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# Guiding Principles for Including High School Students with Intellectual Disabilities in General Education Classes

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## Abstract

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*This article provides teachers and administrators with a description of foundational principles and curricular approaches to create meaningful educational experiences for secondary students with intellectual disabilities in inclusive general education classes. The four principles provide: (a) the least dangerous assumption, (b) partial participation, (c) blending academic and functional curricula, and (d) curricular fairness. They provide school personnel with a conceptual framework to guide practice. The curricular approaches of: (a) multi-level curriculum and instruction, and (b) curriculum overlapping provide practical ways to implement varied and individualized learning outcomes within shared classroom activities. When school personnel understand and apply these principles and approaches, they can provide the foundation for creating more inclusive high school experiences for all students.*

Sarah (pseudonym) a student with Down syndrome, had an elementary school experience similar to students without disabilities in her community. She attended the school in her neighborhood where she was included in general education classes throughout the school day. During these early years of school, Sarah developed interests in science, reading, and art. She also developed friendships that regularly extended beyond the school day. In middle school things began to change; teachers started expressing concerns about what they perceived to be a widening academic and functional

gap between Sarah and her classmates. As a result, she spent more time in a special education resource room receiving one-to-one or small group instruction with other students who also had intellectual disabilities.

Sarah spent less time with her nondisabled classmates and correspondingly less time engaged in the general education curriculum. Sarah's parents noticed that she stopped asking them to look up science or history topics online, rarely mentioned the names of classmates, and was no longer invited to go places with friends. By the end of middle school, Sarah's education shifted primarily to a daily living skills program (e.g., laundry, shopping, housekeeping), justified as being important to prepare her for adult life even though these areas were not considered school priorities for students without disabilities.

Sarah's high school experiences continued along an increasingly segregated path in terms of both place of instruction and curricular content. Her school days were filled with daily living skills, sheltered work experiences, and leisure activities almost exclusively with peers who also had some type of disability. She was not provided with curricular access to interesting literature, biology labs, current and historical events, or math concepts. There were few academic projects that related to grade-level general education curricula. By the time she finished high school, her circle of friends had been reduced, her interests had narrowed, and her opportunities had become artificially restricted. But, at least theoretically, she had developed daily living skills that would enable her to live, work, and recreate in an inclusive adult community.

As high school graduation approached, Sarah's educational team realized that while the lives of students without disabilities were opening up to new opportunities for work, school, activities, and relationships; Sarah's world was becoming smaller. The majority of her segregated secondary school experiences had been facilitated by paid service providers (e.g., special educators, paraprofessionals, therapists) and now it was likely that her adult life would be similar. The school team members began to ask themselves, "Why did we think segregated experiences would prepare her for an interesting life in an inclusive community?" "Without relationships with her nondisabled peers, how can she access their support and friendship now or develop new relationships in the future?" "How might the lives of her classmates have been enriched by long-term friendships and shared experiences with Sarah?"

From a systemic vantage point, there are bigger questions to consider. Why did Sarah's inclusive school experiences during elementary school shift toward increasingly segregated experiences during middle and high school? Why did Sarah move from being an active member of a general education classroom, where she had access to rich and interesting curricula and a diverse group of classmates, to separate settings where she became a relatively isolated learner in a small group of other students with intellectual disabili-

ties? Why did she go from participating in science, reading, math, and social studies, to learning how to do laundry, make a bed, and sort silverware? At some point was she no longer interested in science, reading, math, and social studies?

Whether 7 or 17 years old, Sarah is still an inquisitive learner with strengths and interests that should be deepened and expanded through a variety of school experiences. While Sarah continued to mature, her educational opportunities became increasingly restricted by school personnel who decided that it was no longer important for her to have access to varied and thought-provoking curricula alongside her peers. In retrospect, the team realized that the path they had chosen for Sarah was shortsighted. Ultimately, they realized that segregation would prepare neither Sarah nor her classmates without disabilities for inclusive lives.

