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High Schools and Adolescents With Disabilities: Challenges at Every Turn

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June 6, 2005, was a very special day for Jason Warner. It was also a real highlight for his parents. At 7:30 that evening, Jason joined 289 of his classmates to receive his high school diploma from Woodland High School. Receiving a standard high school diploma was not something that happened by accident or by luck—it was an event that took place largely because of some very deliberate decisions and commitments that had been made by key administrators and teachers in Jason's district several years earlier.

While going through the North Central Accreditation process in 1995, school leaders in Jason's district were alarmed to learn how low the graduation rate was for high school students with disabilities. A few years later, when statewide assessments were implemented and requirements added for schools to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) standards for all students as a result of the No Child Left

Behind (NCLB) Act, school leaders knew that significant steps would have to be taken to alter outcomes for students with disabilities. In an attempt to significantly improve assessment performance and, ultimately, the graduation rate, these school leaders committed to putting four components at the heart of their district's plan for all adolescents with disabilities: (1) use research-based interventions as the foundation of all instruction; (2) actively involve all teachers in programming and teaching decisions on behalf of students with disabilities, not just the special educators; (3) make parental and community involvement a central feature of each student's program; and (4) ensure that each student's program was carefully coordinated across settings and personnel—given the complex nature of secondary schools, orchestration of plans and resources on behalf of students was deemed a very high priority. This chapter describes the broader context in which thousands of adolescents with disabilities, like Jason, must try to succeed.

Educating high school students with disabilities has always been difficult (e.g., Lenz & Deshler, 2004). This challenge has recently been exacerbated by the AYP accountability requirement called for in the NCLB Act, whereby each state must establish a set of high standards to improve the quality of education for all students.

The difficulty of meeting this challenge is underscored by the findings of both the initial National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS1; Wagner, Blackorby, & Hebbeler, 1993) and the second National Longitudinal Transition Study (NLTS2; Newman, 2004). For example, NLTS1 found that a disproportionate number of students with disabilities (38%) drop out of school compared with the general population (25%). Indeed, in some locations, as many as 85% of the students with disabilities drop out of school (Ehren & Lenz, 1986). Before dropping out of school, these students show a broader array of performance and adjustment problems than students in the general population, including (1) higher rates of absenteeism, (2) lower grade point averages, (3) higher course failure rates (Wagner et al., 1993), (4) more feelings of poor self-esteem, and (5) higher rates of inappropriate social behaviors (Schumaker, 1992). Predictably, only a small minority of these individuals (approximately 25%) pursue postsecondary education (Wagner et al., 1993).

In NLTS2, general education teachers were found to set reasonably high expectations for students with disabilities, but many of them failed to meet those expectations. Additionally, these students were found to be less likely to respond orally to questions, work independently, or work effectively with a peer or group (Newman, 2004). In short, success for students with disabilities in high schools has fallen short of the hopes of educators, parents of adolescents with disabilities, and the students themselves. Most important, although these students have struggled to cope with the demands of high school curricula, they have not been prepared to face the even higher expectations of the globalization of commerce and industry,

the dramatic growth of technology, the dramatic transformation of the workplace, and the very nature of work itself (Martin, 1999; Oliver, 1999; Rifkin, 1995).

Subsequently, the passage of the NCLB Act in 2001 established a new set of expectations for students with disabilities. Namely, the accountability provisions of that legislation require schools to report achievement outcomes for all students by disaggregating their data into key subgroups, and students with disabilities constitute one of the these subgroups. Hence, educators now must be as concerned with the academic success of students with disabilities as they are with typically and high-achieving students in their schools.

THE NEED FOR A NEW APPROACH

A dramatically new approach to educating students with disabilities in high schools is necessary to meet these outcome goals. Historically, educators have tried to understand and serve adolescents with disabilities from a limited perspective that focuses on individual characteristics. That is, the prevailing assumption has been that if an adolescent is not performing well in a criterion environment (for instance, the general education classroom), the problem must reside within the student. Hence, detailed explanations for a student's poor performance are sought by administering one battery of tests after another. After a thick file describing the "student's problem" is assembled, an intervention program is designed to "fix" or "change" the student.

But in reality, the difficulties that students with disabilities face cannot be accurately described by merely analyzing the students' behavior alone. A more valid and helpful perspective carefully considers not merely learner attributes, but also environmental factors. High school students with disabilities are, first and foremost, *adolescents* who are trying to understand, cope with, and respond to the pressures associated with comprehensive high school settings. Additionally, as these students gain independence, the way they are perceived and the roles they play in their families and communities change dramatically. All of these pressures and changes, which are different and independent from their personal characteristics as learners, can have dramatic effects on their academic performance. Hence, the performance of adolescents with disabilities is best understood by viewing their behavior as the result of interactions between an individual's characteristics and the environmental conditions within which he or she must live and cope: $B = E \times I$. Efforts to understand and intervene with these students, therefore, should be made in light of a complex array of factors that are present within the individual (I), the environmental settings or contextual factors (E), and the product of an interaction between the two (B).

Numerous studies and reviews have investigated the individual factors associated with adolescents with disabilities, but few reviews have focused on the environmental or contextual factors that they face and how those factors interact with their individual characteristics. The purpose of this chapter is to discuss a host of contextual factors that might interact with the characteristics of adolescents with disabilities to have a potentially significant impact on their academic performance. Interventions must be designed in light of contextual realities such as the unique structures of secondary schools and a myriad of trends that characterize secondary education in America today.

We will briefly discuss eight contextual factors or trends that relate to the education of students with disabilities within today's high schools. Although they will be presented in isolation, these factors clearly do *not* operate in isolation. Rather, the different ways that they can be combined and the varying degrees to which they are present (or absent) create the extreme cultural complexities within which adolescents with disabilities are expected to succeed. The eight factors are not meant to represent an exhaustive list, but to serve as examples of some of the major contextual forces that currently operate in most high schools.

The eight factors are (1) legislative mandates, (2) the standards-based reform movement, (3) curricular and structural demands, (4) the absence of comprehensive service delivery systems, (5) confusion with regard to the role of special educators, (6) cultural and linguistic diversity, (7) the prevalence of violence and fear, and (8) family and community dynamics.

LEGISLATIVE MANDATES

The national context is the largest context within which high school students with disabilities are educated. During the past several decades, a series of federal legislative initiatives have been directed at improving the quality of services for adolescents and young adults. Although the full intent of these mandates has not yet been realized, nonetheless, they create a set of conditions for governing educational decision making and for evaluating current practices at the high school level. While the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and NCLB are the most prominent pieces of federal legislation, several other legislative actions are also germane to the way adolescents and young adults with disabilities are educated and supported. These actions, along with IDEA and NCLB, are briefly described in the paragraphs that follow.

First, in 1989, at the historic governors' meeting in Charlottesville, Virginia, the 50 state governors mandated that by 2000, eight National Education Goals for the education of all students in the United States would be addressed. Although all of these goals apply to students with disabilities as well as to other students, five of them have particular implications

for students with disabilities in relation to preparing them for life during and after high school. These five goals are as follows: (1) the high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90%; (2) all students will leave Grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter, including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, civics and government, economics, the arts, and history and geography; (3) every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our nation's modern economy; (4) all adult Americans will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and to exercise their rights and responsibilities of citizenship; and (5) every school will promote part-nerships that will increase parental involvement and participation in promoting the social, emotional, and academic growth of children.

