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AUTHOR Kauffman, James M.
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ABSTRACT

Proposals for restructuring and integration of special and general education, known as the regular education initiative (REI), represent a revolution in the basic concepts related to the education of handicapped students that have provided the foundation of special education for over a century. Education policy, as presented by Presidents Reagan and Bush, has consisted of: fostering an image of achieving excellence, regardless of substantive change; federal disengagement from education policy; and block funding of compensatory programs. All three strategies are viewed as having a negative effect on programs for special needs students. Thus, the REI is considered a flawed policy initiative which focuses on a small number of highly emotional issues such as integration, nonlabeling, efficiency, and excellence for all. Further objections to the REI are that it does not have the support of critical constituencies, rests on illogical premises, ignores the issue of specificity in proposed reforms, and reflects a cavalier attitude toward experimentation and research. Several changes in direction are recommended for the achievement of meaningful reforms; these include obtaining the support of critical constituencies, increasing attention to the effectiveness of educational strategies rather than the place in which they are implemented, and focusing efforts on incremental improvements in the current system. (Author/JDD)

The Regular Education Initiative as Reagan-Bush Education Policy: A Trickle-Down Theory of Education of the Hard-to-Teach

James M. Kauffman

University of Virginia

Commonwealth Center for the Education of Teachers

Virginia Educational Policy Analysis Center

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Abstract

Proposals for radical reform or integration of special and general education, known as the regular education initiative (REI), are consistent with the Reagan-Bush administration's agenda for education. Such proposals represent a revolution in basic concepts related to the education of handicapped students which have provided the foundation of special education for over a century. As a political strategy, the REI is consistent with the Reagan-Bush tendency to focus on a small number of highly emotional issues which distract attention from deeper analysis, in this case the issues of integration, nonlabeling, efficiency, and excellence. The REI is a flawed policy initiative which does not have the support of critical constituencies. Moreover, it rests on illogical premises, ignores the issue of specificity in proposed reforms, and reflects a cavalier attitude toward experimentation and research. Because the REI represents the policy preferences of a popular administration, it is not a dead issue. If meaningful reforms are to be achieved, however, several changes in direction are necessary: obtaining the support of critical constituencies, increasing attention to the effectiveness of educational strategies rather than the place in which they are implemented, and focusing efforts on incremental improvements in the current system.

The Regular Education Initiative as Reagan-Bush Education Policy: A Trickle-Down Theory of Education of the Hard-to-Teach

Proposals for radical restructuring of special and general education, now generally known as the regular education initiative (REI), suggest a dramatic shift in policies governing the treatment of students with special needs. Federal education policy has been altered substantially by the Reagan-Bush administration, and these policy changes will be felt well beyond the Reagan years (Astuto & Clark, 1988; Clark & Astuto, 1988; Verstegen, 1987; Verstegen & Clark, 1988). Special education has so far successfully resisted consolidation strategies, one of the hallmarks of Reagan-Bush attempts to reduce federal expenditures for social programs. The REI is, however, consistent with the Reagan-Bush policy objectives of reducing federal influence and expenditures for education, which have resulted in declining federal support for programs designed to ensure equity in education of the disadvantaged and handicapped. I will show that it is, in fact, consistent with the conservative agenda for economic and social reforms.

One of the primary hypotheses on which the REI is based is that students with disabilities would be best served by the improvement of education for all students such that students of every description are fully integrated into regular classes, no student is given a special designation (label), costs are lowered by the elimination of special budget and administrative categories, the focus is on excellence for all, and federal regulations are withdrawn in favor of local control. This hypothesis is parallel to Reagan-Bush economic theory, often known colloquially as a "trickle-down" theory, which is based on the presumption that the greatest benefits will be accrued indirectly by economically disadvantaged citizens under a policy designed to benefit more advantaged citizens directly. Implementation of economic policies based on trickle-down theory has produced a mighty river of prosperity for America's most advantaged citizens, but only dust for many who are homeless, poor, hungry, or otherwise markedly economically disadvantaged (see Minarik, 1988). Implementation of education policies based on a trickle-down hypothesis will very likely produce parallel results for those students who learn most easily and those who are most difficult to teach--high performers will make remarkable progress, but the benefits for students having the most difficulty in school will never arrive. Ironically, some of the most vocal advocates of the REI are special educators who appear to be apolitical or politically liberal and

who seem unaware of the fact that the reforms they support are part of a conceptual revolution, a political strategy, and a policy initiative, all of which are inimical to improvement of services to handicapped and at-risk students.

The REI as Conceptual Revolution

Those advocating radical reform of special education suggest revolutionary changes in the way educators think about the problems of teaching and managing classes in which there is extreme diversity. They reject assumptions that have been the foundation of special education services in American public schools for over a century (cf. Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988). These foundational ideas include the following:

1. Some students are very different from most in ways that are important for education, and special education--not the usual or typical education--is required to meet their needs. In the context of public education, these students should be identified as exceptional. Excluding gifted and talented students, exceptional students are handicapped.

2. Not all teachers are equipped to teach all students. Special expertise is required by teachers of exceptional students because such students present particularly difficult instructional problems. Most teachers are neither equipped by training nor able in the context of their usual class size to ensure an equal educational opportunity for handicapped students.

3. Students who need special education, as well as the funds and personnel required to provide appropriate education for them, must be clearly identified to ensure that exceptional students receive appropriate services. Special services will be compromised or lost unless both funding and students are specifically targeted.

4. Education outside the regular classroom is sometimes required for some part of the school day to meet some students' needs. Removal of an exceptional student from the regular classroom may be required to (a) provide more intensive, individualized instruction, (b) provide instruction in skills already mastered or not needed by nonhandicapped students in the regular class, or (c) ensure the appropriate education of other students in the regular classroom.

5. The options of special education outside the regular classroom and special provisions within the regular classroom are required to ensure equal education-

al opportunity for exceptional students. The most important equity issue is quality of instruction, not the place of instruction.

