REGULAR AND SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS’ PERCEPTIONS
OF THE REGULAR EDUCATION INITIATIVE,

MASTER’S PROJECT

Submitted to the School of Education
University of Dayton, in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science in Education

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Official Advisor
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

The need for effective interaction between regular and special education programs has been a constant concern among educators. A major turning point for all educators and exceptional children took place in 1975 when Public Law 94-142, The Education Act for All Handicapped Children Act was passed. This law required that handicapped students need to be educated with regular class peers to the maximum extent possible. It also guaranteed certain rights to these children that had been denied them in the past. The right for a free and appropriate education, a non-discriminatory manner for testing and evaluating, the development of Individualized Educational Programs (IEPs) for each handicapped child, education in the least restrictive environment, and the assurance of due process procedures for all handicapped students were all important milestones attained with the passage of PL 94-142 (Lewis & Doorlag, 1991). Since then, numerous handicapped children have been placed or mainstreamed into the regular classroom setting. Recently, however, there has been a demand that a thorough restructuring, and possibly even the elimination of much of special education, is needed (Kauffman, Gerber & Semmel, 1988).
Much of the current debate revolves around what constitutes the best education for students labeled as mildly handicapped. Alternatives are being proposed that would significantly increase the involvement of regular classroom teachers in the instruction of these students. Although Public Law 94-142 legislates that all exceptional children shall receive an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, controversy exists between educating these children totally in the regular classroom setting (Regular Education Initiative) or pulling them out for certain periods of the day. The Regular Education Initiative (REI), as it is now referred to, is considered a plan to better unify regular and special education into one system. This, it is hoped, would create a more integrated system of general education that would better serve handicapped students (Lilly, 1988).

Since the passage of Public Law 94-142, all public school teachers have had to cope with the concept of mainstreaming. Many question whether the REI proponents are being realistic in fully mainstreaming even more handicapped students into the regular classroom. Many teachers have felt uncomfortable and unprepared to deal with challenge of teaching mainstreamed students. With better understanding of the mainstreaming process, teachers might be better able to meet the needs of the mainstreamed students. However, with all the criticism of the current educational system,
would or could regular education teachers best accommodate these students on a full-time basis?

**Justification of the Problem**

The Regular Education Initiative has been a heavily debated issue among numerous educators. This Initiative calls for changes in the way those with special needs are educated. This proposed merger of special and regular education into one system has attracted much attention and controversy in recent years. This, in turn, has created concern both within and outside the special education field. However, the actual teachers of these mildly handicapped students, especially the regular education teachers, have had an extremely limited role in the discussions regarding the Regular Education Initiative and its definite effects within the teaching field.

Presently, there is considerable confusion and anxiety being generated by the Regular Education Initiative. The purpose of this paper will be to examine this issue more closely and to provide feedback from various educators regarding this issue. The hypothesis is that there will be no significant difference between regular and special education teachers’ perceptions regarding the Regular Education Initiative. This study will also consider what needs need to be met for educating special students, what direction schools should be going, and what implications
there would be for educators if this Initiative becomes a reality.

Assumptions

It is the assumption of this researcher that all the teachers who will participate in this study will be qualified educators who will have had some knowledge and/or experience working with and educating the handicapped.

It is not the purpose of this study to place judgement on those educators who are either for or against the Regular Education Initiative. Every school will have its own teachers and programs that are unique to that school alone which, in turn, may influence their individual perceptions.

Definition of Terms

Adaptive Learning Environment Model (ALEM) - A model developed in which mildly handicapped students are integrated on a full-time basis in regular classrooms (Lewis & Doorlag, 1991).

Assessment - A process for determining a child’s strengths and weaknesses that involves five steps: screening; diagnosis, classification, and placement; instructional planning; pupil evaluation; and program evaluation.

