

# Journal of

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The primary goal of the *Journal of Special Education Leadership* is to provide both practicing administrators and researchers of special education administration and policy with relevant tools and sources of information based on recent advances in administrative theory, research, and practice. The *Journal of Special Education Leadership* is a journal dedicated to issues in special education administration, leadership, and policy issues. It is a refereed journal that directly supports CASE's main objectives, which are to foster research, learning, teaching, and practice in the field of special education administration and to encourage the extension of special education administration knowledge to other fields. Articles for the *Journal of Special Education Leadership* should enhance knowledge about the process of managing special education service delivery systems, as well as reflect on techniques, trends, and issues growing out of research on special education that is significant. Preference will be given to articles that have a broad appeal, wide applicability, and immediate usefulness to administrators, other practitioners, and researchers.

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## A Letter from the Editor

The articles in this issue of *JSEL* cover a wide array of topics. Joseph Gagnon, Margaret McLaughlin, and Lauren Rhim present a policy paper that examines the results from a survey of large district special education directors on standards-driven reform policies that are in place at the local level. While federal and state reform efforts have been the focus of attention, Gagnon, et al. recognize the importance of discovering how these efforts are translated into local-level initiatives and applied to special education.

Carl Lashley considers how the participation of students with disabilities in statewide assessments and the general education curriculum affects policy and administrative practice. The greatest challenge to administrators is to avoid working at cross-purposes with parents of children on IEPs in light of competing demands.

Robert Putnam, James Luiselli, Kenneth Sennett, and Joanne Malonson, in a collaborative effort, designed a study that investigated cost efficiency of out-of-district special education placements using an evaluative measure of behavior support in the public schools as the benchmark. In this paper, the authors argue that schools frequently place students with behavior problems out-of-district rather than developing responsive in-district programs, decreasing both efficacy and efficiency. Putnam, et al. are able to demonstrate that when a school system develops a system-wide approach to behavior intervention it is possible to reduce the per capita cost for out-of-district placements.

Jane Duffey investigates the home schooling of children with disabilities. This paper highlights issues confronting a much under-studied population. The findings in this study indicate that many parents of students with disabilities approach home schooling much differently than parents of children without disabilities and enjoy a more positive relationship with their school districts.

Lastly, Ellen Honeyman provides us with a special education director's perspective of these articles in *Case in Point*.

It is hoped that this issue brings you varied, challenging, and interesting topics that informs both practice and research. The CASE Executive Committee and I always welcome your feedback regarding *JSEL*. We hope you enjoy this issue.

Mary Lynn Boscardin, Ph.D., Editor  
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# Standards-Driven Reform Policies

## • *at the Local Level:*

### Report on a Survey of Local Special Education Directors in Large Districts

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- **Standards, assessments, and increased accountability for student performance are the current hot topics in education.**
- **Little is known about district-level reform policies in these important areas, particularly whether they differ from state policy.**
- **The results of this survey of large school districts point to a layering of state and local standards, assessments, and accountability policies that can place multiple demands on schools and students.**
- **Students with disabilities are differentially considered within specific reform policies.**

The U.S. education system is currently engaged in an historic effort to raise standards and improve student performance. The strategies of reform include new and rigorous content standards, assessments and high-stakes accountability. The model of standards-driven reform is evident in individual state-level reform initiatives and is integrated into major federal programs, such as Title 1 and more recently the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (U.S. Department of Education, 1997).

Standards-driven reforms can be implemented quite differently within and across states (McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997; McLaughlin & Rouse, 2000). However, there are five elements of this reform model shared by all states: (1) a focus on student achievement as the primary measure of success; (2) an emphasis on challenging academic standards that specify knowledge and skills students should acquire and the levels at which they should demonstrate

mastery; (3) a desire to extend the standards to all students, including those for whom expectations have been traditionally low; (4) a heavy reliance on achievement testing to spur the reforms and monitor their impact; and (5) a focus on accountability for student performance that is specifically tied to consequences for schools and/or students (McDonnell et al., p. 11).

## Standards-Driven Reform and Students With Disabilities

Over the past decade, special educators have been grappling to fit special education policy into the larger standards-driven reform effort (Goertz & Friedman, 1996; McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morison, 1997; Shriner, Kimm, Thurlow, & Ysseldyke, 1993; U.S. Department of Education, 1998). In an effort to assure access, special education has historically

This research was supported by Grant #H023H940002-98B, CFDA #84.023H Office of Special Education Programs/DID, U.S. Department of Education, OSERS as part of the research conducted by the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent those of USDE.

focused on including students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The standards-driven reform movement has pushed the notion of inclusion from issues of placement to concerns about access to the general education curriculum. The reauthorization of IDEA in 1997 engendered a new emphasis on including children with disabilities in general education classrooms and providing them with meaningful access to the general education curriculum. IDEA 1997 mandated this access via new provisions regarding Individualized Education Program (IEP) development.

.....  
The standards-driven reform movement has pushed the notion of inclusion from issues of placement to concerns about access to the general education curriculum.

These new provisions presume that students with disabilities have the right to have their performance accurately assessed and to have their performance considered as part of the districts' larger accountability system. In order to accurately assess students with disabilities, states and districts must provide appropriate accommodations that enable children with disabilities to participate in state assessments or promote alternate assessments (McLaughlin & Henderson, 2001).

Standards-driven reform has been a decidedly state process. States have developed standards and assessments and adopted new accountability mechanisms. However, responsibility for implementing these reform initiatives resides at the local district level and depends on the willingness and capacity of local districts (Massell, 1998; McDonnell et al., 1997). Specifically, districts take the lead in managing accountability for student outcomes (McDonnell et al.), and that accountability depends on the extent to which all students have access to the content standards and assessments.

The U.S. Department of Education (1998) acknowledges that state education agencies (SEAs) provide the base for reform efforts and local districts can move beyond state requirements. In practice, many local districts may add on to state requirements by developing expanded content standards,

requiring additional assessments, or otherwise increasing student performance requirements and their consequences.

A number of studies have documented state-level reform policies, including how students with disabilities are being addressed within those policies (e.g., Goertz & Friedman, 1996; Rhim & McLaughlin, 1997). However, there is scant information regarding local district standards-driven reform policies, let alone data regarding how students with disabilities are being included.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study was to investigate how local districts' education reforms are applied to children with disabilities, a national survey with a sample of the largest U.S. school districts was conducted. The focus of the survey grew from the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reforms' three-year study of five local districts engaged in special education reform (see McLaughlin, Henderson, & Rhim, 1998). The Center's initial qualitative case study research revealed that local district reforms, including independently developed standards and assessments can enhance or hinder state-driven policies. Further, data from the case studies indicated that the target local districts either had in place or were in the process of developing their own set of reform initiatives. Based upon these findings the Center's researchers developed a survey instrument to document the degree to which children with disabilities are incorporated in large districts' standards-driven reform initiatives across the nation.

### **Methodology**

The methodology included a mail and telephone survey conducted with a purposeful national sample of special education directors in 49 of the largest school districts in the U.S. The sample was drawn during the summer and fall of 1999 using a two-phase process. First, a list of the 100 largest school districts in the U.S. was obtained from the *Common Core of Data School Years 1991-1992 through 1995-1996* (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1998). However, certain states (e.g., California and Florida) were overrepresented on this list. Consequently, our first decision was to sample a maximum of two dis-

districts per state ( $n = 15$  states). Secondly, 19 states had one district on the list of the 100 largest districts and these were also represented in the sample. As a result of limiting the sample to the largest districts, 16 of the more rural states are not represented. This sampling process yielded a total of 49 school districts. Of these, 34 districts returned the surveys, representing a 69.4% response rate.

## The Questionnaire

The findings from the Center's five case studies served as the basis of the questionnaire. The survey questions sought information regarding district demographics and the inclusion and participation of students with disabilities in specific reform policies. The survey included a total of nine questions, related to district policy in three areas: (1) content area standards; (2) assessment; and (3) graduation. For a summary of the issues addressed within each area, see Table 1.

The survey was pilot tested with ten local special education directors. The pilot test revealed that special education directors did not know or have

immediate access to the specific information requested on the survey (e.g., district demographics, graduation requirements, types of assessments used and grade levels at which they are administered). Because of this, a preliminary search for district information was conducted. Two procedures were employed to obtain this information: (1) conducting an Internet search for each district; and (2) making a phone call to each central district administrative office to request reports or other documents containing district demographic data. Information was obtained for 26 of the 34 districts that subsequently responded.

## Conducting the Survey

Due to a low response rate of 46.9% ( $n = 23$ ) on the written survey, researchers conducted a follow-up phone survey with the 26 non-respondents. The name and/or phone number of the person responsible for administering special education within the school district was obtained from individual state lists of special education directors. The directors were contacted via telephone or e-mail and the survey was described. If they agreed to participate, an interview was scheduled and the partially completed district questionnaire, based on Internet information and district reports, was sent to the director. This was done to verify all information obtained from the websites, as well as to allow the director to prepare for the interview. Two researchers who carefully followed the survey questions conducted the close-ended interviews. The interviewers recorded answers on individual district questionnaires, including all revisions to previously recorded information. A total of three special education directors agreed to participate in the phone interview. Eight other directors referred the interviewers to another professional who had the information readily available. These professionals consisted of special education supervisors/coordinators ( $n = 4$ ), Directors of Curriculum and Instruction ( $n = 2$ ), or Directors of Assessment ( $n = 2$ ). Despite repeated attempts, it was not possible to reach or conduct phone surveys with the remaining 15 special education directors.

**Table 1:** Survey Focus Areas and Question Topics

### Focus Area/Question Topic

#### *Demographics*

- Total student population
- Number and percent special education
- Ethnicity
- Free/Reduced lunch
- English as a second language

#### *Content Area Standards*

- Developed separate from state. If yes, what areas?
- Students with disabilities mentioned. If yes, specify how.

#### *Assessment*

- Existence of written policy on assessment accommodations. If yes, developed by state or district?
- If alternate assessments used, what types of tests?

#### *Graduation*

- Does district offer differentiated diplomas? If yes, what types?
- Can students with disabilities receive a diploma solely for completion of IEP goals?
- Have there been major changes in district graduation requirements in last five years? If yes, in what areas?

## Results

The findings are based on an analysis of the 34 responding districts. Twenty-three states are represented, with 11 states having two districts included. The total student population in these districts is 4,180,538 with enrollments ranging from 42,071 to 681,505. The total number of students with disabilities enrolled in special education in these districts is 339,418. The median percentage of students labeled special education from respondents ( $n = 26$ ) is 11.9% and ranges from 6.7% to 21%. Demographic data for the responding districts is presented in Table 2.

## Academic Content Standards

More than three-fourths of the districts (84.6%,  $n = 22$ ) have content standards developed separately from their state content standards. These district content standards correspond to the most common state content standards (McDonnell et al., 1997). In particular, districts' mandate standards in English/Language Arts (95.5%,  $n = 21$ ), Mathematics (95.5%,  $n = 21$ ), Science (90.1%,  $n = 20$ ), and Social Studies (81.8%,  $n = 18$ ) (see Table 3). Only 12 of 32 (37.5%) respondents noted that their district standards do not address students with disabilities. However, another 12.5% ( $n = 4$ ) did not know whether students with

**Table 3:** LEA Content Standards Policies

Policy	Frequency	Percent of Respondents
<b>LEA Content Standards Developed Separate From State</b>		
	22	84.6
<b>Areas in Which LEA Content Standards are Developed</b>		
Language Arts	21	95.5
Math	21	95.5
Science	20	90.1
Social Studies	18	81.8
Citizenship	7	31.8
Communication	9	40.9
Art	11	50.0
Music	9	40.9
Physical Education	11	50.0
<b>LEA Content Standard Policies and Students With Disabilities</b>		
Students With Disabilities Addressed in Content Standards	16	50.0
General Policy Statement for Special Education	11	68.8
Specific Reference to Special Education	6	37.5
Specific Written Accommodations for Special Education	7	43.8

**Table 2:** Sample District Demographics

District	Districts Reporting	Minimum	Maximum	Median
Student Population	34	42,071	681,505	73,450
# Special Education (%)	26	4,340 (6.7%)	67,501 (21.0%)	9,100 (11.9%)
Caucasian	28	4.0%	94.4%	45.5%
African American	29	.4%	95.0%	25.0%
Hispanic	28	.2%	68.5%	10.4%
Asian	26	.3%	18.6%	3.1%
Native American	25	.03%	12.0%	.5%
Free/Reduced Lunch	21	15.1%	85.0%	42.5%
ESOL	17	.8%	64.0%	7.9%

**Note:** ESOL = English as a second language

disabilities were addressed. Of those district standards that do address students with disabilities ( $n = 16$ ), about two-thirds (68.8%,  $n = 11$ ) reported having a general policy statement referring to all students. Directors were not asked to specifically identify their district's general policy statement. However, such a statement could include statements that all students are expected to meet rigorous standards or attain new levels of achievement. In contrast, districts with a specific reference to special education in their content standards policy ( $n = 6$ ) could include a statement that notes students with disabilities must achieve academic content standards unless otherwise noted in the IEP. Districts with specific written accommodations for special education ( $n = 7$ ) may identify a modified list of content standards for students with special needs.

