

**What is *Access to the General Education Curriculum* for
Students with Significant Cognitive Disabilities?**



Dear Maine Special Educator,

January 3, 2012

I am inviting you to take part in my research study regarding academic curriculum and students with significant cognitive disabilities. I'm asking you to participate because you teach students with significant cognitive (previously referred to as "moderate" or "severe") disabilities in a public school in Maine and could be very helpful in informing policymakers about the role of academic access for your students. I am a PhD candidate in Social Policy at Brandeis University and I'm conducting this study as part of my doctoral dissertation.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that all students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, however, the law doesn't define exactly what access means. My aim is to understand how special educators interpret "access to the general education curriculum" and how you decide what academic content is most important for your students to learn.

My experience in special education has led me to believe that few people truly understand the work teachers do, and your thoughts and opinions are very important to the field! Your participation in an interview will increase my understanding of how teachers make decisions and balance multiple student needs, and this understanding will be communicated through my dissertation and hopefully, result in publications for policymakers, researchers and other teachers, with the goal of improving the school experiences of students with disabilities.

The results of our interview will be confidential and the attached informed consent explains the research process and your rights as a participant, in more detail. This study is solely my own, as part of my PhD work, and the research is being overseen by Dr. Susan L. Parish at Brandeis University.

In addition to helping me and the field of special education, I hope you will enjoy the opportunity to reflect on your daily work and your profession with an interested listener. **Please send me an email at mariat@brandeis.edu if you are willing to consider participating in an interview with me over the telephone or skype.**

If you would like to participate, or if you would like more details on the project before deciding, please contact me (Maria Timberlake) at mariat@brandeis.edu or (207) 807-3043 or Susan L. Parish at (781) 736-3928 or slp@brandeis.edu.

Please consider participating in the interview. I sincerely appreciate your willingness to contribute to this important topic. The interview will be scheduled at a time convenient for you, whether that is during your school day or on an evening or weekend, depending on your preference Please forward this invitation to any colleagues you think might be interested in participating. Thank you very much,

Sincerely,
Maria Timberlake
mariat@brandeis.edu