Advocates of the REI urge the adoption of very different assumptions (Biklen & Zollers, 1986; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, 1989; Lilly, 1988; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Pugach, 1987, 1988; Reschly, 1988a, 1988b; Reynolds & Wang, 1983; Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Snell, 1988; Stainback & Stainback, 1984, 1987, 1988, 1989; Taylor, 1988; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1986, 1988; Wang & Walberg, 1988; Will, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989). The most radical proposals--in effect, suggestions to merge general and special education--include the following premises (see Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, 1989; Stainback & Stainback, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1988, 1989):

1. Students are more alike than they are different, even in the most unusual cases. The same basic principles apply to the learning of all students. Consequently, no truly special instruction is needed by any student. It is therefore not the case that there are different kinds of students. The exceptional-nonexceptional and handicapped-nonhandicapped distinctions are not useful for purposes of education.

2. Good teachers can teach all students; all good teachers use the same basic techniques and strategies. Teaching all students well requires that the teacher make relatively minor adjustments of strategy or accommodation for individual differences. Therefore, truly special training is not required for handicapped students or for their teachers. Special education has become a convenient way for general educators to avoid their responsibility to teach all students, leading to a decrement in quality of instruction for all students.

3. All children can be provided a high quality education without identifying some students as different or special and without maintaining separate budgets, training programs, teachers, or classes for some students. Special targeting of funds for specific students is inefficient, confusing, and unnecessary. No student will be short changed in a system designed to provide a high quality education for every student.

4. Education outside the regular classroom is not required for anyone. All students can be instructed and managed effectively in regular classrooms. Moreover, the separation of students from their ordinary chronological age peers is an im-

moral, segregationist act that has no legitimate place in our free and egalitarian society.

5. Physically separate education is inherently discriminatory and unequal. The most important equity issue is the site, not the quality of instruction, for if handicapped students are educated alongside their nonhandicapped peers, then and only then can they be receiving an equal educational opportunity.

Advocates of the REI reject the current so-called "segregationist" special education and propose a new, "integrated" model in which all students are special. The proposed new special education will be completely, or at least mostly, invisible because it will retain only the best of the outmoded and flawed dual system of special education and general education.

Currently, REI advocates suggest, special education stigmatizes and segregates children needlessly and without benefiting them; it should not work because it is separate and discriminatory. The new special education will not require labeling, will not result in stigmatizing children, and will be effective because it will be an integral part of effective education for all children.

Currently, according to REI advocates, general education is rigid, ineffective, unable to tolerate any but the slightest differences among students; it cannot work because teachers are not expected to deal with difficult students. The new general education will be supple, flexible, appropriate for all children; it will be successful for all children because teachers will know and take pride in the fact that they are expected to teach every child assigned to them--to provide excellence for all and failure for none.

Some advocates of the REI have compared current special education to South Africa's policy of apartheid (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987) and to slavery (Stainback & Stainback, 1988). The conclusion of these advocates of the most radical reform is that nothing short of total integration of general and special education can work to the ultimate benefit of children. Even more moderate proposals for refo[illegible] of the relationship between general and special education (e.g., Reynolds, Wang, & Walberg, 1987; Wang, Reynolds, & Walberg, 1986, 1988; Will, 1984, 1989) include the suggestions that (1) most students currently identified as handicapped h[illegible]e only minor problems, (2) general educators can be expected to manage these problems with little assistance, (3) no reliable differences can be found between difficult-to-teach at-risk students and difficult-to-teach students identified as handicapped, (4) effective strategies for teach-

ing and managing most handicapped students in general education are readily available, and (5) the most effective way to serve most handicapped students is not to have separate special programs for them but to improve education in general. The suggestion that the general improvement of education is the best strategy for educating handicapped students--a trickle-down theory of educational benefit--is consistent with the Reagan-Bush administration's education policy and political strategy.

The REI as Political Strategy

The REI bears all the marks of the Reagan-Bush agenda for education. Admittedly, many of the proponents of the REI may not have political motivations. In fact most of the proponents of the REI, were they to compare themselves to Ronald Reagan and George Bush, probably would see themselves as representing the opposite end of the political spectrum. A closer look at the proposals known as the REI will show, however, that they are entirely consistent with Reagan-Bush policies aimed at decreasing federal support for education, including the education of vulnerable children and youth. These policies represent a shift away from the historical federal rôle of supporting compensatory programs for the most needy students (Verstegen, 1987).

One of the key players in the REI is former Assistant Secretary of Education and Director of the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Madeleine Will, a Reagan political appointee (see Will, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1989). Supporters of proposals for radical reform frequently cite her statements critical of the current "fragmented" approach to the education of handicapped and at-risk students, her questioning of the necessity of the "dual system" of special and general education, her concern about the stigmatization of students identified as handicapped, her suggestion that parents of children who are failing in school may too often want their children to qualify for special programs, her opinion that separate education is inherently unequal (based on the 1954 Supreme Court decision, Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka), and her request for increased collaboration between special and general educators (e.g., Lilly, 1983; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Reschly, 1988a; Snell, 1988; Stainback & Stainback, 1987; Wang et al., 1986, 1988). The calls for reform by the primary political appointee of the Reagan-Bush administration in special education have been consistent with Reagan-Bush policies regarding the education of disadvantaged and at-risk students. These policies have had a negative effect on funding for

students at risk, including handicapped children (Verstegen, 1984, 1985; Verstegen & Clark, 1988).

Reagan-Bush education policy consisted primarily of three strategies: (1) fostering an image of achieving excellence, regardless of substantive change, (2) federal disengagement from education policy, and (3) block funding of compensatory programs. All three strategies have had a negative effect on programs for students with special needs. The changes in education following publication of A Nation At Risk (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) consisted almost entirely of higher academic standards, emphasis on competition, calls for stricter discipline, and exhortations to teachers to do better. These changes seem to have made little difference in the actual quality of education, involving primarily the management of image and public relations (Clark & Astuto, 1988). These changes, though perhaps salutary for more advantaged and capable students, have created a mainstream ever more difficult for and less accommodating of students with special needs (Braaten, Kauffman, Braaten, Polsgrove, & Nelson, 1988; Woodring, 1989).

