Archived Information

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Section I

Context/Environment: This section contains background information on the setting within which special education services are provided to children and youth with disabilities. The first module in this section summarizes literature on parent involvement in educating children with disabilities and provides a list of recommendations drawn from the literature. The second module deals with access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities. It presents Federal legislation related to providing access to the general education curriculum, discusses difficulties involved in doing so, and presents strategies for enhancing access to the general curriculum for students with disabilities. The final module in this section discusses issues in developing a highly trained workforce. It covers Department of Education and Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) professional development activities and provides a historical overview of OSEP personnel preparation efforts.

Parent Involvement in Educating Children with Disabilities

- Research indicates that the overwhelming majority of parents of children with disabilities are involved in their children's education through meetings with teachers, volunteering at school, helping with homework, or other school- and home-based activities.

- The U.S. Department of Education funds 76 Parent Training and Information Centers and 10 Community Parent Resource Centers to provide training and information to parents of children and youths with disabilities. The goal of these centers is to help parents become effective advocates for their children with disabilities.

- OSEP funds model demonstration projects and research institutes in the parent involvement field. These projects explore new models of community-initiated, family-centered approaches to meeting the needs of young children with disabilities.

- Although research documents the benefits of parent involvement, some parents participate only at a superficial level, and barriers that impede successful parent-school partnerships continue to exist.

Providing Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with Disabilities

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1997 contain several provisions directed at providing students with disabilities greater access to the general education curriculum and call for a broader focus in educational planning.

- Access to the general education curriculum is dependent in part on pedagogically skilled educators, instructional materials that are accessible to students, and effective instructional strategies.

- Joint participation and leadership of general and special educators in curriculum and standards development, professional development, resource allocation, and instruction are critical in helping students with disabilities access the general education curriculum and acquire skills that will better prepare them for life after school.

- While there are variations in levels of expectation for student demonstration of proficiency, there is an increasing trend to assess the student's ability to apply or demonstrate the use of skills in higher order thinking or problem-solving activities.

Developing a Highly Trained Teacher Workforce

- The Department of Education, supported and encouraged by Congress, researchers, professional organizations, foundations, parents, students, and community members, has focused considerable effort and resources on improving the quality of our Nation's teacher workforce.

- OSEP will continue to support the professional development of personnel who work with students with disabilities with a focus that will result in greater involvement of States and local communities in professional development endeavors.

- The ability of the Department and OSEP to meet their objectives of a highly trained teacher workforce will be challenged by, among other issues, an anticipated need to hire more than 2 million teachers over the next decade, an increasing diversity of the student population that is not reflected in the current teacher workforce, and high-stakes accountability systems which are placing heavier demands on teachers.

- Addressing these challenges will require changes in personnel recruitment, preservice and inservice training, and induction of new teachers into schools.

Section II

Student Characteristics: This section contains three modules related to the characteristics of students served under IDEA and the Federal funding that States receive to serve these students. The first, special education in correctional facilities, synthesizes available information on youths with disabilities in corrections facilities, efforts to provide this population with a free appropriate public education, and challenges associated with the provision of services to incarcerated youths with disabilities. The second module, children ages birth through 5 served under IDEA, summarizes State-reported data and provides information about the States' progress in implementing comprehensive early intervention services for infants and toddlers and providing special education and related services for children ages 3 through 5 with disabilities. The final module outlines legislative changes over the years and changes in the child count data from 1988-89 to 1997-98 for students ages 6 through 21 served under IDEA.

Special Education in Correctional Facilities

- Efforts have been made to improve corrections education by implementing a national policy for corrections education and developing standards for administration; however, no specific standards have been developed to guide the development of special education programs in correctional facilities.

- The small number of special educators within correctional facilities have a broad scope of responsibilities; they cannot be expected to design, implement, and evaluate their own special education programs. State education agency personnel or regional staff may provide assistance and leadership.

- State and local agencies may facilitate transition of incarcerated youths back to community schools. Selected studies have shown the benefits of transition services for youth with disabilities who are moving from correctional facilities to community-based school or work sites.

