WHOLE SCHOOLING RESEARCH PROJECT

V. INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN MICHIGAN AND THE DETROIT METRO AREA

The schools we studied operate within the context of educational practices in Michigan and, for the most part, in the Detroit Metropolitan area. In this section, we review the educational context as it relates specifically to inclusive education.

Inclusive Education in Michigan

Early on, Michigan developed a progressive tradition for caring for people with challenges in their lives, enacting some of the most generous social service legislation in the country. In this general environment, it was not a surprise that the state passed legislation in the 1970's to educate children with disabilities ages 3 – 26, setting a standard of comprehensive services that would, in part, eventually become part of federal legislation. During the 1970's, the state of Michigan took national and world leadership in the de-institutionalization of persons with developmental disabilities. Significant class action suits related to conditions in state institutions led to a state policy that was committed to community placements-- largely at the time into group homes, sheltered workshops, or other similar programs. Michiganders have long been proud of this heritage[1].

Michigan made major investments in school programs for students with disabilities. Intermediate school districts built new facilities to educate students with moderate to severe disabilities who previously would have been in residential institutions. Special education legislation was passed in the 1970's that substantially expanded funding and the scope of services provided in the state, with services starting at age 3 and continuing in some cases through age 26. Concerned that such programs be well implemented, "special education rules", essentially state regulations, were developed that specified numerous details of program implementation. Programs were organized around special education classrooms based on discrete disability categories.

In the mid-1980's, schools in a few states and Canadian provinces began to experiment with the next phase of services for students with disabilities, bringing supports offered in typical (non-segregated) environments to a new level. In Kitchener, Ontario, schools established successful

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[1] Henrickson, W. (1991). Detroit perspectives: Crossroads and turning points. Detroit, Wayne State University Press.
Gibson, R. & Peterson, M. (2001). Whole schooling: Implementing progressive school reform. In Wayne E. Ross (Ed.). The social studies curriculum: Purposes, problems, and possibilities. New York: State University of New York Press.

efforts to include children with mild to severe disabilities in general education classrooms with support. A unique partnership of individuals worked together to develop, celebrate, understand, and share information. Marsha Forrest, as advocate, trainer, and university technical assistance provider, worked closely with George Flynn, Canadian equivalent of school superintendent, principals, teachers, and parents. Their work had substantial impact in Michigan, only a three-hour drive from Kitchener and four hours from Forrest's group in Toronto. Forrest and her colleagues offered annual summer institutes on integrated school and community. Substantial numbers of individuals from Michigan attended these seminars and obtained grounding in what later was to be called "inclusive education." Teams of people were organized to attend shorter training sessions at the Kitchener school system itself.

School teams from two counties in Michigan were particularly involved in these institutes beginning in 1988 and 1989: Washtenaw county near Ann Arbor in southeast Michigan and Marquette and Alger counties in the Upper Peninsula. These teams gained a base of support, knowledge, bonding, and excitement that laid the foundation for work in their own counties.

In 1988, a series of events occurred in Washtenaw County, Michigan, that stimulated leadership by educators and advocates in implementing inclusive education in that county. The director of the Washtenaw Association for Retarded Citizens had worked for years advocating for change and engaging in discussion with educators in school districts in the area. A new superintendent for the intermediate school district (ISD), Mike Emlaw, was hired who was open to "supported education," as it was then termed by some who saw a parallel to supported employment. He sanctioned a planning and pilot effort to move ahead in the county. Supported by a grant from the Michigan Department of Education, WARC sponsored several training events including a series of presentations by Marsha Forrest regarding the efforts in Kitchener, Ontario. She drew substantial crowds of people to afternoon and evening meetings in the fall of 1988.