Second, as activities related to these National Education Goals were being implemented by the governors and their states, the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (P.L. 101-336) added further protection by pro-hibiting discrimination against persons with disabilities and by affording protections under the law in the workplace. Additionally, the 1990 amend-ments to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act introduced tran-sition service requirements that call for a statement of needed transition services to be written in the individualized education program (IEP) for each student with a disability, beginning no later than age 16 or younger, if appropriate. These legislative changes represent a move toward prepar-ing students with disabilities for their future, for work, and for life after high school.

Third, in 1994, to further underscore the importance of schools ensur-ing that their students meet the National Educational Goals, Congress passed several pieces of legislation (the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, the School-to-Work Opportunities Act, and the Improving America's Schools Act) to promote success by raising academic and occupational standards, encouraging students to work harder to meet them, improving teaching strategies, and strengthening student and parent involvement for all students, including students with disabilities.

Fourth, in 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improve-ment Act (P.L. 108-466) was reauthorized. The primary purpose of this legislation was to ensure a free and appropriate public education for all individuals with disabilities that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for employment and independent living. The authors of IDEA 1997 recog-nized that if children and youth with disabilities are to be successful, it is necessary to focus on instruction and experiences that prepare them for later educational experiences and postschool opportunities, including independent living, formal and informal postsecondary education, and, if appropriate, employment. Thus, Part B of this act sets forth specific

requirements in the areas of transition planning and services that must be implemented at age 16. It is important to note that IDEA 1997 (P.L. 105-17) had expanded earlier transition requirements by lowering the age by which a transition plan must be implemented to no later than age 14. States still have the option to require transition plans to be made by age 14, but the federal law no longer mandates these plans at the younger age level. A major change in the 2004 legislation is to bring its statutes into alignment with the NCLB Act relative to accountability systems and performance goals and indicators.

Fifth, the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Technical Act of 1998 (P.L. 105-332) and the Workforce Investment Act (P.L. 105-220) were designed to work in concert with and support IDEA 1997 by focusing federal investments on high-quality vocational and technical education programs, as well as creating an integrated one-stop system of workforce investment and educational activities for youth and adults.

Sixth, the goal of the Government Performance and Results Act is to improve results for individuals with disabilities by assisting state and local education agencies in providing children with disabilities with access to a high-quality education that will help them meet challenging standards and prepare them for employment and independent living. This goal is to be accomplished by (1) ensuring that all students have IEPs that include a statement of transition service needs focusing on their course of study and that coordinates a set of activities designed to promote movement from school to postschool activities; (2) increasing the percentage of students exiting school who graduate with a diploma; (3) decreasing the drop-out rate; (4) increasing the percentage of students who go on to postsecondary education or employment; and (5) reducing the gap between the average hourly wage of individuals with disabilities and that of peers without disabilities.

Finally, the NCLB Act of 2001 is the most comprehensive piece of educational legislation to be signed into law during the past 50 years. Its implications for all students, including those with disabilities, are significant and far-reaching. In essence, NCLB was designed to change the culture of America's schools by closing the achievement gap, offering more flexibility, giving parents more options, and teaching students based on instructional practices grounded in scientific research. Under the act's accountability provisions, states must describe how they will close the achievement gap and make sure that all students, including those who are disadvantaged, achieve academic proficiency. Further, they must produce annual state and school district report cards that inform parents and communities about state and school progress. Schools that do not make progress must provide supplemental services, such as free tutoring or afterschool assistance; take corrective actions; and, if they are still not making adequate yearly progress after five years, make dramatic changes to the way the schools are run.

In summary, numerous recent pieces of legislation and other initiatives have been directed at the education of students with disabilities, and many

of them are directly related to the high school education of these students. Accordingly, high schools are being required to educate students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, to give them *real* access to the general education curriculum, to ensure that they meet outcome goals, and to help them plan successful transitions into their adult lives. These initiatives may be used to create a positive climate for students with disabilities in high schools. However, some of the trends and factors also present challenges that must be met to create that positive climate.

THE STANDARDS-BASED REFORM MOVEMENT

One movement that may create a barrier to the education of students with disabilities is the national school improvement effort commonly known as *standards-based reform.* As defined by Nolet and McLaughlin, "standards-based reform is a policy response to the dissatisfaction with the performance of American schools—major elements of standards-based reform are (a) higher content standards, (b) the use of assessments aimed at measuring how schools are helping students meet the standards, and (c) an emphasis on holding educators and students accountable for student achievement" (2000, p. 2). Although the movement toward standards-based reform began in the mid-1980s, standards-based reform was formally introduced as a full-blown policy framework in 1994 through the Goals 2000: Educate America Act, which provided incentives to states to adopt an accountability system based on standards and aligned assessments.

The same year, the reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as the Improving America's Schools Act required that states develop an accountability framework based on standards and assessments and that Title I schools demonstrate annual yearly progress toward student proficiency on state assessments. In spite of these legislative initiatives, states moved toward the adoption of standards at an uneven pace and varied widely in their approaches to standards-based reform. In 1994, only 11 states were in compliance with the reauthorized ESEA. As a result, the 2002 reauthorization of the ESEA as the NCLB Act mandated that states develop an accountability system based on standards and assessments, extended the AYP requirement to all schools, and imposed a system of sanctions on schools, districts, and states that fail to comply. Paige (2004) reported that on June 10, 2003, all 50 states plus the District of Columbia had approved accountability plans based on standards and assessments.

The NCLB legislation requires that state assessments of reading and mathematics, and, by 2005–06, science, be administered to all students in Grades 3 through 8 and at least once during the high school years. To achieve AYP, schools must demonstrate that at least 95% of students participated in the assessments and made progress toward achieving state-determined targets for proficiency. Moreover, schools must report on

participation rates and assessment scores for specified subgroups of students, including students with limited English proficiency and students with disabilities. State accountability systems vary as to the stakes of assessments. At present, NCLB mandates that schools must demonstrate their students are progressing toward the goal of universal proficiency by 2013–14. Some states, however, place the burden of achieving proficiency on individual students. At present, 24 states have exit exams that students must pass to graduate from high school with a standard diploma. President Bush's acceptance speech to the Republican National Convention on September 2, 2004, suggested the administration's intent to require exit exams as part of NCLB (Cavanagh, 2004). In addition to these exit exams, many states require that students pass state exams before they matriculate to the next grade.

Naturally, teachers are being required to teach students the information and skills contained on state tests required by NCLB. For example, in the state of Louisiana, teachers must help students pass the LEAP 21 tests at the fourth- and eighth-grade levels in the areas of English, mathematics, science, and social studies if they are to pass into the fifth and ninth grades. They also must help students pass tests in the tenth and eleventh grades in the areas of written composition, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies if they are to graduate from high school (Louisiana Department of Education, 2000).