- The professional development needs of academic staff in correctional facilities are well-documented, most specifically in the area of special education. Teachers need specialized training to work with offender

populations, but institutions of higher education may have difficulty justifying preservice programs geared toward this particular subspecialty.

Children Ages Birth Through Five Served Under IDEA

- The number of children with disabilities served each year under both the Early Intervention Program and the Preschool Grants Program continues to increase.

- The continued growth of this population reflects increased and more effective outreach at the State level through public awareness and Child Find efforts, as well as continued improvement in reporting procedures.

- Over the past 3 years, most children with disabilities in the birth through age 2 population received services at home; children ages 3 through 5 most frequently received services in a regular classroom.

Students Ages 6 Through 21 Served Under IDEA

- The number of students with disabilities served under IDEA continues to increase at a rate higher than both the general population and school enrollment.

- The greatest increases in the past 10 years have been in the 12 through 17 age group and in the other health impairments disability category.

- Although States were allowed to use the developmental delay disability category for children ages 6 through 9 for the first time in 1997-98, only eight States did so, and the number of children reported represented only 1.32 percent of children with disabilities in that age group.

Section III

School Programs and Services: The four modules in this section examine some of the programs and services available within schools for children and youth with disabilities and their families. The module on paraprofessionals in the education workforce reviews the historical and contemporary factors that have led to increased use of paraeducators, presents critical policy questions and systemic issues, and highlights promising practices and strategies for developing standards and systems to

prepare teachers and paraeducators to be members of program implementation teams. Educational environments for students with disabilities summarizes research that demonstrates the positive impact of inclusive schooling practices on students and highlights empirical research on maximizing positive outcomes. The third module describes Federal policies regarding discipline and students with disabilities, summarizes available research relevant to those policies, and outlines the discipline provisions of the IDEA Amendments of 1997. The last module in the section describes the population of students served by visual impairment specialists, the shortage of teachers in this field, and some training programs and initiatives aimed at reducing the shortages of such teachers.

Paraprofessionals in the Education Workforce

- Fewer than half of the State departments of education, including those in the District of Columbia and the territories, have standards or guidelines for the employment, roles and duties, placement, supervision, and training of paraeducators.

- Most teacher education programs have not developed curriculum content to prepare teachers to plan for working with paraeducators, delegate or assign tasks, assess paraeducator skills and performance, and provide on-the-job training.

- A lack of accurate data adversely affects the capacity of SEAs and LEAs to plan and implement policies and systems to improve the quality of paraeducator performance and to develop comprehensive cost-effective education programs for paraeducators.

- OSEP funds the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services to develop guidelines for paraeducator roles and responsibilities as well as model standards for paraeducators' training and supervision.

Educational Environments for Students with Disabilities

- Previous research findings suggest that social interactions between students with and without disabilities are enhanced when students with disabilities are served in regular classes, particularly if teachers use delivery techniques that promote interaction.

- Changes in instructional strategies designed to address the needs of students with disabilities were cited as beneficial for many students without disabilities.

- In 1996-97, over 95 percent of students with disabilities received special education and related services in regular school buildings, and 46 percent were removed from regular classes for less than 21 percent of the day.

- Secondary-aged children were more likely than elementary-aged to receive services outside the regular classroom for more than 21 percent of the school day.

School Discipline and Students with Disabilities

- Recent education policy reflects an attempt to balance the rights of students with disabilities to a free appropriate public education with the provision of an educational environment that is safe and conducive to learning for all students.

- In the past, most States did not collect the data necessary for assessing the extent or type of misconduct by students with disabilities or the disciplinary actions resulting from that misconduct.

- Limitations in available data precluded a thorough assessment of the extent to which students with disabilities are subject to long-term suspension or expulsion.

- Researchers have concluded from recent studies that students with disabilities are suspended and expelled at rates that exceed their proportion in the school population, but data from the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights do not support this finding.

Preparing Teachers To Serve Students with Visual Impairments

- Low numbers of doctoral-level faculty members and a relative lack of specialized teacher training programs have contributed to a persistent shortage of classroom teachers for students with visual impairments.