Federal disengagement from education policy involves scaling back the federal role and emphasizing local control (Astuto & Clark, 1988). As Verstegen (1987) notes, the Reagan-Bush move toward federal disengagement has broken with 200 years of federal concern for fostering equality and the common good, and it has endangered programs and services for the most needy of students. "The pendulum has swung, and we witness the turning back of the hands of time" (Verstegen, 1987, p. 548). The move toward block funding as opposed to separate categorical programs, supported by the argument that separate programs are duplicative and wasteful and that all students will profit from better integrated programs, has resulted in fewer dollars flowing to programs for handicapped and at-risk students. Verstegen and Clark (1988) reported that from 1981 to 1988 federal funding for elementary and secondary education dropped by 28% (in dollars adjusted for inflation); the biggest decrease (76%) was in special programs, "the heart of the block grant that was designed to support state and local efforts toward school improvement" (p. 138).

> Even the most favored programs . . . were losers. Supported by a very effective local and national lobby, education for the handicapped avoided being folded into the block grant, fought off the Administration's

> proposed budget cuts, but nevertheless lost 6% to inflation between 1980 and 1988. By contrast, compensatory education, which lacked an equally effective lobby, lost 25% during a period when the crisis in urban education led the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching to describe the students in big-city schools as "an imperiled generation." (Verstegen & Clark, 1988, p. 138)

Reagan-Bush policy initiatives were able to achieve many of their political goals in spite of their nefarious effects on equity primarily because they focused on a small number of very specific issues with high emotional appeal and offered simplistic answers to complex problems. Efficiency in an era of deficit spending, higher academic standards and tighter discipline in a time of perceived decline in student achievement and behavior, school prayer in the context of resurgent religious conservatism, and the pledge of allegiance in a time of renewed patriotism are prime examples of such issues. To the extent that emotional appeals and simplistic answers were made the focus of reform rhetoric they obscured substantive analyses; the administration was successful in selling a package of empty promises.

Advocacy for the REI rests primarily on the emotional and public relations appeal of the proposed reforms, not on logical or empirical analyses of the probable consequences of those reforms. The REI as a political strategy, then, is rhetoric organized around four primary emotion-laden topics: (1) integration (with racial integration as a metaphor for integration of the handicapped), (2) nonlabeling (especially slogans such as "rights without labels"), (3) efficiency (i.e., deregulation and decentralization), and (4) excellence for all (the capstone of a trickle-down theory of educational benefit to handicapped students).

Integration

One of the most powerful emotional appeals of the REI is the comparison of special education to racial discrimination. Will (1984) cites the Supreme Court decision in Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka and the discredited doctrine of "separate but equal" as justification for the integration of handicapped students into regular classrooms; other advocates of the REI have compared special education to apartheid (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987) and to slavery (Stainback & Stainback, 1988).

Questions about the similarities and differences between race and disability must be raised, as must questions regarding the conditions under which separate education of handicapped students entails discrimination. Are comparisons of special education to racial segregation and slavery appropriate, or are they unfitting? For several reasons, the race metaphor is an inappropriate way of thinking about disability.

First, equating ethnic origin with disability is demeaning to racial groups suffering discrimination on the basis of trivial differences, and it trivializes the needs of people with disabilities, whose differences require accommodations far more complex than disallowing skin color as a criterion for access or opportunity. Second, the physical, cognitive, and behavioral characteristics of handicapped children and youth are more complex and relevant to learning and to the function of schools in our society than is ethnic origin. Separate education may indeed be inherently unequal when separateness is determined by a factor irrelevant to teaching and learning (e.g., skin color), but separateness may be required for equality of opportunity when separation is based on criteria directly related to teaching and learning (e.g., the student's prior learning, the concepts being taught, the teacher's preparation). Were this not so, all manner of grouping for instruction would be struck down as inherently unequal. Third, skin color (the primary basis of racial discrimination) involves difference along a single dimension requiring simple adjustments of educational policy to accommodate an entire group of students; disabilities, on the other hand, are extremely diverse and require highly individualized and sometimes complex accommodations of educational programming. As Singer (1988) notes, Public Law 94-142 guarantees procedural rights, not rights to specific curricula or services, because only the procedures designed to effect appropriate education could be prescribed for so diverse a population as handicapped children. Fourth, the moral basis of the legal entitlement of handicapped students to special education (i.e., unusual or atypical, sometimes separate education in contrast to the usual or typical education, even if the typical education is of high quality) is derived from the extraordinary educational requirements imposed by their characteristics. Finally, unlike characteristics of race or ethnic origin, disabilities often are malleable. Handicapped individuals may therefore pass from one classification to another during the course of their development and education, requiring a more carefully weighed approach to legal rights involving separation.

The civil rights issue for racial and ethnic minorities is one of access to the same services provided to others regardless of their characteristics; the civil rights issue for

handicapped students, however, is one of access to a differentiated education designed specifically to accommodate their special characteristics, even if accommodation requires separation. Thus the REI advocates who appeal to Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka obfuscate civil rights issues for handicapped students. Nevertheless, the call for total integration of all handicapped students and the comparison of special education to such unsavory practices as racial discrimination and slavery have enormous emotional appeal and create the image of moral superiority for advocates of radical change. As long as advocates of the REI can brand their critics "segregationist" and alternatives to total integration as "segregationism" (Wang & Walberg, 1988) or compare special education to slavery (Biklen, 1985, Stainback & Stainback, 1988) or apartheid (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987) they maintain a significant public relations advantage, regardless of any deeper analysis of the issue of integration. This public image approach without regard for underlying substance is consistent with the Reagan-Bush approach to decision making on social issues and appears to have been supported by that administration's primary political appointee in special education, Madeleine Will.

Nonlabeling

Advocates of the REI argue that labels for handicapped students are unjustified because they require arbitrary decisions regarding relatively trivial and continuously distributed variables (e.g., Stainback & Stainback, 1984), that labeling unnecessarily stigmatizes students (e.g., Will, 1989), and that students' rights can be ensured without labels (e.g., Lipsky & Gartner, 1987). The images of capricious labeling and stigmatizing of children are extremely distasteful, and the notion of rights without labels has enormous surface appeal. Yet closer analysis of the anti-labeling rhetoric of REI advocates reveals that it is a hollow promise.

Stainback and Stainback (1984, 1989) argue that there are not two kinds of children, handicapped and nonhandicapped, because children so designated are similar in more respects than they are different and because the designations involve arbitrary decisions regarding children's levels of functioning. Their argument could be extended, of course, to apply to classification of children along any continuous dimension--tall-short, fat-thin, healthy-sick, weak-strong, old-young, or hungry-well fed, for example. It is a truism that all children share many characteristics of humanity, yet no two are exactly alike. If we do not draw distinctions among children along important dimensions, however, we do not provide for their differences. Moreover, the arbitrary choice of a criterion for definition is unavoidable for any continuously distributed variable.