Perhaps if Sarah's team had a different way of conceptualizing the perceived gap between Sarah's abilities and the high school curriculum they might have explored ways to alter their own practices rather than removing Sarah from the classroom. The purpose of this article is to describe four foundational principles and two curricular approaches that high school educators can use to create meaningful inclusive experiences for students with intellectual disabilities. The principles of: (a) the least dangerous assumption (Donnellan, 1984), (b) partial participation (Baumgart et al., 1982; Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991), (c) blending academic and functional curricula, and (d) curricular fairness, provide school personnel with a conceptual framework to guide practice. The approaches to curriculum described are: (a) multi-level curriculum and instruction, and (b) curriculum overlapping (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 2011) They provide practical ways to implement varied and individualized learning outcomes within shared classroom activities. Incorporating these principles and approaches is more likely that students with a wide range of learning and performance characteristics can be meaningfully included in general education classrooms.

## Terminology

Language is a powerful way to create shared understanding. However, when people use the same terms while assigning different meanings to them, it can create barriers to effective communication and teamwork. As teams move forward toward implementing inclusive practices, it should continually clarify the meaning they assign to key terminology. In this section we offer information on two key terms; intellectual disabilities, and inclusive education, with the intention of assisting teams in advancing their shared understanding of these terms.

## Intellectual Disabilities

Antiquated terminology historically used to describe people with intellectual disabilities (e.g., mentally handicapped, mentally retarded) has evolved over time (Goodey, 2005; Schalock, Luckasson & Shogren, 2007) and is likely to continue to evolve as our understanding of human diversity deepens. Over the past decade in particular, the term “intellectual disability” has become the preferred phrase when describing those who previously were diagnosed as having mental retardation (Schalock et al., 2007). The American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2010) has shifted away from describing people on the basis of the severity of their intellectual disability (e.g., mild, moderate, severe, profound) and toward a multidimensional classification system (e.g., intellectual abilities, adaptive behavior, health, participation, context) that includes and categorizes the pattern and intensity of the support individuals need. This model stresses the importance of providing contextually necessary supports that allow for participation and account for a person’s abilities, adaptive behavior, and health characteristics (Wehmeyer et al., 2008). The phrase “intellectual disability” is consistent with international terminology and contemporary conceptualizations about disability (World Health Organization, 2001). Individuals with intellectual disabilities and self-advocacy organizations (e.g., SABLE: Self-Advocates Becoming Empowered) have advocated for this shift in terminology (Schalock et al., 2007; Snell & Voorhees, 2006).

## Inclusive Education

Inclusive education is more than merely being physically present in a general education classroom; it is rooted in an interrelated set of values from which we make decisions and a corresponding set of practices designed to support equitable and appropriate education (Doyle, 2008; Giangreco, 2011). Although there is no single agreed upon definition, it has been suggested that inclusive education exists when each of the following elements occurs on an ongoing daily basis (Giangreco, Carter, Doyle, & Suter, 2010):

1. All students are welcome in general education. The first placement options considered are the general education classes the students would attend if they did not have a disability.
2. Disability is recognized as a form of human diversity. As such, students with disabilities are accepted as individuals and not denied access based on disability.
3. Appropriate supports are available, regardless of disability label or severity. Given their portability supports are provided in typical environments rather than sending students to specialized settings to receive needed supports.

4. Students are educated in classes reflecting the naturally occurring proportion of students with and without disabilities. Therefore, the percentage of students without disabilities in each class would be substantially higher than those with disabilities.
5. Students, irrespective of their developmental or performance levels, are educated with peers in the same-age groupings available to those without disability labels, rather than with younger students. Students with disabilities need not function at or near the same academic level as their classmates (although some do) to benefit from a chronologically age-appropriate inclusive placement.
6. Students with and without disabilities participate in shared educational experiences while pursuing individually appropriate learning outcomes with necessary supports. Educational experiences are designed to enhance valued life outcomes, ones that seek an individualized balance between the academic–functional and the social–personal aspects of schooling.

