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Equity and Excellence

Finding Common Ground Between Inclusive Education and School Reform

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Here is a scene that one might find in any community where people are trying to determine what 12 years of schooling should add up to for their children: A committee of faculty, staff, and parents is trying to redefine the school's diploma in performance language. Everyone agrees that all students should be challenged to perform the best work they can do, that all students need to learn to work well individually and together, and that a diploma based on students' demonstrating and applying what they have actually learned is better than one based on rote memorization and Carnegie units. The committee also agrees that students should work hard to become proficient in key skills and competencies such as reading, writing, and using math and science for solving problems.

Despite large areas of agreement, the group has reached an impasse on deeply held but divergent views on whether one set of academic standards can be fairly applied to all students. What stymies them most is the diploma itself and what it represents. Within this group, the special education teacher, the principal, and a parent of a student with a learning disability want to make sure the new diploma respects the diversity of students and their learning styles and rewards each student for doing his or her best. These three oppose new graduation standards that discriminate against students who might never achieve some of the new, tougher requirements being proposed.

"I don't want my boy to wind up with a diploma that's got big asterisks all over it—you know, the 'Dummy Diploma,' " a parent says.

The principal supports her by saying, "We want to reward hard work and sincere effort and allow all youngsters to find different ways to show us the best they can do."

But the English teacher, the science department head, and a parent who has volunteered in programs for high-achieving students want more academic rigor in the diploma process. They bemoan the lack of intellectual challenge for students, many of whom now take advanced placement courses only because such courses look good on college applications. To them, studying subjects like Shakespeare, physics, or the Federalist debate represents a bulwark against those who would turn our education system over to a bunch of technocrats and process junkies, throwing out the classics and replacing them with software and slogans.

In some communities, this debate is fraught with deep political, religious, or cultural divisions. Elsewhere, as above, it is a discussion

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among allies in the struggle against the status quo, which both sides agree provides neither high standards nor respect for diversity. Although each side is willing to honor the ideals of the other, finding a way to combine them into a diploma package is difficult, to say the least. One reason for the difficulty is that what parents and teachers want for students falls into three complex and interconnected realms:

1. Academic content (i.e., cultural, historical, scientific information)
2. Essential skills (i.e., ways of gaining access to and working with information, ideas, and people)
3. Attitudes and values (i.e., character development and habits of mind) that reflect a diversity of abilities and allow multiple paths for students to demonstrate their achievement

Another equally thorny problem is that the goals of high standards and high achievement appear to clash with those of full equity and respect for the diverse learning styles and abilities of all students. It is hard to devise a performance-based diploma that does justice to both.

Although the scenario depicted is fictitious, it does represent attitudes that exist in communities all over the United States. In fact, during the 1993–1994 school year, a statewide New Hampshire task force sponsored by a federal school restructuring and inclusion grant was convened to grapple with these very issues in the hope of finding a solution that would not require a compromise of anyone's ideals. The group was composed of parents, teachers, college faculty, as well as consultants who were working with school districts involved in significant restructuring efforts in both general and special education. This chapter recounts the yearlong discussions of the task force members and illustrates the necessity for both "sides"—those advocating for general education reform and those concerned with inclusion—to merge their conversations for the benefit of all students.

INITIAL TASK FORCE MEETINGS MIRED IN DEBATE

Each member who joined the task force was committed to collaborating with other individuals and organizations that had students' best interests at heart, so that their combined power might have a chance to make real change happen in public education, despite powerful community resistance to new educational ideas and paradigms. As partisans for different kinds of change, they quickly discovered that they were marching to the beat of different drummers.

As administrators of the sponsoring grant, staff from the University of New Hampshire (UNH) Institute on Disability tended to view

the issue of school reform primarily through the lens of students with significant disabilities. They advocated for membership of all students, regardless of the nature of their disability (and with adequate educational support), into the general education classes to which they would be assigned if they had no disability. Despite the fact that they acknowledged that not all existing classes are high-quality learning environments for students with or without disabilities, inclusion advocates argued that real equity is not found in a perfect education but in a typical education for all students.

