

Promoting Inclusion

(revisited)

*A report and accompanying resource guide
about the issues surrounding the inclusion
of students with special needs
in regular classrooms at their neighborhood schools*



- drawing by Martha Perske

THE GEORGIA ADVOCACY OFFICE... *occasionally produces issue papers on topics of critical importance to people with special needs in Georgia...*

The Georgia Advocacy Office is the Protection and Advocacy System for GA and receives funding through: •US Dept. of Health and Human Services/Administration on Developmental Disabilities (PADD); • Georgia Dept. of Community Affairs (Citizen Advocacy); •US Dept. of Health and Human Services/Center for Mental Health Services, Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (PAIMI); •US Department of Education/Rehabilitation Services (PAIR); •US Dept. of Education, Nat'l Instit. on Disability and Rehab. Research (PAAT); • US Social Security Administration (PABSS) •Donations from Individuals and Corporations.

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We encourage and welcome commentary and discussion about any of the facts and issues raised in this paper.

The roots of exclusion run deep

Historically, society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities, and, despite some improvements, such forms of discrimination against individuals with disabilities continue to be a serious and pervasive social problem; discrimination against individuals with disabilities persists....

- *Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990
Sec. 2. Findings and Purposes*

While early special education thinking and practice separated students by perceived degree of disability, early researchers felt that most students could be included in regular classes (Reynolds, "Framework for Considering Some Issues in Special Education," *Exceptional Children*, 1962, 28:368). A continuum of educational environments evolved in which many children with mild or unobtrusive disabilities are substantially included. *When this issue paper was first written in 1991* we found that nationally and in Georgia, children with substantial developmental special needs were mostly excluded from full participation in regular classes by a system that still isolated and segregated students by degree of perceived disability (National Center for Education Statistics, *Digest of Education Statistics*, 1989). Now, a dozen years later, we find that many students are still being served in segregated settings; but, we also find more students each year being served in more integrated settings, in more creative and individual ways. On the following page you will find one such story.

The "Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975" (P.L. 94-142), the "Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments of 1990" (P.L. 101-476, also referred to as IDEA), and most recently the IDEA Amendments of 1997 (Public Law 105-17) established a right for all children with disabilities to a free public school education. These laws stipulate that exclusion from the regular classroom can occur only when education in regular classes cannot be achieved even with supplementary supports or services. In Georgia, most children with severe handicaps (especially children labeled with mental retardation) still spend much of their school day in self-contained classes or in highly segregated schools where they are excluded from meaningful full-time involvement with typical students (see page three). Thus, special education practice has evolved into a continuum much like the one described in 1962, with most students with severe disabilities are effectively denied full participation in regular classrooms. We must continue to work for creative, individual situations for all students.

“Chandler Has a Great Story”

“I love drawing cats, dogs and friends,” says Chandler Cash, a first grade student at Nickajack Elementary School in Cobb County. Thanks to her school’s practice of including all children, Chandler has plenty of friends to choose from. Her two best friends are classmates Catherine and Jamie, who recently had a sleepover at Chandler’s house.

“We go outside and play together, and we go to the movies,” says Chandler. “My favorite thing about school is playing with Chandler,” says Jamie. “If she wasn’t here, I’d be bored!” Catherine adds, “I’ve been with Chandler for two years already. If she wasn’t here, I would think about her and see how she was doing.”

“Chandler has a great story,” says Holli Cash of her 7-year-old daughter. “At the beginning of last school year, we almost took her out of school and put her in a self-contained class. The problem was, Chandler’s needs weren’t being met as well as they could be. The teachers wanted to meet her needs, but they weren’t sure how.” So Mrs. Cash, who is a member of the PTA and active in her daughter’s school, requested a meeting with her daughter’s teachers and the school specialists. “At the time, Chandler was doing the same work that her classmates were doing, but we realized she needed more breaks in order to be successful. That was written into her educational plan.”

“Another thing we put in place was the opportunity for Chandler to meet her next year’s teacher and see next year’s classroom before the

end of this school year. That way she will already know her teacher and her teacher will know her before her IEP meeting in the fall.”

“We have the same expectations for all of our students,” says Amy Roberts, Chandler’s first grade teacher. “Before I taught here, I observed some classes. I was told, ‘You may have children in your class with severe disabilities. Do you want to be a teacher who includes students?’” “Yes!” I said. “It is amazing to see how loving and accepting everyone is. The kids don’t see a difference [between themselves and others].”