Cooperative learning - The instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other’s learning (Johnson & Johnson, 1988).
Due process - A set of legal procedures designed to ensure that an individual's constitutional rights are protected (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

Exceptional children - A child who differs from the norm in mental characteristics, sensory abilities, communication abilities, social behavior, or physical characteristics to the extent that special education services are required for the child to develop to maximum capacity (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

Individualized education program (IEP) - A program written for every handicapped student receiving special education that describes the child's current performance and goals for the school year, the particular special education services to be delivered, and the procedures by which outcomes are evaluated (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

Integrated classroom - A classroom administered jointly by regular and special education teachers. Usually one-third of the class is made up youngsters with mild handicaps (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

Itinerant teacher - A teacher who serves several schools, visiting exceptional children and their classroom teachers at regular intervals or whenever necessary (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

Learning disability - A developmental disorder that manifests itself in a discrepancy between ability and academic achievement. Learning disabilities do not stem from mental retardation, sensory impairments, emotional
problems, or lack of opportunity to learn, and they cannot be remediated through normal instructional methods (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Least restrictive environment (LRE)** - The educational setting in which a child with special needs can learn that is as close as possible to the regular classroom (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Mainstreaming** - The process of bringing exceptional children into daily contact with non-exceptional children in an educational setting; the placement of exceptional children in the regular education program whenever possible (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Public Law 94-142** - Enacted by Congress in November, 1975. This Education for All Handicapped Children Act insures that all handicapped children will receive a free, appropriate public education (Mercer & Mercer, 1981).

**Regular Education Initiative (REI)** - The belief that many children who are classified as mildly and moderately handicapped could be educated in a well-designed and staffed classroom (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Resource room** - Any instructional setting to which an exceptional child comes for specific periods of time, usually on a regularly scheduled basis (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Self-contained special class** - A separate class in which a special education teacher assumes primary
responsibility for the educational programs for students with handicaps (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Special class** - A class held for children who need more special instruction than the resource room can provide (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Special education** - The educational help devised for children who differ significantly from the norm (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).

**Teacher consultant** - A specially trained teacher who is available to regular teachers to answer questions about a child, materials, or method of instruction, and to provide supplementary teaching aids and materials (Kirk & Gallagher, 1989).
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

With the passage of Public Law 94-142, policies regarding how handicapped children would be educated were radically changed. According to Mercer (1981), it was insisted that all special education placements be based on advantages for the child, and secondly, that needed adaptations in instruction be made in the mainstreamed setting whenever possible (the least restrictive environment principle). Educating these exceptional children in the least restrictive environment (LRE) was one of the cornerstones of Public Law 94-142 (Sachs, 1988).

Until recently, the general thought in the field of education was that it was appropriate and feasible to place mildly handicapped students in regular class settings to the extent that their educational needs could be accommodated and that their chance for success would be enhanced. The Regular Education Initiative challenges this philosophy by recommending the total mainstreaming of mildly handicapped students (Lerner, 1987). Current LRE issues are causing educators to re-examine the pull-out programs and to develop, instead, additional resources for students to succeed within the general education classroom.

According to Davis (1989), as the current debate involving the proposed merger of special and regular
education intensifies, many educators feel the need to choose sides. Either one is for or against the idea of this merger. On one hand, most of the current literature, policies, and special education advocates have supported the belief that handicapped students should not be separated from their non-handicapped peers for the purpose of education. On the other hand, the current educational system often does segregate, to some degree, handicapped students in order to meet their complex educational needs.

The different ways that special and regular education educators often approach teaching and learning adds to the complexity of the issue. Glatthorn (1990) has stated that the special education teacher is often more concerned with one student and how learning might be individualized, where the classroom teacher tends to worry about the entire class and how overall achievement might be advanced. The special education teacher is often concerned with developing a wide range of learning and coping skills, while academic skills and content is the focus of the classroom teacher. Neither of these frames, it is stated, is inherently better than the other; however, they tend to yield different pictures of the classroom.

