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## ***Position Paper on Supported Inclusive Education***

### **ISSUE**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides for infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities, including mental retardation, be educated to the maximum extent possible with students who are not disabled. Recognizing the statutory mandate as a minimum standard, the education of students with disabilities has moved beyond a narrow interpretation of least restrictive environment to the concepts of supported inclusive education and living and working in the community.

However, problems of segregation persist for students with disabilities. Most students do not have access to the same programs and services provided other students. They often leave schools to face unemployment, underemployment, and long waiting lists. Their educational programs are underfunded and lack sufficient trained personnel. They are overlooked in today's educational reform movement.

### **POSITION**

The Arc (of the United States) affirms the legal rights of students and families must be protected and supported. The Arc of New Jersey believes that the education of all students with disabilities begins at birth, and that infants, toddlers, children and youth with disabilities have the inherent right to be fully included in all aspects of school and community life. There is a need to create options and explore opportunities for children and families and to inform and educate all citizens regarding the importance of full inclusion in the lives of people with disabilities.

### **FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES**

- Great expectations are for everyone. Children with disabilities and their families have dreams, visions, and anticipations. They need to believe in their own strengths, assume control over their futures, and anticipate futures with choices and fulfillment.
- Quality Education celebrates the diversity among families. It respects the linguistic and cultural contributions families from varying backgrounds bring to communities.
- Quality education honors the values and addresses the concerns of each student and the student's family. Families offer direct personal insights, resources, and solutions to challenges.
- The principles of full inclusion begin with the birth of the child. The principles of family centered community based services promised in PL 99-457 and its amendments must come to fruition. Services for infants, toddlers and preschoolers should be offered in inclusive settings.

- The value system of the school and community needs to incorporate full inclusion and be based on the belief that "all kids belong." Communities need to develop awareness and enhance capacities to support infants, toddlers, children and youth in natural settings.
- Students with disabilities have the right to attend the same neighborhood schools, classrooms, extra-curricular and recreational activities, and community programs as they would if they did not have a disability.
- Students with disabilities belong on age-appropriate integrated environments and/or classrooms with peers who are not disabled.
- All students and supporting adults should receive instruction which facilitates an understanding and acceptance of individual differences.
- Each student has the right to receive an individualized education which provides choices, acknowledges strengths and capacities, meets the student's needs, and offers all the supports necessary to ensure successful experiences and achievement of his/her potential.

The Arc of New Jersey recognizes that in order to achieve these principles families, educators, and policymakers must collaborate and work together at the state, community, building and classroom levels. This concerned body of citizens must affirm the basic tenets in these fundamental principles. Further, as system advocates, there is a need to address the following issues:

1. Eliminate financial barriers for full inclusion and provide procedural safeguards to ensure the services and supports are both planned for and indeed implemented together with closely adhered-to timelines - funds need to follow the child, not the program.
2. ALL school personnel must receive preservice and/or inservice training to increase their knowledge, acquire skills and improve their attitudes to ensure the provision of educational experiences consistent with best practices.
3. Ongoing technical assistance to collaborative planning and implementation teams should be provided to support students, families, and educators; the designation of the integration facilitator as part of the child study team to coordinate the collaborative efforts will enhance inclusion.
4. In order to achieve accreditation, higher education and state certification granting agencies should adopt the study of individual differences and learning styles to include students with disabilities and, further, must prepare all teachers to work in supported inclusive education settings.
5. Transitions that occur from early intervention to schools and from schools to adult life occur successfully when there is early planning and involvement of all agencies and the family, in coordination and follow-along, and when there is a commitment to successful outcomes for the individual.
6. Program evaluation must be based on outcomes and include in the process all providers, their representatives and advocacy organizations, as well as families and students.

## **IN SUMMARY**

It is the belief of The Arc of New Jersey that while the achievement of the goals of full inclusion in this position statement will significantly and positively enhance the quality and impact of the education received by students with mental retardation, the ultimate effect will be to substantially improve the education of all children.

*Adopted by the Board of Directors  
of The Arc of New Jersey  
November 11, 1991*