## Assessments

For 31 responding districts, the number of separate assessments being administered ranged from one to eight with a median of three. Individual assessments administered more than one time were counted only once. For instance, state or nationally norm-referenced assessments (e.g., Stanford-9, California Achievement Test) administered at different grade levels counted as one assessment. In contrast, end-of-course assessments in different subject matter areas were each counted as a single assessment, as were differing assessments in the same subject matter area (e.g., writing portfolios and writing prompts, math portfolios and math tests).

The most frequently administered assessments are the Stanford-9 and the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS). More than half (51.6%,  $n = 16$ ) of the sample districts are using at least one of these two assessments. In addition, 61.3% ( $n = 19$ ) of responding districts require assessments that are not mandated by the state.

**Alternative Assessments.** As mandated by IDEA (PL 105-17), by July 1, 2000, all states must have provided an alternate assessment for students with disabilities and report on those assessments. Students with disabilities are to participate in alternate assessments and:

*As appropriate, the State or local educational agency—*  
*(i) develops guidelines for the participation of children with disabilities in alternate assessments for those children who cannot participate in State and district-wide*

*assessment programs; and (ii) develops and, beginning not later than July 1, 2000, conducts those alternate assessments (Sec. 612(a)(17)).*

Twelve (37.5%) of the 32 responding districts, offered alternate assessments at the time the survey was conducted. Ten additional districts were in the process of developing their alternate assessments. Table 4 presents the types of alternate assessments provided by those districts that did offer alternate assessment. The most common assessment was a nationally standardized norm-referenced (e.g., Brigance) or criterion referenced assessment ( $n = 8$ ), followed by teacher-made tests ( $n = 7$ ).

**Table 4:** LEA Assessment Policies

Alternate Assessments	Frequency	Percent of Respondents
District Provides Alternate Assessments	12	37.5
District has Alternate Assessments Under Development	10	31.3
<b>Types of Alternate Assessment Provided</b>		
Alternate Assessment: Nationally Standardized, Norm-referenced, Criterion Referenced	8	75.0
Alternate Assessment: Teacher Made and Scored	7	58.3
Alternate Assessment: State Standardized, Norm-referenced, Criterion Referenced	6	50.0
Alternate Assessment: District Standardized	5	41.0
Don't Know What Alternate Assessments are Used	1	8.3

## Graduation and Diplomas

Almost three-fourths (73.1%,  $n = 19$ ) of the districts offer differentiated diplomas. When asked about the types of differentiated diplomas offered (e.g., IEP diploma, certificate of attendance/completion, honors diploma with commendation), the most common responses were a certificate of attendance/completion ( $n = 18$ ) and an IEP diploma ( $n = 12$ ) (see Table

5). In addition, 79.3% ( $n = 23$ ) of the sample districts have changed their graduation requirements in the past five years (i.e., 1994-1999). Among the most common changes to graduation requirements were new course requirements ( $n = 19$ ) and new high school assessments ( $n = 13$ ).

**Table 5:** LEA Graduation Policies

Diplomas and Graduation Requirements	Frequency	Percent of Respondents
Differentiated Diplomas Honors Diploma With Commendation ( $n = 8$ ) Certificate of Attendance/ Completion ( $n = 18$ ) IEP Diploma ( $n = 12$ )	19	73.1
Diploma <b>Solely</b> for Completion of IEP Goals	13	46.4
Changes in District Graduation Requirements New High School Assessments ( $n = 13$ ) New Course Requirements ( $n = 19$ ) New Service Learning Requirements ( $n = 3$ )	23	79.3

## Discussion

This survey of 34 large school districts provides a snapshot of local district educational reform policies and the manner in which districts are adopting standards-driven reform for children with disabilities. The study captures some of the more salient features of local district reform policies and suggests that local schools and individual students are being subjected to the cumulative demands of state and district policy. While the survey did not seek to determine the extent to which state and local policies are aligned or complementary, creating a cohesive reform agenda is a primary goal of both federal and state reform.

A central tenet of standards-driven reform is that the entire educational system should align and that existing resources and new initiatives focus on improving student performance and attaining rig-

orous standards. Yet, state-level standards and assessments, many of which are rigorous and demanding (Meyer, Orlofsky, Skinner, & Spicer, 2002), are frequently considered the baseline for student achievement. Local districts may increase or expand upon state standards and impose additional assessments and accountability within the system. For example, four of the five case studies conducted by McLaughlin and her colleagues (McLaughlin, Henderson, & Rhim, 1998) indicated that districts had developed comprehensive content standards, assessments, and high-stakes accountability mechanisms separate from their respective state initiatives and exceeding their respective state requirements. In the current study, two-thirds of the large districts have developed their own content standards. In addition, increasing state and local graduation requirements mean more hurdles for all students to obtaining a diploma. For students with disabilities, the opportunity to receive a diploma based on meeting IEP requirements existed in fewer than half of the sample districts.

From the perspective of students with disabilities and their teachers, the multiple requirements increase the knowledge and performance demands. Some researchers (Quenemoen, Lehr, Thurlow, & Massanari, 2001) have observed that these increasingly challenging and multi-layered district and state-level standards and assessments may result in greater numbers of students with disabilities being retained in grade, truant, or dropping out. What is unclear from the current survey is the extent to which district and state-level reforms are complementing or competing. That is, are students and their teachers given differing messages about which assessments matter and what content to teach? What we do know is that special education teachers must negotiate the challenge of clarifying expectations and balancing the competing priorities between state and district standards and individual student needs. Continued analysis of both state and district-level reform policies is necessary to effectively promote the desired increases in student performance. Specifically for students with disabilities, it is critical that the effects of multi-layered academic demands be evaluated further to identify the extent to which these students benefit from current reform efforts.

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# *Participation of Students With Disabilities in Statewide Assessments and the General Education Curriculum:*

## Implications for Administrative Practice

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- **IDEA requires that students with disabilities have access to the general curriculum and participate in statewide assessment systems.**
- **Schools are publicly accountable for the progress of students with disabilities.**
- **School must differentiate curriculum, instruction, and assessments and accept responsibility for the educational progress of all students.**
- **These requirements raise a number of questions that could result in disputes between schools and parents.**

The 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '97) was influenced by Congress's and the public's current interest in student performance accountability. When states and districts use system-wide assessments to gauge the progress of students and schools, they must now include students with disabilities in the assessment programs and report the results of these students' performance in the same manner that they report results from assessments of typical students. Currently 1.6 to 3.2 million students with disabilities go to school in states or districts where such assessments are used (34 CFR Parts 300 and 303, p. 12657), and the number is increasing.

Historically, many students with disabilities were either exempted from taking standardized tests or their results were not reported. The Individualized Education Plan (IEP) defined the curriculum for students with disabilities, and their expectations and outcomes were developed both parallel to and independent of the general curriculum, depending on the IEP team's understandings of the student's needs and the appropriate program for him/her. Many educators justify these approaches by arguing that there are good reasons for exempting students with

disabilities from assessments and changing the curriculum for these students:

- If students with disabilities could benefit from the general curriculum and score at standard on statewide assessments, they would not be identified as having disabilities. These students should be exempt because their disabilities preclude their successful participation.
- Continuing to harp on the general curriculum, at which they have been unsuccessful, further exacerbates students' with disabilities sense of failure and saps any motivation they might have for learning. The same can be said about forcing them to participate on standardized tests on which they will not do well.
- Given the time they have with school, there are certain core concepts and key skills students with disabilities need to know and be able to do. Because of their disabilities, they need more time to master these functional components of the curriculum. Much of the general curriculum is not essential for these students to lead independent lives.
- The school's responsibility to students with disabilities is to meet their needs. The general

curriculum is important, but it is not sufficient to meet the needs of these students. They have many other needs that are just as important, if not more so, and the time they have in school precludes teachers doing all they have to do for these students.

- Since students' with disabilities needs dictate a curriculum that is nonstandard, their participation in standardized testing does not provide information about what they have learned nor do standardized tests reflect what students with disabilities need to know. In addition, the modifications and accommodations to standardized tests that are required for students with disabilities to participate violate the assumptions and protocols of the standardization process.
- Parents often want their children to receive special education and related services to insulate them from failure. The general education curriculum is the original locus of their failure, and often standardized tests were the first proof that the general curriculum was not appropriate for the student.

These arguments reflect concerns from the special education tradition about schools' abilities to meet the needs of all students, particularly those whose needs are so unique that they are categorized as disabled. Challenges to the appropriateness of a student's IEP are based on concerns about the schools' capacity to differentiate curriculum, instruction, and assessments in order to provide an educational environment that supports the unique needs of students with disabilities. Demands for more specialized services for students arise because parents or teachers believe that students are not likely to be successful with the existing cluster of special education, related services, supplementary aids and services, and/or accommodations in place. The new provisions in IDEA for participation in statewide assessments and the general curriculum exacerbate these concerns. As a result, parents and teachers who accept the assumptions in the arguments listed above are quite concerned about the effects that raising standards, and applying them to all students, might have on students' futures, educational or otherwise. They are rightly concerned that schools will raise the achievement bar without putting the supports for students and teachers into

place to assure that the opportunity to reach high standards exists for all students.

Increasingly, high school graduation has been tied to performance on state or districtwide assessments. As a result, decisions about whether students with disabilities participate in these assessments are also decisions about whether the student will receive a high school diploma when his or her high school experience is completed. Even though a student might complete the requirements of his or her Individualized Education Plan or obtain all of the requisite credits for graduation, he or she cannot receive credit toward graduation or a diploma in many jurisdictions without passing the required examinations. Access to post-secondary options such as college, vocational training, and the military are more likely to be closed to those students who do not possess a diploma. The necessity to perform at standard on state or district assessments is crucial to a student's future, and schools must be prepared to provide options and accommodations, if students with disabilities are to be educated successfully.

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These arguments reflect concerns from the special education tradition about schools' abilities to meet the needs of all students, particularly those whose needs are so unique that they are categorized as disabled.

Key to students' performance on system-wide assessments is access to the curriculum on which the performance assessment is based. IDEA '97 recognizes that the general curriculum should form the core of the Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) of students with disabilities and that additional goals and objectives be added to the IEP to meet the unique needs of students. While individualized curricular and instructional planning have been in place since the enactment of the Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975, this new requirement changes the nature of the discussions teachers, administrators, and parents must have to provide appropriate and effective programs for students with disabilities. This initiative also emphasizes the importance of the general classroom and general educators in the lives of students with disabilities.

## IDEA '97 Requirements

IDEA '97 includes provisions that require that students with disabilities participate in state and districtwide assessments and have access to the general curriculum. The provisions will require that states and districts change their policies and procedures, both in special education and general education, and it can be argued that these new provisions move toward notions of a merged system of services for all students.

### Participation in State and Districtwide Assessments

All students with disabilities must be provided the opportunity to participate in state or districtwide assessments that are conducted for nondisabled students, unless the participation of a student with a disability would be inappropriate. States must develop and conduct alternate assessments for those students who cannot participate in the general assessments. These provisions will assure that the progress of all students with disabilities will be subject to some form of public reporting and accountability, since 36 states have policies in place that report the results of assessments to the public (*Education Week*, 1999).

