Access to the General Curriculum for Students with Significant Disabilities: What it Means to Teachers

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Abstract: The 1997 amendments to IDEA mandated that individualized education programs of students with disabilities include information about student's participation and progress in the general curriculum. Although there is general agreement with the intent of the access to the general curriculum mandates to ensure that students with disabilities are held to high expectations, receive a challenging curriculum, and are included in the accountability mechanisms being created for all students, there are some concerns as to potential negative effects of unintended consequences from components of school reform efforts, to which the access mandates are linked. One variable that remains unknown, and which can affect the success of the mandates, is the opinion of teachers about this policy direction. The present survey obtained opinions of a sample of teachers on issues relating to access to the general curriculum. The findings suggested that the majority of respondents believed that access is not appropriate for students with severe disabilities and that these students should not be held to the same performance standards as typical peers. Additionally, the study revealed that a number of teachers were not actively involved in planning relating to access, and that almost half of their districts did not have a clear policy on this issue. Implications of these findings to promote student participation in the general curriculum are presented.

The 1997 Amendments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act required that school districts ensure participation and progress in the general curriculum for students with disabilities. Specifically, the Act contained statutory language requiring that each student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) include:

- A statement describing how the child's disability affects the child's involvement with and progress in the general curriculum;
- statement of measurable goals to enable the

child to be involved with and progress in the general curriculum; and
- A statement of the services, program modifications, and supports necessary for the child to be involved in and progress in the general curriculum.

Leaders at the US Department of Education made it clear that the intent of this mandate was to improve outcomes for students with disabilities by ensuring that they are included in emerging standards-based school reform and accountability systems as a means to raise student performance-expectations and to ensure access to a challenging curriculum (Wehmeyer, Lattin, & Agran, 2001). The IDEA regulations define the term 'general curriculum' as referring to "the same curriculum as for nondisabled children" and note that it is expected that disabled students' educational programs will be derived from this general curriculum "to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of the child" (Federal Register, 1999, p. 12592).

On the surface, overall functions of these mandates are noteworthy in their intent. Not only are teachers being asked to continue

their efforts to fully *include* their students in general education, but they are also being asked to raise their expectations about learning outcomes; that is, align IEP goals with general curriculum standards. In this respect students will receive instruction based on the standard curriculum approved by the state and local education agencies. Last, rather than continue to use artificial monitoring systems, the IDEA amendments insist that students with disabilities should be fully represented in statewide accountability measures, a practice not always evident. By raising expectations for students with disabilities and asking state educational systems to assume more ownership, it is hoped that learning can be enhanced and greater state and local education agency commitments to ensuring student progress can be realized. As Wehmeyer, Lattin, et al. (2001) indicated, expectations for students with mental retardation have historically been low, and the amendments to IDEA serve potentially to positively influence these expectations. Also, for critics who question the efficacy of inclusive practice (see Kavale, 2000; Kavale & Forness, 2000), accountability based on general assessment may add much to validate current practice. That is, learning outcomes may now be gauged across two measures: progress in achieving IEP goals and in comparison to standards' benchmarks.

Despite the overall goals of this initiative, a number of issues, particularly for students with mental retardation and developmental disabilities, have been raised, with particular focus on several aspects of standards-based reform efforts that, in turn, affect the general curriculum. The purpose of standards-based reform efforts is to establish content standards that "define the curriculum" and performance standards that "define what students should learn" (Sykes & Plastrik, 1993). Such standards are then combined, in a variety of ways, with the establishment of a vision and goals for schools, instructional efforts that include curriculum design to achieve these standards, teacher training, ongoing education and licensure, oversight of instructional activities, and student or teacher assessment or evaluation procedures in order to affect change. Three assumptions, indeed intentions, of standards-based reform warrant consideration when examining the impact of access

to the general curriculum on students with severe disabilities. One intent of standards-based reform is to *focus* the curriculum to "delimit the work of teachers and students to a manageable core of widely shared learning outcomes" (Sykes & Plastrik, p. 9). A second intent of such reform is to change 'how teachers teach' and thus what and how children learn. Finally, systemic reform is intended to motivate students through the linkages between performance outcomes and a "wider array of stakes and postschool futures" (Sykes & Plastrik, p. 10).

