

Responding to the Least Restrictive Environment Educational Mandates

**Youth Development Clinic of Newark, Inc.
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Who Are We?

- The Youth Development Clinic (YDC) is a 52 year old professional non-profit that offers a range of behavioral health services for children and families.
- This work includes behavioral and mental health consultation, evaluation, and counseling.
- Our goal is to use empirically-based and culturally-relevant methods to cultivate the social, emotional, and educational well-being of children and their families... ***in the communities in which they live.***

Our Work

- In the past ten years, YDC has focused intensively on providing services to children in schools and community-based settings.
- YDC has worked with pre-school through high school students with significant behavioral and emotional needs to stabilize their behaviors and foster learning.
- YDC has also provided consultation to school staff in supporting and managing these students and effectively maximizing their educational attainment.

State and Federal Laws

YDC's work with challenging students is timely, in light of recent changes in State and Federal education laws.

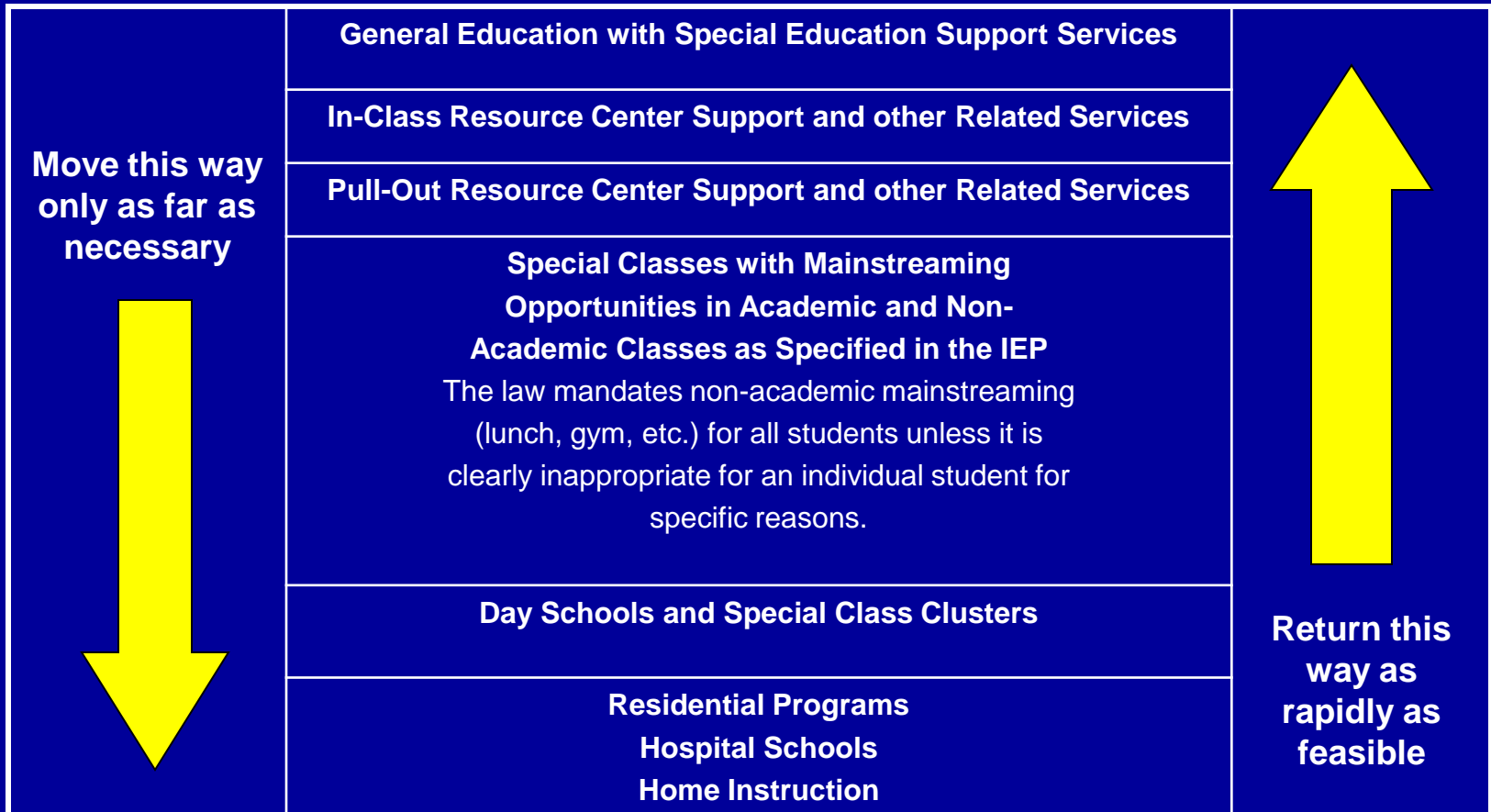
- In recent years, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1975, which was intended to protect the educational rights of children with disabilities, has been expanded and clarified to better meet the needs of its target population.
- One of the major stipulations of IDEA was the “**least restrictive environment**“, which basically states that children with educational difficulties should be educated with their typically functioning peers, to the maximum extent possible.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

- As defined in the New Jersey Administrative Code (NJAC 6A:14-2.10):

“...each public agency shall ensure that: to the maximum extent appropriate, a pupil with an educational disability shall be educated with children who are not educationally disabled; special classes, separate schooling or other removal of a pupil with an educational disability from the pupil’s regular class occurs only when the nature or severity of the educational disability is such that education in the pupil’s regular class with the use of appropriate supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”

Least Restrictive Environment Placement in the Continuum of Educational Services



Source: SPANNJ website

LRE: Impact on School Districts

In order to satisfy the mandates of LRE, the New Jersey Department of Education is now requiring school districts to bring students back in-district and educate them in their local public schools.

