with the community (e.g., multi-agency services)
- Focused on improving teaching and learning within the context of the general curriculum, high expectations, and state and local standards
- Based on a renewed, collaborative approach in partnership with parents
- Incorporating research-based knowledge and best practices
- Providing appropriate training and other support for teachers, including time to plan with other teachers and agency partners

The participants in this forum articulated LRE options as a seamless and integrated system of support for the child.

This reinforced previous work I facilitated as a Senior Scholar of the Council for Exceptional Children. In 1997, representatives from a number of national associations concluded that the following features characterize schools that are implementing LRE mandates.

- *A sense of community*
  There is a vision that all staff and children belong, everyone is accepted, and all are supported by peers and the adults in the school.
- *Visionary leadership*
  The administration is actively involved and shares responsibility with the entire school staff in planning and carrying out the strategies that make the school successful.
- *High standards*
  All children meet high levels of educational outcomes and high standards of performance that are appropriate to their ability.
- *Collaboration and cooperation*
  Students and staff support one another with such strategies as peer tutoring, buddy systems, cooperative learning, team teaching, co-teaching, student assistance teams, and other collaborative arrangements.
- *Changing roles and responsibilities*
  Teachers lecture less and assist more, school psychologists work more closely with teachers in the classroom, and every person in the building is an active participant in the learning process.

LRE, continued, page 12

Clearing the Air

Effective Reading Instruction and LRE Issues

By Kevin Feldman, Ph.D., with staff

"Special Education is not a place." Learning in the least restrictive environment (LRE), effective individualized instruction, and having access to the core curriculum used in general education classrooms: these are great promises of special education. In addition, they are rights mandated by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, and they make good sense. However, it is critical to understand that they may be realized in very different ways for different students.

Spending the entire day in a general education classroom is not necessarily the top priority for the majority of students in special education—kids with learning disabilities. For them, closing the literacy gap and improving social behavior are likely to be more important first steps toward the broader goal of accessing the general education curriculum.

Making the educational challenge even more interesting is the fact that learning to read is fundamentally a developmental task. There are predictable stages of ability and knowledge through which a student must progress—clear stages of acquisition over which instruction cannot jump, or the student will be lost. In order to navigate this sequence, these students need targeted, direct instruction together with age- and level-appropriate reading material in which to practice their emerging reading skills.

For example, if a fourteen-year-old student is reading at the third-grade level, placing him in a class that is studying *A Tale of Two Cities* and reading the book to him, or even giving it to him on a tape player, is not the most effective way to improve his independent reading skills. This is not to say a ninth-grade English class with appropriate accommodations is not a good idea; rather, we need to be clear that it is not a substitute for a reading class. Children learn what we teach. The only way to significantly improve the literacy skills of struggling readers is to provide targeted, direct instruction (e.g. decoding, fluency, comprehension strategies), coupled with massive amounts of engaging reading practice.

Educators must untangle issues about accessing the core curriculum from issues about intervention and remediation, and remember that our goal is to increase student achievement so that all students become literate and competent members of our society. Students with significant reading difficulties need an intervention curriculum that has been validated for the explicit purpose of accelerating literacy development. This is the promise of special education: an individualized instructional program based on assessed needs, with the children being taught at their particular level, so that any existing gap between their skills and learning and those of their grade-level peers is lessened. This includes accurate assessment to guide instruction, monitor progress, and otherwise address learning differences.

> In the design of effective reading instruction. . .
> for students with substantial difficulty, the location—where a student is taught—is not the primary concern. The primary concerns are to
> (1) properly identify critical skills that students will need to learn;
> (2) provide instruction and materials that will effectively address students' deficiencies; and
> (3) schedule adequate time for instruction and practice.
> With increased awareness of these three concerns, schools are developing effective schoolwide options for struggling readers, regardless of their labels.
>
> — Adapted from *The California Reading Initiative: Critical Ideas Focusing on Meaningful Reform*

It is important to remember that **where** services are provided is not necessarily the most important thing. The central issue is **what** services are provided. In other words, to pull out or to push in is not the essential question, but rather, where can students be given targeted instruction based on their assessed needs? A pull-out program may be the best approach for assuring that this happens, particularly if it gives students the differentiated instruction necessary to close the gap between their lagging reading skills and those of their age-mates. Problems emerge when educators equate the "LRE mandate" and "full inclusion" with 100 percent time spent in the regular education classroom.