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According to the U.S. Department of Education, 200,000 to 700,000 students will participate in alternate assessments (CFR Parts 300 and 303, p. 12657). Ysseldyke & Thurlow (1998), who have written extensively on this subject and whose ideas were of considerable influence during Congress's deliberations, estimate that 80–90% of students with disabilities will participate in statewide assessments. They further argue that this will mean that the progress of 98% of all students will be measured

and reported through statewide, standardized assessments.

### Access to the General Curriculum

The IEP, which is developed for all students with disabilities, must contain a statement of how the student's disability affects his or her ability to perform in the "general curriculum (i.e., the same curriculum as for nondisabled students)" (CFR §300.347). Congress and the Department of Education are quite emphatic in insisting that the curriculum known as the general curriculum is *the* curriculum for all students. Only in cases where the IEP team can show that the general curriculum is inappropriate can the student's program veer away from the general curriculum.

According to the high stakes/high standards logic, what students learn in school leads to the good life, economically, socially, and personally. If students with disabilities are to learn what they need to know for the good life, and show us they know it by performing to standard, they must have access to the curriculum that contains the necessary learning. Extending this reasoning to all students entails assuring that students with disabilities, students whose first language is not English, and other students who are at risk for school failure have access to the general curriculum and participate in statewide assessments. Provisions were included in IDEA '97 to provide access and participation for students with disabilities and in the Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 for students whose first language is not English. The rationale (Ysseldyke & Thurlow, 1998) for these provisions can be summarized as:

- Schools are supposed to educate all students and should therefore be held accountable for their actions as they affect all students.
- Students with disabilities have often been either exempted from participation in state or districtwide assessments or their results have not been reported.
- Research about the curriculum in special education classes indicates that it lacks rigor, is overly repetitive, and/or is meaningless to students (Skrtic, 1991).

## Implications for Change in School District Procedures

### Evaluation and Reevaluation Procedures

As schools prepare their procedures for evaluating students for eligibility for special education and reevaluation, they must take into account the student's involvement and progress in the general curriculum and consider the changes necessary in the special education and related services provided to students with disabilities that will enable them to participate in the general curriculum (CFR §300.532 and 533). Assuring that the instruments they use and the reports they write focus on behaviors and skills that are included in the general curriculum will require that evaluation personnel continue their efforts to ground their work in the realities of school life and that they be able to explain what implications the data they collect about students have for progress in the general curriculum. In addition, evaluation personnel should be knowledgeable about the content of the general curriculum and statewide assessments and be able to link individual test results and observational data to that content in their written and verbal reports of student status.

Since schools have often relied on the psychometric and observational lenses from special education to inform eligibility and placement decisions, this requirement could result in a shift in the discourse about student performance to focus on regular classroom behavior, routines, and achievement. While this shift will normalize the discussions and decisions that occur regarding these difficult-to-teach students, it will also focus on their deficits and weaknesses, thus exacerbating the sense of hopelessness and powerlessness that parents and teachers often have about the education and futures of these students.

### IEP Teams

The IEP team is charged with the responsibility for making decisions about the educational program of a student with a disability. Membership in the IEP team must reflect that five perspectives are represented in the team's deliberations (CFR 300.344):

- How the student interacts with the groups of children and the general curriculum in the gen-

- eral education classroom, represented by a classroom teacher who has worked with the student.
- How students with characteristics similar to the student behave and interact, represented by a special education teacher who is knowledgeable in the area of disability under consideration for the student.
- How the student interacts in an individual assessment setting, usually represented by one of the professionals who performed individual evaluation on the student.
- How the school responds to the student, usually represented by an administrator who can organize the resources necessary to implement the IEP.
- How the student interacts in both school and nonschool settings, usually represented by one of the student's parents.

IDEA '97 has added language that strengthens provisions that a regular classroom teacher who works with the child be a member of the IEP team and participate in the deliberations about and development of the IEP. These provisions serve three purposes: (1) to assure that information about the child's performance in the general education classroom is considered in IEP deliberations; (2) to assure that the child's performance in the general education curriculum is represented in IEP deliberations and linked to individually administered standardized assessment results; and (3) to assure that the expectations of the general curriculum are adequately represented in IEP deliberations. Strengthening this language reemphasized the need for a shared responsibility for the education of all students and renews calls for a merger of special and general education in order to provide the support necessary for teachers to respond to the needs of all students (Burrello, Lashley, & Beatty, 2001).

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The local education agency (LEA) must be represented at the IEP meeting by a person who is (1) qualified to provide or supervise programs for students with disabilities, (2) knowledgeable about the general curriculum, and (3) knowledgeable about the resources available to support a program that the IEP team will design (CFR §300.344). Although this requirement could be fulfilled in a number of ways, the approach that seems most reasonable is that the school principal be the LEA representative, since he or she is likely to have the certification, knowledge, authority, and/or access to organize resources to support the IEP.

### IEP Content

New requirements for IEP content move the focus of what is taught to most students with disabilities to the general curriculum. As the IEP team deliberates about the student's needs, it must take into account the results of his or her performance on state and districtwide assessments (CFR §300.344), and the IEP team must include a statement of how the student's disability affects his or her ability to perform in the general curriculum (CFR §300.347). The goals, benchmarks, and objectives that the IEP team will formulate must be tied to the general curriculum, and the services designed for the student must be oriented toward enabling him or her to participate and progress in the general curriculum (CFR §300.347).

The IEP must also contain information about the accommodations and modifications necessary for the student to participate in state or districtwide assessments and, for those students for whom participation is not appropriate, a statement that justifies the inappropriateness decision and describes how the student will be assessed (CFR §300.347).

The gravity of the decision to remove a student from the general curriculum or exclude him or her from participation in state or districtwide assessments is reflected in the language of IDEA '97. Congress and state legislatures have become convinced that low student achievement occurs when students are not held accountable (through testing) and when standards are not high (in the general curriculum). Requiring that these assumptions be applied to students with disabilities, who represent one definable group of low achievers, is an indica-

tion of legislative commitment to high stakes/high standards. Whether the parents or the public are willing to tolerate high levels of failure as the transition to high stakes/high standards proceeds remains to be seen (Loveless, 1999).

### Interpretations of Appropriate

Since Rowley (1982), appropriate has been defined as a program designed to provide educational benefit for the student with a disability. The emphasis on the general curriculum in IDEA '97 focuses educational benefit on participation and progress in the general curriculum. LEAs will be obligated to provide accommodations and modifications to the general curriculum in order to design appropriate programs for students with disabilities, and the test of appropriateness will be whether the student is able to show his or her progress in the general curriculum on state or districtwide assessments. These new provisions cause concern because many students are placed in special education as a result of their inability to perform in the general curriculum.

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Prior to the interest about access to the general curriculum, IEP teams concerned themselves with designing an appropriate program that met the student's individual needs. Those IEPs often focused on needs associated with the disability and with providing educational interventions appropriate to the developmental age of the student. With the interest in access to the general curriculum and the concurrent interest in passing standardized tests in order to graduate from high school, IEP teams will have to shift their foci to preparing the student for participation in the regular curriculum, adapting curricular, instructional, and assessment interventions in the classroom, and providing accommodations that enable the student to participate successfully in standardized assessments.

## Least Restrictive Environment

If the general curriculum is the focus of instruction for students with disabilities, it is a next logical step to argue that instruction should occur in the regular class where teachers with expertise and resources are in place to provide that curriculum. Given the emphasis on the general curriculum and the necessity of performing well on state or districtwide assessments in order to progress in school and graduate, we can expect that the regular classroom will be the preferred placement choice for many students with disabilities. We can also expect that this preference will result in more requests for accommodations and modifications in the regular classroom and that the tension between accommodations and high standards will become more evident.

## Discipline

Students with disabilities who are removed from school either for a brief time through suspension or to an interim alternative setting must continue to receive access to the general curriculum as well as the special education and related services stipulated on their IEPs (CFR §300.121 and §300.522). This requirement necessitates planning for the student's education at a time when school personnel are most concerned about removing him or her from the school. In these circumstances, the tension inherent in IDEA '97 between providing services for students and removing them from their educational environment creates dissonance for parents and administrators.

## Accountability and Reporting to the Public

Many states have in place accountability mechanisms in which they report the progress of students and schools to the public. IDEA '97 adds to reporting by requiring that states report the performance of students with disabilities with the same frequency and in the same detail as they report the performance of typical students. These public reports must include the number of students with disabilities who participate in regular state or districtwide assessments, the number who participate in alternate assessments, and the results of these assessments (CFR 300.139). The challenge to schools, school districts, and states lies in their ability to report

complex test results in ways that are efficient and understandable to the general public. Because many states have been exempting students with disabilities from testing and/or public reporting, their first efforts that include students with disabilities may appear to yield significantly lower test scores—a circumstance that will have to be explained to the public with some delicacy. Schools and the public will need to engage in public discussions that explain the schools' mission to educate all students to high standards.

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## Potential Areas of Challenge to FAPE Decisions

Requirements that students with disabilities participate in state and districtwide assessments and that they participate and progress in the general curriculum raise a number of questions that could result in disputes between schools and parents. Some issues that could become contentious are:

- To what degree can/should accommodations or modifications be made to standardized assessment procedures?
- What justifications for excluding a student with a disability from state or districtwide assessments are appropriate?
- How will alternate assessments be conducted; how will they be reported; and how will their results be used?
- Which evaluation data prevail in an eligibility decision—progress in the general curriculum or psychometric and observational data?
- How is progress in the general curriculum related to appropriateness?
- Does access to the general curriculum for a student with disabilities occur most appropriately in the regular classroom?
- How will students who are removed from school receive access to the general curriculum?

- If a student with a disability does not perform to standard on a state or districtwide assessment, is his or her special education program inappropriate?
- Under what circumstances can/should a student with a disability move from grade to grade if promotion is premised on meeting standards on a state or districtwide assessment?
- Will provision of the special education and related services necessary to meet a student's unique needs be subjugated to interventions necessary to progress in the general curriculum and meeting standards on state or districtwide assessments?

## Summary

Issues related to access to the general curriculum and participation in statewide assessment will arise as educators work to implement the requirements of IDEA '97. Parents and educators will continue to struggle to assure that students with disabilities receive the special education and related services they need. An added dimension to this struggle will be that schools will now be publicly accountable for the progress of these students, a circumstance that will increase the pressure on schools to serve effectively those students whose progress is problematic. Whether access to the general curriculum and participation in statewide assessments serves to draw attention to the needs of students with disabilities and the efforts of schools to meet them, or results in more failure, expense, and lawsuits, will be influenced by schools' willingness to differentiate curriculum, instruction, and assessments and accept responsibility for the educational progress and future of all students.

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# *Cost-Efficacy Analysis of Out-Of-District Special Education Placements:*

## An Evaluative Measure of Behavior Support Intervention in Public Schools

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The May Institute Inc. and The May Center for Applied Research

*Kenneth Sennett, Ph.D., and Joanne Malonson, M.Ed.*

Brockton Public Schools

- **Public schools frequently respond to discipline problems by placing students in out-of-district educational programs.**
- **A cost-efficacy analysis of out-of-district special education placements can be used as an evaluative index of behavior support intervention.**
- **A large urban school district within Massachusetts that had developed a system-wide approach to behavioral intervention was compared to 14 similar school districts relative to out-of-district placement expenditures.**
- **The criterion school district had the lowest per capita cost for, and lowest percentage of total school budget consumed by, out-of-district placements. In addition, it had the highest proportion of students with special needs who participated in inclusive educational classrooms.**
- **When incorporated with other outcome measures, out-of-district placement costs can be a useful metric by which to evaluate the effectiveness and efficacy of behavior support intervention in public schools.**

Student discipline problems are a major concern confronting teachers and administrative personnel in the public schools (Elam, Rose, & Gallup, 1996; Dwyer, Osher, & Warger, 1998; Walker, Colvin, & Ramsey, 1995). The presence of disruptive, defiant, and negative social behaviors interferes with academic instruction. Serious behavior disorders such as property destruction, weapons possession, harassment, and violence create an unsafe learning environment (Mayer, 1999). Furthermore, frequent and persistent discipline problems demand significant time and attention from educational personnel who otherwise could devote their energies toward other objectives.

