

Appendix D

Synthesis of Reports from Nationally Preeminent Special Education Researchers and Teacher Trainers¹⁹

Celebrating IDEA's 20th Anniversary

In 1995, Congress and the nation celebrate the 20th anniversary of one of the most significant disability rights laws ever enacted: the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). It is in every respect proper for Congress and the entire nation to celebrate that anniversary. Certainly no other disability-rights law has had such a powerful and positive impact on children and youth with disabilities, on their families, on educators, and on the nation itself.

At the same time, it is also entirely proper for Congress and the nation to recognize that the promises that Congress made in IDEA and the potential that IDEA can evoke in our country's students, families, educators, and communities are still not yet fulfilled. IDEA is like any one who comes out of adolescence and enters young adulthood: some promises have been kept and others await fulfillment. The potential

¹⁹ This synthesis is based on 27 scholarly research papers commissioned by the National Council on Disability, in collaboration with the Beach Center on Families and Disability at the University of Kansas, as part of its work to provide state-of-the-art information from national experts in the area of special education research and personnel preparation regarding the reauthorization of IDEA. The report was prepared by H. Rutherford Turnbull, III, and Ann P. Turnbull based on their own work and the work of the 27 scholars. (Please refer to Appendix E for a listing of these individuals.) It is anticipated that the research papers will be published in the near future.

for their fulfillment is visible, but is in some ways still unimaginable. So much is in place, and so much more can be added. So it is with IDEA: The Act has encouraged and helped students, their families, and the nation's schools to make phenomenal gains, but the results are by no means all that could and should have been obtained.

On the occasion of IDEA's 20th anniversary, it is important to build on the framework and the successes that IDEA has engendered, and to do so on the basis of the best available data about IDEA's accomplishments and shortcomings. In building upon this framework, guided by reliable data, IDEA itself will be improved, and State and local educational agencies will be equipped to implement IDEA even more effectively. It is especially appropriate for Congress to build on the framework and successes in light of the strong grassroots efforts to reform the nation's schools — a movement that Congress itself acknowledged and assisted by P.L. 103-227, the Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

Six Basic Principles Supporting the Implementation of IDEA

IDEA is based on six basic principles which provide a framework within which States may develop effective special education programs. The current status of the implementation of these principles is described below.

- IDEA'S zero-reject principle has opened schoolhouse doors to all students with disabilities; yet schools still try to expel or suspend students who present behavioral or other special challenges.

rely on and apply its principles. Instead, as Congress reauthorizes IDEA, it should focus on the last of IDEA'S stated purposes: "to assess and assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate children with disabilities" (20 U.S.C. Sec. 1400(c)). The disturbing findings Congress discovered in 1975 are still reality in far too many school districts in 1995. While it is true that the extent and types of education discrimination have been remarkably curtailed, education discrimination still exists and the equal protection guarantee has not been fully realized. The islands of excellence in special education do not yet constitute a mainland, and general compliance is short of the goal of universal compliance. The issue for 1995, then, is the same issue that Congress identified in 1975: to assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities.

In 1995, on IDEA'S 20th anniversary and as school reform efforts gather speed and power, Congress should assure the effectiveness of efforts to educate students with disabilities in two basic and necessary ways:

- First, Congress should reaffirm IDEA's basic premises and principles, declaring in no uncertain terms that IDEA is a necessary and useful civil rights law that, through the framework of its six basic principles, implements the Federal equal protection guarantee and the States' own constitutional assurances of universal education for all of their children.
- Second, Congress should fine tune IDEA itself in a limited number of ways and significantly strengthen Federal, State, and local special education capacities, thereby assuring more effective special education.

Assessing the Effectiveness of Special Education

Congress' reaffirmation of IDEA's basic principles and framework and Congress' capacity-building enhancements to IDEA and its administration should build on the most recent and most reliable data. The National Council on Disability (NCD) has reviewed those data in light of seven questions:

- What are the goals of special education?
- How well have these goals been achieved?
- What are the most promising practices for achieving these goals?
- What are the most significant barriers to achieving these goals?
- What should Congress do to further ensure the effectiveness of efforts to educate all children with disabilities?
- What should Federal agencies, especially the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS), do to ensure that Federal, State, and local education agencies are most effective in educating all children with disabilities?
- What should State governments and State and local education agencies do?

