ISSUE BRIEF
Education of Students with IDD

People with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can learn if provided the opportunities, supports, tools, and high expectations of others in the surrounding environment. Through policies associated with the educational practices and expectations of No Child Left Behind and IDEA 2004, the educational outcomes of students with IDD have advanced. More work needs to be done to see further gains in educational outcomes for students with disabilities, in particular, greater inclusion of students with IDD in the general education curriculum; more effective pathways for transition to adult life and post-secondary training and education; stronger policy, practice, and administrative supports for the full inclusion of all students; improved professional development, personnel preparation, and recruitment/retention of special educators; and the promotion of self-determination within the cultural contexts of the students.

▶ Introduction

This brief describes the research goals identified by the invited participants of a strand charged with addressing education for students with IDD at the National Goals Conference in Washington, DC on August 6-7, 2015. The goals described here are guided by language contained within Article 14 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the international human rights treaty of the United Nations:

- Persons with disabilities are not excluded from the general education system on the basis of disability, and that children with disabilities are not excluded from free, compulsory primary education, or from secondary education, on the basis of disability;
- Persons with disabilities can access an inclusive, high-quality, and free primary education and secondary education on an equal basis with others in the communities in which they live; and
- Effective individualized support measures are provided in environments that maximize academic and social development, consistent with the goal of full inclusion (United Nations [UN], 2006).

▶ Need for Research

Children and adults with IDD can master academic content, which results in better outcomes across the lifespan. Research is needed to identify effective and inclusive education practices for all students and others who continue to learn throughout their lives.

▶ Academic Development Research Goals

To ensure that all students with IDD will read and use numbers with understanding, engage in inquiry, and apply civic knowledge, research is crucial to identify the most appropriate practices and strategies and demonstrate that they can be effectively implemented in schools. Wei, Blackorby, and Schiller (2011) found that reading skills of students with IDD, on average, continue to improve throughout adolescence. Browder and colleagues (2012) have shown that students can use simplified versions of grade-aligned standards to learn mathematics content, and Browder and Spooner (2014) report that educators know

that students with IDD may benefit from having access to general curriculum content while also cultivating their life skills.

▶ Transition & Postsecondary Education Research Goals

To ensure that all students with IDD will leave school with a career path and meaningful community engagement, research is necessary to identify evidence-based practices and supports and demonstrate that they can be effectively implemented in schools.

Compared to their non-disabled peers, youth and young adults with IDD experience less successful adult outcomes. Post-school experiences related to employment or in postsecondary educational institutions are more available; however, we still lack specific information about how to manage these services to achieve the best outcomes for young adults.

IMPACT

Maria is a young woman with intellectual disability (ID) who is taking classes at a nearby public university to learn to work with preschool-aged children. She's a natural caretaker, and children especially like when she reads to them and acts out the stories. Maria's experiences are not unique, but they are rare.

Despite the mandate to provide access to the general education curriculum for all students, the education of children and youth with ID is more likely to focus on functional skills, often at the expense of academic content. Maria was lucky, though, as her teachers and parents collaborated to provide her with an education that prepared her for the challenges of college. With supports, she learned alongside her non-disabled peers in the general education curriculum, and participated in a number of extracurricular activities that helped her develop social skills and learn how to work with others. And, in high school, she had part-time jobs that gave her real-world experience and helped her decide on a career goal.

Maria's experiences should be the norm, rather than a rarity, as research in the field demonstrates that students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) can learn academic content and that preparing students for their transition to adult life can be more successful when done in a culturally responsive manner.

▶ Inclusive Education Research Goals

To ensure that policies, practices, and administrative supports produce scalable, universally-designed, inclusive, and culturally and linguistically competent educational systems that are responsive to the needs of all students, research is essential to enable school systems to improve their practices, policies, and activities, and to facilitate the learning and academic achievement of all students in inclusive environments.

As our national population continues to become more diverse, there is a clear need to ensure that educational environments fully accommodate cultural and linguistic diversity. School administrators must also support the strategies necessary for students with IDD to be included in the general educational curriculum. The Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT), funded by the US Department of Education, Office of Special Education Programs, is a national K-8 center providing academic and behavioral support to enhance the learning and academic achievement of all students in inclusive environments, including those with disabilities and those with the most significant needs.

▶ Personnel Research Goals

To ensure that general and special educators are prepared and available to educate students with IDD to their fullest potential, research is crucial to identify effective personnel preparation and professional development practices and successful recruitment and retention practices and to demonstrate that universally designed and culturally and linguistically competent practices can be implemented in schools.

Challenges and barriers continue to exist in personnel preparation for educators in the early childhood, K-12, and transition to adulthood arenas. Villegas, Strom, and Lucas (2012) report a shortage of special educators from minority groups. There is a critical shortage of personnel in special education, particularly within urban settings to teach minority students with identified needs (Kena et al., 2014). The universal design for learning framework has repeatedly demonstrated utility in assisting educators to create lessons that provide multiple ways for all students to learn and demonstrate what they know and understand.

▶ Self-Determination Research Goals

To ensure that students with IDD are optimally prepared to achieve self-determination within the contexts of their communities, research is necessary to identify the most effective strategies that can be implemented by educators, students, and their families.

Being "self-determined" is the willful action of the individual to work toward attaining a desired quality of life, defined by the individual and the culture in which he or she resides (Wehmeyer et al, 2011). Wehmeyer (2015) notes that "there is an established

and still-growing evidence base that shows promoting self-determination has positive school and post-school benefits for students with disabilities, and yet efforts to do so remain sporadic, at best" (p. 20). Furthermore, self-determination is adaptable through the lens of all cultures, since it can be operationalized within diverse cultural contexts to meet the needs of the individual and their family.

▶ Conclusion

In order to continue to advance education in inclusive, culturally appropriate, and welcoming settings that provide access the general education curriculum for life-long learning, we must continue to refine and support effective practices to increase the inclusion, expectations, assessment, and achievement of students with IDD.

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▶ Acknowledgements