

# **POSITION PAPER ON DELIVERY OF SERVICES TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

Revised April, 1997

## Introduction

During the past year, numerous requests have been received for the membership of the Council of Administrators of Special Education, Inc. (CASE) to issue an update to the position paper on the subject of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as it relates to the topic of full inclusion of students with disabilities. The CASE Strategic Plan indicates CASE "will establish position papers that are reflective of the issues generated by the membership." This paper is therefore being written in response to the CASE Strategic Plan and membership requests. All students, both disabled and non-disabled, have educational needs which must be met. CASE believes public schools should be held accountable for meeting the educational needs of all students.

The development and establishment of special education programs in the United States has been an evolutionary process over several decades. Each incremental stage in the process has led to increased knowledge and implementation of the best practices known and available for the times and corresponding adjustments in the belief systems and attitude held by the educational community. The LRE requirements in the special education regulations has led the education system to establish a continuum of educational placements (environments) over the past two decades. A "special" education system was implemented that came to operate parallel to the general education system within public education.

Currently, rather than focus upon the environment, a focus upon levels of scope and intensity of educational services (least restrictive alternatives) is considered appropriate. Special education (specially designed instruction) is not a site or setting, but a service delivery system that is responsive to the unique needs of each child. The educational community is increasingly advocating for a more "inclusive" public education system for ALL children. The result is an evolving philosophy of inclusionary programming for our nation's students with disabilities.

CASE supports the evolving practice as the appropriate goal of a unified education system of ALL students. CASE does not support any policy/practice in which ALL students with disabilities, regardless of the severity of their disabilities and needs for related services, receive their total education within the regular classroom setting in the school they would attend if not disabled. A continuum of service delivery options must always be available.

## Inclusion Rationale

Inclusion is the result of a major shift in the historic beliefs and practices of educational communities regarding the provision of service to children and youth with disabilities. Inclusion means that students with disabilities are educated in supported, heterogeneous,

age-appropriate, and natural and student-centered classroom, school and community environments for the purpose of preparing them for full participation in a diverse and integrated society. The practice of inclusion transcends the idea of physical locations and incorporates basic values that promote participation, friendships and interaction in all aspects of education and community life.

The implementation of inclusion requires:

- development of a local board policy supporting inclusion;
- a goal of participatory membership for all students;
- administrative support from superintendents, central office staff, and building level administrators;
- sufficient support to students and staff;
- effective leadership, commitment, and a shared responsibility for all students;
- active partnership with parents;
- appropriate pre-service and ongoing inservice training for all staff;
- curriculum and methods which are adapted for individual needs;
- a strong sense of "community" in the classroom, throughout the school and with parents/caregivers;
- a study and celebration of diversity;
- a fundamental change in the role and responsibility of all educators; and
- the ultimate establishment of unified education systems responsible for serving ALL students.

An inclusive education provides benefits for all students. Inclusive schools will assist in the development of future citizens who value all people, regardless of their learning, physical or emotional characteristics. The best preparation for adult life in a diverse society is education in diverse learning environments. Of particular benefit to students with special needs may be:

- increased academic achievement;
- opportunities for friendship and a true sense of belonging;
- the natural availability of role models;
- facilitation of language and communication skills development;
- the development of appropriate social skills;
- learning environments which are more collaborative with and supportive of effective transition into heterogeneous adult environments.

### Position

CASE believes in and supports the evolving practice of creating inclusive environments for all students as an appropriate goal of our educational community. CASE believes that the team decisions about an appropriate education for students must be made on an individual student basis. While there are those exceptions where a fully inclusive setting

may not be appropriate, we believe strongly in the goal of providing children with disabilities the same opportunities and choices as their non-disabled peers. This necessitates a shift in the focus of the IEP teams from a place to the intensity and scope of services that a student needs to be appropriately educated.

CASE encourages all professionals involved in developing and/or providing educational services to endorse the position stated in this paper.