

All Children Are Special: Research on the Benefits of Inclusion

The research evidence on inclusive education is clear: everyone wins, and no one loses.

The word is getting out, but slowly. This might be because there are so many studies of such a variety of students, circumstances, and outcomes. Implications of single studies can be hard to understand and compare. Most show, though, that academic and/or social outcomes for all students are better when they are educated together. Others have found that placement didn't appear to make a difference. The evidence for benefits of segregated education is weak, and mostly found when students in segregated placements were compared to those in general education classes without appropriate supports and services.

An overview of the research provides compelling support for several conclusions:

- **Inclusive education is at least as good, and appears to be better than segregated settings for all students.**
- **Diverse learners can meet individual needs working together.**
- **Parents' and teachers' reports of their experience are positive as well.**
- **Inclusive schools don't cost more.**

Annotated Bibliography

Affleck, J., Madge, S, Adams, A. & Lowenbraun, S.(1988). **Integrated classroom versus resource model: Academic viability and effectiveness.** Exceptional Children, 54, 339-48. Found no difference in performance of students with disabilities by placement, or for typical children in integrated classes. Integrated classes were found to be more cost effective.

Baker, E. T., Wang, M. C., & Walberg, H. J. (1994). **The effects of inclusion on learning.** Educational Leadership, 52 (4). Reanalysis of data from 73 studies showed special-needs students educated in regular classes do better academically and socially than comparable students in noninclusive settings.

Cole, D. A., & Meyer, L. H. (1991). **Social integration and severe disabilities: A longitudinal analysis of child outcomes.** The Journal of Special Education, 25(3), 340-351. the effects of integrated versus segregated schooling on the educational and social competence of children with severe developmental disabilities were examined across a 2-year time period. No differences were found on a traditional measure of developmental skills; however, on a measure of social competence, integrated children progressed, whereas segregated children regressed.

Deno, S., Maruyama, G., Espin, C., & Cohen, C. (1990). **Educating students with mild disabilities in general education classrooms: Minnesota alternatives.** Exceptional Children, 57(2), 150-161. Student achievement comparisons in reading revealed that both low-achieving students and those with mild disabilities did better in integrated programs. Special education students demonstrated no differences in reading achievement in integrated or resource programs. The special education students performed relatively poorly in both integrated and resource programs when compared with their low-achieving classmates but had more social success in general education settings.

Fisher, D., Sax, C., Rodifer, K., Pumpian, I. (1999) **Teachers' perspectives of curriculum climate changes: Benefits of an inclusive education.** Journal for a Just & Caring Education, 5 (3), p256, 13p, 2 charts. The results of this study of high school teachers indicate that they have had positive experiences with inclusion and have identified benefits that students with disabilities have brought, including increased tolerance and respect for diversity on the part of teachers and students, new curriculum lessons, and an improved classroom climate. Cited research that showed parents' positive views of academic and social results of their children's inclusive schooling.

Hollowood, T. M., Salisbury, C. L., Rainforth, B., & Palombaro, M. M. (1995). **Use of instructional time in classrooms serving students with and without severe disabilities.** *Exceptional Children*, 61(3), 242-252. In an inclusive elementary school where students with mild to profound disabilities were enrolled in general education classrooms, the quantity and level of time spent on instruction for students without disabilities, and their level of engagement in instruction, was not adversely affected by the presence in class of students with severe disabilities. Further, time lost to interruptions of instruction was not significantly different in inclusive and noninclusive classrooms.

Hunt, Pam; Goetz, Lori. (1997) **Research on inclusive educational programs, practices, and outcomes for students with severe disabilities.** *Journal of Special Education*, 31 (1), p3-31. Reviewed 19 studies, concluded that: 1) parental involvement is an essential component of effective inclusive schooling; 2) students with severe disabilities can achieve positive academic and learning outcomes in inclusive settings; 3) students with severe disabilities realize acceptance, interactions, and friendships in inclusive settings; 4) students without disabilities experience positive outcomes when students with severe disabilities are their classmates; 5) collaborative efforts among school personnel are essential to achieving successful inclusive schools; curricular adaptations are a vital component in effective inclusion efforts.

Jenkins, J., Jewell, M., Leicester, N., O'Connor, R. E., Jenkins, L., & Troutner, N. M. (1992). **Accommodations for individual differences without classroom ability groups: An experiment in school restructuring.** *Exceptional Children*, 60(4), 344-359. In comparison to a control school, students in an inclusive school "demonstrated significantly superior gains on several...scales, including reading vocabulary, total reading, and language, with a marginally significant effect on reading comprehension. These positive effects were spread across all student types - regular, remedial and special education" (p. 355).

Lipsky, D.K. & Gartner, A. (1995). **National Study on Inclusion: Overview and Summary Report.** *National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion Bulletin*, 2(2), 1-8. This annual national study on inclusion cites numerous schools and districts that report generally positive academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for students with disabilities, and no reports of negative effects academically.

McLaughlin, M. & Warren, S. (1994). **Resource Implications of Inclusion: Impressions of Special Education Administrators at Selected Sites.** *CSEF Brief #3*. Results suggest that the initial implementation of inclusion is likely to require additional resources. However, the ongoing costs of inclusion remain unclear....When the costs of providing services in home schools are considered *relative* to the costs of transportation and educational services in cluster programs or specialized schools, inclusion may very well be less expensive.

Moore, C., & Gilbreath, D. (1998). **Educating Students with Disabilities in General Education Classrooms: A Summary of the Research.** *Western Regional Resource Center, University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon* ; <http://interact.uoregon.edu/wrrc/AKInclusion.html> Reviews research, affirms the benefits of inclusion, provides resources for inclusive practice.

Rea, P., McLaughlin, V., & Walther-Thomas, C. (2001). **Outcomes for students with learning disabilities in inclusive and pullout programs.** *Exceptional Children*, 68 (2), 203-223. Students served in inclusive classrooms earned higher grades, achieved higher or comparable scores on standardized tests, committed no more behavioral infractions, and attended more days of school than students served in the pullout program.

Sharpe, M., York, J. & Knight, J. (1994). **Effects of inclusion on the academic performance of classmates without disabilities: A preliminary study.** *Remedial & Special Education*, 15 (5), p281-88. This study examined the academic performance differences between general education students in an inclusive environment, and a comparison group who were not. The results of the study revealed no statistically significant difference between the two groups for every academic and behavioral measure.

Smith, K., Johnson, D., & Johnson, R. (1982). **Effects of Cooperative and Individualistic Instruction on the Achievement of Handicapped, Regular, and Gifted Students.** *Journal of Social Psychology*, 116 (2), p277-84. The effects of cooperative and individualistic learning experiences were compared on achievement of academically handicapped, normal-progress, and gifted sixth-grade students. The results indicate that cooperative learning experiences promoted higher achievement, greater retention, more positive attitudes among students, and higher self-esteem than did individualistic learning experiences. Handicapped students benefited the most.