The impact of this standards-based reform movement on all students and teachers in American schools has been significant (Howell & Nolet, 2000). The ramifications for students with disabilities are especially problematic (e.g., McDonnell, McLaughlin, & Morrison, 1997). Before the passage of the NCLB, a survey by the National Center of Educational Outcomes reported that educators in approximately half of the 43 states that had adopted standards reported they were using the same standards (or some variation of the standards) for students with disabilities that they used for general education students. Educators in eight states reported they were developing different standards for students with disabilities, and educators in 14 states reported they were uncertain as to which standards they would use (Sack, 2000). In addition, only 23 states could provide data on how many students with disabilities were participating in state assessments and the types of accommodations that were provided (Sack, 2000).

However, the NCLB Act now mandates that all students must meet the same state standards. Although provisions have been made for students with the most severe disabilities to participate in alternate assessments, no more than 1% of students' alternate assessment scores can be counted toward AYP (any scores in excess of 1% must be calculated as nonproficient), and alternate assessments must be based on alternate achievement standards and aligned with state standards that apply to all students (U.S. Department of Education, Title I, 2003).

Before the passage of the NCLB, there were some indications that many students with disabilities were being left out of state assessments altogether. According to testing experts, students with disabilities were not being included because their scores could negatively skew overall scores (e.g., Kleinhammer-Trammill & Gallagher, in press). A study by the National Assessment of Educational Progress confirmed that most students with disabilities were not taking state assessments (Sack, 2000). Another study by the National Center on Education Statistics estimated that nearly half of all students with special needs (including students with limited English proficiency) were excluded from state assessments between 1992 and 1994 (Council of Chief State School Officers, 1998). In spite of the NCLB mandates, several states have failed to make AYP because of widespread non-participation of students with disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, Title I, 2003)

Clearly, there are serious problems associated with excluding students with disabilities from state assessments. Exclusion denies students with disabilities and their families their legal rights under the IDEA. Indeed, the 1997 amendments to the IDEA represent a major advancement in ensuring not only that students with disabilities receive the basic civil rights protections of a free and appropriate education, but also that they receive additional benefits designed to improve the quality of their education. To ensure the quality of education for these students, the 1997 reauthorization specified that students with disabilities should have access to challenging curricula and that their educational programs should be based on high expectations. Hence, this new legislation shifts the focus of educational programming from *physical* access to general education classes to *real* access to the general education curriculum and improved educational performance. In essence, the purpose of IDEA 1997 was to increase the degree of alignment of special education services (programs and policies) with the standards-based reform movement. In addition, both IDEA 1997 and the NCLB ensure that students with disabilities are part of the overall accountability system and make schools responsible for their progress.

Standards-based assessments, then, play a crucial part in determining whether students with disabilities are getting an appropriate education. If these students are not participating in state assessments, no one can determine what they are learning in comparison to what other students are learning and how their educational programs can be changed to help them learn better. According to some experts, excluding students with disabilities from state assessments ignores their academic needs and maintains low teacher expectations for their achievement (McLaughlin & Warren, 1992). Their exclusion also translates into no accountability for their teachers and administrators.

Clearly, the exclusion of students with disabilities from state assessments is problematic. On the other hand, the inclusion of students with disabilities in standards-based assessments to determine promotion and

graduation has its own problems. Currently, 24 states require that all students pass a graduation exam with the same passing score (regardless of whether they have a disability) to receive a standard diploma. Unfortunately, many students with disabilities do not have the skills and knowledge required to pass these exams. Because of these students' lack of skills, some states are being challenged legally. For example, in Indiana, there is a current lawsuit challenging the exit exam required for high school graduation for 1,000 students with disabilities. The lawsuit alleges that the state violated the students' due process rights by changing graduation requirements too quickly and by not allowing enough time for the students to learn the skills and knowledge required on the tests. In addition, the lawsuit alleges that the state violated IDEA by failing to provide adequate testing accommodations (Olson, 2000a).

Because of these problems, the interaction of the standards-based reform movement and special education has been the focus of a great deal of study and debate. A recent report released by the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform, titled *Reforming High School Learning: The Effect of the Standards Movement on Secondary Students With Disabilities* (Dailey, Zantal-Wiener, & Roach, 2000), speaks directly to the impact of this movement on adolescents with disabilities. Among the major findings of this report are the following:

• There is a lack of interaction between special education programs and policies and district- and school-based reform efforts. While most state-level reforms do specify that all students will be part of reform efforts, few states provide guidelines about aligning standards with student IEPs.

• Several factors associated with high schools greatly inhibit the capacity and collaboration among special and general educators needed to include students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum and related assessments. Such factors as departmental structure, subject-matter focus, lack of professional development opportunities, lack of common planning time, credit and graduation requirements, and course scheduling place limitations on the extent to which students with disabilities can access and benefit from a standards-based curriculum.

• There are few service delivery models in high schools that truly facilitate the inclusion of students with disabilities and promote the application of and engagement in a standards-based curriculum.

• Instructional materials that focus on the content subjects and standards often are not designed for students with disabilities. Teacher guides that accompany high school texts often do not provide suggestions or accommodations for diverse learners. Moreover, special education teachers often report using discarded materials from general education.

• District and school leaders often articulate support for including students with disabilities in a standards-based curriculum; however, they often do not provide the resources, incentives, and organizational structures to implement promising practices that engage and apply standards to students with disabilities.

• Both general and special education teachers often lack the necessary knowledge of how to link pedagogy, standards, and content.

• Both general and special education teachers lack the knowledge and skills to coteach in a classroom. In some teaming situations, special educators perceive themselves as assuming the role of an instructional aide. Issues regarding content, delivery of instruction, and grading policies are often unresolved and result in fewer coteaching or teaming situations.

• All teachers reported that time was among the major resources needed to reflect on and plan for the implications of state standards for students with disabilities and to develop appropriate strategies and services to include these students in standards-based instruction.

CURRICULAR AND STRUCTURAL DEMANDS

Simultaneous with the standards-based reform movement has been a major trend in high schools toward enrolling a large percentage of students with disabilities in general education classes for a majority of the school day (e.g., Fisher, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1995; King-Sears & Carpenter, 1996; Lenz & Deshler, 2004; Newman, 2004). In large measure, this trend is the result of efforts to promote access to the general education curriculum among students with disabilities. Thus, the vast majority of students with disabilities are receiving their education in the same environment as their peers and being afforded the same opportunities to learn and the same quality education as their peers. Unfortunately, because of the standards-based reform movement, which has taken place simultaneously with the full-inclusion movement, the demands associated with general education courses have increased dramatically. That is, in required high school general education courses, students are expected to do more academic work and learn more than ever before. They are being challenged to read, write, think, and compute at very complex levels (Brand & Partee, 2000).

One demand within required high school courses that is getting more and more difficult to meet is the reading demand (Kamil, 2003). With the emphasis on excellence in education and the explosion of information, high school textbooks have not only become thicker (many are two and a half inches thick) and larger, by they also contain very complex information. Whereas biology students once needed to learn the definition of

DNA, for example, they now need to know the chemical components of DNA, how they are organized and replicated, and their varying roles in genetic processes. Thus, in today's high schools, students are not only required to read more pages of more complex information, they are also required to read them at high readability levels (Mastropieri, 2003).

