The Pursuit of Excellence in the Transformation of Special Education in School District 15

Darrell W. Mittelheuser

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THE PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE IN THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION IN SCHOOL DISTRICT 15

By
Darrell W. Mittelheuser

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Loyola University Chicago in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

May 1996
PREFACE

Upon entering Community Consolidated School District 15 in July, 1991, the researcher was fully aware of its reputation for excellence. But what soon became apparent was that the pursuit and achievement of excellence pervaded the entire organization. Whether it was curriculum, finances, personnel, or any other organizational function, the goal was to be the absolute best. The researcher was also struck by one of the superintendent's beliefs--"excellence is a journey, not a destination." Putting this belief into action was a goal for everyone in the school district.

District 15 is well known for its excellent test scores, its high achieving students, and national and state recognition for its schools and staff. This is how excellence can best be measured. But, it's often said that the true measure of an organization is how it deals with its most unfortunate clients, which, for schools, is the disabled population. How the school district dealt with its disabled student population could provide an even greater indicator of the system's excellence that wouldn't be reflected in test scores or traditional measures of excellence. Would the school district's pursuit of excellence also apply to these students? Could excellence be pursued and possibly achieved when the measurement of excellence could not so easily be determined? The researcher's challenge was to answer these questions.

To ensure the integrity of the study and to answer these questions, the researcher developed a set of procedures for data collection and analyses. Data
collection was predicated on developing and maintaining a case study data base of archival records, responses to interviews, and documented notes of observations and participation in events. Data analyses were shaped by the use of multiple data sources and maintenance of a chain of evidence throughout the study.

Data collection began with the investigation of board of education agendas and minutes from the formation of the school district in 1946 through the 1994-1995 School Year. Investigation of organizational records, administrative proposals, memoranda, meeting notes, census data, and personnel reports followed next. As key events were identified, the researcher searched for articles from the local newspaper to provide another documented source of data. The next step was to interview someone with knowledge about key events in special education in the school district, preferably during the most eventful years from the 1960s to the 1990s. This interview was conducted with a staff member with many years of experience in the school district. Using this interviewee as a key informant, the researcher was able to corroborate key events, develop a list of parents and staff to interview for further data collection, and return periodically to this staff member for reflection and further direction. Data collection continued with focused interviews of parents, staff, and others using questions in Appendix A and also with the researcher’s observation of district meetings and participation in key events.
Data analyses consisted of identifying and sequencing key events, determining and categorizing influences, and developing the major themes. As themes emerged, data were separated into time periods and by major influences. Thus, chapters one and two comprise the time periods from 1946 to 1985 and from 1986 to 1995; and chapters three through five comprise the influences of parents, the organization itself, and factors external to the organization.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee: Dr. Max Bailey, Dr. Janis Fine, and Dr. Arthur Safer. In particular, I wish to thank Dr. Bailey for serving as the director of the committee and also for his support and guidance in assisting me through the completion of this dissertation.

I also wish to express my appreciation to the staff and parents of Community Consolidated School District 15 who greatly assisted me with data collection and followup questions.

Lastly, I wish to thank my wife, Mary; my son, Jason; and my daughter, Caitlin, for their patience, love, and support throughout this endeavor.
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CHAPTER I
THE HISTORY OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
IN COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT 15
NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL INFLUENCES
1946-1985

Now therefore be it resolved, that all staff members, students, constituents, and community members are invited to join this Board of Education in special programs and activities to highlight 1996 as a commemorative year in observance and celebration of the golden anniversary of Community Consolidated School District 15.¹

- Laura R. Crane, Ph.D.
  President, District 15
  Board of Education
  (January 11, 1995)

Community Consolidated School District 15 was formed on 2 March 1946 by a consortium of rural school districts in the northwest suburban Chicago area.² It was a time of rebirth. World War II was over, millions of G.I.'s were coming home, homes and subdivisions were about to be developed, and families and children were eager to populate the landscape; and, amidst this reawakening, "the culmination of the reorganization committee to bring about an improved school system for Palatine Township, Cook County, Illinois, resulted in the approval by the voters at an election held...on this day...for consolidation."³
Community Consolidated School District 15 was formed by a committee representing six rural school districts with a promise to "improve the quality and expand the quantity of education for all the pupils presently crowding our schools." The school district enrollment was 614 students.\(^4\) Fifty years later, with a student enrollment of twelve thousand students, School District 15 has fulfilled that promise for all of its students, including those students, the disabled and forgotten children, who were not part of any public school system in 1946. With excellence the constant pursuit during those fifty years, Community Consolidated School District 15 has not only demonstrated how one school district met the challenges of educating the "forgotten children" but has also been representative of thousands of school districts throughout the nation that have faced and met the same challenges.

The first forty years of the district's existence, from 1946 to 1985, was a time of emergence for programs and services for disabled children throughout the nation as parents and professionals worked together to effect the legislation, litigation, and funding that ensured every child's right to an education.\(^5\) The events of these years led to the establishment of special education in the district. But the next ten years, from 1986 to 1995, became a time in which special education in the school district faced strong, new influences to challenge those educational programs and services that had been developed for its disabled students over the years. With the advent of widespread skepticism about the efficacy of traditional special education
programs and services as well as the emergence of a movement to educate disabled students in general education classrooms, these ten years represented a period of great change. By documenting the events and exploring the influences, this study describes how one school district transformed the delivery of special education programs and services from a model that primarily segregated disabled children from their nondisabled peers to a model that brought disabled and nondisabled children together in "A True Learning Community."  

Advocacy for the Disabled

The formation of District 15 occurred at a time when a new day was dawning for disabled children. The mid-1940s were:

...a time of...dynamic...activism (by) parents on behalf of their disabled children as they began to organize themselves in response to their smoldering outrage...It was time to put an end to the rejections, the indictments, the closed doors and closed faces, the guilt, the doubt and the despair.7

In the Chicagoland area, the Spastic Paralysis Aid Foundation was organized in August 1945 by a group of parents of children with cerebral palsy. The Parents' Group of the Chicago Hearing Society was organized in the spring of 1947, although the parents had been meeting informally for a number of years. The Institute for Mothers of Preschool Blind Children was organized in 1947 for "mutual interchange of ideas and techniques used in the training of their children." The Association House was organized in 1948 by parents seeking educational services for their mentally impaired children. The South
Side Parent Group was organized in January 1950 "to educate the public and the parent regarding the problems of the mentally retarded, (to bring) together parents and friends of mentally retarded, (to impress) upon public officials, the Welfare Department, and the general public the urgent need for additional educational facilities for the retarded, and (to aid) in the development of medical and psychological research on mental retardation." These and other parent organizations encouraged parents who may have felt the shame of bearing a disabled child to "come out of their closets" and begin educating society about the rights of disabled children to life, opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness. Gradually, those whom the parents wished most to educate--doctors, educators, and parents of nondisabled children--would begin to examine their own beliefs and look towards bringing heretofore excluded children into school districts.

Similarly, educators in the Chicagoland area had been active in the Chicago Chapter for Exceptional Children for many years; and, in 1946, those educators who lived and worked in the suburban Chicago area organized their own chapter, the Chicago-West Suburban Chapter for Exceptional Children. Officers included a principal of a school for educable mentally handicapped students, a director of the orthopedic department of a public high school, two special education teachers, and a social worker. This and other professional organizations also began educating society about the rights of disabled children to life, opportunity, and the pursuit of happiness.
Legislative Initiatives

The goal of this public advocacy was to establish new programs and expand existing programs to open the doors for the unserved and poorly served. Existing programs dated back to the late 1800s when the state of Illinois first acknowledged responsibility for disabled children by establishing state-level services such as the Illinois Braille and Sight Saving School and centers for the feeble-minded. By 1911, that responsibility would begin to shift to local school districts as permissive legislation enabled school districts to establish classes for deaf/dumb and blind children. Further permissive legislation in the 1920s and 1930s allowed school districts to establish classes for crippled, visually impaired, and hearing impaired children. By the early 1940s, the Illinois Department of Public Instruction, under the direction of Ray Graham, Assistant Superintendent, Director of Education of Exceptional Children, published The Illinois Plan for Special Education of Exceptional Children. This plan included information on physically handicapped, visually defective, educable mentally handicapped, speech defective, deaf and hard of hearing, and socially maladjusted disabilities. Soon thereafter, in 1943, state legislation was enacted to provide financial support to school districts for establishing special education programs and psychological services for educable mentally handicapped, speech defective, socially maladjusted, blind and visually impaired, deaf and hard of hearing, and physically and orthopedically impaired children (including children with epilepsy, cardiac problems, and
lowered vitality; and homebound, hospitalized, or institutionalized children). This legislation allowed school districts to claim reimbursement from the state for a portion of the personnel cost, or a maximum of three thousand dollars per professional worker, for psychological services and programs for physically disabled, educable mentally handicapped, speech impaired, socially maladjusted (later referred to as behaviorally/emotionally disordered), blind and visually handicapped, and deaf and hard of hearing students. However, none of these services were mandated. ¹²

During this same period of time, the state received limited federal funds for providing these programs. However, in 1946, the federal government substantially increased its commitment when the U.S. Congress amended the Social Security Act and doubled (from $11,200,000 to $22,000,000) federal funds under the act’s maternal and child welfare provisions. Seven million five hundred thousand dollars was appropriated to fund programs for disabled children. ¹³ This was a major step in developing services for disabled children. Katherine F. Lenroot, Chief of the U.S. Children’s Bureau, Social Security Administration, proclaimed, "This action by Congress is the greatest step forward on behalf of the health and welfare of children since the Social Security Act was passed in 1935." ¹⁴

Program Development

With renewed state and federal commitments, the District 15 Board of Education responded to the needs of its disabled students by approving
programs for speech correction, special instruction for the seriously retarded, and home instruction for the physically handicapped in September 1949; and a program for the educable mentally handicapped in October 1952. Students with these disabilities were served within the district because the number of students within each category of disability was sufficient to afford hiring appropriate teaching staff. However, some low incident disabilities, or disabilities that occur infrequently in the student population, were best served financially and programmatically in regionally based programs that accepted students from a wide geographic area. Thus, in 1952, the board of education began approving the transfer of deaf students to both Bell School for the Deaf in Chicago, Illinois, and the Hard of Hearing Department at Franklin School in Elgin, Illinois; and in 1957, the transfer of blind students to the Chicago Public School System.

In 1955, the state of Illinois enacted legislation to provide financial support to school districts for delivering special education programs to trainable mentally handicapped students. Additional legislation was enacted in 1957 to support programs for multiply handicapped students. While these disabilities represented low incident student populations, District 15 administrators believed that there were sufficient students with each disability to justify exploring options other than transferring the students to regionally based programs.

For many years preceding the 1960-1961 School Year, the school district
had been involved in discussions with neighboring districts regarding the development of a plan for providing special education programs to students in the northwest suburban area. Not only were school districts finding it increasingly difficult to provide the number of special education programs that were needed to serve all of their disabled students, but they were also finding it difficult to provide the complex programs that were needed to serve severely disabled students. On 14 March 1961, fourteen school districts agreed upon a cooperative plan in which each district would house at least one state approved class for disabled students from the other districts. In turn, each district would be entitled to send disabled students to approved classes in other districts within the cooperative plan. This plan would serve disabled students in a geographic area large enough to contain enough students with low incident disabilities such as deafness and blindness yet small enough for students to attend school within the general vicinity of their homes. Unserved trainable mentally handicapped and multiply handicapped students would also be served under this plan when it was implemented for the 1961-1962 School Year.

Program Expansion

By the 1957-1958 School Year, District 15 employed five special education staff members for speech correction, child guidance, special instruction for educable mentally impaired students, and home instruction for physically handicapped students. The following school year, the district
established a program to serve students with impaired hearing (deaf students continued to be served in programs outside the school district). In succeeding years, the number of special education staff members increased yearly as the number of disabled students increased and the need for new and additional services arose. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the provision of special education programs and services by Illinois' school districts continued to be conducted on a permissive basis. The State Board of Education addressed the provision of special education programs by school districts during this time as follows:

Many school districts had acknowledged the need for special services but had complete programs that served but one or two types of handicapped children. Other school districts in this era of permissive legislation did not acknowledge a commanding moral or ethical responsibility for providing any educational program for handicapped children.

As the need for additional special education staff members grew, it became increasingly difficult to find qualified and experienced special education teachers. The board of education responded by approving extra compensation for the 1961-1962 School Year and succeeding years for speech correctionists (two hundred dollars per year), the teacher for educable mentally handicapped students (five hundred dollars per year), and the teacher for hearing impaired students (five hundred dollars per year). For the latter two positions, this extra compensation increased the teachers' salaries by 10 percent or more. Yet, despite extra compensation, the district on occasion would have to hire a nondegreeed candidate for a special education teaching
position during the 1960s.\textsuperscript{23}

The expansion of special education programs also resulted in the need for additional personnel to support the programs. Beginning with the 1961-1962 School Year, District 15 began sharing a school psychologist with two neighboring school districts to provide assessments for students entering special education programs. For the 1962-1963 School Year, the district hired a part-time Administrative Assistant for Special Education to administer the programs and services. Within two years, both positions became full-time.\textsuperscript{24}

By the mid-1960s, the Illinois State Board of Education estimated that only 33 percent of the state's disabled students were receiving special education programs and services in public school districts.\textsuperscript{25} But during this period of time, District 15 continued to identify and serve numbers of disabled students significantly higher than the state's estimate. Based on prevalence rates for that era, 1,100 disabled students should have been receiving special education services in the school district.\textsuperscript{26} During the 1966-1967 School Year, the district served 550 disabled students, or 50 percent of the potentially disabled student population. To serve these students, the district employed nineteen special education staff members, an increase of seven special education staff members over the previous school year.\textsuperscript{27} The 1967-1968 School Year showed more growth. Two additional classrooms for educable mentally handicapped students were added in-district to serve twenty-three students who were attending classes outside the school district and also to
begin serving seven students on a waiting list for placement. These classrooms were established within the district to serve the students closer to their homes and to provide them with an opportunity to become part of the school community. Two additional teachers were added to serve twenty-eight learning disabled students on a waiting list, a part-time vision therapist became full-time to serve an additional five partially sighted students, and a speech/language therapist was added to serve ninety to one hundred students on a waiting list.\textsuperscript{28} District 15 now employed twenty-four special education staff members, a one hundred percent increase in special education staff members within two years.\textsuperscript{29}

Formation of the Joint Agreement

As both the school district's total student enrollment and the number of disabled students continued to increase during this period of time, the board of education began to realize that the district could not keep up with the demands of providing special education programs and services to severely disabled students. Since neighboring school districts were facing similar demands, ten of the fourteen districts in the cooperative plan began investigating the need for reorganizing and expanding the cooperative plan. "After considerable discussion" at the 10 March 1965 Board of Education Meeting, a motion carried for District 15 to participate in a "Community Schools Agreement" for educating trainable mentally handicapped students from the district for the 1965-1966 School Year.\textsuperscript{30} The community schools
agreement signalled a change from the cooperative plan to which the fourteen school districts had agreed in 1961. Under the cooperative plan, severely disabled students were served in classrooms operated by the districts. Under this new agreement, ten of the fourteen school districts would continue to operate special education classrooms while also participating in special education programs for trainable mentally handicapped and other severely disabled students operated directly by the newly formed entity. The other four districts ceased participation entirely.  