Currently inclusive opportunities, especially for high school students with intellectual disabilities, are the exception rather than the rule. Data suggest that the percentage of students with disabilities who are included in general education classes for 80% of the time or more varies significantly based on the student's category of disability and where the student lives. Nationally, 61% of students across all disability categories are placed in general education classes 80% of the time or more. Variations across states range from below 50% (e.g., Hawaii, 30.79%; New Jersey, 46.42%) to above 75% (e.g., North Dakota, 76%; Alabama, 83.5%) According to the United States Department of Education (2011). These same data indicate that, among students classified with intellectual disabilities, only 17% nationally are included in general education classes 80% of the time. Furthermore, significant variation results from where one lives. For example, 15 states report that fewer than 10% of students with intellectual disabilities are included 80% of the time or more (i.e., AZ, CA, HI, IL, ME, MN, MO, NV, NJ, NY, SC, TX, UT, WA, WY); while only four states (i.e., AZ, CT, IA, KY) and Puerto Rico report the figure to be above 40% (United States Department of Education, 2012).

Although specific data related to national inclusion rates for high school students with intellectual disabilities is not available, high school teachers do articulate two primary reasons for the lack of inclusive opportunities at the high school level: (a) their own lack of understanding of inclusive education, and (b) concerns over the cognitive discrepancies between students with and without intellectual disabilities (Doyle & Giangreco, 2009). This article begins to fill those gaps for teachers.

## Inclusive Principles

### Least Dangerous Assumption

Donnellan (1984) described a way of framing decisions by using the principle of the least dangerous assumption, which asserts “in the absence of conclusive educational data, educational decisions should be based on assumptions that, if incorrect, will have the least dangerous effect on the student” (p. 142). For example, it is less dangerous for a student with intellectual disabilities to be placed in a general education classroom with the appropriate supports and accommodations than in a special education classroom. This is logical because inclusive environments provide more normalized opportunities to: (a) engage with varied and interesting curricula, (b) interact with nondisabled peers, (c) access natural supports, and (d) learn routines of daily life, such as following a schedule and being prepared for class. All of these opportunities have been deemed valuable for students without disabilities. Therefore, it is least dangerous to assume that they are also valuable for students with intellectual disabilities (Doyle & Giangreco, 2009).

Donnellan went on to explain that, “Generally, the ... least dangerous assumption holds that there is less danger to students if teachers assume instructional failure is due to instructional inadequacy rather than student deficits” (1984, p. 147). This notion provides teachers with the challenge and opportunity to figure out how to support students with intellectual disabilities in general education classes. Classrooms with varied instructional arrangements such as small groups, team work, interactive projects, cooperative groups, and investigations provide ongoing opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to be members of the class academic and social networks.

Students might, for example, be arranged in interdependent groups of three. Then when the teacher asks a question of the class, no one answers until all the triads have generated an answer. This requires that all students in the class be involved in generating their best answer and all students contribute to and develop group work skills. The teacher then calls on one or two groups to offer their responses. This model of interaction increases the involvement of all students in the content while concurrently providing the natural peer support that might be needed for a student with intellectual disabilities. Indeed, activity-based instruction that prioritizes interaction and group work is far more amenable to including students with diverse characteristics.

As a way to further open doors of possibility for students with intellectual disabilities, Jorgensen, McSheehan and Sonnenmeier (2010) linked the principle of the least dangerous assumption with a notion they called presumption of competence. In Sarah’s case for example, if we presume that

she is competent, then we provide supported access to the general education curriculum. Furthermore, if we presume the competence of general education teachers (which we do), then we assume that many of their existing skills can be applied to teach Sarah, while understanding that they may need some supports from a special educator in the form of co-teaching, direct instruction, or collaborative consultation.