The National Council on Disability and the Beach Center on Families and Disability posed these questions to 27 nationally preeminent scholars in special education and personnel preparation, advising them to rely on the most recent reliable data in providing responses, to back up their reports with annotated abstracts of key data-based literature, and to profile programs that exemplify IDEA's proper implementation across all areas of disability. The following represents, in general, what we have concluded after reviewing the data:

- No matter how effective IDEA has been, there are still significant shortcomings in its implementation. Congress, OSERS, and State and local education agencies should do still more to ensure that every student with a disability has an individualized program of free, appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.

As Congress takes up IDEA on the Act's 20th anniversary, it should again rise to the challenge that it met so well in 1975 and many times thereafter:

- Reaffirm the basic civil rights of all students with disabilities to effective, equal educational opportunities; reauthorize the Federal framework that has benefitted these students so greatly; and encourage further activities to assure their effective education.

Restating the Purposes and Goals of Special Education

Over the course of the last 20 years and as recently as 1990 and 1994, Congress has stated and restated the nation's policies regarding citizens with disabilities.

Restating these policies now, as Congress considers the reauthorization of IDEA, would seem appropriate. The overall purposes of IDEA are:

- To ensure equal protection under the law, particularly equal educational opportunity. Such protection is afforded not only in IDEA, but in the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act Amendments of 1975;
- To assist individuals with disabilities to enjoy lives characterized by equal opportunities, full participation and integration into local communities and society as a whole, independence, self-determination, economic self-sufficiency, and contribution to America. These are also the purposes of ADA and the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act.

To these ends, IDEA has helped State and local education agencies to educate all students with disabilities, no matter what the nature or severity of their disabilities. It

network should enable students to learn, work, live, have social networks, and participate in their communities.

- Prepare all professionals to deliver free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment: All professionals, particularly general and special educators, should have the attitudes and skills that enable them to be as effective as possible in providing a free appropriate public education to all students in the least restrictive environment.
- Carry out model demonstration programs and conduct research to implement IDEA: Special and general educators, researchers, teacher trainers, other professionals, and families —acting together— should carry out model demonstration programs, provide technical assistance, and conduct research to improve the implementation of IDEA'S six principles.
- Ensure school restructuring and effective governance: Students, families, educators and other professionals, as well as community members should reform schools and school governance to advance all of special education's goals. School reform should be sensitive to and accommodate cultural and ethnic diversity in students, their families, and communities.
- Assure safe schools: All schools should be safe for all who use them, and to this end educators and administrators should focus on reducing violence in schools and communities.
- Increase and target Federal, State, and local resources: Federal, State, and local governing bodies should increase their appropriations for special education and permit some funding streams to be used more creatively and flexibly while simultaneously targeting other funding streams to solve particular problems.

Progress to Date in Achieving the Purposes and Goals of Special Education

How successful has special education been in achieving these goals? The answer both heartening and challenging. It is heartening that there are many promising approaches to achieving these goals. Indeed, identifying and applying state-of-the-art practices, supported in large part through Federal resources, has almost always resulted in the achievement of these goals. It is challenging that state-of-the-art exist only in

some school districts. There are islands of effectiveness. However, far too many school districts do **not** or cannot apply state-of-the-art or best practices. These districts constitute the current mainland of special education.

Promising Practices for Effective Special Education

What are the promising practices, the standards by which effective special education should be judged and the means by which all school districts can deliver effective special education? Promising practices can be found systemwide within a State, districtwide within a local education agency, and personally, for an individual student.

Systemwide Promising Practices

At the State agency level it is especially important to have the following:

Professional in-service training through a comprehensive system of personnel development;

Model demonstration programs and technical assistance;

Strong parent participation in designing, planning, implementing, and evaluating State and local agency plans, relying on a strengthened system of Parent Training and Information Centers;

The participation of special education in all school restructuring activities; and

Effective monitoring of and technical assistance to local educational agencies.

