

The State of Inclusion

In Prince George's County Public Schools

**A Report On Access To The General Education Classroom By Students With
Disabilities In Prince George's County, Maryland**

Prepared by

The Arc of Prince George's County

&

The Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee of Prince George's County

August 29, 2007

Presented to

John E. Deasy, PhD., Superintendent, Prince George's County Public Schools

Information and recommendations compiled following the Community Inclusion Forum held
at The Arc of Prince George's County on May 21, 2007

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Acknowledgements

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The parents, family members and educators who attended the Community Inclusion Forum and provided the oral and written testimony upon which this report was based; the Prince George's County Public School system; the Department of Special Education; the Maryland Coalition for Inclusive Education; and The Arc of Prince George's County Education Committee (LRE Subcommittee).

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Introduction

On April 21 of the 2006-07 school year a partnership between The Arc of Prince George's County, and the Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee of Prince George's County (SECAC-PG) hosted a Community Inclusion Forum. The purpose of the forum was to provide a setting for parents, students and educators to share their experiences – the positive aspects as well as the challenges - with inclusive opportunities currently available in Prince George's County Public Schools.

The partnership compiled valuable, first-hand feedback into a report entitled "The State of Inclusion in Prince George's County Public Schools" that will help assess the status of current efforts within the PGCPs system to provide least restrictive environments to students with disabilities, including access to the general education classroom in their neighborhood schools.

Although entitled "The State of Inclusion Report", throughout the document an effort was made to use the word "access" instead of "inclusion" whenever possible in an attempt to reinforce the IDEA's emphasis on access, as well as PGCPs Superintendent John E. Deasy's oft-stated philosophy of "access to academic achievement as a fundamental civil right."

The people who helped create this report, like many people in our county, are encouraged by recent trends and PGCPs initiatives to improve (naturalize) the learning environments for students in special education, such as the Board of Education's creation of a Disability Issues Advisory Board, and the new MEANS (Making Education Accessible in Neighborhood Schools) initiative. At the same time, we are aware of the challenges that can accompany pioneering efforts. We do believe however, that any challenge can be overcome with openness and cooperation. It is in that spirit that this report is prepared.

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Report Summary

A Community Inclusion Forum was held on April 21, 2007 at The Arc of Prince George's County. Over 30 people, including parents, teachers and administrators, attended the forum. A panel of parents who have children in special education with access to the general education classroom presented their experiences first, and then opened the floor to questions, comments and descriptions of other inclusive opportunities. Details about positive experiences, as well as specific challenges, were expressed.

A summary of the State of Inclusion in Prince George's County Schools is best expressed in terms of the positives and challenges that were shared at that forum; positives about the inclusive opportunities available to students in special education, and challenges facing all those involved – students, teachers and parents – in making that access work.

NB: Large asterisk () indicates multiple references in written and oral testimony.*

Positives

- * The benefits of training, specifically the Boundless Learning co-teaching training provided by Johns Hopkins University. (Woodmore ES)
- * The behavior improvements that come with making friends.
- * The Autism Program (at Seat Pleasant) – the “A Team keeps it positive.”
- * The power of the Principal's support for any access effort.
- * The openness of the staff to explain the “nuts and bolts” of the Autism Program.
- * The increased number of Autism Resource Specialists.
- * Co-teaching.
- * Peer learning and peer modeling.
- * Language/Communication improvements.
- * Neighborhood recognition and acceptance.
- * Non-curriculum benefits to general education students: i.e., helps reduce bullying, and fosters tolerance and compassion.
- * Staff dedication.

- * Accepting challenges in a positive manner.
- * Frequent collaboration between related service providers, special educators and general educators.

Challenges

- * Curriculum modification, even in co-taught classes.
- * Unprepared teachers (lack of training).
- * Lack of inclusive “techniques” – more of a classroom management issue, such as seating, etc.
- * Need to “engineer inclusion” with training, techniques and strategies for all, including administrators, and parents.
- * How decisions are made to place students. Highbridge example:
 - a parent with students in special education at Highbridge said she was told by her neighborhood school Principal that “We can’t accommodate your children based on their IEPs.” Consequently, those students attend Highbridge instead of their neighborhood school.
 - a parent of a student in a general education class at Highbridge said so many students in special education are bussed to Highbridge that she feels it is no longer her neighborhood school.
- * Socialization – social skills objectives on IEP not as strong a priority as academic objective, despite socialization being a strong component in school.
- * Large classes.
- * Insufficient training of and keeping aides.
- * Not recognizing behavior as a means of communication.
- * Inadequate teacher-to-parent communication.
- * Balancing the rights of all children.
- * Resistance to inclusion by teachers, parents and other community members.

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Recommendations

For Improving Access to the General Education Classroom for Students with Disabilities

1. Recommendation

Bring all schools' physical plants into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Rationale

Access to the general education classroom is impossible without access to the building. The newly proposed Disability Advisory Board to the Board of Education will help PGCPs address long-standing ADA non-compliance issues.

2. Recommendation

Institute a "People First Language" campaign in all schools, with posters, flyers, and a People First Language link on the PGCPs web site.

Rationale

The power of language can reshape attitudes and perceptions. Let the school system lead by example.

3. Recommendation

Initiate a Disability Awareness Program within PGCPs that is systemic and ongoing, similar to "DAP Days" in Howard County.

Rationale

Introducing students to people with disabilities as part of an "inclusive diversity" educational atmosphere fosters acceptance and an understanding that disability is natural. Past awareness efforts within PGCPs (such as "Kids On The Block") were spotty and not on all grade levels.

4. Recommendation

Encourage initiation of "Inclusive Community Service Hours" for middle and high school students, similar to Peer Buddies in Frederick County.

