

# Education System

## THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

All children and youth with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities (IDD) must receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE) that includes fair evaluation, ambitious goals, challenging objectives, the right to progress, individualized supports and services, high quality instruction, and access to the general education curriculum in age-appropriate inclusive settings. These are essential for achieving the nation's four policy goals of equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency (the four policy goals). Parents and families must be supported as essential partners in the education and transition to adult life of their sons and daughters.

## ISSUE

People with IDD continue to face numerous barriers in their education. Lifelong education is essential for all individuals with IDD to achieve the four policy goals of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and to pursue opportunities for rich lives and contribute to the public good. "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. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of the national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities." (IDEA, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act).

Many students with IDD remain segregated in self-contained classrooms or separate schools, with few or no opportunities for academic achievement or social engagement in inclusive settings. Students with IDD frequently do not have appropriately ambitious and personalized goals, challenging objectives, high quality instruction, individualized transition planning, and related services and supports necessary to engage as full members of their school learning communities. Consequently, many students with IDD leave school unprepared for further education, employment, and independent living in the community.

Many schools have policies and practices that push youth with IDD out of school and into the juvenile justice system (known as the "school to prison pipeline"). Further, many of those in detention facilities with qualifying disabilities are not provided special education and related services.

Many parents, families, and students themselves are excluded from systemic participation as essential partners in the evaluation of the student's strengths and limitations, as well as the development and implementation of their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

Administrators, educators, and support staff too often lack sufficient training and knowledge about the legal rights, learning needs, and abilities of these students. School districts struggle to identify, 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' learning needs. Outdated, inaccurate beliefs about students with IDD persist, leading to low expectations, segregated classrooms, inappropriate disciplinary practices, and diminished accountability for these students. In some communities, an unexamined sole focus on student performance has led to an erroneous conclusion that students with IDD are "bringing down" test scores and are to blame when schools and school systems do not achieve adequate progress.

## **POSITION**

To ensure students with IDD receive the education to which they are legally entitled, all those involved in the education of these students must work to fully implement our nation's civil rights and education laws and accomplish the following actions.

### **All Means All: Zero Reject**

- Assure timely evaluation, identification, and provision of education and related services to all students with IDD, incorporating all aspects of the students' diversity, including age, gender, ethnicity, culture, language, socio-economic circumstances, sexual orientation, and family environment.
- Disciplinary actions (suspension, expulsion, segregation) and alternate placements should not exclude the student from access to appropriate education and related services.

### **Non-Discriminatory and Comprehensive Eligibility Evaluations and Appropriate Assessments**

- Assure that the needs of the individual are considered fairly and comprehensively, including cognitive, emotional, functional, and developmental needs, as well as all areas of suspected disability and mental health needs.
- Assure that multiple assessments, including those that identify a student's strengths and abilities, are used and that IQ is not the sole measure of human functioning, nor does IQ alone determine placement or access to the general curriculum.
- Exercise clinical judgment that is built upon respect for the person and emerges from specialized training and experience in IDD, specific knowledge of the person and his/her environments, extensive data, and use of critical thinking skills.

- Assure that any predictions about a student's potential learning are evidence-based and founded in high expectations for further education, employment, and independent living.
- Assure that all educators implement appropriately ambitious goals and challenging objectives and use measurements of progress that are aligned to the unique ways that students with IDD learn. Develop adaptations for assessment and grading, when necessary, that accurately capture the strengths and limitations of students with IDD.

### **High Expectations and Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE)**

- Develop and implement IEPs with high expectations that include appropriately ambitious personalized goals and challenging objectives and that build on a student's strengths; meet the student's learning, employment, and independent living needs; and offer related services and supplementary services necessary and likely, based on evidence, to ensure the student will make progress toward achieving the nation's four policy goals.
- Ensure that all students have access to the general education curriculum. General education includes the academic curriculum, extracurricular activities, and other school activities.
- 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 training, preparation, and supports they need to be effective professionals.
- Ensure that a range of appropriate technology options are made available in a timely and culturally and linguistically appropriate manner to all students who could benefit from them, and that the necessary training for use of the technology is provided immediately and consistently.

### **Autonomy, Self-Determination, and Decision-Making Supports**

- Incorporate and support the development of autonomy, self-determination, self-advocacy, and leadership skills throughout students' educational experiences, including meaningful participation in the student's IEP.

- Assure that school policy and semi-annual in-service training emphasizes autonomy, self-determination, and decision-making supports, and that teachers and other non-lawyers do not give families legal advice related to guardianship.

