

While studying for my Masters in Special Education, Inclusion was all the rage. It was going to solve everything. All students would be taught in the general education classroom, from gifted to average to those with special needs. Gifted students would receive extra stimulating work, special needs students would receive support and accommodations. I firmly believed in this model until I watched Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) in action.

At MCPS, I saw the gifted students segregated into GT and Honors classes, Magnet programs, and even whole special schools which required students to pass entrance exams. I saw the average students in the general ed classroom with various special needs students. I saw some special programs for students with need for stronger interventions, and even whole special schools for students with intense special needs.

But MCPS was in the process of increasing Inclusion for its students, in line with No Child Left Behind and Maryland State guidelines. So, did they move all the students into general education classrooms, per the Inclusion model? Did they desegregate and move the gifted students into the general education classrooms with the average students?

No, they were increasing Inclusion by closing the most intensive intervention locations for the special needs students, who needed the support the most. They were closing the locations where they had economy of scale for delivering support and services, and promising the same services to each student as needed in his/her neighborhood school.

BANG! The door closed on all the Middle and High School Learning Centers. No more students allowed. If you weren't already in, you would never get in. Ever. Regardless of your need for intensive, repetitive instruction in a small group setting due to your different ways of learning.

BANG! The door closed at the Mark Twain School for students whose emotional and behavioral disturbances made it impossible for them to attend their neighborhood schools. So where did the students go? To their neighborhood schools. Here's your hat; good luck.

BANG! The door closed at the Kingsley Wilderness Center, where students at risk of expulsion, drop-out, or going to jail were sent to attend classes and work outdoors while bonding with their group and instructors, and developing good work habits and skills. Without Kingsley, these kids hit the streets.

The marginalization of the rights of students with disabilities should not continue. Please prioritize Goal 1 in the Strategic Plan, particularly Milestone 7, and fund programs for special children who need them to succeed.

Goal 1: Ensure Success for Every Student

Milestone 7: All students will graduate prepared for post-secondary education or employment.