Rationale

Students helping students will augment disability awareness efforts within the student population. (In 1998, PGCPs sought to create a peer mentoring program, but the initiative was suspended with a change in PGCPs administration.)

5. Recommendation

Implement an on-going "access" speakers' series available to educators, families and the community that includes national speakers and local speakers.

Rationale

As part of continuing outreach and education efforts, providing no-cost lectures and forums will allow for introduction and reinforcement of access initiatives, philosophy and implementation.

6. Recommendation

Communication and awareness efforts must target parents of general education students as well as PGCPs staff.

Rationale

Communication and awareness programs will help dispel fears and misconceptions, and assist in assuring parents of general education students that the level of educational services will not be compromised. It is imperative to share data from current co-teaching models that is showing greater achievement for ALL students.

7. Recommendation

Provide online tutorial support for staff training and disability awareness.

Rationale

Training and outreach must be ongoing and easily accessible for staff.

8. Recommendation

Develop a partnership between University of Maryland speech/language students similar to that which exists in Montgomery County Public Schools.

Rationale

Local resources should be utilized. PGCPs students would be better able to access speech/language services in their neighborhood schools by addressing the shortage of speech pathologists.

9. Recommendation

Explore and quantify the impact that the non-public funding formula has on efforts to return students with disabilities to their neighborhood schools.

Rationale

The non-public funding formula could jeopardize any access initiatives because of the financial disincentive to include students with disabilities in general education classrooms. The current formula appears to be at cross-purposes with any inclusive efforts.

10. Recommendation

Create an Access Specialist position that will assist educators in their efforts to include students with disabilities in the general education classroom. (Position similar to the Autism Specialists and CRI Specialists).

Rationale

Access Specialists will have the knowledge and expertise to work with staff in implementing strategies that will ensure harmonious inclusive classroom environments.

11. Recommendation

Publicize and encourage schools' participation in the annual "Inclusive Schools Week", to be held this year the week of December 3-8.

Rationale

Participation will increase awareness within the general public regarding disability issues in general, and educational access in particular.

12. Recommendation

Solidify and expand existing partnerships with community organizations like The Arc, SECAC, M-NCPPC, MCIE, etc., and cultivate new partnerships with other groups.

Rationale

Such partnerships will help increase community awareness of disability issues and PGCPs efforts, schools will benefit from family participation, and PGCPs will benefit from the resources and networks of those organizations.

13. Recommendation

Create partnerships with private service providers to bring services (speech, occupational therapy, etc.) into the public schools.

Rationale

Partnerships will help reduce the troubling shortage of service providers available within PGCPs; a shortage severely inhibits access to the general education classroom by preventing the provision of appropriate supports and services necessary to make access successful.

14. Recommendation

Begin a "Disability Dialogue" with all Principals. Through the use of surveys and workshops, reach out to Principals to determine their successes and challenges with providing access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities. At the annual Principals' Retreat, have a Disability Roundtable discussion with invited representatives of SECAC-PG, The Arc, and other members of the disability community.

Rationale

When it comes to changing attitudes and perceptions at the school level, utilize the power of the Principal. To embrace and advance any training and awareness programs initiated throughout the PGCPs system, target Principals first.

15. Recommendation

Partner with advocacy groups to lobby for a change in the state funding formula for non-public placements.

Rationale

It is imperative to recognize that the current state funding formula could be a disincentive to the success of any initiatives providing access to the general education classroom for students with disabilities. Over-emphasis on non-public placements is not cost-efficient: approximately one-tenth of the special education population (those in non-public placements) accounts for almost one-third of the PGCPs Department of Special Education budget.

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Conclusion

The Arc of Prince George's County has a long history of collaborating with The Prince George's County Public School system to improve the welfare of students with disabilities. Over that time, PGCPs has recognized and acted on the efforts of The Arc. And although positive changes occurred through their collaboration, much still needs to be accomplished.

The Arc of Prince George's County and SECAC-PG are very encouraged by the attitudes and actions of the school system's leadership which indicates that a new day will soon arrive for all students in Prince George's County Public Schools; a day when children will share their school years with their neighbors, regardless of ability or disability; a day when classrooms embrace the naturalness of disability and comprise a social makeup reflective of the world in which they will live, learn, work and socialize as adults; a day when communities partner with their neighborhood schools, and both become stronger and truly inclusive by those partnerships.

Right now, the movement toward greater access for students with disabilities in Prince George's County Public Schools could be compared to the "toddler" stage of growth: making progress slowly, a little unsteady but eager to move forward; training is paramount to build confidence and reduce uncertainty. Equally important is outreach - reaching out for a stabilizing hand, to be sure, but also to simply make a connection, and share in the knowledge, understanding and reassurance that is needed when we are all faced with change as we grow.

It is in the spirit of growth that we present this report, which we believe is a realistic snapshot of access in our school system. It is our hope that "The State of Inclusion In Prince George's County Public Schools" will be viewed as an instrument for positive growth that will allow all stakeholders to share an optimistic look forward to the day in the very near future when school/community partnerships, by enhancing the quality of life for students with disabilities, enrich the lives of all.

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Appendix

- A. Written testimony from the Community Inclusion Forum
- B. Howard County DAP Days DVD
- C. The Arc of Prince George's County's 1995 "Review of the LRE Classes in PGCPs"
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Appendix

A

Written testimony from the Community Inclusion Forum

**Prince George's County
Special Education Citizen Advisory Committee (SECAC)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Committee
And
The Arc of Prince George's County
Community Inclusion Forum
April 21, 2007**

These are the things that I believe make our inclusion program successful here at Laurel Elementary.

I truly believe that my staff accepts challenges in a positive manner. They are experienced, competent and professional staff members, which also helps.

