The quest for equity and quality in education took a great leap forward with the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act, Public Law 94-142. Like other legislation discussed in this issue, PL 94-142 has far-reaching implications for schools and colleges.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act calls upon educators to reaffirm some fundamental premises of American education. It implies that American schools must now be based on the principle of "no rejects"; on the conviction that every human being has a right to an education and the right to be treated as a person.

Perhaps the most significant aspect of the law is that it reminds Americans that in a democracy the education of other people's children is as important as the education of their own. It calls on educators to eliminate isolation of the handicapped, the prejudice and discrimination that isolation breeds, and the mockery that isolation makes of the fundamental right of access to equal educational opportunity. Review of the congressional testimony on PL 94-142 indicates that the rationale in support of providing access to equal educational opportunity for persons with handicaps is that as human beings living in America, they have a right to access to an education, even if it costs more to provide it.

In the end, if the individualization plan, the zero reject principle, the due process requirement, the parent involvement directive, and the integration imperative of PL 94-142 are realized for handicapped children, they will be extended to all children. Thus special education will become general education, and general education, special.

Whether or not this vision of education becomes a reality will depend on the response we make in the days ahead. What is needed most of all from our profession is a moral stance on the issues raised by PL 94-142 and other educational human rights legislation. In this connection, ASCD can learn a lesson from the Council for Exceptional Children.

The staff of CEC's government relations unit had a direct influence on every major court case and piece of legislation.

For example, a provision that handicapped children would get "appropriate" education was framed in the Mathias Amendment, PL 380, U.S. Code Section 1413. That amendment, fashioned after a "model statute" developed by the Council for Exceptional Children, enjoined that handicapped children be educated with children who were not handicapped but that their education be differentiated based on special needs and appropriate services.

Basing their testimony on the model statute and on a Policy Statement adopted in 1972, CEC became an advocate for "least restrictive environ-
merits," presenting before the courts the new point of view about the best way to educate children with handicaps.

With the court cases and local and state events as a foundation for national legislative action, CEC worked with a strong coalition of parents, lawyers, and legislators, backed by the support of the Education Commission of the States, to bring PL 94-142 through the Congress.

My evaluation of the response of the education profession over one year after the required implementation date is that it has been superficial. We are so bogged down in arguments over recordkeeping for IEPs and the mechanics of due process that we are in danger of losing sight of the lofty purposes for which PL 94-142 was created, and the chance it offers for comprehensive improvement.

It may be useful to remember that the Education for All Handicapped Children Act had strong support in the Congress of the United States. It was passed by a vote of 404-7 in the House of Representatives and 87-7 in the Senate. We can implement the law knowing that we have a clear mandate from the elected representatives of the people to do so.

It is unlikely that another educational event of such powerful human consequence will occur in our professional lifetime. The time and the opportunity for leadership is now.

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