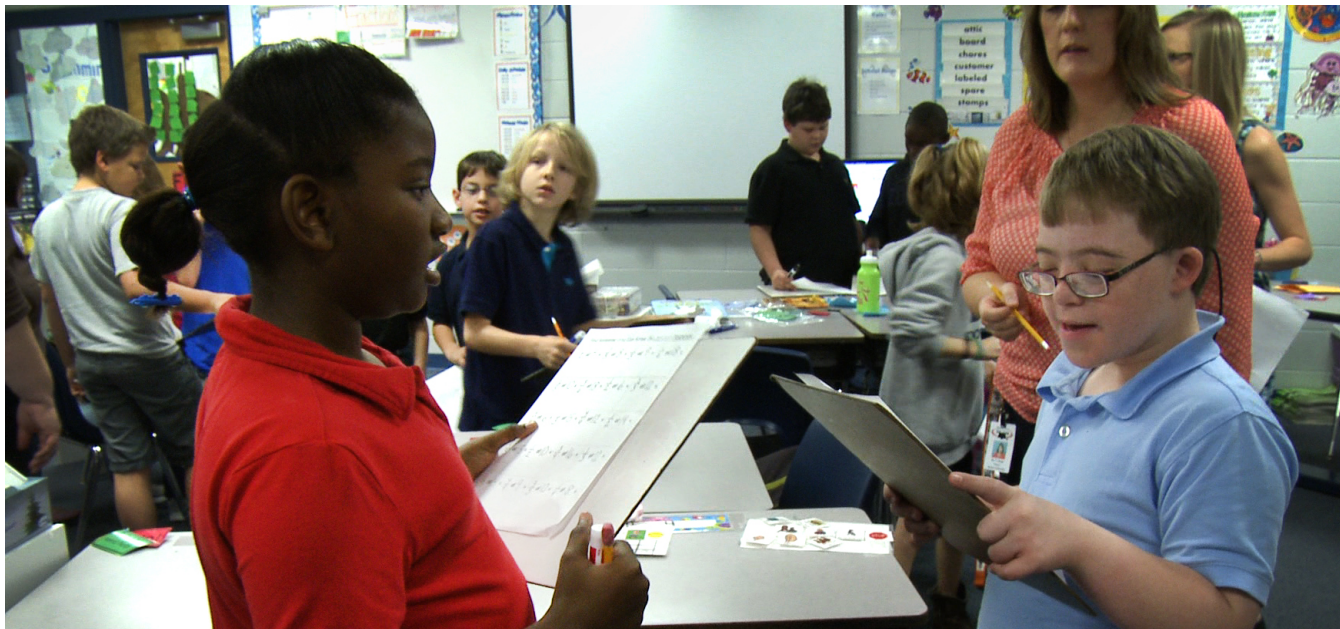


Rationales for Inclusive Education



Elementary school students in Fox Prairie Elementary School in Stoughton, Wisconsin work together in math.

There are many rationales for inclusive education including social justice and civil rights, legal and regulatory requirements, research on the academic and other benefits for students with and without disabilities, and research showing the positive correlation between the time that students spend in general education and quality of life outcomes after high school.

Social Justice and Civil Rights

The introductory Congressional findings of The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 (IDEA) reflect the values- and evidence-based rationale for inclusive education:

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...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. (IDEA, 2004)

Least Restrictive Environment Mandate of IDEA

In the final regulations that guide the implementation of IDEA 2004, the term “least restrictive environment” (LRE) is used to specify the meaning of access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom.

(1) To the maximum extent appropriate, handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, and (2) That special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped

RATIONALES FOR LACK OF INCLUSION

There are only four reasons why students should *not* be placed in a general education classroom, *with the burden placed on the IEP team to justify removal from general education*. Those four reasons are:

- Lack of educational benefits
- Lack of non-academic benefits
- Negative effect of the child on the teacher and other children
- Unreasonable cost (Wright's Law, n.d.).

Unacceptable reasons for removing a student from a general education classroom, as described in a variety of guidance documents (South Dakota Department of Education, 2013; Wright's Law, n.d.), include:

- The number and intensity of needed services and supports
- Student's need for behavior support

- Student's need for extensive curricular modifications
- Student's participation in a state's alternate assessment
- Student's reading level
- Student not having the prerequisite skills required by the curriculum being taught
- Student's use of communication or other assistive technologies
- School's lack of experience with inclusion
- School's history of placing students in separate programs
- Location of skilled staff in other buildings or classrooms
- Class size
- Lack of knowledge or skills by staff

children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Although the LRE mandate seems to give high priority to general education placement for students with disabilities, in reality, this is far from being achieved, especially for the 56% of students with intellectual disability who still spend the majority of their day outside of a general

education classroom (U.S. Department of Education, 2016).