We ALWAYS put the children first and the staff knows how I feel about this. Some may try to have there own agendas, but they know where I will stand.

Finding the appropriate dedicated aides and classroom assistants can be quite challenging. I also believe that more training is needed for these persons.

Our related service providers, special education teachers and general education staff collaborate on a weekly basis regarding our students in special education who are included.

We continue to provide valuable staff development for our staff members.

When faced with challenging situations we have taken a positive problem solving approach and have involved parents and other county personnel to find appropriate solutions.

Melinda Lee
Principal, Laurel Elementary School

Prince George's County Public Schools Budget Concerns for 2008

There is a concern about the special education budget improvements proposed for Fy-08 in Prince George's County Public Schools. The improvements for Special Education Services K-12 are \$6.1 million dollars. This is a small amount in comparison to the \$4.6 million proposed for Special Education Pre-K Phase II. I understand the full day Pre-K program is needed in special education, but the money proposed for K-12 is less than \$1 million dollars per grade. A look at the budget reveals that \$127.4 million goes for salaries and \$78 million for services for an estimated 15,000 identified special education students. Without the salaries, that comes to \$5200 dollars per child, which is below the per child allotment for general education. Our special education students need more Occupational Therapist, Physical Therapist, Speech and Language Specialists, Social Workers, Adaptive PE Specialist, Clinical and School Psychologist, Paraprofessionals and Aides that are trained properly to educate our children. Every school should have a social worker to help students and families. We should be helping parents to train their children, so that they know what is expected. Furthermore, this budget does not address the need for alternative programs to help special education students with behavioral issues or other disabilities because many of these students have multiple disabilities. Many parents are concerned that their children are not getting the best care academically and clinically. Many of these children such as my son need a therapeutic environment because they cannot manage their feelings, emotions and actions. Therefore, my son who was getting suspended from Kindergarten now goes to a nonpublic school because Prince George's County Public Schools can't serve him at this time. I am appreciative that the Prince George's County Public Schools made his private placement possible, but I think about the many parents who feel trapped in their situations. I do talk to many parents at workshops and events by the ARC of Prince George's County. In closing as a parent, teacher, and Executive Board Member of the Council of PTA's, I ask that you look carefully at this Budget to insure that it will help our students to achieve the success that they deserve because children do come first and it is our responsibility as a community to make it happen.

Garland Reed

Prince George's County Inclusion Forum
Special Education Citizen Advisory Committee
Least Restrictive Environment Committee
The Arc of Prince George's County

Comments by
Kilolo K. Ajanaku, DSPR
Parent, Resident, Member of Advisory Committee on Education
National Director
Future America Crime Solution Commission &
Basic Research Institute
April 21, 2007

Greetings: Honorable Committee Members, Parents, Students, Educators.

It is a great opportunity to come before you today. I come as a parent of students attending Prince Georges County Public Schools. I come as citizen of this great country: America remains in my mind a Great Possibility.

Any policy decisions concerning inclusionary services in Prince George's County must take into consideration who the student is; e.g., his or her psychosocial, ethnic, cultural, familial and civic needs.

More fundamentally, those policies must take into account the novel of the human child, incorporate the inherent (or natural) capacity of every child. I know a basic research attorney who has established that, at conception (when the sperm meets the egg), that every Homo sapiens baby has within it the following inborn capacity:

- To imagine, To think new thoughts
- To create new perceptions and perspectives
- To reflect, To dream (new ideas)
- To gather new facts
- To improve on old things or to discard old things
- To create new civilizations
- To create language, and the internal drive to survive and to evolve.

When the baby is born, his/her environment and those who assume responsibility for the baby do not always stimulate and or nurture the baby according to its capacity. Thus, the baby grows up with a limited perception of self and the world in which s/he lives. The New Science Humaculture is designed to orient the baby and those who handle the baby with a new paradigm for learning and rearing healthy human beings.

I would be happy to introduce the researcher to this committee. Thank you.

Inclusion vs Access

This would be a good time to share some thoughts I've been having lately about the word inclusion. In particular, the effect the word inclusion currently has on people. And whether the efforts of those of us who are working toward an inclusive society, starting with inclusive schools, would be better served by using the word access more than the word inclusion.

Personally, I look forward to the day when there will be no need to talk about inclusion, when the phrase "inclusive schools" will be redundant. Because by then, all schools will provide learning environments reflective of a society that will be more welcoming and accommodating to people of all abilities and disabilities. That's the idealist in me. The realist recognizes the glacial pace of societal change and wonders if that day will come in my lifetime.

My reasons behind suggesting using access over inclusion whenever we can is based on the following:

1) More than once in the recent past I've been reminded, as I'm ^{maybe} sure many of you have, ~~by those wanting to maintain the special education status quo~~ that, "Inclusion is not mentioned in IDEA." So, in checking for the appearance and use of "inclusion" and "access" in IDEA, a quick search on the IDEA web site (Part B anyway. Part C is "Coming soon") showed that:

"Inclusion" appears 5 times, none of them germane (like the example below) to the meaning as we intend it in our efforts to have kids with disabilities in general education classrooms:

Sec. 300.28(c)

Term
BIA funded schools. The term includes an elementary school or secondary school funded by the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and not subject to the jurisdiction of any SEA other than the Bureau of Indian Affairs, but only to the extent that the inclusion makes the school eligible for programs for which specific eligibility is not provided to the school in another provision of law and the school does not have a student population that is smaller than the student population of the LEA receiving assistance under the Act with the smallest student population.

"Access" appears 79 times, with specific references ~~(like the following excerpts)~~ to opening up the general education classroom to kids with disabilities:

Sec. 300.39(b)(3)(ii)

To ensure access of the child to the general curriculum, so that the child can meet the educational standards within the jurisdiction of the public agency that apply to all children.