Other demands associated with required high school courses are equally complex and challenging. For example, students are required to research and write long, typed papers (Schumaker & Deshler, 1984). They are required to listen and take notes from lectures, which make up 70% of the instruction they receive (Suritsky & Hughes, 1996). They are required to master 60 to 80 facts per test, answer in excess of 40 questions per test, and provide extended written response to approximately 40% of the test questions (Putnam, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1992). They are required to complete projects over relatively long periods of time, and they are required to complete daily homework, sometimes involving two to three hours of independent study each evening (Rademacher, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1996).

Additionally, the instruction in these classes takes place at a rapid pace. Teachers focus on covering the specified material. If students do not learn it, they do not return to old information to ensure mastery; they simply move on to new material (Lenz, Alley, & Schumaker, 1987). In fact, general education teachers report that they tend to focus on their high-achieving students in diverse classes of learners. Thus, when these students are ready to move on, the whole class moves on. Similarly, when these students reject an activity or teaching method, that activity or teaching method is discarded (Lenz et al., 1987).

Another critical factor affecting instruction is the length of classes. Because block scheduling is often used in today's high schools (Queen, 2000), students find themselves in the same general education class for as long as two and a half to three hours at a time. This means they need to be able to sit in their seats and concentrate on the same subject, and sometimes the same activity, for that length of time.

Indeed, the very structure of high school classes and schedules creates demands on students. Because students are enrolled in several courses at the same time, they need to be able to divide their attention among these courses, as well as keep track of all of the assignments in all of the courses at the same time. Because their general education teachers work with approximately 150 students a day and have little time to really know and attend to individual students, students have to be independent learners who are able to recruit the help they need. Further, because whole-group instruction is the norm for high school classes, students need to be able to learn and perform within that context.

A final high school demand that impacts students with disabilities is new course requirements for high school graduation and entrance into postsecondary educational settings. For example, in most states, students are now required to pass an algebra course to graduate, whereas in previous

years they only had to pass a general math course (Elmore, 1998). For another example, many postsecondary educational settings are requiring students to be fluent computer users. They can either pass a high school computer course that focuses on the competencies required, or they can pass a test of the competencies (Kansas Board of Regents, 2000).

This constellation of demands associated with high school general education courses influences the success of students with disabilities who are enrolled in them. First, these students often have several skill deficits that hamper their attempts at meeting the demands. For example, students with learning disabilities enter high school reading, on average, at the fourth-grade level. Although a large proportion have mastered basic mathematical facts for the addition and subtraction of whole numbers, they often have not mastered the facts for multiplication and division, nor have they learned how to work with fractions and decimals (Warner, Schumaker, Alley, & Deshler, 1980). They typically cannot write a variety of complete sentences, and they do not know how to organize and write paragraphs and themes (Schmidt, Deshler, Schumaker, & Alley, 1989). They hand in an average of 40% of their assignments (Hughes, Ruhl, Deshler, & Schumaker 1995). They do not know how to study for tests, and they often do not pass tests, earning an average of 57% of the points (Bulgren, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1988).

Because of these skill deficits, many students with disabilities enter required general education courses without the prerequisite skills for success. Thus, students who read at the fourth-grade level cannot gain information from textbooks written at the tenth-grade level and above. Students who cannot multiply, divide, and work with fractions cannot do algebra. Students who cannot write a complete sentence cannot write a 10-page paper. And students who cannot pass tests can rarely pass a course.

Second, students with disabilities, especially those with attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, and behavioral and emotional disorders, often have difficulty staying in their seats and concentrating for long periods of time. They need opportunities to move around, as well as frequent changes in activities to stay focused (Carpenter & McKee-Higgins, 1996). Not surprisingly, these students report that they lose interest in a class after about 15 to 20 minutes and rarely do much work after that (Schumaker, personal communication, 2000). Additionally, they have difficulty learning within large-group frameworks (Mercer, Lane, Jordan, Allsop, & Eisele, 1996) and need individual and elaborated feedback to learn efficiently (Kline, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1991).

Clearly, these disparities between the demands of required courses and the skills of students with disabilities impact whether they have true access to the general education curriculum. Although they might be enrolled in general education courses, these students might not truly have the same opportunities as other students to learn within those courses.

ABSENCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE
SERVICE DELIVERY SYSTEM

The full-inclusion movement and the standards-based reform movement have produced changes not only within general education, but also within special education. In fact, the special education services now offered to students with disabilities in high schools are in a state of flux. As described previously, students who used to receive a large proportion of their education in self-contained and resource room environments are now enrolled in general education classes for a majority of the school day (Lipsky & Gartner, 1997). As a result, the services and instruction that special education teachers deliver have changed. Whereas these teachers once may have focused on teaching students how to read, write, and do math, they now have to focus on helping students meet the difficult demands of the general education courses in which they are enrolled.

This means that students who are scheduled to be present in the resource room for an hour a day may receive some assistance in completing their assignments. At best, assistance takes the form of traditional tutoring (Carlson, 1985), which may involve a teacher actually doing an assignment for the student (Hock, 1998). Such tutorial assistance promotes dependence and does not prepare the student to do similar assignments independently (Hock, Deshler, & Schumaker, 1999a). At worst, students use the resource room as a study hall where they can recruit assistance with assignments if they wish. Because the scheduling of resource room hours typically results in a diversity of students being present in the room at the same time, there is no opportunity for group instruction on skills needed by students, and opportunities for individual assistance and instruction are infrequent and short in duration.

Worse yet, in some high schools, students with disabilities no longer receive any services in a resource room; instead, their special education teachers are assigned to teach required courses. In some cases, they coteach with a general education teacher. This can result in a misuse of special education funds: Research has shown that team teaching is often characterized by the special education teacher spending considerable time in a support role in the classroom as an observer who occasionally acts as an aide for the general educator (that is, passing out papers and completing other noninstructional tasks) (Boudah, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1997). Additionally, because the number of courses in which students with disabilities may be enrolled in a full-service high school is large, and because the number of courses in which special education teachers can team teach is limited, this type of service does not reach all of the students with disabilities who need it in all of their courses. Alternatively, special education teachers might teach watered-down versions of required courses to students with disabilities and other at-risk students (Hock, Deshler, &

Schumaker, 1999b). This tactic can be problematic as well because these teachers often are not certified to teach the subject matter in the courses to which they are assigned. Moreover, students with disabilities do not receive the same instruction and the same quality of education as their peers, and as a result may not pass state assessments. Finally, data supporting coteaching instructional arrangements for adolescents with disabilities are extremely limited; of those studies that have been done, the outcomes are equivocal at best (Murawski & Swanson, 2001).

In still other schools, the special education teachers are supposed to act as consultants to the general education teachers. They are to meet with the general education teachers and suggest accommodations and modifications for each activity and assignment that will enable the students with disabilities to succeed in targeted courses. Unfortunately, general education teachers report that this is not a practical way of helping students. Because they are given just a few minutes to plan each day, they want to spend that time planning their upcoming lessons, grading assignments, and taking care of the day's business. They do not want to spend that time planning to accommodate just a few students among the 150 students they see each day, nor are they willing to devote time within their classes to accommodate a small number of students (Lenz, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1991).

