



VALUING DIVERSITY ENCOURAGING INCLUSION

INCLUSION: Fulfilling the Requirement of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. We have become more aware and sensitive to these terms in the last couple of years. As an attorney who represents students with disabilities in education matters, I frequently advocate for the inclusion of students with disabilities in classrooms and school activities with their nondisabled peers. One of the basic tenets of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (commonly referred to as the IDEA) is for students with disabilities to be educated with their nondisabled peers. Yet, all too often

students with disabilities are excluded from the classrooms and school activities, and sometimes excluded from school altogether.

In enacting the IDEA, Congress found that disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. And yet, persons with disabilities often face barriers and encounter discrimination in employment and education. Congress also found that improving the educational results for children with disabilities is an essential

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element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency.

How do we ensure that children with disabilities succeed in school and are prepared for further education and employment and are fully integrated into the community in which they live? One of the first steps is to provide sufficient support and training to schoolteachers and school staff to understand the student's disabilities. The IDEA requires that school personnel have the necessary skills and knowledge to successfully serve children with disabilities. Schools must provide preservice and in-service training to paraprofessionals to ensure that they understand the specific special needs and characteristics of the student with whom the paraprofessional will be working. When school personnel attempt to implement behavioral interventions without the proper training it can exacerbate the student's behavior and result in discipline for the student and even worse, injuries to the student and staff.

Another step is to improve communication between the school and the parent of the child with a disability. The IDEA encourages collaboration between the parent and the school. Training programs must include strategies for effectively involving parents in their child's education, with an emphasis on fostering positive relationships between the parent and school. Sometimes parents simply need to understand more about their child's disability and be given the opportunity to work directly with school personnel to understand what is happening at school. Parents can also share what is happening at home so that behavioral strategies can be implemented in both environments. Many disputes can be avoided with effective communication.



SUCCESS STORIES

DLSI success leads to wide-reaching impact for students with disabilities

DLSI successfully advocated for an elementary student when the school improperly removed her for behavior caused by her disability. After investigation, the Indiana Department of Education found that the school violated state and federal laws and ordered corrective action. The school was required to retrain all special education and administrative staff on several key

areas of special education rules affecting the students. The School was also required to review and revise their current policies and procedures for disciplining students with disabilities to ensure compliance with federal law. Thus, DLSI's work not only benefitted this student, but all current and future students with disabilities who receive special education services from the school district.

DLSI successfully advocates for student to receive appropriate special education services

The parent of a middle school student reached out to DLSI for assistance when the school failed to recognize her child's disability and its effect on her education. DLSI worked collaboratively with the family and

the school to ensure the student was properly evaluated. An individualized education program was developed to meet the student's unique needs. The student successfully completed middle school and is transitioning to high school with proper supports and services in place.

NEW BOARD MEMBERS BIOS



Kate Juerling is an attorney at Norris Choplin Schroeder LLP, where she has worked since 2016. She graduated from Cathedral High School and went on to DePauw University and the Indiana University Robert H. McKinney School of Law. When she is not practicing law, you can find her in the Fort Benjamin Harrison State Park training for the upcoming New York City Marathon or playing on a co-ed slow pitch softball team at the Jewish Community Center. Kate joined DLSI because she believes that from kindergarten through her post-graduate degree, she received a wonderful education. She desires for every school to be able to provide that type of education to its students and for students to be able to reap the benefits of a lifetime of learning.



Christine Hennessy is the Director of Training and Special Initiatives at Indiana Family to Family. Prior to her work at INF2F she built her career in service as a direct care staff and then by directing the intake process for case management services within the Medicaid Waiver program. Christine and her husband are the parents to two boys and reside in Johnson County. When she is not working, Christine enjoys playing soccer in some local adult leagues and being soccer mom to both sons.

Christine joined DLSI because the mission and vision of the organization resonates with her professional and life experience. She believes that each child should have access to an education that promotes personal growth, development, independence and success as defined by the student, family and teaching team using a person-centered approach. Her hope is that increased access to a free and appropriate education will help students and families to realize their potential for their future.



Jennifer Dewitt is our newest board member and will be serving as the chair of our financial viability subcommittee. Jennifer is a graduate of IUPUI, and for the last 7 years has focused on professional roles in development and project management. She worked in several roles at Butler University including on their \$50 million business school building project, now named Dugan Hall. Following her time at Butler she spent a year and a half with Kids' Voice as Director of Development and now works as a part time associate with Norton Philanthropic Counsel. Jennifer is also the mother of three children with IEPs including medically complex twins. In her spare time, she enjoys cooking and finding great barbecue.

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