This is not to say that the issues in question—core curriculum access and least restrictive environment—are not important. But the essence of an IEP (Individualized Education Plan) is to establish and pursue the top priorities. Balancing the right to LRE and access to the core curriculum, while identifying and responding to the child's most critical needs, is the whole point of this plan. Documenting improvement and monitoring progress, also major goals of an IEP, are the best guides to ensuring that this happens.

The central question is whether or not the data collected on the student's performance suggests significant improvement in these areas. Are we closing the gap? If not, we must change the program, not blame the student!

In the preponderance of cases, it is not an "either/or" issue. Kids need as much access to the core curriculum as possible. But, for most students with learning disabilities, that access must be within the context of focused reading instruction. As educators, we must get beyond "either/or" thinking and realize that, for many students, the regular education curriculum may not be more

Reading, continued page 10

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important than specifically targeted instruction that helps each child gain parity with his classmates. There exists the danger of taking a noble concept and subverting it. We cannot overlook or ignore individual literacy needs under the battle cry of LRE or full inclusion. A pull-out program, where the child is taught at his particular level, may be the **least** restrictive environment. And a general education classroom where a child cannot understand the discussion, or where she is not given the specific instruction she needs to improve her reading skills, may be the **most** restrictive. Ideally, schools would create seamless systems of support based on every student's assessed needs, and abandon the categorical medical model of traditional special education.

As educators, we must remember that learning is not about "where." Learning is about learning: about gaining knowledge and ability, with documented improvement. It is our educational and moral obligation to work together to create schools that truly work for all kinds of kids. It's that simple — and that hard.

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children. I went home and sat by the phone. I expected the school to call at any moment and say, "Please come and pick up your son." That never happened. Kevin's special education supports were in place and working.

Kevin stopped talking when he was two, but by the end of the kindergarten year he started saying, "Hi" and "No." He participated in the Christmas performance and his classmates learned sign language as one way to communicate with him. He progressed with his classmates each year through elementary school and is now in middle school. There have been challenges, to be sure, but our IEP team embraced my mission: successfully include Kevin so everyone benefits.

Not everyone always shared our vision and enthusiasm about including students with disabilities. At one school meeting with parents, educators, and administrators, including the superintendent and a representative from the Federal government's Office of Special Education, a mother stood up and proceeded to read a two-page account of why Kevin shouldn't be in school with her son or the other students because of how he could harm

their education. However, a number of parents at that meeting staunchly defended inclusion as a civil right. The protesting mother and other nay-sayers did not dissuade us.

During our first year, a parent group was formed to share and disseminate information on inclusion to other families. We attended many conferences sponsored by CalTASH (California Association for Persons with Severe Disabilities) and National TASH, where we learned about strategies to promote our agenda. Support for Families of Children with Disabilities (SFCD) was also instrumental in spreading the word to families about inclusion. This wonderful organization holds forums for parents and educators.

Inclusion, by now, had become a vibrant issue in our district. The Inclusion Task Force had grown to include more parents, educators, and administrators, who together wrote a manual answering questions about inclusive education. Professional Development Days were also planned to address how to successfully include students with disabilities in the general education classrooms. We invited university professors such as Ann Halvorsen, Lori Goetz, Pam Hunt, and others, to help us in our efforts to create an effective, inclusive school community. Early on Dr. Halvorsen, through a federal grant, gave and continues to give our district her much needed technical expertise.

We have progressed from our first year, when we had four students with disabilities being included in general education classrooms. After eight years, we now have more than 400 students included at 44 schools, from grades kindergarten through twelve. Our general and special education staff continue to work together, including more students each year.

This year, Kevin is in the seventh grade in a middle school with over 1,200 students. He and his brother Kyle go to school together and are in different classes by choice. Kevin attends "Friendship Club" once a week and goes to the after-school learning center to do homework. He joins his peers in computer and art classes. At school, students call out to him, "Hi Kevin! Wassup Kevin? Hey Kevin!"

Kevin's friends, his non-disabled peers, attend his IEPs. It is a celebration IEP. This year those friends told us he is smart in math and his oral book reports have improved. But they also say he must listen to the teachers more. His friends noticed that Kevin was alone during lunch period, and are now asking if he wants to go watch the basketball game in the gym, or jump rope. They talk on the phone with him, which also helps improve his conversational skills—an IEP goal. If they notice students teasing him, they ask them to stop. They go together to the school dances and have volunteered to give Kevin dancing lessons. Kevin's peers write in his "Friends" notebook telling us how Kevin's day at school went, as well as theirs. I hope he will always have a "circle of friends."

