

CONCEPT PAPER  
**Universal Education: A Design for Learning**  
Adopted February 13, 2003

*Everyone Together* and its member networks define *Universal Education: A Design for Learning* as:

*“An approach to education that creates learning environments which are inherently designed for diversity, thus making natural educational settings accessible to all children, all together, all the time.”*

This definition represents a conscious decision to move away from a teaching methodology that directs instruction to an “average” student in a “traditional” classroom. Universal Education embraces a differentiated approach to learning that acknowledges that all children learn differently, enter the classroom at different academic levels, and have very diverse abilities, disabilities, and innate skills, gifts and talents. The myth of general education classrooms where all children are performing at grade level must be dispelled. *Universal Education: A Design for Learning* is a philosophy that would build learning environments that are inherently flexible and accessible, thus benefiting all learners.

The *Everyone Together* concept of Universal Education embraces techniques like *authentic* multi-level teaching and differentiated instruction so that classrooms are inherently designed to meet the needs of all our diverse learners without ability groupings and pull-out programs. **All** students, not only those with educational “labels,” benefit from educational environments which are flexible and serve a wide range of student learning styles and needs, thus enabling students to learn in the ways that are the most natural, comfortable and effective for them.

We conclude that *Universal Education: A Design for Learning* benefits all students. It is the right thing to do for **all children, all together, all the time.**

***Everyone Together:***

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**POSITION PAPER**  
**All Children, All Together, All the Time**  
Adopted February 13, 2003

It is the position of *Everyone Together* that children are best educated in natural educational settings that are comprised of all children, all together, all the time.

We believe that building educational communities that are truly inclusive—where children are universally welcomed not despite their differences but with respect for them—is a worthwhile effort that will lay the foundation for an inclusive community: a community that values the attributes of all its diverse members.

Yet, the unfortunate reality of our education system today is that many children, primarily children with disabilities, are systematically excluded from their natural educational settings—general education classrooms, with same-age peers, in their neighborhood schools. This exclusion from the very community of childhood sets a precedent for exclusion from the larger social community that extends into adulthood. Furthermore, this exclusion, which begins so early, becomes ingrained in all the community members’ ways of thinking, so that exclusion and segregation of people with disabilities, from childhood through adulthood, becomes a socially acceptable concept.

It is the position of *Everyone Together* that exclusion, separation and segregation based on disability is unacceptable. This pattern of exclusion begins within the natural social communities of our youngest children; that is, within our school systems. For the sake of building social communities and a culture that values and embraces all differences, including disability, this pattern of exclusion must be clearly identified as detrimental and divisive. It must be stopped. Our society does not accept “separate but equal” as a justification for segregation based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual preference or any other human condition. It is equally unacceptable and in fact intolerable to continue to accept, condone, and support “separate but equal” as a justification for separating children and people with disabilities from their communities.

Therefore, *Everyone Together* and its member networks hold the following truths to be self-evident:

1. That Universal Education, where the natural settings of childhood are utilized to educate all our children, all together, all the time, is a worthy goal.
2. That our public education system must begin to address how to recreate itself to support Universal Education.
3. That educational segregation based on disability is inherently and morally wrong.
4. That the right of children with disabilities to be included in their natural educational settings is an issue of civil rights, not merely disability.
5. That all children belong in all schools with their same-age peers: no child should have to “earn” the right to belong. (Kunc 1992)
6. That all children can and do learn.

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## *Everyone Together*



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**“All children, all together, all the time.”**

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7. That all children learn differently and need different supports to succeed
8. That Universal Education benefits all community members.

This paper cannot and will not begin to address the many complex systemic, social and financial obstacles that naysayers could use to argue that Universal Education is not attainable. *Everyone Together* and its member networks acknowledge that these obstacles exist and that they will require significant effort and commitment to overcome. However, we also assert the fact that they are merely obstacles, not dead-end barriers, and thus are surmountable.

*Everyone Together* maintains that obstacles to inclusive communities are best and most effectively addressed at the point when they first begin to appear. Therefore, it is most beneficial to do our work in the social community in which we as citizens first learn how to play, work, and act as members of a community: in our school systems.

*Everyone Together* is committed to building inclusive communities where all people, no matter what their differences, disabilities, or innate human conditions may be, are welcomed and, moreover, valued. We are committed to starting that building process in our schools. The premise of Universal Education, which truly benefits *all children* and truly values *all children* as community members, is a concept whose time has come. All children, all together, all the time. *Everyone Together*. **That** is our mission.

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