

Inclusion Versus Self-Contained Learning

By Judith S. Bloch

For parents who are struggling to make decisions for their child about classroom placement, questions abound. Self-contained or inclusionary? How to decide? What are the differences? What are the advantages/disadvantages of each?



Placement and Individualized Education Program decisions for preschoolers 3 to 5 years old, who are classified, are made by the Committee on Preschool Special Education in their school district; for a school-age child, by the Committee on Special Education. Parents often agonize about this important decision. But instead of only worrying, they can and should provide input and an informed viewpoint that helps their committee arrive at the most appropriate recommendation.

Federal law entitles a child who is classified with a disability to receive special education and/or related services in the least restrictive environment (LRE). What do you need to know to help your child have a successful educational experience? Consider the following:

- Will there be modifications in the educational environment if necessary?
- How large is the class?
- Is there a curriculum and individualized instructional strategies that satisfy the Individualized Education Program?
- Will you have opportunities to become involved in your child's education?

Integrated classes provide opportunities for children to learn and play with peers who can serve as good models. Self-contained classes are usually smaller and have a special-education teacher in charge who has training and experience working with children who present specific kinds of learning challenges.

While many educators and parents support the concept of inclusion, they also have legitimate concerns that need to be addressed before they're assured the least restrictive environment will be successful. For inclusion to work, teacher attitudes, staff ratios, class size, planning and meeting time with specialists and parents are essential considerations. With these issues addressed, the final decision becomes a little easier.