Decisions to classify some babies as having low birth weight or to recognize some children as obese are not condemned merely because such decisions require an arbitrary choice of criteria involving weight or because the criterion established is less than perfectly predictive of important consequences for individuals.

Arbitrary decisions involving characteristics distributed along a continuum are frequently necessary to promote social justice, even though the arbitrary criterion is less than perfectly correlated with the performance or responsibility in question. A case in point is the voting age established for the political process. The decision to grant the right to vote to citizens 18 years and older rather than 21 was arbitrary; voting age could be changed at will. And while some 18-year-olds exercise their right with a high degree of responsibility, others do not. Moreover, only a day of life may separate one young person who is granted the right to vote from one who is denied the right, and some 14-year-olds are better prepared to vote than are many 18-year-olds. Yet, to argue against the establishment of an arbitrary criterion for voting age is to suggest that we reduce the right to vote to an absurdity. We know that suffrage for 3-year-olds would make a mockery of the democratic process. But would suffrage for 17-year-olds? Perhaps not. Where do we draw the line? Clearly, we establish an arbitrary criterion; just as clearly, we must if we care about social justice. And just as clearly we must establish arbitrary criteria for inclusion in specific educational programs if we want our education system not to mock our intelligence.

To return to the Stainbacks' argument, if there are not two kinds of children, then how many kinds are there? One? Fourteen? As many kinds as there are children? If every child is considered either the same as all others or unique for instructional purposes, what are the implications for grouping children for instruction? Should students be randomly assigned to teachers? If students are not randomly assigned, then are we not admitting that we have some basis for categories of students? A basic premise of effective education is that instructionally relevant categories of students must be identified. Although current categories of problem learners need to be refined, available data do not support the contention that these categories are unrelated to instructional needs (Keogh, 1988). Clearly, the assumptions that different kinds of students cannot be reliably distinguished and that they must not be identified needs rethinking.

The problem of stigma associated with special education labels and services is persistent. The negative aspects of labeling, one of which is stigma, appear to have been

overestimated, however, compared to the benefits (Hallahan & Kauffman, 1988; Singer, 1988). Advocates of the REI frequently opine that students experience problems because they are labeled (e.g., Biklen & Zollers, 1986). Singer observes that "the learning disabled did not create their problem; they were given a label because of their problem. By extension, taking away their label will not make their problem disappear" (1988, p. 412). Moreover, interviews with children suggest that many feel more stigmatized if they are given extra help in their regular classroom than if they are pulled out for assistance in a separate class (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). This finding lends support to Singer's (1988) observation that stigma is more a function of recognition of differences in the academic performance and social behavior of handicapped children than of the labels used for these differences. Thus, we must consider whether labels and the stigma associated with them are entirely avoidable.

Popular among advocates of the REI is the suggestion that students could be assured of appropriate educational services to meet their needs without categorical labels (Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Reschly, 1988a; Stainback & Stainback, 1984, 1985, 1987, 1989). Nevertheless, "rights without labels" appears to be a euphemism of the Reagan era, a slogan creating the image of concern for equal rights while rendering equity on a substantive level impossible. Candor compels the admission that we could not ensure the rights of disabled individuals who are not labeled--whose disabilities have become essentially invisible or unmentionable to us. One is forced logically to conclude that if "rights without labels" is a viable concept, then disabled people need only their rights to the same services as nondisabled people. But do handicapped students need only the ordinary, not special, allocations of funds, equipment, instruction, or access?

The nonsense of "rights without labels" is easily revealed by applying this slogan to a noneducational example involving labeling and the rights of people with disabilities--handicapped parking. Could people with disabilities be assured of preferential parking without labeling cars or spaces? Could unmarked spaces be effectively reserved? Could spaces be reserved for "handicapped only" without revealing which persons have a right to preferential parking? Obviously, "rights without labels" is a conundrum. Moreover, it captures the essence of the Reagan-Bush approach to equity; it is the appeal to become blind to differences, which has immediate emotional appeal but makes affirmative action, compensatory programs, and special educational accommodation impossible.

How can the rights of handicapped students be guaranteed without our talking about those students as having different needs or instructional requirements? If differences are talked about, then we label them and risk stigmatizing students; without labels we must simply ignore students' differences. This is a terrible dilemma, as Minow (1987) recognizes, but this point must not be missed: We ignore what we do not label. Some labels are known to be more accurate or more palatable or less damaging than others. Surely the most humane and least damaging labels must be sought, but to suggest that no child should be labeled handicapped or disabled or to attempt studiously to avoid all labels is clearly inane and opens the door to apathy and indifference.

Another argument of REI advocates is that too much energy and money are spent determining students' eligibility for special programs (e.g., Reschly, 1988). Without labels, advocates argue, not only could the stigma of identification be avoided but enormous economies would be effected. Yet the absence of publicly stated eligibility criteria and the evaluation and labelling they entail would mean the absence of special services or any requirement of parental participation in decision making.

> It remains unclear how students can be assured of receiving designated services if their eligibility is not determined. If eligibility decisions are not made, it might then be assumed that all students would be eligible for all services. That all students should receive all services is a proposal which can hardly be taken seriously. If all students are eligible for all services but only some students receive them, then both eligibility decisions and special services become covert . . . (CCBD, 1989, p. 204)

That covert eligibility decisions are intended by some proponents of educational reform is no longer in question. "The districts [with schools restructured for high performance] would not be required to publicly identify the students who would otherwise be segregated into special classes" (Center on Education and the Economy, 1989, p. 23). This is quite clearly an appeal to revert to the very conditions that gave rise to the Education for All Handicapped Children Act--schools could determine students' eligibility for special services without parental notification or consent.

The effects of nonlabeling were recently examined by Feniak (1988) in England and Wales. In these countries, sentiment for integration and egalitarianism in addition to concern over the stigma associated with labels led, in 1981, to the legislative abolition of categories of handicap. But, as Feniak's analysis shows, the 1981 Education Act abolishing categorical labels had precisely the opposite effect of that intended by advocates of reform. Students are still labeled, but now only covertly. Moreover, the absence of labels obscures the extent to which children's special needs are being met. Monitoring of programs designed to meet students' special needs is made impossible because insufficient records are kept regarding children's characteristics.