- Efforts to reduce the shortage of teachers specializing in visual impairments requires innovative, collaborative efforts between OSEP

and agencies such as the Council for Exceptional Children and the American Foundation for the Blind.

- Between 1995 and 1999, OSEP invested over $5 million in personnel preparation grant monies to fund 12 projects related to distance learning programs for personnel providing services to children with visual impairments.

Section IV

Results: There are five modules in this section. The first, an interim report from the National Assessment, describes seven nationally representative studies that OSEP will fund over the next 6 years. It also presents nine target issues to be addressed by the national evaluation and the conceptual design of SLI-IDEA. The module on graduation requirements and high school completion for students with disabilities presents information on the percentage of students with disabilities who completed high school in 1996-97 and explores the relationship between State high school graduation requirements and graduation rates. The third module, State Improvement and Monitoring, discusses OSEP's Part B monitoring process. The fourth module reports on progress in the implementation of IDEA's transition requirements at the State and local levels from 1991 through 1999. The final module in this section reports on the participation of students with disabilities and the use of accommodations in the 1996 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Interim Report From the National Assessment

- Section 674(b) of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 mandates a systematic evaluation of the impact of the law, first assessing progress in implementing the provisions of the Act and ultimately evaluating progress toward achieving the objectives of the Act.

- The prospective national evaluation will be the first comprehensive national evaluation of the implementation of the Federal special education program in almost two decades.

- The national evaluation must specifically include an assessment of the status of nine target issues, as well as a comprehensive design for describing how States, local school districts, and schools are interpreting key provisions related to each of the issues.

Graduation Requirements and High School Completion for Students with Disabilities

- In 1996-97, 24.5 percent of students ages 17 and older with disabilities graduated from high school with a diploma.

- Students with disabilities are less likely to drop out of school and are more likely to be competitively employed after high school if they receive adequate vocational education training in high schools.

- The percentages of students with disabilities graduating from high school were highest for youths with speech and language impairments, traumatic brain injury, and visual impairments. The percentages of students receiving diplomas were lowest for students with autism and multiple disabilities.

- States with high school exit examinations graduate somewhat fewer students with disabilities than States without such examinations.

State Improvement and Monitoring

- OSEP focuses its monitoring activities on each State's systems for ensuring that all public agencies comply with the requirements of Part B of IDEA.

- In working with the States to ensure compliance and improved results for students with disabilities, OSEP emphasizes partnerships and technical assistance, together with a strong accountability system.

- Between August 1997 and January 1998, OSEP staff participated in implementation planning meetings in 49 States, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs.

- Using input from a stakeholder meeting held in February 1998, OSEP designed a Continuous Improvement Monitoring Process, which is built around continuity, partnership with stakeholders, State accountability, State self-assessment, and provision of technical assistance.

Progress in Implementing the Transition Requirements of IDEA: Promising Strategies and Future Directions

- Inclusion of transition planning in IDEA occurred in the context of at least a decade of attention to the need to develop transition policies, programs, and services for youths with disabilities that would allow them to make successful transitions from school to adult life.

- At the systems level, the goal of ensuring a successful transition from school to adult life for students with disabilities requires major changes in schools, adult services, and communities.

- Seven themes have emerged that appear to enhance implementation efforts across State and local levels: creating an environment that is conducive to implementation of transition policies and practices, using policy to promote systems change, sharing leadership, engaging in collaboration around governance and practice, building capacity for long-lasting change, linking transition to other restructuring efforts, and using research and evaluation results to enhance policy and practice.

NAEP

- NAEP performance scores provide parents, educators, administrators, advocates, and policy makers with important data on the academic achievement of students with disabilities.

- Use of accommodations was first allowed in the 1996 administration of NAEP.

- Data from the 1996 NAEP, which sampled only 3,835 students with disabilities, suggest that these students did not perform well in science and mathematics as compared to their nondisabled peers.

- NAEP results also suggest that students with disabilities from some racial/ethnic minority groups scored substantially lower than white students with disabilities across grades and subjects. Sample sizes preclude determining differences between racial/ethnic groups.

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