

The State of the State for Missourians with Disabilities

EDUCATION

"We, the people of Missouri, believe that diversity enhances our culture; therefore, we commit our resources and efforts to accept, educate, and support all children and youth. All children and youth, being of diverse backgrounds and abilities, will have access to all learning activities with accommodations and supports to succeed."¹

Our Beliefs

The Missouri Planning Council for Developmental Disabilities (MPC) mission is to assist the community to include all people with developmental disabilities (DD) in every aspect of life. The Council considers education to be a priority based on the data from the Statewide Needs Assessment and the level of impact that education has on the lives of individuals with DD. A quality, inclusive educational experience will impact individuals' ability to live in the community, obtain integrated employment with comparable wages, and be fully included in the community.²

What the Research Says

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA 2004) mandates the opportunity for students with disabilities to receive a free, appropriate public education. The law, which guides how states and school districts provide special education services, has been revised many times since its enactment in 1975, with the most recent amendments made in 2004. As of 2004, over six million students in the U.S., ages 6 through 21, were receiving special education and related services.³ The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), now also requires states to report the scores of students with disabilities on state reading and math assessments, and includes special education students in expectations for proficiency in reading and math and "adequate yearly progress".⁴

Funding issues persist. When IDEA was passed in 1975, the law included a commitment to pay 40% of

the average per-student cost for every special education student. That commitment has never been met. Congress is currently funding IDEA 2004 at less than 18%. NCLB is similarly under-funded.⁵ Meanwhile, the U.S. Department of Education has no data or other information needed to address questions about the costs and fiscal planning needed to better inform how states and localities allocate funds to provide special education services.⁶ Research is needed to address student outcomes in relation to the resources invested.

Over the last 30 years, special education, within the context of federal and state special education law and NCLB, has moved from primarily separate schools and programs to inclusion into neighborhood schools and general education programs, with dramatic change in access to the general education curriculum and higher expectations for academic achievement. Persistent gaps in academic performance still remain, however, between students with and without disabilities, particularly for

secondary age students, despite improved outcomes overall.⁷

While increased accountability is addressing achievement gaps, many teachers still believe that access to general education is not appropriate for students with significant disabilities, and that students should "earn" their way into general education.⁸

The State of the State in Education

Inclusion. In 2005-2006, over 900,000 students attended Missouri public schools (K-12), and

MPC Beliefs

- *People who have DD should receive individual and family supports which are flexible, based on need, and provided in a culturally sensitive manner.*
- *Students with DD should be able to attend school with their peers in regular classrooms and neighborhood schools.*
- *Students with DD should receive individualized supports in a truly inclusive setting that will enable them to develop the necessary skills to reach their full potential to become independent upon leaving the school system.*

What Missourians with DD and Their Families Are Saying⁹

Statewide Needs Assessment Results

Respondents felt that most students with DD (46%) spend their time in a special public school setting rather than an inclusive classroom.

Challenges in Education (Note: IEP= Individualized Education Program)

- IEPs that seemed to be developed prior to the IEP meeting
- Teachers who had not read the student's IEP and were unaware of supports they should be providing
- No follow-through in providing the supports indicated in the IEP
- Lack of resources that limit the opportunities for students to benefit from needed supports and services

Adequacy of Education

- Private or home school education rated inadequate/fair
- Special public education rated good/excellent
- Inclusive education rated inadequate/fair

Availability of Educational Opportunities

- 66% of respondents felt that inclusive education opportunities were either *not available* or *only somewhat available*
- 71% of respondents felt that transition services were either *not available* or *only somewhat available*
- 78% viewed post high-school community educational opportunities as *not available* or *only somewhat available*

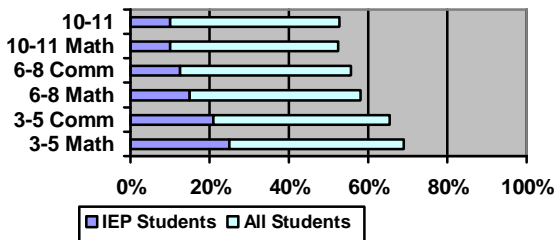
14% received special education services at a per pupil expenditure of \$8,221.¹⁰ 36 other states spend

“My son has been segregated in a room by himself with teacher aides...they have had no plan to get him back into the classroom.”¹²

higher amounts of money than Missouri on elementary, secondary, and higher education as a whole.¹¹

Despite advances in inclusion, gaps in achievement for students with IEPs remain. While the nation celebrates “all-time highs” in reading and math achievement and narrowing of the achievement gap for minority students,¹³ an average of only 16-19% of students with IEPs demonstrate proficiency on Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) communication arts and mathematics testing as shown below.¹⁴ This falls below the target rates for this year and well below the current target of 75% proficiency for 2010-2011 as shown below.¹⁵

Achievement Gap as Demonstrated by 2006 MAP Scores by Grade Level



Missouri is currently one of only two states in the country that operates state-sponsored “schools for the severely handicapped”.¹⁶ Missouri currently maintains 36 of these schools, established through state law to serve Missouri students with severe disabilities ages 5 to 21 when the local school district is unable to meet the child’s educational needs.¹⁷ 3.6% of Missouri students with IEPs, more than 1,000 students, were served in these separate settings at the end of 2006.¹⁸