These assumptions lead to several potentially problematic situations. First, since the goal of standards reform is often to 'delimit' the curriculum to a 'manageable core' of learning objectives (based on a widely held belief that the curriculum, as it exists now, is too broad) there is an intentional "narrowing" of the curriculum. When that narrowing is combined with high-stakes testing procedures established to ensure accountability, the result too often is that the 'general curriculum' focuses only on core academic content areas, to the exclusion of other areas that might be just as (or more) important to students with more significant disabilities. For example, to ensure meaningful student participation in general education, a great deal of attention has been directed towards social and friendship building skills (see Agran & Alper, 2000; Staub, Peck, Gallucci, & Schwartz, 2000). To promote valued student membership in general education, many educators have advocated for educational practices focused on enhancing social competence and networking. However, it appears evident that, like functional skill development, adoption of a narrow, core academic content-focused general curriculum may result in less time directed towards these more functional, but still critical, areas. Ultimately, the intent of curriculum development for students with disabilities, particularly for those with more intensive support needs, are skills that will promote their independence and highest possible quality of life (Knowlton, 1998; Wehmeyer, Sands, Knowlton, & Kozleski, in press). Needless to say, this involves competence across varied curricular domains. In this respect it remains uncertain if the general curriculum, as it exists in many states or districts, adequately serves this function.

Second, although it is an assumption that setting standards will 'describe' the curriculum and that teaching will change to align with the new demands in the curriculum, there is concern that these instructional changes will not extend to the education of students with disabilities. Third, to provide measures of accountability and evidence of student achievement, students need to be included in statewide and local district assessments. For those students unable to meaningfully participate in such assessments, even with accommodations, alternate assessments need to be developed. Such assessments need to be tied as closely to the state or district-wide assessment, yet provide valid measures of learner outcomes (Kleinert & Kearns, 1999). Access to the general curriculum forces teachers to scrupulously determine if the content they had been teaching their students is still valid, if their assessment procedures are still appropriate, and how both of the above fit into the context of the general curriculum. Indeed, it is this determination that is most challenging and requires thoughtful and long-range planning and attention.

This issue is complicated when the district or state implements high-stakes tests. Implementation of high-stakes testing in standards-based reform is predicated (at least partially) on an assumption that students will be motivated to work harder if they know they must pass certain tests to progress on to subsequent grades or graduate. This assumption may be inaccurate when students are already experiencing failure. Students with disabilities currently drop out at higher rates than non-disabled students, and it seems likely, if not inevitable, that placing high stakes on test performance may serve to encourage more students with disabilities to drop out instead of 'motivating' them to achieve.

Last, although state and local agencies are being asked to ensure access to the general curriculum for all students with disabilities, little is known about teacher opinions about this issue. Ultimately, teachers are responsible for developing and modifying instructional content to produce meaningful learner outcomes, but it remains uncertain how they are responding to this initiative. It goes without saying that locally driven teacher support is critical to produce systemic change. Education agencies must not only seek to comply with federal regulations to ensure access, but also build teacher support. We suggest that more attention has been directed towards the former, than the latter.

The purpose of the present investigation was to survey opinions of a sample of teachers who served students with moderate to severe disabilities on issues relating to access to the general curriculum. Specifically, respondents were asked to indicate how their students are served in the general classroom, what grouping arrangements were employed in general education, what student social support patterns were evident, which skills they believed were most important to facilitate access, whether students with significant disabilities should be held accountable to the same standards as typical peers, what they thought the barriers to ensuring access were, and the extent to which they were involved in access-related curricular planning activities. Much of this information remains unknown, and we believe teachers can speak informatively about these issues.

Method

Participants

Participants included teachers certified in severe disabilities in Iowa. Iowa teacher licensure for students with significant disabilities allows teachers to work with students with moderate, severe, or profound degrees of disabilities, at grade levels kindergarten through twelve. A list of names and addresses of all teachers holding certification in this area and currently employed in public school classrooms was obtained from the Iowa Department of Education. This list included a total of 1,485 teachers. Two hundred names and addresses were selected at random to participate in the study.

Instrument

A 22-item questionnaire was developed for this study. Part One included six questions pertaining to demographic information about participants. Part Two contained 16 items related to type and degree of access to the general education curriculum for students with

severe disabilities, supports available, grouping arrangements, social involvement of students with and without disabilities, accountability for student progress, student skill areas that facilitate access, and barriers that restrict access to the general curriculum. These 16 items varied in response mode and included Likert-scaled items and multiple-choice questions. The instrument was accompanied by a cover letter explaining the purpose of the survey, a confidentiality statement to prevent disclosure of respondents' identities, and estimated time required for completion.