Madeline C. Will, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, is attributed to being the leader of the REI movement. This concept is based in large part on the writings of Margaret Wang and on the Alternative Learning Environment Model (ALEM). Will and
Wang, along with others who are in favor of the Regular Education Initiative movement, believe that special education students can be educated fully in the regular classroom. These advocates stress the Initiative is designed to stimulate experimentation, encourage flexibility, and foster new ways of looking at the old problem of how to best educate those students with learning problems and/or mild handicapping conditions (Anderegg, 1988).

REI proponents do not assume that all is well in general education and that the problems will be solved by eliminating the current pull-out programs. These advocates are not proposing that general education is perfect or adequate in its present form, but that the system that has been devised to "save" children from the general education setting has suffered many of the same problems that are present in that system. REI proponents feel that time and effort should be spent helping these special students to achieve in the regular classroom setting. By continuing to implement and encourage these separate systems, instead of creating one unified system, a likely outcome may be that expectations and achievement levels will be lowered for these special students.

Another problem inherent in the current system is that a large amount of time is lost by students traveling to and from the resource room. The students themselves often feel lost in this shuffle between the resource room and their regular classroom setting. When these children do return to
their class, the material being taught is often not what the child was working on during the pull-out time. In turn, these students may fall further behind (Gersten & Woodward, 1990). What REI advocates do encourage is the increase of these support services within the regular education framework. Such services would include the specialists that serve these children such as speech pathologists, psychologists, and learning disabilities instructors, but instead of pulling these students out of the classroom to do it, they would serve these students within their regular class setting.

Although most educators would tend to agree with the goals behind the REI, many have doubts about several factors of it. Those who oppose the Initiative feel that it makes little sense to fully place the handicapped students back into the very system that failed them. If regular educators continually refer students with learning difficulties and problems to the special educators, do the advocates of the REI really expect these same teachers to successfully educate the mentally retarded (Sachs, 1988)?

Each class has a wide range of abilities. The idea of teachers effectively being able to teach all students while accommodating to even more difficult-to-learn students is a major task to accomplish. Good teaching adapts to individual differences in learning style and rate, but there is a limit as to what can be accommodated to in a regular education classroom. Regular education educators need to be asked
what they perceive of the REI, since they would be the ones actually doing the teaching.

Many of those opposed to the Initiative feel that the most effective learning can not take place solely in the regular education classroom, especially with the way the education system is currently set up. Too often, it is felt, regular education teachers tend to teach to the middle-of-the-road students, and for this reason, one tends to see numerous failures among the lower functioning students. Many teachers, it is feared, would not be willing to spend the quality time needed to effectively teach those students who are presently being pulled-out of the classroom for special services.

The issue of handicapped students being stigmatized as dumb by other children is another important issue. Advocates of the REI movement believe that this labeling of students as handicapped is a negative label to attach to a student. Many other educators, however, tend to think that being labeled as one with a learning disability or other form of disability may not be as negative as many REI proponents believe. With or without the pull-out system that is currently being used, there is a certain amount of labeling that already occurs. Students, exceptional or not, who fail to perform adequately in the regular classroom setting will still have labels attached to them. Those who have no known disabilities may, in fact, be rejected more often than those who are already labeled as handicapped.
Other concerns have plagued the opponents of the Regular Education Initiative. A question such as "Where will the money come from researching this idea?" and the belief that there would be more pain than gain accomplished by this Initiative must be addressed. Those against the REI feel that the Initiative places the regular classroom teacher in an environment unsuited for the proper instruction that would be needed for these special students. The students placed in these settings may be underserved and even unwelcomed by the regular classroom teacher. This, it is felt, could mean a possible loss of previous special education gains. In turn, this could lead to the basic educational rights of these students being denied.