Meanwhile, the national State Directors of Special Education stated that “placing students with severe disabilities in a local district setting, with access to regular educational classrooms, while participating in some general education curriculum” was best practice. They stated that “although many of these students were typically in self-contained classrooms, they should have access to the regular educational classroom and not be served via separate facilities.”¹⁹ Unfortunately, per federal law, in cases where parents challenge their child’s placement in segregated schools and lose the due process proceeding, they may be responsible for the legal costs of the school district.²⁰

Overall, 85% of Missouri parents agree to keep their child with severe disabilities in their local school

district, often because they feel “their child would benefit from the integration with non-disabled peers and in fact wanted their student to spend as much time in the regular classroom as possible.”²¹

Teacher Preparation. Change cannot occur without education of teachers regarding inclusive practices. The training provided to those entering the field needs to be updated so that those entering “regular” education, understand they are able to provide the accommodations a child needs to succeed in the typical classroom setting.²²

MPC has aimed to increase the number of general and special teachers trained in disability issues.²³

“Teachers and administrators lack the education about specific disabilities and are not receptive to training or packet information.”²⁴

Improving teacher quality is also important if vocational education is expected to alter its mission to truly prepare students for work or continued education.²⁵

Post-secondary Transition. In order to prepare students for graduation and transition to adulthood, students age 16 and older are expected to have coordinated, measurable, annual IEP goals and transition services that will reasonably enable them to meet their post-secondary goals. This is occurring for less than half (45%) of Missouri students.²⁶

According to DESE, 79% of graduates with IEPs were employed or enrolled in continuing education

“Should prepare and transition a person with a disability to life and work after high school (as part of their educational support).”²⁹

six months after graduation in 2005.²⁷ However, no

information was provided as to type of employment or wages earned. It should be noted that a significant number of persons with

disabilities are “employed” in sheltered workshops run by DESE earning an average wage of \$2.31/hour.²⁸ Long-term follow-up information is needed to determine whether these graduates have the skills needed to persist in schooling and employment. The degree to which personal-planning is being conducted is also unknown.

At the high school level, emphasis tends to be placed on academic improvement versus vocational education.³⁰ “There is a real need for more community-based programming for individuals as they transition from the children’s system to the adult system,”³¹ such as opportunities for career exploration including volunteer and paid work experiences. After high school, only 6% of Missouri youth with disabilities attended vocational, technical, or business schooling in 2003.³²

A remaining challenge is the need to educate and prepare businesses and train them in respect to the

reliability, ability and productivity of employees with disabilities.³³

What We Recommend

Inclusion

- The nation recognizes that inclusion is no longer simply the responsibility of special educators, and mere physical inclusion in classrooms is not an acceptable outcome. An interdisciplinary workgroup of stakeholders should be convened by the State Board of Education to determine effective inclusion practices for Missouri, barriers to inclusion, and targeted training needs for both general and special educators.
- DESE should focus on defining social skills curriculum, due to its primary importance to employability.
- Staff commitment to inclusion philosophy is key. DESE should design school-based training opportunities through the regional professional development centers in which administrators, teachers, and support staff can be involved in planning for increased inclusion and consider use of multiple teaching/learning approaches like co-teaching by general and special educators.

Teacher Preparation

- The ability to provide effective, inclusive, educational opportunities for Missouri students is dependent upon increasing the capacity of staff via pre-service and in-service training. Effective practice strategies for working with students with special needs within the general education setting should be a focus within pre-service and professional development education.
- In order to ensure that general education teachers entering the field are prepared to meet the diverse learning needs of all students, pre-service training should address:
 - The range of types and degrees of accommodations teachers may be implementing to support the various ways in which students may access the general curriculum.
 - Training in teaming; working with para-professionals.
 - Understanding various “hidden disabilities”.
 - Reconciling attitudes around the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education.
- Provision of opportunities during pre-service learning to work with students who have diverse learning needs, with opportunities for reflection on strategies for including all students.

- School districts should receive recognition for attaining and maintaining exemplary levels of inclusion.

Post-secondary Transition

Missouri echoes the nation in its need for coordinated, educational systems change in the development of college preparatory and vocational programs for middle and high school students.

- Educational staff should be made aware of the range of opportunities for community-based, paid employment in order to achieve a broader perspective of what can be created even for students with complex needs.
- There is a need for engagement in person-centered life planning processes for Missouri students. Additional opportunities should be created for parents and students to learn about transition planning, similar to the new transition class offered by MPACT.
- Expand cooperative work experiences for the school districts that don't provide those programs. Expand integrated, competitive and supportive community-based work experiences within the districts that do provide programs.
- Given that the Missouri State Performance Plan for special education targets an increase in the percent of youth who have IEPs and have been *competitively employed* post-school, then planning for post-secondary transition should include:
 - Teaching of self-determination skills in order to appropriately plan for the future and to make educated, informed choices.
 - A strong focus on completing high-school and encouragement to pursue higher-education, given the strong correlation between level of education and employment outcomes.
 - Work that is paired with the educational skills needed for employment, such as basic literacy and social skills.
 - A presumption of *ability to work* held by all those involved in a student's education and post-secondary transition planning.³⁴
- DESE's web site for the State School program should include information about community living and employment resources, in addition to the resources posted for evaluating long-term care facilities and day habilitation programs. MPC should work with DESE to ensure that the state is communicating well-rounded resource information on the DESE web site, as well as the website of other agencies utilizing public funds.

EDUCATION ENDNOTES

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