“I have found that both the teachers and the students treat Chandler as a child, not as a child with a disability,” says Mrs. Cash. “We don’t have ‘special needs’ week at Nickajack. We don’t treat our kids differently! That’s fine by me.” From the smile on Chandler’s face, it’s fine by her, too.

Reprinted from “The GAO Advocate,” Volume XXV, Number 2, July 2002.



Our thesis: Regular classes, typical children, varied instruction

Children should have the opportunity to be educated at their neighborhood school. Although reasonable people can make good arguments that some children need to be segregated in order to be educated, we believe (and research studies such as the one conducted by Project WINS and cited on page 5 of this paper support this viewpoint) that all children with special needs should be educated with their non-handicapped peers in regular classrooms. We know that it took many hard-working parents and advocates many years to establish the right of every child with developmental and other special needs

There is only one criterion for inclusion. life itself.

• Marsha Forest
(O'Brien and Forest,
Action for Inclusion, 1989)

to a public school education, but the work is not yet over. School administrators, teachers, family members and students must work together to help inclusive environments evolve.

With effective planning and redistribution of resources, proper supports can be provided and curricula adapted to allow all children to be educated together in regular classrooms at their neighborhood school. By highlighting Georgia's performance and describing resources that are available for change, we hope to share the vision and information to help make our schools more inclusive for everyone.

Thousands Are Excluded From Regular Classes in Georgia

It is our experience that students with substantial disabilities (and especially students with greater degrees of mental retardation or mental illness) are essentially excluded from regular classes at their neighborhood school. It is also our experience that students with the most severe disabilities tend to be more segregated and isolated. For all practical purposes, the special education system that has evolved in Georgia frequently operates as if students with special needs must be separated from typical students

.... in the field of public education, the doctrine of "separate but equal" has no place."

• U.S. Supreme Court
Brown vs. the Board of Education,
347 US 483 (1954)

in order to have their educational needs met.

Of the 1.4 million students in Georgia aged 6 - 21 there are 165,453 students with an IEP, 11.8% of the student population. Looking at these 165,453 students around Georgia we find that 71,817 of them are in regular education classes for at least 80% of their school day. That leaves 93,636, or 56.6% of these students being pulled out of their regular education classes and into other settings for 20% or more of their day.

Of that group, 50,598 (30.6%) are pulled into segregated settings between 21 and 60% of the school day. Another 3164 children receive education services in settings ranging from institutional and residential school programs to hospital/ homebound programs.

1991	2003
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student population	.98 million 1.4 million
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students with IEPs	8.4% 11.8%
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students included \geq 80%	37.1% 43.4%
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students included 21 - 60% ("resource")	36.2% 30.6%
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students in residential settings	
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Current reality in Georgia

- Over 2,000 school-aged children and youth in institutions and residential schools.
- Estimated exclusion of over 39,000 students with disabilities through placement in special education for more than 60% of school day.

Exclusion

Inclusion

- Few students with moderate or severe disabilities are included in regular classes.
- About 71,000 students spend one segment per day in special education.

Essentially Full-time in Regular Class

The following graph shows some of the growth in the student population of Georgia from 1991 to 2003 and the slight shift to more integrated services for those students who have IEPs.

The discussion above summarizes our extrapolation of information from Georgia's Department of Education. We have made assumptions about the information supplied to us by the Georgia Department of Education in order to make a few comments about inclusion and exclusion of students with special needs in Georgia's public schools. Our experience advocating on behalf of students in about 215 educational situations each year leads us to conclude that our assumptions are fair.

We are told that the most reliable data relate to special education funding. We used data on the percentage of time students spent in special education classes.

One of the most highly excluded groups is made up of students labeled with moderate, severe or profound mental disabilities (the education system's latest term for mental retardation). Students labeled with mental illness and EBD (emotional behavior disorder) also find themselves in this "exclusive" category. A few students with moderate or severe physical disabilities are included in regular classes. Few students with significant intellectual disabilities are included in regular classes (and fewer still receive the appropriate supports to do so).

One research study that has been conducted on the impact of inclusion was done by Project WINS. Project WINS (Winning Ideas Network of Schools) is a collaborative project between the Georgia Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities and Kennesaw State University. It is designed to assist educators engaged in school restructuring and standards-based reform. In "Everybody Wins," by Toni Strieker and Kent Logan, published in The State Education Standard, Autumn, 2001, the authors report on their findings over a two year data collection period.