It was common to hear an advocate of inclusion say, for example, "Kids with disabilities have the same right to be in class with a mediocre teacher as any other kid. Let's get them all in class together, as an integral part of the regular school community. Then we can work to make those classes as good as they can be for all students."

Advocates of curricular reform and high performance standards acknowledged that a small percentage of students may never be able to reach those standards by the time they are ready to graduate. A typical comment was, "I'm sure we can find some way to acknowledge the small percentage of kids who try hard but, through no fault of their own, cannot reach the newer and higher standards. We can't abandon the concept of diploma accountability and the positive pressure it will place on the whole system just because a few kids will end up with an asterisk on their diplomas."

The first few task force meetings produced many sharp exchanges. As advocates used to defending their reforms against traditionalists within school systems, they had little patience with those who claimed to be reformers but seemed so ready to compromise on what the other side saw as *the* critical issue (i.e., full inclusion on the one hand, higher performance standards on the other). As one member put it, "We each saw ourselves as zealots for change—our kind of change—and we naturally assumed that what was crucial to our constituency must be good for everybody else in the school."

Two factors saved the effort from early disintegration. One was a fascination with the debate itself. It was, after all, refreshing to lock horns with articulate change advocates rather than with school-based resisters. A task force member reflected, "As frustrating as our sessions got, as little progress as we seemed to be making in those first few meetings, something kept us coming back. What that 'something' was, we often weren't sure. Maybe it was all the idealism."

The second factor that kept the conversation going was that a systematic plan for moving the task force meetings forward was designed by the facilitators. Rather than continuing to focus on differences, the facilitators suggested that the group take a time-out from

arguing about areas they knew were difficult to resolve and first try to establish educational principles that both groups could support.

PRINCIPLES OF SCHOOL REFORM AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION WERE DEVELOPED

The first step in this process was the development of clearly stated principles of both school reform and inclusive education. These principles, refined over the course of several meetings, are depicted in Table 1. When these lists were finalized, the group could see that there

Table 1. Principles of school reform and inclusive education

Some principles of school reform
1. Schools should focus on helping adolescents use their minds well.
2. Students must master a number of essential skills and be competent in certain areas of knowledge.
3. The governing outlook of schools should be "student as worker."
4. Curriculum and pedagogy should be driven by desired student outcomes.
5. Graduation from high school should not be an expectation of students who merely "spend time" in school but should be awarded based on achievement of rigorous, performance-based learning outcomes.
6. Staff should be generalists first and specialists second. The dominant pedagogy should be coaching. Teaching style and time allotted to achieve mastery should be individualized.
7. Schools should become democratic societies in which individuals share in decisions, accept consequences, and expect justice.
8. Schools should be communities of learners where a spirit of inquiry, reflection, and risk taking prevail.
Some principles of inclusive education
1. Schools should demonstrate respect for each student's gifts and talents.
2. All students can learn.
3. All students benefit from learning together with students who are different from themselves, including those of different races, cultures, genders, talents, temperaments, and experiences.
4. Students with disabilities should be assigned to classrooms and schools using the same decision guidelines applied to typical students.
5. Academic awards and honors should be attainable by any student who demonstrates achievement and effort that exceeds his or her own and others' expectations.
6. Schools should provide enough support to teachers to enable them to provide a quality education to all students in their classrooms without harming any student in those classrooms.
7. Students with disabilities should have the opportunity to make choices similar to those afforded students without disabilities and should be active in school governance, such as the student council.
8. Students with disabilities should be allowed to participate in activities that provide them with an opportunity to fail as well as those offering an opportunity to succeed.

were areas of confluence as well as areas of contrast on the two lists. Finding these areas of agreement was heartening: Everyone believed that all students can learn, that schools should become democratic societies, and that schools should be supportive communities of and for learners.

A list of commonly held principles began to emerge, and the areas of disagreement came into clearer focus. The inclusion advocates continued to say that "if there were only one set of performance standards, some students would be automatically disqualified from receiving a diploma because of the severity of their disabilities." They emphasized the need for "a diploma to which all students can aspire, one that recognizes the achievement of a student's individual goals and his or her best effort."