Under the guidance of the associate superintendent for special education of the ISD in Washtenaw County, a planning committee was established composed of parent and professional representatives of schools throughout the county. Originally, the ISD hoped to pilot this effort in one school building in one district. However, it soon became clear that numerous parents were interested in seeing their children "come home" from Highpoint, the separate school for students with significant disabilities operated by the ISD. Consequently, several schools in several school districts in the county began experiments in implementing inclusive education simultaneously. These included Saline, Ann Arbor, and others. By the spring of 1989, several districts returned students with moderate to severe disabilities to their local schools with support from the ISD. As this occurred, the Washtenaw Intermediate School District set an important precedent and model for the state by developing arrangements whereby funds associated with students in separate schools followed students back to their home districts.

A deaf student assisted by an interpreter in a suburban High School.

This effort built very naturally on an innovation project funded by the Michigan

Department of Education in the Saline Schools, a small rural district just north of Ann Arbor. The "Saline Progression" was part of a statewide series of projects designed to experiment with "alternatives to special education." In this program, the Saline Schools had returned some of their more severely disabled students back to the district from the separate school run by the county, placing them in a cross-categorical special education classroom. The stringency of the special education rules around categorical programs in Michigan made this project an important innovation. That is to say, the detailed special education rules laid out minute specifications for programs designed for students who fell into specific disability categories. Experimenting with the use of "cross-categorical" classrooms was a major departure from first determining a student's disability category and then matching him to a program designated for that category. In the Saline project, students were in a separate classroom in a general education building. However, the district made efforts to integrate students with disabilities with typical students. Through this project, Saline schools moved beyond categorical programs and began to move towards integration. The district's success in this endeavor spurred them to be one of the first in moving substantially into experiments in inclusive education.

Washtenaw ISD and cooperating school districts worked to develop a systemic effort. By 1990, their efforts were being evaluated and teachers, principals, the special education director, and the superintendent began to speak in training sessions, conferences, and seminars throughout Michigan. Saline and other school districts in Washtenaw County soon were providing local examples of inclusive education that were visited by other school districts.

An inclusive, multi-age class in the northern lower peninsula of Michigan

At the same time, parallel efforts were occurring in the Upper Peninsula, driven by somewhat different dynamics. Again led by the Intermediate School District, in this case Marquette-Alger ISD, educators in these two counties developed plans to integrate students with emotional impairments, moving many students from separate schools to their home school. The ISD sent a team of people to the summer institute in Canada in the summer of 1988 and the following year began to develop and implement plans to facilitate integration of students with emotional impairments. As these efforts began to be successful, teachers and administrators from schools also became articulate spokespersons regarding inclusive education.

By 1990, counties at two geographic extremes of the state were implementing effective models of inclusive education. The work in Marquette-Alger ISD was particularly important given the initial focus on students that some would consider the most difficult: students with emotional impairments. Their reasoned and successful approach in one of the most impoverished areas of the state set a model that influenced other districts.

As these two intermediate school districts were beginning to experiment with inclusive education, advocates, educators, and parents began express a desire to develop a statewide focus on inclusive education. In the fall of 1988, the newly appointed director of the Developmental Disabilities Institute at Wayne State University in Detroit and the director of the Washtenaw

ARC agreed to co-sponsor a group of individuals to come together to discuss school integration of students with disabilities. This group built on efforts of the Washtenaw county organization. During its first year, this group held monthly meetings of some 20 people who (1) organized themselves as the Inclusive Education Network; (2) identified strategies to facilitate change towards inclusive education and (2) articulated a position statement on inclusive education. The Inclusive Education Network provided a forum for discussion of issues, mutual support, strategy development, and advocacy. During 1990 – 1994, the network sponsored training programs and coordinated advocacy efforts related to inclusive education policy.

The following position statement on inclusive education was drafted by the group and finalized for signing in April of 1989.

