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# Students with Disabilities: Fundamentals to Determine the Best Academic Environment

## Abstract

Since the inception of Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), students with disabilities have gained access to regular education classrooms. Educating students with disabilities has changed significantly. Much discussion continues to find the basic fundamentals necessary to determine the best learning environment for students with disabilities. This descriptive paper identifies and examines the four fundamentals within the academic community that are responsible for determining and maintaining the best educational environments for students with disabilities: the parental role, the administrators' support, the teachers' attitude and aptitude, and the students' evaluations. Past research studies are synthesized in this paper to show when children with disabilities will learn best. Research shows that in order to have successful educational environments for students with disabilities, the service delivery team of the Individualized Education Plan must include a school community that works together to provide a full continuum of educational options as required by law. This paper applies research of the four education fundamentals to the Christian school setting. Appendices include the continuum of services and four holistic rubrics that clarify the expectations and assess the four fundamentals of successful educational environments.

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by

Marlys Hickox

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Thesis

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Students with Disabilities: Fundamentals to Determine the Best Academic Environment

by

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## Abstract

Since the inception of Public Law 94-142 (the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975), students with disabilities have gained access to regular education classrooms. Educating students with disabilities has changed significantly. Much discussion continues to find the basic fundamentals necessary to determine the best learning environment for students with disabilities. This descriptive paper identifies and examines the four fundamentals within the academic community that are responsible for determining and maintaining the best educational environments for students with disabilities: the parental role, the administrators' support, the teachers' attitude and aptitude, and the students' evaluations. Past research studies are synthesized in this paper to show when children with disabilities will learn best. Research shows that in order to have successful educational environments for students with disabilities, the service delivery team of the Individualized Education Plan must include a school community that works together to provide a full continuum of educational options as required by law. This paper applies research of the four education fundamentals to the Christian school setting. Appendices include the continuum of services and four holistic rubrics that clarify the expectations and assess the four fundamentals of successful educational environments.



## Introduction

Public Law 94-142 (adopted in 1975) states that children with disabilities, previously secluded into separate education programs staffed by specialists, be allowed to participate in the regular education programs. Because of this law inclusive education programs are promoted in public and private schools.

Unfortunately, many school systems are placing increasing numbers of children with disabilities in the regular classroom often without careful preparation of the faculty, the students, their parents, their peers, or the environment (Singh, 2001). Some students with disabilities are not effectively being served in inclusive classrooms. Much research has promoted inclusive education. Yet, a great deal of further research is needed to gain full understanding of the student with disabilities and how the Christian community can best facilitate the most positive outcomes for educational experiences.

Students who are not effectively being served in inclusive classrooms may have difficulty learning because their learning environment is inadequate. Teachers are being asked to do too much for too many, resulting in too little being done for too few (Singh, 2001). The students with disabilities are getting “too little” an education, and because they are getting less than they require, and deserve, these students should seek an educational environment that is more academically suitable.

What are the fundamentals that students with disabilities need to have a successful educational experience? This paper will attempt to answer that question but will address it specifically for students in a Reformed Christian school system.

## Definition of terms

Unless otherwise indicated, the definition of terms used in this paper originates from the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA)-Section 1401: Definitions (Wright & Wright, 2006).

Children with disabilities are deaf, hard of hearing, mentally retarded, autistic, traumatic brain injured, orthopedic impaired, other health-impaired, seriously emotionally disturbed, specific learning disabled, speech-impaired or visually impaired.

A Christian worldview is shaped by God's revelation in His Word as it is revealed in Creation, the Bible, and Jesus Christ. God created, upholds, and rules his world (Van Brummelen, 2002).

An Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is a written statement for each child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised. An IEP includes the child's present levels of academic achievement, a statement of measurable annual goals, how the child's progress toward meeting the annual goals will be measured, a statement of any individual appropriate accommodations, and the dates and frequency for service.

Inclusive classrooms are school rooms where a student with disabilities attends the regular school program, enrolled in age-appropriate classes one hundred per cent of the school day (Guetzloe, 1999).

Inclusion is the practice of educating children with special needs in regular education classrooms.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA) states that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their

unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living.

A learning disability (LD) is a disorder that affects people's ability to either interpret what they see and hear or to link information from different parts of the brain. These limitations can show up in many ways, such as specific difficulties with spoken and written language, coordination, self control, or attention. LD is a broad term that covers a pool of possible causes, symptoms, treatments, and outcomes (Tomey, 2005).

A Reformed, Christian curriculum helps students understand and unfold God's revelation through experience, observation, conceptualization and application (Van Brummelen, 2002).

A Reformed, Christian school bases its curriculum on the conviction that biblical guidelines apply to all of life. Biblical faith directs the Christian academic community to work at influencing all aspects of culture (Van Brummelen, 2002).

Public Law 94-142 (The Education for All Handicapped Children Act-1975) requires that all children with disabilities, whatever the nature or severity of their disability, be provided a free and appropriate education within the least restrictive environment (LRE) possible. This law was amended in 2004 and is now called the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA).

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) is the minimum acceptable yearly increase in academic performance (Tomey, 2005).

A worldview is a comprehensive framework of basic convictions about life. Worldviews embrace what we believe about the nature and purpose of reality, human beings, knowledge, and life in society (Van Brummelen, 2002).

## Literature Review

Since Public Law 94-142 was adopted, many schools simply have not provided the elements of inclusion or the supports necessary for success in that environment (Guetzloe, 1999). The number of students classified as disabled rose from 797,212 in 1977 to seven million in 2005 (Supreme Court Case, November 14, 2005). This is a significant rise in disabled students. This increase should alert the academic community that many students may not be progressing, but merely being advanced to the next grade. Students advancing to the next grade should be provided an education that is meaningful to the student with a disability.

However, children with disabilities are often put into traditional classrooms without appropriate instruction, adaptations, trained teachers, or aides. Too often parents, administrators and educators are more concerned about the setting (where the children receive their education) or test scores, rather than the educational progress of the students (Kauffman, 1999). Inclusion in general education provides physical access but not necessarily instructional access for most students with disabilities (Kauffman, 1999).

Physical access can still restrict access to the instructional procedures that are most effective for students with disabilities (Kauffman, 1999). For example, if children with disabilities are in a general education classroom, but they cannot comprehend the material studied, they have gained physical access to the classroom, but are denied the instructional access because they do not have the keys to unlock the material so that it is meaningful for them. Children with disabilities who do not have the keys to unlock the materials often fail to make progress; therefore, they are not receiving a satisfactory

education. Physical access has restricted their instructional access because there aren't instructional resources available in that physical space.

Unfortunately, many school districts do not provide the essential elements of inclusion which include an IEP, resource teachers, teacher training, and technology for students with disabilities. Knowledgeable professionals understand that the regular classroom is not an appropriate placement for all students. The least restrictive environment may be a special education class or school. It may even be a residential institution (Guetzloe, 1999).

This paper identifies the four fundamentals needed in order for the students with disabilities to have the most adequate academic environment. These fundamentals consistently emerge in identifying successful learning environments for students with disabilities: positive parental involvement, administrators' support, proper teacher attitude and aptitude, and appropriate student evaluation.

To understand the components of the four fundamentals of the academic community, holistic rubrics have been developed by the researcher to assess whether these fundamentals are present to a sufficient degree and to clarify expectations. Through rubrics, educators, administrators, and parents can clarify the criteria needed for a successful academic environment, show what is expected of those who are involved in the students' with disabilities lives, and provide benchmarks which measure progress in the students' academic life (Goodrich-Andrade, 1997). Rubrics are an effective assessment tool in evaluating performance in areas which are complex and vague. Rubrics can be helpful to improve performance, as well as monitor it, showing clear expectations and how to meet those expectations. When rubrics are used, the education

community will become increasingly able to identify and solve problems, thus resulting in the proper academic environment for the students with a disability. The studies that that were examined helped the researcher write the rubrics. Four separate rubrics are included to provide standards for the four fundamentals that are positive parental involvement, administrators' support, proper teacher attitude and aptitude, and appropriate student evaluation (see Appendixes A-D pp. 49-52).

### *Parental Involvement*

Positive, proactive parental involvement is essential for academic success. Parental involvement includes effective family-school collaboration that moves beyond addressing problems, and begins to include discussing and determining the rights, roles, responsibilities, and resources of families, school personnel and students. Families and schools need to foster relationships which support students' educational, spiritual and mental health needs.