Districtwide Promising Practices

At the local school district level, it is important to have the following:

- A zero-reject capacity, including —

- early screening, identification, and intervention at all ages,
 - locally adapted services and plans, and
 - interagency collaboration and coordination of services, systems, and procedures;
- A nondiscriminatory evaluation capacity, including alternative, nonbiased educational evaluations, especially for minority students;
- An appropriate education capacity, including —
 - student-focused —not system-focused— individualized education and services that lead to students' mastery of learning skills and strategies,
 - coherent, easy to use, intensive, and comprehensive services based on validated procedures and methodologies,
 - a system of comprehensive personnel development that assures that all school personnel will develop the skills necessary to deliver a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment, and
 - adoption and implementation of "safe schools" plans; and
- A least restrictive environment capacity, including
 - adaptations of general and special education curricula, especially to accommodate students in the least restrictive environment and to accept, in that environment and throughout the district, students who have challenging behaviors,
 - a full array of least restrictive placement options, with continuous dialogue among special and general educators, school administrators, and families and students about how to secure the least restrictive education for all students,
 - accessibility and other modifications in the schools' physical environments, and
 - flexibility in programs and staffing arrangements, with planned times and places for collaboration among educators and families.

Promising Practices with Students and Families

In order to serve students and families in an appropriate manner, it is necessary for school districts to provide the following:

- A zero-reject capacity, including
 - early intervention to address present special education needs and to prevent additional needs from developing, and
 - adoption and implementation of a "safe schools" plan;
- A nondiscriminatory evaluation capacity, including nonbiased evaluations of students' strengths and needs, especially if the students are from minority populations or present challenging behaviors;
- An appropriate education capacity, including
 - developmentally appropriate and professionally validated practices,
 - appropriate, functional curricula, including instruction for all postschool activities described in IDEA'S transition provisions,
 - instruction in self-determination and self advocacy,
 - culturally responsive instructional methodologies and curricula,
 - appropriate extra-curricular activities,
 - community-based work instruction and work opportunities, including supported employment,
 - education that teaches not only postschool vocational skills but also other independent living skills,
 - flexibility in students' schedules so they can take advantage of integrated learning and work opportunities,
 - use of positive and natural consequences as feedback for appropriate behavior;
- A least restrictive environment capacity, including
 - education of the student in the most typical settings —neighborhood schools— so that all school environments are integrated by the presence of students with and without disabilities,
 - age-appropriate and culturally appropriate teaching practices, and
- A parent-student participation and collaboration capacity, including
 - family-centered services and family involvement, and
 - professional-family collaboration and shared decision making.

The Application of Promising Practices Across the Six Principles of IDEA

However much progress has been made in implementing IDEA and its six principles, it is clear that improved implementation is necessary and possible. Through applying the promising practices listed above, the implementation of the six principles underlying IDEA would improve in the following manner:

- **Zero Reject:** Instead of excluding students from school, a variety of successful intervention techniques would be available to support the inclusion of all students in schools, the result being a zero tolerance for excluding any students, whatever the reason.
- **Nondiscriminatory Evaluation:** Instead of classifying students on the basis of their ethnicity, race, color, national origins or the schools' existing administrative structures, students would be classified according to an accurate assessment of their strengths and needs across the curricular and functional requirements involved in their education.
- **Appropriate Education:** Applying the promising practices listed above would result in a system of comprehensive and effective services and interventions, effective multidisciplinary and interagency collaboration, and a seamless network of beneficial services.
- **Least Restrictive Environment:** Instead of current practice, which in many places encourages the segregation of students with disabilities, application of already-proven, promising practices would allow each student to receive his/her education in the least restrictive setting, supported by an individualized and appropriate array of supplementary aids and services that ensure that the student is physically, academically, and socially integrated into general education.
- **Parent and Student Participation and Shared Decision Making:** With the application of current promising practices, parents, students, and educators would be able to engage in effective collaboration in designing and delivering a free appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment.
- **Procedural Due Process and Federal and State Monitoring:** The application of the promising practices listed above would greatly reduce the number and frequency of due process complaints and shift the emphasis of Federal and State monitoring and enforcement efforts from tracking "paper compliance" to quality enhancement.

Continuing Barriers to the Implementation of Promising Practices

Implementing the promising practices developed over the last 20 years of experience with IDEA would greatly enhance the quality of education for students with and without disabilities. Still, many barriers continue to impede the implementation of these practices in State and local education agencies. These barriers are as follows:

Zero Reject Barriers

- Schools are reactive instead of proactive in responding to students' special needs. In particular, they too often exclude students instead of working with them overcome their challenging behaviors.
- Some schools still do not make the environmental modifications that would increase access, reduce the challenging behaviors of some students, and result in more effective special education.
- Too often the absence of services and support systems for adults with disabilities restricts the development of effective transition programs for secondary-aged students.

