



## Inclusive Education

### **The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Position:**

All students benefit from Inclusive Education: where students with disabilities are full and equal members of the general education classroom and receive the services and supports they need to access, progress, and succeed in the general curriculum.<sup>1</sup> Because Inclusive Education is more effective and less costly than educating students with disabilities in segregated settings,<sup>2</sup> Missouri must fully comply with and implement federal and state laws mandating Inclusive Education.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Reasons:**

Inclusive Education is required by federal law<sup>4</sup> and Missouri regulations<sup>5</sup> and consistent with educational best practices.<sup>6</sup> For example, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states "[t]o the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities [must be] educated with children who are not disabled."<sup>7</sup>

Decades of research have documented the benefits of Inclusive Education for all students - with and without disabilities.<sup>8</sup> Studies show that students with disabilities who were educated in inclusive settings improved their academic performance,<sup>9</sup> increased their communication and social skills,<sup>10</sup> and enhanced their self-determination.<sup>11</sup> Students with disabilities in inclusive classrooms also have greater opportunities to access the general curriculum,<sup>12</sup> increased and more natural peer interactions and supports,<sup>13</sup> higher quality Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals,<sup>14</sup> and take part in more extracurricular activities.<sup>15</sup> In addition, students without disabilities who are in inclusive classrooms make greater progress in educational goals such as reading and math,<sup>16</sup> and those that provide peer support to students with disabilities have increased academic achievement and class participation.<sup>17</sup>

Nevertheless, more than 40 years after IDEA, schools have been slow to comply with Inclusive Education requirements. In Missouri, approximately 43% of students in Special Education programs spend less than 80% of their time in regular classroom settings each day,<sup>18</sup> which is 17% worse than the national average.<sup>19</sup> In our most recent Statewide Comprehensive Review and Analysis, respondents identified several concerns about Special Education programs and supports including a failure to fully include parents and students in the IEP process, poorly trained staff, students with disabilities' educational needs being taken less seriously than those of students without disabilities and other barriers to students getting what they want and need.<sup>20</sup>

### **The Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council's Recommendations:**

- As a state and society, we must acknowledge that Inclusive Education is a legally required best practice that benefits all students.
- Missouri education law, policy, and practice should set high expectations for Special Education programs including full implementation of Inclusive Education.
- Schools should develop and implement Inclusive Education policies and practices that encourage and empower students with disabilities to advance toward further inclusive education, employment, and independent living.
- Schools should provide transition-aged students in Special Education programs with opportunities to identify and take part in inclusive postsecondary education, employment, and independent living programs and supports through partnerships with Vocational Rehabilitation, Centers for Independent Living, Medicaid Waiver providers, and other agencies and services;
- Segregated educational placements, including state schools, should not be used.
- Cost savings from discontinuing segregated education should be invested in policies and practices that enable Inclusive Education, including assistive technology and accessible Universal Design of schools and classrooms.
- As part of its outreach to and regulation of schools and school districts, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education should examine whether schools: (1) Are promoting and practicing Inclusive Education; (2) Require maximum inclusion in school programs and services; and (3) Supporting the development of diverse educational leaders.

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## References

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- <sup>2</sup> e.g., Stone, D. (2019). The least restrictive environment for providing education, treatment, and community services for persons with disabilities: Rethinking the concept. *Touro Law Review*, 35 (1), Article 20. 2; Savich, C. (2008). Inclusion: The pros and cons: A critical review. *Online Submission*. Available at: <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED501775.pdf>; Halvorsen, H., et al., (1996). A cost-benefit comparison of inclusive and integrated classes in one California district. *U.S. Department of Education*. Available at: <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED393249.pdf>
- <sup>3</sup> e.g., The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. 1400, et seq.; Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, 29 U.S.C. 701, et seq.; The Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. 6301, et seq.; The Americans with Disabilities Act, 42 U.S.C. 12101, et seq.
- <sup>4</sup> See, Note 3, especially the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act at 20 U.S.C. 1412(a) (5).
- <sup>5</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (n.d.). Regulation IV: FAPE/IEP/LRE. Available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/regulation-iv-fapeieplre-0>
- <sup>6</sup> e.g., Shogren, K., et al. (2015). All means all: Building knowledge for Inclusive schoolwide transformation. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 40, 173-191. Jackson, L. B., Ryndak, D. L., & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2008). The dynamic relationship between context, curriculum, and student learning: A case for inclusive education as a research-based practice. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 34(1), 175-195.
- <sup>7</sup> 20 U.S.C. § 1412(a) (5).
- <sup>8</sup> Agran, et al., 2020.
- <sup>9</sup> Kurth, J. & Mastergeorge, A. (2010). Individual education plan goals and services for adolescents with autism: Impact of grade and educational setting. *The Journal of Special Education*, 44, 146-160.
- <sup>10</sup> Fisher, M. & Meyer, L. (2002). Development and social competence after two years for students enrolled in inclusive and self-contained educational programs. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 27, 165-174.
- <sup>11</sup> Hughes, C., et al. (2013) Student self-determination: A preliminary investigation of the role of participation in inclusive settings. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 48, 3-17.
- <sup>12</sup> Soukup, J., et al. (2007). Classroom variables and access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 74, 101-120.
- <sup>13</sup> Carter, E. & Hughes, C. (2006). Including high school students with severe disabilities in general education classes: Perspectives of general and special educators, paraprofessionals, and administrators. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 31, 174-185.
- <sup>14</sup> Kurth & Mastergeorge, 2010
- <sup>15</sup> Kurth, J. & Mastergeorge, A. (2012). Impact of setting and instructional context for adolescents with autism. *The Journal of Special Education*, 46, 36-48.
- <sup>16</sup> Cole, C., Waldron, N., & Majd, M. (2004). Academic progress of students across inclusive and traditional settings. *Mental Retardation*, 42, 136-144. .
- <sup>17</sup> Cushing, L. & Kennedy, C. (1997). Academic effects of providing peer support in general education classrooms on students without disabilities. *Journal of Applied Behavior Analysis*, 30, 139-151.
- <sup>18</sup> Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2021). Missouri special education part B – State performance plan. Available at: <https://dese.mo.gov/media/pdf/partb-ssp-targets-table-2-20>
- <sup>19</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2021). 43rd annual report to Congress on the implementation of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Available at: <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/files/43rd-arc-for-idea.pdf>
- <sup>20</sup> Missouri Developmental Disabilities Council (2021). Comprehensive Review and Analysis, February 28, 2021.