After the original draft of the survey instrument was developed, two professors and two graduate students in special education at the first two authors' affiliation reviewed it for clarity and face validity of meaning of terms. The instrument was then field-tested with five part-time graduate students in special education, all of whom were fully employed teachers of students with disabilities. Revisions were then made relative to clarity and format.

The survey was mailed, along with the cover letter and self-addressed stamped envelope, to 200 randomly selected names and addresses. Participants were asked to return the instrument within 10 days. After 10 days, a second survey and cover letter was mailed to teachers who had not returned the first.

Data Analysis

Frequencies of number of respondents who checked each item of each question were tallied, and then converted to percentages for the 6 demographic and 14 multiple-choice items. Two items pertaining to students' skills teachers believed important for facilitating access to the general curriculum and potential barriers to access were ranked for degree of importance (I =Very Important, 5 = Not At All Important). Numerical rankings for each response choice in these two questions were totaled, and then divided by total number of respondents. This procedure yielded a mean ranking of importance for each response choice.

Results

Survey questionnaires were sent to 200 potential respondents, of which 84 (42%) were completed

TABLE 1

Teacher Characteristics

Descriptive Characteristic	Responses (N = 84)
Years teaching experience	1-28
	(M = 13)
Grade range of students	
K-6	68%
7-12	32%
Number of students in classroom	2-25
	(M = 10.33)
Primary Teaching Setting	
General education setting	24%
Self-contained class	33%
Self-contained/partial integration	33%
Resource room	10%
Highest degree obtained	
Bachelor's	46%
Master's	49%
Other	5%

and returned. Descriptions of findings are presented below.

Demographic Profile

Forty-nine percent (49%) of respondents had a Master's degree and 46% had a Bachelor's degree (see Table 1). Five percent (5%) had completed an Educational Specialist's degree. Respondents' experiences as classroom teachers ranged in time from 1 to 28 years (M = 13 years). The number of students in the classrooms in which they had primary responsibility ranged from 2 to 25 students (M = 10.3).

Implementing Access

Eighty-one percent (81%) of the teachers indicated their students were included in general education classes for all or part of each school day (see Table 2). Seventy-three percent (73%) reported including their students with disabilities in small and large group activities alongside students without disabilities. Fifty-seven percent (57%) stated that they relied on para-educators for support, while only 7% indicated the use of peers without disabilities as classroom supports. Forty-three percent (43%)

TABLE 2

Access to the General Education Curriculum

Type and Degree of Access	Percentage of Respondents (N =
Frequency of Integration	
Daily, all day	0%
Daily, less than full day	17%
2-3 times per week	44%
Once per week	20%
None	19%
Most Common Grouping Arrangement	
1:1 with me or another special education teacher	5%
1:1 with a general education teacher	0%
1:1 with a paraeducator or teaching associate	19%
Small group	46%
Large group	17%
Cooperative learning groups	12%
Independent work	1%
Descriptive Characteristic	*Responses (N = 84)*
Most Common Approach for Curriculum Development	
Students with disabilities in my class participate in the same general education curriculum objectives and the same activities as students without disabilities	11%
Students with disabilities participate in modified general education curriculum objectives	13%
Students with disabilities participate in modified standards for performance on general education objectives	17%
Students with disabilities demonstrate mastery of general education curriculum objectives in modified or alternative ways	23%
Students with disabilities have functional academic rather than general education curriculum objectives	37%
None	0%
Most Common Type of Social Involvement	
Formally organized extracurricular activities such as sports and clubs	5%
Informal social involvement before and after school	18%
Circle of friends	17%
Special friends or buddies	18%
Genuine, spontaneous friendship with one or more students without disabilities	43%
Type or Level of Support	
Teacher associate (paraeducator)	57%
Peer-mediated support	7%
Adapted materials	36%
Students in general education classrooms are evaluated by	
Standard grading	5%
Alternative grading of progress	10%
Based upon social appropriateness	6%
Based on degree of participation	5%
As stipulated in IEP	74%
Extent involved in curriculum planning meetings with general educators	
Frequently	35%
My input is sometimes requested	18%
Rarely	20%
Never	27%
Community-based instruction	
Highly compatible (community-based instruction is part of general education curriculum)	12%
Generally compatible (will work for most students)	30%
Not really compatible (won't work for most students)	29%
Not at all (the two approaches are incompatible)	29%

indicated that the most common type of social involvement between students with and without disabilities was spontaneous friendship (see Table 2). Approximately 18% reported their students had special friends or were involved in a Circle of Friends.