The Regular Education Initiative debate has largely take place among educators at the university level. Regular educators have had only a limited role participating in the REI debates. This lack of participation has been a reason why many educators feel that the REI movement is unlikely to be effective. Lieberman (1985) criticized Stainback and Stainback's call (1984) for a merger between regular and special education as similar to "a wedding in which we, as special educators, have forgotten to invite the bride." (p.513). Lieberman sees little value in truly examining the REI issue. He has concluded that regular education at the present is unwilling to change and that the likelihood of such a change taking place is remote.
If, however, the Regular Education Initiative becomes a reality, extensive retraining of regular education teachers would be needed to successfully implement this Initiative into the school system. In order for this to work, teachers would need training and ongoing support. Training in specific skills would be needed on a school-wide basis and teachers would have to learn how to teach to an even more diverse group of students. By simply returning students back into the regular education classroom without a critical change in structure, one is returning the problem to its source. Teachers would need to be taught how to individualize instruction, be flexible with each student, and handle not only the academic growth, but the emotional development of the student as well (McGill & Robinson, 1989). In addition, the money and time needed to accomplish these goals must be taken into account.

The effects of the implementation of the Regular Education Initiative would be felt at all levels. This is felt to be especially true at the secondary level. The gap between the skill levels of students with and without handicaps widens as they grow older. In addition, the academic demands on these special students increase as well. Another obstacle inherent in implementing the REI at the secondary level includes trying to adequately provide the intensive instruction required to reduce these students various skill deficits. Teachers, too, would need to be aware of the complexity of the content taught at this level and
must be willing and able to spend the quality time needed to properly accommodate and educate these special students. Time limitation, overall, seems to be more noticeable at the secondary level as well (Schumaker & Deshler, 1988).

Intervention approaches such as cooperative learning, prereferral teams, consulting teachers, and peer tutoring have all been recommended as ways of accommodating special students in regular classroom settings. In peer tutoring, for example, successful results have been collected and obtained when a tutoring relationship has been established between a student with a disability and one without. However, it is just as important to those with the disabilities to feel that they, too, have contributed something. One example of this was when sign language was chosen as an area of study to be used between the different groups of students (Eiserman, 1988). Cooperation, overall, causes students to interact and learn from each other, and in the process they can take more pride in themselves and others. All these techniques, however, need the cooperation and time commitment from regular and special educators.

Although the support services listed above are encouraging, they do not provide all the support needed by special students. These intervention techniques do not justify, in many educators' minds, the cutting down of special education services, no matter how effective and practical these techniques are. The view that all teachers will be able to achieve the outcomes desired by the
advocates of the Regular Education Initiative is questioned by many educators. These proponents seem to think that the regular education system can accommodate these special children who, in many cases, have previously failed in it. There is a need for continuing the individualized learning that takes place when teachers work one-on-one with the students. The reality of individual differences, especially within the realm of special education, must be taken into account. This, however, might be very difficult to provide on a full-time basis within the regular classroom setting. The ultimate success of the Regular Education Initiative would require expanding the ability of the classrooms to accommodate a wider range of student skills and abilities (Loucks & Roody, 1990).

Davis (1989) concludes that the Regular Education Initiative debate must include more involvement of both special and regular educators at the local education agency (LEA) level. Both proponents and opponents of the REI merger cite issues and concerns directly involving the roles, responsibilities, attitudes, and skill levels of principals and teachers as being essential to the eventual success or failure of the Regular Education Initiative. Yet, for the most part, these are the very people who have not had the chance to express their opinions and viewpoints on this important issue.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

In an effort to gain a better understanding of whether or not teachers agree with some of the assumptions underlying the Regular Education Initiative, this researcher wants to present findings regarding actual teachers’ perceptions of this issue. The teachers themselves need to be asked what they perceive of the Regular Education Initiative since they would be the ones ultimately doing the teaching.

All the participants of this study were educators and/or graduate students in the field of education living in or around the Dayton, Ohio area. The subjects asked to participate in this study consisted of both regular and special education classroom teachers as well as graduate students pursuing a teaching degree.

