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AUTHOR Lipsky, Dorothy Kerzner; Gartner, Alan  
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ABSTRACT

This bulletin summarizes research on the benefits of inclusive education programs; provides data on the current status of special education; and considers studies of individual inclusion programs, state and district studies, and the effects of inclusion on students without disabilities. The research and evaluation data on inclusion indicate a strong trend toward improved student outcomes (academic, behavior, and social) for both special education and general education students. It is suggested that the drive for upgrading standards and the inclusion of all students in these reforms has created tension for educators. A point of congruence between the school effectiveness efforts and those promoting inclusion is that a new approach must become part of a restructured educational system. Districts conducting successful restructuring programs that include all students have identified the following key factors: visionary leadership; collaboration; refocused use of assessment; supports for staff and students; funding that is sufficient and "follows the student," and effective parent and family involvement. (Contains 57 references.) (SW)

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## THE EVALUATION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Dorothy Kerzner Lipsky and Alan Gartner

As inclusive education programs have grown across the country, both supporters and opponents have sought information concerning their effectiveness. The National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) noted in 1994 that, "Comprehensive program evaluations are limited" (*National study of inclusive education*, p. 27). Increasingly, however, states, school districts, and educational researchers are evaluating inclusive education programs, and, along with those concerned with educational policy, are asking critical questions as to the benefits of inclusion.

This *NCERI Bulletin* highlights and summarizes some of the research data describing these benefits. It does not focus upon consequences for particular groups of students with disabilities, particularly the low-incidence conditions, nor is it meant to be exhaustive. (For the views of opponents of inclusion, see Fuchs and Fuchs, 1994, and Kauffman, 1994.) This report does address the following: the current state of special education, studies of individual inclusion programs, statewide studies, reports on the effects upon nondisabled students, and district studies.

### The Current State of Special Education

The current state of special education is characterized by:

- High drop out rates, e.g., nationally, some one-quarter of the students who exited school in the 1990-91 school year dropped out. This in addition to the nearly one-fifth of school exiters for whom there are no data, a high proportion of whom are likely to have dropped out;
- Low graduation rates, e.g., only 43.9 percent of students with disabilities leave school with a regular diploma;
- Special education graduates go on to post-secondary education at less than half the rate of general education graduates;
- Persons with disabilities have the highest unemployment rate of any population subgroup. Two-thirds of persons with disabilities are not working;

- Limited community integration of adults with disabilities;
- Differential certification, categorization, and placement of racial and language minority students. (Lipsky & Gartner, 1989, 1991a & b, 1994, in press)

### Evaluation of Inclusion Programs

Given the limited time period in which inclusive education programs have been implemented, there have been few full-scale evaluations of outcomes. In a report for the President's Committee on Mental Retardation, Nisbet (1994) states, "Inclusion research published to date commonly takes the form of ethnographic studies, narratives, case studies, anecdotes, and surveys, although the range is rapidly expanding and new studies are published every month" (P. 152).

Based upon a comprehensive survey of the literature, a recent report stated:

While there is currently little quantitative data of statistical significance to support full inclusion, there are clear patterns among the research that indicate improved outcomes as a result of integrated placements. These improved outcomes are even more noticeable in the qualitative data that exists in human services research. (*Final report*, 1993, p. 5)

The findings from three meta-analyses concerning the most effective setting for the education of students with disabilities are summarized by Baker, Wang, and Walberg (1994).

These meta-analyses generate a common measure, called effect size...that compared the effects of inclusive versus non-inclusive educational practices for special-needs students. The effect sizes demonstrate a small-to-moderate beneficial effect of inclusive education on the academic and social outcomes of special-needs students...which means that special-needs students educated in regular classes do better academically and socially than comparable students in non-inclusive settings. (P. 34)

The research literature in three areas of inclusion (e.g., students with mild or high incidence impairments, students with moderate and severe impairments, and preschool students) are summarized below:

1. Integration/Inclusion of students with mild impairments or students in high incidence categories of impairment in general education settings

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- When comparing student achievement in integrated versus resource programs, only slight measurable differences were discerned. However, the integrated model results were more favorable and cost effective (Affleck, Madge, Adams, & Lowenbraun, 1988).

