

## **Education of Students with Disabilities**

### **Background:**

Prior to the 1974 passage of PL 94-142 (the law which is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education and Improvement Act or IDEIA), public schools were closed to children with disabilities. Schools were not required to educate or even enroll children with developmental or other disabilities.

Today, the federal special education law, IDEIA, promises over 6 million American children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education. Special education is not a placement, but a service. Children with disabilities, from age birth to age 21, are now guaranteed specially designed instruction and related services through the development and implementation of an Individualized Education Program (IEPs). As a result, no child can be legally denied a free, appropriate, public education based upon his or her disabilities. Students with disabilities are achieving greater independence as they develop their skills in academic and vocational areas and participate in extra-curricular activities.

Despite real progress made since 1974, significant work remains to be done to ensure that the promise to all students with disabilities is kept. Too many children with disabilities continue to be overlooked in the delivery of basic educational services. Too frequently, these children face lower expectations and unnecessary exclusion from the "regular" classroom. Schools must do more to ensure that students with disabilities have real access to the general curriculum, needed modifications and supports, and access to assistive technology. Schools must concentrate on opening the doors to meaningful inclusion in the school community for students with disabilities, including ensuring access to extracurricular activities. Efforts to help students transition from school to work and the community living must continue; too many youth with developmental disabilities are still leaving school unprepared for adult life.

Because access to an appropriate, high quality education is crucial to the success of all children, including individuals with disabilities, the Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities is committed to working with community partners to ensure continued progress in public schools and early childhood programs.

### **Council Position:**

The Oregon Council on Developmental Disabilities believes:

- Schools must value and educate all children
- All children can learn
- Access to public education is a civil right
- Compliance with special education law is not a goal. It is a requirement for every school in Oregon and should be enforced.
- Schools must support students with disabilities to attend their neighborhood schools with same aged peers without disabilities.
- Early childhood education is important to the success of children with disabilities. Oregon must support comprehensive Early Intervention/Early Childhood Special Education programs.
- Ongoing staff training for all school personnel, including regular educators, is essential to the success of children with disabilities in public schools
- Children with disabilities are more successful in school when their parents are actively involved in their education and when parents and educators work in partnership
- Technology is a vital tool for individuals with disabilities. Public schools must improve access to assistive technology for students with disabilities
- Educators, families and students with disabilities must be provided with opportunities to continuously expand their skills, knowledge and understanding of self-determination.
- Planning for transition from school to work and community living must begin early and must result in the student leaving school prepared for adult life.

**Future Activities:**

- The Council will support efforts to improve Oregon's investment in public education, including special education, EI/ECSE, and other educational programs and services that are important to children and youth with disabilities.
- The Council will advocate for increased federal funding for special education and will work with local schools to advocate for adequate funding at the state level.
- The Council, in collaboration with other organizations, will promote the inclusion of children and youth with disabilities in all education reform activities.
- The Council will work with others to monitor the implementation of IDEIA '04 services, including effective transition planning for students ages 16 to 21.
- The Council will promote quality, family centered, multi-disciplinary and inclusive EI/ECSE programs for all eligible children with disabilities, birth to 5.
- The Council will provide leadership that promotes cultural responsiveness in all services to children / youth receiving special education supports and services.
- The Council will work with other organizations to increase opportunities for families and individuals to learn about advocacy skills, special education law, rights, services, best practices, and self-determination.
- The Council will promote the use of best practices, particularly in the transition between school levels (EI to kindergarten, elementary to middle school, middle school to high school, high school to adulthood).

- The Council will support new efforts to increase achievement accountability in special education under No Child Left Behind, while urging reforms to recognize the flexibility needed to reflect the diversity of student ability.

**See other related Education Position Statements:**

- Early Intervention and Early Childhood Special Education
- Transition from High School
- Behavioral Support and School Discipline
- Family Participation
- Accountability and Testing
- Personnel Preparation