Finally, in some schools, and for some students with disabilities, special education services have been substantially altered so that students receive all instruction in their general education classes. Thus, they receive very little assistance outside of what is typically available to students at large, usually supplied through their general education teachers. Unfortunately, these teachers' lives are stressed and stretched thin as they attempt to educate 150 students each day. Not surprisingly, the amount of attention and assistance given to students with disabilities is minimal.

These types of service delivery systems for high school students with disabilities usually supply too little help in situations that require comprehensive support if these students have any hope of meeting the demands of challenging courses. Although comprehensive service delivery programs have been designed for students with disabilities to promote their success in required high school courses (Hock et al., 1999a; Schumaker & Deshler, 1984), the use of these programs is more the exception than the rule. These students need a combination of (1) intensive instruction in the prerequisite skills needed for success in required courses (Hock et al., 1999a), (2) homework assistance that helps them to become independent learners and aids their completion of assignments, and (3) specially designed learner-friendly instruction in their required courses (Hock et al., 1999a). Unfortunately, most high schools are not supplying this combination of services.

CONFUSION WITH REGARD TO THE ROLE OF SPECIAL EDUCATORS

Closely aligned with the lack of comprehensive service delivery systems for high school students with disabilities is a general confusion about the role of special educators in the education of students with disabilities. Although policy by the Council for Exceptional Children (2000) has underscored that specialists should be certified in each exceptionality, many agencies and organizations are pushing noncategorical certification for special education teachers. This is of great concern because many current and future special education teachers are not receiving in-depth training related to particular exceptionalities. Additionally, some agencies are providing alternative routes to licensure, which, again, do not involve in-depth training of specialists. To maximize meager resources, many school districts are emphasizing consulting or coteaching roles for special education teachers; as a result, many of these teachers have been relegated either to being "paper pushers" or to sitting at the rear of classrooms serving as glorified aides. They are disheartened, their morale is low, and the turnover rate in special education positions is high (Mainzer, Deshler, Coleman, Kozleski, & Rodriguez-Walling, 2003). Not surprisingly, districts are having more and more difficulty finding qualified applicants for special education positions.

Regardless of the confusion and the emphasis on noncategorical services, specialists are needed within special education. Take, for example, the field of learning disabilities, which serves the largest subpopulation of students with disabilities. Specialists are needed in this field for a variety of reasons. First, recent research shows that a large majority of students with learning disabilities can be taught the basic skills associated with reading, writing, solving math problems, listening, and speaking if certain instructional methods are used (Vaughn, Gersten, & Chard, 2000). Proper use of these methods requires in-depth training that involves practice as well as feedback from someone who knows how to use them. Nevertheless, many individuals graduating from professional development programs lack the competencies for teaching students with learning disabilities these basic skills (Otis-Wilborn & Winn, 2000).

Second, research has also shown that students with learning disabilities who have learned the basic skills associated with reading, writing, math, and speaking can learn the more complex skills and strategies needed for success in high school and postsecondary school. They also can succeed at a level that is comparable to typically achieving peers in these educational settings (Schumaker & Deshler, 1992). Again, however, the individuals who are to teach these skills and strategies to students with learning disabilities need extensive training.

Third, research is showing that the kind of instruction that enables students with learning disabilities to be successful must be intensive and

explicit. Specifically, students with learning disabilities must have many opportunities to practice and receive feedback on a daily basis, and teachers must focus on the mastery of the skills and strategies for individual students (Deshler et al., in press).

Unfortunately, the conditions for this type of instruction are rarely present in today's schools. For example, in general education classrooms, which contain heterogeneous groupings of students (including those who learn quickly), instruction moves forward regardless of what each student has mastered. Also, because of the number of students enrolled in these classes, the provision of meaningful individual feedback is difficult to arrange. Additionally, general education classes often focus on learning subject-matter information rather than learning skills such as reading, especially in grades where most students have already acquired those skills.

Sometimes these conditions are not present in noncategorical special education programs either. Teachers often state that because of the mix of students within each class hour, there is no time to provide the intensive instruction that students with learning disabilities need. They find themselves dealing with the latest crisis, often related to a student with emotional problems, and unable to devote the time and effort necessary for intensive instruction.

Fourth, research is showing that there is no quick fix for students with learning disabilities. These students need special types of instruction until they learn all of the skills necessary for success at the secondary and postsecondary levels. If specialized instruction proceeds intensively across the grades for at least an hour a day, many students with learning disabilities can learn these skills by the 10th or 11th grade (Schumaker & Deshler, 1992). Thereafter, their performance must be carefully monitored and assistance provided as needed. This means that learning disabilities specialists must be available across the grades to teach these students the skills and strategies they need to be successful lifelong learners in today's competitive world.

Clearly, individuals with learning disabilities need learning disabilities specialists, just as students with other exceptionalities need specialists who know how to meet their unique needs. Unfortunately, today's high school teachers and administrators often find themselves working in conditions that make providing their students with the "appropriate instruction and support" very difficult—in some cases, impossible. Some indications of the adverse conditions that educators face were recently reported by the Council for Exceptional Children in its report *Bright Futures for Exceptional Learners: An Agenda to Achieve Quality Conditions for Teaching and Learning* (Kozleski, Mainzer, & Deshler, 2000). This report was the product of a presidential commission that studied the conditions that today's teachers face in trying to provide quality instruction to our country's most challenged learners. Although the report focuses primarily on the challenges that special education teachers face in meeting the needs

of students with disabilities, its conclusions reflect the mounting pressures that all teachers face in meeting the needs of increasingly diverse student populations.

The concerns discussed in the report were identified as accounting for the fact that special educators are leaving the teaching profession at almost twice the rate of general educators. To fill the void, school districts often recruit inexperienced or unqualified teachers to teach some of the most difficult-to-teach students. In light of this reality, the presidential commission concluded that "the special education field is facing a crisis of capacity: more students and a growing demand for special educators. To stem the loss of our most accomplished special educators, the field must understand the underlying reasons for the attrition rates (these issues) are placing an oppressive burden on educators and create the need for action" (Kozleski et al., 2000, p. 22). Among the most pressing concerns raised in the report are the following:

• *Ambiguous and competing responsibilities:* Special educators face ambiguous, conflicting, and fragmented expectations from other educators, families, administrators, and the public. The shift in the way special educators spend their time is a reflection of the significant changes that have occurred in the roles of these teachers. Many came into the field expecting to work intensively with a small group of students with exceptional needs. Intensive instruction has been the hallmark of special education. However, 68% of special educators report that they spend less than two hours per week in individual or small-group instruction with their students. Increasingly, special educators are expected to engage in collaboration, coteaching, coaching, and mentoring.

• *Overwhelming paperwork:* One of the most frequently reported barriers to quality teaching is the oppressive amount of paperwork necessitated by federal and state regulations. While special educators applaud the important role of IEPs, they struggle with the amount of clerical work that the process requires. The average length of the typical IEP is 8 to 16 pages, with an estimated four hours of premeeting planning time going into each IEP conference. The majority of special educators report spending one day or more per week on paperwork, and 83% report spending one half to one and a half days per week on IEP-related meetings. IEPs, however, are just the beginning of paperwork responsibilities for educators. Many teachers reported that they are expected to do considerably more record keeping today to "keep the school system out of a lawsuit."