Thus, beginning with the 1965-1966 School Year, the Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization (NSSEO) was formed as one of Illinois' first special education joint agreements. The new joint agreement would directly operate state approved classes for disabled students from member school districts in addition to assisting the member school districts in their provision of special education programs and services. Although governed by the superintendents of the member districts through an intermediary agency called the Northwest Educational Cooperative, the joint agreement conducted day-to-day operations autonomously. In its first year of operation, it provided services for blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing, trainable mentally handicapped, educable mentally handicapped, physically disabled, and perceptually handicapped students. It also operated the Center for Child and Family Studies, which provided evaluations, counseling, social work, and psychological services. During the 1965-1966 School Year, twenty-seven out
of the district's 850 disabled students participated in joint agreement programming for blind, partially sighted, deaf, hard of hearing, and trainable mentally impaired students.\textsuperscript{33}

In the next two years, the number of special education staff members in District 15 increased to thirty-seven, and the number of students receiving special education services increased to 950 students even though legislation remained permissive.\textsuperscript{34} But the era of permissive legislation was about to end. In the 1969-1970 School Year, the provision of special education programs and services in Illinois' school districts became mandated by House Bill 1407, which had been enacted in 1965 in response to the estimated numbers of disabled students who were not receiving services.\textsuperscript{35} By the 1970-1971 School Year, District 15 was employing forty-six special education staff members, and 993 students were receiving special education services out of a total student population of twelve thousand students. Within the district, 720 speech/language impaired, 130 learning disabled, 70 educable mentally handicapped, 12 physically impaired, 8 partially sighted, and 2 hard of hearing students received services. Outside the district, 51 students attended schools operated by the joint agreement, with 16 behaviorally or emotionally disordered students attending a therapeutic day school in Arlington Heights; 12 deaf and hard of hearing students attending Byrd School in Elk Grove Village; and 17 trainable mentally handicapped students, four physically disabled, and two multiply handicapped students attending Kirk School, a
newly constructed facility in Palatine financed by the ten member school districts. As a result of being educated at Kirk School, many students who formerly resided in institutions were now able to live at home.

The Disabled Population Grows

By the early 1970s, the delivery of special education programs and services had become a major function of the district. In a 14 January 1971 article in the local newspaper, the Palatine Daily Herald, the district's director of special education expressed the goal of the school district as "trying to give every child equal opportunity to achieve up to his potential." The article stated that a district's accountability to all of its students meant responding to the individual needs of each student; and, in School District 15, accountability had been demonstrated for years through its special education programs and services.

In the 1971-1972 School Year, the number of students receiving special education services remained constant at 970. However, seventy-three students, a 100 percent increase over the previous school year, were served in joint agreement programs. The increase was due to more severely mentally impaired children exiting institutions as well as the initiation of an early childhood program. Despite this increase in the number of district students in joint agreement programs, the director of special education expressed the belief that "permanence and centralization is extremely important to the success of a special education program...the less students are transported from
school to school, the stronger the educational impact will be.\textsuperscript{39}

The early 1970s was also a time of great interest in the field of learning disabilities. After Dr. Samuel Kirk coined the term "learning disabilities" in a 1963 speech at the first conference of the Association for Children with Learning Disabilities, advocacy from parents, educators, universities, and professionals in medical and psychiatric fields had brought learning disabilities to the forefront as a disability.\textsuperscript{40} Since ninety percent of newly assessed students now were being diagnosed as learning disabled, the district's special education department presented a proposal to the board of education to expand the learning disabilities program. The board of education approved changes in program intensity, class size, teacher caseload, teacher qualifications, curriculum, and supervision for the 1972-1973 School Year.\textsuperscript{41} During that school year, District 15 served 324 learning disabled students, a 71.4 percent increase over the 189 students served the previous year.\textsuperscript{42} For the remainder of the 1970s, the number of learning disabled students continued to increase on a yearly basis, reaching 601 students by the 1979-1980 School Year, a 217.9 percent increase during the decade.\textsuperscript{43} This increase was in large part due to federal legislation that defined and operationalized learning disabilities as an eligibility for special education programs and services.\textsuperscript{44}

**The Education for All Handicapped Children Act**

On 29 November 1975, President Gerald Ford signed P.L. 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act (EHA). Disabled children now had
the legislative right to receive a free, appropriate public education, just as any child in any school district. The EHA was the culmination of many years of congressional action to open public schools to disabled children. It began in 1966 when Congress added Title VI to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. Title VI funded a grant program to assist states in educating disabled children and created the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped in the Office of Education. In 1970, Congress replaced Title VI with the Education of the Handicapped Act, which provided funds to school districts to build facilities and buy equipment, as well as funding grant programs for regional resource centers, centers for deaf-blind children, experimental early education programs and personnel training, and research demonstration projects. Just as Congress was pushing to open schools to disabled children, the federal courts were "getting into the act." In 1971, Pennsylvania Association of Retarded Citizens v. Pennsylvania established the right of mentally impaired children to receive a free public education; and in 1972, Mills v. Board of Education of the District of Columbia strengthened that right by ruling that lack of funds could not excuse a school district from providing special education. These were the "lightning rods" that struck against the notion that mentally impaired children couldn't learn and needed to be cared for in institutions. But there still wasn't a clear precedent beyond the jurisdictions that these two courts represented. Between 1971 and 1975, advocates brought at least forty-six suits in twenty-eight states to establish the
right of disabled children to receive special education.\textsuperscript{46}

But the most important pieces of congressional legislation were yet to come. In 1973, Congress enacted the Rehabilitation Act, which included Section 504, the first civil rights statute to protect the rights of disabled children. Section 504 provided that disabled individuals could not be excluded from participating in any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance. In 1974, amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act incorporated into law the key provisions of the EHA, but without the timetable for enactment by the states. This led representative John Brademas, D-Ind., to introduce H.R. 7217, later to become the EHA; and Senator Robert Stafford, R-Vt., to make the following statement during senate debate:

\begin{quote}
We can all agree that all handicapped children should be receiving an education. We can all agree that education should be equivalent, at least, to the one those children who are not handicapped receive. The fact is, our agreeing on it does not make it the case. There are millions of children with handicapping conditions who are receiving no services at all.
\end{quote}

Senator Jennings Randolph, D-W.Va., added, "In all, 3.9 million children are waiting for the fundamental equal educational opportunities on which our nation is based. This is not right and it is an emergency situation."\textsuperscript{47}

The United States Senate passed Senate Bill 6 on 10 June 1975 by a vote of 83-10. Senator Hubert Humphrey, D-Minn., spoke for the majority when he said, "I believe a profound injustice has been suffered by these handicapped children of school age who are excluded from public schools." The United States House of Representatives passed H.R. 7217 on 29 July 1975 by
a vote of 375-44 and incorporated the bill into S. 6, which President Ford signed as the EHA.48

The EHA changed the special education landscape forever by providing grant funds on a yearly basis to states that developed and maintained a plan of providing a "free, appropriate public education" of special education and related services to meet the unique needs of disabled students. These grant funds became an offer that the states couldn't afford to refuse, because they needed the financial assistance to defray the cost of serving an increasing disabled population. But, by accepting these funds, the states were required to create a plan to serve millions of disabled students. Thus, disabled students across the nation now were able to access special programs and an array of related services such as transportation and developmental, corrective, and supportive services, including school health services, social work services in schools, parent counseling and training, speech pathology and audiology, psychological services, physical and occupational therapy, recreation, early identification and assessment of disabilities in children, counseling services, and medical services for diagnostic or valuative purposes.49

The Least Restrictive Environment

Of all the provisions in the EHA, the provision for educating disabled children in the least restrictive environment would have the most profound effect on school districts throughout the nation. Section 226.125 of the Rules and Regulations Governing Special Education in the State of Illinois addressed
the issue of least restrictive environment by the following statement:

Each local school district shall ensure that to the maximum extent appropriate handicapped children, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not handicapped, or that special classes, separate schooling or other removal of handicapped children from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the handicap is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.\(^{50}\)

A term frequently used synonymously with least restrictive environment is the term "mainstreaming," although "mainstreaming" was not referenced in the EHA. Mainstreaming is defined as "students with disabilities...served in selected general education classes based on the individualized educational plan and often with the expectation that the student with disabilities will meet the same requirements for academic and social skills as students with disabilities."\(^{51}\) As school districts sought to implement the least restrictive environment mandate, they began mainstreaming disabled students into academic and nonacademic general education activities from special education classrooms. However, as mainstreaming became more common and the number of "mainstreamable" students increased, school districts began restricting access to academic activities in the general education classroom unless the student was able to "show" beforehand that he or she could successfully function in the general education activity. Unlike the nondisabled student, the disabled student was being held to a standard before being able to enter a general education classroom. Thus, the least restrictive environment for academic activities became the special education classroom for millions of
disabled students. School districts placed disabled students in special education classes rather than writing and implementing a program in which the first placement option was the general education classroom, as prescribed by the EHA. Placement became the program that was already available in the district, instead of program and placement being two separate issues.\textsuperscript{52}

\textbf{Program Expansion Continues}

In the 1974-1975 School Year, the joint agreement served forty-six behaviorally/emotionally disordered students from District 15, almost a 100 percent increase over the twenty-five students served the previous year. The number of students from District 15 who attended the program on a yearly basis continued to increase until sixty-eight students were being served by the 1979-1980 School Year. Having the joint agreement serve the most severely disabled students--whether they were mentally impaired, behaviorally or emotionally disordered, or physically disabled--became the practice of the school district as the decade came to a close. The district’s business manager substantiated to the board of education that the joint agreement was better prepared to program for severely disabled students during that period of time. The district had limited space for extra classrooms while the joint agreement had available space; and the joint agreement had more experience in finding, selecting, and training staff for severely disabled student populations. With this arrangement, the district also did not have to hire expensive specialists that might not be needed in a few years when the number of severely disabled
students might decrease as total student enrollment decreased. 53

At the start of the 1974-1975 School Year, the joint agreement became an independent entity governed by a board of education comprised of one elected school board member from each of the ten member school districts. Consequently, the administration of the joint agreement now was answerable to ten lay persons and could perform its responsibilities independently from the administrative influences of the member districts. 54

Since the 1971-1972 School Year, District 15 had accessed the joint agreement’s Center for Child and Family Studies, a short-term diagnostic and therapeutic placement for emotionally disordered students. In the 1975-1976 School Year, the center served fifty-one students from the school district, a 400 percent increase in three years. However, as the number of students needing therapeutic services continued to increase and with the financial incentives that the EHA could provide to districts for employing school social workers, the district doubled the number of school social workers for the 1976-1977 School Year to provide more therapeutic services. Other school districts in the joint agreement acted similarly, and the center immediately closed. 55 The district’s decision to employ more social workers instead of sending students to the joint agreement was based on the best utilization of financial resources at that time. However, the decision to provide in-district services instead of using the joint agreement was the exception rather than the rule for many years. The number of students in the joint agreement continued to increase yearly. 56
By the 1975-1976 School Year, the school district's disabled student population numbered 1,707, including 850 students receiving speech/language services. Of the remaining 857 disabled students, 399 students were served in special education classrooms, an increase of 17.6 percent over the number of students served in special education classrooms the previous school year. Despite the least restrictive provisions of the EHA, more students were being served in special education classrooms because of the increase in the number of disabled students entering the district from noneducational settings, such as hospitals, and the severity of the disabling conditions.

On 27 January 1976, the district's director of special education presented a written report on the accomplishments of the special education department since 1970. These accomplishments included:

1. A 10 percent increase in the number of students receiving special education programs and services

2. A better informed board of education as a result of board committee work and presentations to the board by staff

3. Representation on the joint agreement's governing board by district board of education members

4. Better informed professional personnel as a result of increased training for both general and special education staff

5. Enrollment of staff in university course work in special education

6. An increase in special education programs and services within the schools

7. End-of-the-year meetings for students receiving special education services
8. Better informed parents as a result of their involvement in parent groups

9. Implementation of procedural safeguards which required parental involvement in the education of their disabled children58

The number of disabled students receiving special education programs and services in District 15 increased slightly during the 1976-1977 and 1977-1978 School Years. However, the quality of programs and services continued to improve as numerous state laws, enacted between 1965 and 1978, began to take effect. These laws:

1. Changed the age for requiring services from a span of five through seventeen years of age to a span of three through twenty-one years of age

2. Required school districts to determine a student’s eligibility for services within sixty days of the student’s referral for such determination

3. Established a state reimbursement program to school districts for providing services to the most severely disabled students

4. Established local councils to advise school districts on providing special education services69

Even a major budget reduction by the school district that eliminated guidance counselors in the elementary buildings had little impact on services to the district’s disabled students. The district hired more social workers, with each social worker’s salary partially offset by state reimbursement.60

During the late 1970s, the impact of the EHA continued to be felt as additional Illinois legislation provided procedural protections to disabled students. These protections included clarification of due process protections,
delineation of the right to an individualized educational program, and protection against discrimination in evaluation procedures. In the late 1970s, the district also began to remodel its buildings to meet the requirements of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.

As the 1970s drew to a close, student misbehavior became more and more of a concern to parents, teachers, and administrators. During the decade, the number of District 15 students attending the joint agreement's therapeutic day school had increased steadily and numbered fifty-five during the 1979-1980 School Year. The therapeutic day school served students with severe behavioral or emotional difficulties. Parents, teachers, and district administrators began to question whether a system could be put in place to assist students before their difficulties became so severe that placement in a special school was the only alternative. In 1977, at the urging of the district, a committee was formed by the joint agreement to address this question. From this committee came a proposal for a program of student support centers to be coordinated by the joint agreement and operated by the member districts within their schools. The program was initiated in the district after additional classrooms were added to an existing building.

**Joint Agreement Expansion**

The EHA targeted 1980 as the year when a free, appropriate education would have to be available to all disabled children. By 1980, District 15 provided special education services to 15.14 percent of its student population,
significantly greater than the 12 percent ceiling that the EHA placed on the states for reimbursement purposes. Increases in the number of students in special education programs and services continued into the mid-1980s even as the total student population decreased steadily. The number of disabled students peaked at 1,873 in the 1983-1984 School Year, as did the percentage of disabled students to total student enrollment (18.72 percent). Increases in the percentage of the student population receiving special education programs and services had increased steadily since the mid-1970s. From the 1970-1971 School Year to the 1985-1986 School Year, the number of District 15 students in special education programs and services nearly doubled while the total student enrollment in the school district decreased more than 20 percent.4

During the late 1970s and early to mid-1980s, the joint agreement also grew in the number of students served and in the range of services offered to the member districts. In 1979, the joint agreement opened the Diagnostic Center to provide speech/language therapy, occupational therapy, physical therapy, diagnostic evaluations, specialized medical evaluations, bilingual evaluations, and any other services requested by the member districts. In 1980, the joint agreement opened Miner School, a special school for students with learning disabilities. In 1982, it also developed a program for mild mentally impaired students at Berkeley School in Arlington Heights. Then, in 1983, despite reservations from some member districts, the joint agreement became an independent special education entity, or separate school district, for
providing special education programs and services. This separate status allowed the joint agreement to operate on an independent basis instead of being overseen administratively and financially by one of the member districts. In the same year, the joint agreement also began to provide more extensive supervision and technical assistance to district-sponsored special education programs and services. In 1984, the joint agreement initiated a communication development program and, in 1985, implemented the regular education teacher consultation project. By the mid-1980s, the joint agreement was providing more and more programs and services for the member districts at the districts' behest. By this time, it also owned two properties, Kirk School and Sunrise Lake Outdoor Education Center, an eleven acre property in Bartlett, Illinois.$^65$

During the same time period, District 15's total student enrollment continued to decline since peaking at 12,217 students in 1972. By 1986, the total student enrollment of 9,377 students was at its lowest point in twenty years. Yet, the school district's reliance on the joint agreement for providing special education programs and services was at its highest point ever in the number of students served and the number of joint agreement programs and services in which the district participated. But this reliance was about to change.$^66$

As a result of the number of students that District 15 was sending out-of-district to the joint agreement, the board of education began assessing the
delivery of special education programs and services within the district to determine whether in-district programs and services could be upgraded and/or expanded to serve those students. During the same time period, in 1984, a parent in the district filed a civil rights complaint challenging the district's case study evaluation and placement procedures. The parent claimed that the district was not using a multidisciplinary approach. Although an investigation by the Office of Civil Rights found no violations, the special services department expanded the case study evaluation and placement procedures within the school district to include special education coordinators, school psychologists, school social workers, and health services staff. The additional personnel that was hired to effect this change--coupled with an impending surge in student enrollment, the growing influence of parents, escalating legal and financial considerations, and the effects of organizational change--would set the stage for transforming the school district's delivery of special education programs and services for the next ten years and beyond.
Chapter One Notes


7. Fine, Catalysts, 58


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17. Gill, Memorandum to Superintendents, 2.


22. Gill, Memorandum to Superintendents, 2.


25. Gill, Memorandum to Superintendents, 2-3.


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47. Ibid., 19-20.


56. *Program Growth*, 4-5.