Because of the vagueness of the LRE regulations, parents and schools have sought clarification from various levels of the U.S. court system to define LRE for a particular student or class of students. Some of these cases have supported an individual student's inclusion, and others have determined that a separate educational environment is the least restrictive. See above for acceptable and unacceptable reasons why students should *not* be placed in a general education classroom.



Samuel Habib (center, a Concord, New Hampshire, High School student) moves the soccer ball down the field alongside his teammates in a [Unified Sports](#) soccer game. Research shows positive effects of inclusion for students with disabilities in a wide array of areas, including more satisfying and diverse social relationships.

Better Outcomes in Inclusive Environments

Inclusive education is also supported by strong educational research. Using theory, historical research, and empirical literature, Jackson, Ryndak, and Wehmeyer (2008/2009) made a case for inclusive education as a research-based practice and concluded:

...placement in age- and grade-appropriate general education contexts and having special and general educators team to provide supports and modifications for all students are first-order research-based practice, and...the benefits of proven methods of instruction are realized in the long run only when this first step is implemented in the life of

a child (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008/2009).

Findings from a large number of research studies show positive effects of inclusion for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities (e.g., autism, cerebral palsy, etc.) including:

- Higher expectations for student learning (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2007);
- Heightened engagement, affective demeanor, and participation in integrated social activities (Hunt, Farron-Davis, Beckstead, Curtis, & Goetz, 1994);
- Improved communication and social skills (Beukelman & Miranda, 2005; Fisher & Meyer, 2002; McSheehan, Sonnenmeier, & Jorgensen, 2009; Soto, Muller, Hunt, & Goetz, 2001);

- More satisfying and diverse social relationships (Guralnick, Connor, Hammond, Gottman, & Kinnish, 1996);
- Optimal access to the general education curriculum (Jorgensen, McSheehan, & Sonnenmeier, 2010; Wehmeyer & Agran, 2006);
- Improved academic outcomes in the areas of literacy and mathematics (Cole, Waldron, & Majd, 2004; Cosier, Causton-Theoharis, & Theoharis, 2013; Dessemontet, Bless, & Morin, 2012; Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010; Ryndak, Alper, Ward, Storch, & Montgomery, 2010; Ryndak, Morrison, & Sommerstein, 1999);
- Better quality Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) (Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992);
- Fewer absences from school and referrals for disruptive behavior (Helmstetter, Curry, Brennan, & Sampson-Saul, 1998);
- Achievement of more IEP goals (Brinker & Thorpe, 1984); and
- Improved adult outcomes in the areas of post-secondary education, employment, and independence (White & Weiner, 2004).

Research on the impact of inclusion on the performance of students without disabilities provides additional support for inclusive practices. In a meta-analysis of research conducted by Kalambouka, Farrell, Dyson, & Kaplan (2007), 81% of the outcomes reported showed that including students with disabilities resulted in either positive or neutral effects for students without disabilities. Theoharis and Causton-Theoharis (2010) found improved educational outcomes for students with and without disabilities when inclusion was the primary school reform.

Other positive effects of inclusion on students without disabilities include improved attitudes towards diversity (Finke, McNaughton, & Drager, 2009); unique opportunities for learning about prejudice and equity (Fisher, Sax, & Jorgensen, 1998); and increased academic achievement, assignment completion, and classroom



Kindergarten teacher Catasha Bailey leads her student Madelyne Bush into the classroom at James C. Rosser Elementary School, Moorhead, Mississippi.

participation by students providing peer supports (Cushing & Kennedy, 1997).

The rationale for inclusion is also supported by the fact that no studies conducted since the late 1970s have shown an academic advantage for students with intellectual and other developmental disabilities educated in separate settings (Falvey, 2004). In fact, studies have shown some negative effects of separate special education placement (Causton-Theoharis, Theoharis, Orsati, and Cosier, 2011; Fisher, Sax, Rodifer, & Pumpian, 1999; Hunt & Farron-Davis, 1992).

Conclusion

Given these strong rationales for inclusion, what factors perpetuate segregation? These factors are present to one degree or another in schools that do not support inclusive education: low expectations for students with an intellectual disability label, a belief that students with intellectual disability will never need to use academic knowledge in their adult lives, de-valuing students with disabilities compared to those without, lack of teacher knowledge and skills for differentiated instruction, and the absence of administrator commitment to lead the systemic changes necessary to shift a school from being exclusionary to inclusionary.

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