



Inclusive Education

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Inclusive education involves every student, regardless of the severity of a student's disability, participating and learning in the same school and with the same classmates as if they did not have a disability. True inclusive education requires instruction, curriculum and assessments, and physical environments that are universally designed and adaptable to meet unique goals and needs of individual students. Schools and school activities present a critical opportunity for children to develop lifelong friendships, learn social skills from one another, and establish an understanding of how to accept and support one another regardless of their differences. The Louisiana Developmental Disabilities Council supports the rights of all children, including those with the most significant disabilities, to have full and equal access to curriculum, instruction, and extracurricular activities in inclusive education environments that are available to all students.

Experiences during the school years set the stage not only for students with disabilities to gain the skills and relationships to be members of the community but also for all students to gain an appreciation for accepting and supporting their fellow citizens in all facets of community life.^{i, ii, iii} Progress made in Louisiana and across the nation in increasing inclusion opportunities has been a result of children growing up understanding and accepting diversity of abilities, talents, and contributions of one another.

Inclusive education has numerous benefits over education provided in segregated settings.^{iv, v, vi} Inclusion results in individuals with disabilities having improved quality-of-life outcomes and enhanced skill development without negatively impacting the academic success of students without disabilities. All children benefit from the expanded range of social relationships and increased natural support structures experienced through learning and growing up with a diverse group of peers.^{vii} It is essential that the building blocks for inclusion begin at an early age. Inclusive educational environments establish the foundation for society supporting the rights of all people to live in their own homes and be competitively employed as contributing and valued members of the community. The Council supports the full inclusion of all children, regardless of the severity of their disability, as full participating members of each and every school.

Recommendations:

Louisiana should immediately take steps to:

1. Ensure all schools receiving state funding accept every student, including students with the most significant disabilities, and provide all appropriate educational services and supports to each child.
2. Ensure an equitable and fair accountability structure that:
 - a. ensures accurate and timely reporting of student composition across schools and school systems;



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- b. utilizes student composition in analysis of school and district performance measures; and,
 - c. promotes inclusive practices and disallows selective admissions that disproportionately excludes students with disabilities.
 3. Ensure schools have adequate support and training in effective, research-based teaching strategies that result in successful inclusion and positive educational outcomes for all students, including those with the most significant disabilities.
 4. Ensure each student is provided appropriate supports and services based on their individualized needs.
 - a. Ensure adequate and intensive early educational intervention is provided
 5. Ensure funding for schools:
 - a. is adequate to meet the needs of every student served by that school;
 - b. is monitored to ensure all funding mechanisms designated for students with disabilities align with and reflect the individualized needs of students as determined by Individualized Education Plan (IEP) teams;
 - c. does not incentivize the exclusion and/or segregation of students with disabilities.
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References:

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- iii. Fisher, D. (1999). According to their peers: Inclusion as high school students see it. *Mental Retardation*, 37, 458-467.
- iv. Georgiadi, M., Kallyya, E., Kourkoutas, E., & Tsakiris, V. (2012). Young Children's Attitudes toward Peers with Intellectual Disabilities: Effect of the Type of School. *Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities*, (25)6, pp 531-541.
- v. Vaughn, S., Elbaum, B.E., Schumm, J.S., & Hughes, M. (1998). Social outcomes for students with and without learning disabilities in inclusive classrooms. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 31(5), 428-436.
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