

## Pathway to Kindergarten

The Arc Michigan believes that special education is a service, not a "place" such as segregated buildings or classrooms. Michigan's educational system must focus on individualized services that follow our youngest children with special needs into natural, least restrictive settings that pave a Pathway to Kindergarten.

The current educational system frequently segregates students with special needs from their non-disabled peers. Through the Individual Family Service Plan and the Individualized Education Planning processes, school personnel often present segregated, center-based services as the most appropriate, least restrictive service. As a result, our youngest students may never have the opportunity to experience natural environments. Research clearly demonstrates that if these children begin school in segregated programs, they are much less likely to experience education in general education classrooms with their typically-developing peers.

Natural environments provide children with disabilities the best opportunity to have integrated experiences with typically-developing peers. Further children who participate in inclusive settings during their preschool years are more likely to be included in general education classes throughout their educational careers. To ensure that all children have typical childhood experiences and successful preparation for Kindergarten, The Arc Michigan proposes the following:

1. a. The Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP), for children ages 0 – 3, will provide the option of natural environments, such as typical preschool or daycare programs, or community-based environments (e.g., home, neighborhood park, play group) appropriate for the child's individual goals.<sup>1\</sup>
  - b. The IFSP will be continued for students with special needs, ages 3 – 5.
  - c. The Individual Education Plan (IEP) for children five years and older will begin with the assumption that children with special needs can be successfully included in their neighborhood kindergarten when they are provided with appropriate services and supports.
2. Parents and professional partnering will drive the child's educational success in natural environments.
3. Training related to the benefits of natural environments and implementation of educational best practices will be available to typical preschool and daycare staff to ensure competent care, acceptance and participation of ALL children.
4. Training on positive behavior supports and medication administration will be provided to school, typical preschool and daycare staff.
5. State licensing regulations for preschool and daycare centers will provide for the personal care needs of all children in attendance (e.g., changing diapers) and will comply with family-centered practice.
6. To support student success in natural environments and general education classrooms,

the IFSP and the IEP will provide the necessary supports, such as supplementary aids and services and curriculum modifications.

7. Universal Design for Learning, which The Arc Michigan endorses, will begin with earliest educational experiences.

The Arc Michigan supports improving educational services for ALL children. The Pathway to Kindergarten promotes this least restrictive option to families of children with developmental disabilities and improves early childhood experiences for all children, including those without identified disabilities who nevertheless present challenges.

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<sup>1</sup>Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Act specifies that early intervention services means developmental services that, to the maximum extent appropriate, are provided in natural environments, including the home and community settings in which children without disabilities participate (P. L. 105-17, IDEA Amendments of 1997). Natural environments are further defined by federal regulation as natural or normal for the child's age peers who have no identified disabilities (34 CFR 303.12(4)(b)2).

*Adopted by The Arc Michigan Board December 2009*