We believe full inclusion means equity and quality education for all students.
We believe that inclusive education is a value and underlying philosophy by which we should educate all students.
We believe that all schools should include and value all students.
We believe that the purpose of education is preparation for adult life through teaching the skills needed to work, play, and live productively in the community.
We believe that preparation for life in the community best occurs when all students are educated together.
We believe that each student belongs in the classroom with same-age peers, attending the same school he/she would attend if not disabled.
We believe that each student deserves an individualized education which includes all the supports necessary for learning.
We believe that regular and special education teachers, administrators and support staff should work together as a steam, supporting each other to meet the unique needs of all students.
We believe that successful inclusion is dependent on the ongoing shared responsibility of parents, regular educators, special educators, support staff, and students.
We believe that school districts should provide the necessary supports and assistance to fully include all students with disabilities.

This statement provided a mechanism for a clear commitment to and understanding of inclusive education. By May of 1989, the position statement was officially signed by some 40 individuals representing 22 organizations.

Around January of 1989, efforts had begun to design a "systems change" project to submit to the Office of Special Education that would assist schools in expanding their efforts to move towards inclusive education. Funded as a Michigan Department of Education initiative by the federal government, the project committed the state to a project goal of "inclusive, community-referenced education in Michigan for all children and youth"[2]. In the fall of 1989, a conference on inclusive education was co-sponsored by the Michigan Department of Education and the Developmental Disabilities Institute. Marsha Forrest again came to Michigan to inspire and challenge approximately 300 people. At this meeting, Associate Superintendent Barbara Markle made a welcome keynote speech for the conference in which she committed the department to support the move towards inclusive education as an integral part of school improvement associated with the recently passed Public Act 25. As surprised attendees subsequently inquired

[2] Michigan Department of Education, 1989, p. B-2

about the specifics of this commitment, the Michigan Department of Education created a committee to develop a policy statement on inclusive education. This committee was the first of several policy groups that would deal with the issue of inclusive education in Michigan.

The inclusive education committee was chaired by Rich Baldwin, soon to be named as the next Michigan special education director, and included representatives of some 20 educational organizations in Michigan. The committee developed a draft of the position statement within one year. Michigan's policy statement on inclusive education was the first in the country. It defined inclusive education as . . .

> the provision of educational services for students with disabilities, in schools where non-handicapped peers attend, in age-appropriate general education classes under the direct supervision of general education teachers, with special education support and assistance as determined appropriate through the individualized education planning committee (IEPC). [3]

Teacher consultant provides assistance to students in an inclusive class in western Michigan.

Initially, inclusive education was perceived as a highly controversial approach implemented with only a very few children in two visible school districts in the state. By 1992, however, schools throughout Michigan were implementing inclusive education with growing numbers of students. A 1991, a survey by the Michigan Association of Directors of Special Education identified a wide range of districts who considered themselves to be increasing school integration efforts for students with disabilities. A report from the Michigan Inclusive Education Project similarly indicated that as of 1991 some 36 school districts were directly involved in the project and were providing inclusive education for 895 students. By 1993, this number had jumped to 67 school districts in 209 specific school buildings involving 3,722 students with disabilities[4].

Based on the charge in the policy statement on inclusive education put forth by the Michigan Board of Education, the staff of the Michigan Department of Education invited leaders involved with inclusive education in Michigan to develop a set of recommendations for implementation of inclusive education. The working group had articulated a range of recommendations each specifically connected with implementation provisions and needed changes in Michigan's special education laws and rules. Shortly after, this report and work of the committee become connected to another planning process: the revision of the special education rules.

[3] Michigan Department of Education, February, 1992
[4] Michigan Department of Education, 1995

A two-year study ensued to revise special education rules in Michigan. However, this process was delayed for many years. Finally, in the spring of 2001, the Michigan Department of Education developed proposed rules changes that would bring Michigan rules and regulations into line with federal law. These changes would have reduced the inflexibility of present rules in Michigan to make use of special education personnel to support inclusive education easier. However, many aspects of these changes, including the abolition of such prescriptive rules which has provided a psychological and legal safety net for many parents, combined with pushing decision-making down to a county level, resulted in great outcries at public hearings. In a rare show of unanimity, parents, teachers, administrators, and advocates all opposed implementation of the new package of rules, albeit for a wide range of contradictory reasons. As a result, the new state superintendent, Tom Watkins, who took office in the fall of 2001, stopped these proceedings and only minor rule changes are being implemented at the present time.