"One of the primary fears about inclusion is that it will have an adverse impact on the achievement of peers without disabilities. Over a two-year period, Project WINS collected data (in the form of grades and Iowa Test of Basic Skills [ITBS] scores) on 500 general education students from five project schools (three elementary, two middle).Our Data clearly show that there is no adverse impact on general education students when students with disabilities are included in their classrooms with co-teaching support.

A second fear about inclusion is that students with disabilities will not meet their Individual Educational Plan (IEP) objectives within the context of the general education classroom. Over a two-year period, Project WINS collected IEP data on 200 students with IEPs at the project schools and analyzed the percentage of time they spent in general education and their mastery of IEP objectives. ...all general and special education teachers reported that they perceived that the IEP objectives in inclusive classrooms were more difficult, more connected to the general education curriculum (Georgia's Quality Core Curriculum [GQCC]), and evaluated against a more rigorous standard than they had been prior to inclusion."

The Georgia Advocacy Office receives hundreds of calls each year about students in Georgia schools. It is just as important to illustrate our failures as it is to highlight our successes. When a student is isolated from their peers it is easy for the other students to forget about them. Segregation and isolation lead us down a slippery slope - if a student is so “different” from their peers that they cannot attend school with them, then why would they want to participate in the same scout troupe? ball team? or dance class? Conversely, since these students are so different from me, we may begin to ask ourselves “Why do I care what happens to this *other* person?”

When people are isolated from their community they become more vulnerable to being abused or neglected. The more eyes that see a person, the more light that is shed on a situation, the more likely it is that a person with developmental or other disabilities will be treated with the respect that they deserve.

The following story illustrates one such situation where a student was vulnerable to harm because of their isolated educational setting.

Kathy is a 7 year old girl with multiple labels. Beginning at age 3 she was served in settings which included both typical children and children with special needs. This continued until her first grade year. Shortly after, her mother agreed for Kathy to be served in a self-contained setting. Most of the children in the class were non-verbal. Kathy also does not use words to communicate and soon started to exhibit signs of frustration. The signs became very severe - she began to injure herself, biting her hand so hard she tore off hunks of flesh.

Kathy’s mom started to ask questions to find out what was going on in the classroom that was causing her daughter such frustration. The parapro who had worked with Kathy for the previous two years left the school and contacted Kathy’s mom to express concerns about Kathy’s classroom situation. Kathy’s mom went to observe in the classroom and the lunchroom and saw that the teacher used punishment rather than the positive behavior management strategies previously used effectively with Kathy as part of her IEP. While the mom was investigating the school situation, Kathy’s behaviors and frustration became so severe that her mother felt she had to remove her from the school setting until the issues could be resolved.

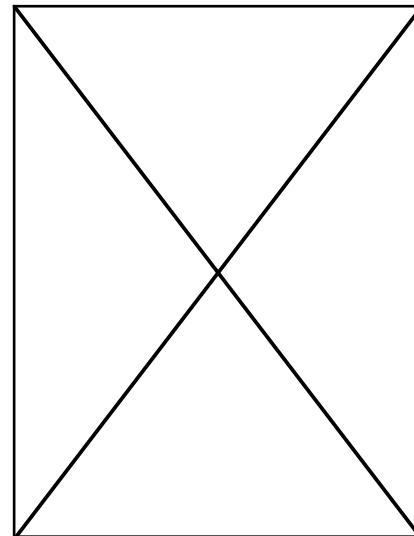
Within a month meetings were held and new placements were proposed. Kathy’s mom was able to observe both of the proposed school settings. A placement was developed which allowed Kathy to spend half of her day with typical peers. Now the self-injurious behaviors have subsided and she is expressing happiness about being back in school.

Think about the safety that being included in the larger school community might have brought to the situation.

Tom Kohler has been working in Savannah for 25+ years as a citizen advocacy coordinator, matching individuals with disabilities in need of spokespersonship with community members who have the energy and spirit to speak for them. Tom was asked to think about a story of one of those relationships that would illustrate how inclusive schooling has changed in Chatham County/ Savannah over the past years.

The following article first appeared in *Savannah Magazine*, in January/ February 2001 and is reprinted in part, with permission.