Each educator was personally given a questionnaire stating the purpose of the study and a request for participation. Each subject was asked to fill out the following information: 1) at what level he/she taught, 2) the type of community he/she taught in, 3) the number of years spent teaching, 4) age of the participant, 5) sex of the subject, and 6) any courses or experiences the participant may have had about educating the handicapped. All the responses were anonymous.
The teachers were then asked to respond to the twenty questions listed using the 5-point Likert scale. One, in this case, would indicate that the participant strongly disagreed with the statement, while five was held to be a strongly agreed belief. The questions were designed to give both special and regular education educators the chance to express their views on the Regular Education Initiative.

Once the data was collected, it was statistically tested to determine if there were any significant findings between the various teaching levels of the respondents. The educators' responses were divided according to if they taught elementary, secondary, or special education. In addition, the responses were analyzed together as a whole group.
CHAPTER IV
RESULTS

This study was conducted to assess both special and regular education teachers' perceptions of the proposed merger of special and regular education into one teaching system, which is now referred to as the Regular Education Initiative. This researcher sought to determine how educators would respond to the underlying assumptions of the Regular Education Initiative.

The sample of participants was representative of various teaching levels, community types, teaching years, age groups, and experiences educating those with special needs. In addition, both female and male teachers were sampled. Means were computed for the twenty statements from the seventy-two respondents and the overall results of the educators were tabulated. This researcher also compared the viewpoints of the various teaching levels the educators taught at: elementary, secondary, or special education. In doing this, statistically significant results were found.

The results obtained from this study suggest that many of the participants feel the need for changes in the current educational system. However, most tended to feel that, overall, special education services are successful the way they are and that these services need to be continued.
Elementary and secondary teachers apparently view the skills that are needed to teach the handicapped similarly, with both groups having a mean response score of 2.00. They tended to disagree with the statement, "The skills that are needed to teach both handicapped and non-handicapped students are the same." The special education teachers, however, felt more strongly against this statement with a mean score of 1.21. This is a statistically different response than those of the elementary and secondary educators (Tukey, p=.00 and p=.00) respectively.

Overall, teachers seem to have positive attitudes about educating the handicapped. However, the degree to which they felt it seemed to vary with the different teaching levels of the respondents. Elementary educators had a mean response of 4.14; secondary teachers 3.50. This is a statistically significant response (Tukey, p=.01). The difference was also significant between special education teachers, with a mean score of 4.50, and that of secondary educators (Tukey, p=.00).

Secondary educators, with a mean score of 3.44, appear to be less willing than both elementary and special educators (4.00 and 4.93) in spending the time to be trained to teach the handicapped. This data is statistically significant for all the groups: between elementary and secondary educators (Tukey, p=.02); elementary and special educators (Tukey, p=.00); and secondary and special educators (Tukey, p=.00).
Special educators, with a mean score of 1.50, strongly view that classroom modifications within the regular classroom are not enough to meet the needs of special students. Elementary educators had a mean score of 2.21, while secondary teachers had one of 2.06. This is statistically significant between special educators and both elementary and secondary educators (Tukey, p=.00 and p=.03) respectively.

The overall opinions of the respondents indicated that the labeling of exceptional students would not be eliminated if full-time regular education placement of these students was achieved. However, special educators, with a mean score of 1.71, felt the strongest that the labeling would not diminish. Elementary and secondary teachers disagreed with the question as well, with mean scores of 2.31 and 2.25. This is statistically significant for both elementary and secondary teachers when compared to special educators (Tukey, p=.00 and p=.04) respectively.

The various educators all agreed that non-handicapped students are willing to help their handicapped peers. The mean scores for the elementary (4.19), secondary (3.94), and special educators (4.64) indicate that there is a positive feeling of helping within the classroom. There was a statistically significant finding, however, between secondary and special education teachers (Tukey, p=.02).