In recent years, no study has been conducted to determine the movement of schools in the state towards inclusion. The Michigan Department of Education did fund a study of "co-teaching" between general and special education teachers out of which were developed guidelines for co-teaching. Based upon these, a training program operated for several years drawing teams from school districts throughout the state.

An ongoing study by researchers involved in the Whole Schooling Research Project has involved university students observing in schools and classrooms in the Detroit metropolitan area to determine practices related to inclusive education. During 1994 to 2002, over 400 observations have been conducted in approximately 300 schools in the Detroit metropolitan area. This data, the initial data collected from 35 schools in the Whole Schooling Research Project, and informal conversations with school leaders and advocates throughout the state allow us to draw several tentative conclusions.

Co-taught class in a Detroit suburb.

First, a major effort towards inclusion of students with more severe disabilities has stalled. Where we find such students in general education classes, it has often been due to substantial parent advocacy rather than school policies or preferences. Many educators we interviewed in schools said that they had "tried that" but it "did not work"; others simply were not aware that such students might go to their school if they had a special education label.

Second, the words "inclusive education" are often avoided because they are seen as controversial. Rather, for many the term "co-teaching" has been used to refer largely to the in-class supports provided for students with mild disabilities: mild learning disabilities cognitive impairments, and emotional disturbance.

Third, however, there has been a quiet trend among a small number of schools to move toward a more inclusive philosophy, reaching out to students with both mild and moderate disabilities, and on occasion more severe disabilities, connecting these efforts to overall school reform. Most of the schools we studied fall into this category.

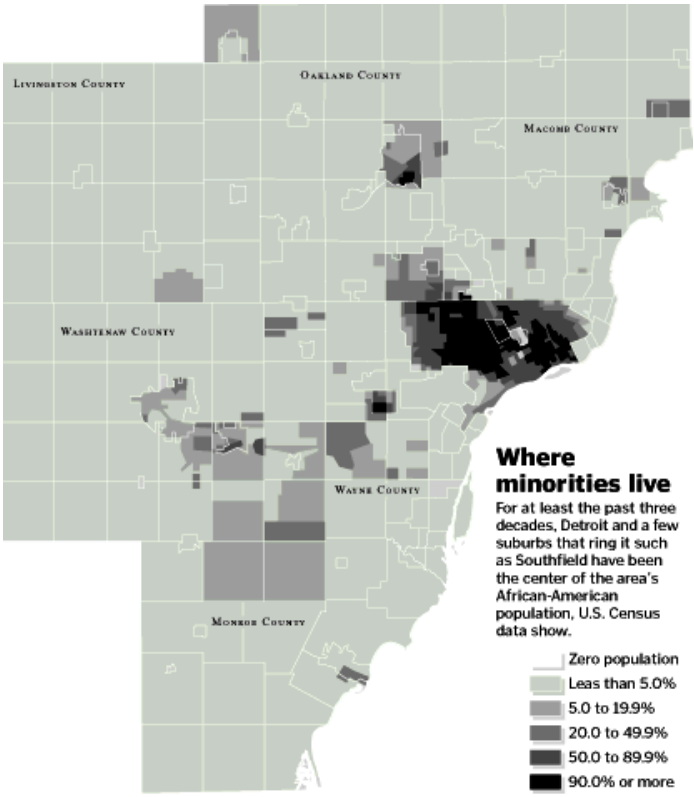
Inclusive education in the Detroit Metro Area

As in many states, Michigan's major city, Detroit, is a story unto itself with respect to inclusive education. Of the seven schools we studied, five were located in the Detroit metropolitan area. Here we discuss the status of inclusive education in Detroit proper and the metropolitan area as a whole. A colleague has said, "Where Detroit goes, so goes the country."[5]

> Detroit has often taken the lead in social movements. The depression of 1929 began when a bank at the corner of Griswold and Michigan in Detroit closed. Many of the first industrial unions were formed there. The collapse of industrial work in the US began in Detroit. There are many reasons to suggest it is an important bellwether location for the country.

Good times and the racial divide.

For many years, Detroit had a stellar international reputation. In the early 20th century, the city was known throughout the world for the quality of its schools, and a boom of school construction created many of the school buildings in which children continue to learn today. Despite the debates about cutting 'frills' such as art and music and the role of schools in 'Americanizing' foreign immigrants, most Detroit schools were filled with active learning, often building on the ideas of John Dewey and other progressive educators of the time[6]. Throughout the city, residential neighborhoods were graced with elm trees and individual homes, more than any major city in the country. Despite



[5] Gibson, Richard. Personal communication, 2001.

[6] Mirel, J. (1993). The rise and fall of an urban school system: Detroit, 1907 – 81. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

racial tension and segregation, by the 1960's the city had a reputation of having the most positive race relations in the country.

Yet, underneath this veneer, a disparity of wealth and resources simmered. Bit by bit, race and wealth played a clearer role. While Henry Ford, General Motors, Chrysler, and other manufacturers made this city and the whole area known throughout the world as the center of the burgeoning auto industry, Detroit divided into ethnic enclaves, each fighting for its own share of resources, predicting what would later become the divide that now exists between city and suburb, largely black and largely white[7].

The city-suburb divide became established in the 1950's as the flight from the city began and fiscal resources for schools began to dwindle. Federal policy provided funds to create highways to bring people quickly in and out of the inner city. Creation of these new highways destroyed many viable neighborhoods. People of color were geographically concentrated in the city, their mobility to other locations hindered, with few loans for home improvement approved in redlined areas. In 1967, conflict tore the inner city apart in what has alternatively been called the 'riot', 'rebellion', or disturbance' (depending on the political view of the commentator). The movement out of the city exploded so that from the census in 1970 to 2000, Detroit lost almost 1/2 million people to the suburbs. As of this writing, the Detroit metropolitan area is one of the most ethnically diverse and most segregated metropolitan areas in the United States[8]. Driving on I-696, the newly constructed loop around the northern part of the city, takes one through small communities that are alternatively largely people of color or largely white[9].

The Heidelberg Project. A local Detroit artist creates a vision out of junk in a low-income area.

[7] Henrickson, W. (1991). Detroit perspectives: Crossroads and turning points. Detroit, Wayne State University Press.

[8] Trowbridge, Gordon. Fewer Metro Detroit neighborhoods are integrated than 20 years ago. The Detroit News, January 14, 2002.

[9] Chaffets, Z. (1990). Devil's night: And other true tales of Detroit. New York: Random House.

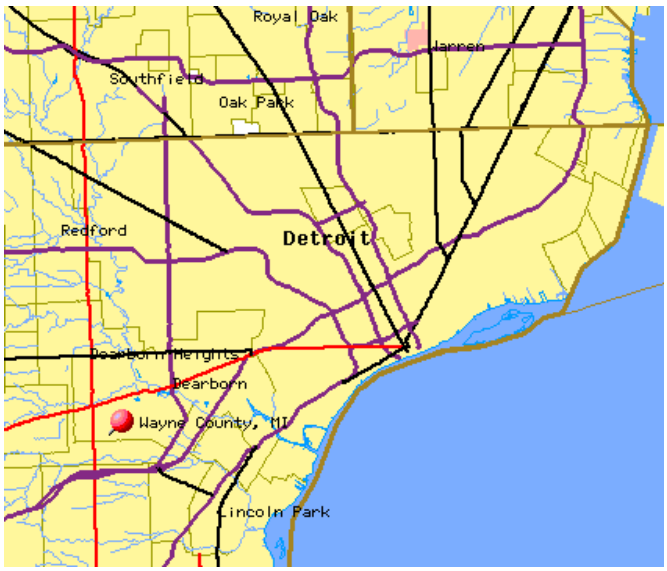
Gibson, R. & Peterson, M. (2001). Whole schooling: Implementing progressive school reform. In Wayne E. Ross (Ed.). The social studies curriculum: Purposes, problems, and possibilities. New York: State University of New York Press.