Sec. 601(c)(5)(A)

(A) having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible, in order to--

(i) meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children; and

(ii) be prepared to lead productive and independent adult lives, to the maximum extent possible;

So, as far as the words access and inclusion in IDEA, in both frequency and context, there's no contest. If we want our efforts to be bolstered by that law, we need to speak its language and use the word access.

Inclusion Experience in Prince George's County

Tobi Colvin-Snyder

My son, Ian, attends kindergarten in the Beltsville Elementary School Autism Inclusion Program.

There has been much positive in my son's experience. The staff and teachers are highly trained and effective. The staff are dedicated and interested in the children's progress. They have been effective in integrating my son into the regular classroom. My son was put in music and P.E. with a regular education class starting the first day of school, and was placed in a regular classroom for reading during the first month of school. My son is decoding (reading words) at grade level (although he has a language disorder and difficulty with reading comprehension). School staff have been responsive when I have raised concerns.

I do have several concerns that I would like to share with you concerning implementation of special education services, staffing, and labeling of children.

IMPLEMENTATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES

I have had a lot of difficulty getting effective implementation of a social skills objective involving playing that was on my son's IEP and was implemented at the preschool special center. I believe that playing is very important for most of the children in the program, and am concerned that this area is not being allotted enough time during the school day. While I support the emphasis on academics that I have seen in this program, for children with language, attention, and/or social deficits, I believe that play is necessary for the children to catch up on skills in these areas and is thus necessary for them to make sustainable and continued progress in academic goals.

My son is below grade level in math. I found on the U.S. Department of Education's website, studies indicate that the math program "Everyday Mathematics" from the University of Chicago is effective for more children than the Scott Foresman program that is being used in Prince George's County schools. I'm certainly not sure if this program would be more effective for children with developmental disabilities that are in the autism program. I do request that the school system investigate the Everyday Mathematics program to determine if it is effective for children with developmental (or other) disabilities, and if it is effective, make it available at least as a supplemental program for children receiving special education services.

Extended Year Services (ESY) are being offered in a self contained environment, even though the children are included in regular education classrooms during the school year. I am pleased to report that, after I raised concerns about this, my son is now being offered ESY in an inclusive environment at the summer camp for neurotypical children that my son will be attending. I suggest that the school system consider redesigning the ESY program so that children will have opportunities for inclusion with neurotypical peers during the ESY session.

STAFFING

I have the impression that specialists (speech and occupational therapist, the psychologist, autism specialists) may be stretched a little thin schedule wise. Could someone investigate their work loads to determine if they are manageable? Could more specialists be hired so that their case loads could be reduced? Could specialists be given more time per child? At my son's school, they all come in only on Thursday. Would the therapies be more effective if the hours of services for each specialist were divided among two days during the week, for example, _ hour of speech on Tuesdays and Thursdays instead of 1 hour of speech on Thursdays? At the beginning of the school year, could extra specialists be hired for a month or two to help get programs set up?

Staff assistants (paraeducators and dedicated assistants) are all excellent, and I am very concerned about their low pay and lack of benefits. These are valuable school staff, and I believe that it is well worth the added expense to improve their pay and benefits to make remaining in these positions more attractive for them.

In a recent forum on Special Education at the ARC, when asked if the school system could hire more autism specialists, Dr. Deasey responded that they are difficult to find. Beltsville Elementary School is located near the University of Maryland; however I have not seen college student interns at the school. Perhaps if college students are invited to observe (and shadow) specialists at the school, some of them will decide to pursue careers as special educators and autism specialists.

LABELING OF CHILDREN

Placing my child in a program called "the autism class" effectively publicly labels my child as having autism. My son has been evaluated by qualified specialists, and does not have a medical diagnosis of autism, so I am not pleased with the name of the program or that staff refer to my child as a child with autism. Further, for those children who do have a medical diagnosis of autism, I believe that it should be up to the family to decide with whom and when to share that information, just as with any other medical condition. I believe that labels that are applied to people, including children, influence the impressions that others have of them. I would appreciate it if the school system would consider these types of issues when developing policies and procedures. I suggest that the program be renamed "The Sensory Differences Program", because I believe that this is the common issue for all of the children in the program. I believe that most parents would be comfortable with this name for the program, and it would avoid publicly labeling a child with a medical diagnosis. Further, there are currently often differences of diagnostic approaches and opinions in the medical community concerning children with autism, related disorders, and sensory disorders, and these diagnostic differences have no bearing on developing the child's IEP goals and educational program. I can tell you from personal experience that, since two highly qualified medical doctors have evaluated my son and told me that my son does not have autism, I was not pleased to be told by school staff that they believe that my son does have autism. I suggest that you could create more goodwill from parents and save financial resources by accepting outside diagnostic evaluations that parents have obtained in lieu of school diagnostic evaluations when they are available.

He does not stick out like a 'Sore Thumb!'

Inclusive Education at High Bridge Elementary School Allows for all Butterflies to Fly....Together!

I remember in elementary school that there was always a class that met in the basement of my elementary school. They were kept away from all the other students, ate lunch as a group in the back of the lunch room, were on a separate bus on field trips and had a separate recess from the general population. The kids were called names many names, but the **'basement kids'** was the most pronounced. Although I did not participate in calling them names, I never knew why they were different, but knew that they were. Our paths rarely crossed and when it did we all would stare, more or less curious about each other at the ages of seven.

One summer, my job was playing in an orchestra. I played 1st chair classical flute, a big accomplishment for an inner city kid. My first day, surprisingly I noticed one of the **'basement kids'** in the orchestra hall. His mother sat patiently by his side. I pleasantly learned that the kid played classical piano more beautifully than I have ever heard in my life. He never left the piano to mingle with the other children, but I often found my self watching him.