57. Ibid.

58. Foster, *Memorandum*.


CHAPTER II

THE TRANSFORMATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION
IN COMMUNITY CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT 15
NATIONAL, STATE, AND LOCAL INFLUENCES
1986-1995

From 1946 to 1985, School District 15 operated as a traditional hierarchical bureaucratic organization. There were seven layers of management within the district; specifically, the superintendent, assistant superintendents, executive directors, principals, directors, curriculum specialists, and assistant principals. Decisions were made in a top-down manner. The traditional approach to effecting change was to seek permission before developing and initiating an innovation. Thus, the control of change rested with a few key leaders in the district. This structure was typical for a school district of its size; and it was efficient, effective, and well organized.\(^1\)

Redefining the Organization

In 1985, the board of education brought in a new superintendent with the intention of changing the system to better prepare students for the future. During the next ten years, the district would face several major challenges:

1. The student population would increase from 9,400 to 12,000.

2. Legislative action would restrict the growth of local revenues and perpetuate a downward spiral of state revenues to the district.
3. Technological and instructional advances would need to be implemented to educate students for the twenty-first century.

The increase in student population was anticipated as a result of fifty housing developments which were being built or were about to be built on undeveloped land in the mid-1980s. A sixty-four million dollar bond issue met this challenge by funding the expansion and improvement of the physical facilities in the district over a period of eight years. The legislative challenge was met by a referendum to raise the educational tax rate, ongoing cost containments including a $2.5 million budget reduction in 1993, and a proactive strategy to maximize available revenues. But the need to prepare students to be "world-class kids" by implementing significant instructional and technological advances was a different challenge that had to be met by redefining the organization and charting a new course for the twenty-first century.²

The first step in accomplishing this task was to thoroughly assess the "state-of-the-district" and develop a five-year plan for the district's immediate future. In 1987, the board of education approved the district's first strategic plan--"The Future of District 15: Defining Excellence"--which called for a number of action steps to meet the rapidly changing environment in which the district was operating. Not only did this strategic plan result in the successful referendum for the bond issue, but it also prescribed the organization of a educational foundation to build school/community partnerships and enhance learning opportunities for all students and steps to increase the involvement
of parents and other community members in the student's education. In 1992, the board of education approved the second strategic plan—"The Future of District 15: A True Learning Community"—which redefined excellence in the district by establishing educational priorities for "ensuring that all students learn to use their minds well in order to be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy." This strategic plan was developed by the District Advisory Committee for Educational Excellence (DACEE), which was comprised of parents, members of the community, business leaders, and district staff. The plan defined the district's educational priorities, mission and vision, and six fundamental functions which learners must develop in order to become educated people.

These two strategic plans laid out a blueprint for leading the district into the next century. But, to accomplish these plans, a significant change in leadership and management would have to occur throughout the district. Individuals with hierarchical, bureaucratic leadership styles were either reoriented or replaced by individuals who believed in a collaborative approach to decision making. Thus, the result was increased parental involvement in decision making, increased responsibility and authority of the principalship, and empowerment of instructional staff in making building level decisions. All of these events served to alter the culture of the school district, especially as it responded to the forces of change. As the school district began to operate
more and more as a collaborative, adaptable organization, it also began to change in its entirety and not just piecemeal. Then, as the entire system became redesigned, it became more clearly focused on the mission of developing a true learning community for all students and educating them for the twenty-first century.5

The transformation from a traditional bureaucracy to a collaborative, adaptable organization was accomplished as a result of a thorough commitment to:

1. Involving parents in decision making processes
2. Reaching out to the community for advice and support
3. Developing partnerships with the business community to support educational programs
4. Involving every employee, not just the teaching staff, in the mission of the school district
5. Working with the professional organizations that represented district staff in a collegial, responsive manner

As these tenets became acculturated in the operation of the district, they began to coalesce and shape a new culture. This culture would not only guide the entire district into the next century, but it would serve to move special education from its focus of the first forty years to a new focus for the future.

Redefining Special Education

The years from 1986 to 1995 represented a time of great change for the delivery of special education programs and services within District 15. As the
entire school district became redesigned, the delivery of special education programs and services in the school district also became redesigned. Strong national, state, and local influences would cause the district to move away from a separate system of providing special education programs and services to a system in which general and special educators would work together to provide an array of programs and services for all of the district’s disabled students. During these ten years:

1. Most of the district’s disabled students who attended schools outside the school district returned to the district for their education.

2. More and more disabled students re-entered general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools.

3. More and more disabled students were educated within the district’s general education classrooms than ever before.⁶

The transformation of special education during these ten years was a major component of the district’s pursuit of excellence and focus on the mission of developing a true learning community for all students. It has been said that excellence is a journey, not a destination. The transformation of special education would not completely reach its destination by the end of these ten years. The story is the journey.

**Service Delivery Systems**

By 1985, the provision of educational programs and services to disabled children had made significant progress in many ways in just a few years. Less than ten years after the implementation of the Education for All Handicapped
Children Act (EHA), special education had redefined the concept and practice of individualized instruction, redefined the role of parents in the education of disabled children, made education possible for one-half million previously unserved disabled children, and improved services for several million other disabled students. But, within District 15, the delivery of special education programs and services operated, for the most part, as a separate system from general education. Disabled students received special education programs and services in settings apart from nondisabled peers, and, in many cases, never interacted with nondisabled peers or interacted only in nonacademic situations. This separate, or dual, system was typical of school districts during this time period.\(^7\)

The dual system had existed from the beginning of special education in the schools. But, by the mid-1980s, the complex regulations of the EHA had created a system in which program eligibility criteria, teacher certification, and funding were predicated on special education existing as a separate entity. Thus, although special education was technically a subset of general education, the dual system represented two types of education, general and special, each with its own students, teachers, and administrators.\(^8\)

The dual system was not without its critics. Parents, advocates, and educators believed that the dual system was inefficient.

1. It required students to "fit" available general education programs or be labeled as deviant.

2. It reduced the range of curricular options for disabled students.
3. It violated their civil and legal rights.\textsuperscript{9}

Even so, these concerns might have remained with the vocal minority if questions about student outcomes had not also surfaced. At the time, critics of the dual system believed that special education graduates from dual systems displayed poor post-school outcomes. They believed that not only were disabled students receiving a substandard education in their separate classrooms, but they were not learning how to function in a predominantly nondisabled world.\textsuperscript{10}

These beliefs led the critics to begin speaking out for restructuring special education into an instructional system that would provide disabled students with more appropriate learning opportunities. Proponents of this system believed that:

1. All students, not just the disabled, have unique instructional needs.
2. Instruction should meet the needs of all students.
3. There is no educational benefit to classifying a student as disabled.\textsuperscript{11}

The proposed system would have both disabled and nondisabled students working side-by-side in general education classrooms. General and special educators would also work together and share their expertise for teaching all students. The range of curricular options would be wide enough to meet every student's needs. The specialized instruction that would be needed for disabled students would also be beneficial for some nondisabled students. Every
student would be taught based on his or her needs without the necessity for a label to prescribe the instructional model. Proponents of this system called for dramatically increasing the number of disabled students in general education classrooms and unifying general and special education into one system in which all students would benefit. 12

TABLE 1

COMPARISON OF DUAL AND UNIFIED SYSTEMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of System</th>
<th>Dual System</th>
<th>Unified System</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Characteristics</td>
<td>Dichotomizes student into special and regular</td>
<td>Recognizes a range of characteristics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualization</td>
<td>For special students</td>
<td>For all students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of Educational Services</td>
<td>Eligibility based on classification</td>
<td>Eligibility based on student needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Strategies</td>
<td>Seeks to use special strategies for special students</td>
<td>Selects strategies based on student’s needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Relationships</td>
<td>Establishes artificial barriers that promote competition and alienation</td>
<td>Promotes cooperation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>Curricular options limited by classification</td>
<td>Options available to students as needed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus</td>
<td>Students must fit general education or be referred for special education</td>
<td>Regular education program adjusts to meet student needs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Proponents of the unified system set an ambitious agenda, which was best expressed by the Council for Administrators of Special Education (CASE), a division of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), when it recommended five policies to direct the future of special education:

1. To establish stakeholder responsibility in the community
2. To develop a clear vision for the education of all students
3. To establish a system of accountability for all educational programs
4. To prepare educators to educate all students
5. To create a funding system of shared resources for all students

These policies were augmented by five action plans:

1. To implement site-based management as the means for restructuring
2. To organize schools into learning communities for all students
3. To create supports for staff development and continuous improvement
4. To integrate community services for all students
5. To provide access to educational technology for all students

These policies and action plans set the agenda for restructuring special education in school districts throughout the nation. In District 15, each of these ten recommendations became key components for the transformation of both special education and the district in its entirety.

The unified system was a radical proposal for systems change. As dialogue about the system became public, it struck fear in the hearts of
advocates, parents, and educators who had fought over the years for the special education that was being provided. Policy statements from special and general education professional organizations—the Commission on the Education of the Deaf (CED), The CEC, the Learning Disabilities Association (LDA), and the National Education Association (NEA)—supported the continued existence of a strong multifaceted special education system. These advocates for the status quo contended that changing to unified systems would eliminate the continuum of placement options that were the basis for determining, on a case-by-case basis, the least restrictive learning environment in which to educate the disabled student.

The least restrictive environment, as defined by the EHA, was interpreted to be the classroom that could best meet the disabled student’s educational needs while assuring that, to the maximum extent appropriate, the student would be educated with nondisabled peers. But, intent and practice were not necessarily the same. While the least restrictive environment was supposed to be the first consideration when determining placement, the placement decision was often based on administrative convenience, funding sources, teacher certification, and program availability. A student needing special education programs and services was often placed in a special education classroom apart from peers instead of receiving the programs and services in the general education setting. Thus, a student with a social problem who needed to develop better peer relationships was placed in a
classroom with peers with similar problems. If a student had a behavior problem and needed better behavioral models, he or she was placed in a classroom with peers who also had behavior problems. If a student had a communication problem and needed to learn to communicate better, he or she was placed in a classroom with peers who also couldn’t communicate well.\textsuperscript{16} Furthermore, once a student was placed in the special education classroom, there was little possibility of the student returning to general education, or being mainstreamed, because re-entry was dependent on the student "showing" beforehand that he or she could meet the same requirements for academic and social skills as nondisabled students and successfully function in the general education setting. Thus, unlike the nondisabled student, the disabled student was being held to a standard for re-entering general education.\textsuperscript{17}

Advocates for a unified system were convinced that radical change was the solution to these problems; and, within some school districts, the unified system became the ultimate destination. However, in District 15, as in many school districts, the unified system became part of the journey more than the destination. While the destination was unknown, there was every reason to believe that the journey would create a better educational system for all.

The Regular Education Initiative

The rallying cry for a unified system was sounded by Madeleine Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS) in the United States Department of Education, in November
1985. In speeches throughout the nation and in a document titled *Educating Students with Learning Problems: A Shared Responsibility*, Ms. Will put forth the recommendations of an OSERS task force by speaking out against the dual system, the fragmented approach of special education programs and services, stigmatization of disabled students, the lack of communication between general and special education teachers, and the growing adversarial relationships between school personnel and parents who differed on "what's best for the child." The OSERS task force proposed that schools adopt a consultant model for providing special education services within the general education classroom. The consultant model would provide a process in which general and special education staff and parents would collaborate to plan, implement, and evaluate instruction for all students in general education classrooms.

Those who agreed with this viewpoint contended that effective instruction as practiced by general education teachers could accommodate individual differences and be implemented for disabled students. Subsequently, under Ms. Will's leadership, the Department of Education began promoting the Regular Education Initiative (REI) as the vehicle for developing a unified system, particularly for students with mild to moderate disabilities. Specifically, states were challenged to renew their commitment to serving children with learning problems and to search for ways to serve as many children as possible in the general education classroom by encouraging special education to form a partnership with general education.
In Illinois, the REI had two main focuses. One focus was to promote the inclusion of disabled students in general education classrooms and ensure their success by providing supports and aids as appropriate. The other focus was to reduce the number of students being referred for assessments that could lead to eligibilities for special education programs and services by assisting general education teachers to utilize interventions and techniques for students prior to or instead of referring them for assessments. The principles of the REI in Illinois were outlined in the May 1989 issue of the Forum, a publication of the Illinois State Board of Education. They were:

1. The goal of education is to enable all students to become productive adult citizens.

2. Students are most likely to achieve this goal of education fully by learning in the company of their peers.

3. How students achieve the goal of education will vary depending on their strengths and needs. Schools have a responsibility to accommodate these strengths and needs. However, schools have unique characteristics; therefore, strategies for accommodating student needs will vary from school to school.

4. Personalized instruction for students should take into account the goals of education. This means that social and behavioral skills as well as academic skills should be priorities.

5. No single group of school professionals can be expected to possess the entire body of knowledge and skills for educating students.

6. Professionals, when they collaborate, are better able to address student needs.

7. When schools function successfully, expectations are explicit and appropriate; professionals and parents communicate clearly with students and each other; and differences are celebrated, not tolerated nor diminished.
The REI was first publicized in Illinois at a state-sponsored conference in March 1989. Ninety-seven initiatives were recognized at the conference, including six from District 15. Although the REI was not state-mandated, the district embraced its goal of developing initiatives to ensure the success of disabled students in general education classrooms and reducing the number of students being referred for assessments. The district's initiatives included:

1. A pre-referral intervention model using peer consultants
2. An intervention model for coordinating regular, special, and bilingual education
3. A team decision-making model to provide assistance to classroom teachers in lieu of referring students for assessment
4. A district-wide language approach for teaching reading and writing to behaviorally disordered students
5. The provision of speech/language services in regular education classrooms
6. The application of learning strategies for disabled students in general education classrooms.

While many school districts in Illinois implemented REI strategies, their strategies initially focused on better serving only mildly and moderately disabled students in the general education classroom. In an August 1990 administrative bulletin, the state's Department of Education introduced an initiative to provide leadership and discretionary funding to assure that every disabled student, including the most severely disabled, would have the opportunity to learn in the least restrictive environment. This initiative was Project Choices, an acronym for "Children Have Opportunities in
Integrated Community Environments." Through its program of needs assessment, technical assistance, and regional training institutes, Project Choices worked with selected schools throughout the state to develop integrated educational options for students with severe disabilities. One of those schools was a District 15 school.

Project Choices was followed by Project Early Choices. The purpose of this initiative was to assist school personnel in developing an array of preschool settings for children with disabilities who could be educated with nondisabled peers. Keys to this initiative were parental participation as equal partners in the planning process; collaboration between parents, general education personnel, and special education personnel; and a commitment to educating disabled preschoolers in integrated settings. One of the funded projects was awarded to the district's early childhood program.25

To assist the district in developing and implementing REI initiatives, the joint agreement formed an REI Committee comprised of joint agreement and district personnel. The committee facilitated staff and parent training on inclusion; team-building; peer coaching and mentoring; instructional programming for at-risk students; peer tutoring; the use of program assistants; and specific methodology such as direct instruction, learning strategies, and curriculum based measurement. The district's new approach to developing and implementing innovations and the joint agreement's assistance resulted in a flurry of activity in the school district towards implementing the REI.26
The other focus, which was to reduce the number of students being referred for assessments, was accomplished by the district during the 1987-1988 School Year. Compared to 810 case study evaluations in the 1979-1980 School Year, the school district evaluated 499 students during the 1987-1988 School Year and 519 students during the 1988-1989 School Year. The utilization of peer consultants, team decision making models such as teacher assistance teams and special services teams, and a multidisciplinary approach for solving problems provided general education teachers with interventions and techniques instead of referring students for assessments.\(^{27}\)

While the REI was strongly promoted nationally, statewide, and locally, it began as an initiative driven by special education professionals with little support from the general education community. Despite REI's goals for strengthening general education by providing special education resources for handling student diversity, it has remained a special education initiative since its inception.\(^{28}\)

By the 1989-1990 School Year, the REI also had not reached the parents of disabled children. However, the impending re-authorization of the EHA resulted in renewed focus on enforcement of key provisions of that law, such as the protection of the disabled student's rights, the development of a program based on each student's individual needs, and the provision of an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment.\(^{29}\)

On 30 October 1990, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act
(EHA) was re-authorized as P.L. 101-476, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although the IDEA did not include any provisions regarding the least restrictive environment, parents and professionals alike began to infer that the IDEA had mandated that all disabled students had to be educated in general education classrooms. In fact, this inference was so common that parents of disabled students began to request general education placements for their children because they believed those placements were mandated by the IDEA.