Therefore, it is the parents who bear the ultimate responsibility for the education of their children. In *Schaffer v. Weast*, (2005) the Supreme Court ruled that parents who disagree with a school system's special education plan for their child have the legal burden of proving that the plan will not provide the appropriate education that federal law mandates for all children with disabilities (Greenhouse, 2005). With the burden resting on the parents, the federal law sets forth the premise that the primary key of educational progress belongs to the parents.

Family circumstances and situations have the greatest impact on educational outcomes (Lewis, 2002). Regardless of the service deliveries for children with special needs, if the parents are not integrally involved in the process of the child's education, the

child's success will be limited. Proactive parents should be willing to invest their time, money, and influence to foster and nurture their children toward an environment that fulfills the children's needs. Research and studies done by E. Geutzloe (1999) , A. Lewis (2002), and H. Tomey (2005) were analyzed for this paper to recognize the five areas that are crucial as parents nurture children with disabilities: (1) demonstrate parental involvement at home; (2) know the local, state and federal laws; (3) enact an IEP; (4) involve the student with a disability in extra-curricular and/or co-curricular activities; and (5) communicate with the school community (see Appendix A, p. 49 for a rubric developed for assessing parental roles).

First of all, parents must be involved with their children at home. A loving, trust relationship needs to be established and nurtured between the parent and their children that lead to mutual respect. Respect for children includes a suitable education as well as good medical, psychological, and social service interventions as needed. Respect also involves interaction where there should be simple play between parents and sibling and where toys, books, computers, etc. are available (Tomey, 2005). In the late 1960s, federal strategies designed to increase parent involvement focused on creating more school-like behavior at home. This approach took the form of such formal programs as "Parents as Teachers" or informal efforts to encourage parents to read books at home, support homework, and play educational games (Lewis, 2002). When children with disabilities see the importance that their parents put in education, they are more apt to trust the academic decisions of their parents. In an outstanding parental relationship, the parent involves the children with disabilities in a completely loving, trusting relationship (see Appendix A, p. 49).

Second, parents must know the local, state and federal laws. Simply put, parents must do their homework to gain an understanding of what government services are available to them. There are books, agencies, web-sites, and newsletters available to parents. Knowledge of the law is the ammunition parents need to be proactive in schools. Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act 2004 (IDEA) is the national law that works to improve educational results for infants, toddlers, children, and youth with disabilities. If parents just knew the law, U.S. Department of Education (ED) reasoned, they would then exercise their right to improve their child's learning environment (Lewis, 2002). In an outstanding parental relationship, the parents support the child with a disability by accurately and proactively understanding and implementing the local, state, and federal laws (see Appendix A, p. 49).

Third, parents of children with disabilities, have the most important role of deciding what will be written in the children's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Goals, objectives, and benchmarks are written in precise behavioral terms with a team of professionals from school. Those professionals include the administrator, special education teacher, and the regular education teacher(s). The IEP can be more than an outline and management tool of the students' special education program. It can be an opportunity for parents and educators to work together as equal participants to identify the students' needs, to decide what will be provided to meet those needs, and to generate anticipated outcomes.

While parents are often present for decision-making when drafting the IEP, they must also stay aware of the progress and assessment of the IEP. The IEP is the foundation of special education (Tomey, 2005). Since the IEP is such an important part



of the students' educational progress, parents must not only have input, but also understand the responsibility of carrying out the goals and objectives. In an outstanding parental relationship, parents provide input and are an active participant in the decision-making and assessment of the children's IEP (see Appendix A, p. 49).

Fourth, participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities is the responsibility of the parents so that their children have a well-rounded education. Children with disabilities, along with their parents begin to understand their particular gifts and talents through the extra-curricular activities. Parents of children with disabilities often find their greatest support groups in these settings. Enrolling children with disabilities in swimming classes, tennis lessons, horseback riding, or a myriad of other options allows students with disabilities to reach their potential. In an outstanding parental relationship, parents identify the gifts and talents of the children with disabilities and continuously provide extra-curricular and co-curricular activities through church and/or community (see Appendix A, p. 49).

Finally, when working in community, both within the school and beyond the school day, communication is a key to academic success. Families and educators often differ in their expectations, goals, and communication patterns. This can sometimes lead to frustration and misunderstanding among students, families and educators. When these differences are not recognized and addressed, the divide between home and school grows and further separates the two most vital support systems available to students with disabilities. When collaboration is characterized by open communication, mutually agreed upon goals, and joint decision-making, education becomes a shared responsibility. The academic community gives freedom and liberty to parents when raising children, but

they should work together in partnership with parents when specific academic needs arise. Building bridges with parents involves respect, competence, personal regard and integrity (Lewis, 2002). In an outstanding parental relationship, the parent communicates in an organized and precise manner with the school and community so effective collaboration takes place (see Appendix A, p. 49).

This paper asks how Christian schools can implement these fundamentals to build a successful learning environment for students with disabilities. Application of these fundamentals is paramount in the Christian school setting. However, to answer that question, the purpose of the Christian School must be established. The purpose of the Christian school is to educate children for a life of obedience to their calling in this world as image bearers of God; this calling is to know God's Word and his creation, to consecrate the whole of human life to God, to love all people and to be stewards in their God-given cultural tasks. Christian schools help children learn a worldview. It's more than a Bible study; it's learning about the world through the Bible. In Christian schools students learn to transform the world. Christian schools help students learn that the world belongs to God, who created it and cares for it. They learn that Christ came to redeem the world and make it new again. And they learn that the Holy Spirit empowers people to carry out God's work in his world. The family, school, church and the entire community work together to see the world just at it is: created by God, stained by sin, and restored again in Christ (Christian Schools International, 2006).

In a Christian school setting, parents are in a binding covenant requiring a promise and intention to instruct their children as soon as they are able to understand instruction (Brink, ed. 1987). Parents have a covenantal obligation to communicate with

their children and the teachers about academic and behavioral expectations and progress. Parents should seek to support this obligation through school associations and school boards which engage the services of Christian teachers in Christian schools. Children should be raised by their parents with the Christian worldview that they are children of God with a purpose and potential as God ordained. A Christian school that promotes a Biblical way of thinking seeks to impress the words of Psalm 24:1 on the hearts of children. Psalm 24:1 (New International Version) states, “The earth is the Lord’s, and everything in it, the world and all who live in it.” Children with disabilities are part of the world so are valued, treasured image bearers of God and should be treated with respect. Children with disabilities are an integral part of the whole body of Christ.

#### *Administrators’ Support*

The academic community requires intentional support as it reaches out to all learners, including those at risk of failing. To successfully reach a population of diverse learners requires substantial community contributions. Those contributions consist of aides (or co-teachers), adapted resources, special education teachers, assistive technology, teacher training, resource rooms, adult mentors, peer facilitators, flexible scheduling, community services and other out-of-school activities (Guetzloe, 1999; Kame’enui & Simmons, 1999; Sanacore, 1997). Therefore, administrators must know their community, teachers, and resources so there is sufficient educational scaffolding for children with disabilities.

Students with disabilities must gain cognitive access to regular educational content. Consequently, attention must be given to the architectural requirements of the general educational content (Kame’enui & Simmons, 1999). In order for children with

disabilities to succeed, administrators must provide the student services that will lead to academic success. If administrators' support and resources are lacking, parents need to identify a better educational environment for their children with disabilities.

Dr. James Vander Laan, the Disability Concerns Director for the Christian Reformed Church, lists the resources that are absolutely necessary for children with disabilities to reach their potential. Those resources should include, "a special education room to which students can escape, special education teachers with appropriate skills, a supportive and sympathetic school administration, involved parents whose judgment is respected by the school staff, and skilled professionals to serve as backup" (Vander Laan, personal correspondence, December 19, 2005). All of these resources need to be coordinated by the administrators of the school. The task of the administrators is vast as it provides leadership and necessary change by orchestrating resources and/or people in their community.

Research and studies done by E. Geutzloe (1999), J. Sellentin (2003), D. Ernst ((2003), E. Kammenui (1999), D. Simmons (1999), J. Sanacore (1997), D. Rice (1999), and N. Zigmond (1999) were reviewed for this paper and are evaluated below. Research points to five areas where administrators must lead with knowledge, integrity, and dignity in supplying the appropriate educational environment for children with disabilities. These five areas are to (1) build a positive, Christian environment; (2) know, apply and implement the school policy as well as local, state and federal laws; (3) manage funding for school improvement; (4) direct the service delivery of the IEP; and (5) provide proper personnel (see Appendix B, p. 50).

First, administrators must send consistent messages to families and staff that their contributions toward forming effective partnerships are valued. Schools must work at open dialogue between home and school and develop the idea of the school being a valued partner in the education of their children with disabilities. Students with disabilities will require more collaboration among regular and special educators, parents, administrators, and service providers than students without disabilities.