Louisa Abbot has been a citizen advocate for some years and had been recently elected to the bench when this article was written. The article generated a letter to Judge Abbot which follows.



boy who used crutches and who was resisting assignment to a special school for the “orthopedically handicapped.”

“This child and his mother felt very strongly that he should be able to go to his neighborhood school,” Abbot recalled. “Ultimately, the school system did permit him to stay.”

Abbot saw the episode as affirming the “inherent value and humanness” of her protege - and the need to fight “the threats and barriers that keep your partner from participating in community life... ultimately we recognize that segregation is not beneficial to people. Being good citizens means living together in community, recognizing the value of everyone in the community.

Advocacy in Action

by Brad Swope

photo by Paul Nurnberg

Louisa Abbot, Chatham County’s newest Superior Court judge, learned something lasting about the importance of individual dignity more than a decade ago, after she became a citizen advocate with Chatham-Savannah Citizen Advocacy.

The nonprofit organization asked Abbot to advocate for - or “partner with” - a 7-year-old

After the article appeared in *Savannah Magazine*, Judge Abbot received a letter from someone she had not heard from in several years.

January 20, 2001

Louisa,

It's been a long time to be sure. I received a copy of the Savannah Magazine the other day. I was just flipping through the pages and came across an article about you. You made mention of your relationship more than 10 years ago with a little boy on crutches, and I kind of thought you might be talking about Jeffrey. I thought you might like to know what became of the little boy for whom you became and advocate and a friend. He has become quite the handsome young man and is planning on attending college in the fall. He has been accepted to East Carolina University but is thinking about UNC at Charlotte as well. We have moved around a little during his lifetime and currently live on Fort Bragg, North Carolina where his father is stationed. Jeff has done remarkably well for himself. He's done well in school, endured many surgeries over the years, but otherwise is in very good health. He plays wheelchair tennis, and is a member of the National Wheelchair Pool Players Association. He drives a car that we have outfitted with hand controls. He works for Carmike Theaters and thoroughly

enjoys making money like the rest of us! He couldn't be any more balanced as a teenager and is a joy to his father and me. To this day, Jeff remembers the struggle that we all endured just to get him accepted at his neighborhood school. I do hope that we made a difference for children that came after Jeff and that their struggle for acceptance was made easier.

I do hope that you take some pleasure in knowing that you helped put Jeff on the right path to success. I am a firm believer that people cross our paths for a reason, even if it's just for a short time. You helped Jeff and me when we needed it and we just wanted you to know.

Sincerely,

Brenda

Finding ways to diminish the segregation that children with disabilities are forced to endure in the Savannah-Chatham County School System continues to be an uphill battle. Local public school special education department staff did recently accompany parent advocate Esma Campbell on a trip to Blacksburg, Virginia to see an inclusive school system. Time will tell how change will come for children in Savannah- Chatham County Public Schools.

Viewpoints of Inclusion

In the years since we first visited this issue there has been some slow progress made on building more inclusive education settings here in Georgia. We want Georgians to continue to learn about and work for inclusive education and we hope that this issue paper will further this end. The first version of "Promoting Inclusion" offered examples from other states. Now, *some 12 years later*, we are able to offer examples of successful inclusive education right here in Georgia.

Inclusion is a Mind Set

Seeing is believing ... or I'll believe it when I see it. If you believe that inclusion is the right thing to do, then your awareness of opportunities will be heightened. It will be hard to look at a situation without thinking about ways to involve people with disabilities in the activity. There become very different expectations for what is possible.

Loganville High School is a setting where opportunities abound. The traditional approach is to channel students with special needs into special education classes where all their needs are addressed. If the goal is to figure out how to make a student with special needs an integral part of the school life, then the entire school campus and variety of academic and extracurricular activities become the stage.

Courtnei Dearing is a freshman in high school. She started high school primarily in special education classes. Her mother wanted her opportunities expanded so Mrs. Dearing offered to observe in some classes to see if Courtnei's individual education program could be addressed in an array of settings. Courtnei has dreamed of working in child care, a beauty shop, or a hospital. With this in mind, here are the opportunities that her mother found:

Consumer Science and Education class (formerly Home Ec) was a place where Courtnei could learn kitchen safety, following recipes, measuring ingredients, learn facts about nutrition, and baking and packaging cookies that are sold in the cafeteria at break time. The teacher also is sponsor for the Future Homemakers of America. She knows Courtnei because her son played on Courtnei's brother's ball team.