Nondiscriminatory Evaluation Barriers

- All too often schools rely on testing that targets the students' needs instead of their strengths or testing that simply is inadequate to identify strengths and needs in minority students, thereby causing misclassification, erroneous educational placement, and inappropriate interventions.
- Similarly, schools pay insufficient attention to the cultural dimensions of their students' lives, and teachers are often not prepared to respond to the cultural diversity of their students.
- For several groups of students, nondiscriminatory evaluation procedures are themselves inadequate.
- Placement is still based on the categorical label assigned to students, not on their particular strengths or needs.

Appropriate Education Barriers

Schools still use inappropriate curricula.

The talents of many teachers and related service providers are misused.

Service and support systems are unavailable or ineffective.

Services, even within schools, are poorly coordinated.

Schools are generally not creative in identifying appropriate interventions or supportive services that might be employed when students are having difficulty in less restrictive placements.

Professionals do not know enough about other services available in their communities, particularly those services that could make students' education and transition more appropriate and beneficial.

Schools turn too often to "educational faddism" and are driven too frequently by political, rather than sound pedagogical, motives.

School systems often lack instructional leadership by highly competent, well-trained administrators, master teachers, and support personnel.

Students continue to be disempowered by teacher-directed, deficit-based teaching methodologies.

Teachers need a great deal more preservice and in-service training.

Curricula often rely too much on specific —and outmoded— models for educating certain categories of students.

Teachers may not know how to work with parents or with each other in order to combine their strengths and resources.

Competent teachers are in short supply, especially for students with specific types of disabilities.

General educators often do not feel responsible for educating students with disabilities.

Least Restrictive Environment Barriers

Schools still operate improperly segregated programs and inappropriately place too many students in these programs.

Schools still isolate special education students from contact with people and events in their communities.

State and local funding patterns create disincentives to placing students in less restrictive programs.

State and local agencies still have organizational and administrative structures that perpetuate separate systems of special and general education.

Schools still use less intensive special education services for students who need more specialized and intensive teaching.

Political and attitudinal factors may lead to a lack of community support for schools' efforts to integrate students with disabilities.

Schools may place students into less restrictive placements without the physical, academic, or social supports necessary to ensure that they will experience success in these placements.

School districts may have limited less restrictive placement options due to their historic use of more restrictive options.

Parent Participation and Procedural Due Process Barriers

Schools often lack sufficient accountability to their students and parents.

Schools still suffer from limited parental involvement.

Parent Training and Information Centers still do not reach as many parents as they might, especially parents of traditionally underserved or minority students.

Some parents are highly resistant to adaptive changes in programs such as less restrictive placement, the use of positive behavioral supports as the intervention of choice for challenging behaviors, or transition initiatives.

Funding Barriers

Special education is often underfunded at the Federal, State, and local level.

- Some funding streams are too restrictive because they either prevent students from receiving special education who could benefit from it or they prevent districts from using the funds more effectively.

Administrative Barriers

- School districts may have a long history of reliance on categorical programs requiring students to fit the service system rather than the service system to fit the student.
- Placements may be determined on students' categorical labels rather than on their strengths and needs.
- Separate systems of special and regular education administration often discourage interdisciplinary and interagency collaboration.

Ideological and Attitudinal Barriers

- Prejudicial attitudes regarding students with disabilities may exist among general and special educators, among parents, and among members of the general community.
- Ardor for specific programs or teaching methods can vitiate individualized and effective instruction.

Federal, State, and Local Policy Barriers

- Outmoded policies still inhibit accomplishment of the goals of IDEA and its full implementation. These policies too often restrict implementation of the principles of appropriate education, least restrictive education, and collaborative decision-making.
- These policies also stand in the way of effective school restructuring, school-linked services, and safe schools.

Personnel Preparation Barriers

- Special and general education practices reflect teacher preparation, just as teacher preparation drives school practices. This symbiotic relationship between practice and preparation means that the implementation of promising practices is quite uneven on a national basis.

- While many students preparing to be teachers benefit from experience with state-of-the-art practices in their education, far too many still do not have access to the quality of practices and preparatory experiences that should have been created by now. Therefore, outmoded and ineffective practices are reinforced and perpetuated.

Recommendations Derived from a Review of Scholarly Research on IDEA

While the implementation of IDEA has certainly not been flawless, it has provided educational opportunity to millions of students who were previously excluded from school altogether. Can IDEA be improved? Can its implementation be improved? The unequivocal answer to both these questions is affirmative. The data reviewed during this research process lead to sound recommendations for improving IDEA and its implementation.