Marcel Proust wrote, "The voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." This mother's new eyes are seeing her son with autism live and thrive in our world.

For more information

Visit the websites for TASH: **http://www.TASH.org/** and CalTASH: **http://www.caltash.gen.ca.us/**

Including the Majority of Students

Educating Children with Mild to Moderate Disabilities

By Colleen Shea Stump, Ph.D., San Francisco State University

Determining the least restrictive environment (LRE) for students with mild to moderate disabilities (i.e., students with learning disabilities, emotional disturbance, and mild to moderate cognitive impairment) has been a focal point of educators and parents alike since the passage of Public Law 94-142. Today, the emphasis for LRE is often on inclusion: children receiving most, if not all, instruction in the general education classroom. As schools adopt inclusive models of instruction for students with mild to moderate disabilities, it is important to consider available research on the effectiveness of inclusive models of service delivery.

Achievement outcomes

Findings of studies investigating the impact of inclusive and other service delivery options on student achievement continue to differ, and at times, contrast with one another. In one of the most comprehensive investigations of inclusive practices involving students with mild to moderate disabilities, Zigmond et al., (1995) found that over 50 percent of these students did not make desired or adequate gains in reading when included in general education classrooms, even when extensive supports were provided. The authors concluded that the students received a very good general education, but not a special education.

In another comprehensive study, Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, Schumm, and Elbaum (1998) investigated outcomes of students with learning disabilities (LD) included in general education classrooms. These students were all identified by teachers as "likely to benefit from inclusion." Although a majority of the students did make academic gains, those students with learning disabilities who began the academic year as poor readers failed to make gains in reading. The authors argue that this subgroup of students with learning disabilities did not benefit from the literature-based program provided in the general education classroom and that interventions ". . . were not developed specifically for students who have severe reading disabilities. As has been demonstrated before, students with severe reading problems seem to require specific, intensive reading

instruction individually or in small groups if they are likely to make significant gains (p. 159)." The authors conclude ". . . that full-time placement in the general education classroom with in-class support from special education teachers is not sufficient to meet the needs of these students. They require combined services that include in-class support and daily, intensive, one-on-one instruction from highly trained personnel. This is an expensive proposition but it appears to be the only solution that will yield growth in reading for students with severe reading disabilities (p. 159)."

Benefits of inclusion

On the other hand, additional studies find that inclusion does bring about desired gains for students with learning disabilities, and report that the reading gains of students with LD who receive reading instruction in the general education classroom were similar to the gains made by low-achieving, general education students.

One recent study also questioned the efficacy of resource room programs, and revealed that within many of these programs, little instructional time was found to be devoted to teaching phoneme-grapheme relationships and decoding strategies or to teaching comprehension and reading strategies — areas identified as key to the development of literacy. The students in this study experienced no change in their standardized achievement scores in the area of comprehension.

Student perceptions

Students themselves have been surveyed concerning their perceptions of inclusive models. Vaughn and Klingner (1998) reviewed eight studies that investigated student's perceptions of resource room instruction and instruction in inclusive settings. These studies revealed five overall findings: (a) the majority of students with high incidence disabilities (i.e., learning disabilities) preferred to receive instruction in resource rooms as compared to push-in supports provided in inclusive classrooms; (b) students had positive attitudes towards the resource room because they received the help they needed in that setting; (c) students reported that the inclusive classrooms assisted them in forming friendships; (d) students valued the support that special education teachers provided in the inclusive classrooms and that in many situations, were not aware that the additional teacher in the classroom was a special education teacher; and (e) students were not aware of how it had been determined they were eligible for special education

Majority continued, page 12

LRE *continued from page 8*

- *Array of services*
  An inclusive school offers an array of services, all coordinated with the educational staff and designed to meet the needs of learners experiencing various cognitive, physical, and/or emotional challenges.
- *Partnership with parents*
  Parents are embraced as equal and essential partners in the education of their children.
- *Flexible learning environments*
  Children are not expected to move in lock steps, but, rather, they follow their individual paths to learning.
- *Strategies based on research*
  Schools use proven and effective teaching strategies in the classroom.
- *New forms of accountability*
  Standardized tests are relied on less, and there is more use of new forms of accountability (e.g., portfolios, performance-based assessment) to ensure that all students are progressing towards their goals.
- *Access*
  Schools make necessary modifications to the building and provide appropriate technology, allowing all students to participate in school life.
- *Continuing professional development.*
  Staff design and obtain ongoing professional development founded on research-based practices.

