

The term *mainstreaming* is familiar to educators in connection with efforts to implement PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975. The Act doesn't mention mainstreaming; it simply requires that handicapped students be educated in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). In other words, the educational setting must be as normal as possible while meeting students' individual learning needs. This can mean that students remain in special education programs most or all of the time they are in school, because that is the placement most appropriate for them, given their handicaps. But it can also mean that, depending on the school district's services and the student needs, students may spend most or all of the school day in a regular classroom with special help being provided to the regular classroom teacher.

Mainstreaming and LRE are often used interchangeably, but there is a difference. Sometimes in the school's hurry to meet the demands of the law, handicapped students are placed full- or part-time in regular classrooms without a close examination of their unique needs or of how those needs can best be met.

Frank Hewett of the University of California notes that the spirit of mainstreaming is found throughout society. People are becoming increasingly positive about sharing themselves and their lives with the handicapped. For example, as teachers and students work with handicapped students, they begin to lose their uneasiness about handicaps, and the youngsters themselves begin to feel more comfortable around those with whom they will interact as adults.

Teachers are also realizing that many students in the regular classroom have learning needs similar to those of special education students, and that teachers already have much of the knowledge and skills needed to work successfully with them. These realizations prompted Jack Birch of the University of Pittsburgh to predict that in the future, fewer and fewer students will be placed in special education programs and that efforts will increase to meet their needs within the regular classroom.

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Four crucial areas in the success of mainstreaming are good communication, administrative support, adequate time, and inservice.

MAINSTREAMING: an Unmandated Challenge

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Why Regular Class Placement?

Why Mainstreaming?

After decades spent designing special education programs, why is it now thought desirable to place exceptional children back into regular classrooms? Should handicapped students have remained in regular classrooms all along?

The development of special education has had many beneficial results. For example, it encouraged educators and medical personnel to examine closely both the learning process and learning impairments, promoted awareness of handicaps and of the need to provide appropriate help to the handicapped and their families, and resulted in the formation of parent groups and specialized training programs for parents, paraprofessionals, and teachers. It also brought attention to the lack of materials and techniques for the handicapped and, in many instances, resulted in the development of such materials.

Unfortunately, placement in special education programs also had negative results for many handicapped persons. One of these was the isolation of special students from normal peers who could model acceptable behaviors and attitudes. Students became so protected in the special education setting that they were out of touch with the "real world" in which they would someday function. Another result was the negativism and lowered expectations associated with

labeling.

Although mainstreaming will not automatically resolve these problems or guarantee that exceptional students will become functional members of society, it should help them learn to cope with the real world and help nonhandicapped students, parents, and professionals learn about and accept individual differences to a greater degree.

Mainstreaming is not for everyone; we still need to use self-contained special education classes when they are both the least restrictive and most appropriate setting for a given student. For the mildly handicapped, however, the concept of LRE demands participation in regular classrooms to some extent. The challenge is to go beyond legal requirements by wholly integrating mildly handicapped students into the class, to learn from them and allow them to learn from those without handicaps, providing the most effective education possible while still meeting the conditions imposed by their handicaps—and to do all this willingly.

The Mandate

Possibly the most far-reaching effect of PL 94-142 has been the creation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). The law requires that such a plan be written for each student before he or she is placed in any special education program, and that each IEP be reviewed annually. The IEP is to be based on regular teachers'

observations, multifactorial assessment, and any parental input provided. It must include (a) the student's current educational level, (b) the special services the student is to have, (c) the annual goals and short-term instructional objectives that should be covered in the special education program, (d) the date special education services are to begin and the probable time they will be needed, (e) the criteria by which one can tell whether or not the goals and objectives have been met, and (f) the extent of the student's participation in regular education programs. The IEP is to be signed by parents to indicate their participation in a planning conference and their agreement with the proposed plan.

The IEP is not a legally binding contract, and a teacher cannot be sued if the student does not meet all the proposed goals and objectives. The IEP is only an educational tool designed to describe the special education services the student requires.