- While students with mild disabilities included full time in a regular class progressed more slowly than their peers, the gap was not widening as rapidly as that between students in pullout programs and their typical peers (Deno, *et al.*, 1990).

- Students with disabilities were as likely to engage in positive social interactions with peers as were students who did not have disabilities (Ray, 1985).

- A full-time approach exceeds the resource room approach for attaining desirable classroom processes, student attitudes, and student basic skills (Wang & Birch, 1984). This was confirmed by statistical tendencies that suggested full-time mainstream placement is more beneficial for students with moderate disabilities (Wang, Peverly, & Randolph, 1984).

## 2. Integration/Inclusion of students with moderate and severe impairments in general education settings

- There was no evidence of harmful effects on students who did not have disabilities, and their attitudes, values, and beliefs, as well as those of others in the setting, were favorably affected (York, Vandercook, MacDonald, Heise-Neff, & Caughey, 1992; Haring, Breen, Pitts-Conway, Gaylord-Ross, & Gaylord-Ross, 1987; Biklen, Corrigan, & Quick, 1989; Murray-Seegert, 1989).

- Findings of improved outcomes were confirmed by parents who reported their perceptions regarding the effect of general education classroom placement of students with severe disabilities on their children who did not have disabilities (Giangreco, Edelman, Cloniger, & Dennis, 1992).

## 3. Integration/Inclusion of preschool students in integrated settings

- Integration/Inclusion results in positive gains in attitude toward peers with disabilities, and these gains are maintained over a long period of time (Esposito & Reed, 1986).

- The critical component in integration/inclusion is not the simple presence in the class of children who do not have disabilities, but the way in which interactions among children are systematically guided and encouraged (Schnorr, 1990).

- Preschoolers with severe mental impairment exhibit lower rates of inappropriate play in integrated settings in comparison to their behavior in segregated settings (Guralnick, 1981).

- Placement of students who do not have disabilities in integrated special education classes where the majority of peers had disabilities did not appear to interfere with normal development (Odom, Deklyen, & Jenkins, 1984).

- Both parents and teachers of children who were developing in typical fashion perceived important benefits accruing to the children as a result of the involvement in integrated placements (Peck, Carlson, & Helmstetter, 1992).

Nisbet (1994) points out that, "[o]ver the past 25 years, there has been an extensive body of research on preschool integration" (P. 153). Citing recent summaries of this research by Buysse and Bailey (1993) and Peck *et al.* (in

press), Nisbet says the following conclusions can be drawn:

- First, it is clear that integration has positive effects on the social competence and interactions of preschoolers with disabilities. Findings include more time playing with peers, more positive interactions with peers, and more verbalizations with peers.

- Second, integration opportunities also appear to have positive effects on other behavioral outcomes, such as more sophisticated play with toys.

- Third, integrated and segregated settings seem to be equal in terms of measured developmental progress on standardized tests; thus, any argument that segregated settings might provide more specialized and more effective interventions are not valid.

- Fourth, no negative outcomes have been reported for normally developing children. (P. 153)

## Statewide and Other Research Studies

Currently, a number of statewide studies are underway, including in Massachusetts (Rossman & Anthony, 1992), Michigan (Christmas, 1992), Oregon (Arrick *et al.*, ND), Utah (McDonnell, McDonnell, Hardman, and McCune, 1991), and Vermont (Hasazi, Furney, and Johnstone, 1994).

A multi-year study of the implementation of inclusion in Vermont (*Vermont's Act 230*, 1993), reports:

- Grades for students served in general education settings were not significantly different than their grades had been when in special education classes;

- General education teachers, special educators, parents, and the students themselves judged special education students to have comparable performance in the general education class settings in all of the categories measured: behavior, social interaction, classroom performance, and overall success. For example, 92% of the general education teachers, 95% of the special educators, 91% of the parents, and 94% of the students responded affirmatively to the question, "Overall, do you feel the student was successful in school?"