One approach to effective student discipline is the design of behavior support interventions. As presented by Sugai, Sprague, Horner, and Walker (2000), there are three levels of behavior support applicable in public school settings. One approach is to implement intensive plans that target individual students who present the most difficult discipline problems. A second strategy is to institute classroom

programs that include groups of students as opposed to single individuals. The third level is the establishment of whole-school or "universal" intervention packages. With this orientation, the entire school population becomes the focus of discipline practices.

Several studies have reported improved student discipline as an outcome from comprehensive behavior support in the public schools (Lewis, Sugai, & Colvin, 1998; Mayer, 1995; Walker, Horner, Sugai, Bullis, Sprague, Bricker, & Kaufman, 1996). These interventions have incorporated several measures to document program effectiveness, including (1) reduction in exclusionary discipline practices (e.g., suspensions, office referrals, drop-outs); (2) decrease in disruptive behaviors; (3) increase in students' social skills; and (4) improved academic performance. However, despite the positive effects that can result from the systematic application of behavior support interventions, it is not uncommon for school districts to respond to discipline problems by sending students to out-of-district placements. Typically,

these settings are private day-schools or residential-care facilities that may be sought because a public school district is unable to provide appropriate educational services, is confronted with extreme challenging behaviors, or is uncertain whether sufficient resources can be marshaled to address discipline concerns. Although out-of-district placements may be indicated in some cases, they are costly and put significant financial burden on school districts. For example, in Massachusetts the mean cost for public education each year is \$6,684 per student contrasted to a mean yearly out-of-district placement cost of \$30,000-\$120,000 per student (Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2000). Additionally, transportation and ancillary costs can inflate tuitions as much as 30%. Another disadvantage to out-of-district placements is that once a student leaves the public schools, the majority do not return but instead, continue to receive educational services in private programs.

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The preceding discussion suggests that the financial costs of out-of-district student placements provide an indirect measure to evaluate the effects from behavior support practices in the public schools. This index of resource allocation could function as an efficacy measure by showing reduced out-of-district expenses relative to the types of behavioral intervention instituted in the schools. In effect, a cost-efficacy analysis could be included with intervention outcome data (e.g., grades, achievement scores, office referrals, suspensions/expulsions) when evaluating school discipline practices.

This report describes an evaluation of out-of-district placement costs for the 15 largest, urban public school districts within Massachusetts. A comparison was made of the financial expenditure of one school district that had developed a systematic program of behavior support to other districts that had similar demographic features. The evaluation yielded data on the percent of total budget consumed by out-of-district placement costs and the per capita amount of out-of-district placement costs for

each school district. The inclusion status of students with special needs in the school districts also was examined. The objective in conducting this analysis and presenting the findings is to demonstrate how an evaluation of out-of-district expenditures can be used as an outcome measure of large-scale behavioral intervention within public schools.

## Method

### Data Collection and Analysis

The data on expenditure costs for the 15 school districts during fiscal year 1995 (FY'95) and fiscal year 1997 (FY'97) were gathered from statistics published by the Massachusetts Department of Education. The FY'95 data and the FY'97 data were made available in the state's Department of Education per Pupil Expenditure Reports for 1995 and 1997 respectively. The measures included in this analysis were (1) the number of students enrolled in the school district, (2) the per capita dollar amount for out-of-district placements, and (3) the percent of yearly public school budget consumed by out-of-district placements.

An additional measure targeted the inclusion status of students with special needs in the 15 school districts. These data were compiled by the Urban Special Education Leadership Collaborative (2000) and represented a composite presentation of student enrollment numbers across districts for the 1999 academic year. The information was quantified as the percent of students with special needs who received services in the regular education classroom in excess of 80% of the school day.

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Out-of-district placement costs were defined as the tuition dollar amount for any student who was enrolled in a private day-school or residential-care facility. Students who comprised this data base had to have been identified as having "special needs" according to state regulatory guidelines and a completed Individualized Education Program (IEP).

## Selection of School Districts

The criterion school district was from an urban community of approximately 93,000 residents with an enrollment of more than 16,000 students. In total, the district was comprised of 25 schools. The administration of the district had committed itself to developing effective services to meet the needs of students who were most at risk for alternative placement because of learning and behavior challenges. To this end, the school district had instituted a comprehensive system of behavior support that extended to its elementary, middle, and secondary school programs. For approximately 13 years, and continuing to the present, consultation services were provided by the senior author and associates to assist the school district in several general areas: (1) identifying at-risk students; (2) developing interventions to decrease discipline problems; (3) training educators in program implementation; and (4) reducing out-of-district placements through the application of effective in-school supports. A variety of consultation services were established within the school district to address these priority areas. Table 1 presents the types of services that comprised the districtwide approach toward behavior support.

**Table 1:** Service Components of Districtwide Approach Toward Behavior Support

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Functional behavioral assessment (FBA)
Preparation of written behavior intervention plan (BIP)
Social skills assessment
Social skills training
Data-based progress monitoring
Parent training
Competency-based staff training
Classroom-based behavioral intervention
Schoolwide behavioral intervention

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The other districts included in this evaluation were selected because, when combined with the criterion school district, they represented the 15 largest urban systems in the state. The information about the 14 comparative school districts was based exclusively on the out-of-district placement cost data

discussed earlier. We did not have descriptions, nor can comment on, the behavior support practices in these school districts.

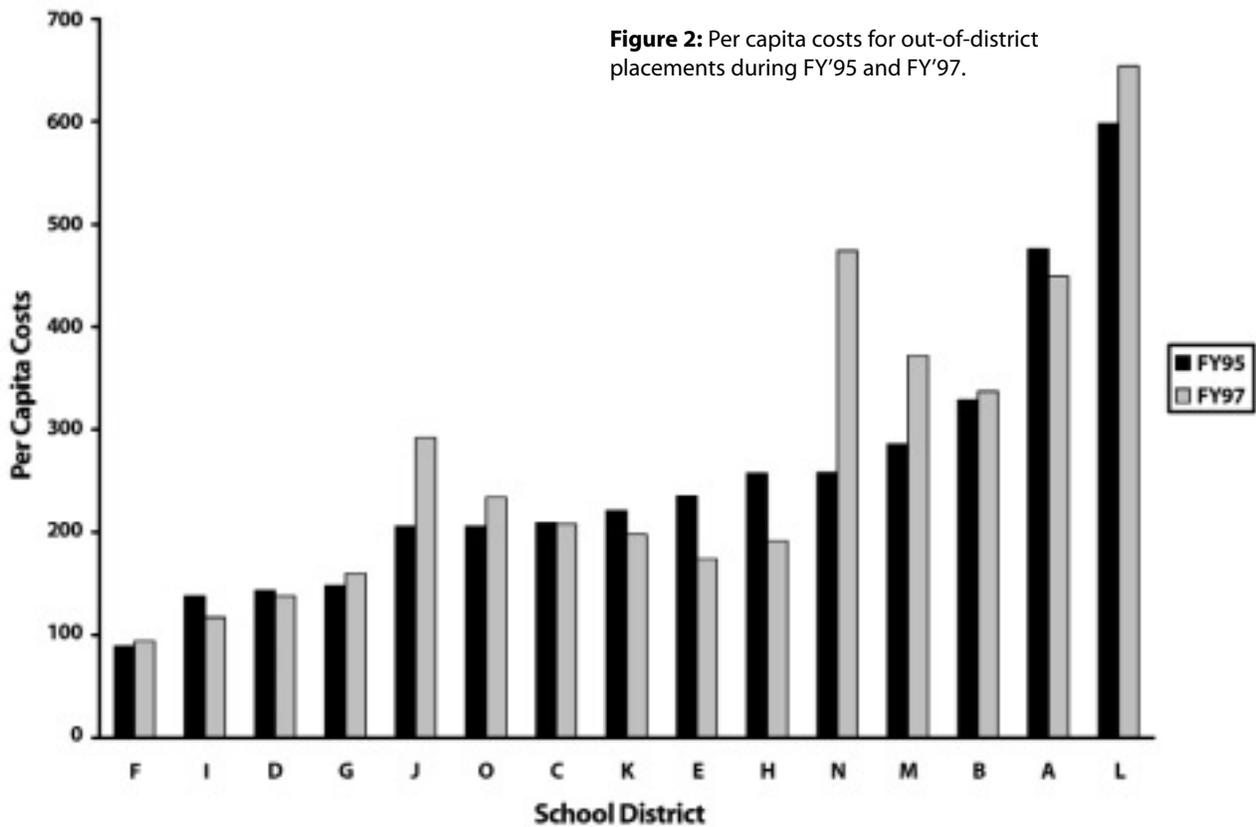
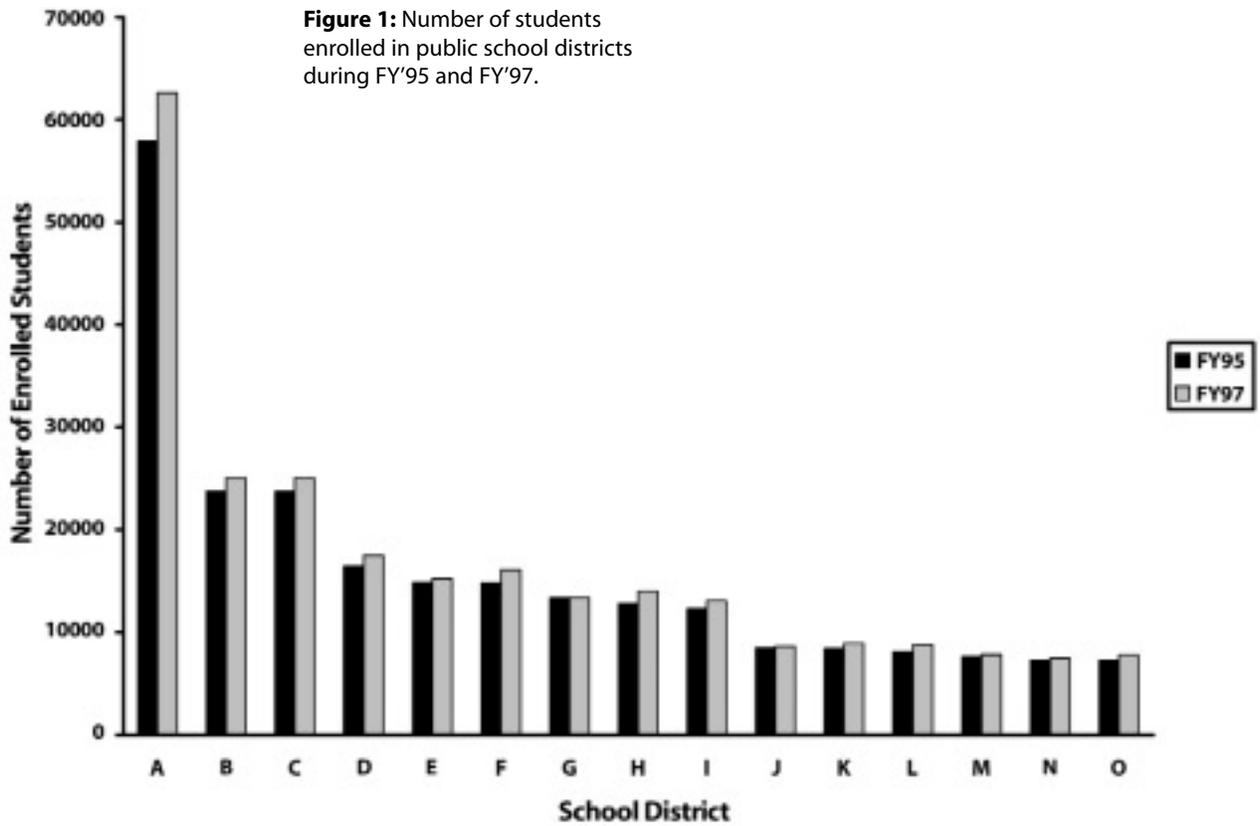
## Results

