

Education

Children and youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities¹ (I/DD) must receive a free, appropriate public education as guaranteed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Education must include individualized supports and services, quality instruction, and access to the general education curriculum in age-appropriate inclusive settings, in preparation for adult life.

Issue

IDEA requires that students with disabilities be educated to the maximum extent appropriate with students who do not have disabilities. However, many students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities remain segregated in self-contained classrooms or separate schools, with few or no opportunities for academic or social involvement in inclusive settings. Students with I/DD frequently do not have access to quality instruction or services and supports necessary to participate as full members of their school communities. Consequently, many students with I/DD leave school unprepared for work, postsecondary education, or adult life in the community.

Administrators, educators, and support staff too often lack sufficient training and knowledge about the needs and abilities of these students. School districts struggle to recruit and retain qualified special education personnel. Paraprofessionals providing support in inclusive classrooms are often poorly paid and do not always receive or seek professional development relevant to students' needs.

Outdated, inaccurate beliefs about students with I/DD persist, leading to low expectations, segregated classrooms, and a diminished sense of accountability for these students. In some communities, No Child Left Behind's focus on student performance has led to the conclusion that these students are "bringing down" test scores and are to blame when schools and school systems do not achieve adequate yearly progress.

Position

Students with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities have the right to be educated in general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools with appropriate services, supplementary aids, and supports. Alternative placements should be rare and considered only when education in the general education classroom cannot be satisfactorily achieved. In order to provide a free, appropriate public education for students with I/DD, all those involved in the education of students with I/DD must:

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- Fulfill the federal commitment to fund IDEA at 40%.
- Increase active monitoring and enforcement through local, state, and federal agencies to ensure that IDEA and state special education laws and mandates are met.
- Ensure that students with I/DD are educated to the maximum extent appropriate alongside students who do not have disabilities.
- Ensure that teachers and related services personnel, as well as their representatives, are prepared to teach and/or support students effectively in the general education curriculum and in inclusive settings.
- Serve students in the least restrictive environment (LRE), as determined for each student. Unless the Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires otherwise, the student attends the school s/he would have attended if s/he did not have a disability.
- Develop and implement IEPs that build on student strengths, meet the student's needs, and offer supports and services necessary to achieve success.
- Reflect sensitivity to linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic diversity as well as diverse family circumstances.
- Provide access to the general education curriculum along with supplemental aids and services and extracurricular activities with same-age peers without disabilities.
- Foster the development of peer relationships and membership in the school community to create a receptive, welcoming atmosphere.
- Utilize the principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL)² in designing curricula, materials, instruction, and assessments to create maximum access to learning environments for students with diverse abilities and learning styles.
- Incorporate evidence-based, peer-reviewed instructional strategies and interventions, provided by professionally qualified teachers, related services personnel, and other staff, all of whom receive the support they need.
- Ensure the meaningful involvement of students, families, their chosen advisors, and guardians in designing and monitoring the educational process at all levels.
- Connect students, families, and guardians with resources and training that help them understand their rights, procedural safeguards, and dispute resolution options.
- Incorporate and support the development of self-advocacy and leadership skills.
- Ensure that students with disabilities are not subjected to unwarranted restraint or isolation or to aversives. Physical restraint which restricts airflow, including prone restraint, and mechanical restraint must be prohibited.
- Ensure that all students have access to assistive technology, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and effective communication systems.
- Develop adaptations for assessment and grading.
- Provide early intervention and preschool services to infants, toddlers, and preschool-age children with disabilities alongside their typical peers and provide transition planning for children as they move to kindergarten or first grade.

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- Develop and implement transition plans based on student strengths, preferences, and interests to facilitate movement from school to adult life, including postsecondary and vocational education, employment, independent living, and community participation.

Rev'd 2011

The Arc and AAIDD have worked together to revise this statement and the revised version will go before The Arc's business session for a vote in November.

¹ "People with intellectual disability and/or developmental disabilities" refers to those defined by the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (AAIDD) classification and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 4th Edition (DSM IV)*, published by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). In everyday language they are frequently referred to as people with cognitive, intellectual and/or developmental disabilities although the professional and legal definitions of those terms both include others and exclude some defined by *DSM IV*.

² UDL is an educational approach to curriculum and instruction using technology to enable students with diverse learning needs to be successful in the classroom. UDL means designing instructional methods and materials so individuals with differences in their abilities can achieve their learning goals.

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