> It is difficult to know how students are chosen to receive either a "developmental" curriculum, a "modified" curriculum or a "mainstream plus support" curriculum since the new [reporting] format drastically reduces the amount of information which is supplied.... The net result is that the needs of these students are not being addressed (Feniak, 1988, p. 122).

Like the issue of integration, the nonlabeling issue is exploitable for its public relations value. And it is consistent with the Reagan-Bush administration's approach to equity issues, which relies on the surface appeal of nondiscrimination without analysis of the deeper meanings for individuals with a history of disadvantage.

Efficiency

REI proponents appeal to the cost savings to be reaped by restructuring what they deem to be duplicative, inefficient, and fragmented programs for handicapped and at-risk students (e.g., Center on Education and the Economy, 1989; Reynolds et al., 1987; Wang et al., 1988; Will, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1989). Their proposal is to combine administration and funding of all special or compensatory programs into a single unit. In some cases, this noncategorical approach has been extended to encompass all education funding, special and general (e.g., Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). With fewer administrative structures and regulations, these advocates argue, education will become more flexible, adaptive, efficient, and powerful. These arguments are immediately attractive to most administrators and other fiscal agents, many of whom have been persuaded of the advantages of deregula-

tion and of combining programs into bl ck grants for funding, as advocated by the Reagan-Bush administration. As r d previously, however, analyses of Reagan-Bush policies have shown that the results have been decreases in funding for programs and services for children at risk (Clark & Astuto, 1988; Verstegen, 1987; Verstegen & Clark, 1988).

Combining general and special education budgets and services or combining all compensatory programs would almost certainly have the effect of decreasing the special services available to handicapped students. Specific budget lines are set aside for whatever purposes are deemed more important. Individuals who wish to achieve a specific financial goal must scrupulously set aside funds for that specific purpose. The same principle applies to the budgets of public institutions. In this era of deficit spending, the appeal to efficiency through block funding and deregulation is politically savvy. Ironically, politically liberal proponents of the REI are supporting an initiative which policy analyses indicate is virtually certain to retard or reverse progress in providing services to handicapped students (cf. Verstegen, 1985; Verstegen & Clark, 1988).

The appeal to efficiency raises equity issues for handicapped and at-risk students, and these issues encompass more than macroanalyses of funding formulas (Colvin, 1989). The issues also demand classroom level microeconomic analyses of resource allocation. Such analyses suggest that teachers always face a dilemma in the allocation of their resources when teaching a group. Teachers must choose between (1) allocating more time to the production of expected mean outcomes for the group, which sacrifices gains of the least capable learners, or (2) allocating more time to the least capable learners to narrow the variance among students, which inevitably sacrifices achievement of students who learn most easily. Teachers can not avoid this dilemma, which would be made more painful by the inclusion of more difficult-to-teach students in regular classrooms (Gerber & Semmel, 1985; Kauffman et al., 1988). Moreover, the problem could be eased only by a massive infusion of resources into general education. In the context of scarce resources and an emphasis on competitive excellence, typically defined as higher mean achievement gains (see Center on Education and the Economy, 1989), it is not difficult to predict how most classroom teachers would most often choose to allocate their time and effort.

Excellence

The Reagan-Bush position on education was that we must focus on excellence in our schools, and that excellence and equity are not competing issues. To the extent that we can foster excellence among our best students and schools, this doctrine suggests, we will foster the same among our least capable students and our poorest schools. This trickle-down theory of education will work very well for the educationally advantaged, but not for educationally disadvantaged or handicapped students. Excellence and equity are always competing issues; what is gained in one is lost in the other. Excellence requires focusing support on the most capable learners; equity requires the opposite.

In an apparent variation on the themes of efficiency and excellence, some proponents of the REI suggest that education should be made special for all students because all students have special needs (Gartner, 1989). This would spare students the trauma of being labeled and save school districts the cost of identifying eligible students and administering special programs (see also Gartner & Lipsky, 1987, 1989; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Although every student is different from every other and every student can (and should) be recognized as an individual, the suggestion that every student be given a special education is as vacuous as the notion that all students can be above average. Moreover, the feasibility of changing general education so dramatically that what has not worked for a century will work now--providing an appropriate education for every student in general education, handicapped or not--must be questioned (Kauffman, 1988b; Singer, 1988).

The history of education does not suggest that a single program of general education has ever been so "supple" or accommodating of extreme heterogeneity of learners as to serve all students well, nor does a logical analysis suggest that such a program is possible, particularly when its focus is excellence defined as higher mean achievement. Certainly, instruction could be (and should be) improved for all students. Nevertheless, "excellence for all" is a conundrum that appeals simultaneously and contemptuously to American pride and egalitarianism. The National Center on Education and the Economy, in its publication To Secure Our Future (1989), has sketched a plan for restructuring elementary and secondary education for high performance: "The challenge is to provide an elite education fo everyone" (p. 9). As ludicrous as the notion of the ubiquitous elite may be, it is apparently proposed with no lack of seriousness and with full understanding of its public relations value.

Unless the call for excellence includes the protection of educational resources for handicapped students at the expense of possible higher mean performance for the larger student body, however, it is an appeal to widen the gap between educational haves and have nots. Unfortunately, To Secure Our Future does not propose protection of funding for handicapped students. Indeed, it proposes a program design in which "high performance schools" could combine funds for a variety of compensatory programs, including funds under the "Education for All Handicapped Act" (Center on Education and the Economy, 1989, p. 23).

The REI as a Flawed Policy Initiative

Besides the vacuousness of the political ideology driving the REI, there are at least four other reasons to question whether it can be successful in accomplishing the ostensible goals of its proponents: (1) lack of support from key constituencies, (2) the illogic of its basic premises, (3) lack of specificity in the proposed restructuring, and (4) proponents' cavalier attitude toward experimentation and research. Similar observations prompted Singer to describe the REI as "deeply flawed" (1988, p. 419).