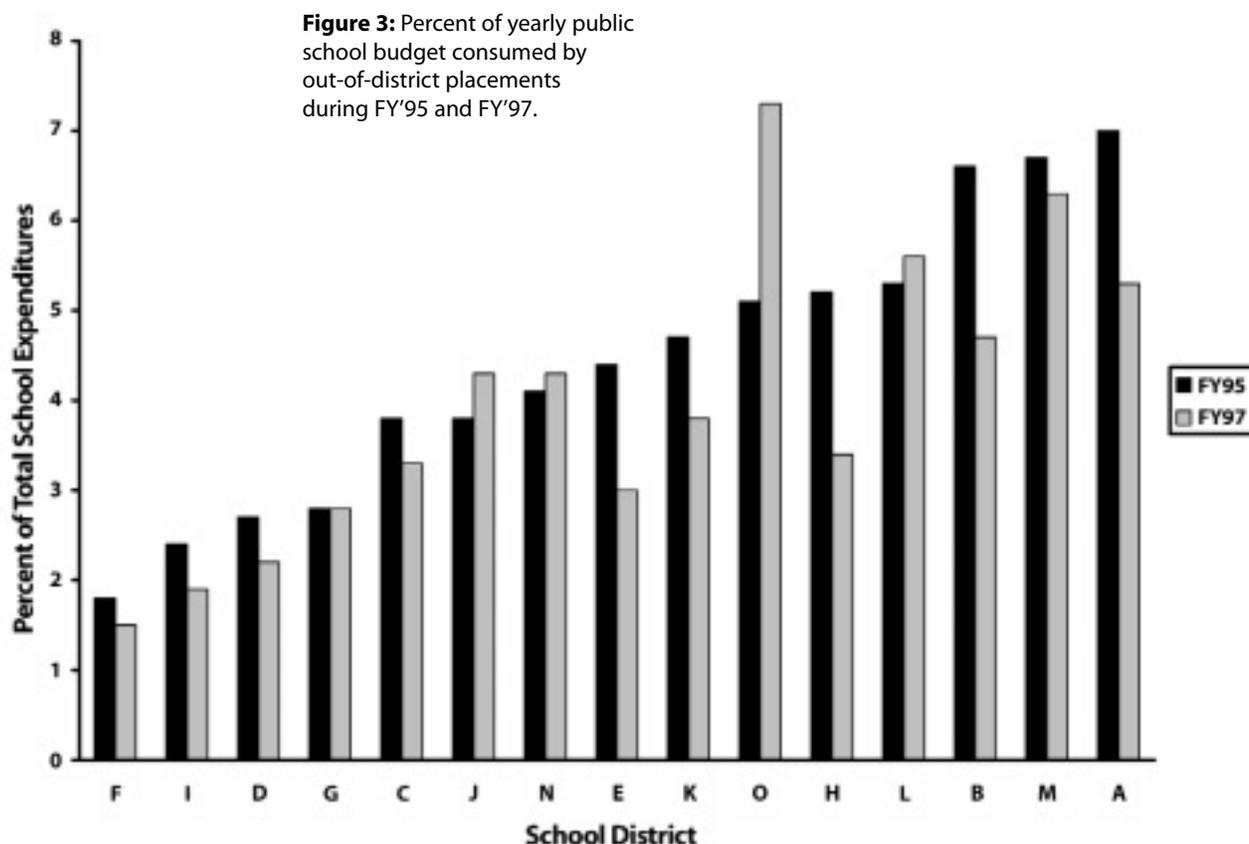
On average, public school districts in Massachusetts spent 14.5% of total expenditures on special education costs in FY'97, with 4.1% dedicated to out-of-district placements. For the 15 public school districts comprising our analysis, the average was 17% of total expenditures for special education and an identical 4.1% allocated for out-of-district placements. By contrast, the criterion school district spent 1.6% of total expenditures on out-of-district placements, or about \$94 per student compared to an average of \$286 per student for the other 14 districts.

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On average, public school districts in Massachusetts spent 14.5% of total expenditures on special education costs in FY'97, with 4.1% dedicated to out-of-district placements.

Figure 1 presents the number of students enrolled in the 15 public school districts during FY'95 and FY'97. School district "A" had a significantly higher enrollment in both years in contrast to the other districts. The criterion school district, labeled "F," was the sixth largest urban district in the state. With regard to the per capita cost for out-of-district placements, Figure 2 shows that the criterion school district had the lowest expenditure during FY'95 and FY'97. Similarly, Figure 3 reveals that this school district also had the lowest percentage of yearly budget consumed by out-of-district placement costs for both fiscal years.



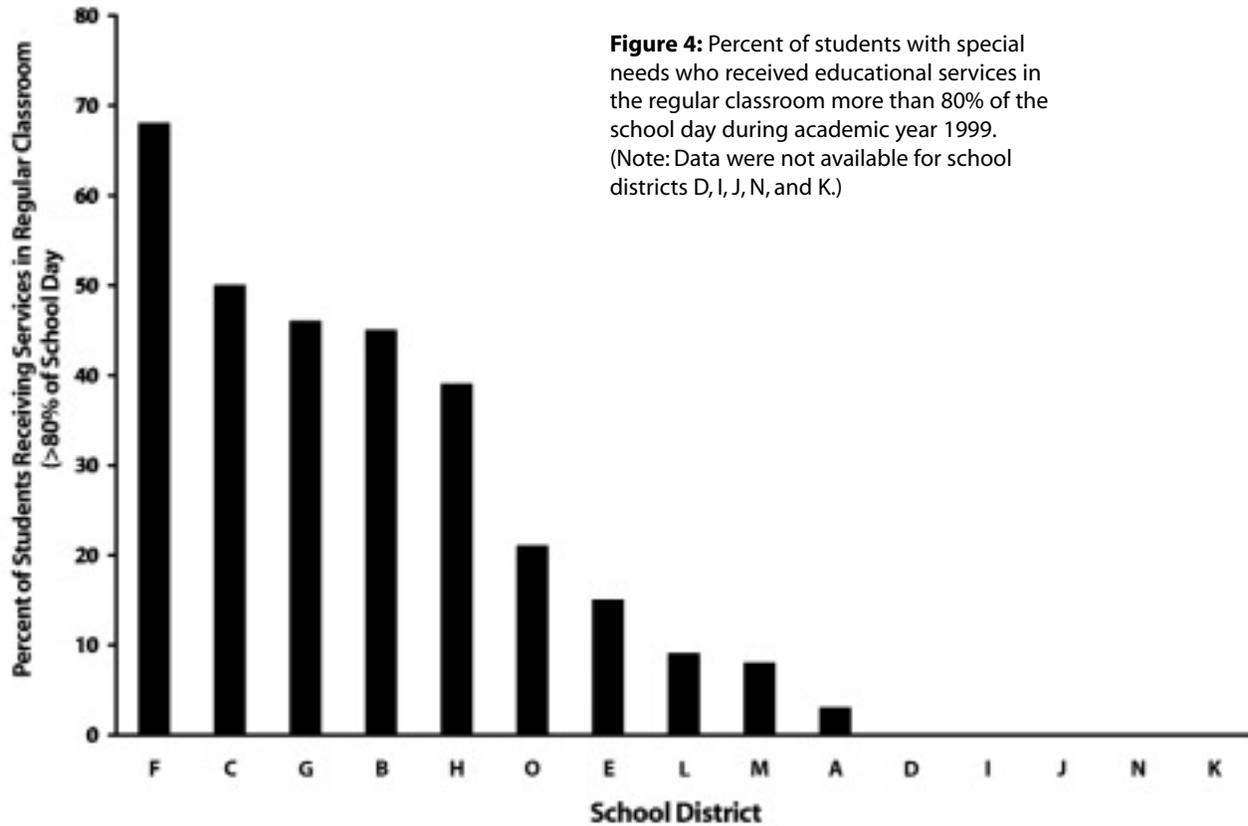


The percent of students with special needs who received educational services in the regular classroom more than 80% of the school day during academic year 1999 is depicted in Figure 4 (see following page). The criterion school district had the highest percentage of students participating in inclusive education when compared to the school districts where data were available.

A statistically significant correlation was not found between population size of the public school districts in this analysis and the percent of total school expenditures for out-of-district placements ( $r = .39$ ), per capita costs for out-of-district placements ( $r = .36$ ), and percent of total school expenditures for special education services ( $r = -.14$ ) (see Table 2, next page). The percent of total school expenditures for special education services correlated both with the percent of total school expenditures for out-of-district placements ( $r = .55$ ) and the per capita costs of out-of-district placements ( $r = .66$ ). The per capita costs of out-of-district placements also was correlated with the percent of total school expenditures for out-of-district placements ( $r = .90$ ).

## Discussion

This report described cost-efficacy analysis as one component of comprehensive program evaluation of public school behavior support services. Specifically, the financial expenditure committed by public school systems to educate students with special needs in out-of-district settings was proposed and illustrated. Within the limitations of this evaluation (discussed below) a school district that had developed a system-wide model of behavior support had the lowest per capita cost and lowest percentage of total budget consumed by out-of-district placements when compared to 14 similar school districts. This school district also had the largest proportion of students with special needs who participated in inclusive education services (i.e., classroom learning with typically developing peers). Interpreted broadly, these findings suggest that system-wide applications of behavior support can be of value in maintaining students who have challenging special needs within their school districts.



**Figure 4:** Percent of students with special needs who received educational services in the regular classroom more than 80% of the school day during academic year 1999. (Note: Data were not available for school districts D, I, J, N, and K.)

There was no correlation between population size of a public school district and out-of-district placement costs, either as a percent of total expenditures or per capita basis. The districts selected were the largest urban locations in the state and, therefore, extrapolating these findings to smaller rural districts may be problematic. Percent of total school expenditures for special education services was correlated

with percent of total school expenditures for out-of-district placement and per capita out-of-district placement costs. These data suggest that the management of out-of-district student placements through targeted and systemic interventions can lead to reduced overall special education costs.

It also should be emphasized that the percent of expenditures devoted to out-of-district placements by

**Table 2:** Correlation Statistics

Measure	Population Size of School District	Percent Total School Expenditures for Special Education Services	Per Capita Costs of Out-Of-District Placements
Percent Total School Expenditures for Out-Of-District Placements	0.39	0.55*	0.90**
Per Capita Costs of Out-Of-District Placements	0.36	0.66**	
Percent of Total School Expenditures for Special Education Services	-0.14		

\* p < .02  
 \*\* p < .002

the criterion school district was 1.6% of its total costs. This result represents substantial savings that can be used to strengthen in-district services for all students. For example, if on a statewide basis the target school district's percent of total expenditures for out-of-district placements was applied during FY'97, school districts within Massachusetts would have saved over 150 million dollars. Obviously, additional finances would have to be spent to improve the practices and supports within these public schools. This allocation, however, should improve considerably the intensity, comprehensiveness, and positive outcomes of special education services.

This cost-efficacy analysis clearly is limited by the fact that the behavior support practices of the comparative school districts were unknown. In effect, we cannot speak to the quality of behavioral intervention in these school districts and how they relate to resource allocation. It seems logical to assume, however, that school systems with high out-of-district placement costs are not devoting resources toward in-district program development. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that reduced out-of-district expenditure cannot, by itself, be used as an index of effective behavior support. That is, the quality of behavior support practices cannot be assessed solely by the number of students being educated in the public schools versus those placed in alternative out-of-district programs. Our suggestion is that like other dependent measures available to public school systems (e.g., office referrals, suspensions/exclusions, achievement test scores), the data on out-of-district expenditures can be used in combination with other indices to evaluate properly the effects from districtwide behavioral intervention.

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 This cost-efficacy analysis clearly is limited by the fact that the behavior support practices of the comparative school districts were unknown.