In secondary content areas, for example, there are specific vocabulary terms related to each unit of instruction. In order for Sarah to learn some of the new vocabulary, teachers need to design multiple ways for her to review and practice the new terms. Teachers might incorporate online flashcard programs where the terms, definitions, and pictures can be combined. Because many online flashcard programs provide a variety of games to practice the vocabulary, initial preparation of the flashcard stacks will lend itself to many ways for Sarah to practice. Such an accommodation may be necessary for Sarah, and it may also be helpful for many other students who have difficulty with memorization, speak English as a second language, or are visual learners.

In another situation, the classroom teacher might need assistance in figuring out how to meaningfully include Sarah in classroom discussions. The special educator could model how to incorporate delayed responding techniques during instruction as a way to give Sarah the extra processing time that she needs. In Sarah's case, this involves posing a knowledge level question to her with the prompt, "Sarah, I'll be back for your answer in a moment." During this time Sarah can look at her notes or ask a peer for assistance. The teacher continues instruction and circles back for Sarah's answer.

Teachers who presume competence proceed as if students who are functioning at a significantly different level than their peers are curious and capable of learning interesting content. Presuming competence encourages team members to start with a sense of optimism that all students have untapped capabilities to learn and that teachers can help unleash their creative potential.

## Partial Participation

The second principle that is helpful when considering inclusive secondary classrooms is the principle of partial participation (Baumgart et al., 1982; Ferguson & Baumgart, 1991). Simply put, partial participation refers to the idea that everyone can participate, at least in part, in most activities. Partial participation provides a name for a practice that has always been with us in various contexts. Starting from a very young age, parents invite their children to assist with parts of many common tasks (e.g., baking, cleaning, home repairs, yard-work), long before the child can do the entire task independently. Transferring this principle into the high school context allows all students to participate, at least in part, in most classroom and school



activities. Partial participation offers a constructive alternative to an “all or nothing” mentality that too often leads to students with intellectual disabilities being separated from the general education classroom, curriculum, and nondisabled peers.

When considering how a student might partially participate in any high school activity, it is important to keep in mind that the context and nature of the involvement must be at least status-neutral, but preferably status-enhancing. Generally, contexts that are status-enhancing are those where students without disabilities of the same age spend time (e.g., general education classrooms, cafeteria, library). Activities that are status-enhancing are those in which students without disabilities of the same age value and participate in on a regular basis (e.g., membership in a school club or on a sports team, participation in volunteer activities, going to the movies with friends). In the school context consider a chemistry experiment where one student is the recorder, another reads the directions, a third combines the chemicals into a solution, and all three observe and discuss the chemical reaction. Each student has a distinct role and participates in the completion of the project. During a social studies class where students are learning about the contributions of specific historical figures, a student with intellectual disabilities might be called upon to contribute information at a knowledge level of understanding, while another student offers information that requires a synthesis of the content. In mathematics, one student solves the problem without a calculator and the other checks it with a calculator.

The possibilities are endless if teachers consider partial participation as a cooperative way to include all students in the majority of activities. Moving these first two guiding principles from theory to practice can raise important questions about the relationship between functional life skills and academic curricula, as well as questions about fairness that are addressed in the next two sections.

## Blending Academic and Functional Curricula

As students with intellectual disabilities mature, it is not uncommon for team members to question whether they should participate in a functional life skills program (e.g., daily living skills) instead of a traditional academic program. It is important for teachers and administrators to think about this question in a manner that considers creative possibilities for students with and without disabilities. The question itself wrongly assumes that the answer requires a choice between those two options. In reality, a third option is to balance both in an individually determined way (Giangreco et al., 2011; Hunt, McDonnell, & Crockett, 2012).