TABLE 3

Importance of Skill Areas for Access

Skill Area	Mean Ranking 1 = Very important 5 = Not all important
Appropriate grooming skills	1.4
Appropriate social skills	1.6
Communication skills	2.0
Knowledge of choice-making skills	2.3
Problem-solving skills	2.4
Academic skills	2.4
Daily-living skills	2.5
Transition/work skills	2.8
Leisure/recreational skills	2.8

Curriculum Development

When teachers were asked to rank the relative importance of nine skill areas for facilitating access for their students to the general education curriculum (1 = Very Important, 5 = Not At All Important), appropriate social skills were ranked the highest *(M = 1.6)* (see Table 3). Communication skills were ranked second in order of importance *(M = 2.0)*, followed by choice-making *(M = 2.31)*. Academic skills *(M = 2.4)*, daily living *(M = 2.5)*, and transition from school to work *(M = 2.8)* were ranked least important for students with severe disabilities to gain access to the general education curriculum.

Instructional Planning

Only thirty-five percent (35%) of the teachers reported they actively participate in general education curriculum planning for their students (see Table 2). Seventy-four percent (74%) of the respondents reported that criteria for their student's progress through the general education curriculum were stipulated on the IEP. Only 5% of the respondents indicated that standard grading procedures were used with their students, and 10% indicated alternative grading procedures were used (see Table 2). However, 95% indicated that alternate assessments of students with severe disabilities were very important. The overwhelming majority, 85% of the teachers indicated that students with disabilities should not be held to benchmarks or standards for progress as students without disabilities.

A despairing finding was that over half of the respondents (53%) reported that their school district had no clear plan for ensuring access to the general education curriculum for students with moderate to severe disabilities (see Table 4). Additionally, teachers ranked resistance from general educators and the students' challenging behaviors as the

TABLE 4

Teachers' Attitudes About Access

Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students with moderate to severe disabilities should be held accountable to the same performance standards as non-disabled students	4%	8%	48%	40%
Access to the general curriculum is more important for students with mild disabilities than severe disabilities	24%	39%	25%	12%
The emphasis on access will promote inclusion of functional skills into the general curriculum	18%	56%	25%	1%
It is important to have alternative assessment procedures for students. with severe disabilities	60%	36%	2%	2%
Ensuring students' access to the general curriculum will help increase educational expectations for students with moderate to severe disabilities	21%	54%	19%	6%
My school district has a clear plan to involve students with moderate to severe disabilities in the general curriculum	12%	35%	29%	24%

TABLE 5

Barriers to Access

Barrier	Mean Ranking 1 = Very Important 5 = Not at all a Barrier
Challenging behaviors of students	1.5
Resistance from general educators	1.6
Administrative resistance	1.9
Parent resistance	2.1
Resistance from special educators	2.1
Uncertainty about content to teach	2.1

most important barriers to access *(M = 1.5 for each)*, followed closely by resistance from administrators *(M= 1.9)*; (see Table 5). Lack of state *(M = 2.4)* or local *(M = 2.8)* standards for progress through the curriculum were ranked as the two least important obstacles to access by participants (see Table 5). (This was not surprising since Iowa is the only state that has not adopted statewide standards, instead placing high value on locally determined school standards.) Seventy-five percent (75%) of respondents indicated that they believed access to general education curriculum leads to raised expectations for students with moderate to severe disabilities (see Table 4). However, 63% of the teachers indicated that access to the general education curriculum is more important for those students with mild disabilities. Additionally, 42% of respondents indicated that they believe the general education curriculum was, compatible with community-- based instruction. Last, 74% indicated that access to the general education curriculum would promote the inclusion of functional skills into the general curriculum.

Discussion

Findings suggest that, although a majority of respondents indicated that their students were participating in general education on a frequent basis, it would appear that few efforts, if any, were being made to provide these students with access to the general curriculum. Likewise, although the

majority of respondents indicated that access to the general curriculum would raise educational expectations for students with severe disabilities, failure to provide such access suggest that expectations will remain as is (see Table 4). This is not to suggest that the expectations of teachers in the sample for their students are low since we did not ask them to provide this information. Clearly, these expectations may be high even if they do not refer to the general curriculum. However, what is noteworthy is that the majority of respondents did not believe that access to the general curriculum is appropriate for students with severe disabilities and that these students should not be held accountable to the same performance standards as typical peers. In short, the teachers indicated that access is more important for students with mild disabilities.