All efforts to improve IDEA, its funding levels and funding policies, and its implementation at the Federal, State and local levels must be premised on capacity building and directed toward improving the abilities of those involved:

- Improve the ability of schools to deliver services as IDEA envisions them being delivered.
- Improve the ability of families to collaborate with educators and other professionals in sharing decision-making power related to their children and to service systems as a whole.
- Improve the ability of students with disabilities to benefit from effective special education and to enjoy lives characterized by integration, productivity, and independence.

Every recommendation made by the 27 nationally preeminent scholars in special education and personnel preparation points to the need to build the capacities of schools, parents, and students in order to improve the implementation of IDEA. A summary of their specific recommendations is provided below.

Recommendations for Improving IDEA

One overall recommendation emerged from a study of the scholarly literature regarding the implementation of IDEA to date:

Congress should reaffirm the basic framework and underlying six principles of IDEA, acknowledge that it is essential legislation for assuring the equal protection and basic civil rights of people with disabilities, and focus on improving the quality of special and general education. Accordingly, Congress should fine tune IDEA and give direction to Federal, State, and local agencies so that they can ensure improved quality of special and general education.

Specific recommendations regarding the six basic principles supporting IDEA and related issues are presented below.

Zero Reject

To improve implementation of the zero reject principle:

- Incorporate the statement of national goals and policies for persons with disabilities as set out in the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act.
- Change the timelines affecting eligibility for early intervention services and provide more funding for early intervention programs.
- Require States to put into place systems that ensure collaboration and coordination of transition services.

Nondiscriminatory Evaluation

To improve implementation of the nondiscriminatory evaluation principle:

- Provide financial incentives in model demonstration, systems change, research, and personnel preparation projects, to ensure the use of nondiscriminatory evaluation instruments and processes with students from minority populations.
- Fine tune the definitions of "traumatic brain injury" and "severely emotionally disabled."

Appropriate Education

To improve implementation of the appropriate education principle:

- Provide financial incentives in model demonstration, systems change, research, and personnel preparation projects to ensure the use of best practices such as the following:
 - special education delivered to minority students in culturally competent ways;
 - collaboration among general and special educators and related service providers;
 - interagency collaboration, especially between educational, medical, social service, and other human service agencies;
 - interdisciplinary and interagency service delivery;
 - improved transition plan processes;
 - self-determination curricula as well as teaching and student participation in educational planning and decision-making;
 - education in the least restrictive environment;
 - community-based work experiences before a student leaves school;
 - use of Participatory Action Research techniques in all research, training, and model demonstration programs; and
 - parent and student participation through shared decision making.
- Improve technical assistance efforts.
- Lower the age for mandatory transition planning from 16 to 14.
- Ensure that students have a greater decision making role in designing and carrying out their programs.
- Allow students to be eligible for school-based transition services after they graduate.
- Provide special education students with more useful and credible diploma options.
- Strengthen transition planning so it focuses not only on work, but also on other post-secondary outcomes.

- Appropriate more funds for post-secondary programs.
- Exercise greater oversight with respect to IEP development, implementation, and appropriateness.
- Allow the low incidence population of students with physical disabilities to be included as one of the focus categories under Subchapter HI.

Least Restrictive Environment

To improve implementation of the least restrictive environment principle:

- Support personnel preparation, not only in special education teacher training but also general education teacher training, particularly in implementing the principles of least restrictive education, collaborative education with other professionals (related service providers and administrators), and relating to families in a culturally competent manner.

Parent-Student Participation and Collaboration

To improve implementation of the parent-student participation and collaboration principle:

- Extend to older students and their families the family service provisions of the Individualized Family Service Plan now available to infants and toddlers under PartH.
- Preserve and extend the Parent Training and Information Center programs to better serve minority populations.
- Enact a presumption that research, training, and demonstration programs will utilize techniques of Participatory Action Research, directing OSERS to award extra credit in peer reviews to research, training, and demonstration projects that use this type of process.

Oversight and Monitoring

To improve oversight and monitoring of the implementation of IDEA:

- Congress should exercise vigorous oversight and OSERS should conduct more stringent monitoring of IDEA'S implementation.

Funding

To improve the implementation of IDEA:

Congress should work toward full funding to the authorized maximum (40 percent of excess cost) or create or allow new and different funding streams.

