

Position Statement On The Education Of Children With Disabilities

The New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities endorses the following findings of the United States Congress regarding the education of children with disabilities contained in The Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000 and The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act:

"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.

Before the date of the enactment of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94-142) - the special educational needs of children with disabilities were not being fully met;

The enactment and implementation of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 has been successful in ensuring children with disabilities and the families of such children access to a free appropriate public education and in improving educational results for children with disabilities. However, the implementation of this Act has been impeded by low expectations and an insufficient focus on applying replicable research on proven methods of teaching and learning for children and youth with disabilities.

Over 20 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children and youth with disabilities can be made more effective by:

- having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access in the general curriculum to the maximum extent possible;
- strengthening the role of parents and ensuring that families of children and youth with disabilities have meaningful opportunities to participate in the education of their children at school and at home;
- coordinating all educational reform efforts in order to ensure that children and youth with disabilities benefit from such efforts and that special education can become a service rather than a place where they are sent;
- providing appropriate special education and related services and aids and supports in the regular classroom and natural environment , whenever appropriate as required by IDEA;
- providing a full range of transition to adult life services to enable youth with disabilities to develop the skills they need for employment, independent living, and full participation in civic and community life as adults;
- implementing strategies to develop the independence and self-advocacy skills of children with disabilities starting as they enter the special education system;

- supporting high-quality, intensive professional development for all personnel in order to ensure that they have the skills and knowledge necessary to enable them to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, those challenging expectations that have been established for all children;
- to be prepared to lead productive, independent, adult lives, to the maximum extent possible;
- providing incentives for whole school approaches that support positive behavior and pre-referral interventions to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address their learning needs." (20 U.S.C. Chapter 33 Sec. 1400)"

It is the position of the New Jersey Council on Developmental Disabilities that the State be vigilant in its efforts to ensure the goal of achieving better results for children with disabilities of all ages in New Jersey.

The Council makes the following recommendations in order to advance their position on education for students with disabilities in New Jersey:

- That legislation be enacted to mandate that state special education dollars are dedicated funds spent only on special education.
- That the legislature direct the State Department of Education to complete the cost study as required by the Comprehensive Educational Improvement and Financing Act (CEIFA) in 2000.
- That legislation be enacted to develop funding incentives particularly for the use of extraordinary aid to meet the needs of children with significant needs in district rather than in separate settings.
- That all new construction for public educational purposes includes facilities for all children including children with the full range of disabilities.
- That the State Board of Education adopt state certification and licensing requirements that mandate a strong foundation in teaching to diverse populations for all teachers
- That the State Board of Education adopt requirements for all teachers to receive training in meeting the needs of students with disabilities through their required continuing education hours with the following provisions:
 - 20% of the hours for special educators focusing on curriculum content and assisting student with disabilities in meeting the Core Curriculum Standards;
 - 20% of the hours for general educators in meeting the needs of students with disabilities in general education classes.
- That all Department of Education committees, task forces and advisory boards providing guidance on education policy issues include representatives with special education expertise. That the NJ Council on Developmental Disabilities encourage a study of the impact the existence and new construction of separate facilities for the education of students with disabilities has on the Least Restrictive Environment mandate in IDEA.
- That interagency-agreements be established to encourage, develop and enhance collaboration in the transition of students with disabilities from school to adult life and to implement strategies to develop the independence and self advocacy skills for these students.

- That the Department of Education send out a policy directive to all school districts requiring all school programs and activities including school to work, adult life programs, vocational schools and employment programs be available to all children and youth with disabilities.

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