It is within this context of change in IDEA and the evolution of thinking by educators and researchers that the California Department of Education has initiated a statewide LRE Initiative. A design team has developed state, district, and local self-assessment protocols to help educators, administrators, and parents identify areas of needed change for improving LRE options, teaching, learning, and overall student results. These protocols are aides and tools, conceived to be used as part of a larger and continuous effort to improve educational programs for students with disabilities.

The California Department of Education is encouraging educators and parents to use these LRE protocols as a part of the Statewide LRE Initiative. The insert to this issue of *The Special EDge* contains a summary of this Statewide LRE Initiative.

LRE efforts across the state must not be carried out in isolation, but in conjunction with other statewide efforts, such as the California Reading Initiative and the Preferred Practices Initiative. The overall goal of all of these initiatives is to improve results and outcomes for our children and youth with disabilities.

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To visit the NASDSE website, go to **http://www.nasdse.org**

Majority *continued from page 11*

and how decisions were made concerning where they received instruction, whether in the special education resource room or inclusive classroom.

What to do

Determining appropriate service delivery models for the largest group of students with disabilities—those with mild to moderate disabilities—is complex because of the heterogeneity and the shear number of students included within this group. Since the passage of PL 94-142, educators, in partnership with parents, have attempted to develop models that provide for the diverse educational needs of these students. Currently, the push has been to adopt inclusive models and decrease and/or eliminate programs that are viewed as more restrictive (e.g., special day classes and resource room programs). However, as the data suggest, a simple solution of adopting one approach for everyone does not appear warranted. In their review (discussed above), Vaughn and Klingner (1998) concluded that "The important lesson is that no one educational model will meet the needs of all students with learning disabilities; thus there is an advantage to providing a range of educational models" (p. 86). In 1997, following a review of eleven studies of inclusion programs and academic outcomes, Manset and Semmel concluded "The evidence presented does suggest that inclusive programs for some students with mild disabilities can be an effective means of providing services, but the evidence clearly indicates that a model of wholesale inclusive service delivery models does not exist at present."

As stated in the law, students with disabilities are to be educated in the least restrictive environment. For students with mild to moderate disabilities, it appears the least restrictive environment is still found along a continuum of service delivery models, from general education settings that model full inclusion to settings that are uniquely designed for students with disabilities.

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Autism in the Classroom: One Mother's Story

By Alycia Chu

"If we are to achieve a richer culture . . . We weave one in which each diverse human gift will find a fitting place."
— Margaret Mead

When he was two and one-half years old, our son Kevin was diagnosed with autism. He wouldn't make eye contact and displayed bizarre and repetitive behaviors, the most disturbing of which was placing his hands over his ears and running and hiding when our "living noises" became too loud. How could Kevin ever cope with the outside world?

We placed Kevin in a nonpublic school that offered a small classroom with five other young boys with disabilities. We believed it would be a haven for Kevin. There were three special education teachers, and each student had his own cubbyhole. In addition, there was a "meltdown" room right outside the classroom door. We thought this ratio of one teacher to two students would help create the nurturing atmosphere we thought Kevin needed.

Early in the school year, the head teacher, Tina Giovanni, asked us why we didn't put Kevin in the same school as his fraternal twin brother, Kyle. Tina knew Kevin had autism but believed that, with appropriate supports, he could learn and develop in a general education classroom. She started asking questions like "Don't you think Kevin could learn with non-disabled peers in a general ed classroom?" and, most importantly, "Wouldn't you like him to have friends?" Our justifications—offering him a world where it was safe to be autistic and to be sheltered from the harsh sights and sounds of our world—began to make less sense. Tina's gentle arguments in favor of educating all young students together started to take hold. Her positive encouragement became our first step towards inclusion.

The following spring, we started to make plans to move Kevin out of the nonpublic school and have him "included" in our neighborhood public school for the fall. Although there was one catch: our district had no program for including students with disabilities.

Our first inclusion support teacher was Jeffrey Libby, a special education teacher who was experienced in inclusive educational practices. He helped to start bridging the gap between general and special education.

