

# Providing Appropriate Education for Students With Learning Disabilities in Regular Education Classrooms

*National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities*

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Many children and youth with diverse learning needs can and should be educated within the regular education classroom. This setting is appropriate for some, but not all, students with learning disabilities. More than 90% of students with learning disabilities are taught in regular education classrooms for some part of their school day.<sup>1</sup> When provided appropriate support within this setting, many of these students can achieve academically and develop positive self-esteem and social skills. The regular education classroom is one of many educational program options but is not a substitute for the full continuum necessary to assure the provision of an appropriate education for all students with learning disabilities.

In this paper, the National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD) will identify (a) those factors necessary for an effective educational program

for students with learning disabilities, (b) the problems related to serving students with learning disabilities in the regular education class room, and (c) the recommendations for actions required at the state, school district, and school building level to effectively educate students with learning disabilities within the regular education classroom.

## Factors Related to Effective Education of Students With Learning Disabilities

As early as 1982,<sup>2</sup> the NJCLD took the position that “providing appropriate education for individuals must be the principle concept on which all educational programs and services are developed.” The NJCLD reaffirms its commitment to and support for the following:

- The education, social, and emotional needs of the individual, the types of disabilities, and the degree of severity should determine the design and delivery of educational programs and services.
- A continuum of education placements, including the regular education classroom, must be available to all students with learning disabilities and must be flexible enough to meet their changing needs.
- Specialized instructional strategies, materials, and appropriate accommodations must be provided as needed.
- Because the educational, social, and emotional needs of students with learning disabilities change over time, systematic and ongoing review of the student’s progress and needs is essential to make appropriate adjustments in

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<sup>1</sup> The 12th Annual Report to Congress on the Implementation of the Education of the Handicapped Act.

<sup>2</sup> Issues in the Delivery of Educational Services to Individuals with Learning Disabilities National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (NJCLD, 1982).

current educational programs and related services.

- Because learning depends on the quality of the programs and services provided, systematic and ongoing evaluation of programs and their effectiveness in producing desired long-term outcomes is essential.
- Due to the chronic nature of learning disabilities and the changes that occur across the life span of the individual, coordinated educational and vocational planning are required. Therefore, provisions must be made to facilitate transitions that occur at all major junctures in the student's education.
- Social acceptance has a significant impact upon self-esteem of students with learning disabilities. Social acceptance of these students requires the sensitivity of the entire school community.
- To ensure effective mainstreaming of students with learning disabilities, the building principle must set the tone for a positive and accepting learning environment for all children.

## Problems

The NJCLD acknowledges the following problems related to the education of students with learning disabilities in regular education classrooms. Some of these problems are encountered by the teacher in the classroom while others are related to administrative policies and procedures. All of these problems must be addressed by public and private education agencies as plans are developed and implemented for the education of students with learning disabilities.

- The regular education teacher is required to deal with multiple factors including an increasing number of students with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, developmental variations, disabilities, family and social problems, and large class size. The co-occurrence of these factors compounds the situation.
- Many regular education teachers are not prepared to provide the kinds of instruction that benefit a wide diversity of students in the classroom.
- The characteristics of individuals with learning disabilities and the ways in which they interact with curricular demands are not understood by all school personnel.
- Teachers often are required to adhere rigidly to a prescribed curriculum and materials, and,

therefore, may not have the flexibility to address the unique needs of students with learning disabilities.

- Adequate support services, materials, and technology often are not available for either the teacher or the student with learning disabilities.
- Time and support for the ongoing planning and assessment that are needed to make adjustments in students' programs and services often are inadequate.
- Schools rarely have a comprehensive plan to evaluate the effectiveness of programs and services for students with learning disabilities, especially those served in regular educational classrooms.
- Coordinated planning is lacking for students with learning disabilities as they make transitions from home to school to work, across levels of schooling and among educational settings.
- Communication concerning students with learning disabilities among administrators, teachers, specialists, parents, and students is often insufficient to facilitate the development and implementation of effective programs.

## Recommendations

Implementation of the following recommendations is essential to provide appropriate education for students with learning disabilities in regular education classrooms. Specifically, public and private education agencies should:

- Establish system-wide and school-based plans for educating students with learning disabilities in the regular education classroom when such placement is appropriate. The responsibility for developing plans must be shared by regular and special educators, parents, and student consumers of the services. Once developed, a plan must be supported at all levels of the educational system.
- Establish mechanisms for the development of collaborative relationships among professionals, parents, and students.
- Establish instructional conditions and environments that allow teachers to capitalize on the strengths and remediate or compensate for the weaknesses of students with learning disabilities. These should include:
  - reasonable class size;

- reasonable paperwork requirements and noninstructional assignments for teachers;
- appropriate physical environments, including attention to noise levels;
- sufficient time for teaching and collaborative planning;
- appropriate materials and technology; and
- flexibility in determining the array of skills necessary for attainment of overall curricular objectives.
- Ensure the availability of services needed to support the education of students with learning disabilities in the regular education classroom, including:
  - appropriate related services for students;
  - consultation services for teachers;
  - direct services for students from teachers certified in the area of learning disabilities and other qualified professionals such as school psychologists, counselors, speech-language pathologists, reading teachers, audiologists, and social workers; and
  - teaching assistants/aides trained to work with students who have learning disabilities.
- Provide time and support for planning and communication among and between professionals and parents.
- Ensure the involvement and participation of the regular education classroom teacher in the development and implementation of the Individualized Education Program for students with learning disabilities served in regular education classrooms.
- Establish a system-wide plan for helping students with learning disabilities to make transitions from home to school, from level to level through the school years, and from school to work and life in the community.
- Conduct district and school-building level program evaluation of regular education classroom programs serving students with learning disabilities that focus on student progress and effectiveness of instruction. Based on the evaluation, modifications to the program should be made as needed.
- Require in-service programs for all school personnel to give them the knowledge and skills necessary to provide education for students with learning disabilities in the regular education classroom. The in-service program should be:
  - research validated;
  - use components other than the single workshop format; and
  - include activities to help participants learn strategies to meet individual needs of students, foster attitudes conducive to educating students with learning disabilities in the regular education classroom, and promote collaboration.
- Provide inservice programs for those school personnel who have not previously had such training in the following areas:
  - child and adolescent development
  - individual differences
  - spoken and written language development and disorders
  - cognitive development and learning theory
  - social and emotional development
  - cultural diversity
  - nature of learning disabilities
  - informal assessment
  - validated instructional strategies
  - adaptation of instructional materials and teaching techniques
  - classroom management
  - collaboration, consultation, and team teaching
  - multidisciplinary team interaction
  - parent and family support

The NJCLD acknowledges that implementation of these recommendations is challenging. For schools to succeed in educating students with learning disabilities in the regular education classroom, there must be a careful analysis of the factors which contribute to effective education and attention to the problems and recommendations included in this paper. A plan of action must be developed and implemented.