



POSITION STATEMENT

LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT AND SUPPORTED INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The Arc Michigan supports the concept of supported and inclusive education which moves beyond the narrow interpretation of "least restrictive environment" to an environment that includes all students learning together in their neighborhood schools in age appropriate and integrated classes.

The Arc Michigan affirmed the concept of least restrictive environment with a position paper in 1981. The Arc US position on least restrictive environment (1984) declared that "the concept of least restrictive environment should be applied to all programs and services for persons with retardation."

In the 1980's a number of Michigan school districts moved students from their center based programs to classrooms in regular education buildings. However, for many students with severe handicaps there is still little or no interaction with regular education students.

The principle of integration in education is based on Public Laws 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, which holds that children with handicaps should be to the maximum extent possible, educated with children who are not handicapped. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 forbids unnecessary separation of services with disabilities.

Therefore The Arc offers the following definition of Supported/Inclusive Education:

The provision of educational services, for all students with disabilities, in their neighborhood schools, in age appropriate classes, under the supervision of regular education teachers with support from special education teachers and support personnel.

To enable this, The Arc Michigan believes the educational system must do the following:

1. Begin a planning process at both state and local levels to ensure the successful implementation of supported/inclusive education. The plan must include a time-line, a team approach to problem solving and decision making and a written plan for implementation, monitoring and evaluation of progress.
2. Insure that local school districts involve students with and without disabilities, parents, advocates, regular and special educators and support personnel in working together to plan for supported/inclusive education.
3. Facilitate assimilation of students with severe handicaps into their neighborhood school by local school districts by providing comprehensive inservice training for regular and special education staff, parents and students.
4. Create an educational environment that fosters positive relationships and that encourage and nurtures normal social interactions between students with disabilities and those without.
5. Support the maximum assimilation of special educators into the generic educational community.
6. Utilize a team approach in planning for supported/inclusive education for each individual student. Teams should include the student, parent or guardians, both regular and special education teachers, school administrators, related services support personnel and advocates.
7. Provide all necessary supports to insure the success of quality individualized education programs in integrated settings including related services such as speech, physical and occupational therapy.
8. Teach older students job skills in the community including community college settings.

9. Prepare all students to become successful citizens in their communities.
10. Support the legal rights and protections of students and parents that presently exist in the law.

A change in the delivery of education services is needed. Current efforts are not graduating or exiting students capable of functioning productively in their communities.

Research suggests that supported/inclusive education results in achieving these goals: Adults with handicaps who are productive members of their community and who are accepted and valued by others.

Supported/inclusive education is a natural precursor to supported independent living and supported employment in the community. The development of supported education in an inclusive education community can result in a unified school system structured to meet the needs of all students.

ARC/Michigan will monitor progress toward the processes and goals outlined in this position paper.

adopted 12/2/89

(PS11.ARC)