Jeffrey also started an Inclusion Task Force to support both general and special education teachers in their attempts to collaborate and make inclusion efforts like ours successful. In the beginning there were only five of us

on this team: two teachers, two parents, and an administrator. We all knew the task before us was daunting: We were asking general and special education to trust each other.

Many staff members on both sides were asking "Why should we work together? Why should we change the present system?" Of course the structure of the system supported this attitude, as everyone, it seemed, from the administrators on down to the students, operated in one of two carefully separated worlds. General and special education were divided and people were comfortable with that model.

What our task force needed was support from the top, someone at the administrative level to help open doors, and, we hoped, open minds. We did end up getting that support. As a result, more people who shared the same vision started coming to our meetings to help plan. Overall, we received amazing support from the people in the San Francisco Unified School District—parents, teachers, administrators, and therapists. There were so many of them who welcomed our kids and worked with us to make inclusion a successful venture.

IEP (Individualized Education Plan) teams, new to implementing inclusion, faced a very daunting task. How do you convince and gain the trust of the general education school community, special educators, and administrators? Would they be able to see that our children with disabilities could learn alongside their non-disabled peers? Would they realize that all children benefit from being educated together? In order to encourage these beliefs, we needed to establish a track record. The Inclusion Task Force and IEP teams had to work doubly hard to make inclusion a success.

Our first year of inclusion was 1993. Kevin was one of four students in the district who were included that year, and the only one in an elementary school of over 500. Before school started, we met with general and special educators and administrators to discuss Kevin's special education supports. I will be forever grateful to our school principal, Judith Rosen, who was always supportive of including Kevin in her school.

With her and Jeffrey Libby's help, we were able to figure out what Kevin needed to be successfully included. The answer turned out to be relatively easy: Kevin needed extra classroom assistance and a special education teacher, or inclusion support teacher, overseeing his program. Both general education and special education needed to collaborate and coordinate supports and services to make this effort successful.

On the first day of school, I remember standing in the kindergarten yard with 31 other new kindergarten parents. The morning bell rang, and we followed our children into the classroom and stood behind them at their desks as they sat down. The kindergarten teacher welcomed us all and then dismissed parents, asking us to return that afternoon to pick up our

Autism continued, page 10

Institutes continued from page 7

one highly effective tool in this process.

As one teacher commented on an institute evaluation, "This has been a life-changing event. We have learned more about how to work together than in a year of meetings. Now we can bring these inclusive strategies back to our school and share what we have learned for all students."

Resources

Building Inclusive Schools: Tools and Strategies for Success. Halvorsen, A.T. & Neary, T. (2001). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

The California Confederation on Inclusive Education: **http://interwork.sdsu.edu/projects/ccie/info2.html**

The National Institute for Urban School Improvement: **http://www.edc.org/urban/**

Professional Development for All Personnel in Inclusive Schools. McGregor, G., Halvorsen, A.T., Fisher, D., Pumpian, I., Bhaerman, B., & Salisbury, C. (1998). Alexandria, VA: National Association of State Boards of Education, Issue Brief, November, 3 (3),1–12. For the complete text, go to **http://www.asri.edu/CFSP/brochure/prodevib.htm**

Community continued from page 5

his or her learning abilities, [has] more patience with his or her own limitations."

Members of inclusive classrooms are also seen to develop a social conscience and a willingness to become spokespersons for their friends who "can't speak out." As one teacher noted, perhaps inclusive education "serves much more the other children rather than the disabled child" as it engenders respect for everyone, regardless of abilities or physical conditions.

At Thousand Oaks Elementary School, inclusion is a way of life. Educators and parents are committed to creating a school in which all students are valued members. These adults are to be credited with showing many like-minded individuals throughout the state how effective inclusion is accomplished.

This article was adapted from original research by Pam Hunt, Anne Hirese-Hatae, Kathy Doering, Patricia Karasoff, and Lori Goetz.

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- A school must model what the staff wants its community to be.
- All students benefit when they engage with diverse populations.
- Belonging to a community of learners promotes the potential of all students.
- All students benefit from the shared responsibility between special and general education.
- There is no one right decision for all students.
- Those impacted by a decision need to be involved in the decision-making process.

An important aspect of Brywood's model is their development of, and emphasis on, child-centered programs. These programs meet the individualized needs of all children: special education, at risk, and gifted. The school's many extended opportunities for learning include after-school classes in math and language arts, flexible grouping by ability, small groups for re-teaching, consultation, the merger of general education and special education teacher roles, and student study team collaboration with support from their Special Program for Inclusive Collaborative Education (SPICE) team.