The restructuring people responded, "Without common high expectations, we'll never have true accountability. Right now, in communities where poor and minority kids are shunted into low-level classes, parents are told their kids are doing 'just fine' and are 'working at their capacity.' But they end up with worthless diplomas."

Easy answers were elusive. At one point, a school reform advocate proposed that students' academic accomplishments be reflected in their diplomas by adding the phrase *with modification* for students with learning disabilities.

"No!" came the retort from the inclusion advocates. Their position was that going through graduation is more than a rite of passage earned by students who try to do their best. It is a public acknowledgment that the school has honored the students' hard work and achievement, even if some students' talents are different from the norm. They believed that backing down on the issue of the same diploma for all students would only continue the pattern of consigning people with disabilities to the margins of society. In a school that embraces personalization and recognition of individual talents, every student's diploma should signify something unique.

NEW VIEWS BEGAN TO EMERGE

By midpoint in the year, the inclusion advocates came to appreciate, albeit cautiously, the power of standards as an intellectual focus for school reform and agreed that most students with learning difficulties would benefit from implementation of those standards as long as there was also a comprehensive system of supports. The restructuring advocates began to see the benefit to the school climate of students learning together with others who represented a spectrum of diversity, including race, culture, gender, age, talent, temperament, and experi-

Table 2. Qualities and beliefs of restructured and inclusive schools

1.	All students are valued members of society and of their school communities. *All students* means every single student.
2.	Schools help students to think clearly, develop their intellectual and creative potential, and in general learn to use their minds well.
3.	Schools respect each student's gifts and talents by recognizing and honoring demonstrations of effort and achievement.
4.	Schools see themselves as communities of learners in which a spirit of inquiry, reflection, and risk taking prevails.
5.	All students benefit from learning together with others who represent a spectrum of diversity, including race, culture, gender, age, talent, temperament, and experience.
6.	Knowledge is as varied and interwoven as human experiences. This principle is reflected in the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum.
7.	Teachers view themselves first as educators of students and second as specialists in a subject area. They are excited about learning and enthusiastic in their work with students.
8.	Class sizes are small enough so that teachers can personalize instruction. At the high school level, this means that no teacher has to work with more than a total of 80 students per semester.
9.	Schools are democratic societies in which students share in decisions regarding governance, curriculum, and goal setting.
10.	All students benefit from opportunities to receive, as well as to provide, assistance and service to others and to their community.

ence. Table 2 represents the growing number of areas of common agreement.

UNRESOLVED DIFFERENCES PERSISTED

Despite the satisfaction of developing the list of common principles (see Table 2), many believed that the group was still stalled. Table 3 depicts several areas in which proposed language met with serious concern.

The extent of the impasse was reflected in the questions that were lobbed back and forth across the conference table:

"What about students with severe disabilities who may never demonstrate what most folks see as competence in language arts and math?"

"What is a *core curriculum*? Do you really believe that all students should take the same courses?"

"How can our schools be held accountable for quality if there are no benchmarks that assess students' learning and teachers' teaching?"

"Can we really expect teachers to personalize instruction in a heterogeneous class of 25 or 30 students?"

"Does *all students* include those kids whose behavior can throw an entire class into turmoil?"

"Must we eliminate tracking and ability grouping altogether? What about courses that require prerequisites, especially in math and science?"

"Sure, outcomes are important. But shouldn't teachers be free to focus on areas such as citizenship, that aren't tied to a measurable 'educational outcome'?"

The temptation was great by this time to give up, to agree to disagree and retreat to the security of partisan camps: "Inclusion advocates over here; you restructuring people, over there!"