Since classmates are a part of the learning environment, administrators must also prepare and equip students without disabilities to interact appropriately with students who have disabilities. Careful planning and advance training is necessary so that students without disabilities are knowledgeable about handicapping conditions and their effects, and are both sensitive and competent in working with students with disabilities (Guetzloe, 1999). Administrators need to lead the way in constructively interacting with students with disabilities. Outstanding administrators build a positive environment for all students, parents and staff by proactively using effective community collaboration (see Appendix B, p. 50).

Second, outstanding administrators must know the law. Ernst states that, "... school laws are derived from board policies, student handbooks, faculty handbooks, the negotiated agreement, and statute" (Ernst, 2003, p. 1). Many school policies are often predicated on laws established through local, state and federal governments. There has been increased demand for accountability on behalf of schools and their administrators through Public Law 94-142 (which initiated IDEA and the LRE), Public Law 101476 (IDEA), and the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Administrators are also more accountable for the academic performance of all their students because of the

standard-based education reform. It is the task of the administration to stay abreast of new laws, codes and standards established by the government, but it is equally important for the administration to be an advocate for the school community and the students with disabilities that they represent. Outstanding administrators support the students with disabilities by consistently and accurately understanding and implementing school policies as well as the local, state, and federal laws (see Appendix B, p. 50).

Third and closely related to the laws are the funds that are needed to carry out the mandates. One of the greatest threats to educating students with disabilities is a lack of finances. If there is no government funding, church partnership, or personal family monetary assistance, the administrators may have good intentions regarding student services, but cannot engage those student services because of the fiscal inadequacy. Education requiring special services is fiscally demanding on administration budgets. Children with disabilities will need resources such as case management, mental health services, and crisis intervention (Guetzloe, 1999).

One of the chief tasks of administrators is to manage funding for school improvement (internal scaffolding of cognitive supports and the external physical plant). “Eighty-eight percent of superintendents and eighty-three percent of principals feel that policymakers are enacting more mandates but are not providing the requisite funding to implement them” (Sellentin, 2003, p. 3). The job of balancing the local, state, and federal requirements concerning the students with disabilities with the funding available in local private schools is immensely difficult. Children with severe developmental disabilities or serious medical conditions may need medical services beyond what the school can monetarily provide. Planning committees should consider other sources of fiscal support

besides local tax money, such as grants from the Office of Special Education Programs, National Institute of Mental Health, Child and Adolescent Social Services Programs, and private foundations (Guetzloe, 1999).

Funds must also be made available for staff development for both regular and special educators. School improvements are continually needed internally (staff education) as well as externally (site modifications). However, funding systems must not be based on the maintenance of programs, facilities, and personnel, but rather on the provision of services to students (NASP, 2002). Special education has moved beyond merely gaining physical access to regular education schools and classrooms; it also involves the methods, materials, and equipment used in instruction, the particular students being taught, the teachers who provide instruction, and the tasks students are asked to perform (Kame'enui & Simmons, 1999).

While appropriation for funding the various aspects of education is a monumental task, to short-change students with disabilities is cheating them out of their right to a effective education. Difficult decisions require perseverance, and pivotal planning with school boards and the entire school community. Outstanding administrators offer accurate and thorough fiscal information and serve as a knowledgeable resource for the school community when legal mandates, staff development or IEP service deliveries need funding (see Appendix B, p. 50).

Fourth, administrators must direct and supervise the service delivery of the IEP. Service delivery includes the special education plan, the related services, and the students' participation in regular education. By regulation, an IEP cannot be developed with only the special education teacher and parent present. A school administrator must

be present at all IEP meetings along with all the other required personnel. The administrator acts as the conductor to schedule a mutually agreed time and place for the team meeting where those gathered will link the present level of educational performance to the anticipated annual goals, objectives, evaluation criteria, procedure and schedules of evaluation. At this meeting options for service delivery are discussed.

A determination of the special education and related services is then based on the student's IEP goals and objectives that correlate to the student's present level of educational performance. Those services are direct special education services (specialized instructional services provided directly to the student), indirect special education services (consultation services provided by psychologists, or counselors to assist them in developing programs appropriate for the student), related services (that involves transportation issues to developmental, corrective, and other supportive services) and transition services (interagency responsibilities or linkages before the student leaves the school setting) (Tomey, 2005). In a middle school and senior high school setting, this involves several teachers who need to consistently apply the accommodations across the curriculum. The administrator has the responsibility of holding all teachers accountable to the accommodations stated in the IEP.

Determination and implementation of services is paramount to determining the best educational environment. The administrator needs to be proactive in pooling the resources and orchestrating the best IEP and service delivery. Students with disabilities will then have less frustration, have fewer behavioral issues, and experience greater success in evaluation and testing. When the correct special education and related services are applied suitably, the students will have found their proper educational environment.



That environment may or may not be a traditional and/or contained regular education classroom (Guetzloe, 1999). An outstanding administrator directs the service delivery of the IEP with accurate and informed knowledge of direct special education services, indirect special education services, related services, and transition services; and appropriately uses several resources in the school community (see Appendix B, p. 50).

Fifth, the administrators are responsible for providing proper personnel. Proper personnel would include the regular classroom teacher as well as aides, special education teachers, adult mentors, co-teachers and/or peer facilitators. With careful selection and delivery of the IEP services, coordinating the personnel is pivotal in providing the correct educational environment. Superintendents and principals have the responsibility to develop and continually renew the gifts of their teachers through in-service days and teacher training. Options for this training may include full day sessions, study groups, peer coaching, school/university partnerships, and time for collaboration (Sanacore, 1997). When teachers are supported, encouraged, and prepared (emotionally, spiritually, and educationally), the students are in an educational environment that is suitable for them.

However, it is imperative that the teacher be given the aides, assistive technology, resource rooms, adult mentors, co-teachers, peer facilitators, flexible scheduling and community services that may be needed for the students with disabilities. Administrators need to stay aware of new, innovative ways to educate students with disabilities. In a study done by Rice and Zigmond (1999), co-teaching approaches to support students with disabilities in inclusive secondary classrooms were investigated through interviews and classroom observations of seventeen teachers. In this comparative study, data collected

in Queensland (Australia) and Pennsylvania (USA) public schools, allowed comparisons of teacher roles and responsibilities with two education systems. The co-teaching partnerships in both countries were dominated by subject teachers with special educators being assigned monitoring or helping duties within the class. The roles of co-teaching partners were examined with particular attention to those of special education teachers.

This study (Rice & Zigmond, 1999) took place in ten public secondary schools, two in large urban school districts in southwestern Pennsylvania, and eight in an urban area of southeast Queensland. Seventeen teachers were observed or interviewed, nine from Pennsylvania and eight from Queensland. The teachers' years of classroom experience, as well as their time in co-teaching roles, varied considerably. The classes in which the co-teaching had been undertaken all included students with disabilities. The numbers of such students varied from three to eight in a class. All teachers volunteered to participate and made themselves available for interviews (Rice & Zigmond, 1999).

One aim of this study (Rice & Zigmond, 1999) was to gather data from teachers in different secondary school co-teaching contexts so the researchers in this study collected qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations. Through the interviews and observations the research team sought to elicit information regarding the negotiation of respective co-teaching roles, the rationale for adopting a co-teaching approach, and evaluations of the strengths and weaknesses of particular models of co-teaching. Each of the teachers was interviewed by the authors of the study or a professional interviewer using a semi-structured protocol for about ninety minutes at mutually agreed-upon locations and times. The interview was taped and transcribed for analysis (Rice & Zigmond, 1999).

Several themes emerged from the Australian and American data sets. (1) Teachers attributed the success or failure of co-teaching to a school-wide commitment to inclusion and the extent of administrative and collegial support they received. (2) There were benefits for all those involved from the subject and special education teachers to the students with and without disabilities. (3) Co-teachers must have personal and professional compatibility in the co-teaching partnership. (4) Special education teachers had a need to prove themselves to colleagues in order for the partnership to work. (5) Co-teaching partnerships needed equity in teaching roles. (6) Obstacles need to be overcome in maintaining successful partnerships (Rice & Zigmond, 1999).

Teachers believe that well-implemented co-teaching results in academic and social gains for all students and should be regarded as an effective support option for inclusive secondary classrooms (Rice & Zigmond, 1999). This is a service delivery option that should be explored, promoted and used by administrators to ensure that students with disabilities are reaching their optimum educational success. Administrators need to stay aware of the best options in service delivery. Co-teaching is advantageous because it involves teaching procedures in which two or more educators, possessing distinct sets of skills, work in a coordinated fashion to jointly teach academically and behaviorally heterogeneous groups of students in integrated educational settings (Rice & Zigmond, 1999).