The Health Occupations class was a place for

A Parent's Perspective

Courtnei has always been included because of her mother's diligent efforts to make sure her daughter wasn't excluded. According to Carol, here is why inclusion is so important: "My dream for my daughter is that she will have a home of her own and a job that she loves. I know that for these things to happen that she needs to be a part of her community. I have always pushed to make sure that she had opportunities to be included. I know that I will not always be around to look out for her. The people her age are the ones that will be around when I am gone. I want them to know Courtnei."

"They will be the bank loan manager who can help her buy a house or the employer who can hire her for a job. Since I have insisted that she not be excluded, these students are familiar with her. They aren't afraid and they see her potential. They, too, may be parents of a child with a disability in the future and may handle it better because of knowing Courtnei."

"I get angry when people say, 'Oh, you just want her to be social.' No, that is not it at all. I want her to be challenged. I have expectations for her to do as much as she can for herself. I want her to contribute to her community. She is a caring person. I want people to really know the person that she is and see beyond her disability. I don't want them to cut her any slack if she is doing things that she shouldn't do. I don't want her time wasted on busy work. She needs to be learning things that are meaningful and will help her become more productive."

Reprinted from Inclusive Youth Development, by Dottie Adams, published by the Institute on Human Development and Disability

Inclusion is a Mind Set (continued)

standard for health care professionals, making hospital beds, and developing first aid skills. In addition, her mother wants to explore the possibility of Courtni being a candy striper at the local hospital.

The Early Childhood Education class, which is an actual preschool program for 4-year-olds, could be a Mecca for Courtni. The classroom aide had been a camp counselor and Bible School teacher for Courtni and felt that she would readily fit in. The opportunities included work on the computer to get ideas for games and art projects, fixing snacks for the kids, making art materials and bulletin boards, and playing with kids in the various centers. The aide even welcomed Courtni to go along with her to the grocery store on Mondays to purchase the ingredients for the children's snacks.

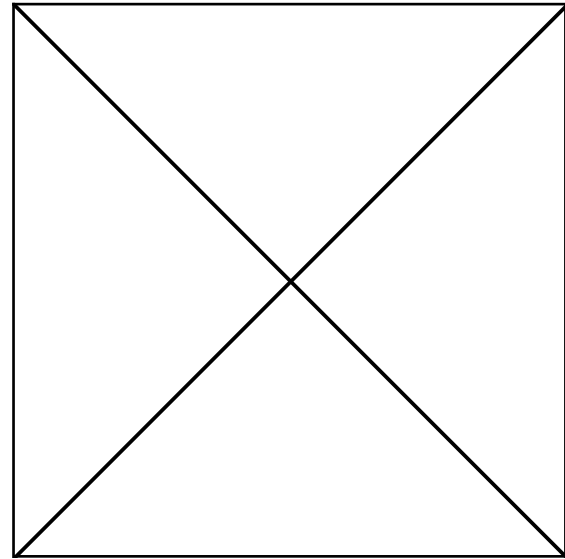
The Cosmetology class had a dispensary for beauty supply products that needed to be organized and managed. There were chances to launder and fold towels, sweep up cut hair, sterilize implements, sort rollers, and learn to wash someone else's hair. The teacher had experience with inclusion and felt that Courtni's objectives could be worked on during any period of the day.

The number of places available for Courtni to learn skills that would promote her vocational marketability and her independent living was incredible. The hard part is to help others see the relevance of thinking outside the "special" boxes. Creativity becomes contagious once people feel they have the permission to look for options. Take the challenge and expand your mind set.

The article describing Courtni Dearing's high school experience brings up the topic of transitioning from school to work, and how well are our schools preparing students with developmental and other disabilities for life after school? INCLUSION is not a concept that should stop at the school doors.

When one looks at the last national census the employment statistics are startling. In

Courtni at school, displaying her 4-H Project



the age group 25 - 59, only 63% of Georgians who self-reported having some type of disability are employed. This is in sharp contrast to the 86% of the population who are employed and self-reported as having no disability.

Part of this gap in employment rates between Georgians with and without disabilities has to do with the ongoing concern that some employers express about hiring a person with a disability and then finding out that they may not be able to perform the functions of a job as well as their non-disabled peer. Or they are unsure of how to ask the applicant what type of accommodations they might need to accomplish all of the tasks.