A BREAK IN THE IMPASSE

A break in the impasse came about when two members of the group who had assumed the roles of co-facilitators met over lunch. They spent several hours working on draft language of what they were now calling the "prickly" issues (see Table 3). But they were able to move the discussion ahead only when they had identified what the underlying concerns for both sides were. Such convergence did not come easily. What made it possible to begin to break the logjam on points like these was a mutual realization that unless the issue of performance expectations and curriculum standards becomes an ongoing part of a school's conversation, the probability is great that little significant progress will be made in improving what most students actually get from their years of compulsory schooling. By the same token, unless the needs, talents, and social acceptance of students with disabilities and other challenges are an ongoing part of a school's conversation,

Table 3. Principles that appeared to defy consensus

1.	Education programs for all students are based on a core curriculum. A variety of instructional strategies are necessary to help students achieve success within the core curriculum.
2.	As students progress through key transition points in the K–12 curriculum, they demonstrate competence in areas that include language arts and mathematics.
3.	Students work to master a number of essential skills and to be competent in certain areas of knowledge. High school diplomas are awarded based on a student's achievement of performance-based learning outcomes.
4.	All students are educated in heterogeneous classes in the schools to which they would normally be assigned.
5.	Teachers understand the diversity in students' styles of learning and apply that understanding in the classroom. They personalize instruction and the conditions under which students work to achieve mastery.

the probability is great that other unconventional students will likewise be discriminated against or ignored.

Here was an accommodation that did not require a compromise of principles. When the two facilitators shared this mutual recognition with the larger group, it allowed the members to expand and categorize their list of shared principles in a manner that would be acceptable to a broader group of advocates for inclusion and school reform. The full list of agreed-on principles is included in Table 4.

THE TASK FORCE CONCLUDES ITS WORK

By July 1994, 11 months of deliberations had brought the group a long way toward a meeting of the minds regarding inclusion and school reform. Four points of disagreement remained: heterogeneous grouping of students in all classes, standards of performance assessment, students who did not achieve as expected, and the characteristics of the diploma. Statements designed to resolve those issues are presented in Table 5, although this task force did not come to a final consensus on them.

Why Are There So Many Unresolved Questions?

One would think, with the list of principles held in common by the advocates of curriculum restructuring and the champions of full inclusion (see Table 4), that the group members would all have expressed a collective sigh of relief and congratulated themselves on achieving a level of accord that once seemed impossible.

They knew that they had been part of a discussion that is too often missing from public education. Teachers especially have little time within their school day to reflect on their own practice with their colleagues, much less debate some of the beliefs and assumptions about education that reflect the values of the society as a whole. They also realized that in building a bridge between the inclusion and restructuring movements, they had taken on the many unresolved issues within each movement (e.g., concerns about including students with serious emotional difficulties, debates about how much Shakespeare to require, whether there are any reliable standardized measurements to assess what students actually know and can do).

But, after almost a full year of deliberations, the group was ready to disband. They had broadened their own understanding of inclusion and school reform, yet there was a reluctance to patch together a shaky consensus on the toughest issues. So, they ended their work with a list of questions, depicted in Table 6, to bequeath to teachers and parents who struggle on a daily basis with making their schools

Table 4. A synthesis of common educational principles and beliefs

Principles related to how people work and learn together

1. All students are valued members of society and of their school communities. *All students* means *every single student.*
2. All students are educated to live, work, and play in diverse communities.
3. All students benefit from learning together with others who represent a spectrum of diversity, including race, culture, gender, age, talent, temperament, and experience.
4. All students benefit from opportunities to provide as well as to receive assistance and service to and from others in the community.
5. Schools work hard to strengthen relationships among students, families, the community at large, and the school. When students are young, their families are active partners in creating and evaluating students' educational programs. Increasingly, as students age, they advocate for themselves.
6. Schools are democratic societies in which students share in decisions regarding governance, curriculum, and goal setting.
7. Schools establish clear expectations for behavior based on respect, trust, and decency that provide explicit consequences and fair judicial procedures.
8. Collaboration between and among students, educators, and support staff takes place as a regular part of every working day.

Principles related to how schools are organized and the roles people play

1. Teachers view themselves first as educators of students and second as specialists in a discipline. They are excited about learning and enthusiastic in their work with students.
2. Class sizes are small enough so that teachers can personalize instruction. At the elementary school level, the target teacher–student ratio is 1:20. At the secondary level, the target ratio is 1:80.
3. Teachers and other school staff have ongoing support and training to enable each student to be successful.
4. Teachers understand the diversity in students' styles of learning and apply that understanding in the classroom. They do personalize instruction and the conditions under which students work to achieve mastery so that students' unique talents and abilities are developed and appreciated.
5. School principals and staff have the chief responsibility for site-based decisions about curriculum, teaching methods, and use of time for all students.
6. Schools see themselves as communities of learners in which a spirit of inquiry, reflection, and risk taking prevails.
7. Schools help students think clearly, develop their intellectual and creative potential, and, in general, learn to use their minds well.
8. Schools respect each student's gifts and talents by recognizing and honoring demonstrations of effort and achievement.

