



Dispelling the Myths of Inclusive Education

The purpose of this document is to share and dispel several common myths about inclusive education for students with disabilities. Please also refer to the companion publication titled "Frequently Asked Questions About Inclusive Education" at www.tash.org/iefaq.

Myth #1: Students with significant disabilities educated in general education classrooms won't get the support they need.

Nothing is further from the truth! Inclusive education is the practice of educating students with disabilities in general education classrooms alongside their classmates who don't have disabilities, with supports provided so that each and every student 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 "Inclusive education doesn't work," we usually find that teachers have not been taught what to do, and supplemental aids and services have not been provided, as required by the Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act. Most high quality educational practices require preparation, training, leadership, vision, and the creative allocation of resources; inclusive education is no different.

Myth #2: 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 students with disabilities spend in a general education classroom – regardless of the severity of their disabilities. In these studies, 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 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 can 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

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with classmates who don't have disabilities, the absence of appropriate role and behavior models, a negative impact on all students' attitudes about disability and diversity, and a decrease in confidence by general education teachers for teaching diverse learners.

Myth #3: Inclusive education 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. 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.

Myth #4: Some students with disabilities are too disruptive to be included in a general education classroom.

When students 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 students might need assistive technology to communicate, so that they have a way to express their needs and show what they know. Other students might need assistance managing the sensory input of a busy classroom and school – just the kind of environment that they will experience when they leave school! Teachers might need additional professional development, support, and time for collaboration with one another. Inclusive education is not only about including students with disabilities in a general education classroom; it also is about bringing special education personnel in to the general education classroom, to share the teaching load and enrich the learning experience for all students.

Myth #5: The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) values services in self-contained special education classes equally with services in inclusive general education classes.

Although the 2004 Amendments to the IDEIA do not mandate inclusive education, they do affirm that the regular classroom is the presumptive placement for students with disabilities. IDEIA states:

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.

IDEIA 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 non-disabled,” 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.”

An important court case, *Gaskin v. Pennsylvania Department of Education* (2005), found that (1) students may not be removed from regular education classes simply because of

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the severity of their disabilities; (2) school districts have an obligation to provide students with disabilities, including students with significant cognitive disabilities, specially designed instruction or other supplementary aids and services, if needed, to benefit from participating in a regular education classrooms; (3) before considering removal of a student with disabilities from a regular education classroom, the IEP team must first determine whether the goals in the student's IEP can be implemented in a regular education classroom with supplementary aids and services; and (4) school districts will consider the full range of supplementary aids and services, based on peer-reviewed research to the extent practicable, that can be utilized in regular education classrooms before contemplating removal of a student with disabilities from a regular classroom.

Myth #6: 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 who has disabilities 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 meet the exact same standards as students without disabilities in order to be successfully educated in a general education classroom, but they do need to be held to high academic standards. To that end, a few students with more significant disabilities might be learning modified academic content that is reduced in depth, breadth, and complexity from their general education classmates, and still benefit from access to the general education curriculum in the general education classroom. Teachers find that using the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is the best way to meet the needs not only of students with disabilities, but also of students who come to school with vastly different life experiences, who speak many different languages, who have diverse strengths and needs, and who need creative ways to "show what they know."

Myth #7: Inclusive education is more expensive than educating students in special education classrooms.

The cost of inclusive education is best viewed 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. 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. At the preschool level, in fact, several models of inclusive education have been shown to be somewhat less costly than traditional special education service models. 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. They also believe that when the benefits of inclusive education are balanced against the negative effects of segregation, the cost-benefit ratio is clearly on the side of inclusive education.

Myth #8: Inclusive education is just another educational fad.

The judge deciding the case of *Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon* (1993) opined that "Inclusion is a right, not a privilege for a select few." Just as civil rights for African Americans or equal rights for women are not fads, neither is inclusive education.

"Inclusion is not about disability, nor is it only about schools. Inclusion is about social justice... Inclusion de-

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mands 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).

The Autistic Self-Advocacy Network also weighed in on inclusive education as a fundamental right. "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