



**Florida  
Developmental  
Disabilities  
Council  
Universal  
Education  
Position, Policy  
& Practice  
Statement**

*"ALL CHILDREN,  
ALL TOGETHER,  
ALL THE TIME"\**

*Universal Education, also referred to as inclusion, is an approach to education that creates learning environments which are inherently designed for diversity, making natural educational settings accessible to **all children, all together, all the time.***

### ***Position***

#### **Education is the right of ALL children.**

*We believe that to ensure individuals, regardless of ability, are viewed as important, integral members of society:*

- Florida's children should receive their education in an inclusive general education setting, reflecting natural proportions and age-appropriate heterogeneous groups across core academic and elective/special areas within the school community (10-15% of the classroom and school community);
- Students with disabilities are valued members of the classroom and school community and have teachers that hold high expectations for all students' success in school and the community;
- The community at large must be educated about universal education;
- All teachers, administrators and families support universal education and have the knowledge and supports available to enable them to effectively teach all children; and
- All teachers should be provided access to current research and technical assistance in best practices, instructional methods, and supports tailored to individuals' needs.

\*This title and some of the concepts presented are used, with permission, from the "All Children, All Together, All the Time," Position Statement of the Everyone Together project of United Cerebral Palsy of Michigan and funded by the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council.

## Legislative History

This policy has its roots in the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 which stipulated that no child, regardless of disability, can be denied an appropriate education in the least restrictive environment. The Act, renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1990 and reauthorized by Congress in 2004, created significant educational opportunities for students with disabilities and established important safeguards to ensure a free appropriate public education to students with disabilities. While IDEA does not mandate general

education class placement for students with disabilities, it presumes it to be the first option. As in other states, Florida continues to work toward universal education. The Federal DD Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, PL 106-402 states disability is a natural part of the human experience and does not diminish the right of individuals with disabilities to fully participate in and contribute to their communities through full integration and inclusion in the economic, political, social, cultural and educational mainstream of United States society.

## Policy

It is the policy of the United States that all programs, projects, and activities shall be carried out in a manner consistent with the principles that individuals with disabilities, including those with the most severe developmental

disabilities, are capable of integration and inclusion in all facets of community life with services and supports that are individualized for the person and their family, who are the primary decision makers.

*The Florida Developmental Disabilities Council is committed to fully inclusive schools and supports policies and legislation that promote:*

- Continuous collaboration and education of key stakeholders in research-based best practices that ensure high expectations, access to age appropriate “general” education curricular and extra-curricular activities for all students with disabilities and work toward removing all barriers that interfere, impede and/or prohibit access to the full range of learning opportunities;
- Leadership at the local level through school improvement plans that advance inclusive educational goals for all students;
- Re-allocation of resources and restructuring of educational systems (e.g. state, district, school and instructional team) to support inclusion of all children and adults with disabilities;
- The inclusion of children and adults with disabilities, including those with developmental disabilities, as part of a person-centered planning process;
- Allocation of resources to promote school and community-based inclusion for all persons with disabilities; and
- The development of community understanding and awareness about the benefits of school inclusion for all and the contributions of persons with disabilities.

## Practice

Universal education, alternately referred to as inclusion, requires effective collaboration among teachers, therapists, students, family members and others that are involved with the student’s development. There must be specific and organized processes for decision making and problem solving among all stakeholders.

Effective practices for universal education are: administrative leadership; supports in the general education class-

room; peer support and interaction; natural proportions; differentiated instruction; authentic learning experiences; physical environments facilitate learning; reduction of one-to-one support; age appropriate placements and heterogeneous groupings; community building; student access to accommodations and technology; participation of all; a collaborative culture; transition planning at all levels; positive behavior supports; and progress evaluation.

## Defining Characteristics of Universal Education

*The defining characteristics of universal education are focused on school values, knowledge, and supports. Schools must have the following commitment to:*

- Educate students with disabilities in general education classes in the school.
- An understanding of disabilities, including developmental disabilities.
- A commitment to developing a unique profile of the student's strengths, needs, and learning style.
- An awareness: 1) that performance and skill/knowledge are not equivalent; and 2) that measures other than standardized tests of intelligence are needed and should be used.
- An awareness of the impact of environments and events which may effect the individual, and accommodations to offset such effects (e.g. preferred seating, visuals, sensory, diet); and an understanding of the student's inconsistent performance which may result from such environmental factors.
- An understanding of the positive behavior support needs of the individual student.
- A commitment to provide supports throughout the school community and in particular in the general education classroom;
- Ongoing capacities to identify, evaluate, and resolve problems that lead to respectful solutions.
- Promotion of friendships through relationship-building activities.
- The ability to plan well with families to provide services and supports to meet the unique communication, sensory, and learning needs of each student with disabilities.

## Benefits of Universal Education

*The benefits of schools that promote universal education include:*

- Increasing academic gains for all students;
- Typical peers serving as models for students with disabilities;
- The development of natural friendships within the child's community;
- Learning new academic and social skills within natural environments, facilitating the generalization of skills;
- Students with disabilities existing in natural proportions within the school community;
- All students learning to value diversity as normal;
- Reducing dependence on one-to-one adult support and therapies by building interdependence among students, use of assistive technology and incorporating therapeutic activities into the natural environments (i.e., settings and routines of the school day); and
- Educators better meeting the needs of all students, with and without disabilities, as a result of additional instructional resources, staff development opportunities, a more flexible curriculum, and an adapted instructional delivery system.

*Universal education requires changing the structure of parallel systems of general education and special education. It is a philosophy and practice that fosters a sense of belonging among and the full membership of students with disabilities in school-wide communities, extending from birth through adulthood. Universal education honors the rights of all students to learn together and is the result of shared beliefs regarding successful academic and social outcomes for all students. Universal education is not a transient reform idea whose time will soon pass – it is the right of ALL children.*



Sponsored by the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services,  
Administration on Developmental Disabilities & the Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.

---

*Phone:* (850) 488-4180 / (800) 580-7801

*Fax:* (850) 922-6702

*TDD:* (850) 488-0956 / (888) 488-8633

*Web Page:* [fdcd.org](http://fdcd.org)

---

**Florida Developmental Disabilities Council, Inc.**

124 Marriott Drive, Suite 203  
Tallahassee, Florida 32301-2981

POSTAGE  
HERE

To: