The Case for Inclusion

Why Students with Disabilities Belong in General Education

What Is Inclusion?

Inclusion means students with disabilities learn alongside non-disabled peers in general education with the right supports and services built in.

It is NOT the elimination of specialized services. It IS the presumption that every student starts in the least restrictive environment.

What the Law Requires (IDEA)

IDEA requires placement decisions start with the general education classroom. Placement CANNOT be based solely on:

- Category or severity of disability
- Availability of special education services
- Configuration of the service delivery system
- Availability of space
- Administrative convenience

— CFR, 2006, p. 46588

What the Research Shows

+24.3
pts ELA
Advantage for students in general education vs. separate settings (Cole et al., 2023)

+18.4
pts Math
Higher math scores for students spending 80%+ in general ed (Cole et al., 2023)

22%
more likely
To graduate by passing assessments vs. receiving a waiver (Cole et al., 2023)

Higher
Life Outcomes
Likelihood of competitive employment and independent living (Marder et al., 2003)

Sources: Cole et al. (2023); Gee et al. (2020); Mansouri et al. (2022); Marder et al. (2003)

NH's only independently funded disability justice advocacy organization.

ABLENH.org

Disability rights are civil rights. Every student deserves to be seen, supported, and included.

Benefits for Students

ACADEMIC

- Higher reading and math scores on statewide assessments
- Greater literacy, math, and communication skill growth
- More likely to achieve IEP goals
- 22% more likely to graduate via passing assessments
- More prepared for post-secondary education and careers

SOCIAL & LIFE OUTCOMES

- Greater growth in social skills
- More participation in school and community groups
- More meaningful social connections
- Higher likelihood of competitive employment
- Higher likelihood of living independently

QUALITY OF SERVICES

- Access to age- and grade-level materials (not 'simplified' alternatives)
- Student-centered instruction; co-teaching more common
- Positive peer models for behavior and communication
- More access to teachers certified for the right roles
- Lower use of restraints; less non-academic instruction

Questions Every IEP Team Should Ask

At every IEP meeting, ask:

- Is the general education classroom the starting point?
- Is this placement driven by my child's IEP not by program design or room availability?
- What supplementary aids and services have been tried?
- Why can't my child be educated in a less restrictive setting?