Administrators must be alert, aware, and agreeable to implement service deliveries that match the talents and resources of the school community. Other service delivery options which affect teachers and help students may be creating a closer link between the classroom and the learning center, using the special education teacher as a

team teacher, bringing in an extra set of hands through volunteers and paraprofessionals, and providing authentic, instructional resources (Sanacore, 1997). Teachers and students with disabilities are also affected by the class size. Lowering class size is an important way of helping members within the school community. Outstanding administrators provide and coordinate proper personnel to adequately meet the needs of all students which involve thorough knowledge of service deliveries that match the talents and resources of the school community (see Appendix B, p. 50).

In a Christian school setting a positive, Christian environment for students, parents, and staff is a chief goal of administrators. The administrators define and refine the principles, values and the religious underpinning of the school. The worldview that everything is under God's control needs to be implemented openly and thoroughly throughout the curriculum. It is the task of the administrators to be true to their mission statement as they keep the school pure from the philosophies of the age which seeps into school communities. In addition, administrators are Christian role models in their school communities as they model respect and dignity toward children with disabilities. Administrators must also give students without disabilities the resources they need to treat all of God's image bearers with dignity. "Christian school administrators don't handle many hammers and nails, but they are in the construction business. They draft blueprints for their school's future, construct school policies and programs, and oversee a dedicated crew. They are building the kingdom of God, one school at a time (Christian Schools International, 2006)."

### *Positive Teacher Aptitude and Attitude*

Teacher aptitude and attitude affect the success of children with disabilities. Singh (2001) investigated the knowledge base and professional readiness of regular education teachers for the inclusion of learners who have physical disabilities. The sample for this study consisted of fifty regular elementary and secondary education teachers who were enrolled in the various teacher education programs at a university in western New York. The only group that was excluded was regular education teachers who were enrolled in the graduate special education program. One thousand students are enrolled in the School of Education where 92% per cent were female and 8% were male teachers. Ninety eight percent were certified, two percent were teaching but not certified. Sixty eight percent of the participants were elementary school teachers and 32% were secondary teachers. Ninety four percent were full time teachers and a small proportion, that is, six percent had part-time teaching positions. Eighty eight percent of the teachers were employed in public schools and the other twelve percent were employed in private schools.

The study specifically addressed the following research questions: 1) Do regular education teachers feel competent and adequately prepared for the inclusion of students with physical disabilities in their classrooms? 2) Do regular education teachers have adequate knowledge about assistive and adaptive equipment? 3) Do regular education teachers have adequate knowledge about the environmental adaptations needed by students with physical disabilities? 4) Do regular education teachers have adequate knowledge about the disability specific characteristics and health care needs of students with physical disabilities? 5) Do regular education teachers have adequate knowledge about the social needs of students who have physical disabilities? 6) On the average,

how many clock hours of in-service training do regular education teachers receive to integrate students with physical disabilities in their classrooms? (Singh, 2001).

Findings indicated (1) fifty percent of the teachers reported that they do not feel competent and adequately prepared to include students with physical disabilities in their classrooms; (2) ninety four percent of the teachers believed that they needed training in assistive and adaptive equipment for educating students with physical disabilities; (3) sixty six percent of the regular education teachers had some knowledge about the environmental adaptations needed by students with physical disabilities and showed awareness of the need for wide walkways and special classroom furniture for students with mobility impairments; (4) regular education teachers did not have adequate knowledge about the disability-specific characteristics and health care needs of children with physical disabilities; (5) seventy two percent of teachers showed awareness that students with physical disabilities needed help in creating and maintaining friendships; (6) sixty six percent of the participating teachers reported that they had not received any in-service training for the inclusion of students with disabilities in their classrooms. The findings also indicated that regular education teachers received 1.9 clock hours of in-service per academic year (Singh, 2001).

Regular education teachers need more training to update their knowledge and skills for successful inclusion. G. Bunch, J. Lupart, and M. Brown (1997) researched the need for greater teacher training. Their report presents findings of a Canadian study of 1,492 regular classroom teachers, administrators, resource teachers, special class teachers, and university students. Three data sources were used in the research: an Educator Opinion Questionnaire, voluntary spontaneously written comments, and

individual, in-depth interviews. Results indicate that the educators' attitudes toward inclusion divided into two major areas. The first related to strong concerns about work load and the effect of inclusion on regular class teachers, adequacy of professional development, and administrator support. The second area of concern centered on positive beliefs regarding inclusion and teacher ability (Bunch, Lupart, & Brown, 1997).

Teacher ability and mind-set are extremely important in educating students with disabilities. Therefore, when critics of inclusion claimed that teachers are unprepared to teach in inclusive educational classrooms, advocates responded that it is crucial that college teacher-training programs become more responsive and prepare future teachers to work with diverse student populations in their classrooms (City University of New York, 1996). Early career preparation for inclusion will give teachers more skills and therefore a better attitude toward teaching children with disabilities. If children with disabilities are placed in classrooms where there is a lack of teacher training or the teacher has a negative pre-disposition toward children with disabilities, then the children may need to be placed in a more appropriate educational setting.

Teachers ultimately manage the classroom which has an aggregate of needs from many different students. Teachers may find themselves overwhelmed trying to meet the needs of these learners as they deal with factors such as social problems, deteriorating family structure and poverty, as well as children with disabilities (Kame'enui, & Simmons, 1999). Teachers need to move from frustration and dissatisfaction to proficiency, ability and satisfaction. With increased collaboration and resources from parents, administration, and the school community, teachers can help to correctly identify the best educational environment for the students with disabilities.

Research done by Singh (2001) and Bunch, Lupart and Brown (1997), which was assessed earlier in this paper, studied the need for greater teacher aptitude and attitude. Research by M. McLaughlin (2000) and E. Guetzloe (1999) was also reviewed for this study and their research is appraised below. Research guides teachers to recognize their responsibilities to (1) communicate and collaborate with parents, colleagues, administration, the IEP team, and service providers who are involved in the delivery system of the IEP; (2) connect the children to the curriculum by engaging positive attitude and aptitude; (3) practice pedagogy which addresses multiple intelligences to make education real, meaningful and relevant; (4) discern the difference between progress and scores on evaluations/assessment/testing; and (5) promote lifelong learning through professional development (see Appendix C, p. 51).

First, time must be provided during the school day for communication, networking, in-service training, and planning among all individuals (stakeholders) involved in the service delivery of the IEP (Geutzloe, 1999). Information relayed with good articulation builds a trust relationship between the parties involved. The more trust each party has with the other, the more progress can be made in dealing with the students with disabilities. The trust will be continually strengthened as all parties take ownership in their respective roles.

One of the priorities of communication is mutual cooperation and commitment which builds teamwork and unity. Another aim of good communication is that of early intervention (Alberta Department of Education, 2000). It is essential to identify students who may have a disability and to communicate behaviors and difficulties that have been observed so that a diagnosis can be made. It is also vital for teachers to listen to parents



expressing their concerns over possible problems. Early detection assists parents and teachers to mutually find the best educational environment for children with disabilities early in their school years. An outstanding teacher collaborates well with parents, colleagues, administration, the IEP team, and service providers which results in a trust relationship with the parties involved (see Appendix C, p. 51).

Second, it is an educator's responsibility to connect children with disabilities to the curriculum and/or the goals and objectives that have been established for the student in the IEP. Teachers need to provide a curriculum and classroom environment where students feel significant, wanted, and secure. In order to do that, the teachers must, first of all, know the children. As the teachers continually get to know their students, the teachers' instructional methods must be wide-ranging and varied to reach the different learning styles of all children, including the children with disabilities. An outstanding teacher connects unique gifts of students with disabilities to the curriculum to make classroom instruction real, meaningful and relevant for the students (see Appendix C, p. 51).

Third and directly tied to the different learning styles are the multiple intelligences that children possess. Because of the various intelligences or modalities, there are distinct learning styles. For example, some students are visual learners; some are auditory learners, while others are kinesthetic (Romkema, 2004). Some students may be a combination of these learning styles. An outstanding teacher will vary the pedagogy to include all the types of learners. This is especially true when dealing with students with disabilities. For example, students have difficulty with reading and comprehending the written word, but once something is drawn or diagrammed, the

students can relate the concepts to their world. Other students may need a kinesthetic activity to reinforce a concept that was initially delivered by the spoken word. For the students with disabilities, regular education teachers should also focus on the specific reasons that contributed to the students' eligibility for special education services. These specific reasons should be addressed as goals and objectives in the students' IEP. Both content and instructional methods must be structured to meet the students' individual needs (Guetzloe, 1999).

