

18.40 Equitable Access and Improved Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

Resolution passed 2020; amended 2022

Whereas, the U.S. Supreme Court in 2017 in a unanimous opinion (hereinafter “Andrew F.”) ruled the legal standard for measuring progress for students with disabilities must be “markedly more. . . than de minimis progress from year to year;” and

Whereas, the U.S. Supreme Court in Endrew F. stated federal law governing special education requires that “every child should have the chance to meet challenging objectives;” and ruled that special education programs must be “reasonably calculated to enable a child to make progress appropriate in light of the child’s circumstances;” and

Whereas, federal and state law governing the rights of students with disabilities promote inclusive educational settings. Specifically, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA '04) states “having high expectations for such children and ensuring their access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom to the maximum extent possible;” and

Whereas, significant and persistent gaps remain between the achievement of students with disabilities and students without disabilities, such as high school graduation rates and post K-12 access to secondary education, training, or job placement, which remain tragically low; and

Whereas, when compared to other states, Washington state’s rates of inclusion and high school graduation rates across categories and/or groupings of disabilities (i.e., mild to moderate to severe) rank near the bottom of the country; and

Whereas, students with disabilities in Washington state continue to experience uneven and inequitable access to enriching extracurricular activities and learning opportunities that are a necessary component of every child’s education; and

Whereas, people with disabilities have significantly lower rates of employment and educational attainment than their non-disabled peers, and, as a result, also experience higher rates of poverty; and

Whereas, there is a crucial relationship between teacher expectations of students with disabilities and higher levels of achievement, and students with intellectual disabilities educated in general education settings have been found to score higher on literacy measures than students educated in segregated settings; and

Whereas, it is crucial for families to have the information they need to make fully informed decisions for their students and to be able to confirm that all educational team agreements are fulfilled.

Washington’s all-party consent law for recording means all meeting participants must agree to be recorded, so in most cases, Individual Education Plan (IEP) and 504 meetings cannot be recorded as a resource for families to refer back to; and

Whereas, upholding high expectations for all students and promoting cooperative relationships between students of all abilities can reduce the high incidence of stigmatization; and students, in turn, benefit by forming positive relationships and friendships.

Therefore, be it

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils urge all stakeholders in the educational system – teachers (both general and special education), paraeducators, staff, families, administrators, school board directors, and members of the community to:

- Have and maintain high expectations for students with disabilities with regards to academics, extracurricular activities, and overall school participation
- Create an environment that ensures families of students with disabilities are equal partners in education decision-making
- Recognize the intersectionality of disability and other identities including, but not limited to race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, students of color, students of diverse cultural or linguistic backgrounds, students of lower-income status, students of high mobility (e.g. homeless, foster care, migrant, incarcerated, and military families), and other historically marginalized identities
- Provide families of students with disabilities information and opportunities for meaningful engagement and participation in their child’s education
- Include students with disabilities in all school-based and school-directed activities
- Publish consistent data on outcomes for students with disabilities that is accessible to all; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils will advocate at the federal, state, and district level to:

- Ensure that school districts are funded for the full cost of providing educational services to all students with disabilities, as well as the cost of identifying disabilities
- Remove the 13.5% funding cap so that all students requiring services are funded
- Expand funding to districts to include both students with Individual Education Plans (IEPs), as well as the cost to provide accommodations for students with 504 plans
- Ensure students with disabilities are educated in the Least Restrictive Environment with appropriate supports alongside their typically developing peers
- Provide families and guardians access to the information they need to make fully informed decisions about their student’s education and that they have the ability to record education-related meetings to accurately document their student’s educational needs and educational team agreements
- Ensure families have access to state funded educational advocate services
- Promote cooperative relationships between students of all abilities through experiences such as peer mentoring, collaborative problem solving, and cooperative working groups, as well as through more casual or unstructured interactions
- Support expansion of school-to-work programs such as apprenticeships; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils advocate for preservice learning for teachers in training and ongoing professional development for all educators regarding adapting instruction and providing accommodations and modifications to meet the needs of students with disabilities in all settings; and be it further

Resolved, that Washington State PTA and its local PTAs and councils advocate with all communities for the development of a comprehensive statewide technical assistance system and the implementation of best practices in meeting the needs of diverse learners through such practices as inclusion, Universal Design for Learning (UDL), Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), Response to Intervention (RTI), and any other similar instructional practices to support Core Content instruction, as well as access to accommodations including assistive technology for students with disabilities, so that they may reach their highest potential.