His mother noticed me watching and invited me over to meet her son. The orchestra director never introduced, Elijah to us. His mother abruptly introduced him. I'm sure that not introducing Elijah was an over site by the director. Although Elijah and I did not talk much, we would gravitate towards each other every day we practiced. Our parents allow us to rehearse together and other kids began to join us and befriended Elijah. There was something beautiful about Elijah; he was no longer a 'basement kid' to me. He became human, a friend and my orchestra mate. His mother called him her **beautiful butterfly**.

I was confronted at the age of eight with a very important lesson that summer about acceptance, compassion, empathy, friendship and understanding. In a way, I wondered was it was God's way of preparing me for life altering changes as an adult.

Fast forward, thirty-four years later, I have two boys in early education within Prince Georges County Schools on the autism spectrum. I now have two **beautiful butterflies** of my own. Armed with the life lessons and distant memories of Elijah, a host of books on learning disabilities, dismal ratings for both son's on their IEP's, frustration with the IEP process and parental rights, I felt like I was about to embark upon a fierce battle to get my children educated and give them every opportunity to be productive, independent and accepted into mainstream society.

I was told that my youngest son has expressive & receptive speech, social emotional and adaptive delays. My oldest son was significantly delayed in every domain category except for cognitive and gross motor. With rigorous intervention by the ages of 14 months, The Arc, Chapel Forge and other local organizations assisted my oldest son especially in moving forward towards being

a very productive student. After showing significant progress in pre-school, I requested that my oldest son, Jordan be given the opportunity to take reading & math in a general education setting for kindergarten at our neighborhood school. I was told by the representative and others attending his IEP meeting that my beautiful butterfly, "*would stick out like a sore thumb*" and with the rigors of their curriculum that the neighbor school could not accommodate him. I was told that this particular school had some of the highest test scores in the county. We all can read between the lines, they were insinuating that to my oldest son would drive down their schools test scores. There was a great sense of hostility and resentment during this 3rd IEP/transition meeting. Having a child already significantly delayed especially in social/emotional domain, I made a tough decision not to exacerbate this issue to mitigate any risk of causing him setbacks by putting him in a hostile school environment at Lake Arbor.

With open arms, High Bridge Elementary accepted my son and the staff was warm and welcoming. My concerns were addressed, made tears were wiped away and my request for inclusive kindergarten was granted for a trial 60 days. Jordan excelled! I have now made it my life mission to support, encourage and demand where appropriate inclusive education and to work to change the culture of parent's and teachers opposing the access. It's important to learn acceptance, compassion and understanding in early education as I did when at the age of eight. My youngest son will be joining the High Bridge family soon and I'm excited about it.

I would like to personally thank the principal of High Bridge Elementary, her teaching and administrative staff for having the courage and programs in place to bolster one of the highest inclusive student populations in the county. ***High Bridge Elementary School Allows for All Butterflies to Fly....Together!*** From kindergarten through the second grade the kids are together. I hope to see this practice permeate through every grade level. The High Bridge teachers and staff embrace all children. My son enjoys going to school. Inclusive education continues to be a great experience for my son and my family.

Benefits of Inclusion to Prince Georges County:

For Jordan Chatman: Jordan has become more independent, competitive, social, engaging, focused on academic achievement and emotionally stable. He imitates the behavior of others so his stimming/repetitive oral & physical behavior is at a record low; significantly reduced disability related disruptive behaviors. We still have many more hurdles to go. However, I see a dramatic improvement due to his access and active participation in a general education setting.

For his peers without IEP's/disabilities: His peers are learning acceptance, compassion, understanding at an early age. General education students exposure to kids with disabilities reduces their fear of human differences at an early age; warding off future teasing, bullying and most of all violence to those that are different or with special disabilities.

For the School and the Community: Tears down walls of separation and the dangers of creating two separate educational groups/society separation; diverse peer groups are more representative of society at large; diversity is valuable; Special Education should be treated only as a service and not a destination for children.

Schools & Parents greatest challenge: Dealing with parents/some teachers/community members who say that they welcome 'inclusive education', as long as special education kids are not bused to their schools or are not in their child's class. Also, balancing the rights of all children to have access general education while remaining academically competitive.

Suggested Next Steps:

I challenge Prince Georges County School System to continue to explore and implement less restrictive environments for our 'all' of our beautiful butterflies as the rate of new cases of autism spectrum students' rises dramatically. Please continue to consider:

- Extensive or Continued Staff development of all with access to our children and the student population to focus on what we have in common, not what's different.
- Develop student awareness programs to bridge the gap of general and special education
- Develop positive slogans and campaigns for schools that wards off teasing and bullying.
- Install cameras on all public school buses. Many parents including me have had issues with verbal or physical abuse to our child(ren) with special needs by other students or aides on Prince Georges County public school buses.
- CEO and Board to clearly articulate their position, philosophy and implementation Strategies
- Develop "Best Practices" to implement throughout the county
- Establish partner decision models to include: Parents, Teacher and community in School Boards and CEO's decisions on inclusion to avoid hostility and backlash.
- Ensure properly trained and licensed practitioners are employed to address issues of the children and inclusive settings, 'reduced' class sizes are important as to not over burden teachers
- Development more co-teaching models like High Bridge Elementary or explore other like team teaching, student peer partners, etc.

To date the inclusive education has been a success for my oldest child and family. I look forward to being actively involved in school & parent initiatives that will support this very important cause.

Thank you for your consideration.

Bridget Cashaw Chatman

Tuesday, April 17, 2007 12:50 PM

To Whom It May Concern:

I have a son that is a senior in high school. My son had a 504 plan in elementary school that developed into an IEP plan by middle school. He was diagnosed with ADHD w/depression, then Bipolar, Sinustachycardia, and a learning disability. Because of his heart condition we were unable to effectively treat his ADHD and mood disorder. He also had delays in his fine and gross motor skills.