Eliminate categorical funding provisions that provide disincentives to delivering special education in the least restrictive environment, and create incentives for more education in the least restrictive environment.

Allow more flexibility in using funds for direct services, program administration, and eligibility.

Increase model demonstration program funding.

Increase technical assistance funding, especially for regional service centers that assist students with visual impairments.

Increase research funding.

Establish a formula grant category for services and supports that result in the successful employment for secondary level students.

Expand Medicaid coverage to allow greater coverage of related services.

Recommendations for the Improvement of Personnel Preparation and Comprehensive Systems of Personnel Development

The special education researchers and teacher trainers were overwhelmingly disappointed by the quality of personnel preparation offered by institutions of higher education and in the comprehensive systems of personnel development operated by State and local education agencies. They unequivocally agreed that a great deal of work needs to be accomplished in the areas of teacher preparation and teacher in-service education.

At present, many recent graduates of the nation's special and general education teacher training programs are not well prepared to apply best practices and state-of-the-art methods. Moreover, State and local agencies' comprehensive systems of personnel development do not effectively remediate the problem created by inadequate preservice training. Similarly, state certification and evaluation standards and procedures for new or continuing teachers do not assure that teachers will be as effective as they should be in the classroom, in collaborating with each other and with professionals in other agencies, and in sharing decision-making responsibilities with parents and students.

These conclusions apply to preservice and in-service programs that focus on categories of disabilities such as learning disabilities, severe emotional disturbance, mental retardation, autism, traumatic brain injury, vision or hearing impairments, physical disabilities, and other health impairments. Likewise, they also apply to programs that focus on skills for early intervention, early childhood education, least restrictive environment and integration strategies, transition, supported employment, school-linked service delivery, interagency collaboration, responding to challenging behaviors through positive behavioral support, and violence prevention.

For example, many early interventionists and early childhood educators still are not utilizing proven successful practices. Special and regular educators are often not trained to carry out the principles of appropriate education and least restrictive environment. That is true, too, with respect to the overarching goal of independence

for individuals with disabilities: Professionals are still not properly trained to enhance students' self-determination and choice-making related to transition and employment. Special efforts are needed to recruit minority professionals as researchers, trainers, and district-based educators, especially for low-incidence populations such as students with hearing impairments. Finally, professionals still lack the necessary skills to collaborate with each other and with parents in making decisions about students' education and about research and demonstration programs.

The good news is that there is a set of promising preservice and in-service practices and programs. The not-so-good news is that these practices and programs have not yet spread across the nation. The result is that, although some professionals receive superb preservice and in-service training, too many do not. Accordingly, students—who have a right to an education that benefits them and does so in the least restrictive environment—are being shortchanged. Education is by definition labor-intensive and labor-dependent. When the labor force—the professional cadre—suffers from inadequate preparation and in-service training, students also suffer.

Since the enactment of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (P.L. 89-750) in 1966, P.L. 91-230 in 1970, and of P.L. 93-380 in 1974 (the predecessors to P.L. 94-142), the Federal and State governments have shared the responsibility for personnel preparation in general and special education. There is a unique role for the Federal government in developing a national leadership cadre of researchers and other leaders

and in augmenting State efforts to train teachers. The leadership cadre, after all, performs nationally significant roles, whereas the teacher corps performs locally significant roles. By the same token, there is a unique role for State governments, acting through their institutions of higher education. This role is to prepare, certify, and evaluate teachers. This Federal-State partnership is responsible for the present state of affairs in preservice and in-service education, and accordingly the Federal government, State education agencies, and institutions of higher education have joint responsibility for improving preservice and in-service education.

Recommendations Regarding Research

Research should focus on interventions related to student needs. For example, research is still needed to achieve the following:

Improve student capacities through early intervention and early childhood special education.

Increase students' self-determination and reduce their challenging behaviors.

Prepare students for transition into and out of special education and into supported employment.

Carry out IDEA'S principle of education in the least restrictive environment.

Enhance students' social relationships and their abilities to participate with nondisabled peers and adults in the lives of their communities.

Ensure that students with challenging behaviors receive positive behavioral support from qualified educators.

Similarly, research is still needed to improve teacher-to-teacher collaboration and teacher-and-parent shared decision-making, and to enhance consumer participation in

setting research priorities, conducting research, and disseminating and using research data. On a different level, research is still needed on the incidence and prevalence of some disabilities, especially mild mental retardation and traumatic brain injury. Indeed, improved data collection and follow-up studies are particularly relevant to some student populations, especially those with mild mental retardation. Finally, research on larger systemic issues such as nationally important initiatives in school reform, comprehensive services through school-linked service provision, and violence prevention has just gotten underway and should be continued.

