

## **Quality Sexuality Education for Students with Disabilities or Other Special Needs**

WHEREAS, students in the United States with physical, emotional, cognitive, developmental, or multiple disabilities are guaranteed an appropriate education under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA), Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and other relevant mandates protecting the education rights of students with disabilities or other special needs in the United States; <sup>1, 2</sup>

WHEREAS, the sexual rights and sexuality education of individuals with disabilities have been advanced by the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), advocacy organizations for individuals with disabilities, and numerous authors in professional literature for the past three decades; <sup>2, 3, 4, 5</sup>

WHEREAS, students with disabilities or other special needs develop sexually in similar ways as students without disabilities, and sexuality influences the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social aspects of life regardless of disability; <sup>6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13</sup>

WHEREAS, research indicates that individuals with disabilities can experience unique barriers to sexual health because of exceptionalities, and that these barriers can result in sexual exploitation, sexual assault, unintended pregnancy, and sexually transmitted infections; <sup>11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19</sup>

WHEREAS, students with disabilities or other special needs often require more assistance, specialized instruction, or adapted services to understand their sexuality in relation to their physical, emotional, and social development and to increase their skill development to reduce sexual risk; <sup>2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 17, 20, 21, 22, 23</sup>

WHEREAS, parental support for sexuality education in schools for children with disabilities or other special needs is increasing because of parental concerns regarding their children's risk of sexual exploitation and assault, inappropriate behavior, unintended pregnancy, and vulnerability to HIV and other sexually transmitted infections; <sup>7, 24, 25, 26</sup> and

WHEREAS, special education, health education, and health professionals support sexuality education for students with disabilities but receive minimal instruction to deliver sexuality education in professional preparation programs. <sup>2, 14, 16, 23, 24, 27, 28</sup>

**THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED:** that the American School Health Association:

- 1) recognizes that students with disabilities or other special needs are sexual beings with developmental issues that are both similar to and unique from their non-disabled peers and that these issues influence their sexual health and behaviors;
- 2) is firm in its support and advocacy efforts of the right of students with disabilities or other special needs to have developmentally appropriate, quality, comprehensive, medically accurate and skills-based sexuality education in grades K-12, preferably delivered within the context of comprehensive health education;
- 3) recommends that individuals teaching sexuality education to students with disabilities or other special needs receive adequate training in pre-professional programs and through continuing professional development to plan, implement, and evaluate sexuality education that is ability-centered, age-appropriate, developmentally sensitive, culturally

- competent, and accommodated;
- 4) encourages (a) the inclusion of students with disabilities or other special needs in national data collection programs targeting sexuality and youth; (b) research that specifically targets sexual behaviors and outcome of students with disabilities and other special needs; and (c) the use of alternative research methods, such as qualitative inquiry, for youth who cannot participate in traditional research methods; and
  - 5) invites cooperative and collaborative program planning, policy development, research, and advocacy efforts among special education, health education, and allied health professionals to improve the sexual health of students with disabilities or other special needs.

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Year Revised 2009

Year Adopted: 2003

© 2009

American School Health Association

7263 State Route 43 / P.O. Box 708

Kent, OH 44240

330/678-1601 (phone)

330/678-4526 (fax)

asha@ashaweb.org (e-mail)

www.ashaweb.org