The REI continues to exist ten years after its inception. However, it has never achieved its goal of merging general and special education because it has always been a voluntary initiative at the local level without financial backing. But, by the 1990-1991 School Year, with the REI in existence for five years and the reauthorization of IDEA in the limelight, advocacy groups for the disabled began to promote inclusion as the preferred placement for every disabled student.

**Inclusion**

Inclusion refers to educating a disabled student in an age and grade appropriate classroom with supplementary aides and services utilized to support the general education environment. The inclusion movement became the initiative for operationalizing the concept of a unified system. Instead of developing a system that would merge general and special education and serve all students, inclusion was usually a student-initiated process that
placed disabled students into general education classrooms and forced the system to change whether or not it wanted to change. Inclusion proponents included those who were concerned with students with high incident disabilities, such as learning disabilities, behavior disorders, and mild/moderate mental impairments. These supporters were united both in their no-holds-barred critique of special education and in the belief that special education had to recognize it was part of a larger educational system.

Other inclusion proponents were advocates for students with severe intellectual disabilities and severe and profound mental impairments. This group was concerned with integrating students with severe intellectual disabilities into neighborhood schools, but not necessarily into general education classrooms.31 Most proponents believed that special education should coordinate and collaborate with general education, but some pushed for the elimination of special education altogether.32 Their strategy was for students with mild to moderate disabilities to transfer on a full-time basis to general education classrooms, which would make room for students with severe to profound disabilities to be educated in separate classrooms within their neighborhood school.33

The strategy of both groups was to promote inclusion in general education as the right of every disabled child. While the educational community felt unprepared for including severely disabled students in general education classroom, parents and advocates began approaching school districts
to request student transfers to those classrooms from separate classrooms and special schools. For many parents, inclusion was not just one option during discussions with their school districts about the proper educational settings for their children, it was the only option.34

These parents and other inclusion advocates were not alone. Position papers in support of inclusion by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and the National Association of School Boards (NASBE) provided evidence that general education was embracing inclusion as more than just a special education initiative, as was the case with the REI.35 Reflecting on this trend at a National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDE) seminar on Special Education in Reform, Tom Gillung, the NASDE President, stated, "We have come to understand that our issues and our problems are similar, that we all want to effect change--we are not satisfied with how the system is working."36

Court Decisions

Inclusion advocates became further emboldened by one court decision after another that directed school districts to include any and all disabled students at the request of parents. Significant among these court cases were Greer v. Rome City School District (1991), Oberti v. Board of Education of Clementon School District (1993), and Sacramento City Unified School District v. Rachel H. (1994), all of which found that the districts failed to consider
modifications using supplementary aids and services in the general education classroom to allow the disabled student to function. These cases were significant because they found that students had a presumptive right to an education in an inclusive setting, and separate settings were appropriate only when the severity of the disability precluded an appropriate education. Unlike mainstreaming from special education classrooms to general education classrooms, in which disabled students had to "show" beforehand that they could successfully function in general education settings, inclusion "turned the tables" and placed the obligation on the school district to justify the decision to educate the student in a separate setting. Moreover, in the Oberti decision, the court ruled that "IDEA's strong presumption in favor of mainstreaming would be turned on its head if parents had to prove that their child was worthy of being included, rather than the school district having to justify a decision to exclude the child from the regular classroom."  

In November 1993, the United States Department of Education sent copies of the Oberti decision and the department's brief supporting Rachel H. to state education secretaries, state special education directors and special education administrators. Judith Heumann, Assistant Secretary of the OSERS, stated the following:

This is the position of the United States Department of Education. The inherent rightness or wrongness of inclusion is not a legal issue. The legal issue is what the IDEA requires.  

By 1994, four appeals courts with jurisdiction in 18 states had issued
decisions in favor of the inclusion of students with severe disabilities in general education classrooms under appropriate circumstances. These decisions indicated that inclusion was the preferred placement unless strong evidence existed that the student could not be educated in that setting.39

**Parental Influences**

These court decisions served to influence school district personnel to accede to parents' wishes to include their children in general education even when inclusion was questionably beneficial for the student. Such was the case with the first severely disabled student who transferred from the joint agreement program outside the district to a general education classroom within the district in the 1990-1991 School Year. This placement set the precedent for a flurry of inclusive placements within the district during succeeding years and also signified the beginning of groups of students leaving programs operated by the joint agreement and entering either general education classrooms or special education programs within the district.

While these placements were initially parent-initiated, as the students began to experience some success, school district personnel became more confident that the district could serve severely disabled students from the joint agreement, whether the services were provided in a general or special education classroom. Confidence fostered willingness, and district personnel soon began developing new programs and services for students from the joint agreement to effectuate their return to the school district.
While the REI and the inclusion of students from joint agreement programs were transforming special education in the school district, the transformation of the entire system was beginning to take hold. Increased parental involvement in decision making, increased responsibility and authority of the principalship, and empowerment of instructional staff in making building level decisions were not only transforming the entire system but were producing the collaborative, adaptable organization that special education needed to effect its transformation.

Increased parental involvement in decision making throughout the district was especially evident in the parents' role in implementing inclusion. The late 1980s saw parents throughout the nation entering a vacuum created by the retreat of REI supporters as a result of disillusionment about general education's lack of interest in special education and by the opposition, or neutrality, to REI by special education organizations. Led by The Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH), parents of disabled children focused on the issue of normalization by working to "make available to the severely disabled the patterns and conditions of everyday life that were as close as possible to the norms and patterns of mainstream society." In 1988, TASH adopted a resolution calling for the education of students with severe and profound disabilities in general education. While the REI advocated cooperation between general and special education, TASH advocated total inclusion and the elimination of special education. TASH's philosophy of
inclusion was exemplified by the following statement:

Inclusion implies that people are welcomed, that each person reaches out to include another person. Inclusion is different from "letting in" or "adding on." Inclusion conveys the idea that we appreciate each other, that we see each other's gifts, that we value being together. Inclusion speaks to the importance of relationships. Other aspects of work, for example, our learning and teaching skills, abilities, and techniques, are not ends in themselves, but merely avenues to inclusion. 43

In a short period of time, TASH had a profound effect on policymaking by educational organizations such as the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Association of School Boards of Education (NASBE) and on special education organizations such as the CEC that "came out" in support of inclusion. TASH also exerted influence on funding initiatives by the OSERS as well as policymakers in various states and school districts. TASH's advocacy for an end to the continuum of services for all disabled students resulted from the belief that the continuum contained placement options that precluded socialization experiences. By 1990, TASH's advocacy would begin to have an effect on the initiation of inclusion in the school district, as parents of physically disabled students--the first large scale group of disabled students to be included in the district--embraced and promoted TASH's no-holds-barred philosophy of including all disabled students in general education classrooms. These parents acted as "trailblazers" for parents of disabled children who would either be included within the district or return from out-of-district placements.
Organizational Influences

The increased responsibility and authority of the principalship and empowerment of instructional staff also played a significant role in the transformation of special education in District 15. One of the OSERS' recommendations for effecting change in special education was "to empower building-level administrators to assemble appropriate professional staff and other resources for delivering effective, coordinated, comprehensive services for all students." With the influx of included students, staff were faced with the need to construct more educational options to provide a broader continuum of services within the district. General and special education staff members began to work with building administrators to design the programs and services that they believed would best meet the needs of their disabled students. Eventually, the responsibility of building administrators expanded to include the operation of all special education programs and services within each school. Building level management and design of special education programs and services became a fundamental aspect of the school district's ability to respond to the forces of change and become proactive in bringing about change. With support from the board of education, the superintendent, the special education department, and the rest of the central administration, the schools became the places where the work of the organization was performed as each school became more clearly focused on the mission of developing a true learning community for all of the district's students and
educating them for the twenty-first century.\textsuperscript{45}

From 1986 to 1995, the delivery of special education programs and services changed in many ways. Inclusion of severely disabled students--such as physically disabled, visually impaired, and mentally impaired students--within general education classrooms became routine occurrences. By the 1995-1996 School Year, 95 percent of the physically disabled students in the district were totally included in general education classrooms. Overall, the number of mildly to moderately disabled students being served in general education classrooms increased dramatically.

With more disabled students exiting separate classrooms for general education classrooms within the district, classroom space became available for educating students returning to the district from joint agreement programs. Joint agreement programs were costly, and many parents were eager to have their children educated in District 15 schools. As students began to successfully transfer back into the district, the administration began to question the need for sending students to joint agreement programs. Eventually, the wishes of parents to return their children to district programs, the school district's ability to educate severely disabled children, and external organizational influences such as finances and the district's relationship with the joint agreement would become influential factors in the transformation of special education in the district.

The transformation of special education can be described in many ways.
Parents became more active partners in the educational process. Each school became the center of the delivery of special education programs and services to students within that particular school. Special education and general education staff members in each school attempted innovations for delivering programs and services to disabled students. Co-teaching, the use of learning strategies, direct instruction, cooperative learning, and thematic teaching were implemented to broaden the continuum of services and ensure student success. Collaborative strategies such as peer coaching, teacher assistance teams, team building, and behavioral consultation were also implemented as preventative measures to reduce the number of student assessments. Special education in the district began to be reconceptualized as a support to general education, rather than as "another place for the student to go."

The district's transformation from 1986 to 1995 required great commitment and effort. For the district--and especially for special education--that commitment was accompanied by the belief that each child could learn and succeed, that diversity could enrich everyone, that students at risk of failure could overcome that risk through involvement in a thoughtful and caring community of learners, that each child could make unique contributions to the community of learners, and that effective learning could result from everyone's collaborative efforts. As the district became transformed in its entirety, the transformation of special education occurred simultaneously and naturally. For special education, it all started with the parents.
Chapter Two Notes


4. Ibid., 1-4.

5. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author, 13 February 1996.


34. Ibid.


40. Fuchs and Fuchs, Inclusive Reform, 294-309.


CHAPTER III
PARENTAL INFLUENCES
1986-1995

The Regular Education Initiatives (REIs) that the district's special education staff developed and implemented in the late 1980s were designed to ensure the success of disabled students in general education classrooms and reduce the number of students being referred for assessments. However, while the number of yearly assessments decreased dramatically, the provision of educational services to disabled students in general education classrooms was not affected by the REI. All of the indicators of a dual system--the number of disabled students attending schools outside the district, the number of disabled students in separate classrooms throughout the district, and the number of disabled students attending schools other than their neighborhood schools--remained unchanged.

Ultimately, the impetus for transforming special education in the district was provided by parents of disabled students. It began with the concerns of a few parents about the special education programs their children were receiving in the joint agreement. While the district was charting new directions for the twenty-first century, it maintained the belief, based on parental input, that the joint agreement was providing exemplary programs
for the district's severely disabled students. However, a small number of the parents of students in the joint agreement were beginning to think otherwise.²

At the same time, national, state, and local organizations such as The Association of Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) were advocating for unified systems and the return of severely disabled students to their neighborhood schools and/or inclusion in general education classrooms. As parents from the district began to attend these organizations' national conventions, state conferences, and local workshops, they were not only told about the right of every child to be educated in a general education classroom but began networking with other parents, advocates, and attorneys who were anxious to push the inclusion agenda.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

The role of parents in special education was about to change. For many years, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) had provided to parents of disabled children the right to be involved in the decision making process for planning appropriate educational programs for their children. The law mandated parental participation in multidisciplinary conferences and required parental consent for assessments and program placement. The passage of the IDEA in 1990 both reaffirmed and expanded parental involvement as prescribed by the EHA. Grants were made available to private nonprofit organizations for the purpose of providing information and training to parents of disabled children and advocates, "to enable such individuals to
participate more effectively with professionals in meeting the educational needs of disabled children.\textsuperscript{3}

The IDEA’s commitment to parental involvement recognized that the EHA mandate for parental participation had not necessarily made parents the true partners of educators in the decision making process. To truly design the most appropriate programs for disabled children, the benefits of parental involvement had to extend beyond the basic rights of participation and consent. Parents would have to be viewed as consumers of the services supplied by schools and be afforded a basic consumer right, full satisfaction with the service.\textsuperscript{4} It was time to truly make parents valuable allies in developing the educational programs of disabled children.

\textbf{Students in the Joint Agreement}

The influence of parents on the transformation of the district’s special education programs and services began in the late 1980s. A small group of parents whose children were being served in special education classrooms operated by the joint agreement requested that the district provide a special education program for their children. The parents believed that their children were being inappropriately served in the joint agreement program and had the right to be educated in general education classrooms within their neighborhood school.\textsuperscript{5} This was the first time that the district had been faced with such a request. Since the formation of the joint agreement in 1965, severely disabled students of had been served in special education programs operated by the
joint agreement outside the school district.

The story of the eventual inclusion of these children within the district is a testimony to the perseverance of a small group of parents who were "blazing a new trail." It is also a confirmation of the school district's willingness to join with parents to make meaningful decisions about their children's lives.

From 1989 when the parents' concerns about the joint agreement program surfaced until two years later when the children began to leave the joint agreement to enter general education classrooms in the district, the parents were convinced that their children belonged in District 15 classrooms. But their apparent vacillation about making the final decision to return their children to the district is indicative of the dilemma that parents of disabled children face about "pulling" their children out of specialized programs for the uncertain world of a nonspecialized general education classroom.

As the 1989-1990 School Year began, many of the students had been enrolled in joint agreement programs for years. Although District 15 residents, the students attended special education programs outside the district because the severity of their disabilities required specialized programs that were provided only by the joint agreement. Everyday, the children boarded their special education buses to make the journey to their classrooms miles away.

A few parents weren't convinced that making that long journey was necessary. Gradually, by attending professional workshops and reading
journals, articles, and other literature, the parents became well informed about special education and their childrens' disabilities. As a result of this newfound knowledge, some of the parents realized that their children could possibly remain in these separate programs for their entire school careers unless they were given opportunities to enter the "mainstream." Thus, as a first step, the parents requested that program staff provide a few opportunities each day for their children to function independently without assistance from the teacher or the teacher's aide. One example of an independent activity that the parents cited was cooperative learning within the classroom. Another was structured peer-to-peer interaction.

However, as the year progressed, these opportunities failed to materialize. Although the parents were generally pleased with the joint agreement program, the staff's failure to provide these opportunities became an issue. By mid-year, the parents' concerns had increased, and they began to focus on the inappropriateness of the joint agreement program and the need for an alternative program within District 15. In telephone calls and letters to the district, they expressed their concerns about the absence of a program for severely disabled students within the district, especially a program in which their children could be educated in general education classrooms within their neighborhood schools. In one letter, a parent cited four benefits of such a program for their children:

1. Less time spent traveling to and from school
2. The opportunity to make friends at school with neighborhood children

3. Increased self-esteem as a result of attending their home school

4. The opportunity to become part of the school community

Parents also knew that most schools within the district were handicapped accessible, that recent studies had reflected no cost differential between educating disabled students in general education and special education classrooms, and that the state was adopting inclusive program initiatives, such as Project Choices, to integrate severely disabled children into their home districts.7

District-level administrators were empathetic to the parents' wishes but expressed many reservations about proceeding with inclusionary placements. At the time, inclusion was just emerging; and many educators, including district staff, were apprehensive about including severely disabled students in general education classrooms. They were uncertain about the cost of inclusion, how inclusion would be implemented, and whether inclusion would ultimately benefit disabled students. Moreover, district-level administrators expressed caution about offering this alternative within the district unless the students' individual needs could continue to be met. Yet, while administrators and parents had differing opinions, the parents were assured that district staff would work with them to make placement in the district an eventual reality.8

The parents continued to express their concerns. In a conversation with an administrator from the special education joint agreement, they complained
about the lack of parental input into the special education program's curriculum, the absence of a parent group for the parents of severely disabled students, and the fact that the school day was shorter for the special education students than the general education students.⁹

Later in the school year at annual review conferences, the recommendation was made to continue each student's placement in the special education program. Although none of the parents disagreed with the recommendation, they openly expressed their wishes for their children to eventually leave the joint agreement program. However, only one parent specifically requested an alternative program within the district.¹⁰

District staff were aware that severely disabled children were being included in their neighborhood schools in some school districts throughout the state. It was conceivable that the provision of an educational program in a lesser restrictive environment such as a general education classroom could meet a child's needs as well or better than could the special education program. Despite their reservations, district-level administrators realized that the beginning of inclusion was just a matter of time. Thus, they began to investigate the organizational and financial aspects of placements in general education classrooms. Organizationally, administrative staff was concerned about the provision of initial training and ongoing technical assistance to staff who would be working with the students, the immediate personnel and equipment needs, and long range personnel and equipment needs.
But the immediate concern was for district-level administrators to decide how to deal with one parent’s disagreement with the recommendation for continuation in the special education program. The district’s primary responsibility was to provide a program in the least restrictive environment that could meet the children’s educational needs. Another conference was scheduled with the parent. Based on a description of the student’s needs, there appeared to be three alternatives:

1. Maintain placement in the special education program with maximum mainstreaming in regular education classrooms
2. Provide full-time mainstreaming on a trial basis at the school in which the special education program was housed
3. Begin placement in a general education classroom with supportive services at the student’s home school within the district

In evaluating these alternatives, district-level administrators believed that maintaining placement in the special education program would best meet the students’ needs because:

1. The program was designed to meet the total needs of severely disabled students.
2. It provided a home base from which all related services, such as physical therapy, could be delivered to students.
3. Mainstreaming into a general education classroom could be implemented on a gradual basis with a plan for monitoring student progress.