My son was provided services the first year of his IEP plan. Since then, it has been nothing but a struggle to get him the services needed to be successful in school.

One of the areas he received services in was writing and spelling. After the first year this service was neglected to be provided, I inquired several times about this matter and was told by two teachers and a counselor not to worry about it, that computers have spell check on them.....?????

Teachers are supposed to receive snapshots of the students IEP's. Every year, I would have to contact the teacher and inform them of my son's IEP. In fact, there were times I would remind a teacher several times and the teacher would give me the same response "Oh Yeah". I had a teacher tell me that he had so many students with 504 plans and IEP's that he was just lenient on all of them.....?????????

There was a time when I went to the school for a meeting in which my son was supposed to attend. The staff would have to go looking for him only to find him walking around on the school grounds because the teacher had put him out of class for sleeping.....?????????

My son was having difficulty in one class and I spoke to the teacher. I brought attention to one of the services stated on his IEP that may help with the situation and she told me that she didn't have time for that.....?????????

It has been stated on my son's IEP plan since middle school that he be placed in co-taught classes. One year the school just completely neglected the fact and placed him in regular classes until I brought it to their attention. This year, I was informed that co-taught classes were not offered for 12th graders.....?????????????

My son was placed in a class last year in which the teacher was of foreign descent and my son had a very difficult time understanding her. I had a difficult time understanding the teacher myself and I deal with a very diverse group of people in my profession. I brought this matter to the attention of his counselor, vice principal, and principal. The principal told me if he really paid attention and focused on what the teacher was saying that he would learn to understand her. We are talking about a student with attention deficit. Shouldn't all students be focusing on what is being taught and not focusing on trying to figure out what the teacher is saying. I had many complaints from other students without special needs about this matter. This year he was also placed in a Spanish class that was in turmoil for the whole first half of the year without a regular teacher. The students would just watch a movie and do a handout. I was told if he just showed up and did the handout he would pass.....????????????.....What a way to teach our children!

My son's doctor recommended that he be placed in vocational training. I was told that I needed to research that idea myself and that he needed to have good grades in order to be placed in such a program so he probably would not be accepted.....???????

I also inquired several times about having him placed in the transition program where he would be provided with all the services he needed in order to be successful, but was given many excuses and deterred away from that idea. Some excuse that were provided to me were: *they didn't think they would have room for him or he didn't need to be with the kinds of students in that program.....??????*

Last year my son met his caseload manager one time. This year he did not meet her until halfway through the year.

Instead of the school system providing a supportive learning environment it has provided nothing but obstacles for my son. I believe that there needs to be many changes in the system in order to better serve all our students.

Some suggestions I have, would to provide the teachers with the training and support to better serve the students with special needs being placed in their class. This could be accomplished by having the caseload manager and teachers come together prior to the beginning of the school year to discuss the students that they will be serving and determine what training, resources, and support they would need in order to best serve these students.

The caseload manager should meet with the student at the beginning of the school year and monitor their progress throughout the year to determine if there needs are being met or if there needs to be an adjustment.

The caseload manager should make contact with the family and a form of communication established at the beginning of the year. I have left phone messages for teachers and caseload managers that are never returned, emails never answered, and mygradebook.com not used or updated to provide the picture of what is really happening with your child. Communication is key to success.

This is just a VERY brief picture of what my son and I have had to endure over the years. I could write a novel. He is due to graduate this year and I pray that God give him and me the strength to get through these last few weeks. In my heart, I know if my son don't graduate this year he will drop-out because of the constant obstacles placed before him in our school system.

I would love to be on a committee to assist in determining better ways to serve our students.

Debra L. Walker

The State of Inclusion
In Prince George's County Public Schools

Appendix

B

Howard County DAP Days DVD
(For a copy of the DVD please contact The Arc of Prince George's County)

The State of Inclusion
In Prince George's County Public Schools

Appendix

C

The Arc of Prince George's County's
1995 "Review of the LRE Classes in PGCPS"

**A REVIEW OF THE "LRE" CLASSES
IN
PRINCE GEORGE'S COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

A Report Prepared by

The Arc of Prince George's County
1300 Mercantile Lane, Suite 200
Landover, Maryland 20785

January 1995



Report Prepared by

**Members of the Education Committee
of The Arc of Prince George's County**

Doni Dondero, Chair
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Executive Director

Report Adopted by
Board of Directors
January 12, 1995

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Education Committee extends its thanks to the Department of Special Education for its time and effort in arranging for our visits. We also thank the principals, classroom teachers and students of the following schools who welcomed us into their classrooms:

Elementary Schools

James Harrison
Glenridge
Samuel Ogle

Middle Schools

Benjamin Tasker
Dwight D. Eisenhower
Oxon Hill
Thomas Johnson
Thurgood Marshall
Oxon Hill

High Schools

Bowie
Central
Frederick Douglass
High Point

INTRODUCTION

Since 1959, The Arc of Prince George's County has been a strong advocate for citizens with mental retardation. The Arc has been concerned with every aspect of the life cycle. Particularly in the last decade, education has been a primary focus. This present report is the third in a series of Arc reports on Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) programs for students with mental retardation. In preparing each report, Arc representatives visited a sampling of schools, observed classes, and interviewed school personnel using a standard questionnaire to gather consistent information.