Principles related to curriculum, performance, assessment, and achievement of students

1. All students can learn.
2. All students are provided with necessary supports to learn and be successful.
3. Students work to master a common set of districtwide, performance-based learning objectives in essential skills and areas of knowledge that have been delineated by the faculty with parent and community input as critical to students' success in life. These performance objectives are reflected in the ways that schools are organized, time and staff are used, and student mastery is assessed.

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Table 4. (*continued*)

4. The curriculum represents an effective educational program for students to master performance objectives. It includes areas that best represent what the school and community expect students to know (e.g., understanding, information), to be like (e.g., values, attitudes, habits of mind), and to be able to do (e.g., skills, practices). Options and choices are provided for students in the manner in which they demonstrate mastery and in other areas in which they choose to become proficient.
5. Curriculum development and assessment are guided by "depth over breadth."
6. Knowledge is as varied and interwoven as human experiences. This principle is reflected in the interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum.
7. Student success within this curriculum is achieved through intellectual, interpersonal, and experiential strategies that enable students to acquire essential skills and knowledge and to develop character and values. Learning is an active rather than a passive experience, with students being responsible for performing the intellectual work of the curriculum and teachers supporting, coaching, and facilitating students' endeavors.
8. The primary work of the curriculum is accomplished by students' actively thinking through, experimenting with, speculating about, researching, debating, discussing, and responding creatively to the ideas and issues contained within the curriculum. Didactic instruction (i.e., lecturing) plays a part in an overall approach to teaching, but most essential content knowledge is acquired by students working with information and applying it in performance and problem-solving contexts.

places where all students are welcomed and supported to achieve the highest standards possible.

CONCLUSIONS

The task force completed its work in 1994. Although it is impossible to establish a causal relationship between this group's work and the current state of the state of New Hampshire relative to inclusive education and school reform, a number of significant changes did occur that have a potential impact on every student in New Hampshire and not just those with disabilities.

One of this chapter's coauthors testified in the landmark lawsuit brought by five New Hampshire school districts that challenged the state's funding of public education through property tax revenues. He brought his conviction about the rights all students have for a quality public education to the forefront of those deliberations.

In addition, the first national equity and excellence conference was held in New Hampshire in January 1996. At that conference, 400 teachers and administrators from all over the United States focused on the issues of school reform and inclusion of students with disabilities in presentations made jointly by experts in both fields. Because of the resounding success of that endeavor and the participants' hunger for continued opportunity to collaborate with colleagues tackling both issues at once, a second conference was planned for October 1997.

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Table 5. Proposed principles designed to resolve persistent differences

1.	Students are heterogeneously grouped within the curriculum in classes that provide a challenging learning experience for all students. As they advance toward achieving their graduation requirements, students select additional courses and activities based on interest, with access open to all who wish to participate.
2.	Students are expected to demonstrate competence in curriculum objectives as they progress through transition points in primary, elementary, middle, and high school grades. These assessments are critical to ensure that the student, staff, and parents are aware of the student's progress, given his or her learning style and talents.
3.	For any student who does not achieve the stated competencies at these transition points, a concerted effort is mounted by the student, teachers, and parents to improve areas of inadequate performance. These efforts should not jeopardize the student's social acceptance and self-esteem. At each of the transition points, the student receives formal recognition of his or her achievements.
4.	Students earn certificates of mastery when they complete the district's performance-based learning objectives. They are then prepared to pursue post-secondary education or to begin their working careers. Students may require varying amounts of time to achieve these certificates.

