



# STRATENOTES



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## Responsible Inclusion: A New Vision

Inclusion is being operationalized in many schools across the nation today solely as the enrollment of students with disabilities in regular classrooms. In some cases, special education administrators, teachers, and services are being greatly curtailed; in others, "consultative services" are being provided to regular class teachers, and direct services to students are being eliminated. This is cause for concern since there is currently little evidence available to support these moves at the elementary level and no evidence to support them at the secondary level. To date, there is not a single empirical research study to our knowledge that supports enrollment of students with mild disabilities within regular classes with only consultative support (i.e., no one has shown that consultative support enables these students to succeed as independent learners in these environments), nor is there any study that shows that simple enrollment in these classes enables these students to succeed.

Thus, we would like to propose a new vision of inclusion, called "Responsible Inclusion," for students with disabilities. Within this vision, the goal of special education would be to enable each student to be fully included within the educational community of a school and eventually within the larger community, our society. That is, inclusion would be adopted as a goal for each individual student, and the provision of validated methods of instruction designed especially for this population would be adopted as the means to that goal.

Also within this vision, a successful inclusion program would result in the following outcomes whenever a student is enrolled in a regular class:

- The student is an integral member of the learning community and is not singled out for special treatment;
- The student truly achieves commensurate with average or above-

average students in the class (i.e., does not receive "gift" passing grades);

- The student is fully integrated socially within the social milieu of the classroom;
- The student is not dependent on others for his/her success (i.e., the student functions independently or interdependently as a member of the learning community);
- Instruction within the class is not affected in a negative way by the presence of the student;
- Students, parents, and teachers are satisfied with the outcomes of the learning situation.

We offer the following suggestions with regard to reaching the goal of inclusion for an individual student:

- The decision regarding a given student's placement in a regular class will be based on the student's current skill level, the requirements inherent in a given placement, and the capacity of the educator(s) in that setting (or in other settings) to provide the instruction needed by that student to realize the outcomes listed above;
- Each student will have an Individual Educational Plan which specifies how the student will meet the particular demands he/she will be facing in the regular class;
- Educators who serve the student will be trained in validated instructional methods that will enable the student to reach the outcomes specified above;
- These instructional methods will be used to empower the student to take an active part in the learning community of the regular class.

Thus, this new vision embraces the idea of inclusion as a goal for each student and rejects the notion of inclusion as simple enrollment in regular classes for all students with disabilities. It is based on KU-IRLD research and other research that shows that:

- Enrollment of students with learning disabilities within traditional regular classes (and the majority of students

within this population is currently enrolled in regular classes for a majority of the school day) is currently resulting in a high rate of failure and drop out among this population.

- As long as certain innovative instructional services are provided that have been specifically designed for students with learning disabilities, these students can be successful throughout the grades in regular classes and can earn well-deserved high school diplomas.
- These instructional services include intensive instruction in the strategies these students need to fulfill the complex demands of regular classes. This intensive instruction can be provided to them across the grades at the same time they are also enrolled in regular classes.
- The regular class setting tends not to be tolerant of the addition of this intensive type of instruction. When it is provided in the regular class setting, often only after intensive efforts on the part of many educators, teachers and other students in the classes may not be satisfied and/or the instruction may not be maintained. Also, in some cases when it is provided in this setting, none of the students with learning disabilities make gains; in other cases, only some of these students make gains.

Thus, based on this research, we offer this new vision of services for students with disabilities. Within this new vision, inclusion in regular education classrooms and society is seen as the ultimate goal that can be reached for students with learning disabilities through responsible planning, cooperation, and action on the part of educators. Now that instructional methods are available to enable students with disabilities to succeed in regular classes throughout the grades, denying students access to this instruction through wholesale enrollment of these students in classes where teachers cannot provide this instruction is irresponsible and unconscionable. We hope that members of the Network and other educators throughout the nation will stand together to support a new vision of responsible inclusion for students with disabilities. Your comments on this matter are solicited and will be greatly appreciated.

### **What else is new on inclusion?**

Enclosed within Stratenotes are two documents. In one, originally published in *News and Views*, a Florida ACLD publication, Dr. Larry Silver describes his fears about the "inclusion movement." The other document is a mission

statement disseminated by the International Institute for Advocacy for School Children (I'ASC) describing their purpose in ensuring that children and youth are protected from academic abuse. We send these documents to you as food for thought. If you want more information about the I'ASC, write to Dr. Nicholas Maddalena, 296 West 8th Avenue, Eugene, Oregon, 97401.

Another document that you might want to read is a report called "Winners All: A Call for Inclusive Schools" that was written by the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) Study Group on Special Education. This report is available through NASBE for \$10 (1012 Cameron Street, Alexandria, Virginia, 22314). (It's 44 pages long and too much to copy!) The authors of this report do not seem to be aware of anything that is working in special education. After reading the report, you might consider informing them about the programs that are working in your area.

### **The National Trainers' Conference**

We just want to remind you that we'll be celebrating the KU-IRLD's 15th Anniversary at the National Trainers' Conference (July 8-10) in Lawrence. Lots of activities are being planned for this event, and we're hoping that you'll be here to enjoy them with us. Dr. Robert Slavin will be our keynote speaker on July 8. Dr. Slavin, a professor at Johns Hopkins University, is well known for his work in the area of cooperative learning programs. He is the major developer of a New American School called "Roots and Wings."

We want to invite you to be a speaker, too. Many of you have designed great programs and materials that we would love to have you share with others. If you would like to present, you can apply for one of two options. You can give a one-hour presentation, or you can participate in The Poster Extravaganza. The Poster Extravaganza will be a session in which you can display and share anything about your training or about your SIM Program that you wish. You might have training materials, posters, pictures of your classroom, a videotape, student products, instructional displays, etc. that you wish to share. Please apply by April 15 on the form provided.

**Registration for the conference will be \$20 per day plus a charge for the 15th Anniversary dinner if you wish to attend. Watch your mail for the Registration Form.**