

The Essential

**SPECIAL
EDUCATION
GUIDE**

for the

Regular Education Teacher

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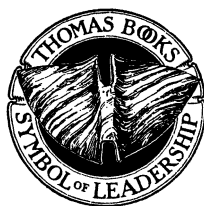
SPECIAL EDUCATION GUIDE

for the Regular Education Teacher

By

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CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
Springfield • Illinois • U.S.A.

Published and Distributed Throughout the World by

CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.
2600 South First Street
Springfield, Illinois 62704

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© 2007 by CHARLES C THOMAS • PUBLISHER, LTD.

ISBN 978-0-398-07754-9 (hard)
ISBN 978-0-398-07755-6 (paper)

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 2007010073

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*Printed in the United States of America
UB-R-3*

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Burns, Edward

The Essential special education guide for the regular education teacher / by Edward Burns.
p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-398-07754-9 (hard) -- ISBN 978-0-398-07755-6 (pbk.)

1. Special education--United States--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 2. Children with disabilities
--Education--United States--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 3. Inclusive education--United States
--Handbooks, manuals, etc. 4. Teachers--In service training--United States--Handbooks, man-
uals, etc. I. Title

LC3981.B87 2007
371.900973--dc22

2007010073

PREFACE

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 2004 has placed a renewed emphasis on the importance of the regular classroom, the regular classroom teacher and the general curriculum as a primary focus of special education. Every individualized education program requires goals “to meet the child’s needs that result from the child’s disability to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the **general education curriculum.**” In order to achieve these goals supports for school personnel must be provided so that children with disabilities **can be involved in, and make progress in, the curriculum** and participate in nonacademic activities.

Special education is not, and has never been, conceptualized as a place where children are placed in order to provide services in a separate location. The presumed placement for every child is the regular classroom; and the goal for every child with a disability is to enable regular classroom participation to the maximum extent possible.

The purpose of this book is to provide a guide for achieving this fundamental goal: to enable children with disabilities to participate in the regular classroom and the general curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate. The role of the classroom teacher in the determination of classroom needs and curriculum involvement to maximize regular classroom participation is essential. Indeed, the goal is to decrease the need for special education, and to increase the ability of every child with a disability to function as independently as possible in the regular classroom. This cannot be achieved without the participation of the regular classroom teacher in the identification of real classroom needs, in the planning of individualized education programs, and in the inclusion of children with disabilities in all aspects of the general curriculum.

This book contains over 100 topics that deal with real issues and concerns regarding the regular classroom, the classroom teacher and the special education process. These concerns range from requirements for referring a child for an individual evaluation, the participation of classroom teachers in IEP meetings, inclusion and mainstreaming, and various legal requirements relating to the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act amendments, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the No Child Left Behind act. In addition, a variety of additional topics are discussed that have a direct bearing on the regular classroom teacher’s involvement in the education of children with disabilities such as classroom-based assessment, school discipline, IEP responsibilities, classroom accommodations, aide training and supervision, and how

to advocate for all necessary classroom supplementary supports and services. The ultimate purpose of this book is to provide real information, based on current law and regulations, that will benefit the classroom teacher and enable the successful participation of children with disabilities in the regular classroom and general curriculum.

E.B.

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Part I

High Expectations

Research and experience has shown that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by high expectations, and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom, to the maximum extent possible.¹

1. A SERVICE AND NOT A PLACE

High expectations and access to the general curriculum will allow children with disabilities to meet developmental goals and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children.²

When Congress approved the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amendments in 2004 the law (Public Law 108-446) was introduced by several findings concerning the importance of regular classroom participation, appropriate services, independence, and high expectations.³ All educators should be guided by the phrase that **special education is a service, not a place**. The meaning of this is that the needs of children with disabilities are best met by providing appropriate services, having high expectations for all children, and using the general curriculum and the regular education classroom as the benchmark for educational success and participation. The needs of children with disabilities are not best met by assuming that a placement in a restrictive environment, in and of itself, is in any way “appropriate.” The following are several Congressional findings that characterize the philosophy of IDEA and the emphasis on the general curriculum and regular classroom participation:⁴

Regular classroom participation: Before the enactment of IDEA in 1975, the educational needs of millions of children with disabilities were not being fully met because children did not receive appropriate services, were excluded from regular classroom participation, children were not identified, and many parents were forced to seek help outside of the school system.

Improving educational results: Since the enactment of IDEA the law has been successful in ensuring children with disabilities have access to a free appropriate public education and in improving educational results for children with disabilities.

Low expectations: The implementation of special education has been impeded by low expectations and an insufficient focus on research showing proven methods for teaching and learning for children with disabilities.

Special education is a service: Coordinating the law other agencies and school improvement efforts to ensure that such children benefit from

such efforts and that special education can become a service for such children rather than a place where such children are sent.

Regular classroom support: Providing appropriate special education and related services, and aids and supports in the regular classroom, to such children, whenever appropriate.

Reduce labeling: Providing incentives for whole-school approaches, scientifically-based early reading programs, positive behavioral interventions and supports, and early intervening services to reduce the need to label children as disabled in order to address the learning and behavioral needs of such children.

What does this mean for the classroom teacher? Have high expectations for children with disabilities. Children with disabilities should not be simply “in the classroom” but participate in the general curriculum and classroom activities. Of course, the participation of children with disabilities in the classroom is always followed by the phrase “to the maximum extent appropriate,” but the appropriate level of participation cannot be achieved without high expectations.

The key to special education is...? The key to successful special education is not the special education teacher and not special education classes, but the ability to participate in the regular classroom under the direction of the regular classroom teacher. The purpose of special education, the purpose of the special education teacher and special education classes is to achieve the goal of maximizing regular classroom participation. Having high expectation is the first step toward achieving this goal.

What can the classroom teacher do? Provide reasonable accommodations and encourage curriculum participation. Collaborate with special education and related service personnel. Help identify classroom needs and generalize skills learned in nonclassroom settings to meet regular classroom needs.

2. THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PROCESS

The FAPE Mandate: A Free Appropriate Public Education

Special education is a process that is designed to provide a child with a disability a free and appropriate public education; special education is not a place where children with disabilities are educated because this assumes that appropriate is synonymous with a special environment. The appropriate placement for a child with a disability is where a child can participate in the general curriculum to the maximum extent appropriate; and the determination of this appropriate placement always begins with the regular classroom.

The regular classroom teacher plays an important role in all phases of the special education process. The classroom teacher is an important source of data for understanding classroom needs of a child with a disability prior to referral; the classroom teacher provides important information and observational data during the full and individual evaluation; the classroom teacher contributes to the development of the IEP; the classroom teacher is essential for the implementation of the IEP; and the classroom teacher is obviously important for determining the extent a child can be educated with nondisabled students.

- ▼ **“Procedural flaws do not automatically require a finding of a denial of a free appropriate education, but procedural inadequacies that result in the loss of educational opportunity clearly result in the denial of a free appropriate education.”⁵**

Prereferral

The key to the referral component in the special education process is response-to-intervention (RTI). The RTI approach to specific learning disabilities has re-emphasized the importance of the regular classroom teacher in the determination a specific learning disability by ensuring that every child has received high quality, research-based general education instruction prior to referral for special education. Just as important, RTI is viewed as a way to reduce the number of overreferrals and misclassifications in special education. The IDEA requires that “a child shall not be determined to be a child with a disability if the determinant factor for such determination is lack of appro-