Other research reports, including Rossman and Salzman (1993), present the following findings:

- Students with learning disabilities made academic gains as reflected in scores on criterion-referenced tests and report cards (Chase & Pope, 1993);

- Using the Metropolitan Achievement Test to make comparisons between students with learning disabilities in two demographically similar schools, Jenkins *et al.* (1992) found that the students in the school serving these students in the regular classroom had significantly higher overall average gains than did those students served in the control school using a pullout resource room model;

- Students with significant disabilities had greater success in achieving IEP goals than did matched students in traditional programs (Ferguson, 1992);

- Benefits to students with disabilities occurred without curtailing the educational program available to nondisabled students (Co-teaching, 1991);

- Gains occurred in student self-esteem (Burello & Wright, 1993), acceptance by classmates (Marwell, 1990; Christmas, 1992), and social skills (McDonnell, McDonnell, Hardman, & McCune, 1991);

- Inclusive programs provide positive experiences and

improved attitudes upon the part of the children (Giangreco, 1992; Phillips *et al.*, 1990; Rainforth, 1992; Stainback *et al.*, 1992; York, *et al.*, 1992);

- Several studies report more behavioral progress, increased social competence, and few academic increases (Cole & Meyer, 1990; Saint-Laurent & Lessard, 1991);

- Supports from parents of students with disabilities was found to be positive (Chase & Pope, 1993; Co-teaching, 1991; Marwell, 1990);

- Supports from students, both general and special education, was generally positive (Chase & Pope, 1993; Co-teaching, 1991), although not uniform (Rossman & Anthony, 1992); and

- Among school staff, support ranged from very enthusiastic (Burello & Wright, 1993; Co-teaching, 1991) to more moderate support (Rossman & Anthony, 1992; Chase & Pope, 1993; Christmas, 1992; McDonnell, McDonnell, Hardman, & McCune, 1991).

#### Effects Upon Non-Disabled Students

Staub and Peck (1994) addressed outcomes for nondisabled students in inclusive classes. They define inclusion as the full-time placement of children with mild, moderate, or severe disabilities in regular classrooms. They note that "[t]his definition explicitly assumes that regular class placement must be considered as a relevant option for *all* children, regardless of the severity of their disabilities" (Emphasis in the original, P. 36). In considering outcomes for nondisabled students, they address what are identified as three common fears:

1. *Will inclusion reduce the academic progress of nondisabled children?* They report on the few studies which have used quasi-experimental designs to compare the progress of nondisabled students in inclusive classrooms to that of matched children enrolled in classrooms that do not include children with disabilities. "These studies have consistently found no deceleration of academic progress for nondisabled children in inclusive classrooms" (P. 36). They report that, "Surveys conducted with parents and teachers who have been directly involved in inclusive settings generally show that both parties have positive views about inclusive programs and do not report any harm to the developmental progress of nondisabled children" (P. 36).

2. *Will nondisabled children lose teacher time and attention?* Reporting on the one study which has investigated this topic in depth, they summarize its findings as follows: "the presence of students with severe disabilities had no effect on levels of allocated or engaged time. Further, time lost to interruptions of instruction was not significantly different in inclusive and noninclusive classrooms" (P. 36). They state: "These findings are supported by survey responses from teachers and parents who have direct experience with inclusive classrooms" (P.37). Reporting on high school students who had been involved in inclusive classrooms in rural, suburban, and urban areas of Washington, they state: "These students did not believe that their participation in inclusive classrooms had caused them to miss out on other valuable educational experiences" (P. 37).

3. *Will nondisabled students learn undesirable behaviors from students with disabilities?* Citing the limited research on this topic, they report that the evidence indicates that

nondisabled students do not acquire undesirable or maladaptive behavior from peers with disabilities.

In reporting the potential benefits of inclusion for nondisabled students, they identify five positive themes from the available research:

1. Reduced fear of human differences accompanied by increased comfort and awareness;
2. Growth in social cognition;
3. Improvements in self-concept;
4. Development of personal principles; and
5. Warm and caring friendships. (Pp. 37,ff.)

A special issue of *The Journal of The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps* addresses the effects of the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms and schools upon their peers who do not have disabilities and the general education community. Authors were invited to use a variety of research methodologies - including quantitative, qualitative, and critical theory approaches (Meyer, 1994, 251).