Regarding other alternatives, full-time mainstreaming at the site of the special education program was believed preferable to a general education classroom within the home school because it would allow special education
program staff to "back up" the classroom teacher with technical assistance, record keeping, and on-site problem solving. Furthermore, it was believed that home school placement would not provide sufficient support to meet the student's needs, including the extensive amount of related services and the need to develop an augmentative communication system.¹¹

Meanwhile, parents continued to express their concerns about the special education program. At a parent meeting in May 1990, parents complained about the lack of parental input into the program's curriculum, the absence of a parent group for the parents of severely disabled students, and the shortened school day. The parents were especially critical of information from a school newspaper about activities that were taking place in various classrooms in the school. The school newspaper stated that the students in the general education classroom were continuing to improve reading decoding skills using consonant, blend, and vowel rules; they were working on two digit addition and subtraction facts, time telling, and fractions; they were raising plants, caring for guppies in small pond habitats; they were tracing the origins of fairy tales; and they were studying careers. In comparison, students in the special education classroom had fun at a very special art fair; they were studying wildflowers and going on a scavenger hunt; and they were looking forward to going to camp. Parents cited this newspaper article as an example of lowered expectations in special education classrooms.¹²

Additional concerns were raised at the meeting about a need for an
orientation program for the parents of students coming into the program and for regular meetings to provide opportunities for parents to give input to staff about how to best work with their children. The 1989-1990 School Year was almost over. Parents were becoming concerned that issues were not being addressed, and planning for the new school year was not taking place.

At the next round of multidisciplinary conferences for the students, including the conference for the parent who had requested an alternative program, recommendations were made to provide full-time mainstreaming in a general education classroom for each student on a trial basis at the school in which the special education program was housed. The mainstreaming program would contain a number of components:

1. Students would participate fully in the general education classroom with total access to grade level curriculum.
2. The special education teacher would provide technical assistance to the classroom teacher in developing adaptations for students to utilize in certain situations.
3. The classroom teacher would facilitate the students’ independence as much as possible.
4. Related services would be integrated into the classroom routine.
5. A teacher’s aide would provide support to students for bathrooming needs, mobility needs, and for organizing workspace.

If the mainstreaming program was successful, re-entry into the district would follow. Still uncertain about removing their children from a special education program that they believed was beneficial even with the program’s apparent faults, all of the parents agreed with the recommendations.
In effect, the implementation of an inclusion program in the district was inevitable. It was also apparent to district-level administrators that returning a few students to the school district would lead other parents to make the same request for their children. The education of disabled students was "turning a new corner."

The recommendations for full-time mainstreaming were implemented at the start of the 1990-1991 School Year. Students were enrolled in general education classrooms in the same school in which the joint agreement program was housed. As the school year progressed, some parents began to express concerns about the fast pace of the general education classroom compared to the slow pace of the special education classroom. They felt that both settings were extreme—one too fast, the other too slow. In this instance, what the children were experiencing is indicative of the difference between "mainstreaming" and "inclusion." Throughout the years, mainstreamed students had to "fit" into the classroom curriculum, which in this case was too "fast" for the children. However, with inclusion, the curriculum would be adjusted to fit the child's needs.¹⁵

Frustrated with the special education program, the parents met with district-level administrators to request a transition plan for returning students to general education classrooms at their home school. However, a few days after the meeting, the parents "backed off," stating they believed their children's needs were being met in the current placement and did not want to
proceed further with a district placement.\textsuperscript{16}

Regardless, district-level administrators were now convinced that placement in general education classrooms within the district was "just a matter of time" and advised principals at various schools throughout the district to begin to work with their staffs to prepare for the students. The district was fortunate that the principals were cooperative and willing to accept the challenge. District-level administrators believed that some principals might not be as willing to accept the challenge and do everything in their power to "make it work."\textsuperscript{17}

The principals were ready for the challenge, even though most of them felt that a gradual transition, with the students remaining in the current placement for half of the school day and attending the home school for the other half of the school day, would make a better option. However, all of the principals were prepared to overcome any challenge and "make it work." In fact, most foresaw positive aspects for the disabled students, nondisabled students, and staff. Most assuredly, this broad picture was more important than the everyday challenges the children would present to the classroom teachers and other staff members.\textsuperscript{18}

At the same time, other District 15 parents with children in joint agreement programs began to question why special education programs weren't being provided within the district for their children. In a letter to the editor of the local newspaper, one of the parents pointed out that some joint
agreement programs had moved three times in three years. She stated:

It's time for the 10 member districts...to start meeting the needs of all students in their districts. To provide a quality education and to ensure some continuity in the schooling of these very valuable assets to the community - our children. It's time for the parents to speak up, attend the board of education meetings in our districts, to ask questions and be heard. Ask when our children will receive the quality education now enjoyed by the rest of society, that they so deserve. You are the only one who can make a difference for your child. You are your own best advocate. 

The district's architect was directed by the administration "to assure that all new and remodeled schools were designed and equipped to serve all students, regardless of their special needs." 

Annual review conferences were held at the end of the 1990-1991 School Year. Classroom teachers reported that students were having difficulty with grade level work and needed frequent redirection despite having one-on-one teacher's aides. Parents continued to express concerns about the current program, and they wanted their children placed in general education classrooms within District 15. This time, they didn't change her minds.

Although all of the parents had wanted their children to be placed in general education programs within the district for a long time, it had taken a number of years to develop an understanding of "what to ask for" and at least two more years to make the decision. Fearful about losing the specialized services that their children were receiving, the parents weren't certain that they had made the right decision until a year or two after their child's new placement. It was then that they realized the district could accommodate their
children’s educational needs and that the advantages of being in a neighborhood school extended well beyond the school day.

**Inclusion**

The decision to include severely disabled students in general education classrooms throughout the school district signified a radical departure from previous practice. Before inclusion, a disabled student had to demonstrate beforehand that he or she could "keep up" with the regular education curriculum in the classroom. This reasoning was the basis by which a student was mainstreamed into general education. In contrast, the decision to include a student could be made with the realization that, even though the student couldn’t "keep up" with the general education curriculum, there were other benefits, such as socialization with peers and the feeling of "belonging" to the community. More importantly, the responsibility for a successful experience in the general education setting would shift from the student to the teacher.

This decision also signified the beginning of a shift away from a reliance on joint agreement programming outside the district to a reliance on the school district to provide programming for all disabled students, including the most severely disabled. By the end of the school year, seven severely disabled students were being served in general education classrooms within the district.22

Thus, the transformation of special education in District 15 began with a handful of severely disabled children transferring out of the joint agreement
into general education classrooms within the district. Shortly after, parents of severely disabled preschoolers began to request general education classrooms for their children. Parent after parent began coming forward to request inclusion for their child. Within a few years, forty physically disabled students were included in general education classrooms within the district. Students with mental impairments, visual impairments, and hearing impairments were also included in the district.²³

**Parental Involvement**

The district valued parent participation. A commitment to increased parental involvement in the decision making process was firmly in place by the time inclusion came to the district in 1990. The superintendent consistently urged the staff to regard parents as the district's customers. "Our commodity is their children. Involve parents in the decision making process."²⁴ Another administrator spoke of the need to meet parents halfway, or more than halfway, regarding their children. She believed that we need to remember that parents of disabled children have issues that parents of nondisabled children will never understand. "Decisions are not always black and white. We need to look into the gray areas with great empathy."²⁵

One aspect of this commitment was to encourage parents to participate more freely at multidisciplinary conferences (MDCs). These conferences, scheduled at least annually, are designed to provide parents and the school team an opportunity to evaluate a child's progress and develop an
individualized educational program (IEP) for the child. However, a national study reported that only half of parents attended IEP meetings; and, in another study, 70 percent of the parents provided no input to the development of their child's program. Professionals believed that parents contributed little to IEP meetings; they seemed intimidated or were provided little opportunity to become involved. However, the district's commitment to involving parents in this process was a reflection of its district-wide commitment to involving all parents. From 1990 onward, parents rated their participation in MDCs in the district at the 95 percent level of satisfaction.

In many cases, parents didn't need encouragement to participate in MDCs. As parents received more information about students' rights under the IDEA, they became more proactive in working with teams to formulate their children's programs. Under the 23 Administrative Code of the state of Illinois, school districts are mandated to discuss at least three program options with parents before recommending a specific program. Since those options must be discussed beginning with the least restrictive option, the discussion always begins with the general education program. For each option that is rejected, the multidisciplinary team must provide justification for rejecting that option. This regulation assisted parents by mandating discussion about the "least restrictive environment" at every MDC. Parents became very skilled at requiring teams to justify their decisions.

In District 15, the commitment to increased parental involvement
extended well beyond the MDCs. Parent meetings, parent surveys, and parent "coffees" provided a flow of information between parents and district personnel. Memberships on committees also brought parents of disabled children into the decision making process. In 1994, parents participated on a yearlong district-wide committee that evaluated the district's special education programs and services and recommended a five-year special education plan for the district.  

**Parental Perspectives**

Parents were also willing to share their perspectives and experiences. A parent of a physically disabled child spoke eloquently at a board of education workshop on inclusion about her son's friendships with neighborhood children. She stated that, at first, it hurt her when he wasn't invited to birthday parties. Since her son used a wheelchair, parents of other children were reluctant to invite him to their houses. But, as the years passed, the barriers came down, and he was included "24 hours a day," not just in school.  

A parent wrote of the real and positive changes in her child's life that inclusion had wrought. She stated the following:

> Doors open, lights turned on--in previously closed, dark corners of his mind. He has come to realize, through the program, that he is an individual, a real person; his is truly a great miracle. In fact, I have witnessed many, many miracles with several children since I started coming to the school. Differences are made in children's lives. Possible 'hopeless' cases are transformed into hopeful situations. Tiny hands are held and hope is restored. Within the walls of the school, miracles are happening every day.  

A parent spoke about how thankful she was that the school district had
been "willing and cooperative with the inclusion philosophy." She further stated, "I know my daughter has an improved self-image, a greater willingness to try, and is happier than in previous 'self-contained' years. Parents have been very receptive to this program, as well as staff and administration."

A parent of a severely disabled child being educated in a general education classroom in the district told how "inclusion for my child this year is like night and day compared to last year." The parent further stated, "The key to my child's inclusion is having a teacher who has a knack for modifying lessons and doesn't get upset when problems occur."

Parental Support

The support of the parents fueled the beginning of inclusion in the district. Their support ensured the continued transformation of special education in the ensuing years. In a survey of school districts conducting restructuring efforts, the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI) reported that, until 1990, parental involvement had been more perfunctory than substantive, more a matter of honoring due process procedures than enhancing the educational experience. However, from 1990 onward, these same school districts reported an upsurge in parental participation in restructuring efforts. This upsurge was experienced in District 15.

In the mid-1990s, inclusion is emerging in many school districts throughout the nation. In some school districts, inclusion is decidedly "parent-
driven." in other school districts it is emerging from individual schools; and in still other school districts it is being mandated from the top of the hierarchy. In District 15, inclusion was initially parent-driven. But, very quickly, the leadership at the top of the hierarchy in conjunction with the administration and staff at the individual schools created a partnership to make inclusion successful. It is this partnership that carried the transformation of special education in the district to the next level.
Chapter Three Notes


3. Public Law 101-476, Section 1431 (c).


5. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author on 10 November 1995.


7. Letter from a parent to a District 15 administrator, 28 February 1989.


10. A joint agreement administrator, interview by the author on 13 November 1995.


13. A District 15 administrator, interview by author, 7 November 1995; and an undated memorandum from District 15 archives.


17. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author, 10 November 1995.
19. A letter to the editor, Daily Herald, 6 March 1990.
23. Ibid.
25. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author 14 February 1996.


33. A District 15 parent, interview by the author, 12 February 1996.
CHAPTER IV
ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCES
1986-1995

The birth of inclusion was not a cataclysmic event that shook the school district. Little notice was given to the small number of students who entered general education classrooms after years of being educated in a joint agreement program outside the school district. At the time, inclusion was being implemented sporadically in neighboring school districts. A few school districts which had made a conscious decision to include all disabled students within their schools were scattered throughout the state. Consequently, except for the staff in the schools in which these few students were enrolled, teachers and building administrators throughout the school district were unaware that this event would become a catalyst for transforming special education programs and services for all disabled students in the district.

Planning for Inclusion

The decision during the summer of 1990 to transfer students from the joint agreement into the district set off a flurry of activity in those schools into which the students were transferring. A principal in one of the schools recalled her panic upon hearing that a severely disabled student would be
entering her school in a few weeks. Foremost in the principal’s thoughts was her staff’s lack of training. But, there were more immediate tasks and no time to waste. A teacher had to be selected, a teacher’s aide had to be hired, information had to be shared with the staff, and a myriad of details had to be sorted out. The principal had a thousand questions. She felt inadequate to the task, and she was scared.

Fortunately, the first teacher that the principal approached agreed to take the student into her class. Not only did the teacher’s quick acceptance solve the biggest immediate problem, but her willingness to work with the student was instrumental in ensuring a successful experience. Shortly thereafter, the district hired a teacher’s aide, staff responsibilities were defined, staff training was initiated, and a manual of pertinent information was developed for the staff.¹

With these initial tasks accomplished, the principal and her staff began facing the challenge of inclusion on a daily basis. Special classes, such as the art class, were relocated to minimize the distance that the student traveled to class. On a yearly basis, the student was sectioned into a classroom that was purposely assigned the fewest number of students in order to improve the teacher-student ratio. Next year’s teacher was always designated in the spring to facilitate pre-planning, such as observing the student in the current classroom, becoming familiar with the student’s routine and special needs, attending staff training, and planning during the summer months.
One year, the teacher moved with the entire class from one grade level to the next grade level in order to minimize the transition for the student. Every year, students attended a presentation of "Kids on the Block," which used a puppet with special needs to illustrate disabling conditions. The student was included on a playground equipment planning committee that recommended the installation of additional equipment to meet the needs of students with physical disabilities. On an ongoing basis, every effort was made to facilitate peer interaction.

In this school, inclusion became a building goal. The principal reported that staff came to believe that there was no problem that couldn’t be solved. It soon "got around the neighborhood" that staff were sympathetic toward inclusion. Families reported that they specifically bought houses in the neighborhood for their children to attend the school. Staff began to notice students' sensitivity toward all of the disabled children in the building. The culture of the building became a culture of compassion and understanding. It became a culture for benefitting every student, not just the disabled student.

The staff accepted the challenge of providing a true learning community for this student and other severely disabled students in subsequent years. However, if the challenge had presented itself a few years earlier, it might not have been accepted. The traditional hierarchical bureaucracy would have precluded the ability of the staff to determine how to best serve this student. But, by 1990, the organization had already begun to change.
Building Based Initiatives

Upon entering District 15 in 1985, the superintendent established a vision for changing the culture of the school district to clearly focus on the mission of educating students for the twenty-first century. By the 1990-1991 School Year, the vision had begun to materialize. Within the next five years, it became more fully realized as the district continued to change into a collaborative, adaptable organization. The major thrusts of this change were increased responsibility and authority of the principalship and empowerment of instructional staff in making building level decisions.

