

## **AutCom Position Statement on Education**

The inclusion of all students is a right and not a privilege to be earned.

We believe all students can be taught without hurting them. No child should be subjected to physical pain, intentional humiliation or threats.

We believe that inclusive education is a matter of social justice and not clinical debate. We believe that every child (even those with the most severe reputations) can contribute to the life of the school.

Every child, even "the most difficult," can be included and served, if the educational practices are sound.

Full inclusion is the true option with all necessary supports and training to insure appropriate and meaningful education.

We believe that heterogeneous classroom groupings can occur along natural proportions without sacrificing individualized education.

Inclusive education is a process, not a product. Our educational practices will become more sophisticated as we become more just as a society.

Children with disabilities can and need to participate in making choices that affect their lives.

We believe every child needs and has the right to be loved and accepted in order to learn.

Children with specialized needs must be supported by teachers who have some specialized information, which we believe is easy to understand.

Educators can assume responsibility for their students' learning.

We encourage schools in their acceptance of all students and in the celebration of differences.

All students benefit from inclusion.

### **All schools should have the following characteristics and provide the full array of needed supports and accommodations:**

1. A strong commitment to include the autistic student in general education classes and the general education curriculum in the public school.
2. Demonstration of an understanding of the neurological/motor/sensory aspects of autism, including the effect on communication, and continuing efforts to access new knowledge through training and other sources of information.

3. Outreach to consultants/specialists in developing more accurate assessments of autistic children, youth and adults.
4. A commitment to developing a unique profile of the individual which acknowledges strengths, needs, and learning style.
5. An awareness that
  - autistic individuals typically perform poorly on standardized tests
  - performance and skill/knowledge are not exact equivalents
  - other measures of competence are needed and can be used.
6. An awareness of the impact of environments and events which may affect the individual, and of accommodations to mitigate such effects (e.g., communication access and supports, preferred seating, preview of materials, sensory diet, Universal Design for Learning), and an understanding of the inconsistent performance which may result from such environmental factors.
7. Provision of a full array of supports and accommodations which may include, but not be limited to, any or all of the following:
  - Computer (Assistive Technology) and other communication devices and systems, and adapted and/or alternative materials
  - Preview of materials and visual referents
  - Accommodations for classroom work, homework, and tests, including additional time as needed
  - Regular physical activity and sensory integration therapy
  - Opportunities to choose to participate (fully or partially) in all activities in the life of the school and be supported in those activities, or to choose an appropriate alternative (e.g., swimming or walking vs. floor hockey or volleyball)
  - 1:1 tutor/facilitator/teacher for all activities, as needed, including individual tutorial as needed in an environment without distractions
  - Exemption from or a clarification and accommodation in the discipline code which must acknowledge the sensory and communication difficulties of the individual.
8. Provision of an array of services including these:
  - Speech/language and sensorimotor therapies
  - Full and ongoing access to a robust augmentative and alternative communication system matched to the individual's strengths and needs
9. Development and implementation of an educational program which moves beyond compliance/control models to meet the learning needs of the individual.

10. Capacity to measure progress based on skill and knowledge acquisition rather than the mere suppression of behaviors.
11. Ongoing capacity to identify, evaluate, and analyze problems leading to respectful solutions.
12. Participation (full or partial) of individuals in choosing any or all activities available to others.
13. Recognition of the importance of social connections and friendships for all students and the promotion of real friendships, potentially through a Circle of Friends and similar efforts.
14. Respect for the individual's needs, preferences and strengths.
15. Demonstrated sensitivity to individual, family and cultural values.
16. Ability to plan with families to provide services and supports to meet the unique communication, sensory, and learning needs of autistic individuals.
17. As more information about autism becomes available, it should be incorporated into planning and services for autistic students.

Addendum from Dr. Barbara Cutler: These guidelines have been used at presentations in several New England states. They are useful for planning for individual students and helpful in evaluating the performance of public schools in meeting the needs of their autistic students.

In my twenty-five years of experience in working with schools, agencies and families, I have consistently incorporated new information into my services and practice. The quotation below is an admonition to keep learning. These guidelines can be expanded and/or revised as new knowledge emerges, particularly from those writers who are themselves autistic.

*"You can gain experience, if you are careful to avoid empty redundancy. Do not fall into the error of the artisan who boasts of twenty years experience in his craft while in fact he has had only one year of experience -- twenty times." -- Trevanian*

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