Historically, teachers have considered functional life skills such as cooking, shopping, telling time and money management to be functional because they assist many people in moving through some of the daily responsibilities.

ties related to home, work, and leisure. Some students with intellectual disabilities take longer to learn these and other skills. As a result, many of them spend years working exclusively on functional life skills in an effort to prepare for adult life. Unfortunately, a singular focus on future functional life skills overlooks those functional skills associated with being an adolescent such as texting with friends, attending athletic events, or participating in school performances. It also denies the student interesting academic content that is available to most students through the general education high school curriculum. Such an exclusive focus often leads to social isolation just at a time when developmental friendships provide invaluable opportunities to learn about one's self, others, and the community. Conversely, an exclusive focus on academic skills when one has not developed important functional life skills can be problematic as well.

If high school teams identify the functional life skills that will support a student with intellectual disabilities to access the life and learning of an adolescent and embed those skills in the secondary school context, then it is more likely that the student will have access to enriching, age-appropriate, academic, functional, and social learning opportunities (Hunt et al., 2012). Examples of these naturally occurring functional opportunities include: (a) getting to class on time with peers, (b) having the necessary materials for each class, (c) maintaining appropriate behavior while in class, (d) hanging out with friends, (e) making and communicating choices, (f) managing money for events with friends, and (g) participating in after-school activities. Some of these functional life skills are the framework of the daily life of an adolescent who is involved with school and friends. In addition, the academic portion of the day offers students with opportunities to deepen and expand their understanding of the world around them, identify their strengths, discover new interests, and tackle new challenges (Ryndak, Alper, Hughes, & McDonnell, 2012).

Too often high school students with intellectual disabilities are not afforded the opportunity to explore a wide variety of content. This can occur if teachers mistakenly assume that engaging in rich and interesting content is less important for these students. Quite to the contrary, a rich life of the mind affords all students with the chance to experience new learning, regardless of the quantity. As renowned educator and disability activist Burton Blatt (1987) so eloquently stated: "The brimming cup has little to do with the size of the cup or the temporary nature of its contents... It is all in the mind and, for sure, in the soul" (p. 358).

## **Curricular Fairness**

High school personnel seeking to implement inclusive educational opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities will inevitably face questions related to curricular fairness. For some teachers, variations in how individu-

al students access the general education curriculum, and in how much they learn can lead to questions of equity such as: "Is it fair that a student is accountable for significantly less or different content than classmates?" and "Is this really enough content?" "Is it appropriate to evaluate student progress based on a criterion-referenced rather than norm-referenced approaches?"

It is helpful for teams (e.g., teachers, special educators, parents) to have ways to think and make decisions about these legitimate questions. For example, if the educational team determined that it is appropriate for a student with intellectual disabilities to be responsible for less content, then "yes" it is enough content. The principle of the least dangerous assumption encourages us to implement the appropriate and least intrusive supports within a classroom context to enable the student to learn at least part of the curriculum that has been identified as being important for students without disabilities. In high school classrooms, students with intellectual disabilities should have opportunities to engage in ongoing interactions with same-age peers, be exposed to general education curriculum content, have opportunities to learn the functional life skills that are associated with being an adolescent, and more. Students with intellectual disabilities enjoy and benefit from learning in some of the same ways as their peers, even if they do not learn the same amount or all of the same content. In addition, students without disabilities can gain reciprocal benefits of friendship, supporting a classmate, and developing inclusive attitudes as members of a diverse community.

It can be helpful to remind fellow teachers that another way to think about curricular fairness is to consider that "fair" means everyone gets what they need, even though it is not necessarily the same. For example, if a student needs glasses to see better, it is fair that she uses them. If another student needs a text written at the second-grade level or the movie version to enhance understanding of the elements of a story, it is fair that he receives them. When individual students get what they need, it does not detract from the learning or accomplishments of other students. Research has consistently indicated that the presence of students with disabilities in general education classes tends to have either a neutral or positive impact on students without disabilities, academically and socially (Peterson & Hittie, 2010; Ruijs, Van der Veen, & Peetsma, 2010). When high school teachers adopt an inclusive outlook on curricular fairness, students with and without disabilities learn that having characteristics or needs that are different from others, does not have to mean removal from the classroom or separation within it. After all, when a line is drawn in the sand regarding who is and is not included, how long will it take for the line to be moved and cut off the next student?