The UNH Institute on Disability has infused thinking about fundamental school reform into the fabric of its work in education at all levels. Project coordinators are working closely with New Hampshire Department of Education staff on issues relating to curriculum frameworks and the statewide assessment program. These same staff participated in reviews of local districts' applications for consolidated federal funding in areas such as Title I, migrant education, special education, and English as a second language. A statewide educational summit was held in October 1996, which was attended by local and state leaders in both general school reform and inclusion. We have come to realize that school reformers and inclusive education advocates share a passionate concern for the future of all children and that only through finding common ground with one another on the details of day-to-day educational practice will our visions become reality.

The debate about equity and excellence influences the lives of students and teachers at the local school level. What might a school that manages to challenge and include all students look like? In Chapter 3, the foundations of restructuring and inclusive schools are presented through examples from a number of schools across the United States.

Implementation Suggestions for Teachers

1. Become familiar with some of the literature on school restructuring and inclusion. The authors recommend *Horace's School: Redesigning the American High School* (Sizer, 1992); *The Power of Their Ideas: Lessons for America from a Small School in Harlem* (Meier, 1995);

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Table 6. Topics for the next conversation

1.	How can we decide what kind of knowledge we expect all students to possess, realizing that there is hardly a single fact, date, formula, or term that all successful or educated people do, in fact, know? Is there any specific knowledge required by everybody?
2.	What kind of distinction ought we to make between the a) knowledge that we want our children, as they grow toward adulthood, to acquire about the cultures that define us as a nation (e.g., historical, scientific, sociopolitical, literary, artistic, linguistic) and b) specific knowledge (i.e., cultural literacy) that some people feel we should require all students to learn in school?
3.	Does it even make sense to press for student mastery of traditional areas of knowledge, or disciplines, as they currently exist in secondary schools (e.g., English, social studies, math, science, the arts), since the application of such knowledge increasingly tends to be interdisciplinary and problem centered?
4.	How can we find ways to personalize every student's learning agenda without running the risk that some schools or districts will use this as an excuse to permit low standards to be set for students from disadvantaged families who are not able to advocate well for their fair share of educational resources and opportunities (e.g., gifted programs, honors courses)?
5.	Similarly, how can we set high and challenging standards for all students, based on our best guess of the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that people will need in their lives, without putting the attainment of such standards out of reach for some students with disabilities?
6.	How do we balance, on the one hand, the need to be fair to and supportive of students who come to school with a range of academic and social strengths and weaknesses with the desire, on the other hand, to help a much greater percentage of such students to work hard to master essential skills that may require sustained effort on their part?
7.	How can we advocate strongly for our vision of educational equity and excellence for the future while keeping faith with present-day educators who are struggling often against serious opposition to make more modest reforms that may pave the way for our vision to be realized?

The Passionate Teacher: A Practical Guide (Fried, 1995); *Inclusion: A Guide for Educators* (Stainback & Stainback, 1996); *No Pity: People with Disabilities Forging a New Civil Rights Movement* (Shapiro, 1993); and *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (Oakes, 1985). Read literature by people with disabilities and their families to get a first-person perspective on the experience of disability. Suggestions include *Nobody, Nowhere: The Extraordinary Autobiography of an Autistic* (Williams, 1992), written by a woman who has autism; *I Raise My Eyes to Say Yes* (Sienkiewicz-Mercer & Kaplan, 1989), written by a woman who lived most of her life in an institution and was discovered to be intelligent; and *Circles of Friends: People with Disabilities and Their Friends Enrich the Lives of One Another* (Perske & Perske, 1988).

2. Examine your own attitudes and beliefs about diversity, competition, learning, community, and education.

3. Organize a discussion group of teachers—general education and special education—to discuss some of these topics. Make participation low risk by establishing ground rules of confidentiality and keeping your discussions internal for a while.
4. Bring issues relating to students with disabilities to larger discussions in your school about raising standards, equity, and teaching.

Leadership Suggestions for Administrators

1. Ensure that students with disabilities are considered in each and every discussion about, for example, standards, graduation requirements, improving student performance, and assessment.
2. Invite special education administrators to be part of every administrative team meeting.
3. Support teachers to organize their own reflective inquiry groups and provide them with resources to consider questions of equity and excellence.

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