

EDUCATION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

The National PTA believes that all children have the right to a quality public education, which allows each child the opportunity to reach his or her fullest potential. The National PTA is committed to the belief that all children can learn and that school and family collaboration is essential to successful academic and developmental growth. Given this commitment, the National PTA supports a variety of public education and related support services that benefit the learning of all children.

An effective program for children with disabilities should include the following components:

Parent and Family Involvement

- School districts must inform parents of their rights under federal, state and /or local statutes and policies governing special education programs at the beginning of each school year and whenever policy changes occur.
- Parents of disabled children must have an active role in working with the school to develop an instructional program and/or other related services based on the needs of children with disabilities. Such a program must include the following:
 - Educational services must be based on a complete and individual evaluation and assessment of the specific and unique needs of each child;
 - An Individual Education Program (IEP) will be co-developed with parents and educators for every child or youth that is disabled stating precisely what kinds of special education and related services he or she will receive;
 - Parents have the right and must be involved in every decision related to the identification, evaluation, and placement of their child or youth with disability;
 - Parents must give consent for any initial evaluation or placement, approve any proposed changes in placement, and be included, along with teachers and other professionals, in conferences and meetings held to write individual programs;
 - Parents have the right to confidentiality of their child's education records;
 - Parents have the right to challenge and appeal any decision related to the identification, evaluation and placement of, or any issue concerning the provisions of free appropriate public education (FAPE) for their child;

Least Restrictive Environment

The National PTA believes that:

- To the extent appropriate, all children and youth with disabilities will be educated in the regular education environment alongside their nondisabled peers.
- Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from this environment occurs only when the nature and severity of the disability are such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be satisfactorily achieved.
- All students benefit from education that values and practices the recognition and support of including nondisabled children in the same classroom as disabled children. Inclusion, as a means for implementing the least restrictive environment, works only when the curriculum is changed to meet the needs of all children.
- The National PTA believes a successful inclusion program includes the following:
 - A planning process which includes parents, regular and special education teachers, the principal, and support personnel from areas of related services which develops the objectives to support inclusion programs at any level (whether individual, classroom, school, or school district);
 - Full involvement by parents in planning the inclusion program with an ongoing awareness between the school and all parents related to the needs of children;
 - Training for both parents and staff to fully integrate services for both disabled and nondisabled children – general educators must be provided with the training they need to meet the special learning and behavioral needs of students;
 - Resources available to support the appropriate needs of the children, which could include: additional staffing (another teacher, a paraprofessional or an aide); individualized learning stations or modules; a resource room, assistive technology including computers and multimedia, peer tutoring, and summer school programs;
 - Adaptations in the regular curriculum to meet the special and individualized needs of each student in the program, which may include the use of supplemental materials, special remedial teaching for students falling behind in work, cooperative learning opportunities, or changes in core curriculum materials;
- Whenever possible, Head Start, Title I, bilingual and vocational education programs should cooperate in providing services to children with disabilities.

Discipline

The National PTA believes that:

- Schools should ensure safe and disciplined classrooms, and that the most effective way to create and maintain a safe school is through measures that prevent discipline problems before they start;
- Students who are disabled should not be expelled for disciplinary violations but should be provided alternative educational settings that address the discipline problem while maintaining the educational program as stipulated in the IEP;
- Methods for the swift removal from the IEP setting of children who are a substantial danger to themselves or to others be implemented for up to ten days;
- No change can occur in the IEP placement of a child beyond the ten day period without the consent of the parents. If a change in placement is necessary, the school must work with parents and the IEP team discussion should include the development of a behavioral management plan listing alternatives that would be mutually acceptable in cases of behavioral problems necessitating change.

Funding

The National PTA believes that:

- The federal government should meet its funding commitment for special education children including toddler, preschool, elementary and secondary levels, and that no public school should be required to use its funding to subsidize nonpublic schools for special education services.
- Other community entities that provide related services to students such as health care, counseling, social services, and hospitals should be expected to share in the cost or delivery of services to children who are disabled.

The National PTA believes:

- The state and local school district is accountable for guaranteeing that each child with a disability is provided a free and appropriate education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment;
- Effective accountability for academic and school-to-work transition results should focus on both the individual child and the school district, and should include the following:
 - An IEP for each child which includes the essential elements for achievement, including measurable annual objectives and access to the general curriculum coordinated with district and/or state-wide learning standards and objectives;

- o An annual review at which time the school determines whether the yearly objectives of the IEP have been achieved and revises the child's program to address areas of needed improvement;
- o Overall school, school district and/or state accountability measures that include children with disabilities so parents and educators know how well each entity is doing in improving the results for students with disabilities;
- o Inclusion of special education by each state and local community as part of any district and state-wide improvement plan(s) calling for educational standards and assessment;
- o School and school district program evaluations to determine how well the special education services met the needs of parents of students with disabilities including related services, parent and family involvement, and diagnostic and referral services;
- o The state is responsible for establishing, with parental involvement, state special education objectives coordinated with objectives required of all children, standards for special education teacher training, and parent and teacher professional development;
- o Reduction of regulatory burdens (to the extent possible) to allow greater flexibility, reduce duplication, and diminish fragmentation to better meet the needs of families and students with disabilities — while at the same time assuring that there be no reduction in services or parent and family involvement in making decisions about their children.

Other Considerations for Children with Special Needs

The National PTA:

- Encourages every local governing PTA board to become informed, and to educate its membership, about the implementation of federal legislation such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) or other legislation crafted for children and youth with disabilities;
- Believes that statutes, rules, regulations, and educational options and programs should apply the same to children with disabilities from families in the Department of Defense schools as they do to children with disabilities in schools within the United States.
- Supports the protection of the rights of children with special needs and those of their parents or guardians including due process.
- Supports the creation of a timely review system if a difference of opinion regarding the education of special needs children occurs between parents and local schools. In the interests of all children served by the school community, the school district has the option of appealing differences regarding the education of special needs children between parents

and the local school to a hearing officer or a mediator with the mutual goal of providing a free and appropriate education for all children.

- Urges state, council and local PTAs, schools and community groups to support active efforts to develop programs such as the Special Olympics, which would involve children with special needs in school physical education, before-or after-school sports, and/or recreational programs which are physically and developmentally appropriate.

Adopted: by the 1996 Board of Directors

Reviewed: by the 2001 Convention Resolutions Committee

This position statement archives the position statements: Children With Special Needs, Physical Education and Sports Programs for Children with Developmental Disabilities, Education for the Handicapped Students, and Education of Children with Disabilities.