In many respects, the research community is just on the edge of significant breakthroughs in preventing and ameliorating the effects of disabilities, improving teaching methodologies, ensuring students' participation in general education and in their own communities, and strengthening and even improving the capacities of schools, teachers, and parents to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Just as teacher preparation is a shared Federal-State responsibility, so too is research. Although the greater portion of special education research funds are provided by the Federal government, there are State-funded and State-supported research activities. Some States have their own research funds, but all States support faculty in their institutions of higher education to conduct research. Thus, both the Federal and State governments can and should respond to these recommendations for research.

Recommendations Regarding Demonstration Programs

By the same token, Congress, OSERS, and State agencies should continue, expand, and redirect model demonstration programs. These programs should include rehabilitation research and training centers, systems-change efforts, technical assistance projects, policy analyses, and short-term (three-year) models to develop and disseminate state-of-the-art and promising practices. Just as preservice and in-service training and research funding are shared between the Federal and State governments, so too with demonstration projects: both levels of government are responsible for improving demonstration activities.

The overall effect of model demonstration projects is to develop new and improved techniques for teaching students, advancing IDEA's six principles (especially the least restrictive environment principle), and preparing special and general educators, families, and students themselves for collaborative decision making. Historically, these demonstration programs have been at the forefront of advancing IDEA's purposes and goals. At present, they need to be significantly more targeted on current implementation and improvement issues.

Recommendations for Policy Revision

As noted above, many Federal, State, and local policies are problematic. Too often policies impede schools from implementing the principle of the least restrictive environment, and too rarely do they create incentives for schools to implement that

principle. In some States, teacher union contracts limit regular or special educators in implementing the principle of the least restrictive environment. Moreover, some State laws, such as the Nurse Practice Acts, impede educators and other professionals from delivering school-based services to students with health-related needs.

Better Federal and State-level interagency collaboration is required, especially to improve services to students with severe emotional disabilities and traumatic brain injuries and to help students with visual impairments have easier access to printed materials. In addition, the purposes, goals, and rights guaranteed under the Americans with Disabilities Act need to serve as the basis for future policy discussions and decisions regarding special education and the delivery of services to children and youth with disabilities.

Recommendations for Improvements in Special Education Practice

Congress, OSERS, and State and local agencies must take action to improve special and general education practices. Practices that reflect state-of-the-art service delivery are well known. They are in place and have been in effect for quite some time. The problem is that these practices are the exception, not the rule. Once again, islands of excellence do not constitute the mainland.

State and local education agencies are responsible for delivering special education. They are responsible for assuring that education benefits students and is

delivered in the least restrictive environment. Unfortunately, far too many State and local agencies fall short in using promising practices and state-of-the-art services that would help them effectively discharge their responsibilities in the areas of appropriate education and least restrictive environment for students with disabilities. In particular, appropriate services are still unavailable consistently and uniformly throughout the country to students who have been classified as having, among other disabilities: learning disabilities, severe emotional disturbance, mental retardation, severe and multiple disabilities, other health impairments, autism, traumatic brain injuries, visual impairments, and hearing impairments. For many of these students, curricula are ineffective and dated. Their transitions from school to adulthood are haphazard. It is not the least surprising, then, that the results of their education are so disappointing.

Indeed, there also is evidence of a paucity of services —not merely an absence of best practices— for students with traumatic brain injuries, visual impairments, and hearing impairments. There is also evidence that minority students, as well as children in early intervention and early childhood education programs, are especially shortchanged by the lack of any services or the lack of appropriate services. It is one thing to lack services altogether or to not have appropriate education even if some services are provided. These problems are compounded when services are finally provided that do not reflect state-of-the-art or promising practices for serving students in the least restrictive environment.

In early intervention, early childhood education, and throughout the elementary-to-upper school years, practices in special and general education simply do not sufficiently comply with the principle of least restrictive environment. Much more could be done to decentralize large centers where too many students receive their education and to disperse specialized services throughout their home communities. The restructuring and dispersal of presently centralized services are long overdue. While it is true that some students still need highly specialized services, they need to have access to an array of services which will meet these needs in their home communities. Most students currently placed in these centers can be educated to a much greater degree in general education. Their current levels of physical, academic, and social integration leave a great deal to be desired.