Another means of implementing LRE placement is found in the continuum of services concept (Figure 1). Each level presents a different organizational means of providing

services to exceptional students. The number of types of placements and the specific types of services a district provides are not spelled out by federal mandate; instead it is up to states and individual school districts to design their own models for provision of the range of services.

Implementation—the Stumbling Blocks

Despite the intent of the law, the tools it provides, and a general trend toward mainstreaming, a number of obstacles demand attention if handicapped learners are to be successfully integrated into the general school population. People originally hired to facilitate mainstreaming are spending enormous amounts of time on paperwork and the demands of due process procedures spelled out in PL 94-142; students and teachers are not getting all the assistance they anticipated. New demands on principals, school psychologists, and even superintendents are often neither shared nor understood by teachers and parents.

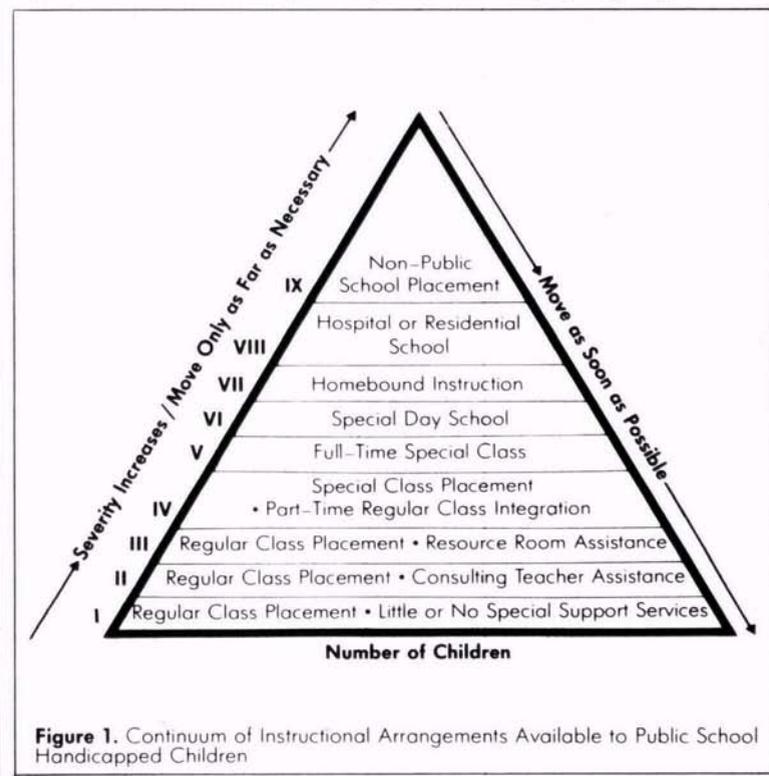
Legislators, administrators, and college faculties have not been as sensitive to preparing regular class-

room teachers for the inclusion of handicapped students as they have been to safeguarding students' rights, says Frank Hewett. The majority of teachers, he says, are in favor of mainstreaming but want to have a "say" in the amount of time special students are included in their classes. Teachers also want support and consultation when placements are not working well or when specific difficulties arise. They particularly want to understand and feel support regarding due process procedures, an aspect of PL 94-142 which concerns many regular educators working with exceptional learners.

Jack Birch feels that many special education teachers have been as unprepared for mainstreaming as the regular classroom teachers. Special educators may feel threatened when their "territories" are invaded and their students are placed in regular classrooms. The new role demands of such teachers are often vague, and most have had no training to prepare them. Special educators need new skills in communication, consultation, working as team members, taking part in due process procedures, and assisting students in learning and completing assignments from other teachers.

At the secondary level, demands on resource teachers and tutors become even more diverse and difficult. At this level, the special educator may be expected to tutor each student in four or five courses, improve students' study skills, develop job skills, monitor the students' work in other classes, build effective relationships with teachers in a variety of fields, and still deal with the paper work and parent contact required. In addition, there are fewer materials designed for secondary students with learning problems and such students often have attitudes that further complicate their learning difficulties—two major problems which make tremendous demands on any teacher.