Given that the majority of respondents reported that they are not frequently involved in curricular planning activities with general educators and that half reported that their school districts do not have clear plans to involve students in the general curriculum, these findings are not surprising (see Table 2). Teachers in the sample may not think access to the general curriculum is important for their students since they may neither understand what their students can gain from it or how it can be done. If the intent of the 1997 IDEA amendments is to raise expectations and ensure access to a challenging curriculum (Wehmeyer, Lattin, et al., 2001), it would appear that these effects are not evident for students served by teachers in this sample.

A point of contention (or to some, confusion) regarding access is the belief that the federal mandate necessitates that a student's educational program be entirely based on the general curriculum, irrespective of the child's instructional needs. Since the IDEA amendments stipulate that a single set of standards is developed for "all" students (Boundy, 2000), there may be the assumption, albeit erroneous, that instructional targets are restricted to the standard academic curriculum. Such practice would, of course, be in violation of the overall mission of IDEA regarding the development of individualized education programs. Rather than impose a standardized

curriculum, the intent instead should be to use the curriculum as a benchmark so that "personalized modification" for the student can be made (Wehmeyer, Lattin, et al., 2001; Wehmeyer, Sands, et al., in press). It is incumbent on IEP and curriculum planning teams to understand that the function of standards is to help teachers align instructional programs with the general curriculum so that each is compatible with and can validate the other. In the present study, 74% of the teachers indicated that students should be evaluated based on criteria stipulated in the IEP. What the access to the general curriculum mandate seeks not to do is to disregard this requirement but make efforts to align and link these goals to the general curriculum. It remains uncertain if teachers understand this relationship.

Teachers ranked appropriate social skills and communication skills as the two most important skill areas for facilitating access to the general education curriculum. Choice-making, academic skills, daily living, and transition skills were judged to be less important for students with severe disabilities. These findings are somewhat surprising for at least three reasons.

First, while social and communication skills are necessary for all students and are often significant needs for those with severe disabilities, they may not be sufficient for access and participation in the general education curriculum. Social relationships and communication between students with and without disabilities are of undeniable importance (Bogdan & Taylor, 1989; Salzberg, Agran, & Lignugaris-Kraft, 1986; Nietupski, Hamre-Nietupski, Curtin, & Shrikanth, 1997). However, it seems logical to assume that the ability to make choices and achieve some level of competence in both core and functional academic skills should also enhance access to the general education curriculum, as well as participation across a variety of inclusive environments. Further, as Billingsley and Albertson (1999) noted, these skills may also be important for facilitating the development of meaningful social relationships and friendships in the general education classroom.

Second, the fact that academic, daily living, and transition skills were ranked least important for access to the general curriculum seems inconsistent with what is known about the learning characteristics of students with

significant disabilities (Brown, Nietupski, & Hamre-Nietupski, 1976; Ryndak & Alper, 1996). The difficulties these students encounter with transfer, generalization, and synthesis of skills learned from the classroom to non-school settings are commonly observed. These learning difficulties make training in daily living and transition skills imperative.

Third, the relative low priority placed on these skills by teachers raises questions about whether they may have interpreted "access to the general curriculum" in the narrowest sense of the core content areas. It may be that much more work is needed to relate the phrase, "access to the general education curriculum" to functional and transition skills widely documented as critical to overall community adaptation, positive post-school outcomes, and perceived quality of life for all students, and not just students with disabilities. We maintain that the ultimate goal of access to the general education curriculum for students with disabilities is successful and meaningful outcomes. We also agree with McDonnell, Thorson, and McQuivey's (2000) call for more research focused on how to embed a variety of social, functional academic, and transition skills within the ongoing activities and curriculum in the general education classroom.

It is somewhat paradoxical that participants in the present investigation ranked choice-making and transition from school to work as relatively less important for access, while other researchers (e.g., Chesley & Calalvce, 1997) found that school administrators voiced concern that students with severe disabilities were not receiving instruction in functional and vocational skills in general education. Clearly, there is not yet a consensus on what skills should be prioritized for instruction to students with severe disabilities in general education (cf., Billingsley & Albertson, 1999; Fisher & Sax, 1999). It seems likely that resistance to access to the general education curriculum for all students will persist until this controversy is resolved.

Interestingly (although, perhaps not surprising), teachers ranked resistance from general educators, students' challenging behaviors, and resistance from administrators as the three primary barriers to access. Clearly, more

research is needed to increase our understanding of the basis for resistance from general educators and how to alleviate their concerns about access.

