

A Look at the State of Special Education

Dr. Judy Schrag is the co-principal for the Education and Human Services Group and past director, Office of Special Education, of the U.S. Department of Education. During a recent visit to Georgia, Dr. Schrag provided some perspective on the state of special education and the SPDG program.

Dr. Schrag has done much work in the area of improving family engagement for SWD in schools as director of the US DOE Department of Special Education program.

Under her leadership the funding for national parent training and information centers (PTI) began.

This is part 2 of a 2 part interview.

Q. What is one of the main challenges for educators in special education right now?

It seems to me that all the above exciting changes in special education can also be major challenges. We know that our economy is struggling and so are local school districts and school budgets.

Parents need to be vigilant and very engaged in decisions that are made about their school and school district programs and services for students with and without disabilities.



It is important that schools and states don't lower their expectations for all students, including those with disabilities, continue to hire highly qualified special and general education teachers that work together for all students, continue to provide access and inclusion of students with disabilities in the general curriculum/programs and services, and continue to provide assistive and other educational technology for students with disabilities.

It is also very important that middle and high schools continue to implement academic and behavioral programs and supports so that increased numbers of students with and without disabilities graduate from high school. That is the goal of the GA SPDG project --to learn about and implement scientifically based programs and services to keep students with and without disabilities in school successfully moving toward graduation.

Q. Tell us a little about the work you are doing now.

Our job is to gather ongoing data and information throughout the school year and the five years of the Georgia SPDG about the progress being made (process evaluation) as well as the outcomes of the activities being carried out (outcome evaluation).

We work closely with Dr. Causey, the state SPDG staff, and the regional Georgia Learning Resource System (GLRS) to gather this data/information. In spring of each year, we prepare an Annual Performance Report for the Georgia Department of Education. This Annual Performance Report is required by the U.S. Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). The Report includes both process and outcome evaluation data/information to "tell the Georgia story" about the overall SPDG efforts toward reducing dropouts and increasing graduation rates of students with disabilities. This means that we report on the activities that were carried out

during the year and whether there were positive results for children and youth with disabilities as a result of the SPDG activities.

Howard and I also have this same role as third party evaluators for the Alabama, Delaware, and Arizona SPDG projects. As such, we work closely with their State Departments of Education staff responsible for carrying out the SPDG.