Change began with the reorientation or replacement of individuals with hierarchial, bureaucratic leadership styles. Individuals who believed in a collaborative approach to decision making were brought into the district. With these individuals in place, staff was trained on school based decision making. Gradually, staff began to accept a number of beliefs about the advantages of school based decision making:

1. Decisions would be school relevant.
2. Decisions would improve learning opportunities for all students.
3. Decisions would result in continually reinvented schools.3

Staff further believed that school based decision making could be a catalyst for more significant actions to come. School based decision making was ready for a trial run.

Upon entering the school district, one of the superintendent's first tasks
was to review the district's staff development program. The superintendent's review found that staff development was conducted primarily to promote teacher implementation of district-wide curricula and instructional models. Staff development activities were not well coordinated, few resources existed to support implementation of teacher initiatives, and the staff development budget was controlled by the central office and inadequately funded. Recognizing these inadequacies, the superintendent initiated a new approach to staff development.

This initiative substituted the centralized, remedial approach with a building-based, staff directed approach. Teacher teams were established in each school to work with the principal to plan and lead staff development activities. These teams also developed support systems for teacher inquiry and experimentation with new instructional strategies. Each school was provided with discretionary funds for staff development. The district's role in staff development was redefined. Instead of taking sole responsibility for staff development, the district's primary role was to model and support collaboration and inquiry at the school level. School based decision making had begun.4

This new approach to staff development was a key step in changing the culture of the district. The building based approach to staff development was extremely well received by building staff. It was followed by a number of building based initiatives:

1. Building based vision setting
2. Building based selection of instructional materials
3. Building based budgeting
4. Building based allocation of support personnel
5. Building based school improvement planning

All of these initiatives served to increase the responsibility and authority of the principalship and empower instructional staff in making building based decisions.

As building staff gained more experience in developing and implementing building based initiatives, additional training was developed for both administrative leaders and teacher leaders in the skills necessary to facilitate change and support innovations. "Assisting Change in Education" (ACE) training was provided to teams of principals, teachers, and central office administrators to support staffs in learning, applying, and internalizing facilitation, consensus, and problem-solving skills. These are the skills that were considered the critical components for changing the culture throughout the school district.5

Another important element in changing the culture was securing the support of the Classroom Teachers Council (CTC), the teachers' bargaining unit. During the 1990-1991 School Year, a Task Force for Staff Support Members was formed to discuss issues and conditions affecting district staff. The task force—which comprised teachers, administrators, and a board of education member—developed a set of short-term and long-term solutions to a
myriad of internal and external issues. The process of addressing the issues and developing solutions provided task force members with the opportunity to become advocates for collaboration. This opportunity was instrumental in securing CTC support for change.⁶

One outgrowth of this process was especially significant. Additional training was developed for CTC leadership and administrative staff in the "Seven Habits of Highly Effective People." This training, known as Covey Training, solidified the cooperation of the teachers' bargaining unit in moving the district forward on its mission. A few years later, CTC members and district administrators formed a committee, which met periodically to discuss implementation of inclusion throughout the school district. A positive outcome of this committee was the production and dissemination of a manual of successful inclusive practices for general education teachers who had inclusive students in their classrooms.

As the district moved towards becoming a collaborative, adaptable organization, teachers began to assume more responsibility for tasks that were formerly beyond their domain:

1. Establishing building goals
2. Shaping the curriculum
3. Choosing textbooks and instructional materials
4. Setting standards for student behavior
5. Deciding how the school budget is spent
6. Selecting new teachers and administrators

Individuals who were affected by decisions were now involved in making those decisions. The result was greater accountability by teaching staff for the mission of developing a true learning community and educating students for the twenty-first century.

Instructional changes, the infusion of technology, increased dollars for supplies and materials, innovative educational programs, and school/business partnerships are a few of the programmatic changes that occurred from this time forward. Curriculum development focused on improving the instructional program by investigating and implementing the best age appropriate practices for a given subject area. By 1993, the structure of a collaborative, adaptable culture was firmly in place. Initiatives such as Curriculum Integration, Stages of Literacy, and the Reading/Writing Workshop were driving curriculum and instruction within the schools.

Curriculum development had always functioned as a district level initiative. The central office initiated curriculum development, and interested teachers worked to accomplish the district's goals. However, as the culture of the district changed, centralized curriculum development became incompatible with the changes. Thus, the district's department of instruction was reorganized structurally and philosophically.

Departmental Reorganization

By 1991, the department of instruction consisted of 32 departments,
each with its own administrator or department head. This departmental structure promoted a hierarchical, top-down management style. During this same time period, the administration began to express concerns about reduced state revenues and legislation restricting property tax levies. The decision was made by the board of education to reduce the district’s budget.

The budget reduction process was an exhaustive process that ultimately reduced $2.5 million from the district’s budget on a yearly basis. The primary goal of the process was to reduce expenditures and maintain the reductions through succeeding years without affecting direct services to students. After a yearlong process, reductions were approved by the board of education. Among the reductions was a reduction of the administrative and department head positions in the department of instruction from thirty-two positions to three positions.\(^9\)

To effect the reduction and maintain a basic level of service to the schools, a new position was created for each elementary school. This position, the building assistant, was responsible for assisting the principal in the performance of his or her duties, the most important being the coordination of instruction within the school. Thus—with the addition of this assistant—the authority of the building principal was enhanced, and an additional instructional leader was provided for each school.\(^10\)

The creation of the position of building assistant would coincide with the next major change in the delivery of special education programs and services
within the district. The budget reductions that the board of education approved included the elimination of three full-time special education coordinator positions in the department of special services. This represented the entire program coordination staff.

**Building Based Special Education**

To replace the coordinators, either the principal or the building assistant from each school was designated as the building case manager. The building case manager was responsible for the administration of special education in the building. The district's administrator for special education, whose title was "director of student services," was responsible for the district-wide delivery of special education programs and services, for assuring that the district maintained compliance with federal law and state rules and regulations, and for providing ongoing training to building case managers.

Thus, either the principal or building assistant in the role of building case manager became responsible for the operation of special education programs and services in each school. In this role, the building case manager functioned as an "inventive pragmatist." An inventive pragmatist:

1. Establishes leadership which recognizes the need for change
2. Appreciates the importance of consensus building
3. Looks at general education with a sense of what is possible
4. Respects special education traditions and values and the law that undergirds them
5. Seeks to strengthen the mainstream, as well as other educational options, to enhance the learning and lives of children.13

One such inventive pragmatist was the principal who faced the challenge of including one of the first students to return from the joint agreement by changing the culture of her school to a culture of compassion and understanding for all students.

This principal’s experience also served as an example of efforts by the Illinois State Board of Education to promote the Regular Education Initiative (REI). As the result of a successful grant application for an REI project in her school, the principal used state funds to expand the REI at the school, to train general education and special education staff in the collaborative/consultative model, expand and modify general education curriculum for disabled students, and raise awareness about the value and benefits of the REI to staff, students, parents, and the board of education.14 This principal’s efforts exemplified the benefits of a special education system in which general and special educators worked together to provide an array of programs and services for all disabled students. Her staff’s efforts also served as a model for other building staff in the school district.

Another successful grant application that resulted in an award of funds from the Illinois State Board of Education was an Early Choices Planning Grant for the district’s early childhood special education program. These funds were used to train staff about model early childhood programs. As a result of this training, staff developed an innovative program, the Preschool Integration
Program (PIP). This program combined eight disabled preschoolers and eight nondisabled preschoolers in an early childhood classroom. The PIP was developed to serve disabled children while promoting a culture that would benefit every child, not just the disabled child.

The district's early childhood program provided leadership in the inclusion of disabled students. As children exited the early childhood program, the staff was committed to including them in kindergartens throughout the school district. When early childhood staff came to the department of student services with the concept of initiating a kindergarten inclusion program, the concept was well accepted. The kindergarten inclusion program was a "good idea;" it was aligned with the overall philosophy of the district; and, thus, it was supported with personnel and district-wide support.15

The new culture empowered building staff to design programs to best facilitate inclusion for the students in their schools. One example of a building-based initiative was "Partners in Learning" at one of the junior high schools. This initiative, referred to as the consultative model, was designed to provide a diversified curriculum for disabled students and foster a school atmosphere in which students were encouraged "to honor themselves, respect others, and value their community."16 A model for middle school programs across the nation, this initiative facilitated inclusive placements for most disabled students in the building.

In some schools, the inclusion of mildly disabled students in general
education classrooms and a reduction in the use of resource rooms for serving these students became a major focus of the staff. Instead of designing programs for an entire building, a small number of general and special education teachers would join together to alter the traditional roles of general and special educators within their group. Typically, this type of initiative involved a special education teacher providing support services to children within the general education classroom. Co-teaching, cooperative learning groups, and other collaborative strategies allowed disabled students to remain in general education classrooms and still receive the special services that they needed. The implementation of supportive teaching in one general education classroom after another provided positive examples of collaborative ventures that were highly responsive to student needs.¹⁷

Initiatives such as these projects were developed for students by individuals who worked at the level in which the programs and services were delivered. Site-based and grant funds paid for:

1. Out-of-district consultants to train staff
2. Releasing staff for the training and regular team meeting
3. Including parents in the training

Increased responsibility and authority of the principalship and empowerment of instructional staff in making building level decisions were now an integral component of the delivery of special education programs and services in District 15.
Redefined Roles and Responsibilities

The return of disabled students from schools outside the district and the provision of services to disabled students in general education classrooms throughout the district were accomplished by rethinking staff roles. The creation of the position of building case manager placed the responsibility for the day-to-day operation of special education programs and services in each school on either the principal or the building assistant. The key to the success of this position was communication—especially communication to staff and parents that disabled students belonged in the school and were an important part of the student body. The building case manager was responsible for "carrying the banner" on behalf of disabled students and their teachers to other administrative levels. The role included supporting teachers with collaboration, solving problems with scheduling issues, and creating time for teachers to meet and plan together. The building case manager was also responsible for creating opportunities to recognize staff for their contributions.18

Most building case managers had little experience with special education. Therefore, monthly training sessions and ongoing consultation from the director of student services was necessary to assist them in the performance of their responsibilities. For many building case managers, the first few years were difficult. Special education is time intensive and legalistic. As the special education administrator in the building, the building case
manager was expected to "have all the answers" for meeting those challenges. That was not always the case. However, over time, the knowledge and experience was acquired, and building case managers became very capable in performing the responsibilities of the position.

The role of the director of student services also differed in some respects from the traditional role of a special education director. Since programming decisions were made by the building team under the direction of the building case manager, the director functioned in an advisory capacity to each team unless the program involved relocating the student to another school in the district. In that case, the director determined the appropriate school.

The director also acted as a "cheerleader" for building based initiatives. For programs to move toward cohesion and become successful for students, the director provided collegial support, and in some cases, financial support through the special education budget. The director actively supported the new roles of building case managers, including responsibilities which were previously the responsibilities of the director and other members of the special education department.¹⁹

The role and responsibilities of the director had been redefined after the budget reductions in 1992. As a result of the reductions, administrative and department head positions in the department of instruction had been reduced and restructured into building assistant positions in the schools, and special education coordinator positions had been eliminated. With one director and
no program coordinators, the emphasis of the director's position changed from supervision to service. Intentionally, the director's title became "director of student services" to emphasize "students" and "service." The director of student services was also an administrator in the department of instruction. As such, the emphasis was on special education functioning as part of the district's instructional program, not as a separate entity unto itself.20

Philosophically, these changes were designed to create the message that instruction was the primary purpose of all departments, whether they were the bilingual department, gifted services, or special education. The primary responsibility of the special education department was service to students via the schools. Schools were the places where the work of the organization was accomplished. The mission of the Department of Student Services was to create a culture most conducive for the schools to carry out their mission for all students.21

The Challenge of Inclusion

The return of disabled students from schools outside District 15 and the provision of services to disabled students in general education classrooms throughout the district was not accomplished without some difficulty. The REI began as an initiative driven by special education professionals while inclusion was driven by parents. However, despite being the group of professionals most responsible for the success of these movements, general education teachers were brought into the picture without any choice in the matter.
While most general education teachers enthusiastically embraced REI and inclusion because of the benefits for children, the reluctance of some teachers was understandable. Teachers had many concerns:

1. Included students were experiencing general education classrooms for the first time in their school careers.

2. The prospect of becoming responsible for the education of severely disabled children was frightening for some teachers.

3. Instructional models for educating disabled children in general education settings were nonexistent.

4. The welfare of other students in the classroom could be compromised.

5. The efficacy of inclusion was unknown.\textsuperscript{22}

One administrator felt that the biggest obstacle to inclusion was staff fear. She related how staff at first perceived the district as "giving in" to the parents' desire to have their children out of special education and into a "normal" environment.\textsuperscript{23} Another administrator stated the following:

This is not utopia. Schools do not have an endless day or an unlimited number of staff members. But everyone knows that this is an expectation. So everybody pitches in and accommodates each other as much as possible. We are a learning organization. We keep learning, we learn from the experts, we learn from each other, we learn from the students. It's not easy, but worth it.\textsuperscript{24}

The district understood these concerns from the beginning of the process and immediately made the commitment to provide maximum support to the general education teacher. This commitment set the right "tone" in ensuring the success of all disabled students within the district. The district provided extensive staff training, hired teacher's aides when teachers needed extra
support for specific students, provided specialized equipment for students, and supported time for staff to meet and plan for students.

Even so, the day-to-day reality of working with a severely disabled student was challenging for everyone. A special education teacher who was assigned to consult with a general education teacher stated the following:

There's still a tendency for some teachers to say to the specialist, "He's your student." We have to work hard to say, "No, he's your student. We're here to support you."

A general education teacher responded by stating, "I don't feel I've been dumped on because of the support that comes with the child." Another general education teacher offered the following analysis:

When teams are working well, you can't pick out the disabled kids unless they have an obvious physical disability. All kids have needs, but they don't need to be singled out.\textsuperscript{25}

The district's program of including disabled students in general education classrooms has been successful. On a case-by-case basis, interaction, communication, cooperation, and the development of friendships are just a few of the benefits that disabled students have accrued as a result of this commitment. Many have thrived academically. But, inclusion was not the primary goal of the transformation of special education in the district. Inclusion remains just one option in a continuum of options that the district employs for its disabled students. More importantly, the success of inclusion forced general education and special education personnel in the district to look at a wider range of lesser restrictive program and service options other than
separate classrooms and separate schools. A recognition that disabled students could benefit from less restrictive settings was crucial to bringing special education out of the past and preparing for the future.

The results of a national survey by the National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion (NCERI), identified essential factors for successfully restructuring general and special education. One of those factors, effective parental involvement, was discussed previously. The other factors were:

1. Visionary leadership
2. Collaboration
3. Support for Staff and Students

These factors significantly influenced the transformation of special education in District 15. Visionary leadership by the board of education and the superintendent transformed the district from a traditional bureaucracy to a collaborative, adaptable organization. A culture of collaboration became the driving force behind the transformation of the district’s special education programs and services from a separate delivery system to a system in which general and special educators worked together. Support for staff and students was the key component in the success of inclusion of disabled students in general education classrooms.

All of these factors were played out within the district as influences external to the organization refused to be ignored. The major influence was
finances. The dwindling financial resources that precipitated a significant budget reduction in 1992 stressed a climate of financial responsibility. This influence, coupled with the district's disenchantment with the joint agreement, set the stage for the rest of the journey.
Chapter Four Notes


2. Ibid.


15. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author, 16 February 1996.


20. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author, 16 February 1996.

21. Ibid.


23. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author, 14 February 1996.