Because the criterion public school system in this analysis had the fewest number of students attending out-of-district programs, more students were able to participate in inclusive education. The data in Figure 4, in fact, support this contention. They revealed that nearly 70% of students in the criterion school district received educational services in regu-

lar classrooms for the majority of their school day. Again, these findings are correlational and cannot speak to the quality of behavioral intervention but they would seem to serve as an additional measure to judge the impact of support services.

Professionals in the field of child and adolescent mental health have emphasized the importance of cost-saving and cost-efficacy analyses when evaluating the effectiveness of community-referenced alternatives in favor of traditional (i.e., hospital-based) therapeutic services (Burns, 1991; Henggeler, Melton, & Smith, 1992; Schoenwald, Ward, Henggeler, Pickrel, & Patel, 1996). Similarly, we posit that the type of resource allocation analysis presented in this report should be incorporated by behavioral specialists who are responsible for assisting public school systems in designing districtwide interventions to support students who have special education needs and challenging behaviors. Reduced out-of-district placement costs should provide a meaningful measure that reflects improved in-school behavior supports and the financial advantages of targeting preventive interventions.

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# Home Schooling Children • With Special Needs

Jane G. Duffey, Ph.D.

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- **Among the growing population of home schooled students in the U.S. is evidence of a sub-population of children with special needs.**
- **The profile of families that practice this educational choice is similar to that of the general home schooling population.**
- **Parents of these families were very resourceful in meeting the needs of their children, seeking help from both private and public sectors.**
- **Unlike the general population of home schooled children, the special needs children often spent as much time in a public or private school setting as in a home school environment.**
- **Parent participants generally desired a more satisfying relationship with school systems.**

The following article is a summary of a recent research study (Duffey, 2000). This descriptive study sought to extend the knowledge base on home schooling to include the population of families with special needs children. This study compared the results on home schooled children with special needs to previous studies on the general population of home schoolers and presented case studies of four families. Through a nationally distributed survey, data were generated that provided demographics, educational backgrounds of both parents and students, and information about the content and process of the home school. The second phase of the study provided an in-depth look into the lives of four families who home schooled at least one special needs child.

The results of the survey suggested that home schooling families with special needs children were similar to their counterparts within the general population of home schoolers. The most significant difference was in the number of years special needs children were conventionally schooled. Special needs children, whose parents are more likely to seek help from outside sources, are enrolled in conventional schools longer, and were more likely to participate in part-time services than regular home schoolers.

The study recommended the development and implementation of public access policies at the state

and local levels for home schooling families. Also, the study suggested a need for a collaborative relationship between home schooling families and their local educational agencies. Since this study was exploratory and descriptive in nature, it did not address the efficacy of the practice in academic and social terms except to solicit parental perception of their children's progress.

## Home Schooling for Everyone?

Is home schooling for everyone? Probably not. But for those families whose lifestyles and philosophical convictions accommodate the choice, home schooling seems to be working. Public opinion of the practice has certainly become more favorable in recent days, especially with the outstanding showing of home schoolers in national competitions such as spelling and geography bees. There have even been several recent studies (Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999) that have heralded the academic successes of home schoolers.

Home schooling has been an educational practice in the U.S. since colonial times. Its popularity has ebbed and flowed over the centuries. Within the last two decades, the home schooling movement has been experiencing a resurgence and gaining momentum. Current home schooling population estimates

range from 500,000 (Lines, 1996) to 1.6 million students (Ray, 1997) with a current yearly rate of growth of about 15% (Kennedy, 1997). Researchers have not yet established the number of children within that general population who require special education. However, it is apparent that there is a significant number of these students as evidenced in literature within the home school community, such as *Home Education Magazine* and *Home School Court Report*.

With the growing home school population, there are also tributes to its success in learner outcomes (Farris, 1997; Klicka, 1995; Ray, 1997; Rudner, 1999). Duvall, Ward, Delquadri, and Greenwood (1997) even suggested that learning disabled students who are educated at home experience greater academic success than their counterparts in a public school setting. The apparent legitimacy of home schooling as an educational practice as well as the increased success of home school advocates in garnering favorable state regulations have brought encouragement to the movement.

The atmosphere of success and relative acceptance of home schooling has brought about a number of consequences. More parents are continuing to withdraw their children, some of whom have special education concerns, from conventional schools to educate them at home. However, at the same time, many of these parent-teachers are seeking access to conventional schools to enroll students on a part-time basis in academic courses and extracurricular activities, or to make use of resources and programs for both students and parents (Dahm, 1996; Lines, 1996; Terpstra, 1994). In Iowa, Dahm (1996) reported that a proportion of these families desiring part-time enrollment had special education needs.

In interpreting policy resulting from Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education (OSEP) advised that school districts must include home educated children in their child find activities (National Association of State Directors of Special Education [NASDSE], 1998). All children deemed eligible under federal funding provisions can be served through the public schools—whether in attendance there or in private or home settings. School districts must also determine ways to accommodate these students and include them in their accountability reporting. Additionally, a growing

number of state legislatures are enacting regulations to accommodate home schoolers' access to public schools (Home School Legal Defense Association, 1997), and school districts are developing programs to follow suit (Hawkins, 1996). Educators can develop programs and accommodations that will be effective if they have a greater understanding of the nature and needs of the population with whom they are concerned. The intent of this study was to provide descriptive data on the home school special needs population and insight into why parents of special needs students are choosing to educate them at home, how those home schools are conducted, and what the families' perceptions are of the success of their undertaking. More specifically, the guiding research questions were as follows:

1. What are the demographic characteristics of the home schooling families with special needs children?
2. What are the educational backgrounds and training of the teacher-parents of special needs children?
3. What are the special education classifications of the home schooled special needs children?
4. What are the rationales parents of special needs children give for choosing home education?
5. How can the special needs home school be structured, what are the instructional practices, and what is the nature of the curriculum?
6. What are the home schooling parents' and students' perceptions of the home schooling experience concerning academic and social progress?
7. Do the factors that characterize the general population of home schooled children also characterize the population of home schooled special needs children?

## What Does Existing Research Indicate?

Examining existing research and interviewing home school experts around the U.S. indicated that there was almost no research on the target population of this study—special needs home schoolers. Furthermore, some researchers (Welner & Welner, 1999) were critical of the quality of existing home school research in general. However, it was clearly evident from the

amount of informal literature—home school publications and Internet websites—that a sizable population of parents who taught special needs children existed. There are support organizations and Internet sites specifically designed for families home schooling these children. Nationally Challenged Homeschoolers Associated Network (NATHHAN) and Parents Rearing and Educating Autistic Children in Christian Homes (PREACCH) are two examples. There are also resources within some of the larger home school organizations dedicated to special needs students, such as the Special Needs Coordinator at Home School Legal Defense Association.

The literature concerning the special needs children segment is largely informal. Informational pieces tend to be written from private experience and are testimonial in nature—as support group literature should be. There are several books (Hensley, 1995; Herzog, 1994; Sutton & Sutton, 1997) written by educators with a home schooling background for the purpose of assisting families with special education needs. Additionally, there are references to the special education population within feature articles (Dahm, 1996; Kantrowitz & Wingert, 1998). The two research studies on home educated special needs students consist of a legal review of litigation concerning these children (Reinhiller & Thomas, 1996) and an experimental study (Duvall et al., 1997) conducted to investigate the success of home schooling children with learning disabilities.

### **Size of the Population: Guess and Conjecture**

Since none of the descriptive studies on the general population of home schoolers delineated the numbers into categories, the size of the special needs subpopulation is purely speculative. Based upon the estimates of the U.S. Department of Education (1997), there are approximately 5.8 million special education students. The number of home schooled special needs students could range from 58,000 to 116,000 depending upon the estimates of Lines (1996) (one percent of the school age population) and Ray (1997) (two percent)—if the same proportion of special needs students are within the home school population. A review of membership applications at Home School Legal Defense Association (C. Hurst, personal communication, monthly from February to December, 1999) yielded the following information. The percent

of the total applicants that are families with special needs varied throughout the months. The cumulative percentage of families was 9.8. However, there was no indication of how many special needs children each family might have. If one child, 9.8% seems to reflect the incidence of special education students within the conventional school setting (10–12%). If the number of children per family matches the 1.4 mean as seen later in this study, then the overall percentage could be 13.7. However, with no central reporting of home schooled children, these figures are thought-provoking but clearly speculative.

### **Describing an Elusive Population: Methodology**

Since the guiding research questions of this study asked for data that could be quantified, such as many of the demographic characteristics, and data that required narrative responses, a mixed design was the appropriate choice for this study. The intent of this study was to provide descriptive data, some of which referred to previous study results. It was then necessary to select similar methodology to compare results to those studies. Therefore, the first phase of this study included questions from a survey instrument that contained close-ended questions whose answers could be analyzed using descriptive statistics. The results of these answers were then compared to results produced most notably to the Ray (1997) study.

The open-ended questions of the survey and the case studies produced data that went beyond the picture presented by the statistics. This qualitative data offered an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of home schooling special needs children through the eyes of those who experience it. Open-ended questions were analyzed using thematic analysis characteristic of the constant comparative method. Taking information from data collection and comparing it to emerging categories, themes, and trends were interpreted by identifying common and uncommon responses.

Phase 2 of the study was a multicase, descriptive study using a phenomenological approach. Because of the range of diagnoses possible within the population of special needs children, four cases rather than a single case were chosen to represent some of the variation possible. Creswell (1998) suggested the use of multiple

cases showing different perspectives and experiences of the phenomenon. The results of this phase of the research study were presented according to the two forms of data collection: interview and observation. Interview data were summarized and analyzed noting themes. Observations of the home schools in progress were described in narrative form. Cross-case analyses were conducted after considering the individual cases.

Verification of procedures occurred throughout the length of the project. Such procedures were those specified by Creswell (1998) and included the following: prolonged engagement and persistent observation over the course of two years; triangulation of data gathering methods in the use of survey, interview, and observation; noting researcher bias; use of member checks while conducting the case studies; external audit by an outside consultant as well as the doctoral dissertation committee; peer review by a special education and early childhood expert; and rich, thick description detailing the participants and setting under study.

## The Greatest Challenge: Finding Study Participants

Due to the unique nature of the population (i.e., the lack of organization and difficulty to identify and access), selection of participants was conducted in a unique manner. Initially, survey participants were to be members of support groups for home schooling families with special needs children. Contact was established with several key home schooling parents who had agreed to distribute surveys to the membership of their respective groups. Additionally, a support group publication, *NATHHAN News*, advertised a need for participants. Although both of these strategies produced participants, what also evolved was an Internet search for participants and a reliance on one home schooling parent to inform another—snowball selection. Participants were enlisted through accessing Internet message boards and listservs, such as Forum for Home Educators of Special Needs Kids and AUT-2B-HOME (a group of home schooling families with children in the autism spectrum).

Finding respondents for participating in the first phase of the research project was challenging and required both perseverance and creativity. Of approximately 400 distributed surveys, there were 100

returned and completed surveys by the cutoff date. For the 21 families who responded after that date, the data was used to look for similarity in response and the occurrence of notable outliers. These 121 surveys comprised a response rate of 30.3%.

The top diagnoses (by frequency) of the special needs children in the first phase participant families were ADD/ADHD, learning disabilities (LD), pervasive developmental delay (PDD), and speech and language impairment. The four families selected for the second phase of the study were chosen based upon these educational diagnoses. Other factors that also determined selection were geographic location and accessibility. Varying geographic locales were selected to sample the differing home schooling climates created by state and local home school laws as well as the level of organization of home schooling families in an area.

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Accessibility to the families was provided through contacts with home school advocates and through the Internet. Introduced by one contact, I selected a family of five who lived in a military housing community in a southeastern state. The two children being home schooled in the family had ADD and ADHD, both with chronic illnesses and one with speech and language impairment. Meeting through an Internet search, parents of three children in a rural setting in a south central region agreed to be observed. The oldest of their three children (age 8) was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome. Another contact introduced me to the other two families who were her clients. The first was a family of six who lived in a large city in the mid-Atlantic region. This family, situated in an Orthodox Jewish neighborhood, home schooled three sons—one with a learning disability and the other two with autism. The final family lived in a suburb in the Silicon Valley region of Northern California where the parents home schooled two sons with learning disabilities.

