

State of Michigan Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council



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Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote in 1954 "in these days, it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity, where the state has undertaken to provide it, is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms."

On May 17, 2004, the education community will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Court's landmark opinion in *Brown versus Board of Education*. We are here to urge the State Board of Education to endorse, on that historic date, the concept of universal education for all students, including students with disabilities. In this way, the State Board of Education can take a bold step toward eliminating disability-based segregation in Michigan schools while, at the same time, help all students learn more effectively.

"Universal education" goes beyond efforts to include students with disabilities in general education. It reflects an adoption of common standards, integration of academic and applied learning, and application of universal design principles. Universal design in learning means the design of instructional materials and activities that allows learning goals to be attainable by individuals with wide differences in their abilities.

More than dealing merely with pedagogical methods, universal education views schools as learning communities where all community members must learn to support one another in all aspects of community life. With respect to students with disabilities, this means that non-disabled peers learn to view disability as only another of many dimensions of difference that contributes to vibrant communities. Students with and without disabilities learn to help each other as needed, to offer help as needed, and to receive or reject offers of help as individual needs and preferences may dictate. School staff view community building and academic instruction as mutually dependent and equally important.

Universal education, with a continuum of supports, strategies and services for all students, can end double standards of treatment, eliminate duplicative and expensive systems, and help all schools provide better instruction. Universal education is consistent with best practices in adult supports and helps prevent the destructive effects that school segregation wreaks on adult lives, including continued isolation and low rates of employment. Universal education brings the benefits of differentiated instruction to all students.

We realize the adoption of universal education might make some people anxious about losing supports or specialized services which right now are reserved for students with disabilities. That is not our intent; our proposal entails no loss in services and supports whatsoever.

Rather, we hope to take the positive lessons learned from special education - the benefits of individualized learning and supports provided in the classroom - and make them available to all students, regardless of label. In an age when schools will be held accountable for the learning outcomes of all students, nothing less will do.

The inclusion policy offered by the state Special Education Advisory Committee, while well-intended, includes too many loopholes that allow segregation to continue. More than that, however, it is fundamentally flawed because it maintains separate systems. So long as those separate systems remain, segregation will continue.

In lieu of the SEAC policy, we urge the State Board of Education to join the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council in endorsing a policy favoring universal education. [See attached] In the next few minutes, presenters and video recordings will help you build a vision of successful, effective universal education.

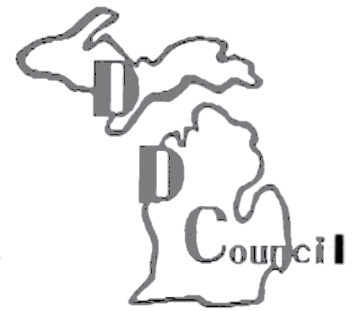
We are happy to answer your questions and provide further information. Thank you for your time.

The Education Workgroup of the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council,
including representatives from

Michigan Protection and Advocacy Services
Developmental Disabilities Institute
Everyone Together

Position on Universal Education

March, 2003



Obstacles to inclusive communities are best and most effectively addressed at the point when they first begin to appear. Therefore, it is most beneficial to do our work in the social community in which we as citizens first learn how to play, work, and act as members of a community: in our schools. It is therefore the position of the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council that children and young adults are best educated in natural educational settings that are not segregated with respect to disability or any other dimension of human diversity.

The Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council holds the following truths* to be self-evident:

1. That Universal Education, where the natural settings of childhood and young adulthood are utilized to educate all students, all together, all the time, is a worthy goal.
2. That our public education system must develop a plan to recreate itself to support Universal Education.
3. That educational segregation based on disability is inherently and morally wrong.
4. That the right of students with disabilities to be included in their natural educational settings is an issue of civil rights, not merely "special education."
5. That all students belong in all schools with their same-age peers: no child should have to earn his or her right to belong.
6. That all people can and do learn.
7. That all people learn differently.
8. That Universal Education benefits all community members.

The Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council is committed to building inclusive communities where all people, no matter what their differences, disabilities, or innate human conditions may be, are welcomed and valued. We are committed to starting that building process in our schools and in outreach programs for infants and toddlers. The premise of Universal Education, which truly benefits all students and truly values all students as community members, is a concept whose time has come. All students, all together, all the time.

*Adapted from the Council's "Everyone Together" project