The elementary teachers who took part in this survey tended to feel more strongly that blame for a student’s
failure should be the responsibility of the teacher. Elementary teachers had a mean score of 2.45, while secondary and special educators had scores of 1.88 and 2.07. This statement produced statistically significant findings between elementary and secondary educators’ views on this matter (Tukey, p=.01).

Secondary educators appear to be the least willing to change their teaching styles in order to accommodate more handicapped students. The secondary teachers’ mean score was 3.13, as compared to 3.71 for the elementary educators, and that of 4.57 for the special education teachers. This data was statistically significant between elementary and secondary educators (Tukey, p=.02), as well as between secondary and special educators (Tukey, p=.00).

Elementary teachers felt more strongly than either secondary or special educators that teachers have time to effectively teach more handicapped students on a full-time basis. Overall, though, the teachers strongly disagreed with the belief. The mean score for elementary teachers was 1.93, while the special educators score was 1.86, and the secondary teachers was 1.50. Statistically significant data was found between that of elementary and secondary educators (Tukey, p=.02).

Both elementary and secondary educators hold similar viewpoints regarding the academic benefit of full-time regular education placement for special students. Both had a mean scores of 2.81, indicating that they disagreed with
this belief more than they agreed with it. Special educators, however, felt more positive about the academic benefit with a mean score of 3.00. This is a statistically significant response than those of elementary and secondary teachers (Tukey, p=.00 and p=.00) respectively.

The belief that it would be academically and socially beneficial to all students if full-time regular education placement for the handicapped was attained varied between the different teaching levels. Elementary and secondary educators felt more disagreement, with mean scores of 2.86 and 2.63, than the special education teachers, who had a mean score of 3.43. These findings indicate a statistically significant response between special and elementary educators (Tukey, p=.01). In addition, the response was statistically significant between secondary and special education teachers (Tukey, p=.00).

The results to the statement, "I would welcome the chance to work closely with special educators and other specialists within the regular classroom setting," indicates that educators tend to agree, although not by much, with this belief. The mean score for elementary educators was 3.36; secondary teachers 3.19; and special educators 3.86. The special educators response is statistically significant than that of secondary teachers (Tukey, p=.02).
Limitations of the Study

When reviewing the results of this study several factors need to be taken into account. The acquaintance the researcher had with the teachers questioned may have had an impact on the results. The subjects may have felt more obligation in answering the questions in the way they thought the researcher would like, and this, in turn, may have affected the final results.

Another limitation that needs to be addressed was that many of those questioned were teachers and/or graduate students that were returning to school to better themselves in the teaching field. These subjects may have been more open to both the idea of and the changes needed to educate special children in the regular classroom setting.

In addition, the sample surveyed may not have been representative of all areas. Those who took part in the study were teachers living in the Dayton, Ohio area, which, in turn, may have influenced their decisions in some way. Also, the number of educators actually surveyed was small and selective in nature which may have had an impact on the outcome.
TABLE 1

SUMMARY OF MEAN SCORES OF RESPONDENTS
ACCORDING TO THE OVERALL MEAN OF EACH STATEMENT
AND TEACHING LEVEL

* One (1) indicates a strongly disagreed belief; five (5) indicates a strongly agreed belief.

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<th>Special</th>
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CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS

The hypothesis that there would be no significant differences between regular and special education teachers' perceptions of the Regular Education Initiative was not supported. The analysis of the mean scores of the teaching levels of the participants indicated that there were statistically significant differences regarding special and regular education teachers' views of the Regular Education Initiative.

The overall feeling of this research indicated that special education services need to continue. It was felt by the participants of this study that the resource room and self-contained special classes that are currently in place will continue to be a necessary and educational option for certain students.