CHAPTER V
EXTERNAL ORGANIZATIONAL INFLUENCES
1986-1995

Special education costs more than general education. Nationally, in 1991, for every $1.00 spent on a general education student, $2.30 was spent on a student with disabilities.¹ A recent report on the growth of special education spending from 1967 to 1991 found that spending for special education in a representative sample of school districts rose from less than 4 percent of total expenditures in 1967 to 18 percent in 1991.²

Most accounts of the growth in special education spending point to the passage of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA) of 1975. Unlike general education programs, special education is an entitlement for students diagnosed with disabilities. School districts are mandated to serve disabled students in accordance with their individual educational programs. Lack of funds does not release school districts from this obligation. But, while legislation may have prodded special education expansion, records from the sample school districts indicate that special education was growing as a share of total expenditures before the EHA went into effect.³

The growth in special education spending is the result of complex changes in educational practices, medical technology, and social policy. School
districts serve all disabled students, including the most severely disabled who were once served in non-educational public or private institutions. In some cases, these changes reduced special education spending. Eradication of rubella reduced costs of special state schools for deaf children. By 1967, the number of children with severe orthopedic disabilities had been reduced by polio vaccines, and polio was disappearing as a cause for special education enrollments.

In other cases, growth in special education funds represented shifting public and private social resources, not net increases. School districts now handle severely disabled students who previously were treated in non-educational public and private institutions. State schools for "palsied" children were part of the state hospital system in 1967 and were not be included in educational expenditure data for that year. Severely and profoundly mentally impaired children were often housed in private charitable institutions without financial assistance from school systems. Less severely mentally impaired children were also privately cared for and did not attend school systems.

In most cases, however, special education growth reflects real new spending, not shifts from other agencies. New spending is a result of:

1. Increased sophistication in diagnosis of disabilities, such as learning disabilities and autism, in children who would have been deemed "slow learners" in years past
2. Greater sensitivity to causes of learning difficulties
3. A desire to relieve classroom teachers of disciplinary problems or having to provide extra instruction to a specific student
4. A higher survival rate for children born prematurely with low birth weight or birth defects who need special education services

5. An increase in students with severe behavioral and emotional disorders from dysfunctional families

6. A willingness by some school districts to classify children for special education who, in 1967, would have been considered within the normal span of learning styles.

Many of these children would not have survived birth or lived long enough to attend school a few years ago. One eligibility, learning disabilities, which was nonexistent twenty-five years ago currently accounts for five percent of the student population nationwide.\(^4\) School districts also serve students from three to twenty-one years of age.\(^5\)

**Financial Responsibility**

Through the years, District 15 has provided quality special education programs while maintaining fiscal responsibility. However, financial concerns resulted in a board of education resolution in 1992 to reduce the district budget by $2.5 million a year. As with every other department in the organization, special education was not spared. Although the budget reduction protected instructional programs and services from being eliminated, it threatened how well those programs and services would be provided. Programs and services to students with disabilities faced dwindling financial resources amid a climate of stringent financial responsibility.\(^6\) Confronted with the reality of this financial climate, the special education department was most concerned about two costly programs. They were:
1. The inclusion program for severely disabled students in general education classrooms throughout the district

2. Special education programs for severely disabled students in joint agreement or other out-of-district classrooms

Each of these concerns was linked to the other. An influx of included students could be costly. However, since included students would typically come from costly joint agreement and out-of-district placements, it was difficult to predict whether costs would increase or decrease.

As a new program to the district, inclusion appeared to be a costly program. Cost would be affected by many factors:

1. Many general education teachers would be provided with teachers' aides to provide assistance to student's physical needs.

2. Students could require specialized equipment and materials.

3. Special transportation, using either busses with wheelchair ramps and/or limited seating, would be required for most students.

4. Preservice and ongoing training would be necessary for teachers, teacher aides, and other specialists.

5. Teachers could be released from teaching duties to attend planning meetings.

6. Renovations, especially to playgrounds, could be required at all schools.

The special education department faced the challenge of providing quality, cost efficient programs and services to an ever-increasing number of included students.

The cost of programs for severely disabled students remaining in joint agreement or other out-of-district classrooms presented a greater concern.
Unlike the cost of inclusion within the district, the cost of out-of-district programs was determined by the joint agreement in which the district was one of ten members. While the district consistently voted against cost increases and repeatedly requested that the joint agreement exercise more stringent fiscal responsibility, the joint agreement continued to increase greater than the District 15 budget. For the 1993-1994 School Year, the cost of educating a District 15 student was approximately $6,000. Since the cost of providing special education to a disabled student was 2.3 times greater than the cost of educating a nondisabled student, the cost per disabled student should have been $13,800. That year, the per student cost for students in joint agreement programs was:

1. $11,100 for each mild to moderately mentally impaired student
2. $12,000 for each student in the half-day early childhood program
3. $15,600 for each severely learning disabled student
4. $18,800 for each severely behaviorally/emotionally disordered student
5. $19,900 for each physically disabled or health impaired student
6. $20,300 for each trainable mentally impaired student
7. $22,700 for each severely mentally impaired student

Both inclusion within the district and programming for severely disabled students out-of-district offered real financial challenges. Providing the necessary financial support for either or both of these programs could result in reduced financial support for other special education programs and services.
in the district. Three strategies were proposed to contain costs, especially without affecting programs and services to students:

1. Stricter adherence to special education class size limits
2. Increased monitoring of the number of special education teacher aides
3. Stricter monitoring of the special education budget

Another potential cost saving strategy would be to replicate the joint agreement programs in-district, but at a lower cost. Assuming local control of special education costs was very desirable to the administration. This was a strategy that promised tremendous benefit.

Special Education Study Committee

Thus, inclusion, joint agreement programming, and special education costs spawned the formation of a district committee to assess special education programs and services and make recommendations for the development of a special education plan for the future. The special education study committee was comprised of 21 members. Board of education members, parents, general education teachers, special education teachers, special education support staff, and both general and special education administrators. The committee was divided into five focus groups, each of which was charged with addressing the following series of questions pertinent to their area of study:

1. How well do the goals and objectives of the district’s special education program align with the mission and vision of District 15? If further alignment is needed, what steps can be taken to accomplish this?
2. What special education services are mandated by law to be provided? What special education services are provided by District 15 above and beyond the mandates? What parent education services, such as the Parent-Infant Education Program, would be beneficial for all students, not just special education students?

3. How are other school districts meeting the needs of special education students? Which exemplary practices in other school districts could be replicated to meet the needs of district students with special education needs?

4. What is the cost of educating students with special education needs? How does this cost compare locally, statewide, and nationally? What reimbursements are available for special education from state and federal sources and how do they compare to costs? Can strategies be identified to control costs without affecting services? What resources can be reallocated to alternative ways of meeting the needs of special education students?

5. What does current research say about meeting the needs of special education students? In particular, what does current research say about how early intervention programs affect long term service delivery?

6. How well does the current special education structure within District 15 and the joint agreement meet the needs of District 15 special education students? What percentage of district students with special education needs return to regular education settings?

7. What type of structure must be present in the next five years and possibly beyond to meet the needs of the district’s special education students? How can current research and exemplary practices inside and outside the district be drawn upon to develop this structure? How can the district best respond to the requests of parents who wish to have special education services provided in their neighborhood school rather than in a program operated by the special education cooperative? How would changes in special education programming affect transportation services and costs? What steps will need to be taken to achieve this five-year plan? How will the new structure of special education services align with the mission and vision of District 15 to meet the needs of all students?
Each focus group studied a specific area of special education such as learning disabilities, behavioral/emotional disorders, early childhood education, low incidence disabilities (mental, physical, visual, and hearing impairments), and special education procedures. After months of study, the participants convened as a committee to report on the findings of their focus group, make appropriate recommendations, and provide input on the key questions for which the committee was charged to address.12

The district’s special education programs and services had never been studied. A multi-year plan for serving disabled students had never been proposed or approved by the board of education. After a year of exhaustive study, the Special Education Study Committee presented thirty-eight recommendations to the board of education. The recommendations covered two areas of concern:

1. The provision of in-district programs and services
2. The feasibility of providing in-district programs and services to students served in out-of-district programs

In-district recommendations included:

1. Providing more comprehensive programs and services to students
2. Developing program evaluation procedures
3. Collecting data on students transitioning out of special education
4. Increasing staff training

Recommendations regarding the feasibility of providing in-district programs for students in the joint agreement were not only supportive of the
concept but also projected cost savings for the district. The report of the study committee compared the cost of seven programs that the joint agreement provided to District 15 students with the cost of providing those programs in-district. While the total cost savings for the seven programs was minimal, additional cost savings would be accrued from:

1. Reduction in daily transportation of students out-of-district
2. Reduction in payments to the joint agreement for program administration

**TABLE 2**

**COMPARISON OF PROGRAM COSTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Program</th>
<th>Joint Agreement Cost</th>
<th>District 15 Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mild/Moderate Mentally Impaired</td>
<td>$408,000</td>
<td>$354,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Behavior/Emotional Disorders</td>
<td>$437,125</td>
<td>$478,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severely Mentally Impaired</td>
<td>$546,020</td>
<td>$525,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Severe Learning Disabilities</td>
<td>$106,000</td>
<td>$119,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physically Impaired Program</td>
<td>$89,400</td>
<td>$88,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-Infant Program</td>
<td>$62,300</td>
<td>$62,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Childhood Program for Severe Developmental Delays</td>
<td>$108,000</td>
<td>$109,500</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


These recommendations legitimized the administration’s belief that District 15 was capable of providing programs and services for students with
disabilities at the same cost, or at a lower cost, than the joint agreement. Although the total student population in the District 15 was increasing yearly, the physical facilities could accommodate a limited number of extra classrooms. The administration began preparations for providing the programs.13

**Program Development**

In 1990, the administration had decided to begin constructing classrooms to house the district’s physically disabled students, who attended the joint agreement program. The goal was to return all physically disabled students to District 15. However, as construction neared completion, the inclusion of physically disabled students within the district left few students in need of a special education classroom. The district turned its attention to providing classroom space for students with mild/moderate mental impairments (MMI).

District 15 had three (eventually four) classrooms available for its mentally impaired students who were being served outside the district by the joint agreement. The challenge was to convince parents that the district was capable of serving their children. Transition planning was conducted during a period of many months. Parents were invited to meetings in which district personnel solicited input about the relocation. The district’s priority was to give parents every opportunity to express their concerns and to work with them in developing the program.

The process of working with parents was complicated by the joint
agreement administrator's desire to keep the program in the joint agreement. Even if the classrooms were located in District 15, the administrator wanted the joint agreement to be responsible for operating the program. Thus, the transition planning period was not only concerned with securing parent input, but it also became a struggle between the district and joint agreement.

Ultimately, the district agreed that the joint agreement would operate the program, while reserving the right to assume that responsibility in the future. Parents were given a choice as to whether they wanted their child to remain in the joint agreement program or enter the new program within the district. All but a few parents chose to enter the new program. The students were relocated to the district and thrived in their new school.¹⁴

As a result of this experience, district administrators believed that future relocations would be perceived as challenging the joint agreement's existence and resisted by joint agreement personnel. Despite District 15's inclusion program, the district had the second highest number of students in joint agreement programs of the ten member districts. A wholesale removal of the district's students would reduce the joint agreement's student population by 17 percent.¹⁵

During the next school year, the special education department continued to assess the feasibility of providing programs and services for district students in the joint agreement. The district's special education study committee was completing its evaluation of special education programs and services and
formulating recommendations for the development of a special education plan for the future. Suddenly, one of the member districts in the joint agreement began questioning its financial relationship with the joint agreement.\textsuperscript{16}

\textbf{Joint Agreement Concerns}

As members of the joint agreement, districts paid a combination of per student tuition charges and fixed charges based on the district’s total student population and equalized assessed valuation of property. All of a district’s federal funds for special education, which were generated by the total number of disabled students in the district, were received and kept by the joint agreement to fund joint agreement programs. Since the member district that was questioning its financial responsibility with the joint agreement had relatively few students in joint agreement programs despite a large student enrollment and a large property base, its payments were significantly larger than the other member districts.\textsuperscript{17}

This member district’s administration believed that significant inequity existed between its payments to the joint agreement and the amount of services that students from the district were receiving. The district questioned the joint agreement’s funding procedures, property acquisitions, and relationship with member districts.\textsuperscript{18}

At least one other district concurred with this assessment. The District administration had been concerned for years about the cost of joint agreement programs. Some program costs were as much as four times the cost
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of educating a District 15 student. The district believed that the joint agreement fee structure should be based on paying for services on a "per use" basis. If a district requested additional services, it would pay for the service. A basic fee would be charged for membership in the joint agreement, but "pay as you go" would be the standard for all services.19

As a result of the concerns of both districts, a committee of board of education members and administrators from the member districts was formed to discuss the joint agreement's funding mechanisms. One of the issues that the committee faced was the distribution of federal special education funds. Federal funds were generated based on the number of disabled students in a school district. These funds flowed from the federal government to the joint agreement via the state of Illinois. For years, the joint agreement had kept these funds to subsidize joint agreement programs. However, funds from both district's were being used to subsidize programs in which no students from the districts were enrolled.

District 15 believed that federal funds should flow through the joint agreement to the school district. In this manner, local boards of education, not the joint agreement, could decide how to expend those funds. After six months of meetings, the committee recommended to the joint agreement governing board that the joint agreement continue to receive and use the federal funds. However, the recommendation also provided for the first time ever that each district's share of the federal funds would offset its cost of joint agreement
programs by allowing the funds to be fully credited against the district’s payments to the joint agreement. The governing board accepted the recommendation and passed a resolution to that effect.\(^{20}\)

Despite having its concern addressed about the joint agreement’s use of federal funds, District 15 had already charted a course for its disabled students to leave the joint agreement and enter programs in the district. The district served notice to the joint agreement that the four classrooms that housed the MMI Program that was relocated to the district two years previously would be used for an MMI program operated by the district.\(^{21}\)

The Special Education Study Committee finished its work and made two recommendations that affected the joint agreement. They were to:

1. Develop a district program for severely behaviorally/emotionally disordered students

2. Investigate the feasibility of withdrawing from the joint agreement and becoming a legal entity for providing all special education programs and services to District 15 students

The development of two new programs would return eighty out of the district’s one hundred twenty students from the joint agreement. The 19 January 1995 edition of the local newspaper quoted a district administrator as follows:

As of next year, we will be operating our own MMI program at Winston Campus in Palatine. We will start our own BED program for our students. Right now they go to school in Northbrook. It’s mostly because our parents have always asked us to look at what we can do in the district. We are always looking for opportunities to educate our students in District 15. We will look at other options in the future.\(^{22}\)
District 15 administrators began meeting with parents to discuss transitioning their children from joint agreement programs to district programs. While parents would once again be given a choice as to whether they wanted their child to remain in the joint agreement program or enter the program within the district, all of the parents decided to transfer their children to the district programs.²³

Most joint agreements were formed in the 1960s and early 1970s for the purpose of providing programs for severely disabled students from the member school districts. This formation of districts was necessary at the time because:

1. School districts lacked sufficient numbers of severely disabled children to develop groups for programming purposes.
2. School districts lacked teachers with the expertise to teach severely disabled students.

By joining together, the member school districts could provide enough students for the joint agreement to develop programs; and the administrator of the joint agreement could hire, train, and evaluate specialized personnel.

Over the years, school districts with small student populations continued to rely on joint agreements. However, with significant increases in the number of students with disabilities, school districts with large student populations contained sufficient numbers of disabled children for which to program. With increased students, especially in the high incident disabilities such as learning disabilities, districts began to develop a cadre of special education teachers, some of whom became administrators. Thus, school districts provided special
education programs and services for the majority of students with disabilities.

As the years passed, joint agreements continued to provide programs for severely disabled students. Joint agreement programming contained certain benefits:

1. Programs for students with similar disabilities were located together to centralize specialized services and enhance grouping of students.

2. Centralized programs and services reduced direct and indirect costs.

3. Parents could network with parents whose children were similarly disabled.

There were also certain drawbacks:

1. Students from a wide geographic area travelled great distances to school.

2. Certain costs, such as administrative and support services, were duplicated.

3. In regards to any matter, a district could be overruled by a majority of member districts.\(^{24}\)

**Withdrawal from the Joint Agreement**

By 1995, the size of the district's student population, the expertise of the staff, concerns about the cost of joint agreement programs, and numerous requests from parents to return their children from the joint agreement to the district had prompted the administration to bring the issue of the district's continued membership in the joint agreement to the board of education.