In addition to providing equal resources in terms of classrooms and supplies, finding qualified personnel to staff positions created by the law, conducting "child find" surveys, arranging transportation for students, and attending hearings, educators must address controversial topics such as grading. In the higher grade levels, how does one grade mainstream students—by their perfor-





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mance vis-à-vis their abilities or by the expectations of the class as a whole? If students cannot meet the standards for classes, how can high school credits be awarded? Should they have adapted courses? If so, should they receive diplomas or would certificates of attendance be more appropriate?

Issues such as these remain unresolved. As they surface, though, and as educators begin to propose solutions, it is increasingly apparent that decisions made regarding the education of handicapped students will have repercussions for the education of the nonhandicapped and even gifted students.

Robert Medcalf, a former superintendent and now professor at Wright State University, believes that PL 94-142 may be the beginning of individualized education for all; that since the law forces educators to individualize for handicapped students, lawsuits and parental demands will force educators to plan for nonhandicapped students individually.

It Can Work!

Given all the if's, and's, and but's, it

is surprising but reassuring that some schools have successfully implemented the LRE concept. A team at Wright State University asked several state and local agencies to recommend successful programs in Ohio. The team then visited these programs, interviewed the administrators, special educators, regular educators, and some students, and analyzed the results. The following were found to characterize successful programs:

1. Good communication between regular and special educators. People felt comfortable talking with each other about problems or triumphs they had.

2. Frequent, informal communication. Brief meetings before or after school or during lunch seemed more effective than formal conferences.

3. Administrative support. Teachers in all schools visited stressed the quality of the support they had from their principals as being essential in their programs.

4. Flexibility in scheduling. Teachers changed the schedules of particular students as needed in order to provide special help or to ease

students gradually into the regular classroom for more and more of the school day. This was generally done on an informal basis.

5. Positive attitudes on the part of the receiving (regular) teachers. When teachers expected a special student to achieve and to manage in the regular class environment, the student did.

6. Time. Successful programs had been mainstreaming students for an average of seven years—before, in fact, the mandates of PL 94-142.

7. Special educators viewed as part of the total faculty. Special educators did the same committee work, had the same duties, and attended the same meetings as their regular educator counterparts. They were not physically isolated in rooms out of the normal traffic patterns of the school.

8. Special educators' attitudes. The special educators in these schools seemed determined that mainstreaming would work, would be a positive experience for their students, and were willing to work extra hard to ensure it.

9. Peer acceptance of special students. Regular students had become accustomed to having handicapped students in classes. In some places, regular classroom teachers had designed activities to encourage such understanding and acceptance on the part of nonhandicapped students.

Smoothing the Way

Given that mainstreaming is not simple and that some schools and school districts have effective programs, how does one implement a successful program? The four most crucial areas seem to be communication, administrative support, time, and inservice. The first three have already been addressed to some extent in the preceding section. Each of these can be dealt with on the school or district level through the efforts of administrative personnel. The last area, inservice, is the most nebulous and demanding.

Lack of preparation at the college level, lack of experience, and/or lack of adequate inservice training may prevent teachers from feeling competent when assigned exceptional students. Each school must assess the perceived needs of its staff to locate areas of concern for information or training. Such surveys usually indicate needs in one or more of the following areas:

1. Requirements and implications of PL 94-142
2. Clarification of which students will be mainstreamed
3. Role definitions for personnel involved in mainstreaming
4. Additional problems caused by mainstreaming (scheduling, paperwork, due process procedures, peer attitudes)
5. Identification of appropriate materials and strategies that can be used effectively with mainstreamed youngsters.

