

Missouri Center for Inclusive Education

Philosophy of Advocacy

We believe that special education is a civil rights issue. *Brown v. Board of Education* not only paved the way for Blacks to have access to the same public schools as whites, but it has paved the way for historically marginalized people of many races and levels of ability to have equal access under the law. The Fourteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution guarantees that all people have equal protection under the law, and this is where our passions lie.

This leads us right into a term called “Social Justice Leadership.” We believe that the work we do is a calling. We believe that “social justice cannot be a reality in schools where students with disabilities are segregated or pulled out from the regular classroom, or receive separate curriculum and instruction” (Theoharis, 2007, p. 222). Thus, we advocate for all children to receive special education services inside the environment that is least restrictive for them, as determined by the IEP team.

We believe that separate is never equal, and children with disabilities have the civil right to be educated alongside their typically developing peers. We recognize that sometimes there may be a need for a child to be educated in a setting other than the general education setting, and we believe that these decisions should be individualized for the student so that he or she may be able to access the general education curriculum. “Inclusion is not a ‘silver bullet,’ and full inclusion is not appropriate for all students with disabilities. For some...full inclusion is simply unjustifiable because no level of modification or accommodation will allow them to benefit in a regular education environment” (Turnbull, Stowe, & Huerta, 2007; p. 208). We believe these situations should only exist in extreme circumstances.

We believe that IDEA 2004 is a well-written law that is designed with the best of intentions for children with disabilities. As social justice leaders, we believe that “by actively engaging in reclaiming, appropriating, sustaining, and advancing inherent human rights of equity, equality, and fairness in social, economic, educational, and personal dimensions,” we can use the letter of the law as well as the spirit of the law to work toward ensuring your child will be provided the education he or she is entitled to under the law (Goldfarb & Grinberg, 2002, p. 162).

Finally, we believe that you, the parent, are your child’s best teacher and advocate. We are here to support what you believe is the best for your child, and we will use the IDEA 2004 to that end. We will not only advocate for you and your child, but we will teach you about IDEA 2004 so that you can feel confident in being your child’s advocate!

References

*Goldfarb, K. P., & Grinberg, J. (2002). Leadership for social justice: Authentic participation in the case of a community center in Caracas, Venezuela. *Journal of School Leadership*, 12, 157-173.

*Theoharis, G. (2007). Social justice educational leaders and resistance: Toward a theory of social justice leadership. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(2), 221-258.

*Turnbull, H.R., Stowe, M.J., & Huerta, N.E. (2007). *Free Appropriate Public Education: The Law and Children with Disabilities*. Denver: Love Publishing Company.