For years general education teachers have voiced valid concerns over class size, increasingly diverse student body, lack of inservice training, and insufficient supports to maintain students with disabilities in their classrooms. Unfortunately, the current crisis in the shortages of teachers, therapists, and trained paraprofessionals qualified to serve students with disabilities, and the predicted shortage of general educators exacerbates the situation.

The finding that students' challenging behaviors were perceived by teachers as obstacles to access is of no surprise. Challenging behaviors (particularly verbal and physical aggression) have long been used to justify placing students in more restrictive settings. It is somewhat ironic, perhaps, that we are increasing our knowledge of positive behavioral supports to effectively deal with these behaviors (e.g., Koegel, Koegel, & Dunlap, 1996) at the same time the occurrences of violent and aggressive behaviors seem to be at the forefront in the public's eye, fueled perhaps by media accounts of tragedies such as Columbine. In all, this finding may suggest that teachers in the sample do not feel skilled sufficiently to address these challenges. Most distressingly, this will deny access to the general curriculum for a number of students. Rather than develop creative and sound support systems for students, placement decisions may instead focus on whether the student is "ready for" or can "earn" his or her way into general education. Clearly, this is not acceptable.

The majority of the respondents (57%) indicated that the principal educational support their students receive is from a teacher associate or paraeducators. This finding is consistent with other research findings on the role of paraeducators in inclusive practice (see Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). A point that Downing et al. raised that is pertinent to the present investigation is the fact that, although paraeducators are critical members of educational support teams, he or she is not the total team. Aligning instructional targets with comprehensive, educational standards requires systematic planning among general and special educators. In this study we did not ask teachers

what were the responsibilities of paraeducators in general education, so we do not know what role they served; specifically, how they facilitated the students' access. However, because paraeducators are oftentimes insufficiently trained (French & Pickett, 1997), it is likely that students may not have been accessing the general curriculum because their associates did not know how. Again, this may be due to paraeducators lack of skills or due to overall lack of planning time as reported by many respondents. Whatever the reason it is essential that we assist and support paraeducators as they, in turn, support students.

There are several limitations to the study. First, fewer than 50% of the members of the sample returned completed questionnaires, thus restricting the generality of these findings. Given the fact there is relatively little published on the issue of access for students with significant needs, a replication of this survey with a larger sample is warranted. Second, we do not know if teachers responded differentially based on the access policy of their school districts. That is, it is likely that teachers who had a more proactive position on access to the general curriculum were employed in districts that had a clear policy on this issue and supported teachers as needed. Although the following information was not obtained, it would be of interest to identify what information, if any, teachers were provided on access and what support or assistance they received in trying to achieve it for their students. Third, we do not know to what extent the skills they taught their students were aligned to their district's standards. Future research on this relationship would be of value as we advance the access initiative. Fourth, the opinions presented represent those of special educators. It is very possible that a sample of general educators would have responded differently than the present sample. For example, resistance from general educators was ranked as one of the most important barriers to access. It is unlikely that general educators would concur with this opinion. Interestingly, in another study in which general educators were asked to rank which skills they believed were most important for students with severe and other disabilities in inclusive programs, their responses were similar to those presented

in the present study; that is, social and self-determination skills were ranked highly, and academic and daily and community living skills were ranked lower (Agran & Alper, 2000). An expanded survey involving general educators would be of great value to conduct. Last, it remains unknown what specific problems the teachers may have experienced in their efforts to include their students in the general curriculum. Along these lines, 41 % of the respondents indicated that their students were participating in the general curriculum either fully or in a modified manner. Determining how this was done would have been of great value to educators, but remains known at present.

In summary, the findings suggest that, despite the federal mandate to ensure access for all students, respondents do not believe it has much relevance for students with severe disabilities, and have done little to advance it. It is likely that the lack of a clear school policy and the failure to be involved in related planning have contributed to this situation. Further, the high ranks given to the social, communication, and self-determination skills areas and the relatively lower ranks for academic skills suggest that the skills the students are learning are not being referenced to the general curriculum (although, we would note, the general curriculum in most states or districts include these content areas) It is interesting to learn that many of the teachers indicated that their students' challenging behaviors represented a major burden to ensuring access. Regrettably, these teachers continue to believe that students need to "earn" their way into general education. In response to this, we hope that as the access initiative picks up more momentum and as districts have a clearer idea on how to achieve it, the planning and collaboration that will result will aid everyone in understanding that education is truly a shared responsibility, involving not two curriculums, but one sufficiently broad to address the needs of all students.

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