Key Constituencies Not Involved

Perhaps the most startling fact about the REI is that it is not, as its name implies, an initiative of general educators. Rather, it represents the self-criticism of some special educators and an apparent attempt by those special educators to suggest to general educators that they must take the initiative in solving the instructional problems of handicapped and other difficult-to-teach students (Braaten et al., 1988; Singer, 1988). But, as Singer asks, "What leads special educators to believe that regular educators are willing to take back responsibility for special needs children?" (1988, p. 416). If regular classroom teachers do not assume ownership of the REI as their agenda, can it succeed? Perhaps millions of teachers could be coerced into accepting the REI as a fait accompli. But if they were so compelled, could the proposed reforms succeed in an atmosphere of coercion?

Moreover, no evidence has been brought forward to suggest that most special education teachers see the REI as their agenda or believe that it will work. How could the REI succeed without the clear consensus of practitioners? Recent surveys of hundreds of general and special education practitioners in various regions of Virginia

(Smith, 1988) and in 15 different states (Anderegg, 1989) found that most did not agree with most of the propositions on which the REI is based.

A few professional organizations (e.g., National Association of School Psychologists) and advocacy groups (e.g., National Council of Advocates for Students) have gone on record as supporting reforms associated with the REI (see Reschly, 1988a). It is important to note, however, that several professional organizations in special education, including the Council for Children with Behavioral Disorders and the Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children, have expressed grave reservations about these same reforms (CCBD, 1989; TED, 1986). Moreover, some advocacy groups (e.g., Joint Action Committee of Organizations Serving the Visually Handicapped, National Association of the Deaf) have offered testimony to Congress complaining that the "generic mainstreaming" suggested by advocates of the REI is inappropriate (Viadero, 1989).

Parents of handicapped students are a very strong advocacy group in special education, without whose support major policy changes are almost certainly doomed. Yet it seems unlikely that most parents would support the REI. A major five-year research project begun in 1982 (The Collaborative Study of Children with Special Needs; Singer & Butler, 1987) involving five large school districts from various regions of the country suggested that parents of handicapped children who are receiving special education in pull-out programs would be reluctant to see their children returned to general education.

> Regardless of site or family background, parents of special education students were generally very satisfied. They were satisfied with their children's overall education program and related services, with their social interaction with other students, with the administration and teaching in the special education program, and with the facilities.
>
> These findings are in marked contrast to parental views prior to the implementation of PL 94-142. In fact, the researchers believe that parents of special education students are more satisfied with the public

schools than parents of school children in general (Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, 1988, p. 10).

In short, proponents of the REI appear to be gambling unwisely that their proposals will be successfully implemented, for they have not built the necessary base of support among critical constituencies (Davis, 1989). The only hope of conservative politicians who support the REI appears to be that the public relations value of integration, nonlabeling, efficiency, and excellence will carry the day, for any deeper analysis of the issues may make the REI a political time bomb.

Illogical Premises

The students about whom the REI is concerned are those who general education has failed. As Keogh notes, "It is a strange logic that calls for the regular system to take over responsibility for pupils it has already demonstrated it has failed" (1988, p. 20). Advocates of the REI conclude that special education also has failed these students, both procedurally and instructionally, and that radical reform is therefore necessary to provide effective instruction and procedural protection (e.g., Biklen & Zollers, 1986; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Wang et al., 1988). Singer (1988) and others (e.g., Braaten et al., 1988; CCBD, 1989) have noted the illogic of the suggestions that (1) although special education has failed, it has insights to offer general education about how to keep students from failing and (2) procedural protections which have not worked in special education will now work in general education. A more rational suggestion is that if special education has developed powerful interventions they should first be implemented reliably in special education settings, then applied experimentally in general education. A more reasonable gamble with students' procedural rights would be first to find ways of effecting them more fully under current regulations for education of the handicapped, then to see whether they could be guaranteed in general education and with fewer regulations. Note that if proponents of the REI admit that special education has indeed developed successful interventions and procedural protections, one of their major lines of argument for reform is vitiated

Supporters of the REI argue implicitly or explicitly that general education today, compared to only a few years ago, is better equipped to learn how to deal with the problems of handicapped students. But "special education was the solution to the regular educator's thorny problem of how to provide supplemental resources to children in need while not shortchanging other students in the class. Nothing else has

happened within regular education to solve this problem" (Singer, 1988, p. 416). Keogh (1988) notes that the REI is being proposed in the context of widespread criticism of regular education and its inadequacy for pupils who do not have particular educational problems. Moreover, the instructional reforms so far implemented in general education are those known to be most likely to fail with at-risk students (Carnine & Kameenui, 1989).

In brief, the illogic of the REI is readily apparent. Its implementation would be based on a crumbling conceptual foundation and would likely compound the difficulties now experienced by general education in meeting the needs of an extremely diverse student body.

Lack of Specificity

The proposals advanced by proponents of the REI are remarkable for their lack of detail regarding critical aspects of how special and general education should be restructured. For all the talk of restructuring and redeployment of personnel, there have been few suggestions and no real specifics regarding who would be responsible for what problems or how and where services would be made available to students. Although Wang et al. (1988) and Will (1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1989) decry the lost instructional time entailed by pull-out programs, they offer no specifics regarding time saved by alternative assignment of personnel--except, of course, the implication that no instructional time is lost when no student is pulled out of one class for instruction in another place. If, however, special instruction and related services are still to be available as reform advocates suggest (i.e., special services are not to be abandoned), then it is not clear how such services would be provided without a loss in some category of regular instructional time.

Reschly's (1988a) suggestion that special education reform will be furthered by a revolution in the roles of school psychologists is an example of enthusiasm for the REI without the level of specificity needed to make the arguments for reform believable. Reschly calls for school psychologists to spend less of their time evaluating students for eligibility for special programs and more of their time consulting with teachers regarding the resolution of difficult instructional and behavior management problems. As Kauffman (1988b) pointed out, however, were the anticipated revolution in school psychology to occur, and were it to result in all school psychologists doing nothing other than consulting with teachers, the average classroom teacher could not expect more than 30 to 40 minutes of consultation per week. Whether this level of

service would be sufficient to help most regular classroom teachers cope with particularly difficult-to-teach students--especially were the number of such students in regular classrooms to be increased by the dissolution of most or all of special education--is not known but seems doubtful.

