

# Research Highlights

## Topic: Access to the General Curriculum

Agran, M; Alper, S. & Wehmeyer, M. L. (2002). Access to the general curriculum for students with significant disabilities: What it means to teachers. *Education and Training in Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities*, 37 (2) 123-133.

### BOTTOM LINE

In 1997, amendments to IDEA mandated that information concerning the participation and progress of students with disabilities be included in their IEPs. Although there is agreement that students with disabilities should be held to high expectations, receive a challenging curriculum, and are included in accountability mechanisms, there are some concerns that these standards may have some unintended negative effects. A survey of sample teachers revealed that they did not think severely disabled students could be held to the same standards as typical peers, and that many teachers were not actively involved in planning relating to access, and that their districts did not have a clear policy on this issue.

### TIPS

- Use the standard curriculum as a guide so that personalized modifications for students with disabilities can be made to access this content.
- Engage in systematic planning between general and special education personnel to align instructional targets with comprehensive, educational standards. Training for paraprofessionals is also important to enhance their role in facilitating student access.

### KEY FINDINGS

- Results of this study showed that IEP and planning teams need a clearer understanding of the function of standards as a tool to help teachers align instructional programs with the general curriculum.

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## KEY FINDINGS

cont.

- Barriers to success were cited as resistance from general educators, students' challenging behaviors, and resistance from administrators to access to the general curriculum.
- Study found that special education teachers ranked social and communication skills more important than choice-making, academic, and daily living skills for students with severe disabilities.
- Study found that respondents do not believe that access to the general curriculum has much relevance for students with severe disabilities and thus are not doing much to advance this idea.

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## METHOD

- This study used a 22-item questionnaire containing demographic information and questions related to the type and degree of access to the general education curriculum for students with severe disabilities.
- Survey was mailed to 200 special education teachers who were randomly selected, with instructions to return surveys in 10 days.
- Follow-up letters were mailed out to participants who did not respond in 10 days. Eighty-four surveys were completed and returned
- Surveys were scored using a numerical ranking system assigned to questions for degree of importance, numerical scores were tallied and divided by number of participants, and a mean ranking of importance was recorded.

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## RELATED PUBLICATIONS

- Agran, M., & Alper, S. (2000). Curriculum and instruction in general education: Implications for service delivery and personnel preparation. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 25, 167-174.
- Billingsley, F. F., & Albertson, L. R. (1999). Finding a future for functional skills. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 24, 298-302.
- Boundy, K. (2000). Including students with disabilities in standards based education reform. *TASH Newsletter*, 26(4), 4-21
- Brown, L., Nietupski, J., & Hamre-Nietupski, S. (1976) Criterion of ultimate functioning, In M. A. Thomas (Ed.) *Hey, don't forget about me! Education's investment in the severely, profoundly, and multiply handicapped* (pp. 2-15). Reston, VA: Council for Exceptional Children
- Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D. L. & Clark, D. (2000). Paraeducators in inclusive classrooms: Their own perceptions. *Remedial and Special Education*, 21, 171-181.

RELATED  
PUBLICATIONS  
cont.

Wehmeyer, M.L., Sands, D. J., Knowlton, E. & Kozleski, E. (2002). *Teaching students with mental retardation: Providing access to the general curriculum*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.

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