Another problem with current practice is found in the relatively low quantity and quality of parent-student participation and collaboration. While many parents do share decision-making responsibilities with special and regular educators, there is compelling evidence that many do not and that the reasons for this noninvolvement have less to do with their willingness and capabilities to be part of their children's education teams than with educators' attitudes and practices. Time and again, schools and educators are reluctant to share responsibilities and decision-making powers with parents and students, to schedule meetings at times and places convenient to parents and students, and to develop the skills to collaborate with parents and to teach self-determination to

students. In short, there are administrative, attitudinal, and skill barriers to implementing this important principle.

To improve performance in the areas of appropriate education, least restrictive environment, and shared decision making, State education agencies need to put into place more regular and stringent systems for monitoring local agencies. Monitoring involves more than paper-compliance reviews: It has to involve scrutinizing the actual quality of special education services. Moreover, monitoring and quality assurance have to be proactive. That is, they must involve technical assistance and improvements in comprehensive systems of personnel development, targeting resources toward improving the skills of special and regular educators to deliver an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment to students with disabilities in collaboration with one another and with parents and students.

The need for interprofessional and interagency collaboration and coordination is one that State and local education agencies must address during the next five years. To deliver services in the least restrictive environment, to assure transition from school to postschool opportunities that IDEA and ADA envision, and to make certain that school restructuring benefits students in special education, State and local education agencies — and especially State agencies as they monitor local agencies— have to reconceptualize themselves. They have to be willing and able to move from separate systems of special and regular education to a unified system where all schools "own" all students, where all

indeed means *all*, and where, if necessary or desirable, school-linked services emanate from comprehensive schools.

This shift will require State legislatures to design funding streams that unify school district administrative structures and services. It also will require State legislatures to ensure that State funding is based on the number of students needing special education (not just the number receiving IEPs), and on the needs of the students themselves (not on the categories into which they have been classified). State and Federal funding has been too closely tied to the number of students having IEPs, thus penalizing States that provide special education to those who need it but who may not have an IEP. Furthermore, State and Federal funding has been tied too much to categories of disability, so that students with a certain classification receive certain types and levels of service, rather than receiving what they actually need, without regard to their classifications.

In summary, State and local education agencies and even State legislatures themselves should move aggressively to adopt the promising practices that research, demonstration, and personnel preparation programs have developed and validated over the past 20 years of experience in special education, including reconfiguring service delivery, monitoring methods, and funding policies. It is clear that the knowledge base exists to improve special and general education practice. It is also clear that State and

local education agencies and State legislatures have not, to date, put that knowledge to best use.

Recommendations for School Restructuring

The opportunities —and the risks— are high as State and local agencies begin to restructure themselves pursuant to the Goals 2000: Educate America Act.

Opportunities exist to create new norms and forms for all students, to reshape schools so that excellence and equity coexist, especially for students with disabilities. Indeed, to the extent that comprehensive schools, serving as the hub of school-linked human services, can be created as restructuring moves forward, the chances increase for wider implementation of the principle of least restrictive environment. However, intensive oversight by Congress, OSERS, and State agencies is especially warranted due to the risk that school restructuring will proceed without special education constituents being substantially involved and will result in school norms and forms that reduce opportunities for students with disabilities to receive education in the least restrictive environment in neighborhood schools.

Summary

As Congress considers the reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act on the 20th anniversary of P.L. 94-142, the indisputable conclusions to be drawn from a review of scholarly literature and the work of nationally preeminent scholars in the fields of special education research and teacher training are as follows:

- IDEA advances the equal protection doctrine of the Constitution. It is not one of the so-called "unfunded mandates." It is, instead, Federal assistance to the States so that the States and their local education agencies can carry out their own Federal and State constitutional duties to educate all children with disabilities.
- IDEA has been the single most significant vehicle for creating and implementing effective special education. Its 20-year history of positive impact on students, their families, educators, other professionals, and communities is both obvious and impressive.
- Congress, OSERS, and State and local educational agencies must, however, improve IDEA and its implementation. The improvements will link the current islands of excellence in special education to the educational mainland. In time, they will create the mainland itself. When that happens, all students—those with and without disabilities— will benefit, all families and educators will benefit, and indeed the whole nation will benefit from the investment we have made through IDEA in advancing equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for students with disabilities.