Over the years, District 15 had transformed from a traditional,
hierarchical bureaucracy to a collaborative, adaptable organization. The 1987 strategic plan had:

1. Clarified the future direction of the district
2. Designed a vision for the future of education in the community
3. Created a plan of action to accomplish the vision

From this strategic plan had come the sixty-four million dollar referenda from which two new elementary schools were built and 17 existing schools renovated. As a result of the construction and renovation program, each school contained a computer lab, an expanded resource center, an art/science project community room, upgraded classrooms, additional storage space, and space for support programs.

The 1992 strategic plan had:

1. Clarified the district’s outcomes and strategies
2. Redefined excellence by setting an agenda for the year 2000
3. Required extensive data collection to identify or redefine priorities

From this strategic plan had come the technological and instructional advances that would be needed to fulfill the mission of developing a true learning community for all students while educating them for the twenty-first century.

As part of the true learning community, the district’s fifteen hundred students with disabilities were being provided special education programs and services in a highly collaborative, adaptable organization. During these ten years:
1. Most of the district’s disabled students who attended schools outside the district had returned to the district for their education

2. Most disabled students were being educated in general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools

At its meeting of 8 February 1995, the administration presented an analysis of the district’s relationship with the joint agreement. After some deliberation, the board of education adopted a resolution to withdraw from the joint agreement. The resolution cited three reasons:

1. District parents of students with disabilities want to have their children educated in District 15 rather than travel to neighboring school districts for services.

2. The district’s interest is in providing special education services which are coordinated and aligned with other educational services.

3. The district’s desire is to operate high-quality special education services in the most cost-efficient manner possible.26

The journey that began with the concerns of a few parents had transformed the delivery of programs and services to disabled students in many ways. But the journey would continue, because all that had transpired to this point in time was just a prelude to the continuing pursuit of excellence.
CHAPTER FIVE NOTES


3. Ibid.


5. Illinois State Board of Education, 23 Administrative Code, Section 226.120.


8. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author, 14 February 1996.


12. Ibid., 2-3.


20. NSSEO Governing Board, Minutes, 7 December 1994.


23. A District 15 administrator, interview by the author 16 February 1996.


EPILOGUE

The board of education’s resolution to withdraw from the joint agreement was the school district’s first step in becoming an independent legal entity for providing special education programs and services. The last date for membership in the joint agreement will be 30 June 1996. In the seventeen months between the board of education’s resolution and the date of withdrawal, the district will have to accomplish four specific tasks:

1. Approval from the Illinois State Board of Education for the district’s comprehensive special education plan

2. Approval of a withdrawal agreement regarding assets and liabilities that the district acquired as a member of the joint agreement

3. Approval for the withdrawal by the trustees of the four townships that encompass the joint agreement

4. Development of in-district programs for the remaining students in the joint agreement or approval of a contract to allow students to remain with the joint agreement

The district’s comprehensive special education plan was approved by the state board of education in November 1995. A withdrawal agreement between the district and the joint agreement was approved in January 1996. Approval by the trustees was expected in April 1996. In-district programs were developed for the 1996-1997 School Year; although parents were given a choice
as to whether they wanted their child to remain in the joint agreement program or enter the new program within the district.

New Programs

At the end of the 1994-1995 School Year, eighty students left the joint agreement for district programs. Four classrooms of the program for students with mild/moderate mental impairments were housed in a school for kindergarten through eighth grade students. Five classrooms of the program for students with severe behavior or emotional disorders were also housed within the district. Students attending this program had previously attended a joint agreement program in which they travelled two hours a day to and from school. The district also implemented a parent/infant program for children from birth to three years of age. This program signified the district's commitment to serving all children with special needs.

The inclusion of physically disabled children and other severely disabled children continued to expand. Inclusion became the primary placement for preschoolers leaving the district's early childhood program for kindergarten. The kindergarten inclusion program provided the children with a general education classroom experience that could hopefully be sustained as they progressed through the next grade levels.

By 1995, special education in District 15 was becoming reconceptualized as a support to general education, rather than as "another place to go." Most students with disabilities spent all or most of their school day in general
education classrooms. Though some students continued to be taught in separate classrooms, the school district's strong belief in the least restrictive environment ensured the presence of disabled students in general education classrooms to the maximum extent possible.

Research Findings

The inclusion of disabled students within District 15 classrooms exemplified the transformation of special education in the district. Based on this study, the transformation was achieved as a result of five factors. They were:

1. Parents provided the impetus for change.
2. Parents and district staff struggled for two years before deciding to initiate an inclusion program within the school district.
3. Inclusion was accomplished on a child-by-child basis.
4. The success of inclusion precipitated other change initiatives.
5. The transformation of special education was a district-wide initiative.

The initial impetus for change was provided by the parents of disabled children who attended programs outside the district. The parents' wishes for their children to be educated in the district were realized after two years of struggle. From 1989 to 1991, the parents struggled with their own uncertainty about returning their children to the district; and district-level administrators struggled with their own apprehensions about including severely disabled students in general education classrooms.
The caution with which district-level administrators approached inclusion was understandable considering the uncertainty about the cost of inclusion, how inclusion would be implemented, and whether inclusion would ultimately benefit disabled students. However, when the decision was made to begin an inclusion program, this caution fostered a healthy respect within staff to plan carefully for the challenge.

Inclusion was accomplished on a child-by-child basis. It began with a handful of severely disabled children transferring from the joint agreement into general education classrooms within the district. Shortly after, other parents came forward to request inclusion for their children. As the inclusion program grew, the district developed a plan for inclusion that included staff training, procedures for transitioning students, the provision of equipment and other supports, and the empowerment of building staff to make decisions and solve everyday problems. The implementation of this plan by building staff ensured the success of inclusion.

This success encouraged building staff to develop programs for the benefit of all students. Such initiatives as co-teaching, cooperative learning, and staff collaboration allowed disabled students to remain in general education classrooms while still receiving the special services they needed.

Consequently, the transformation of special education was a district-wide initiative. As the entire school district became redesigned, the delivery of special education programs and services became redesigned. Both special
education and general education, working together as one entity, became focused on the district’s mission of developing a true learning community.

**Charting the Course**

The staff’s understanding of special education as a support is critical to achieving the district’s mission. According to the prevailing view of parents, advocates, and many educators, what is wrong about special education is the stigma and isolation that result from disabled children being removed from general education, especially for long periods of time. Special education now has effective strategies to bring help to most disabled students rather than removing them from the general education classroom. This belief will chart the course for special education in the district into the next century.

The five policies and five action plans that were recommended by special education organizations to direct the future of special education were key components for the transformation of both special education and the district in its entirety. In the years between 1986 and 1995, District 15 addressed these policies and action plans in many ways:

1. **Stakeholder responsibility was established in the District 15 community by involving community members in strategic planning, the operation of the educational foundation, and district planning committees.**

2. **A system of accountability for all educational programs was implemented that involved board of education members, community members, parents, and district staff. Program evaluations resulted in a 70 percent turnover of the district’s educational programs in ten years.**
3. A clear vision for the education of all students was developed in both strategic plans.

4. School based staff development, building based teams, and a major commitment of funds prepared staff to educate all students.

5. A fiscally responsible funding system was developed which protected educational programs for all students.

6. School based management became a key component of the delivery of special education programs and services.

7. Schools were organized into learning communities for all students.

8. Supports such as "total quality management" and "benchmarking" were created to ensure continuous improvement.

9. Community services were coordinated for students in need.

10. By 1995, access to educational technology for all students was ensured via 2,500 computers throughout the school district.

These initiatives represent a sample of the efforts of parents, community members, and staff during these years. These efforts redefined the district into a true learning community in which each student would have the opportunity to prepare for the twenty-first century and become "world-class."

But the district's work is far from being accomplished. An organization that remains static will eventually die. Therefore, the leaders of the district understand the need to continually assess the district's progress and, when necessary, redefine the vision. At a meeting on 26 February 1996, the superintendent referred to this process as "charting the course."

Charting the course for the future means:

1. Increasing community support
2. Continuing quality improvement efforts such as strategic planning, benchmarking, and cost containments

3. Continuing fiscal responsibility through balanced budgeting

4. Recapturing local control

5. Meeting enrollment challenges

6. Using advanced technology to support student learning

7. Advancing student performance of basic skills

For many years, the motto of District 15 has been "The Pursuit of Excellence." Since it has been said that "excellence is a journey, not a destination," the journey continues in School District 15.
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1.0 Events that influenced the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the school district
   1.1 What event or events signalled the initiation of inclusion in the district?
   1.2 How did you first become aware of this event or events?
   1.3 Who or what was the impetus behind this event or events?
   1.4 Where did the ideas for this event or events come from?
   1.5 What other events were significant to the implementation of inclusion district-wide?

2.0 Parental influences on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the school district.
   2.1 Describe the influence of individual parents on the initiation of inclusion in the district.
   2.2 Describe the influence of individual parents on the implementation of inclusion in the district.
   2.3 Describe the influence of national, state, and local parent advocacy groups on the initiation of inclusion.
   2.4 Describe the influence of national, state, and local parent advocacy groups on the implementation of inclusion.

3.0 Legal influences on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the school district.
   3.1 Describe the influence of national legislation on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the district.
   3.2 Describe the influence of state legislation on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the district.
   3.3 Describe the influence of case law on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the district.
   3.4 Describe the influence of other legal initiatives, such as due process hearings, on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the district.

4.0 Administrative influences on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the school district.
   4.1 Describe the influence of central office administration on the initiation of inclusion in the district.
   4.2 Describe the influence of special education administration.
   4.3 Describe the influence of building-level administration.
   4.4 Describe the influence of central office administration on the implementation of inclusion in the district.
   4.5 Describe the influence of special education administration.
   4.6 Describe the influence of building-level administration.

5.0 Organizational influences on the initiation and implementation of inclusion in the school district.
   5.1 Describe the influence of district-wide initiatives, i.e. tax referendum, strategic plans on the initiation of inclusion in the district.
   5.2 Describe the influence of district special education department initiatives, i.e. staffing patterns, staff training, model implementation.
   5.3 Describe the influence of building level initiatives, i.e. site-based management, site-based staff development, and site-based program development.

6.0 Factors associated with the restructuring of the delivery of special education services in the district.
   6.1 Describe how the delivery of special education services has been restructured in the district.
   6.2 Who or what was the impetus behind the restructuring of the delivery of special education services in the district?
   6.3 How was restructuring implemented in the district?
   6.4 What was your role in the restructuring?
   6.5 What was the effect of inclusion on restructuring?
   6.6 Describe the parental influences on restructuring special education.
      6.6.1 Describe the influences of individual parents on restructuring.
      6.6.2 Describe the influences of national, state, and local parent advocacy groups on restructuring.
      6.6.3 What were the significant events that involved parents with restructuring.
   6.7 Describe the legal influences on restructuring special education.
      6.7.1 Describe the influences of national legislation.
      6.7.2 Describe the influences of state legislation.
      6.7.3 Describe the influences of case law.
      6.7.4 What were the significant legal events that influenced restructuring.
   6.8 Describe the administrative influences on restructuring special education.
      6.8.1 Describe the events and influences of central office administration.
      6.8.2 Describe the events and influences of special education administration.
      6.8.3 Describe the events and influences of building-level administration.
      6.8.4 What were the significant events that involved the administration with restructuring.
   6.9 Describe the organizational influences on restructuring special education.
      6.9.1 Describe the influences of district-wide initiatives, i.e. tax referendum, strategic plans
      6.9.2 Describe the influences of district special education department initiatives, i.e. staffing patterns, staff training, model implementation
      6.9.3 Describe the influences of building level initiatives, i.e. site-based management, site-based model implementation, site-based staff development.
      6.9.4 What were the significant events that involved the organization with restructuring.
APPENDIX B
RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, a committee for the reorganization of school districts was formed in Palatine Township, Cook County, Illinois, in 1945 representing six rural school districts, and

WHEREAS, the committee and the respective Board of Education for each of the rural school districts prepared and presented to the public, a proposal “for meeting present and future needs of our public schools at lower cost,” and

WHEREAS, the committee concluded that the reorganization was needed “to improve the quality and expand the quantity of education for all of the pupils presently crowding our schools,” and

WHEREAS, the Cook County Superintendent of Schools, Noble J. Puffer, endorsed the reorganization by stating,

“"The movement was not imposed on the committee by anyone. The study has been conducted at all times by local people.”

“"I wholeheartedly commend them for their proposal to establish a new Community Consolidated School District. I believe it is a forward-looking step, in line with progress characteristic of America.”

WHEREAS, the culmination of the reorganization committee to bring about an improved school system for the township resulted in the approval by the voters at an election held on March 2, 1946, for consolidation, and

WHEREAS, the result of the election illustrated the unselfish courage and willingness of the residents to make sacrifices personally and financially in the interest of the education of all children, and

WHEREAS, the residents of the newly consolidated school district elected its first Board of Education on April 13, 1946, and

WHEREAS, since consolidation, fifty-one individuals have dedicated their efforts as members of the Board of Education and met the challenges of maintaining and expanding opportunities for educational excellence for all students, and

WHEREAS, this Board of Education acknowledges all individuals for their many years of dedication and commitment to ensure that Community Consolidated School District 15 abide as an exemplary school system, and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that all staff members, students, constituents, and community members are invited to join this Board of Education in special programs and activities to highlight 1996 as a commemorative year in observance and celebration of the golden anniversary of Community Consolidated School District 15.

Laura R. Crane, Ph.D.
President

January 11, 1995
RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, the Board of Education of Community Consolidated School District No. 15, Cook County, Illinois, is currently a member of the Northwest Suburban Special Education Organization (NSSEO), a special education joint agreement established in 1968 pursuant to the provisions of Section 105 ILCS 5/10-22.31 of the Illinois School Code, and

WHEREAS, the law requires that disabled children receive quality educational programs and services with maximum opportunities to interact with mainstream student populations, and

WHEREAS, the law requires that special educational programs and services be provided as close to a student's neighborhood school as possible in order to maximize social interaction and minimize transportation distance and time, and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has determined that it may better meet its obligations under the law, improve and expand its special education programs and services, and operate its special education programs more efficiently and cost effectively, by withdrawing from NSSEO and establishing School District 15 as an independent special education entity.

NOW THEREFORE, be it and it is hereby resolved by the Board of Education of Community Consolidated School District No. 15, Cook County, Illinois, as follows:

Section 1. That the Board of Education hereby finds that all of the recitals contained in the preambles to this Resolution are full, true and correct and does hereby incorporate them into this Resolution by reference.

Section 2. That the Superintendent of Schools, on behalf of the Board of Education is authorized and directed to sign and forward the attached correspondence to NSSEO, by certified mail, formally notifying NSSEO of the Board of Education's intent to withdraw from NSSEO effective June 30, 1996.
Section 3. That the School District Administration is authorized and directed to take all actions necessary to prepare and file with the Illinois State Board of Education and the State Advisory Council any and all applications, reports, plans and related documentation required to secure recognition of School District No. 15 as an independent special education entity.

Section 4. That all other resolutions or parts of resolutions in conflict herewith be and the same are hereby repealed, and this Resolution shall be in full force and effect immediately and forthwith upon its passage.

AYES: UNVERRICH, BASSI, CRANE, SANDS

NAYS: NONE

ABSENT: FANEL, MURTAUGH, STREET

Adopted this 8th day of February, 1995

Laura R. Crane
President, Board of Education

Attest:

Patti L. Compton
Secretary, Board of Education
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VITA

The author, Darrell Wayne Mittelheuser, was born on August 11, 1946, in Coventry, England. He graduated from Palatine Township High School in 1964. He was conferred a Bachelor of Science degree from Northern Illinois University in 1968 and a Masters of Science degree from Northern Illinois University in 1971.

Mr. Mittelheuser served as both a regular classroom teacher and a special education teacher from 1968 to 1978 in Glendale Heights, Illinois; Medinah, Illinois; and Wheaton, Illinois. Since 1978, he has held administrative positions in various suburban Chicago school districts.
APPROVAL SHEET

The dissertation submitted by Darrell Mittelheuser has been read and approved by the following committee members:

Dr. Max A. Bailey, Director
Associate Professor
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Arthur Safer
Professor
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Loyola University Chicago

Dr. Janis Fine
Assistant Professor
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies
Loyola University Chicago

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation committee and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is therefore accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education.

April 16, 1996
Director's Signature