• *Inadequate district and administrative support:* Many administrators lack the knowledge, skills, and time to support services for students with exceptionalities. Some of this may be tied to the fact that licensing for administrators rarely addresses the knowledge and skills that administrators need to provide effective leadership for establishing and running effective programs on behalf of exceptional learners. Additionally, special

educators report that they often do not have the necessary materials they need to provide quality instruction. In many schools, the special education program is still the last on the list for books, instructional materials, classroom space, and equipment. To make up for some of these shortages, teachers regularly spend as much as $500 each of their own money on classroom supplies and materials.

• *Significant teacher isolation:* Special educators report being isolated from both their special education and general education colleagues. With few opportunities to collaborate, this sense of separation is often combined with a feeling of powerlessness to participate in, let alone influence, major decisions and policies that guide their work and things done on behalf of students with disabilities.

• *Insufficient focus on improved student outcomes.* To help each student achieve high-quality learning results, teachers must select instructional approaches and strategies that match the learning needs of individual students. Unfortunately, too many widely adopted approaches to teaching in specific content areas lack evidence of successful student outcomes. Furthermore, many learning approaches, materials, and interventions are ineffective for students with disabilities. In spite of available research identifying teaching methods and strategies that produce learning results, valuable instructional time is spent using weak teaching strategies (Kozleski et al., 2000, pp. 4–5).

In summary, students with disabilities need people with the knowledge and skills to teach them what they need to know to be successful learners; they need people who can focus their attention on them and provide them with the intensive instruction and feedback they need; they need people who can set up instructional conditions that are conducive to their learning; and they need sustained contact with a series of such teachers across the grades. Unfortunately, because of the current confusion over special education teachers' roles and the emphasis on generalization rather than specialization in teacher preparation programs, many students with disabilities do not have access to teachers who are specially trained to teach them. In addition, because special education teachers often labor under conditions that are not conducive to optimal learning, and because they often do not receive support from their administrators, even teachers who are trained to provide research-based instruction often cannot implement it.

CULTURAL AND LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY

Another major trend that impacts high school students with disabilities and their special and general education teachers relates to the dramatic increase in diversity among the U.S. student population. Because of the increase in cultural and linguistic differences among students, the prevailing

context of many high schools is dramatically different from previous decades. In 1998, almost 40% of all public school students were students of color, and nearly 25% of those students were living in households where languages other than English are spoken (Mazzeo, Carlson, Voekl, & Lutkus, 2000).

Additionally, the composition of the population of students with disabilities is changing. In fact, 1996 National Assessment of Education Progress assessment data indicated that one out of every five (20%) limited English proficiency students was also classified as having a disability (Mazzeo et al., 2000). Furthermore, an analysis of special education prevalence data shows that, in some states, as many as 27% of students with limited English proficiency receive special education services. These rates are significantly higher than the national disability prevalence rate of 12% (Robertson, Kushner, Starks, & Drescher, 1994).

Clearly, these increased numbers of English-language learners pose complex challenges in terms of referral, assessment, and instruction. For example, studies of the referral, assessment, and placement of culturally and linguistically diverse learners with disabilities indicate that many teachers and support personnel are unable to distinguish linguistic differences and characteristics of second-language acquisition from language or learning disorders (Ortiz, Garcia, Wheeler, & Maldonado-Colon, 1986; Wilkinson & Ortiz, 1986). As a result, many such learners are inaccurately labeled as having disabilities.

Regardless of the difficulties inherent in educating these students, the prevailing notion is that they are to receive the same education and assessments as other students. The Improving America's Schools Act, for example, encouraged educators to serve students with limited English proficiency in general education classrooms whenever possible to ensure their access to the general education curriculum. Additionally, increased expectations for culturally diverse learners are clearly manifested in curriculum standards (that is, goals that indicate what students should have learned upon completion of their public school education) that guide the work of general education teachers. These standards have been developed and promoted by a range of professional organizations for *all* children. For example, the authors of the Standards for the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics stated, "We believe that *all* students can benefit from an opportunity to study the core curriculum specified in the *Standards*" (1989, p. 259). The staff of the National Center for History in the Schools stated, "A reformed social studies curriculum should be required of *all* students in common, regardless of their 'track' or further vocational and educational plans" (Pyne, Sesso, Ankeney, & Vigilante, 1992, p. 9). Members of the National Committee on Science Education Standards and Assessment stated, "The commitment to science for all implies inclusion not only of those who traditionally have received encouragement and opportunity to pursue science, but of all racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities,

and those with limited proficiency in English" (1993, p. 1). Finally, members of the National Council of Teachers of English (1996) stated that their goal is to promote equality of educational opportunity and higher academic achievement for *all* students. These pronouncements clearly indicate that general education teachers are expected to adjust the nature of their instruction to meet the needs of all students, including those with disabilities and those who are bilingual.

Additionally, these students are expected to take part in the same types of assessments as other students. Both the *21st Annual Report to Congress* (U.S. Department of Education, 1999) and the National Association for Bilingual Education (1999) emphasized the need to include limited English proficiency and bilingual students in state and national assessments. They also emphasized the need to provide these students with accommodations or alternative assessments similar to those given to students with disabilities.

The change in the composition of the student population in recent decades has had several implications for high school students with disabilities. First, the composition of general education classes is more diverse. Not only are classes filled with a variety of learners (high achievers, typical achievers, low achievers, and students with disabilities); they are also filled with students who speak a variety of languages and have a variety of background experiences. In some schools in California, more than 100 languages are spoken by students (Williams, personal communication, 1999). This puts tremendous pressure on general education teachers as they try to deliver instruction in their courses. The likelihood that these teachers will be able to give attention to individuals with disabilities who already speak English is diminished if they also have to focus on students who cannot speak English.

Second, the composition of any special education class will be more diverse. Again, special education teachers who once may have had time to teach students learning strategies may now have to devote a great deal of time to teaching these students how to read, speak, and write English. Thus, the presence of students who cannot speak English well may have a deleterious effect on the amount of time and attention that can be devoted to students with disabilities.

THE CLIMATE OF VIOLENCE WITHIN TODAY'S SCHOOLS

Another major trend in high schools, which may or may not be associated with the diversification of the student population and tensions among student subgroups, has been an overall change in the way students treat each other. Aggressive, antisocial, and violent behavior is a reality in today's high schools. The National Association of School Psychologists

estimates that, every day, 160,000 students stay home from school because of a fear of bullies (Vail, 1999). In a 1993 survey of 6,504 6th- through 12th-grade students in the United States, 71% reported that bullying, physical attacks, or robbery had happened at their school (Nolin & Davies, 1993). Similarly, in another study, 77% of the respondents indicated that they had been victims of bullies at school (Vail, 1999). Although a recent report for the U.S. Department of Justice suggested that violent crime among juveniles is decreasing, it also noted that 47% of all teens believed their schools were becoming more violent (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 1999). The authors of the report suggested that a gap exists between statistics related to youth and school violence, what students think of their schools, and what Americans think is or could be happening in their children's schools. They stated, "Sadly, many of the policy changes being enacted across the country are based on policymakers' sense of adult perceptions, and not the actual incidence of crime, or the experiences of children in school" (Brooks et al., 1999, p. 8).