## Research Findings: Profile of the Population

From this effort, a profile of the population emerged. In demographic terms, the typical family was white (non-Hispanic), with two married parents who lived in a suburban setting. A slight majority of the fathers were professionals with the mothers overwhelmingly homemakers who contributed the bulk of the teaching. The mean number of children per family was 3.5 with 1.4 having special needs. The special needs categories of the children in this study included 11 of the 13 categories of disabilities described in Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

As far as qualifications of the parents to home school their children, their educational backgrounds generally did not approach a professional educator. The mean number of years of education for the fathers was 14.8 and for the mothers, 14.3. Eighty percent of the mothers contributed 80% of the teaching time. Of these mothers, 12% were certified teachers and 30% had taken some form of training in special education—usually specific to their child's disability. Of the four mothers I interviewed, all had conducted extensive research into the disabilities of their children. One mother stated, "I've probably read every book there is on ADHD. My friends feel I am very knowledgeable in that realm ... I feel like I've done as much research as I can fathom at this point. I've made the changes that make it easier for them to learn."

These families tended to be very resourceful in structuring their home schools to meet the challenges disabilities often presented. The parents often sought and used outside help. They utilized various therapies and counseling available through the public schools and through private means (see table following). Additionally, 24% of the families enrolled their children on a part-time basis in conventional schools. Almost all the families were members of support groups and used support services. A home schooling mother in Massachusetts described her resources: "He has been getting physical and occupational therapies through the public school this year and they are willing to do special math and language classes as well. If this does not work out, I will hire a tutor to work with him in these areas. The rest I feel I can handle."

### Support Services Received by the Special Needs Children

Support Service	Frequencies	
	Public School	Private Setting
Physical therapy	18	11
Speech/language therapy	32	33
Occupational therapy	24	26
Biofeedback therapy	3	1
Vision therapy	11	0
Psychological counseling	18	4
Learning disability therapy	5	4
Other (itinerant teacher, therapeutic horseback riding, sensory integration, behavior modification, audiologist, yoga)	10	5

In this study, I could not effectively assess academic and social progress of these children. Their diverse backgrounds and circumstances prohibited such comparisons being made to the general population of home schoolers or their conventional school counterparts. However, parents reported their perceptions of their children's progress. Overall, parents' perceptions of their children's academic progress were positive. Likewise, most parents also felt that their special needs children exhibited either average or improved social progress since home schooling. The special needs children participated in extracurricular activities on the average of 4.14 activities per child.

Perhaps some of the most interesting information that emerged from both the surveys and the in-depth interviews of parents was the rationale for selecting this educational practice. For the most part, parents were dissatisfied with conventional schooling. Families often decided to home school their children when conventional schools failed to live up to their expectations and they felt that home was a more suitable environment. Sixty-one percent of the parents responded in such a way citing the following categories: a negative experience in school, poor reputation of the public schools, noncompliance of schools to provide required services, inadequate attention to child, failure to meet child's needs, and an unsafe environment. However, there was also clearly an ambivalent feeling on the parents' part. Their frustration with schools and school systems

was expressed on the one hand, but there was a willingness to utilize services and resources and desire a more fruitful relationship on the other hand.

## Comparing Special Needs Profile to General Population

When the results of this study were compared to the general population of home schoolers, a profile generated by Ray's (1997) study, there were clearly some similarities as well as a few discrepancies. The educational level of the fathers in the general population was slightly higher (15.6 to 14.8 years) as was the mother's level (14.7 to 14.3 years). Fifty-three percent of the parents in Ray's (1997) study held a bachelor's or higher degree; 44% of the parents in the special needs study did so.

The breakdown of the formal teaching within the home school was very similar for both groups, deviating by one to two percentage points for the three selections: mother, father, and other. Quite similar also, were the percentages of parents with teaching certification; Ray's (1997) mothers had a higher percentage by three points. Perhaps one of the greatest discrepancies in the data was the racial/ethnicity background of the parents. In Ray's (1997) study, both parents were at 96% white (non-Hispanic) in his sample. In the special needs study, parents were 88% and 89% white.

Strong similarities also existed in the average number of children, both at 3.3, and the percentage of families represented by two parents, 98% and 97%. The average age of children in Ray's (1997) study was 10.5 years and in the special needs study, 9.8 years for all children and 9.0 years for those with special needs. There was a higher percentage of homes with computers in the special needs study (91% to 86%), but this study was conducted a few years later, possibly accounting for a greater use of technology in the homes.

In curriculum choices, the major selection in each study was a parent-designed curriculum. However, more parents in Ray's (1997) study designated this choice. Both sets of respondents used curricular packages by about the same amount (24% to 23%). In the special needs group, there were more parents selecting the "other" categories and specifying unschooling or programs (11% to 6%). While 6% of the special

needs parents used a school program for their children, only 1% of Ray's group did so. Extracurricular activities for both groups were quite comparable.

Probably the most significant area of difference in the findings was the average number of years home schooled and conventionally schooled for the children in the studies. As far as number of years in home education, the mean number for a child in Ray's (1997) study was 4.8 years. If any children were enrolled additional years in conventional schools, the mean number of years was 0.4. In the special needs group, the mean number of years in home schooling was 3.8 with 3.6 in conventional schooling. These figures seem to suggest that the special needs children in the study experienced more years of schooling both in the home and in the conventional setting. In other words, their education often started earlier and took longer. Children with special needs often have need of early intervention services and resources and stay in school settings longer to ensure adequate transition beyond secondary schooling.

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## Case Studies and Emerging Themes

The in-depth look into this educational phenomenon through the experiences of four families revealed four distinct home schools constructed by the participating families. Three of these four families reported great satisfaction with the educational progress of their children, including satisfactory test scores as well as satisfactory participation in extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the parents were very pleased with the strengthened family relationships they seemed to feel was a result of the home schooling way of life.

The fourth family in the urban setting had complex needs. There were six children, three of whom were home schooled and had special needs: two with autism and one with a learning disability. Two of these children had made positive academic progress.

Their disabilities were the most severe and received the bulk of attention. The third child was left on his own much of the time and the mother, admittedly, felt his failure to progress was a result of that fact.

### **Mother-Directed Learning**

Beyond this brief and seemingly superficial assessment of these four home schools, there were several themes that emerged based upon the totality of the experience of observations and interviews. In home schooling literature and in the surveys of this study, there is a strong reference to the desire to achieve, or satisfaction in having achieved, family unity through the selection of home schooling. However, what I heard and observed gave evidence to mothers who directed the learning experiences of their children and delighted in being an integral part of that process. In other words, not all the family was involved in the teaching/learning process. None of the fathers contributed to direct instruction of the children although all were reportedly supportive.

### **Needs-Based Instruction**

In the survey, parents noted the advantage of choosing curricula and instructional methods that were customized to the needs of their children. The case study mothers also spoke about selecting curricular materials that fit their children's abilities and interests. Likewise, they developed their instructional techniques to respond to the needs of their children. These efforts were taking place, but the additional element of the amount of instructional time allotted to the individual children became an issue in the case studies. The planning and intent were present but the ability and interest differences among the children in each family created an inability for the mother to provide equality in instructional time.

### **Philosophy: Parental Control**

A philosophy of parental control arose from the survey responses and was apparent in the case studies. Parents in the surveys challenged the traditional acceptance of the educational professionals knowing what is best for a child educationally. Furthermore, they indicated that this responsibility was given to them by divine appointment as well as relegated to them through school systems that failed to do the job. The case study mothers similarly gave strong

testimony to their conviction that they were in charge of their children's education. As they shared their strong convictions and beliefs in the practice of home schooling that was influenced by a religious faith, it was apparent that they shared a common philosophy.

### **Now What? Implications for Policy**

What seems clear from this research is that parents who home school their special needs children want help. However, they want help from a trusted source that understands and respects their philosophical position. Several parents reported successful partnerships with their local schools where their children utilized services such as speech and occupational therapies while the parents contributed the bulk of the educational activities each day. There are also some model programs scattered throughout the country.

School districts in Des Moines and Ames, Iowa have made proactive efforts to establish partnerships with home schooling parents of special needs children. The districts not only provide the special education services and programs for eligible students, but also the parents are advised in curricular choices and instructional methodologies and provided with a certified visiting teacher, free annual standardized testing, and annual written evaluations. Other states, such as Washington and Oregon, also have put programs into place. However, the implementation of programs is being slowed down by battles over participation in cocurricular activities (Dailey, 1999; Hawkins, 1996). Children who need resources and services are seemingly being caught in the middle when parents are hesitant to approach school districts rocked by controversy and negative press.

Terpstra (1994) asked the question, "Can we see new possibilities for the public school acting as an umbrella for some types of alternative schooling?" (p. 58). For those parents who desire the partnership, there are exciting possibilities if they could join hands with professional educators. As an example, California has created several charter schools for home schoolers; some of these schools are specific to special needs students (Walsh, 1997). These students have the benefit of the legal covering of the school as well as access to counseling, resources, and services.

Many home schooling parents already utilize testing and evaluation procedures offered by both private and public schools since some form of evaluation is required by the states' home schooling regulations. If public schools should expand this service, the school district would be much better informed and be in a position to offer help if warranted. Furthermore, since many of these students tend to transition back into the public schools, that process could be greatly enhanced by maintaining current testing information and building a relationship with the home schooling family.

Recently, the school where I am an administrator has begun its inaugural home school program encouraging home school students to enroll as part-time students. We invite these students and their families to participate in extracurricular activities, utilize services and resources, and enroll in one to two classes. Our goal is to build a partnership with these families who hold a notable presence in our community. Some of these students have disabilities and we have great hopes of entering into a collaborative relationship that will provide an educational environment that might truly be the best of both worlds.

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## CASE IN POINT:

# • *The Proactive Practice of Special Education Administration*

Ellen G. Honeyman, C.A.G.S.

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The role of a special education administrator has always included the responsibility to address, on behalf of the school district, the implementation of federal and state regulations and to manage complaints and possible issues of noncompliance. There was an underlying assumption that the primary focus of the school systems' special education leaders was to develop and oversee quality programs, policies, and practices, which could lead to the most positive educational, vocational, and social outcomes for students with disabilities.

In recent years, the role of special education administrators has been transformed increasingly from one that is proactive in nature to one that emphasizes complaint resolution and the oversight of regulatory requirements, which are typically viewed as burdensome by the larger school community. There are numerous complex reasons that have led to the shift to what might be described as "reactive" administrative practices. It is fair to say that special education administrators at the local level often find themselves on the defensive. Problems include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Inadequate federal funding for special education.
- Difficulty recruiting and retaining qualified special education teachers and related service providers.
- Implementation of federal and state regulations, which are viewed as complex and subject to differing interpretations. Teachers and building administrators complain that the completion of the paperwork and the convening of the meetings required by these regulations take valuable time from direct teaching and provision of classroom-based support by related professionals. It can be argued that the very regulations that were intended to assure FAPE have had the unexpected outcome of impeding access to the

educational services and programs originally envisioned.

- The increase in litigation and advocacy efforts, which are often highly contentious and personalized in nature. The expenditure of financial and human resources to address these matters can be considerable.
- High stakes testing and the evolution of how to most appropriately include students with disabilities in the assessment process and to report their results. Gagnon, et al. (see this issue of *JSEL*) point out "...that special education teachers must negotiate the challenge of clarifying expectations and balancing the competing priorities between state and district standards and individual student needs."
- The development of alternative educational programs, including charter schools and home schooling and the impact on service delivery for students with disabilities must be considered. Jane Duffey (see this issue of *JSEL*) suggests that "...home schooling families with special needs children were similar to their counterparts [except that] special needs children...are enrolled in conventional schools longer and were more likely to participate in part-time services."
- Societal changes reflected in the nation's schools by the increasing number of students with serious emotional disturbances and highly complex medical/educational needs that require considerable resources.