One can take the stance that employment discrimination based on disability is illegal, and the Americans with Disabilities Act would certainly back us up on that stance.

We also have lots of legislation that provides for an appropriate education for all children in their neighborhood schools.

But, Ms. Dearing speaks for many parents when she writes about her daughter, “She needs to be part of the community.Since I have insisted that she not be excluded, these students are familiar with her. They aren’t afraid and they see her potential.” The same students that your child attends class with today are the people that will be their co-workers, neighbors, beautician, physician, postal carrier, etc. tomorrow.

INCLUSION is not just about school. It is about community. It is preschool and playdates, scouting and summer camp, having something meaningful to do with your day.

Inclusive schooling impacts much more than how well students with developmental and other disabilities learn. Many students learn material faster by teaching it to their peers. We believe that having a diverse classroom is also an opportunity for all students to learn about the value of differences.

Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

In Conclusion

We hope that people who have a stake in Georgia's schools will openly discuss the issues surrounding inclusive schooling and make active efforts to learn, to teach others, and to make inclusion happen in our schools.

Beyond this, we should all expect, encourage, and support changes in law and policy that enable schools to become inclusive without losing resources.

There is no substitute for working hard for something over time. Creating an inclusive new order takes a lot of time and work. As you learn, reflect on how much you want to take on for the long haul; develop strategies for renewing your commitment. Seek out others who are working for inclusion. Build a group of allies starting first with those who will work for inclusion with you. Work hard to win supporters within the school system. Finally, let us know about any work you are doing for inclusion.

RESOURCES FOR INCLUSION

BOOKS

Action for Inclusion: How to Improve Schools by Welcoming Children with Special Needs into Regular Classrooms, O'Brien and Forest, 1989, Frontier College Press

Better All Together: A Collection of Articles and Information on Inclusive Education, 1995, Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities

Circles of Friends, Perske and Perske, 1988, Abingdon Press

Disability is Natural, Snow, 2001, Braveheart Press

Natural Supports in School, at Work, and in the Community for People with Severe Disabilities, Nisbet, 1992, Paul Brookes Publishing

Opening Doors: Strategies for Including all Students in Regular Education, Schaffner and Buswell, 1991, PEAK Parent Center

Schooling Without Labels: Parents, Educators, and Inclusive Education, Biklen, 1992, Temple University Press

Support Networks for Inclusive Schooling, Stainback and Stainback, 1990, Paul Brookes Publishing

Winners All: a Call for Inclusive Schooling, Roach, 1992, National Association of State Boards of Education

RESOURCES FOR INCLUSION

HELPFUL WEBSITES

<http://www.copaa.net>

COPAA is the Council of Parents, Attorneys, and Advocates. It is an independent, nonprofit organization established to improve the quality and quantity of legal assistance for parents of children with disabilities.

<http://www.communityworks.info>

Community Works provides information on futures planning through the PATH process. Many articles are available online - from school inclusion to building community.

<http://www.disabilityisnatural.com>

This site is by the author who wrote the book by the same title. It features articles from the subscription newsletter "Revolutionary Common Sense."

<http://www.thegao.org>

The homepage of the Georgia Advocacy Office. It features our most recent newsletters, an on-line version of "Advocating for Your Child's Education" in both English and Spanish, and announcements of upcoming training events.

<http://www.gcdd.org>

The homepage for the Governor's Council on Developmental Disabilities. You can access the latest edition of "Making a Difference" magazine, read the Council's latest legislative fact sheets, and find links to other advocacy organizations.

<http://www.inclusion.com>

This is the homepage for Inclusion Press. In addition to ordering publications and videos, this is also a good place to find out about workshops and seminars.

<http://www.pacer.org>

PACER is the Parent Advocacy Coalition for Educational Rights. Their mission is to expand opportunities and enhance the quality of life of children and young adults with disabilities and their families, based on the concept of parents helping parents.

<http://www.ProjectWINS.org>

This site is still partially under construction. It offers local links for parent support as well as an on-line discussion board.

<http://www.reedmartin.com>

This site offers a free Email newsletter, "Advocacy Tip of the Week," Special Education Articles, ASK REED Questions and Answers, "Worst School Outrage of the Month," and more.

<http://www.wrightslaw.com>

This site offers accurate, up-to-date information about effective advocacy for children with disabilities.