Teachers also seem to benefit from inservice in attitudes toward mainstreaming and handicaps. Ways of meeting these needs can vary widely. For example, a school in the El Paso, Texas, area had the special educator identify her most able student and then work closely with that student and a regular teacher for two months. The principal provided them with time to discuss the student and develop a program for that student by

covering the teacher's class when necessary. As a result, the teachers of that school came to believe that half of the students in special education could succeed in the regular classroom if the teachers had adequate preparation time.

In California, after teachers spent some release time in special education classes with handicapped students, they reported a more positive feeling for mainstreaming. Simulations of handicapping conditions and honest, open discussion of feelings, thoughts, and concerns before teachers begin to work with handicapped youngsters are other ways to attack the problem. In some instances, simulations have been done with the regular classmates of the integrated youngster to help them understand what that youngster must face.

Phyllis Paolucci-Whitcomb of the University of Vermont reports that in a highly successful program a consultant teacher works alongside a regular educator to model strategies; the regular teacher is not abandoned when a handicapped student is added to the class, but is given additional support until it is no longer needed. Frank Hewett describes another system in which principals enthusiastically share information with teachers through inservice and then make a point of being available for consultation and support. As a result of these and other programs, regular teachers increase their skills in meeting individual needs of students and improve skills in meeting the needs of the nonhandicapped learners as well.

Thomas Stephens of Ohio State University reports there are model programs throughout the nation in districts that started early and have good communication and support from administrators. Some of these are:

South Burlington Schools
South Burlington, Vermont
Patricia Stone, Coordinator
Briar Cliff High School
Vanderlyn Elementary School
DeKalb County Schools
Atlanta, Georgia
Trudy Sprunk, School Psychologist
Chauncey Elementary School
Box 276
Chauncey, OH 45719
Clyde Jarvis, Principal

Anecdotal reports and studies alike indicate that the attitudes of teachers, administrators, and students are crucial elements in the success or difficulties of a mainstreaming effort. Positive attitudes cannot be forced by law; they must be encouraged and carefully supported. ■

Suggested References

Approaches to Mainstreaming. Teaching Resources, 50 Pond Park Road, Hingham, MA 02043 (Unit I, \$78; Unit II, \$79). Filmstrip cassette kits on management, selecting and adapting materials, and modifying strategies for special students.

Fairchild, Thomas, ed. *Mainstreaming Series*. Teaching Resources, 50 Pond Park Road, Hingham, MA 02043 (\$6.75 per book, \$99 for series of 15 books). One book on each topic, cartoon-style, basic content for initial inservice. Covers learning disabilities, behavior disordered, hyperactive, mentally retarded, hearing impaired, visually impaired, communication disordered, physically handicapped, gifted, communicating with parents.

Glick, Harriet; Schubert, Marsha; and Bauer, Deborah. *Simulating Handicapping Conditions*. Wright State University, 373 Millett Hall, Dayton, OH 45435 (\$3.50). A set of activities increasing awareness of learning problems through simulation.

Glick, Harriet; Schubert, Marsha; and Bauer, Deborah. *Tips for Teachers Working with Handicapped Students*. Wright State University, 373 Millett Hall, Dayton, OH 45435 (\$1.50). Basic strategies for getting started with handicapped students.

Introduction to PL 94-142. Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 (approximately \$90). Filmstrip cassette kit that introduces the law, IEPs, and getting started.

Jordan, June B., ed. *Exceptional Students in Secondary Schools*. Council for Exceptional Children, 1920 Association Drive, Reston, VA 22091 (\$8.95). Describes programs, alternatives, and resources for exceptional adolescents.

Schubert, Marsha; Glick, Harriet; and Bauer, Deborah. *Least Restrictive Environment and Handicapped Students: Aids for the Regular Classroom Teacher*. Wright State University, 373 Millett Hall, Dayton, OH 45435 (\$3.50). A handbook for understanding and getting started with mainstreaming.

Turnbull, Ann P., and Schulz, Jane B. *Mainstreaming Handicapped Students*. Allyn and Bacon, Inc., Dept. 894, 470 Atlantic Avenue, Boston, MA 02210 (\$14.95).

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