### **Approaches to Curriculum**

Over the past decade, federal legislation has moved toward establishing the expectation of high curricular standards for all students, including those

with disabilities. The *No Child Left Behind Act* (2002) and the *Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Education Act* (2004) both emphasize that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum. There is emerging information about how to facilitate this progress in the general education curriculum for high school students with intellectual disabilities ; (Agran, Cavin, Wehmeyer & Palmer, 2006; Browder, Wakeman, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, & Algozzine, 2006; Evmenova & Buhrmann, 2011). It can be helpful to have a conceptual framework for thinking about curriculum and instruction, as well as practical ways to implement them that are broad enough to benefit students functioning at a variety of levels in today's complex secondary classrooms. Multi-level curriculum and instruction, as well as curriculum overlapping are two approaches that can address this need (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 2011).

### Multi-Level Curriculum and Instruction

Any teacher will tell you that the students without disabilities in their classes range in ability both above and below the designated grade level. Teachers have been designing curriculum and instruction to address these variations for generations. In fact, in schools where multi-graded classrooms are the norm, teachers have deliberately created an even greater range of abilities than would be found in single-graded classes, using student diversity as a positive point of leverage. Multi-level curriculum and instruction is an approach that can be used to address the needs of any high school classroom where learners are functioning at, below, and above grade-level.

Multi-level curriculum and instruction refers to "teaching a diverse group of learners within a shared activity in which students have individually appropriate learning outcomes within the same curriculum area" (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 2011, p. 10). High school teachers often implement aspects of multi-level curriculum and instruction throughout the course of an intellectual unit. Concerns can arise when the perceived academic gap is particularly significant. For example, how does a teacher implement multi-level curriculum and instruction related to the learning priorities of Sarah, the student with Down Syndrome?

Fundamentally the application is the same; the key is to consider the curricular content in relationship to Sarah's strengths and needs. For example, Sarah brings several assets to her English class. She has developed a love for literature, although in tenth-grade, she can read at the second-grade level, and when given a plot line of five key events, she can fill in the basic elements of a story. During class the teacher might have Sarah fill in the skeleton of a plot line on the Smartboard®, followed by other classmates adding to it as the class discussion evolves. While most students are examining the complex relationships within the plot, Sarah's individually appropriate learn-

ing outcomes are to learn the basic events of the plot and the relationships among key characters.

Because Sarah's teacher is committed to using multi-level approaches for all students, the reading materials available in the class range from graphic novels to texts written at an elementary level (e.g., *Streamline Shakespeare*, *Cliff Notes*) to old English versions of the written text. There are text readers, ebooks, and electronic flashcard stacks available for all students. The deliberate use of multi-level curriculum and instruction has benefits for all students in the classroom.

### Curriculum Overlapping

There are some students with severe intellectual disabilities for whom multi-level curriculum and instruction is insufficient. In these cases it is helpful for the educational team to apply the concept of curriculum overlapping as a way to ensure individually appropriate curriculum content within general education classes. Similar to multi-level curriculum and instruction, curriculum overlapping refers to "teaching a diverse group of students within a shared activity in which students have different individually appropriate learning outcomes" (Giangreco, Cloninger, & Iverson, 2011, p. 11). The difference is that in curriculum overlapping the learning outcomes are from two or more different curriculum areas. The student is learning different content, at a different rate, but in shared activities with nondisabled classmates. For example, high school sophomore, Charles, has severe intellectual disabilities and his learning priorities include: (a) initiating and responding to peers, (b) operating his electric wheelchair, and (c) using a microswitch to turn on and off electrical devices.

During small group activities in social studies for example, while his classmates are learning content related to World War II, Charles will initiate and respond to his peers, navigate his wheelchair around the classroom and use microswitches to activate necessary classroom items (e.g., laptop computers, overhead projectors, pencil sharpeners). The teacher is clear that Charles' primary goals are different from his peers and the goals are to be addressed within small group instruction.