The suggestions of Reynolds et al. (1987) and Will (1984, 1989) that special education teachers' roles be restructured to include more work with regular classroom teachers and Pugach's (1988) proposal that special education be included in the training of all teachers also require considerable elaboration before they can be entertained seriously as alternatives to the current arrangement. If special education teachers were to assume more responsibility for assisting regular classroom teachers, what scheduling changes would be necessary? How much assistance (i.e., minutes per day or week of consultation) would be available to the average regular classroom teacher? If special education training were required of all teachers, how much training could be offered, and from whom? With what range of students would regular classroom teachers then be able to work successfully?

In brief, the REI appears in some respects to be a strategy without tactics, a top-down reform of education without full consideration of the implications of change for front-line educators or students. To the extent that the REI involves deregulation (or an alternative mode of regulation based on reward for high performance, as suggested by the National Center for Education and the Economy, 1989), it appears to be an expression of faith that local education agencies will find solutions to educating difficult-to-teach students within a unitary system structured for high performance--a faith not based on evidence of past success. Given the recent concern of general educators for competitive excellence, it behooves proponents of the REI to state explicitly and in considerable detail how restructuring special and general education will address the problems of students with histories of school failure.

Cavalier Attitude Toward Experimentation and Research

Critics of the REI agree that special education has serious problems which must be addressed. They do not, however, agree with many of the REI proponents' interpretations of research. Critics do not agree that research supports the following conclusions of REI advocates: (1) special education pull-out programs are not effective, (2) referrals to and placements in special education programs are out of control, (3) the stigma of identification for special education outweighs the benefits, (4) students seldom or never exit special education, or (5) tested alternatives to the current system

are available (see Anderegg & Vergason, 1988; Braaten et al., 1988; Bryan, Bay, & Donahue, 1988; Carnine & Kameenui, 1989; CCBD, 1989; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988a, 1988b; Gerber, 1988; Hallahan, Keller, McKinney, Lloyd, & Bryan, 1988; Kauffman, 1987, 1988a, 1988b, 1989; Kauffman, Gerber, & Semmel, 1988; Kauffman & Pullen, 1989; Keogh, 1988; Lieberman, 1985; Lloyd, Crowley, Kohler, & Strain, 1988; McKinney & Hocutt, 1988; Mesinger, 1985; Schumaker & Deshler, 1988; Singer, 1988; Vergason & Anderegg, in press). Indeed, these conclusions can be reached only by ignoring research supporting opposite conclusions.

The conclusion that special education resource instruction is ineffective requires that one ignore evidence from meta-analysis (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980) as well as individual studies showing that such pull-out instruction has been effective for some students (e.g., Marston, 1987-88; O'Connor, Stuck, & Wyne, 1979). The conclusion that special education referrals are out of control is not confirmed by recent data from urban schools (Buttram & Kershner, 1989). Interviews with children have shown that they do not necessarily see being pulled out of regular classes for special instruction as more embarrassing or stigmatizing than receiving help from a specialist in their regular classes (Jenkins & Heinen, 1989). Singer (1988) reviewed evidence that the percentage of handicapped students returned to general classes is not as "embarrassingly low" as critics (e.g., Gartner, 1989; Gartner & Lipsky, 1987) have charged. Alternatives to current pull-out programs are not clearly supported by research (Hallahan et al., 1988).

A careful examination of all available research reveals that the evidence regarding most aspects of special education is mixed. Research suggests the plausibility of the conclusion that special education as currently structured (though not always as practiced) can be highly effective and cost efficient. "Proponents of the [REI] argue that the best solution is to abandon the current system, but in doing so, I fear that we would be throwing out the baby with the bath water" (Singer, 1988, p. 419). A prudent approach to research of the current problems of special education would be to seek ways to make the current system more effective, as well as to seek additional alternatives to the current system (Kauffman & Pullen, in press).

Another concern of critics of the REI is the response of some REI proponents to research evidence that is not entirely supportive of their proposals and claims. For example, a meta-analysis of the efficacy of special class placement (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980) is cited by proponents of the REI (e.g., Gartner & Lipsky, 1987; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987) as evidence of "little or no benefit for students of all levels of severity

placed in special education settings" (Gartner & Lipsky, 1989, p. 13). Moreover, Gartner and Lipsky's interpretation of Carlberg and Kavale's findings is cited by other proponents of the REI in support of their contention that special classes per se have been ineffective (e.g., Lilly, 1988, Wang & Walberg, 1988). Carlberg and Kavale's analysis showed, however, that although regular classroom placement produced slightly better results than special class placement when all types of students were considered together and when students with low IQ were considered alone, special class placement produced substantially better outcomes than regular class placement for students classified as LD and ED/BD. Thus, citation of Carlberg and Kavale (1980) to support the argument that special classes for all types of mildly handicapped students are ineffective is a distortion of fact.

> For LD and BD/ED children in special classes ... an improvement of 11 percentile ranks resulted from their placement. Thus, the average BD/ED or LD student in special class placement was better off than 61% of his/her counterparts in regular class.... When exceptional children were placed in special classes on the basis of low IQ, they did not respond as well as their regular class counterparts. The situation was reversed with respect to LD and BD/ED children, who were found to show greater improvement in the special class. A 99% confidence interval around the ES [effect size] for the LD and BD/ED categories ranged from 0.7 to .75; there is a high probability that these children demonstrate a better response in special classes than their counterparts in regular classes. (Carlberg & Kavale, 1980, pp. 301-302)

The centerpiece of reform rhetoric of many REI advocates has been the Adaptive Learning Environments Model (ALEM), a program of individualization developed by Margaret C. Wang and her colleagues (e.g., Wang, 1980; Wang & Birch, 1984; Wang, Peverly, & Randolph, 1984). Reviews of the literature have concluded, however, that evaluations of ALEM suffer from very serious methodological weaknesses (Fuchs &

Fuchs, 1988a, 1988b; Hallahan et al, 1988). When calls are made for "experimental trials" regarding alternatives to the current system (e.g., Reynolds et al., 1987), "experiments" should be taken to mean well controlled studies from which one could make generalizations according to the canons of scientific research. Yet the response to criticism of ALEM research has been to skirt the issue of methodological limitations and call the position of critics "segregationism" (Wang & Walberg, 1988).