Indeed, the statistics on violent crime rates may not tell the whole story. Researchers who monitor school climate suggest that it is more hazardous than in previous years and that bullying is rampant (Limber & Nation, 1998; Portner, 2000). Among males in some high schools, as many as 21% reported having seen a person sexually assaulted; 82% reported having witnessed a beating or mugging in school; 46% reported having seen a person attacked or stabbed with a knife; and 62% said that they had witnessed a shooting (Singer, Anglin, Song, & Lunghofer, 1995). Similarly, in a survey of junior high and high school students, Limber and Nation (1998) reported that 88% had witnessed bullying and 77% had been victimized by bullies. These authors further noted that bullying occurs more frequently on school grounds than on the way to or from school. In contrast, the results of a National Household Education Survey taken in 1993 revealed that 20% of high school students were worried about becoming victims at school, 8% reported they had been personally victimized, and 6% reported having been bullied at school. Thus, bullying seems to be more frequently reported in recent surveys. Unfortunately, student surveys suggest that teachers seldom discuss bullying in class and seldom intervene effectively when problems occur (Banks, 2000). When adults do become involved, their interventions often make the situation worse (Vail, 1999). Indeed, bullying is often underreported, minimized, or unacknowledged by school staff members (Vail, 1999).

This is cause for concern. High schools have become fearful and unhappy places for many students. Victims' grades deteriorate, and their fear often leads to absenteeism, truancy, or dropping out of school (Vail, 1999). Some authors have suggested that victims run an increased risk of isolation at school (Banks, 2000) and mental health problems, as well as an increased likelihood that they, too, will commit acts of violence (America's Children, 2000; Davis, Nelson, & Gauger, 2000). Victims of bullies report

higher levels of loneliness, distress, and negativity toward school than nonvictims (Kochenderfer & Ladd, 1996), and, as adults, victims of bullying are at an increased risk for depression, poor self-esteem, and additional mental health problems (Limber & Nation, 1998). More alarming are reports that children who are bullied are more likely to commit suicide (Portner, 2000). According to Portner, childhood suicide has tripled during the past 30 years and is the third-leading killer of 10- to 19-year-olds in the United States. However, only 1 in 10 schools has a plan to prevent it.

This overall change in high school climate can have an especially devastating effect on students with disabilities, who often are isolated, alienated, and experience difficulty becoming an integral part of the high school community. In fact, students with disabilities have been consistently found to be rejected by their peers (Gresham & Reschly, 1986), bullied more than their peers (Sabornie, 1994), and ignored and treated in negative ways within cooperative groups (Vernon, Schumaker, & Deshler, 1994). They also have fewer social skills than their peers (Hazel, Sherman, Schumaker, & Sheldon, 1986). Some investigators have reported that students with disabilities in inclusionary settings experience heightened feelings of "disconnectedness" (King-Sears & Cummings, 1996). Given the current climate within high schools, one could predict that students with disabilities might fall prey to loneliness (Margalit & Levin-Alyagon, 1994), victimization (Sabornie, 1994), and alienation (Bryan, 1986) even more than ever before.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY DYNAMICS

Besides the contextual factors present in today's schools, how well high school students perform academically and how well they deal with the uncertainties and pressures of adolescence are influenced, in a significant way, by the nature of their family situation and the quantity and quality of interactions with adults in their lives. Two factors in particular have contributed to increased instability in the homes of U.S. teenagers during the past quarter of a century: poverty and the absence of parents.

With regard to poverty, numerous research studies have indicated that economic hardship or poverty at the family and neighborhood level affect adolescent mental health and school achievement. In 1997, the U.S. Census Bureau revealed that when poverty was defined as an annual income of $16,036 or below for a family of four, 35.6 million Americans were found to be living below the poverty line. Poverty rates were three to four times higher for black youth, five times higher for female-headed families, and consistently higher in nonmetropolitan areas (Dalaker & Naifeh, 1998).

Other variables seem to interact with poverty to impact children. For example, the duration of poverty, family conflict rates, and the presence of maternal depression and family violence are all variables that can

significantly influence the magnitude and type of impact that poverty has on children and adolescents (Garrett, Ng'andu, & Ferron, 1994).

Indeed, the duration of economic deprivation is often neglected as an important variable influencing the effects of poverty. For adolescents, the number of years that the family lives in poverty is a highly significant predictor of school attainment and early career outcomes (Corcoran, Gordon, Laren, & Solon, 1992). In terms of onset, the combination of family poverty and welfare use during adolescence has been shown to be a significant predictor of increased high school drop-out rates (Haveman, Wolfe, & Spaulding, 1991).

Predictably, studies have shown that economic stress adversely influences the quality of family relationships (Elder, Conger, Foster, & Ardelt, 1992; Voydanoff, 1990). Poverty is directly linked to depression and loneliness in adolescents because youth are significantly affected by the disruptions in parent–child relations caused by parental preoccupation with the economic needs of the family (Flanagan, 1990; Lempers, Clark-Lempers, & Simons, 1989). For example, in one study of 378 white families, economic stress was associated with the number and severity of parent–adolescent conflicts and marital discord (Conger, Ge, Elder, Lorenz, & Simons, 1994). These conflicts often were manifested as parent hostility toward the adolescent, which was associated with increased risk that the adolescent would develop behavioral problems (Conger et al., 1994). Additionally, families with youth with special needs are more likely to demonstrate conflict or aggression in their interactions than other families (Robinson & Jacobson, 1987).

Economic hardships are particularly difficult for single mothers. The effects of poverty and sustained unemployment are often manifested in increased levels of depression experienced by mothers, as well as levels of punishment given to adolescents in their homes. In turn, the adolescents of single mothers have been found to evidence higher levels of stress and depressive symptoms than other adolescents living in poverty (McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994).

Finally, according to the *Nineteenth Annual Report to Congress* (U.S. Department of Education, 1997), family poverty is closely linked to the increased likelihood of disabilities and participation in special education (LaPlante & Carlson, 1996; McLoyd, 1998). In an analysis of the National Health Interview Survey of 25,000 households from 1983 to 1996, researchers concluded that the odds of having a child with a disability were 88% higher in a single-parent household than in a two-parent household and that poverty was the most significant predictor of disability status (Fujiura & Yamaki, 2000).

Closely related to the adverse effects of family poverty are the effects of the neighborhood in which a youth resides and associates (Mayer & Jencks, 1989). Unfortunately, as a result of structural changes in postindustrial society, there has been an increase in the number of poor and jobless

families in inner-city neighborhoods. Neighborhoods with poverty rates of 40% or more are often termed "ghetto" neighborhoods (Wilson, 1991). The number of poor neighbors becomes more important for children as they enter school, and especially as they reach adolescence (Duncan, Brooks-Gunn, & Klebanov, 1994). A poor neighborhood is more likely to have a substantial number of youth who are using drugs, having early unprotected sexual intercourse, and dropping out of school (Crane, 1991). All of these factors tend to negatively influence adolescent behavior (Steinberg, 1998). Neighborhood poverty has been found also to have significant implications for students with disabilities. Namely, these students experience more stress, victimization, and violence because of the deleterious effects of violence and poverty in their neighborhoods (Groves, Zuckerman, Marans, & Cohen, 1993; Osofsky, 1994).