Every classroom teacher has an identified SPICE team member for on-the-spot collaborative trouble shooting and for developing longer-range intervention strategies. Because specialists are in the classrooms, their familiarity with students not only expedites problem solving, but also frequently prevents problems from happening in the first place. Decisions about each student are driven by the student's needs, not by the existence—or lack of—an IEP.

Staff trainings, an essential part of Brywood's success, are based on the needs of students and teachers. They are designed with the collaborative model in mind and attended by grade-level and site-level teams. After these sessions, the administration expects the staff to implement the practices they have learned, and this is monitored through classroom observation and annual teacher goal-setting.

Parent involvement is also fundamental to the success of Brywood's model. Parents are at all of their children's Student Study Team meetings. They volunteer daily at the school, with volunteer hours totaling over 30,000 a year. The school uses parent surveys, PTA open-forum meetings, School Site Council meetings and formal program reviews, and formal and informal town meetings to promote active, effective communication between parents and the school. It also sponsors parent math, science, and literacy nights to teach parents how to help their children at home.

The collaborative staff at Brywood consistently report that they do not wish to return to the traditional classroom model. Incentives for sustaining the collaborative model are powerful for teachers and students alike, with teachers reporting a number of benefits: a reduction in their feelings of isolation; a dramatic enhancement of their personal and professional efficacy through continuous professional growth; and the satisfaction of shared successes as well as burdens.

Students in special education also have benefited in many ways. The appropriate instructional interventions they are given dramatically reduce the rate of failure. Being part of their home community allows them to see themselves as being like their peers. They are given the opportunity to take personal responsibility for their own learning, successes, and failures. They are given the occasion to understand the connections between their behavior and outcomes; and because others consider them capable, they can see themselves that way, too.

These two schools, Rincon Middle School and Brywood Elementary, truly exemplify the best aspects of collaborative instruction. Working together is the norm on these two campuses, with collaboration taking place at all grade levels, in all classrooms. Because teachers use instructional strategies that benefit all students, it is difficult to even identify the special education students in any classroom. At these schools, all means all.

LIBRARY RESOURCES

View all resources from the RiSE (Resources in Special Education) Library online at **http://www.php.com**; or phone in orders to 408/727-5775, ext. 110.

Co-Teaching Lesson Plan Book 2000. By Lisa Dieker. Knowledge by Design; Whitefish Bay, WI; 2000; 46 pp. Call #22465. This book is designed to support the collaborative planning and communication required to make co-teaching successful and help students with disabilities succeed in general education classrooms.

Collaborating with Teachers and Parents: Methods, Materials, and Workshops.

By Catharine S. Bush. Communication Skill Builders; Tucson, AR; 1991; 182 pp. Call #7910. Materials for curriculum and communication projects in the classroom and for workshops with parents are included.

Creativity and Collaborative Learning: A Practical Guide to Empowering Students and Teachers.

By J.S. Thousand, R.A. Villa., and A.I. Nevin. Paul H. Brookes Publishing; Baltimore, MD; 1994; 420 pages. Call #7416. Provides strategies of cooperative learning and guidelines for adapting curricula and instructional methods, developing peer-mediated teaching systems, facilitating peer connections and friendships, and enhancing creative thinking.

Teacher Education in Transition: Collaborative Programs to Prepare General and Special Educators. By Linda Blanton, Cynthia Griffin, Judith Winn, and Marleen Pugach, Editors. Love Publishing Company; Denver, CO; 1997; 276 pages. Call #22325. The authors of this book support collaboration in teacher education programs as a shared agenda between special education and general education. They show the need to jettison the old separate, parallel system of teacher training in favor of new roles and responsibilities for faculty.

CALENDAR 2001

JULY 19–21, 2001

Piecing the Puzzle Together: Restructuring for Caring and Effective Education

This summer leadership institute is designed for anyone interested in improving educational practices in support of children with learning and language differences in the general education classroom: teachers, school administrators, parents, paraprofessionals, and school teams. It offers an opportunity to learn, plan, connect, and share. Featured presenters include internationally renowned speaker and author Norman Kunc, award-winning Professor Mary Falvey, Director of the Special Education Division of the California Department of Education Alice Parker, and authors Richard Villa and Jacqueline Thousand, among other leaders in the field of inclusive and least restrictive educational efforts.