The first of these reports, entitled *Regular School 'Companion Classes' As Alternatives To Separate Schooling For Special Education Students With Moderate and Severe Disabilities*, was prepared in 1985-86. At that time, essentially all students with mental retardation who required Level V services were associated with a special center. "Companion classes" were the least restrictive option available to those students; they were self-contained classes belonging to a multi-handicapped center, but located in a regular school. The Arc recommended that the number of these classes be increased, that they be permanently associated with the school in which they were located, and that measures be taken to increase inclusion, while providing related services at least at the level provided by the multi-handicapped centers. The PGCPS acted to implement these recommendations.

Over the course of a few years, companion classes were transferred to supervision by their host schools, and renamed "LRE classes," in reference to the "least restrictive environment" which they were presumed to offer. The number of such classes was increased from 20 classes located in 10 schools in 1985, to 48 classes in 20 schools at the start of the 1994-95 school year. The instructional program remained similar to that which was previously used in the companion classes, and also in the multi-handicapped centers themselves. It is based on The Madison Plan, developed in 1978 by the Madison Metropolitan School District and the University of Wisconsin - Madison. A key component of the program is "community-based instruction," in which certain functional skills are taught in the actual setting in which they will be used, rather than (or in addition to) being taught in the classroom. In accordance with regulations in effect at the time for Level V (now Intensity V) instruction, the average class size was set at nine students in a classroom with a teacher and an assistant teacher. In addition, the PGCPS established in 1988 another program of "elementary transition classes," also self-contained Level V classes in regular elementary schools, but intended for students who needed a more academic, less functional curriculum.

In 1991, in the report *Educational Opportunities for Students with Mental Retardation in the PGCPS*, The Arc reviewed the status of these new programs, as well as the other Level V programs for students with mental retardation. The Arc found that there had been progress in many areas. More students were being placed in self-contained classes in regular schools when there was no demonstrated need for a special center program. More opportunities were being provided to meet the academic needs of individual students. However, there were also serious problems. In the case of the LRE classes, these included lack of strong leadership, excessive variation from class to class and dependence on individual teacher resourcefulness, insufficient support and guidance to the schools in managing the classes, failure to create opportunities for inclusion, and in many cases still not enough attention to academics.

Given these concerns, The Arc decided in 1994 to revisit the LRE program and see what progress had been made. It was decided to address a narrowly defined set of issues, attempting only to assess how well the PGCPS is doing in implementing the approach it has chosen, but *not* addressing the issue of whether the LRE class model is the most suitable approach for this student population. The following pages provide a summary of The Arc findings.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. SCHOOL TEAM COLLABORATION

The degree of collaboration between general and special education teachers varies from site to site. Special education and general education teachers are often unaware of each other's activities and therefore both may overlook opportunities for inclusive activities. For general and special education staff to share a mutual vested interest in student outcomes, collaboration should be stressed and facilitated with a formal program of inservice training, not only for teachers but also for administrators and other school site personnel.

2. SITE ADMINISTRATION RESPONSIBILITIES

The level of involvement of LRE site principals in the oversight and support of the LRE program differs from site to site. The school environment reflects the vision of the principal. Principals' evaluations should give consideration to effective supervision of special education classes and leadership in inclusion of special education students in the life of the school. Principals need appropriate training to accomplish these goals.

3. SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT RESPONSIBILITIES

LRE students are often given a lower priority than other students when obtaining space, materials, transportation, or funding. Site based management necessitates a change in the responsibilities of the Special Education Department. The Department must now advocate and exercise oversight to assure the rights of LRE students. In addition, the Department should demonstrate pro-active leadership in developing programs, policies, inclusive strategies, best practices and curriculum.

4. CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

It is evident that in the past three years there has been an intentional effort to support academics. However, very little systematic curriculum development has occurred. The tool used for instructional planning in the LRE program, the Madison Plan, simply provides a framework for instruction and is not an actual curriculum. For example, it does not include bibliographies, resource lists, sample lesson plans, or assessment strategies, thus leaving teachers on their own. LRE outcomes and curriculum should be developed, regularly reviewed and updated, just as is done for general education students. A pro-active approach by the Special Education Department is crucial in developing curriculum.

5. APPROPRIATE MATERIALS AND RESOURCES

Appropriate materials are not available at all LRE sites. This is especially evident at the middle and high school levels, where the functioning level of the students may be far below that of their non-disabled peers and therefore academic materials and resources available in the building may be unsuitable. Materials must be appropriate to both the age and the functioning level of the students. A review of materials and resources should be conducted by a curriculum committee which includes both special and general educators, standards established and a resource guide developed. These should be standard procedures just as in other programs.

6. FUNDING

Even when appropriate materials and resources have been identified, many LRE teachers report they have difficulty obtaining funds to purchase them. The Special Education Department and the school management teams must develop clear procedures for accessing funds.

7. SCHOOL ACCESSIBILITY

Some sites selected for LRE classes are not accessible. Inaccessibility excludes some students from classes. Accessibility needs sometimes lead to classroom locations that are far away from same-age schoolmates, which inhibits age appropriate interaction. All school buildings should be accessible.

8. TRANSPORTATION

Transportation schedules for LRE students do not always coincide with official school hours. Some students lose up to a half hour of instructional time daily because their buses arrive late and leave early. Furthermore, activity buses do not serve LRE students who live outside the school's geographical area, thereby denying LRE students the opportunity to participate in extra-curricular activities. Transportation differences discriminate against LRE students and needlessly distinguish them from their peers. The Transportation Department should ensure that students in LRE classes receive a full day of instructional time and that an activity bus is provided for LRE students if one is provided for general education students. The Special Education Department and school site administrators should monitor compliance.

9. COMMUNITY BASED INSTRUCTION

Some improvement is noted in the use of community based instruction (CBI). The CBI is now more closely adapted to individual student needs and family preferences, and relates more closely to classroom instruction. However, this varies from site to site. Because CBI takes up large amounts of time in the LRE student schedule, it must relate to classroom instruction and IEP goals.