With regard to their home lives, many adolescents experience uncertainty and disruption and have parents who are largely absent from their lives (Stepp, 2000). Whether they are victims of the dramatic increase in the divorce rate in American families (Holtz, 1995) or circumstances that allow them limited access to their parents, adolescents are increasingly experiencing a significant void in adult role models in their lives. Economic pressures are keeping parents in the workplace for longer hours (Oliver, 1999) and requiring both parents to be engaged outside the home for a significant portion of the day. For example, only one in five teenagers report spending time with their fathers daily (Steinberg, 1998). In a classic study on adolescent activities, Csikszentmihalyi and Larson (1987) found that adolescents spent only 4.8% of their time with parents and 2% of their time with adults who were not their parents. In short, as youth move into their teenage years, there is a marked separation from significant adults in their lives.

Hersch (1998) describes the effects of this separation as follows:

> America's adolescents have become strangers. They are a tribe apart; somewhere around age 14 the nation's kids slip into the netherworld of adolescence and estrangement. Today's teens have grown up in the midst of enormous social change that has shaped, reshaped, distorted, and sometimes decimated the basic parameters for healthy development. They live in families that have difficulty fitting in child rearing—[child rearing] needs to compete with the energies put into earning a living. At a time when teens need role models to emulate, the adults around them seem to be moving targets. (p. 147)

Hersch (1998) further argues that because of the altered dynamics within many homes and extended families, teenagers often experience a significant sense of disconnection from adults who, in previous generations, played a central role in the lives of adolescents.

The teens of the 1990s were more isolated and more unsupervised than other generations. Today, mom is at work. Neighbors are often strangers.

Relatives live in distant places. This changes everything. It changes access to bed, the liquor cabinet, and cars. These days, kids can more easily be good or bad without others knowing about it. Exchanges do not take place between generations. Conversations do not get held; the guidance and the role modeling are not taking place. The wisdom and traditions are no longer filtering down. How can teens imitate and learn from adults if they seldom talk to them? What kids need from adults is not just rides, pizza, and chaperones. They need the telling of stories and close, ongoing contact so that they can learn and be accepted. Without a link across generations, kids only learn from their peers. In the absence of a community within the family and the neighborhood, students have separated themselves and set up their own community as "a tribe apart!" (Hersch, 1998, p. 153).

In short, one of the major struggles that teenagers face is a lack of connection to significant traditions and older mentors. Related to this void is the noted decrease in teenage involvement in extracurricular school activities (Stepp, 2000). Increasingly, many teenagers find meaningful relationships and interests in the mall or in groups (in some cases, gangs) that are set apart from the formal fabric of the high school scene (Brand & Partee, 2000). Indeed, today's adolescents often learn to depend on each other for the sense of community they long for and often do not find within their families. Regrettably, some of the role models that they find among their counterparts are not always positive. In many cases, youth find few individuals or groups with whom to associate and experience a significant sense of isolation and aloneness (Hersch, 1998).

To summarize, the effects of poverty and disrupted home lives on adolescents can be devastating in terms of their feelings of stability and connectedness. If adolescents who are poor live in poor neighborhoods, have little contact with their parents, have home lives marked by conflict, have no other positive role models with which to connect, and also have disabilities, their chances of success in the complex environment of today's high schools are diminished. Take, for example, the academic demand that they complete two to three hours of homework per day. If their home lives are chaotic, stressful, and conflictual, they will not be able to concentrate well enough to do homework. If their study time is not structured and supervised, and if assistance is not available to them when they encounter difficulty, they are not likely to complete their assignments. Thus, adolescents with disabilities, many of whom come from poor families, seem to be at a particular disadvantage because they are the very students who need the most adult support and stability.

CONCLUSION

Although federal mandates are in place requiring that students with disabilities have real access to the general education curriculum and receive

the assistance they need to succeed within that curriculum, many other contextual factors present in today's high school serve as barriers to these students' success. First, for the most part, state standards are driving the high school curriculum. The demands associated with required high school courses are complex and difficult enough that most students with disabilities, given their skill deficits, cannot meet them. Second, there is an absence of comprehensive service delivery systems and confusion about the role of special education teachers. Instead of focusing their time and energy on using validated instructional methods to provide students with disabilities the intensive instruction and assistance they need to become independent learners, these teachers are often acting as aides in general education classrooms, dealing with paperwork, teaching watered-down courses, or tutoring students. Third, the diversity of today's student population adds a new set of challenges for teachers who are already stressed by the new levels of accountability to which they are answerable. Fourth, the social climate of today's high schools often is not conducive to helping students feel part of the school community and motivated to learn. The frequency of bullying is growing, and many students live with fear as a daily part of their lives. Further, the culture of negativity prevents many students from even trying to do schoolwork. Finally, poverty, chaotic home lives, problematic neighborhoods, and the absence of adults in many teenagers' lives create a context within which many students have difficulty concentrating and performing academically.

These serious contextual conditions must be met with serious interventions if the nine outcome goals in IDEA 1997 are to be met. We offer the following recommendations for creating a better context in which to ensure that adolescents with disabilities succeed in high school. These recommendations are based on the assumption that high expectations will be maintained for students with disabilities. Further, they must be accompanied by equal access for these students to a standards-based curriculum. Finally, the recommendations that have emerged from this research synthesis build on and support those highlighted by the recently published document from the Center for Policy Research on the Impact of General and Special Education Reform (Dailey et al., 2000).

- The IEP should be the tool for negotiating, reconciling, and determining supports needed for students with disabilities to participate within a standards-based curriculum.
- Preservice and inservice professional development experiences should prepare general education teachers to deal with the demanding realities of implementing a standards-based curriculum in a manner that allows diverse groups of students to be successful.
- Preservice and inservice professional development experiences should prepare special education teachers to provide the types of

specialized instruction that subgroups of students with disabilities need to be successful in a standards-based curriculum.

- Districts should experiment with models for organizing high schools as interdepartmental and interdisciplinary structures that bring general and special educators together in planning and instructional configurations that optimize student performance.
- Comprehensive service delivery models based on research-validated methods must be made available so that students with disabilities receive learner-friendly instruction in their required courses, as well as intensive instruction in the skills and strategies they need to be successful in those courses. They also need appropriate homework assistance so that they can become independent learners who are capable of motivating themselves to learn and complete their work, regardless of the conditions around them. Additionally, these models must provide students with disabilities with instruction in how to deal with the negative social culture prevalent in many schools so that they can respond in productive ways to bullying and negativism and build positive relationships with other students and mentoring relationships with adults.

Insofar as a central goal of IDEA 2004 is to improve the academic outcomes of students with disabilities, and given that this improvement must take place within the larger context of standards-based reform efforts, educators must use instructional practices that have the greatest probability of preparing students to successfully respond to these demanding standards and compete with typically achieving peers. Indeed, *real* access to rigorous general education curricula must make available the instruction, supports, and accommodations necessary to ensure these students' academic success, as well as their feelings of connection to their school community.

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