

# NATIONAL INCLUSIVE EDUCATION INITIATIVE

## for Students with Autism and Related Disabilities

### BACKGROUND AND NEED

As the population of students with autism spectrum disorders increases (1 in 150 children is diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder in the U.S.), educators need strategies and resources to improve their ability to teach increasingly diverse student populations in general education classrooms in neighborhood schools..

Over 30 years of research has shown that academic and other important outcomes are positively correlated with the amount of time students with autism and related disabilities (ARD) spend in general education classrooms. The high costs and poorer outcomes associated with educating students with ARD in out-of-district and/or segregated placements are troubling to families, schools, and communities. Emerging best practices need to be translated and broadly disseminated to teachers for use in formats that are accessible and sustainable. Furthermore, families need to be fully engaged in the process of education, and therefore, also need skills to advocate for their children.

Finally, state and national policies need to be informed by best practices in order that regulations, funding formulas, and enforcement activities support *sustainability* of innovative practices leading to more equitable access to the general education curriculum, graduation, post-secondary education, and productive adult lives.

### ABOUT THE NIEI

The National Inclusive Education Initiative for Students with Autism and Related Disabilities is focused on improving educational services and outcomes for students with autism and related disabilities through efforts in the areas of leadership development, personnel preparation, professional development, model demonstration, clinical evaluation services, and research and policy. The NIEI is supported by the Fund for the Improvement of Education and is administered by the U.S. Department of Education.

### NIEI ACTIVITIES

**Leadership** – Engage administrators in a web-based leadership series designed to improve knowledge of best practices and leadership skills; and enhance implementation of best practices at the classroom, school, and district levels, resulting in improved membership, participation, and learning by students. Implement a national youth inclusion project that empowers young people to take action to create inclusive schools and communities.

**Personnel Preparation** – Prepare new professionals through University of New Hampshire graduate programs in special education (i.e., certify teachers to be Inclusion Facilitators of students with intellectual and developmental disabilities), assistive technology, augmentative communication, and autism. Disseminate curricula to faculty from other institutions.



**Professional Development** – Create an online learning module “Improving Access to the General Education Curriculum for Students with ASD,” (b) sustain a Community of Practice (COP) for professionals and family members where they can have access to the latest information about educating students with ASD in inclusive classrooms, and (c) host the IOD’s 12th Annual Autism Summer Institute for educators and family members.

**Model Demonstration in Schools** – Provide technical assistance to schools to encourage implementation and sustainability of model practices. Scale up local school efforts through training and coaching of state level teams.

**Influence Public Opinion Towards a Culture of Inclusion** – Create a film highlighting best practices in inclusive education and plan a national dissemination campaign.

**Model Demonstration of a State (NH) and National Professional Development and Technical Assistance Network** – Establish a comprehensive and coordinated system of professional development and technical assistance to schools in New Hampshire. Evaluate the process and outcomes of this effort and engage in partnership with other states to replicate it.

**Research and Policy** – Write and submit for publication a research paper on model demonstration site activities and outcomes. In cooperation with the NH Department of Education and the NH Autism Council, identify needed revisions in NH policies related to educating students with ARD in general education classrooms. Convene a national symposium to address the disparities between states in placement practices for students with ARD and submit proceedings and recommendations to the U.S. Department of Education for improved federal guidance and accountability.

**Dissemination** – Write a textbook highlighting evidence-based practices that support students with ARD in general education classrooms. Widely disseminate NIEI products and results to families and professionals.

## **NIEI FACULTY AND CONTACTS**

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*The NIEI is a program at the University of New Hampshire Institute on Disability. Since 1987, the Institute on Disability has been advancing policies and systems changes, promising practices, education, and research that strengthen communities to ensure full access, equal opportunities, and participation for all persons. For more information visit [www.iod.unh.edu](http://www.iod.unh.edu).*

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