### **Inclusion and the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)**

- To the maximum extent appropriate, every student has a right to be educated in their inclusive neighborhood school and in the general education curriculum in that school. Any exception should be rare and considered only when education in the general education classroom cannot be satisfactorily achieved. Each student has a right to the related services, supplementary aids and services, accommodations, and modifications needed to learn alongside students without disabilities.
- Assure that the student is integrated in academic and social aspects of the general curriculum.
- Include an explicit written plan to achieve more integration in both academic and social aspects of the general curriculum when the student is currently in a restricted setting.
- Foster the development of peer relationships and membership in the school community to create a receptive, welcoming atmosphere, including extracurricular activities and school trips.
- Avoid the long-term costs of segregating students with IDD, including the reduced opportunities for learning, employment, independent living, and social engagement.
- Ensure that all teachers and related services personnel are trained, prepared, and supported to teach and support students effectively in the general education curriculum and in inclusive settings.

### **Safe and Supportive Education Environments**

- Ensure safe school environments that provide mental health supports and protection against bullying.
- Ensure that all students with IDD have effective culturally and linguistically appropriate communication systems and technology that reduces the need to use behavior to communicate and maximize educational engagement.

- Assure development and ongoing use of school-wide and system-wide intervention models, including school-wide positive behavioral supports and using the principles of universal design for learning (UDL) in designing curricula, materials, instruction, and assessments to create maximum access to learning environments for students with diverse abilities and learning styles.
- Avoid harsh policies and procedures, such as “zero tolerance”, that lead to exclusion, injury, loss of education, or involvement with the criminal justice system by implementing school-wide positive behavior support that includes students with disabilities to prevent or eliminate such situations. Assure appropriate evaluations and IEPs, and avoid the criminalization of behaviors that are the manifestation of the student’s disabilities.
- Prohibit the use of mechanical or chemical restraint, isolation, or aversive. Emergency, time-limited, monitored restraint may be used only by trained personnel and only when the student’s behavior presents an imminent danger of serious physical harm to the student or others and less restrictive interventions are insufficient to mitigate the imminent danger of serious physical harm. Physical restraint which restricts airflow, including prone restraint, and mechanical restraint must be prohibited. Ensure that supports and strategies are planned and implemented to successfully reintegrate a student who has been restrained or secluded back into the school or classroom environment.
- Assure that students are not disciplined for the manifestation of their disabilities.
- Assure safe school transportation for all students with disabilities, provided by trained and monitored drivers with background checks, in order to avoid abuse and maltreatment of students. Schools must assure the sufficient allocation of transportation resources such that transportation is not used to justify early departures, late arrivals, or excessive travel times.

#### **School Choice**

- Charter schools and private schools that accept public funds through a voucher or voucher-like system must comply with IDEA, the Americans with Disabilities Act

(ADA), and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act (Section 504). Specifically, they must provide zero reject and free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, including nondiscriminatory evaluation, individualized appropriate education plan, access to the general curriculum (academic, extracurricular, and other school activities), procedural safeguards, and parent participation.

- Ensure that school choice efforts do not diminish the resources and effectiveness of public school systems in which they operate.

#### **Family and Student Participation**

- Ensure the meaningful participation of students, families, and their chosen advisors in the evaluation of students and the design and monitoring of the students' IEPs.
- Assure that parents with special needs, including those with disabilities or language or cultural differences, receive the information, supports, services, and full ADA/504 rights to effectively exercise their rights to partner in the education of their children.
- Expediently connect students and families with information, resources, and training that help them understand and exercise their rights under the IDEA, Section 504, the ADA, Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).
- Assure that school personnel provide timely explanations that are understandable and use functional descriptive language for special education and related services being proposed for the student.

#### **Lifelong Education, Transition, and Post-Secondary Education**

- 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 to ensure access to the general education curriculum and full integration in neighborhood schools as they move to kindergarten or first grade.
- Develop and implement transition plans based on student strengths, preferences, and interests to facilitate each student's successful movement from school to adult life,

including postsecondary and vocational education, competitive integrated employment, independent living, and community participation.

- Develop an individualized postsecondary and/or pre-employment program, including choices and creative career exploration through apprenticeships and internships, in coordination with IDEA and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).
- Ensure that all students receive meaningful evidence of their school achievements including diplomas.

### **System Capacity Development, Funding, Oversight, and Accountability**

- Assure that the training, preparation, compensation, supports, and accountability systems needed to build a cadre of effective professional teachers, other education personnel such as school principals, related services personnel, paraprofessionals, and other staff are evidence-based and effective to meet the child's specific needs.
- Assure a cadre of effective lay and legal advocates to assist families and individuals to exercise their rights.
- Increase active monitoring and enforcement through local, state, and federal agencies to ensure that the IDEA, ADA, Section 504, and state special education laws and mandates are met.
- Fulfill the federal commitment to fully fund the IDEA.
- Ensure that all students with disabilities, including those with the most significant cognitive disabilities, continue to be included in public school, district, and state level accountability systems. Ensure that states are not allowed to exempt more than 1% of students (that is, exempt only those students that the state determines have the most significant cognitive disabilities up to 1%) from their general accountability data.

2021 - Contact the Public Policy Office at (505) 883-4630, or email [arcpp@arcnm.org](mailto:arcpp@arcnm.org)