Curriculum overlapping represents a way of planning and thinking about participation that allows for meaningful inclusion for students who are considered to have the most severe disabilities. Curriculum overlapping, combined with the active use of the principle of partial participation, allows students with severe intellectual disabilities numerous ways to participate in a wide variety of age-appropriate activities and content which enrich their lives as well as the lives of their classmates and teachers. In considering the most appropriate instructional approach, it is important to acknowledge that one does not have to choose between traditional academic versus functional approaches.

## Role of Administrators

Administrative leadership and commitment to inclusive practices are critical to the development of inclusive school communities (Giangreco, Carter, Doyle, & Suter, 2010; Riehl 2000; Salisbury & McGregor 2002). School administrators can advance inclusive educational practices by: (a) creating a climate of belonging, (b) demonstrating a commitment to equity and social justice that is operationalized through specific actions, (c) enhancing staff skills and practices, and (d) engaging in clear and purposeful communication (Theoharis, 2007). As the administrator facilitates the development of a shared vision of inclusion, it is important that teachers are an integral part of operationalizing the vision in daily reality.

There are several specific steps that administrators can take:

- schedule opportunities for collaboration among teachers, special educators, and other service providers.
- provide staff development related to inclusive practice (e.g., differentiated instruction, universal access, co-teaching, natural supports).
- ensure constructive working conditions (e.g., caseload size and configuration, staffing ratios, reducing paperwork burden).
- proactive development of conceptually sound service delivery models that are sustainable and provide alternatives to the all too common responses of either increased segregation or inappropriate overreliance on paraprofessionals (Giangreco, Broer, & Suter, 2011; Giangreco et al., 2010; Giangreco, Doyle, & Suter, 2012).

## Conclusion

Let us construct an alternative scenario for Sarah using the guiding principles described in this article. Imagine that Sarah continued to be included in general education after elementary school. In middle school the teachers would continue to support Sarah and her classmates in building positive interdependence through a variety of shared experiences. Although this is critical for Sarah as a way to contribute meaningfully and to access the natural supports of her peers, teachers have realized that many students without identified disabilities benefit from this approach as well. Presuming competence means that the teachers believe Sarah is capable of learning. As a result Sarah acquires more academic and functional information, skills, and experiences that transfer to expanding her areas of curiosity and provide her with interesting things to talk about with friends and family. Similar to her peers, Sarah's intellectual and social worlds expand.

Sarah participates in afterschool clubs with a few of the same students who have been her friends since elementary school and with others she meets during high school.

Sarah would have many opportunities to learn the functional life skills appropriate for her age. While in high school, she could learn money management by participating in various club fundraising events as co-treasurer, purchase her own lunch and school supplies, shop with her friends, and more. Although Sarah does not cook complex meals, she can arrange her own lunch and snacks. She and her parents might decide that after high school she will take a cooking class in the community and learn other skills associated with independent living. As she works toward independent adult living, many of her high school friends without disabilities have similar needs. For example, some of her friends who plan to live in apartments after high school will need to learn to cook, run a household, and manage their finances. As young adults, all of the graduating high school seniors have functional life skills to learn as they enter this next phase of their lives.

Why is this focus on inclusive education so important now? The answer is quite simple. Despite decades of research and practice demonstrating successful examples of inclusive education for students with intellectual disabilities at the elementary level (Cole, Waldron, & Madj, 2004), inclusion continues to be the exception rather than the rule in high schools. Many high school students with intellectual disabilities receive substantially separate educational experiences and then proceed to live unnecessarily segregated adult lives. Understanding the principles described in this article provides educational teams with foundational understandings and approaches to include students with intellectual disabilities in general education classes and activities. By taking these steps, it is more likely to lead to more fulfilling high school and post-school experiences for students with and without disabilities.

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