Henrickson, W. (1991). Detroit perspectives: Crossroads and turning points. Detroit, Wayne State University Press.

Kozol, J. (1992). Savage inequalities. New York: Harper Perennial.

The Detroit Metro Area

The Metro area is composed of three counties, each unique, each linked to the others. Detroit is located in *Wayne County*. The Detroit River, long a carrier of major cargo freighters from Lake Michigan to Lake Erie and a major source of the early growth of city, runs alongside Detroit and then alongside southern Wayne County. The river has determined the location of major auto plants and other industries, many of which are located in the Downriver area, now home to working and lower middle class communities, largely white. *Oakland County*, northwest of Detroit, is home to the richest and wealthiest as well as the impoverished city of Pontiac. Pontiac is a miniature version of Detroit, also a victim of abandonment by white residents and major industries. *Macomb County*, toward the northeast, is home to "Reagan Democrats," many of whom are people of eastern European descent who moved from Detroit in the 1960's, fleeing from a Detroit they saw as increasingly and intolerably black and poor[10].



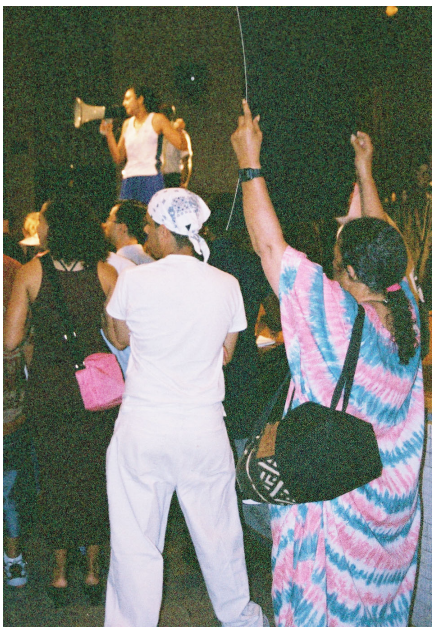
Detroit schools.

The decay of the schools began in the 1950's and has continued and worsened. By 2000, 85% of the student population of the Detroit Public Schools was black, with concentrations of other ethnic groups in particular locations throughout the city. Over the last 12 years, Detroit has had seven school superintendents, each coming with a major reform agenda, each failing[11], and has lost some 30,000 students in the last five years as the black middle class follows the path of their white predecessors, moving to the suburbs or placing their children in newly formed charter schools.

Reform has come in waves with each superintendent, and, more recently, with a political restructuring of the governance of the city's education system. Superintendent Deborah McGriff brought efforts to empower local schools following the Chicago model. She quickly angered teachers and the union who largely opposed these efforts. Dr. Eddie Green later promoted numerous progressive reforms in his short stay as superintendent, putting in place a major federal grant to improve math and science and obtaining funds from the Annenberg Foundation for a major school reform initiative. Starting in 1997, this five-year reform initiative required schools to work in clusters and apply for grants of up to $4 million to support school reform.

[10] United States Census Bureau. (2000). http://www.census.gov

[11] Mirel, J. (1993). The rise and fall of an urban school system: Detroit, 1907 – 81. Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press.



Angry demonstrators speaking at Detroit board meeting protesting takeover of the school board.