Finally, some reform advocates (e.g., Biklen, 1985; Lipsky & Gartner, 1987; Stainback & Stainback, 1988) trivialize or disparage experimental trials and empirical data, arguing that restructuring the current pull-out system is a moral imperative. Critics of the REI, on the other hand, argue that advocacy and policy regarding the education of handicapped and other difficult-to-teach students must be informed by reliable empirical data, and that moral imperatives in special education and other compensatory programs cannot be fully determined in the absence of such data (e.g., CCBD, 1989; Fuchs & Fuchs, 1988a, 1988b; Hallahan et al., 1988; Carnine & Kameenui, 1989; Lloyd et al., 1989; Singer, 1988).

Conclusions

The REI should not be questioned merely because it may have emanated in part from the Reagan-Bush administration. Rather, it should be questioned because of its insubstantial empirical and rational bases and because of where it may be moving public education, irrespective of the political orientation of its advocates. The fact that the REI is consistent with the policies of a popular previous administration and appears to be finding the favor of the Bush-Quayle administration (Miller, 1989), however, may explain why it continues to receive support from some quarters and poses a more serious challenge to education than if it had no political base. The REI, though deeply flawed, is not a dead issue.

The nature of policy options should be considered in analyzing the REI and its alternatives. Policy always represents a trade-off of benefits and relative advantages, never a final solution to the problems it is designed to address. The policy options for addressing a given problem are generated by one or more conditions which present dilemmas or points of choice--scarcity, preferences or beliefs, relative advantage, and accidental circumstances. In the case of the REI, fiscal constraints are a scarcity condition obviously motivating attempts to combine programs into more efficient

packages, regardless of the consequences for at-risk students. The belief systems represented by the REI are a peculiar case in which both conservative ideology (e.g., focus on excellence, federal disengagement) and liberal rhetoric (e.g., nonlabeling, integration) are combined to support the diminution or dissolution of a support system for handicapped students. The relative advantage given to handicapped students by the REI is primarily cosmetic; ironically, the substantive losers are those students whom the policy is ostensibly designed to benefit. Finally, the resurgence of political conservatism following a period of rapid expansion of social programs is an accidental social circumstance providing fertile ground for faulty belief systems that allow political justification for the loss of relative advantage formerly granted to persons with disabilities. More careful attention to the nature of policy options and the trade-offs entailed by the options selected for support and implementation might help us achieve more meaningful reform of education.

Meaningful reform of education cannot be achieved without ownership of that reform by the teachers who will be called upon to implement it and by the parents who support it. Attempts to reform institutions without the support of primary constituencies almost always are disasters. If the REI or any other set of proposals for reform is to have any reasonable chance of success, much more groundwork will need to be laid at the level of classroom practitioners and parents.

The REI has as its primary goal changing the place of instruction from special to regular classrooms. Special education should be pursuing the goal of more effective and humane education for handicapped students--helping these students to learn more academically, feel better about themselves and about school, and relate more adaptively to others. The primary objective should be more effective education; the secondary objective should be to provide that treatment in the least restrictive or most normalized setting. In pursuing both objectives the achievement and socialization consequences of educational options must take precedence over the immediate consequences of place or location. As noted recently by prominent behavior therapists,

> Freedom of individual movement and access to preferred activities, rather than type or location of placement, are the defining characteristics of a least restrictive environment.... Consistent with the philosophy of least restrictive yet effective treatment, exposure of an

> individual to restrictive procedures is unacceptable unless it can be shown that such procedures are necessary to produce a safe and clinically significant behavior change. It is equally unacceptable to expose an individual to a nonrestrictive intervention (or a series of such interventions) if assessment results or available research indicate that other procedures would be more effective. . . . Thus, in some cases, a client's right to effective treatment may dictate the immediate use of quicker acting, but temporarily more restrictive, procedures (Van Houten, Axelrod, Bailey, Favell, Foxx, Iwata, & Lovaas, 1988, pp. 382-383).

Given the research available today, the generalizations that education in separate classes is never effective and that effective education in regular classrooms is feasible for all handicapped students (even for all mildly and moderately handicapped students) are indefensible. A policy mandating placement of all handicapped children in general education under the assumption that pull-out programs have been shown to be ineffective for all students and that "integrated" education of all handicapped children is known to be feasible would be based on a gross misinterpretation--and a grotesque misapplication--of research.

The assumption that students with mild disabilities are also those most easily integrated into general education may not be warranted. Integration of students with severe disabilities into regular classrooms may in many cases be more feasible than integration of those with mild or moderate disabilities. Teachers and peers may more readily make allowances for the characteristic social behavior and academic performance of a student whose disability is obvious to the casual observer than for the characteristics of one whose difference is more subtle. In fact, mild or moderate but nonlabeled and persistent deviations from expected social behavior and academic performance may present the most difficult problems of teacher tolerance and peer acceptance.

Efforts should be focused on incremental improvements in the current system through research, training, careful logical analysis of strategies, and rigorous analysis of policy. Radical reforms or revolutions should be attempted only after a clear

empirical basis for such reforms has been established. Whenever possible, reliable data should be used in making decisions about the structure of special and general education. In the absence of reliable data, careful logical analyses, not presumptive assertions of moral superiority, should guide decisions. Furthermore, in evaluating learning environments for handicapped students, professional judgment alone is insufficient for decision making--parental opinion and choice regarding effectiveness and restrictiveness must be considered as well.

The REI is a complicated set of issues which demand careful analysis and challenge us to seek more effective ways of integrating many handicapped students into the mainstream. The simplistic answer to the REI of maintaining the status quo must be rejected, as must the equally simplistic notion that all handicapped students must be fully integrated into general education, regardless what the data or rational analyses suggest. The statements of Madeleine Will and other advocates of the REI notwithstanding, special education is an integral part of American public education, not a separate system. It is, indeed, an identifiable and special part of public education that can be legislated or regulated into or out of existence. But it can be erased from our consciousness and ledgers only at great peril to handicapped students. Thus, proposed reforms of public education should include revitalizing this invaluable part of the system to make it serve its special purposes more effectively rather than dismantling it. This revitalization might best be accomplished by combining a commitment to higher professional standards of training and performance for special education teachers and administrators with strategies designed to improve the effectiveness of general educators.

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