For more information, call 760/761-4917; fax 760/ 761-4917. Reduced rates are available for parents and paraprofessionals.

LATE AUTUMN, 2001

Regional Field Trainings

From November through March, the California Department of Education, Special Education Division, will again offer Regional Field Meetings that address critical topics in education. Eight identical meetings are planned for San Diego, Riverside, Los Angeles, Burbank, Fresno, the Bay Area, Sacramento, and Redding. Topics will include Least Restrictive Environment, Secondary Transition, Interagency Agreements, Infant/Toddler programs, Preschool, Assessment and Accountability, Speech and Language, Charter Schools, and more. Registered participants will receive the following new CDE publications: *I Can Learn*, *Transition to Adult Living: A Guide for Secondary Education*, *Program Guidelines for Language, Speech, and Hearing Specialists;* and *The School Nurses' Green Book.* Interested parents, educators, and school teams should contact their regional Focused Monitoring and Technical Assistance (FMTA) CDE administrator after June 30, 2001, for dates and exact locations. Names and phone numbers for FMTA administrators are on page three of the insert to this issue; and also at **http://www.cde.ca.gov/spbranch/sed/fmtacnt.htm**

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Collaborative Challenge Award Winners

It's no surprise they're . . . collaborative!

Two California schools—Rincon Middle School in Escondido and Brywood Elementary School in Irvine—exemplify the movement many schools are making toward a collaborative model of instruction. The approach to education at both schools dissolves the distinctions between general and special education and supports the staff in meeting the educational needs of all students.

Together with the school's principal, the members of the special education staff at Rincon Middle School designed a program that integrates all students with special needs into general education classrooms, whenever it is appropriate. Rincon developed a powerful commitment to "blurring the boundaries" between children of differing abilities. This is accomplished through a carefully thought-out series of interventions.

Before the school year begins, special educators meet with their interdisciplinary teams to review each incoming student's strengths and requirements. General education teachers receive a written summary of the educational history of each student with an IEP (Individualized Education Program). The special education teacher then issues a letter to parents explaining Rincon's program of inclusion and collaboration. Throughout the year, the progress of all students with special needs, whether new or returning, is reviewed regularly. Then all students are given assessment tests at the beginning and again at the end of the year to assure proper grade and program placements.

Students at Rincon are taught by interdisciplinary teams of teachers. Each team of 180 students shares the same set of teachers, along with the same counselor, the same assistant principal, and the same special education teacher and instructional assistants. This group of professionals attends regularly scheduled weekly meetings, during which everyone shares ideas and strategies for best serving their students. Because special education teachers are in the general education classes daily, general and special education teachers are able to address their ongoing challenges together. It is easy to forget that students are not the only ones isolated from the general school population. Special education teachers are often marginalized also. Rincon's collaborative model helps the whole school community, staff as well as students, work together for the good of all.

Rincon Middle School continues to have pull-out classes for those students who need specialized assistance. The parents of the students and their general and special education teachers work together to make this decision. The school also offers study skills classes to help students learn how to get organized or to allow for additional time to complete assignments or tests.

Rincon encourages parents to become as informed as possible about their children's needs and progress. Teachers send home formal progress reports every six weeks, and weekly or daily, if needed. Students themselves are not left out of the communication loop. They are regularly kept apprised of their progress and receive computer printouts of their grades every three weeks. General and special education teachers work together to evaluate students. Those who need extensive accommodations may receive modified grades.

The school district also supports the school's collaborative efforts by approving more hours for Rincon's support staff in order for teachers to be released for training and collaboration. In addition, students themselves contribute in unique ways. During their eighth-grade physical education elective, approximately thirty students have volunteered to become "buddies" for students who have more severe disabilities. Everyone benefits from this arrangement: they learn acceptance, develop social skills, and begin to take a genuine interest in each other's success. According to Debbie Whitty, special education teacher at Rincon, "The inclusive/collaborative model has produced benefits beyond providing the best possible support for special education students. Students with and without disabilities have learned about tolerance and have discovered that, despite their differences, every student is a learner, and all students have something valuable to offer."

Brywood Elementary School shares a similar commitment to the collaborative model, teaching all classes collaboratively and integrating all students into general education classrooms. The staff there attribute their success to a particular set of shared beliefs:

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