Teachers should practice pedagogy which inspires all students to progress. Students progress more cheerfully when curriculum and pedagogy are conveyed with joy. A positive attitude on behalf of teachers is a prerequisite for relating the pedagogy. Teachers must be able to laugh with their students and share funny moments. When teachers relate their hearts and their stories to the students, the students will give their hearts and their stories to the teacher. It is at that moment that trust is established, and the lesson plan can be delivered. An outstanding teacher uses a great variety of teaching methods cheerfully and effectively to reach out to the special needs and the multiple intelligences of all the children in the classroom, including the children with disabilities (see Appendix C, p. 51).

Fourth, it is also the teachers' responsibility to discern the difference between progress and scores on evaluations/assessment/testing. Unfortunately, standardized testing is the initiative that drives some teachers' practice. With the standard-based reforms, more and more teachers are teaching toward the standardized tests. A great deal of pressure is being felt by teachers to meet all the standards and the new expectations with all students. In a study done by McLaughlin (2000), teachers reported having to

teach more concepts, skills, and processes during a semester or school year than ever before. The result was an ever increasing pace of instruction that left little time for re-teaching or catching up slower students. This is known as the “Treadmill effect” (McLaughlin, 2000). Teachers could recognize progress, but because of state testing to qualify for funding, teachers feel pushed as they struggled to get all students to grasp a concept in a lesson.

The purpose of the McLaughlin study (2000) was to examine how educational reforms were being defined and implemented at the district, school, and classroom levels and how those reforms were involving and impacting special education programs and students. During the first phase of the research, case studies of each of the school districts were constructed based on information obtained through in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations and extensive document reviews (McLaughlin, 2000).

Interviews were conducted with office administrators, special education supervisors, principals, teachers, parents, and other community members. The districts were chosen for study because they were in states that were implementing differing educational reform models. Each of the districts was chosen because of its size, economic situation, and geographic location and its reputation as a high-reform district. The case studies were analyzed to identify key cross-cutting themes relating to both the context for the reforms as well as the specific interpretations for students who were receiving special education and related services (McLaughlin, 2000).

The second phase of the research focused expressly on teachers and their classrooms. The intention of this phase was to systematically examine how standards,

assessments, and accountability were impacting classroom pedagogy, particularly for students with disabilities (McLaughlin, 2000).

The next portion of the study dealt with an overview of the four districts, (Bannister, Hanley, Doyle, & Watertown) involved in the study. In each district, two elementary and one middle school were selected for the in-depth study. The instrument and systematic observation procedure McLaughlin (2000) used to gather data was developed for use in elementary and middle schools for the Congress to Classrooms project (Wilson & Floden, 1997). Classrooms were selected that had at least three children with IEPs. The study gave descriptions of what was found in each of the districts. This was followed by a discussion of crosscutting themes and issues. Two of those themes are (1) teachers who wrote the standards and designed assessments were more inclined to work on the standards in their own classrooms, and (2) professional development, in the form of intensive engagement in translating standards into actual classroom lessons, was the most influential factor cited by teachers in the implementation of reforms (McLaughlin, 2000).

The study then explained students' with disabilities role in assessments. During the initial site visits, the four school communities did not speak of a need for students with disabilities to demonstrate high levels of achievement on specific assessments. However, by the end of the fourth year of the study, all teachers and principals were aware of the need for higher tests scores on the part of almost every student. There was a shift from the presence and participation of students with disabilities to expectations that the students must learn what was being taught because they would be tested on that curriculum and their scores would matter to the school (McLaughlin, 2000).

The second aspect was determining the focus of responsibility of instruction. In the McLaughlin (2000) study, regular educators looked to special educators for assistance in designing specific lessons or modifying materials for students with disabilities. For students with severe or cognitive delays, special educators provided specially designed materials. Regular education teachers expressed a limited understanding of the instructional goals of lower functioning students. Students with disabilities were expected to learn as much as they could (McLaughlin, 2000).

The final portion of the study dealt with a summary of major themes for all students. The major areas of concern are (1) teacher ownership and teacher knowledge, (2) understanding what access to the regular education curriculum means, and (3) the “treadmill effect” where more and more concepts need to be taught faster and faster.

Therefore, parents, teachers, administrators and the government must work together to teach the whole child, the whole school, and therefore, the whole community in the area of assessment and evaluation. The McLaughlin (2000) study gives hope that school communities are aware of the need to assess students with disabilities fairly. School communities need to continue to work toward efficacy in standard assessments. Teachers should give students multiple means of showing what they know (Vander Ark, 2000). Schools must assess in accordance with their mission and vision statements. Children with a disability must be assessed according to the goals and objectives in their IEP. When the service delivery on the assessment of the IEP is carried out diligently, then students with disabilities may have found the best educational environment. Outstanding teachers acknowledge the differences between progress and scores on

evaluations, assessments, and testing. They work toward using authentic assessment that measures progress for students with disabilities (see Appendix C, p. 51).

Fifth, it is also the responsibility of educators to promote lifelong learning through professional development. Teachers of students with disabilities need to stay familiar with the resources used by the service delivery team established by the IEP. Regular education teachers will need training in special education procedures and requirements, the characteristics and needs of students with disabilities, classroom management of disruptive students, learning strategies and social skills instruction, therapeutic group procedures and affective education, and crisis intervention (Guetzloe, 1999). Outstanding teachers promote lifelong learning through professional development and stay abreast of the resources used by the IEP service delivery team (see Appendix C, p. 51).

In a Christian school setting, teachers have a unique calling to guide young minds in an exploration of God's world (Christian Schools International, 2006). When teachers have an increased aptitude and positive attitude toward inclusion as a viable educational setting, teachers can demonstrate the intersection between faith and living that will help students choose how they will serve God when they are older (Vander Ark, 2000).

Teacher training starts with a Reformed, Christian worldview to understand how all children with diverse abilities and talents are God's instruments to transform our culture. That training continues as teachers become aware of the importance of the mission and vision statements which compel the goals and objectives of the school. Once the goals and objectives are established, the curriculum can be arranged. Classroom teaching then becomes the delivery system of the curriculum. For children with disabilities, it is most often the regular education teachers who are in charge of the delivery system of

accommodations mandated through the IEP. When classroom teachers deliver the pedagogy through a Reformed, Christian worldview they are living out their faith as role models to their students.

In a Christian school setting, teachers need to recognize children's unique gifts, nurture them, and direct them to exercise their talents to build the kingdom of Jesus Christ (Vander Ark, 2000). Teachers need to listen with their ears and their hearts as they discern how to link the world of the children to the world that God created. Teachers should also be required to master the curriculum and integrally relate God's created order. Teachers must continue to "expand the toolbox of techniques" to relate the Word and the world to the students with disabilities, or "tune teaching to talents" (Vander Ark, 2000, p. 71). To tune teaching to talents, teachers' instructional methods must be wide-ranging and varied to reach the different learning styles of the children with disabilities. Otherwise, teachers are only a "resounding gong or a clanging symbol" (I Corinthians 13:1, New International Version), without giving any relevance or meaning to the students receiving the instruction.

In a Christian school setting, a teacher's optimistic attitude gets its inspiration through communication and interaction with the Incarnate Word (John 1, Logos), the inspired word (Special Revelation, the Bible), and the created word (General Revelation). A teacher's personal relationship with God is foundational as it gives each teacher inspiration and confidence. II Samuel 22:33, 35a (New International Version) states, "It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect...he trains my hands for battle." In order to grow in a personal relationship with God and in the learning experiences teachers give to their students, teachers need on-going professional

development. Teachers are called to a life of discipleship, to declare the creative and redemptive work of Jesus Christ in their teaching. Christian schools enable teachers and administrators to be actively engaged in learning as a continuous process (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993).

#### *Appropriate Standardized Assessment*

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) mandates that schools include all students with disabilities as well as students in the regular education curriculum and its subsequent testing. NCLB refers to the minimum acceptable increase in performance measures as adequate yearly progress (AYP). The very thesis of NCLB, that all students must reach a given level of learning in reading and math as measured by a standardized test is antithetical to the philosophy of special education that students with disabilities must be the center of the learning focus and instruction must be individualized according to students' unique needs (Allbritten, Mainzer, & Ziegler, 2004).

When mandatory class testing and performance takes precedence over an individual's academic progress, there is a situation that needs to be reviewed. Children in this particular educational "testing" environment are taught to take tests, not to progress in their education. A different educational environment, then, may be considered necessary to meet the educational needs of the students with disabilities.