Most of Detroit's 300 schools sought the funds that were eventually awarded to 10 clusters of some 35 schools in 1999[12]. As funds were awarded, Governor Engler ousted the elected school board and requested the Mayor of Detroit to appoint a "reform board," largely members of the elite who have had no connection to Detroit schools. The first year board meetings were filled to overflow with outraged citizens held in check by as many as 200 police, some meetings interrupted as police arrested protesting parents and students [13]. The board hired an acting CEO for one year, David Adamany, recently retired President of Wayne State University, and Detroit teachers walked off the job in a surprise wildcat strike[14], ignoring recommendations of the union leadership. In the summer of 2000, Dr. Kenneth Burnley was hired as CEO, coming from Colorado Springs, home to the PEAK Parent Center, a school system in which inclusive education has become well established

Detroit Metro Area and Inclusive Schooling.

Moves towards inclusive education in the Detroit metropolitan area are spotty, an enclave of work and movement here and there, a pattern reflective of the state. Perhaps it should not be surprising that inclusion of children with disabilities occurs more frequently in wealthier school, particularly in several Oakland County districts. Southfield Public Schools passed a board level commitment to inclusion in 1996. Birmingham schools have engaged an initiative to return students from center programs to local schools with increasingly inclusive options. Farmington Public Schools (1994) developed a comprehensive ten-year strategic plan for elementary schools that commits all schools to implementing inclusive education. These shifts, however, reflect much dialogue and learning. Numbers of highly educated individual parents have insisted on inclusive education for their children with success in these districts.

In both Wayne County outside Detroit and Macomb County, both largely populated by working class families, segregated services are strongly imbedded. This particularly occurs in Macomb County where the Intermediate School District directly operates large, well-funded special education schools. Some districts, such as Wyandotte Public Schools, have led the way with co- teaching models for students with mild disabilities having operated since the late 1980's, substantive mainstreaming efforts of students with moderate disabilities, and placement

[12] Gibson, R. & Peterson, M. (2001). Whole schooling: Implementing progressive school reform. In Wayne E. Ross (Ed.). The social studies curriculum: Purposes, problems, and possibilities. New York: State University of New York Press.

[13] Gibson, R. & Peterson, M. (2001). Whole schooling: Implementing progressive school reform. In Wayne E. Ross (Ed.). The social studies curriculum: Purposes, problems, and possibilities. New York: State University of New York Press.

[14] Schmidt, S. (1999, July). Detroit educators organize for democratic schools. Substance, 24(11), 1, 27-28.

severe disabilities in a prominent place in the local high school[15]. Despite these positive efforts, most services remain largely segregated.

Detroit schools are highly segregated, maintaining historic patterns and movement towards inclusive education has been minimal. The system operates 13 segregated schools for students with moderate to severe disabilities. A small number of 'outreach programs' for students labeled as trainable mentally retarded have self-contained classes in general education schools. In almost all schools, students labeled as learning disabled or educable mentally impaired are educated in self-contained classes[16]. Until recently, some schools contain no special education students at all; students are transferred to other schools if they are identified as having a disability.

Some mainstreaming does occur in some schools, typically for very short periods of time. In some schools, outdated models in which students are 'mainstreamed' into classes that match their presumed mental age are used. Thus, in two schools, 13-year-old students with mental retardation were mainstreamed into a 3rd grade class[17].

Recently, some work toward inclusive education has occurred. In 1994, the district established a study group for inclusive education and identified the move toward more "inclusionary options" as part of the special education strategic plan[18]. This goal, however, was virtually unknown to rank and file special education teachers and school principals[19]. A short-term project funded by the Michigan Developmental Disabilities Council sought to work in schools where parents were insisting on inclusion for children with more severe disabilities. However, this project was abandoned by the district prior to its completion. During this time, some resource rooms were established, moving away from full time self-contained placement for students with mild learning disabilities, a move seen as a major reform in an otherwise totally segregated system[20].