- Helmstetter, Peck, and Giangreco (1994) analyzed a statewide survey of high school students and reported that more positive outcomes were associated with more contact and more substantive interaction (e.g., increased responsiveness to the needs of others, valuing relationships with people with disabilities, personal development, increased tolerance of other people, development of personal values, increased appreciation of human diversity, and positive changes in social status with peers):

- Kishi and Meyer (1994) reported on a six-year follow-up of an elementary school program of social interaction with students with severe disabilities. They found significantly more positive attitudes, higher levels of current reported social contact, and more support for full community participation as a function of the earlier social contact; and

- Hunt *et al.* (1994) studied the achievement of students in cooperative learning groups. They reported that the students with severe disabilities both independently demonstrated targeted basic skills and generalized them. Members of the group without disabilities performed as well on targeted academic objectives as members of a control group within the classroom that did not include a child with severe disabilities.

#### District Studies

Increasingly, a number of school districts with inclusive education programs are conducting evaluation studies. Reported here are details from a few of these studies, excerpted from NCERI's *National study of inclusive education* (In press). The districts' self-reported information focus on issues of implementation and student outcomes.

- California:

At the Fort Bragg Unified School District (CA) inclusive education takes place at two elementary schools, the middle school, and the high school. They report:

Multiple examples of positive changes in student behavior are evident across the grade levels. Academic changes have been verified by standardized test scores, authentic assessment, and plain old observation. Social changes are evident as well, importantly within the general education population, as well as the inclusion students and their families.

Simply put, regular education students have become humanized, and special education students have the opportunity to become known as individuals with their own personalities.

At the Napa Valley Unified School District (CA) elementary and middle schools are implementing inclusive education programs. They report:

Significant changes, both socially and educationally, have been observed and documented for the fully included students. Changes ranging from increased independence and self-esteem to elevated reading levels have been noted. Many of these outcomes are evaluated through teacher/parent/student observations and interviews as well as standardized testing and authentic assessment. Changes in the attitudes and self-esteem have been noted in the students without noticeable disabilities. The Full Inclusion Program was a major reason Carneros Elementary School was named a California Distinguished School in 1993.

• Florida

At the Brevard County School District (FL) all of the students are served in the neighborhood schools. They report:

We have seen a lot of caring and acceptance from the regular education students toward our more challenged students. They are very protective and understanding of them. The special needs students are growing tremendously. There are EMH students that are excited by learning. The parents of our Downs students and autistic students report a tremendous growth in vocabulary and communication. Students that came from a self-contained setting and exhibited a lot of anxiety about the regular classroom appear to be relaxed and comfortable with their new placement.

• Georgia

In the Gwinnett County Public Schools inclusion programs operate at four elementary schools and a middle school. They report:

Student outcomes for students with disabilities have been outstanding. All students are exceeding IEP objectives over progress in self-contained classes; parents report increased generalization of learning at home; school staff consistently report positive changes in students once they are included; students with disabilities resist going back to their self-contained classmates and participating with them in "handicapped only" activities. We have noted that students learn well when taught by regular education staff, special education staff, and peers.

• Indiana

In the Lawrenceburg Community Schools, where all students are served in the elementary school, they report:

Changes in students have been two-fold. For non-handicapped students, they have come to be more aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of their handicapped peers in ways that are less prejudicial and hateful. For handicapped youngsters, the main change is connected to their increased level of expectations as to both academics and behavior. We evaluated these outcomes through a climate audit study conducted by an independent group from Indiana University.

• Maryland

The Howard County Public Schools is exploring ways to evaluate outcomes for these students other than the standard classroom grades and achievement toward IEP objectives. They report:

First, we have undertaken a change in the way IEP goals and objectives are written. All special educators have been trained in this new approach, which is more child-centered, measurable and based on demonstrated need, rather than curricular orientated. This coupled with portfolio assessment should help establish baseline data from which to measure outcomes. In addition, there will be a move to explore data collection on actual classroom behaviors...

This county also is part of a pilot program sponsored by the State of Maryland to assess students who are not part of the statewide assessment program already in place. This form of assessment will involve data collection and behaviors demonstration through video.