The education system needs to be accountable for the learning of all children. The old saying, "we treasure what we measure" can now be extended to "we treasure who we measure." Accountability, according to many state reform-based tests seem to be saying if the classroom's aggregate scores do not "measure" up to standards, those students who bring down the scores should be penalized and certainly aren't viewed as a



“treasure”. Students with disabilities should be measured, but an appropriate standard-based test with proper accommodations should be prescribed for the students with disabilities. Students with disabilities should be held accountable for their learning.

“Too many school boards, administrators, principals, and teachers continue to devalue the unrealized potential of students with disabilities” (Albritten, Mainzer & Ziegler, 2004, p. 157). Students with disabilities should not be underestimated or dismissed.

Consider the research by the National Center on Educational Outcomes (NCEO) and by investigators of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which revealed that students with disabilities were being systematically excluded from assessment systems, and as a result, from the accountability measures based, in part, on student achievement (Thurlow & Krentz, 2001). This exclusion had negative effects because administrators gave more attention to regular education students when the pressure was on to get the best score possible for a school or district. Systematic exclusion also caused increased rates of referral to special education services (Thurlow & Krentz, 2001). It is not educationally responsible to exclude children with disabilities from testing, but the educational community must find the appropriate measurement tool.

Concerns continue to be raised as to how a heterogeneous group of students with diverse talents can be accurately and meaningfully assessed. Finding the proper assessment tool and policy is difficult because the “tests” change rapidly due to legislative processes, subsequent rule-making procedures that follow legislative sessions, and states’ acts taken in response to federal legislation (Thurlow & Krentz, 2001). Reasons for having students be a part of the state-reform based testing are three: (1) if the students are held accountable, administrators will give attention to their needs in

regards to staff and resources; (2) low-scoring academic students sometimes enroll in special education classes simply because students with disabilities are held to a lower standard; and (3) alternate assessment systems can be incorporated into the accountability system (Thurlow & Krentz, 2001). If an adequate alternate assessment system were used there would be public accountability that would go beyond the IEP team and the individualized AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) to achieving public goals.

While accountability can raise scores, there are also negative effects of testing. Evaluation (and its subsequent results) increases the number of students who drop out of school and are retained. Low test results also lead to litigation as in *Schaffer v. Weast* (Greenhouse, 2005).

Research by M. Thurlow and J. Krentz (2001), S. Valencia and M. Buly (2002), and G. Bracey (2003) were also reviewed for this thesis and their research is evaluated below. Research relative to this paper revealed five areas where parents, teachers and administrators must use assessments and accountability with responsibility toward students with disabilities. Those five areas include (1) allowing alternate assessments by using portfolios or a body of evidence; (2) requiring states to include a set of guidelines for those who need alternate assessment; (3) guarding against superficial interpretations and responses that restrict teachers' flexibility to deal with individual students; (4) cautioning against using test scores in high stakes threats or rewards; and (5) considering accommodations for students with disability (see Appendix D, p. 52).

In order for testing and accountability to be successful the students with disabilities must be given the opportunity to excel. If the purpose of the test is to show how little students with disabilities know, then the testing procedures should be re-

evaluated so the students with disabilities and the school are not penalized. Alternate assessment through a portfolio or a body of evidence shows what students can do, thus showing how all students, including students with disabilities can excel.

Thurlow and Krentz (2001) conducted a study to find out what alternate assessment methods of accounting and reporting were done in the United States. These are samples of their findings: In Kentucky, the average performance of all students is assessed in each content area. The content-area averages are combined with non-academic factors to determine a school or district average performance level. Scores from alternate portfolios are included in the academic indices. This enables data from alternate portfolios completed by eligible students to contribute the same weight to the academic component of the accountability index as would the data for students participating in the regular components of the assessment program (Thurlow & Krentz, 2001).

Louisiana also allowed twenty percent of those with significant disabilities to take an alternative assessment as required by their IEPs. In Missouri, those students with disabilities who receive accommodations will not have valid norm-referenced scores, but will receive valid information about their performance in relation to the Missouri standards. Their standard-based scores will be aggregated with those of other students to describe classroom, building, and district performance. Student with disabilities will have their scores aggregated in their district of residence, even if they receive services in another district (Thurlow & Krentz, 2001). These states have shown a desire for more equitable evaluations. An outstanding evaluation allows consistent alternate assessment

by using portfolios and/or a body of evidence that leads to an opportunity for students with a disability to excel (see Appendix D, p. 52).

Many educators support a single, statewide accountability system consistent with NCLB for all states. Through the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), special educators support requiring states to include within their accountability systems a set of guidelines for identifying the students with disabilities who need alternate assessments, as well as a requirement that states specifically report the number of students with disabilities who take alternate assessments (Albritten, Mainzer & Ziegler, 2004). While a uniform guideline would seem appropriate, it would be extremely difficult to have a guideline that could encompass the wide-range of heterogeneous students with disabilities. However, it would be good for assessment teams to grapple with guidelines so that alternate authentic assessment with accommodations remains a form of accountability for the students with disabilities. It is also necessary to have a statewide accountability system so our treasured students with disabilities are measured. Then state funds and programs can be equitably appropriated for all children. An outstanding evaluation supports a statewide accountability system with a set of consistent, positive guidelines for identifying the students with disabilities who need alternate assessments, and accurately reports the number of students who take alternate assessments (see Appendix D, p. 52).

Third, it is important to guard against superficial interpretations and responses that restrict teachers' flexibility to deal with individual students (Bracey, 2003). Schools need to be aware of and alert to state and district policies that mandate specific instruction strategies or curriculum programs for students with disabilities. Parents and

teachers need to remain part of the decision-making process for the students with disabilities. The best leadership uses the services and decisions by those who are intimately involved with the situation. A one size fits all approach to fixing poor test scores is not fair or valid. It would be more appropriate to look at why the student did poorly on the test. Administrators would benefit from probing beneath the surface of test scores (Bracey, 2003).

According to a study done by Valencia and Buly (2002), the more educators generalize the remedies, the more students fail. Their research came from the results of an empirical study of students who failed a typical fourth-grade state reading assessment. Valencia and Buly (2002) conducted their research in a typical northwestern U.S. school district of 18,000 students. Forty three percent were students of color and 47% received free or reduced-price lunch. For the purposes of the study, during September of fifth grade, 108 students who had scored below standard on the state test given at the end of fourth grade were randomly selected. These 108 selected students constituted approximately ten percent of failing students in the district. Classroom teachers, not reading specialists or special education teachers were solely responsible for the reading instruction of these children and their achievement (Valencia & Buly, 2002).

As part of their data collection and assessment tools, Valencia and Buly (2002) conducted individual reading assessments, working one-on-one with the children for approximately two hours over several days to gather information. They administered a series of assessments that targeted key components of reading ability identified by experts such as word identification, comprehension, and fluency.

This study (Valencia & Buly, 2002) found that when the researchers examined the average scores for all 108 students in the sample, students appeared to be substantially below grade level in all three areas. However, when Valencia and Buly (2002) analyzed the data using a cluster analysis, looking for groups of students who had similar patterns across all three factors, the researchers found six distinct profiles of students who failed the test. The most prominent finding is that the majority of students were not weak in all three areas; they were actually strong in some and weak in others. Valencia and Buly (2002) then continue in their study by describing a prototypical student from each cluster and specific suggested specific instructional targets for each.

Their brief description of the six prototypical children and the instructional focus each one needs is a testimony to individual differences. The evidence in this research clearly demonstrates that students fail state reading tests for a variety of reasons (Valencia & Buly, 2002). Teachers need to go beneath the scores on state tests by conducting additional diagnostic assessments that will help them identify students' needs. The evidence also points to the need for multilevel, flexible, small-group instruction.

In the areas of testing, assessment and evaluation, it has become more of a challenge to monitor the gifts of individual children, and more difficult to stay focused on the complex nature of performance and instruction. An outstanding evaluation guards against superficial interpretations and responses that restrict teachers' flexibility to deal with individual students with a disability (see Appendix D, p. 52).

Fourth, great caution needs to be taken when using test scores as the only assessment in high stakes threats or rewards. Adding to the difficulty of accountability is the pressure put on by the government. Too often there are threats (administrators and

teachers lose their jobs) when scores are low, or incentives (increased funding and resources) when scores are high. This punitive/reward system seems to punish the schools that need the funds most. With assessment scores made public and published in newspapers, there is a tremendous amount of pressure for schools to perform. Thus, many schools are not interested in educating the whole child; merely in meeting expected score levels. This leads to the negative side of standard-based reform. The students with disabilities have the most to lose because they are most often the individuals who do not score well in the testing. Thus the student with disabilities becomes the scapegoat for poor tests and ultimately school failure.