Work in Head Start has been a high point in establishing one effort toward inclusive education. In the 1997-1998 school year, 205 children with diagnosed disabilities were enrolled in Detroit's Head Start, slightly over the federally mandated 10% of enrollment. These children were included in regular Head Start classes with support services. Efforts to transition young children into inclusive placements have been fraught with difficulty and resistance to date,

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[15] Peterson, M., Feen, H., Silagy, M. & Tamor, L. (2000). Whole Schooling Research Project: Field Notes. Detroit, Michigan: College of Education, Wayne State University.

[16] Detroit Public Schools. (2001). Efficiency and effectiveness report. Detroit, Michigan.

[17] Peterson, M., Gibson, R., and Feen, H. (1999). Whole Schooling Research in Michigan: Initial Analysis. Unpublished paper. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University.

[18] Detroit Public Schools. (1994) Special education strategic plan. Detroit Public Schools: Detroit, Michigan.

[19] Peterson, M., Gibson, R., and Feen, H. (1999). Whole Schooling Research in Michigan: Initial Analysis. Unpublished paper. Detroit, Michigan: Wayne State University.

[20] Peterson, M. (1997). Inclusive education in Michigan: A story of educational change. Detroit, Michigan: Renaissance Community Press, Wayne State University.

despite efforts by Head Start staff to develop collaborative programs with special education-funded PPI (Pre-primary Impaired) self-contained classes in Detroit elementary schools[21].

During the 1990's a few abortive efforts a to establish inclusive education in Detroit schools through collaborative work between local school staff and university faculty of the Whole Schooling Consortium also took place. At one high school, a special education department head had worked for ten years laying a foundation for inclusion. However, the implementation of plans for establishing inclusive education in this school was halted by administrative action[22]. As part of the Annenberg initiative, faculty of the Whole Schooling Consortium provided substantial assistance to a cluster of three elementary schools that adopted the Five Principles of Whole Schooling to guide their school reform efforts. Ultimately, however, as schools were awarded money to implement school renewal efforts, they backed away from this commitment[23].

As of this writing, the direction of the new administration of Detroit Public Schools is not clear. The new CEO, Kenneth Burnley, certainly has had opportunity to observe and understand inclusive education as superintendent of Colorado Springs school system. He has hired a special education director with a reputation for promoting unification of general and special education. Beginning in the fall of 2000, special education students who were previously bussed across town are being returned to their neighborhood schools. In April of 2001, the Burnley announced reform and change efforts to improve the schools that included a commitment to "move towards full compliance with federal law by relocating special education students from self-contained settings to least restrictive environments."[24] A district newsletter published on the same date announced a commitment to "improve service to special education students" and "enhance the district's ability to use inclusion and mainstreaming to benefit regular and special education students."[25] The comprehensive study of the schools upon which this initiative was based articulated key problems with segregation and the need to establish pilot inclusive education programs while moving all schools towards effective inclusive options. As part of the implementation of the district's restructuring plan, several special education schools are being closed and these students are being transferred as a group to wings of high schools[26]. In May of 2001, 30 principals were brought to a meeting for training on inclusion for students with mild disabilities. While beginnings, these moves represent dramatic shifts in practice and policy in this district. In spite of these administrative changes, segregation remains the primary service delivery model for Detroit special education students.

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[21] Office of Early Childhood Education, (1999). Head Start program data. Detroit: Detroit Public Schools.

[22] Peterson, M., Beloin, K., Rodgers, A., Arnold, A. (1998). For better or worse: Building inclusive schools in poor urban and rural communities. Detroit, Michigan: Renaissance Community Press, Wayne State University.

[23] Peterson, M. (2000). Assessment of Strengths and Needs: Eastside Detroit Whole Schooling Cluster. Detroit, Michigan: Whole Schooling Consortium, Wayne State University.

[24] Burnley, K. April 5, 2001

[25] Detroit Public Schools. (2001). Efficiency and effectiveness report. Detroit, Michigan.

[26] Detroit Public Schools, April 5, 2001