The Anne Arundel County Public Schools serve some 68,000 students with 113 schools. As part of the state Systems Change Project, inclusion initiatives take place in several of the district's feeder systems. Cooperative teaching is used extensively. They report:

A study comparing the academic performance of 9th grade students co-taught in general education classrooms with similar classrooms without co-teaching compared performance on the state's ninth grade minimum competency tests and classroom grades. [Students in the co-taught classes and the comparison classes had similar academic profiles and backgrounds.] Results found that the co-taught classes, with a general educator and special educator working collaboratively with a heterogeneous group of special and general education students can produce significantly better results than general education classrooms in achieving academic requirements for high school graduation. In particular, a significantly greater percent of ninth grade students from co-taught classes passed statewide minimum competency tests in three different content areas than students from content classes which did not include special education students and were not co-taught by a general educator and a special educator. The findings suggest that the combined effect of two teachers' capabilities, one strong in content and curriculum knowledge, the other in adaptive teaching strategies and classroom modifications, can in fact enable the general classroom to successfully address the learning needs of a diverse group of students, including mainstream special education students. Moreover, the results suggest that all students within a co-taught class benefit from this service delivery model and that school improvement plans should consider such collaborative models in developing educator reform initiatives for all students.

• Michigan

The Hillsdale Community Schools educate almost all of the district's students, K-8, in age-appropriate regular education classrooms with support from Chapter 1, local Gifted and Talented, and Special Education staff. They report:

Parental involvement has been both positive and supportive. Parents of handicapped students have welcomed the opportunity to see their children educated with their age mates in non-exclusive settings. Parents of nonhandicapped were cautious until they saw achievement results that were not depressed and a social milieu that was friendly and relaxed. Students have been our biggest surprise. Conventional wisdom held that children were cruel to one another and the handicapped would face ridicule and scorn. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our experience has been:

that the children have been kind, supportive and protective of their handicapped classmates. Often the adults who have been involved have learned kindness and tolerance from observing the children in their care. Of all the surprises we have found with this project, none has been as dramatic as this one.

- Texas

The Mansfield Independent School District is one of three districts that received in 1992 a grant from the state's Council for Developmental Disabilities to implement inclusive education.

In 1994, the state expanded the program evaluation to include review of student records, parent surveys, general and special education teacher and principal surveys, and classroom observations. Conducted by an outside evaluation consultant (Hess, 1994), the study reported:

At all grade levels, 94 percent of the students with disabilities were educated on their home campus; of these 96 percent were on general education classroom rosters; and 54 percent of students with disabilities receive 100 percent of their instruction in general education classes. On a 5-point scale, 76 percent of the general education teachers responded 4.0 or above that students enrolled in subject area classes are engaged in IEP-specified learning activities with classroom adaptations and supports. In terms of assistance to teachers, at 100 percent of the campuses training was provided in tolerance and respect for differences; at 100 percent of the campuses principals reported that staff development opportunities concerning inclusion were provided to all teaching personnel. Districtwide, 67 percent of the teachers reported that they used peer tutors a minimum of two times a week; 76 percent of the teachers reported that they frequently used peer tutors and incorporated student cooperative learning activities in their classroom; 94 percent reported no negative impact on the academic grades of students without disabilities. In terms of parental attitudes, 92 percent of the parents of general education students reported that they felt their child benefitted from more contact with students with disabilities.

#### Conclusion

The research and evaluation data on inclusion indicate a strong trend toward improved student outcomes (academically, behaviorally, and socially) for both special education and general education students. A recent report on integrated placements for general and special education students notes:

When one contrasts such indications with the fact that there appears to be little, if any, evidence in research to support superior student outcomes as a result of placement in segregated settings, one must seriously question the efficacy of spending ever-increasing sums of money to maintain dual systems (*Final report*, 1993, pp. 5.f).

The drive for upgrading standards and the inclusion of all students in these reforms has created tension for educators. Educational reform efforts, such as those developed by James Comer, Henry Levin, Ted Sizer, and Robert Slavin, indicate, as Edmonds put it more than a decade ago, the possibility of raising the "floor" and thus narrowing the gap for everyone (Edmonds, 1979). A point of congruence between the school effectiveness efforts and those promoting inclusion is that a

new approach must become part of a restructured educational system.

Districts conducting successful restructuring programs that include all students have identified the following key factors:

- visionary leadership;
- collaboration;
- refocused use of assessment;
- supports for staff and students;
- funding, that both is sufficient and "follows the student"; and
- effective parent and family involvement (*National study of inclusive education*, 1994).

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