“If a school’s students with disabilities cannot reach the proficiency level of their age mates, NCLB punishes the school and the school district. And because the reason for that failure is the lack of adequate resources to implement NCLB fully, NCLB’s punishments in effect target economically depressed districts” (Albritten, Mainzer & Ziegler, 2004, p. 159). Extreme caution should be taken when pressure is put on administrators and teachers for low test scores. An outstanding evaluation consistently cautions against using test scores as the only assessment in high stakes threats or rewards for schools (see Appendix D, p. 52).

Finally, evaluations must utilize accommodations. Accommodations including supplementary aids and services needed by the student to assist the student in both the special and regular education should be listed and described in the IEP. This may include instructional modifications, assessment modifications, adaptive equipment, and/or assistive technology devices (Tomey, 2005). When assessment modifications are listed in the IEP, the school community is obliged to use them. Accommodations may include

(1) flexibility in setting, (2) flexibility in scheduling and timing where the student is allowed to take more time on tests, and be able to take the test when the child is most alert, (3) varying the method of presentation (the child may have the test read to him orally or the teacher may give other options to show mastery of the academic material), (4) using multiple methods of response (a teacher fills in the bubbles on a test form, or allows giving a verbal response), and (5) using aids and adaptive technology (Tomey, 2005). However, it is imperative that school communities be honest to report the accommodations that were used for the test. It is the goal of evaluations to see the progress, not the failure of students. An outstanding evaluation uses familiar, fair and appropriate accommodations to bring about the greatest opportunity for testing success (see Appendix D, p. 52).

In a Christian school setting evaluations, assessments and testing must allow students and teachers to function as images of God which means they must be involved actively in their own learning. Second, testing must contribute to the development of knowledge; therefore, evaluations need to go beyond assessing just analytical development. Third, evaluations must contribute to the classroom covenant community by affirming each student's involvement and contribution to the community. Students must sense that teachers are not just judging their worth. Fourth, assessment is a valuing activity. We value the students for whom they are as persons and that our review of their learning is intended to help them develop their own gifts. Fifth, evaluation must communicate meaningful information to students and parents about student learning. Teachers must communicate in a variety of ways with parents (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993).



In a Christian school setting, administrators, teachers and parents need to realize the purposes and limitations of different types of standardized tests. Some diagnostic and standard-based tests can be used to point out strengths and weaknesses of specific subject areas. However, standardized tests cannot be the chief measure of the Christian schools' educational programs. Assessment, testing, and evaluations should promote humble service rather than self-glorifying achievement, and a positive account of abilities rather than a negative sense of self (Stronks & Blomberg, 1993).

### Discussion

Educating all children is a moral imperative and a requirement for social justice. Children have a right to fair treatment as children of God. The Christian community must work toward education at the highest level for all of God's children. To find the most advantageous educational environment for children with disabilities, the educational community must identify the roles and responsibilities of the four fundamentals in the academic Christian community which most influence the children with disabilities.

Anecdotal evidence from several parent/teacher/administrator interviews suggests that one of the first signs to show that children of disability were no longer learning in the regular classroom environment was negative behavior that was exhibited because of the deeper issues which involved parents, administration, teachers, or evaluations.

"Learning is interrupted by behaviors that manifest a lack of ability to perform" (Vander Kam, personal communication, December 15, 2005). "Violent behavior was making school unsafe for themselves or others" (Yoder, personal communication, December 17, 2005). In these two situations, the education of the whole classroom was severely

impacted by a single individual because the students were not in the proper educational environment.

Behavior, then, is a symptom of an inappropriate classroom environment. If a child refuses to cooperate, strikes out at other children, cries, or is easily frustrated, there is a deeper problem that needs to be identified and addressed. The misbehavior (a symptom) of the child is most often caused by four other factors (fundamentals): improper parental involvement, lack of resources or administrators' insufficient support, teachers' negative attitude or lack of aptitude, and improper student evaluations.

Ideally, the students with disabilities would be in a school community where all outstanding fundamentals (according to the rubrics established in appendixes A-D, pp. 48-51) are exhibited. The school community should recognize weaknesses and then move toward improvement in those areas, while continuing to cultivate their strengths. Because of our fallen state, school communities will always have struggles over parental involvement, administrative support, teacher attitude and aptitude, and equitable student evaluations. However, we are called to be transformers of our culture. That is why it is so crucial to protect and give proper placement to the students with disabilities. Parents, administrators, teachers, and students' evaluations should serve as a checks and balance system so that academic progress is continually made by children.

When determining placement, the student must be in the least restrictive environment possible. However, the least restrictive environment is not always a classroom. Regular education teachers may be unable to educate students with disabilities because of an inappropriate service delivery team. Research has shown throughout this paper that the service delivery team must include the school community.

Determination of placement will involve six factors (in no particular order). First, the students must have the opportunity to participate with non-disabled students in academic, nonacademic, and extracurricular activities. Second, the students should be served in a setting as close as possible to which the students would be assigned if the students did not have a disability. Third, the students should be removed from the regular educational environment when the nature and severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services are not sufficient. Fourth, consideration is given to any potential harmful effects the placement may have on the students. Fifth, the placement provides the quality of services the students require. Sixth, the program/services as specified in the students' IEPs are appropriate to meet the students' needs (Tomey, 2005). A continuum of services must then be chosen (see Appendix E, p. 53).

### Summary

The greatest challenge for our Christian school communities is to offer the best education for all of God's children. Research has shown that children with disabilities can progress if they are in an academic environment that is safe, meaningful, and relevant. Care must be taken in identifying the objectives and goals for the student. Parents and teachers must work together to make the IEP challenging so the student will maintain and gain in their academic growth. Equally urgent is the administrators' role in organizing and utilizing the service delivery team. Research has shown that too often it is just teachers who are required to make accommodations. It is crucial that the student be monitored continually by all the fundamentals of successful educational environments to ensure that goals and objectives on the IEP are maintained, attained, and evaluated.

Additionally, the IEP team needs to expand the service delivery beyond the classroom to include other options (see Appendix E, p. 53). A vital responsibility rests on parents, administrators, teachers, and evaluations to determine the best policies, procedures, facilities, and services that must be used to make sure the educational success of all children with or without disabilities takes place. With that in mind, schools must maintain a full continuum of educational options as required by federal law.

#### Considerations

Since schools, parents, teachers and evaluations are heterogeneous, and disabled students are heterogeneous, we are dealing with many variables. We must recognize that no program works one hundred per cent of the time for every student with a disability in all schools.

There is a desire for accurate data regarding the short and long term impact of inclusion on students with disabilities. Investigations should deliver quantifiable data. A need for data in evaluations is needed as well. Authentic assessment and accommodations need experimental evidence so that our standard-based reforms accurately show the progress of students with disabilities. System-wide reforms will be needed to make sure that every student learns at appropriately high and challenging levels in the best academic environment.

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## Appendix A

<b>Role of the Parents for Children with Disabilities</b>		
<b>Outstanding (5)</b>	<b>Developing (3)</b>	<b>Emerging (1)</b>
<b><i>Involves</i></b> the children with disabilities in a consistent loving, trusting relationship with a positive, Reformed worldview.	<b><i>Involves</i></b> the children with disabilities in a loving, trusting relationship with a Reformed worldview.	<b><i>Lack of a</i></b> loving, trusting relationship, lacks an understanding of a Reformed worldview.
<b><i>Supports</i></b> the children with disabilities by accurately and proactively understanding and implementing the local, state, and federal laws.	<b><i>Supports</i></b> the children with disabilities by occasionally understanding and implementing the local, state, and federal laws.	<b><i>Supports</i></b> the children with disabilities by sporadically understanding and implementing the local, state, and federal laws.
<b><i>Provides</i></b> input and is an active participant in the decision-making and assessment of the children's IEP.	<b><i>Provides</i></b> input and is a limited participant in the decision-making process, and is sporadic in the assessment of the IEP.	<b><i>Is</i></b> a passive participant in the decision-making process; does not follow up on the assessment of the IEP.
<b><i>Identifies</i></b> the gifts and talents of the children with disabilities and continuously provides extra-curricular and co-curricular activities through church and/or community.	<b><i>Identifies</i></b> the gifts and talents of the children with disabilities and occasionally provides extracurricular or co-curricular activities through church and/or community.	<b><i>Fails to identify</i></b> the gifts and talents of the children with disabilities and rarely provides extracurricular or co-curricular activities through church and/or community.
<b><i>Communicates</i></b> in an organized and precise manner with the school and community so effective collaboration takes place.	<b><i>Communicates</i></b> with some organization and precision with the school and community so some collaboration takes place.	<b><i>Communicates</i></b> with limited organization and precision with the school and community so little collaboration takes place.