There has never been a time when the efforts of special education administrators to demonstrate that the knowledge and services of their departments are part of a continuum of supports for *all* students have been more important. Tensions over funding, allocation of resources, and the assessment of student progress have the potential to polarize

regular and special education, which could seriously undermine the progress of the past twenty-five years in assuring full access to appropriate education for students with disabilities. Collaboration and cooperation among all elements of the school community are essential. Gagnon, et al. (see this issue of JSEL) point out that "A central tenet of standards-driven reform is that the entire educational system should align and that existing resources and new initiatives focus on improving student performance and attaining rigorous standards." Carl Lashley (see this issue of JSEL) stresses that IDEA '97 "...changes the nature of the discussion teachers, administrators, and parents must have to provide appropriate and effective programs for students with disabilities." It is the responsibility of special education leaders to take the initiative to engage their general education colleagues in this critical dialogue to assure that outcomes for students with disabilities are part of the discussion.

The impetus for positive change in a school system can arise from both internal and external stimuli. Special education administrators have the opportunity to utilize requirements imposed by regulatory agencies to involve the broader school community in the study and potential improvement of educational and support services for *all* students. State Departments of Education, the federal Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP), and the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) oversee school districts' compliance with regulations affecting students with disabilities and offer technical assistance. It is possible to utilize the process that results from an inquiry by one of these agencies to support systemic change in a district, which can involve multiple constituencies.

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Special education administrators have the opportunity to utilize requirements imposed by regulatory agencies to involve the broader school community in the study and potential improvement of educational and support services for *all* students.

The Office for Civil Rights recently conducted an investigation of a mid-size (26,000 students) urban school district in response to a parent's complaint that alleged discrimination by the school district.

The findings of the extensive OCR investigation indicated that the complaint was unsubstantiated. By coincidence, district administrators had been engaged in a discussion concerning student support services and the need to develop uniform procedures across the school district. The OCR investigation served as a catalyst to form a task force to consider and address identified system needs and to develop a *Unified Student Support Services Process and Procedures Guide*. The task force members included: the deputy superintendent, the supervisor of pupil personnel, the director of special education, the director of bilingual education, quadrant managers (assistant superintendents), evaluation team chairpersons, school psychologists, school adjustment counselors, guidance counselors, the school safety officer, elementary, middle, and high school principals, special education and regular education teachers, and other interested parties. The work of the task force, completed in four months, was very focused and collaborative.

The *Guide* includes documents that define the manner in which individual schools implement and document adherence to school district policy in a consistent manner regarding: Bilingual/ESL Services, Student Support Teams, Functional Behavioral Assessment/Behavioral Intervention Plans, and Discipline. Relevant state and federal regulations were included to provide information that clarifies the legal requirements underlying many of the policies and procedures detailed in the guide.

In the introduction to the guide, the Superintendent points out that the school district allocates its multiple resources in a coordinated manner that considers and meets the needs of diverse learners. Staff and funding available through Regular Education, Special Education, Title I, and Bilingual Education are considered and blended to provide support to students who present with a continuum of educational, linguistic, and social differences and needs. *The Unified Student Support Services Process and Procedures Guide* aligns with these policies as it delineates expected practices, which can enhance positive educational outcomes for all students.

Ongoing professional development for administrators and teaching staff were considered critical to the successful and consistent adherence to the

processes and procedures included in the *Guide*. It was expected that on at least an annual basis the guide would be amended to reflect current knowledge and changing state and federal mandates.

The activities and development of the *Guide* described above are offered as an example of "proactive practice." While the *Guide* provided a tangible result of the task force's work, the establishment or reconfirming of positive relationships among professionals from various disciplines within the school district was a key outcome of the process. The investigation required by the Office for Civil Rights, completed by the special education administrator, served as a catalyst to address broader systemic issues. The potential for positive outcomes for students when there is a common knowledge base and framework for practice among school staff is obvious.

Putnam, et al. (see this issue of *JSEL*) offer a fine example of proactive practice in their *Cost-Efficacy Analysis...of Behavior Support Intervention in Public Schools*. The development of a systematic behavior support program throughout the Brockton, MA Public Schools resulted in a significantly reduced

placement of students in out-of-district special education schools. The broader benefits of these practices for all students in the school system can be assumed.

The practice of special education administration is enhanced, and yields greater benefits for students, when there is a commitment to engage in proactive relationships with parents and colleagues as the first priority. The responsibility to oversee and assure compliance with regulations cannot be underestimated. However, it is through effective collaboration with all members of the school community that true compliance with the letter and spirit of special education regulations is met and students with disabilities are provided a true continuum of services, which leads to positive outcomes.

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# Call For Papers

## Manuscript Guidelines and Editorial Policies

The *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, published by the Council for Administrators of Special Education, seeks articles that capture an administrator's attention by providing useful information that stimulates new ways of thinking about managing and leading. Only articles that have been validated and accompanied by accepted theory, research, or practice are sought.

The *Journal of Special Education Leadership's* goals are:

1. To provide fresh ideas and perspectives, grounded in recent advances in administrative theory and research, on contemporary issues that administrators must face.
2. To become a primary source of useful ideas for those who seek to educate present and future administrators of special education programs.
3. To become a forum through which practicing administrators of special education programs can challenge the meaningfulness of translations of administrative theory and research.

Contributors to each issue will include practicing administrators, researchers, policymakers, or others interested in special education administration. The purpose of this arrangement is to encourage interaction among individuals within those roles in developing articles. Interactions may include any of the following: a jointly authored manuscript, an interview preceded or followed by commentary written by the interviewer, and a follow-up article that is specifically linked to the theory and/or research article that provides examples from the field and implications for administrators in similar situations.

A typical article might begin with either a brief case illustrating the primary theme, or posing certain questions and issues that special education administrators need to address. A typical article will also satisfy the academic reader who seeks more than just opinions and wants to see a serious effort at connecting ideas to accepted theory and research.

With respect to style and format, manuscripts should:

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- Conform to APA format (see Appendix B of *APA Publication Manual*, 4th edition, 1994), particularly:
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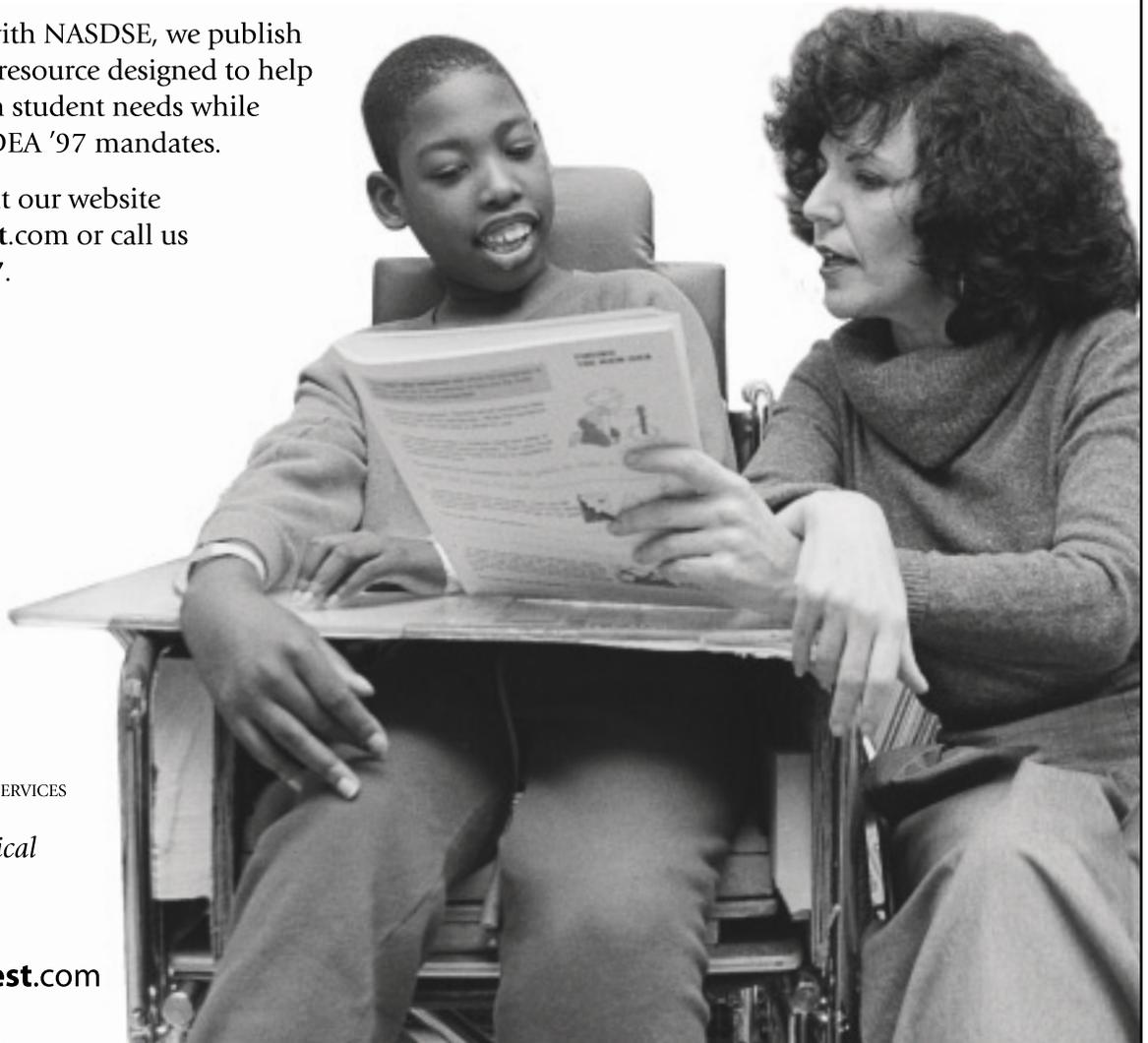
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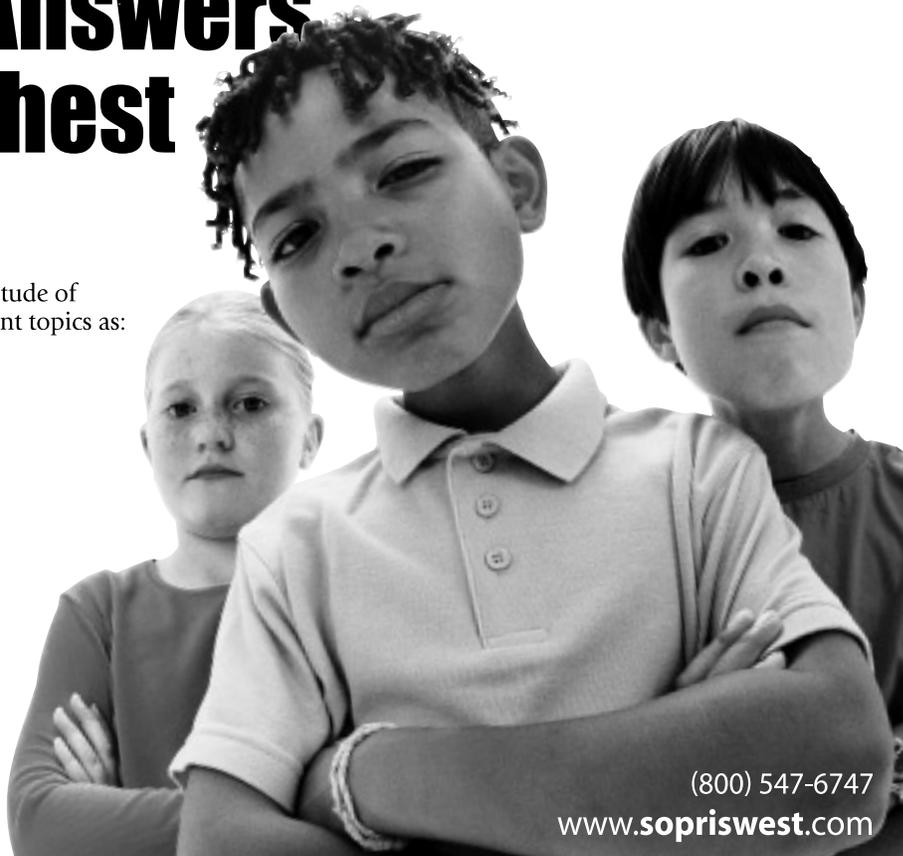
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