



NDSC Position Statement on Inclusive Education

The National Down Syndrome Congress (NDSC) believes that all students, including those with Down syndrome, have the right to an education designed to help them make progress in the general education curriculum for the grade in which they are enrolled, should have an opportunity to meet the requirements for a regular high school diploma, and should be prepared to pursue postsecondary education and/or competitive integrated employment. In addition, except in rare circumstances, students with Down syndrome should be educated in the general education classroom, with appropriate services, supplementary aids and supports, in the school the student would've attended if not for the disability. Alternative placements should be considered only when education in the general education classroom cannot be satisfactorily achieved because of a specific issue related to the child's disability and not because the system is failing to provide the services, supplementary aids and supports needed for a free, appropriate public education. Decades of research demonstrate that students with disabilities and their peers benefit academically and socially and have improved long-term outcomes when educated using inclusive best practices.¹

NDSC recognizes that parents and self-advocates can and do make a variety of decisions about educational placements based upon individual needs. However, we also recognize that those who are seeking an education in the general education classroom face significant systemic obstacles. (Recent studies demonstrate that only 17% of students in the intellectual disability category under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and 3% of students who are taking state alternate assessments are being educated 80% or more of the day in the general education classroom.)² Therefore, NDSC must work to promote policies that support inclusive education opportunities for students with Down syndrome, including the Least Restrictive Environment provisions in IDEA that consider the general education classroom as the presumed placement unless it is determined that a particular student cannot be educated satisfactorily in that environment even with supplementary aids and services.

NDSC is committed to advancing policies that:

- Recognize all students with Down syndrome as general education students first, who also happen to receive special education services, and therefore must benefit from the high

¹ *The Segregation of Students with Disabilities*, Chapters 5 and 6, National Council on Disability
https://ncd.gov/sites/default/files/NCD_Segregation-SWD_508.pdf

² *Where Students with the Most Significant Cognitive Disabilities Are Taught*
Implications for General Curriculum Access, [Harold Kleinert](#), [Elizabeth Towles-Reeves](#), [Rachel Quenemoen](#),
[Martha Thurlow](#), [Lauren Fluegge](#), [Laura Weseman](#), [Allison Kerbel](#),
<http://www.ncscpartners.org/Media/Default/PDFs/Resources/NCSC%20LRE%20Article%20Exceptional%20Children%20EC%201670%20APA.pdf>

academic expectations for all students expressed in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), as well as their rights under IDEA (including when public funds are used to educate them in private schools);

- Provide training opportunities for administrators, teachers, and specialized instructional support personnel to have the pre-service preparation and ongoing professional development to implement Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports and Universal Design for Learning (www.udlcenter.org), and provide the necessary accommodations, modifications and other supports to ensure progress in the grade level general education curriculum alongside nondisabled peers to the maximum extent possible;
- Evaluate students with Down syndrome for – and give them access to any tools and services needed for communicative competence;
- Fully inform self-advocates and their parents as members of the IEP team;
- Align the IEP planning process with the academic and functional goals needed for a life of integration in all aspects of the community: for elementary, secondary and postsecondary education, social life, independent living, and employment for the same wage and opportunities for advancement of any other in that position (competitive integrated employment);
- Prepare students with Down syndrome for self-determination and self-advocacy at as young an age as possible;
- Prevent the use of restraint, seclusion and other aversive interventions that deny people their humanity and rob them of their dignity;
- Enable students with Down syndrome to access extra-curricular activities provided by the school, with supplementary aids and services as needed;
- Prepare students with Down syndrome for inclusive postsecondary education and competitive integrated employment prior to leaving secondary school, with the development of job skills being accomplished through paid apprenticeships, work-based learning opportunities and other integrated job opportunities, for pay if possible;
- Do not preclude students with Down syndrome, including those who participate in alternate assessments, from attempting to meet the requirements of a regular high school diploma;
- Enable students with Down syndrome to receive a meaningful exit credential if they do not earn a regular diploma;
- Promote the development of and funding for high-quality inclusive higher education opportunities;
- Execute a transition process that provides a smooth pathway to adult life; and
- Provide to students with Down syndrome and their families all the information needed to enable them to access adult services as they exit secondary education.