References: Lewis (2002), National Association of School Psychologists (2002), Tomey (2005)

## Appendix B

<b>Role of the Administrators for Students with Disabilities</b>		
<b>Outstanding (5)</b>	<b>Developing (3)</b>	<b>Emerging (1)</b>
<b><i>Builds</i></b> a positive Christian environment for students with disabilities, parents and staff by proactively implementing and applying a Reformed worldview using effective community (church, home, and school) collaboration.	<b><i>Builds</i></b> a Christian environment for students with disabilities, parents and staff by maintaining a Reformed worldview using some community (church, home, and school) collaboration.	<b><i>Fails to build</i></b> a positive Christian environment for students with disabilities, parents and staff, therefore, the Reformed worldview is difficult to follow because it is fragmented. Lacks community (church, home, and school) collaboration.
<b><i>Supports</i></b> the students with disabilities by consistently and accurately understanding and implementing school policies as well as the local, state, and federal laws.	<b><i>Supports</i></b> the students with disabilities by occasionally understanding and implementing school policies as well as the local, state, and federal laws.	<b><i>Does not support</i></b> the students with disabilities or implement school policies as well as the local state and federal laws.
<b><i>Offers</i></b> accurate, thorough, fiscal information and serves as a knowledgeable resource for the school community when legal mandates, staff development or IEP service deliveries need funding.	<b><i>Offers</i></b> some fiscal information and serves as a resource for the school community when legal mandates, staff development, or IEP service deliveries need funding.	<b><i>Offers</i></b> limited fiscal information and/or inaccurate resources for the school community when legal mandates, staff development or IEP service deliveries need funding.
<b><i>Directs</i></b> the service delivery of the IEP with accurate and informed knowledge of direct special education services, indirect special education services, related services, and transition services; appropriately uses several resources in the school community.	<b><i>Directs</i></b> the service delivery of the IEP with some knowledge of direct special education services, indirect special education services, related services, and transition services; occasionally uses resources in the school community.	<b><i>Directs</i></b> the service delivery of the IEP with little or no knowledge of direct special education services, indirect special education services, related services, and transition services; seldom uses resources in the school community.
<b><i>Provides and coordinates</i></b> proper personnel to adequately meet the needs of all students which involve thorough knowledge of service deliveries that match the talents and resources of the school community.	<b><i>Provides and coordinates</i></b> proper personnel to meet the needs of some students and has a knowledge of service deliveries that match the talents and resources of the school community.	<b><i>Provides and coordinates</i></b> personnel that occasionally meets the needs of some students and has a limited knowledge of service deliveries that match the talents and resources of the school community.

References: Ernst (2003), Guetzloe (1999), Keme'enui & Simmons (1999), National Association of School Psychologists (2002), Rice & Zigmond (1999), Sanacore (1997), Sellentin (2003), Tomey (2005), Vander Laan (2005)

## Appendix C

<b>Role of Teachers for Students with Disabilities</b>		
<b>Outstanding (5)</b>	<b>Developing (3)</b>	<b>Emerging (1)</b>
<i><b>Collaborates</b></i> well with parents, colleagues, administration, the IEP team, and service providers that results in a trust relationship with the parties involved.	<i><b>At times collaborates</b></i> with parents, colleagues, administration, the IEP team, and service providers that results in a relationship with the parties involved.	<i><b>Collaborates</b></i> sporadically with parents, colleagues, the administration, the IEP team and service providers that results in a weak relationship with the parties involved.
<i><b>Connects</b></i> most of the unique gifts of students with disabilities to the curriculum to make classroom instruction real, meaningful and relevant for the students.	<i><b>Connects</b></i> some of the unique gifts of students with disabilities to the curriculum to make classroom instruction real, meaningful and relevant for the students.	<i><b>Connects</b></i> very few of the unique gifts of students with disabilities to the curriculum so the classroom instruction isn't real, meaningful and relevant for the students.
<i><b>Uses</b></i> a great variety of teaching methods cheerfully and effectively to reach out to the special needs and the multiple intelligences of all the students in the classroom, including the students with disabilities.	<i><b>Uses</b></i> a few different teaching methods effectively to reach out to the special needs and multiple intelligences of some of the children in the classroom, including the students with disabilities.	<i><b>Uses</b></i> the same teaching methods daily; little recognition of special needs and multiple intelligences of the children in the classroom, including the students with disabilities.
<i><b>Acknowledges</b></i> the differences between progress and scores on evaluations, assessments, and testing, and works toward complete authentic assessment that measures progress for the students with disabilities.	<i><b>Acknowledges</b></i> some differences between progress and scores on evaluations, assessments, and testing, and works toward some authentic assessment that measures progress for the students with disabilities.	<i><b>Acknowledges</b></i> no difference between progress and scores on evaluations, assessments and tests, and does not promote authentic assessment that measures progress for the students with disabilities.
<i><b>Promotes</b></i> lifelong learning through professional development and to stay abreast of the resources used by the IEP service delivery team.	<i><b>Occasionally promotes</b></i> learning through professional development and to stay abreast of some of the resources used by the IEP service delivery team.	<i><b>Promotes</b></i> sporadic learning through little professional development and to understand a few resources used by the IEP service delivery team.

References: Bunch, Lupart & Brown (1997), City University of New York (1996), Guetzloe (1999), Kame'enui & Simmons (1999), McLaughlin (2000), Romkema (2004), Rouk (2000), Singh (2001), Stronks & Blomberg (1993) Vander Ark (2000),

## Appendix D

<b><u>Evaluation</u></b>		
<b>Outstanding (5)</b>	<b>Developing (3)</b>	<b>Emerging (1)</b>
<b><i>Allows</i></b> consistent alternate assessment by using portfolios and/or a body of evidence that leads to an opportunity for students with disabilities to excel.	<b><i>Allows</i></b> some alternate assessment by using portfolios and/ or a body of evidence that leads to an opportunity for students with disabilities to excel.	<b><i>Allows</i></b> sporadic alternate assessment by infrequently using portfolios that does not allow students with disabilities to excel.
<b><i>Supports</i></b> a statewide accountability system with a set of consistent, positive guidelines for identifying the students with disabilities who need alternate assessments, and accurately reports the number of students who take alternate assessments.	<b><i>Limited Support for</i></b> a statewide accountability system with guidelines for identifying the students with disabilities who need alternate assessments, and accurately reports the number of students who take alternate assessments.	<b><i>Lack of support for</i></b> a statewide accountability system with some guidelines for identifying the students with disabilities who need alternate assessments, and reports the number of students who take alternate assessments.
<b><i>Guards</i></b> against superficial interpretations and responses that restrict teachers' flexibility to deal with individual students with disabilities.	<b><i>Some</i></b> superficial interpretations and responses that restrict teachers' flexibility to deal with individual students with disabilities.	Superficial interpretations and responses that restrict teachers' flexibility to deal with individual students with disabilities.
<b><i>Uses caution</i></b> consistently in using test scores as the only assessment in high stakes threats or rewards for schools.	<b><i>Occasionally uses caution</i></b> in using test scores as the only assessment in high stakes threats or rewards for schools	<b><i>Caution</i></b> is seldom used with test scores; test scores are the only assessment in high stakes threats or rewards for schools.
<b><i>Uses</i></b> familiar, fair and appropriate accommodations to bring about the greatest opportunity for testing success.	<b><i>Uses</i></b> limited accommodations to bring about good opportunity for testing success.	<b><i>Rarely Uses</i></b> appropriate accommodations to bring about some opportunity for testing success.

References: Allbritten, Mainzer & Ziegler (2004), Bracey (2003), Thurlow & Krentz (2001), Tomey (2005), Valencia & Buly (2002)

## Appendix E

<b>Continuum Options for Placement for Children with Disabilities</b>	
Option 1	Direct instruction and/or consultative services within regular/vocational education
Option 2	Direct instruction and/or consultative services within regular/vocation education with content instruction in a resource room
Option 3	Direct instruction and/or consultative services within regular/vocational education with content instruction in more special education classes
Option 4	Self-contained in a special education classroom with integration as appropriate
Option 5	Self contained in a special education classroom with no integration in regular school
Option 6	Separate public day school for students with disabilities
Option 7	Separate private day school for students with disabilities
Option 8	Public and/or private residential facilities
Option 9	Homebound
Option 10	Hospital

Reference: Tomey (2005)

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