10. VOCATIONAL PROGRAM

The vocational training program continues to be a major part of the LRE program, preparing students for work and finding placements in a variety of employment opportunities during the school year. It is essential that training always reflect the current trends in technology, providing students with a variety of necessary skills to gain and maintain employment.

11. RELATED SERVICES

Related services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, and speech-language therapy are available. However, we are unable to determine whether student needs are fully addressed. The Special Education Department must see that all students requiring related services are receiving them as specified in IEPs.

12. REPORT CARDS

The use of report cards is inconsistent. The lack of a report card distinguishes LRE students from their peers. Report cards should be issued at every level and parents should be advised that, in addition, the IEP can be reviewed quarterly or at any other time interval as requested.

13. GRADES

"What grade are you in?" is a question LRE students can not answer because they are in a non-graded program. This is a major social disadvantage. LRE students should be assigned the grade equivalent of their same age schoolmates.

14. RATIO OF SPECIAL ED TO GENERAL ED POPULATION

The percentage of students in Intensity V classes at most sites appropriately reflects the proportion of persons with disabilities in the community. The Special Education Department should ensure that "mini-centers" are not created at sites where multiple programs exist for students needing Intensity IV or V services.

15. LRE SITES

There is no LRE program at the high school level in Area II. There should be at least one LRE elementary, middle, and high school program in each administrative area of Prince George's County.

16. POLICY ON INCLUSIVE PRACTICES

There is no policy on inclusive practices. Most LRE students spend limited time with nondisabled peers in regular classrooms. No formalized approach to friendship-building exists, although several proven approaches are available. There is still only limited use of peer buddies and tutors. A strong policy on inclusion should be adopted by the Special Education Department. In addition, the successful ideas for inclusion developed by many creative teachers should be shared, perhaps through inservice training.

17. "PHILOSOPHY OF LRE"

The Special Education Department handout "Philosophy of LRE" is outdated and the general expectation level presented for the students is low. An official statement of policies, outcomes and strategies should be developed and distributed to all principals, teachers, parents and interested parties.

And finally...

18. THE NAME LRE

Students in these classes are generally still in self-contained classrooms which in the context of current practice nationwide is a very restrictive environment. The name "LRE" itself sets students apart as being in a different program than their non-disabled schoolmates. In addition, the name LRE is meaningless to the balance of the student body who only wonder what it stands for and why. The name LRE should be eliminated.

CONCLUSION

Since The Arc's education committee site visits in 1991, it is evident that there have been some efforts to improve LRE classes. The program, however, as a whole, is not realizing its potential. While there are individual teachers doing an outstanding job and some highly effective LRE classes, many of the problems that were pointed out in 1991 continue.

While the LRE program could be a stepping stone to an inclusive system of educational services, it lacks strong commitment from the PGCPS. Even years after introducing the LRE program, there is still no defined curriculum and there are no defined goals for student achievement and participation within the schools.

The Arc strongly believes that the PGCPS must fully embrace the true concept of least restrictive environment. With a commitment to a unified educational system by the Board of Education and Superintendent, there will be equitable educational opportunities for all students.

Additional concerns brought to the attention of the education committee during the preparation of this report include large class sizes, combining primary and intermediate age groupings into a single class, and student transition from elementary to middle schools, middle to high school, and high school to work.

The State of Inclusion
In Prince George's County Public Schools

Appendix

D

Community Inclusion Forum promotional materials

Prince George's County
Special Education Citizen Advisory Committee (SECAC)
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) Committee
And
The Arc of Prince George's County
Presents:
Community Inclusion Forum

April 21, 2007
9:00am-12:00pm
The Arc of Prince George's County
1401 McCormick Dr.
Largo, MD 20774

Parents, educators and students are invited to share their experiences with inclusive opportunities in Prince George's County Public Schools. This forum will allow the community to give feedback on current inclusive initiatives and experiences in PGCPs, and be part of a "State of Inclusion" report that will be presented to PGCPs CEO Dr. John Deasy.

If you are planning on attending this forum, please provide your name, e-mail, and phone number below, and let us know how you would like to participate:

___ I would like to attend as an audience member.

___ I would like to give *2 minutes of oral testimony on my child's inclusion experience in PGCPs.

___ I would like to provide written testimony on my child's inclusion experience in PGCPs.

Name _____

E-mail _____

Contact Phone # _____

Free continental breakfast will be available.

RSVP by April 14, 2007
Please mail or email to:
Melonee Clark
The Arc of Prince George's County
1401 McCormick Dr. Largo, MD 20774
Email: mclark@thearcofpgc.org

* Due to the interesting topic, it may be necessary to limit time for each participant's oral testimony.

Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee of Prince George's County

*(SECAC-PG)

For Details, Contact:
Melonee Clark
Phone: 301-925-7050 ext. 307

SECAC-PG
c/o Department of Special Education
Prince George's County Public School's
2001 Shadyside Ave. Suite 212
Suitland, MD 20746

Phone: 301-817-3142
Email: samantha.taylor@pgcps.org

Press Release

"Community Inclusion Forum"

April 21, 2007

9 a.m. to 12 noon

The Arc of Prince George's County
1401 McCormick Dr.
Largo, MD 20774

For information contact:

Melonee Clark

301-925-7050 ext. 307
mclark@thearcofpgc.org

Community Inclusion Forum –

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RSVP by April 14 –

To register to attend the forum, please contact:

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The Arc of Prince George's County
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301-925-7050 ext. 307
Email: mclark@thearcofpgc.org

* Maryland state regulations established special education citizens advisory committees (SECACs) to advise local school systems on the needs of students with disabilities within each jurisdiction.

For Immediate Release

Special Education Citizens Advisory Committee
of Prince George's County
(SECAC-PG)