- Public school administrator must respond to the needs of these returning students. Districts must develop effective and comprehensive programs to avoid legal consequences of not complying with state education requirements.
- Parents and the community at large also have significant expectations that their children will be provided with the best possible education in their neighborhood schools.

LRE: The Challenge

In New Jersey, the need is great for in-district, cost-effective, supports for students in least restrictive settings.

The challenge is that many schools do not have the capacity, resources, or specialization to effectively provide comprehensive services for these students.

Our Response

In response to this, YDC has developed the following services to support school districts in implementing the Least Restrictive Environment educational mandates.

Autism Education Services

Consultation and Counseling Services

Child Study Team Support Services

Autism Education Services

- Research shows that New Jersey has the largest incidence of Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) in the country. Compared to the national autism rate of 1 in 145, New Jersey's rate is **1 in 72**. In fact, 1 in 66 boys in New Jersey are diagnosed with ASD.
- Educationally, many of these children were undiagnosed, in inappropriate academic placements, or were being unnecessarily placed in out-of-district schools at significant inconvenience to them and their families, and at considerable cost to their home school districts.
- Teaching children with ASD requires different teaching practices than those of regular special education. In order to receive successful results, teachers need specialized training and materials to meet the requirements of ASD students and the state.

Consultation and Counseling Services

- Many students who are considered for or placed in out-of-district educational settings have significant behavioral conditions that affect their capacity to learn.
- Many schools have limited resources to provide these students with the behavioral health services that they need in order to learn. YDC's model is designed to meet these needs by providing counseling to the students and their families and consultation to educational staff working with the student.

Child Study Team Support Services

- A critical component of working with ASD and other behavioral conditions in schools is an effective Child Study Team. As school districts have had to bring back and keep challenging students, Child Study Teams have been taxed in their ability to keep up with the workload of evaluating, classifying, placing, and tracking these students. As a result, some schools are experiencing a significant bottleneck in the provision of services to these students.
- YDC looks to work with school districts to resolve this issue by providing school psychologists, social workers, and Learning Disability Teacher Consultants (LDTC) to assist in Child Study Team services.

How We Implement the Model

Step One: Needs Assessment

The YDC team meets with key individuals in the school system to determine the educational needs of students with ASD and/or other behavioral difficulties.

The team works to determine a set of goals and desired outcomes that the school district wants to achieve with respect to providing behavioral services to the identified students.

How We Implement the Model

Step Two: Plan of Action

YDC develops an Action Plan through which the school district can achieve its goals and outcomes for the identified students.

The Action Plan may involve ASD, counseling and consultation, and/or child study team services.

It will also include recommendations for:

Level of Programming Needs
Educational Staffing
Resource Requirements
Cost and Savings

How We Implement the Model

Step Three: Staff Training

YDC provides a series of trainings to all staff and administrators who will be involved in working with the identified ASD and special education students. The trainings focus on theoretical and practical issues in working with students with behavioral difficulties.

Topics include:

Behavioral Disorders in Children

Behavior Management

Classroom /Physical structure for students with ASD

Learning Strategies

How We Implement the Model

Step Four: Ongoing Consultation

YDC will provide on-going consultation to administrators and classroom staff.

Consultation services include:

Problem-solving for Program/Classroom Issues

Monitoring of Classroom Structure

Data Collection

Behavior Plan Consultation

New Students Selection and Orientation

Behavior Management Issues

How We Implement the Model

Step Five: Additional Services

YDC will be available to provide additional support services to the school district, as needed.

Services may include:

Parent Workshops/Meetings

Sensitivity Training

Additional Staff Trainings

Special Topic Trainings

How We Implement the Model

Step Six: Program Evaluation

YDC will conduct program evaluations, with educational staff, identified students and parents, at pre-determined intervals during the first year to determine the progress of the program and the perceived effectiveness of the YDC staff.

A program report will be generated at the end of the academic year detailing the successes of YDC's services in the school, and also highlighting areas for continued improvement.

Summary

Due to changes in federal and state education laws, school districts in New Jersey are faced with the challenge of educating students who they previously would have placed in specialized out-of-district schools, at significant cost to the district and inconvenience to the students and families.

Despite their desire to meet these educational mandates, many school districts do not currently have the expertise, resources, and capacity to effectively educate these children in-district.

Youth Development Clinic has responded to this need by developing the model to assist school districts in providing comprehensive, effective, in-district services to their special needs students.

To date, YDC has worked with three school districts to successfully meet the mandates of least restrictive environment.

Benefits

The YDC Model will lead to:

- Significant cost savings to school districts who implement this program over the long term.
- Significant lifestyle benefits to students with ASD and other behavioral difficulties.
- Significant educational benefits to students with ASD and other behavioral difficulties.
- A more knowledgeable, consistent and effective classroom staff.
- A more stable classroom learning environment.

For More Information:



Youth Development Clinic

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