Because of the training being undertaken by many of the educators that were surveyed, the subjects may have been more open and accepting of teaching to a wider range of abilities. It has been found (Stephens & Braun, 1980) that regular teachers who had taken special education classes were more willing to accept handicapped students into their classrooms than those who had no special training or courses.
Special educators felt the strongest that the current labeling of students would not diminish if full-time placement of exceptional students was achieved. One explanation for this may be that special educators are more conscious than regular educators of the labeling that occurs to students who do not perform well in class. This may be true for all students, regardless of whether or not they receive special education services.

Regular education teachers were more inclined than special educators in thinking that classroom modifications would be enough to accommodate more handicapped students. Regular education teachers may not be as aware of the essential skills that are needed to teach the handicapped. These skills are different, and although most of the educators realized this, special educators were more conscious of the differences.

Elementary teachers tended to feel more responsible than other teaching levels if a student failed to perform in the classroom. Elementary teachers may have felt more responsible for a student’s overall success or failure because of the amount of time that they spend with students. Elementary educators ultimately have full control of their classroom learning environment, and if a student fails to achieve, they may feel that they were, in some way, responsible.

The secondary teachers seemed to feel that the older non-handicapped students would be less willing than other
age groups to spend time helping their handicapped peers. These findings may be due to the academic achievement expected of older students. Secondary teachers, although positive, may have felt that non-handicapped students were more concerned with their achievement than in helping their handicapped classmates in their studies.

Secondary educators, possibly because of time and academic demands, appear to be the least willing to accommodate more handicapped students on a full-time basis. Secondary teachers are more subject oriented and may be less willing than others to change their ways of teaching. This may be due, in part, to the subject material that needs to be covered at the secondary level.

Regular educators felt less optimistic than special educators about the overall academic and social benefits that would be available to all students if full-time placement of exceptional students was achieved. Regular educators may have felt that, in one way, it would be ideal to educate students as a whole group instead of as separate ones. However, when faced with the obvious academic differences of students, these educators may have felt that it would not be fair to all students to try and accommodate such a wide-range of abilities on a full-time basis.

There was agreement from both special and regular educators that communication needs to increase between these educational groups if proper instruction for exceptional students is to be achieved. By involving the special
education teachers in more of the daily activities and educational curriculum of the regular education teacher, it was felt that one could accomplish some of the goals of the Regular Education Initiative without dissolving the current pull-out programs. This, however, would require time and commitment from both special and regular education educators, along with principals and other administrators, on a continual basis.

Although many of those surveyed have had limited time teaching handicapped students, most felt that they had the positive attitude necessary to instruct these special students. By continuing their education, many felt that they were gaining the skills needed to educate these students properly. However, most of the respondents questioned if those qualities alone would be enough to educate such a diverse group of students and wide-range of abilities on a full-time basis.

Educators today know that special children have many skills and abilities that can lead them to accomplish great achievements. However, the future of the educational system that will serve them and lead them to those goals is still uncertain. Many changes will certainly happen in the years ahead. Much more research and evaluation will be necessary in the present system before those changes are positive. When, or if, the ideas and proposals concerning the Regular Education Initiative are accepted, more questions about the Initiative must be answered. Different handicapping
conditions pose different questions. Strict adherence to the REI could lead to unnecessary hardships for students placed in those settings. Concerns about the overall impact of the REI for those with disabilities is wide spread and these concerns cannot be taken lightly. Educators need to look closely at these exceptional students and the ways in which they learn best in order to determine if the present teaching methods are meeting their needs.

Most educators would agree that for many of these students, their problems are not educational in origin. Rather, they are rooted in deeper societal problems and issues such as poverty, homelessness, and lack of health care. The odds are already against these children to achieve in the current system. The whole REI debate, in some educators minds, is really about how this nation's schools can better serve students who require the special attention, interaction, and support that is needed in order for these students to enjoy a better quality of life. (Kauffman, 1988; Mercer & Mercer, 1981).

One way in which to begin serving these children that fall through the cracks of society is to provide the special services that are needed at a very early age. Before children even enter school, the focus should be on prevention. One of the central goals of the REI is to substantially reduce the number of students with mild academic handicaps that are served in the self-contained and pull-out special education programs. Early intervention and
effective prevention will be the ingredients necessary for the successful teaching of all students. Other key factors that have been suggested for the successful education of exceptional students include the need for the increase of skills, confidence, and motivation of regular education teachers. In addition, the need to individualize and adapt instruction must be available to these students throughout their schooling (Slavin, 1990).

To enhance the chances of everyone being respected, accepted, and treated kindly in the regular classroom setting, educators will need to foster and nurture a basic understanding of and appreciation for the individual differences and similarities among all students (Stainback & Stainback, 1984). Before this can happen, however, a critical examination of both past and present special education policies and practices needs to continue. Reynolds, Wang, and Walberg (1987) have stated that unless major structural changes are made, the field of special education is destined to become more of a problem and less of a solution, in providing education for children who have special needs. The hope and goal of all this restructuring would be that all students, both handicapped and non-handicapped, would be better served in the educational system.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

Please take a moment to fill out the following information:

1) The level I teach or plan to teach at:
   * Primary ___ * Secondary ___ * Special Education ___

2) The type of community I teach in:
   * Rural ___ * Suburban ___ * City ___

3) The number of years I have been teaching:
   * 0-5 ___ * 5-10 ___ * 10-15 ___ * Over 15 yrs. ___

4) Age:
   * 21-30 yrs. ___ * 31-40 yrs. ___ * 40 yrs. and up ___

5) Sex:
   * Female ___ * Male ___

6) Previous experiences concerning the handicapped:
   * College classes ___ * Workshops ___ * Personal contact with someone who is handicapped ___ * None ___

Please read each statement regarding the Regular Education Initiative carefully and circle the appropriate response. Please answer every question. Thank you for your participation. One (1) indicates a strongly disagreed belief; five (5) indicates a strongly agreed belief.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
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</table>

1) Special education programs as they currently are set up are not productive. | 1 2 3 4 5 |

2) Students are stigmatized if they receive special education services. 1 2 3 4 5

3) Students are over-identified for special education services. 1 2 3 4 5

4) The skills that are needed to teach both handicapped and non-handicapped students are the same. 1 2 3 4 5
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5) I have a positive attitude towards educating the handicapped.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Students are accurately identified for special education services.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7) I would be willing to spend the time to be trained in teaching the handicapped.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8) Once having been trained in educating the handicapped, the regular classroom teacher will be able to use these skills as effectively as special education teachers would have in the pull-out programs.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9) Classroom modifications are enough to meet the needs of exceptional students within the regular class setting.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10) Full-time placement of handicapped students into the regular classroom would eliminate labeling.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11) Non-handicapped students are willing to help their handicapped peers.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12) Blame for a student’s failure should be the responsibility of the teacher.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13) I would be willing to change my teaching style in order to accommodate more handicapped students.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
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<tr>
<td>14) Teachers have time to effectively teach more handicapped students on a full-time basis.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15) Full-time placement in a regular class setting would socially benefit exceptional students.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16) Full-time placement in a regular class setting would academically benefit exceptional students.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17) It would be academically and socially beneficial to all students if full-time regular education placement for the handicapped is attained.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18) Communication needs to improve between special and regular education educators.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19) I would welcome the chance to work closely with special educators and other specialists within the regular classroom setting.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20) Handicapped students educational rights would diminish if full-time placement into the regular classroom setting is achieved.</td>
<td>Strongly disagree</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Dear Teacher,

I ask your participation in filling out the following survey regarding teachers' perceptions of the Regular Education Initiative. The Regular Education Initiative is a proposed merger between regular and special education in which special educators would provide their services within the regular classroom setting. This Initiative aims to eliminate the current pull-out programs for those classified as handicapped and proposes to place these students for their education in the regular education setting on a full-time basis.

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather the opinions of educators regarding the issues and concerns that have been generated by this proposal.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Sincerely,

Michelle Black