The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, The American with Disabilities Act, and The Individual with Disabilities Education Act, and how the Autism Student Population has been Affected

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SECTION I-INTRODUCTION

Ana* is a 35 year old mother of an eight year old son who is autistic. She always knew something was wrong. When Joseph* was born she explains she, "had a normal pregnancy, but when he was born, he wasn't breathing. The doctors said he had choked on the amniotic fluid. Joseph stayed in the hospital for one week with IVs in him giving him the antibiotics he needed in order to stay alive." When Ana saw that Joseph wasn't showing the normal signs of development the doctors had told her that, "with therapy he'd be fine. He's not autistic. It's just an issue with his sensory system, with some services, speech will follow, and everything will be fine." Joseph received speech services an hour a week from the time he was 17 months up until he was three years old. Ana eventually got in touch with a regional center about Joseph's developmental disorders. When she first tried to get an evaluation for Joseph she explains that, "they didn't take me seriously and tried to dismiss me as a new mother." This was extremely difficult for her to hear. In order to meet with a specialist she had to get two referrals, one from Joseph's speech therapist and one from the director of his pre-school who thought he might have Asperger's or high functioning autism. She went to wrightslaw.org to learn her rights as a parent of a child with a developmental disability. "From there," she explains, "I proceeded to get Joseph an evaluation, and when he finally did the doctor diagnosed him with high functioning autism." Joseph was four and a half. She describes her next step, "we then had to seek intervention, and were placed in the Central Valley Autism Project (CVAP)." CVAP focuses directly on behavioral skills. This allowed Joseph to receive 40 hours of therapy per week in their home.

Once Joseph hit Kindergarten, Ana describes that CVAP always had one tutor with him at all times. The tutor was always right there to assist him and to help the teacher out. As time went on Joseph showed improvement. "In the first grade we discontinued services that provided

him with a tutor at all times while in the classroom. In the second grade we pulled Joseph completely out of CVAP because his behavior was great." Tutors were still present in the classroom, but Joseph didn't know they were there for him. They were known to the students as 'teacher's helpers.' Ana talks about what they did, "the tutors would sit in the back of the classroom observing Joseph and collecting data on him in order to track his progress. After school we would go home and from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. he would receive coaching from another tutor that was different from those in the classroom." Now Joseph is in the third grade. He receives one half hour in reading language comprehension and math services four days a week. He gets speech therapy for one half hour two days a week, and meets with an Autism inclusion specialist 45 minutes per week. Ana says the only way Joseph learns is if, "instructions are set out point blank for him because that helps him know exactly what he has to do."[1]

An autistic child wasn't always provided with these individual services. Throughout history people who showed the signs of what we know today as autism were often institutionalized, because they were not seen as contributing members to society. They were often categorized as "mentally retarded" or "insane." Autism is said to be the earliest form of schizophrenia, but that theory was eventually disproven.[2] Early on, doctors believed the reason why children were acting this way was because their parents didn't provide them with the affection and love that a child needs from a parent. As a result, children were often times sent away to foster care homes under the belief that they would progress and be cured of their "problems." As time went on autism awareness came about.[3] Three United States Laws that were

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* Names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.

[1] Interview with mother of autistic child, Joseph*

[2] Williams Jr., Robert W. "Autism Through Ages Baffles Science." *Pediatric Services, Morro Bay, California*. 7 Mar. 2010. Web. 21 Oct. 2010. <http://www.pediatricservices.com/prof/prof-26.htm>.

[3] Unknown. "Autism FAQ - History." *Autism Resources*. Web. 28 Oct. 2010. <http://www.autism-resources.com/autismfaq-hist.html>.

passed that guaranteed civil rights for people with an emotional, physical, and/or social disability. If it weren't for these three acts, it is hard to say where we would be right now as a society.

When these three acts were passed, it also gave children with disabilities the right to an equal and quality education. These regulations were the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Although the main focus of this paper is autism, a developmental disorder that is eligible under the IDEA, it is important to discuss the history of the various disability laws first. All three of these laws convey four basic goals. These objectives are equal opportunity, full participation, economic self sufficiency, and independent living. These four major goals propose to provide people with disabilities the same chance as everyone else for employment, education, and self-government.[4]

A division of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 facilitates the protection of people who have disabilities through received funding from the United States Department of Education. This law focuses more on physical disabilities versus mental, emotional, or social disabilities.[5] The Americans with Disabilities Act is the United States civic law that was enacted in 1990 promising equal rights for people with disabilities. This particular act authorizes rational adaptation and efficient interaction for the disabled.[6] The final act, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act was first passed in 1990, and was last reauthorized in 2004. The

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[4] McLaughlin, Margaret J. "Evolving Interpretations of Educational Equity and Students with Disabilities." *Exceptional Children* 76.3 (2010). *Education Resource Information Center*. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <http://http://web.ebscohost.com.ezproxy.lib.calpoly.edu/ehost/detail?vid=3&hid=14&sid=12d00442-f4ff-4857-a257-82ac3950d535%40sessionmgr14&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d#db=eric&AN=EJ879543>.

[5] Unknown. "Glossary." *Projects for Students by Students.* 2007. Web. 21 Oct. 2010. <http://library.thinkquest.org/06aug/00021/glossary.htm>

[6] Unknown. "U.S. Department of Justice Americans with Disabilities Act ADA HOME PAGE." *ADA Home Page - Ada.gov - Information and Technical Assistance on the Americans with Disabilities Act*. ADA Publications, 02 Dec. 2010. Web. 03 Dec. 2010. <http://www.ada.gov/>.

IDEA is a law that shapes the rights and guidelines for U.S. students who have a disability and need special education,[7] providing a Free and Appropriate Education (FAPE) and learning in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE).

In order to know the process of how an autistic child is educated, we must first look at the history of these three acts. Secondly, we will dig deeper into the Individuals with Disabilities Act, because if it weren't for this law alone, autistic children would not be provided with the individualized academic programs they need in order to succeed. Lastly, we must know what autism is and the characteristics of this specific disorder.

SECTION II--LEGISLATIVE BACKGROUND ON THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973, THE ADA, AND THE IDEA

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was the first federal law to be passed regarding disabled people. This act prohibits discrimination by federal agencies for those with disabilities. Federal agencies include any form of government employment, programs, or activities that receive federal funding.[8] Section 504 includes public special education in which gives students with disabilities the rights to an education that meets their individual and special needs.[9]

In order for a student to be eligible under the Rehabilitation Act they must meet a certain criteria. These qualifications include the student having a physical or mental impairment resulting in not being able to carry out life's major activities. Life's major activities are when a person can accomplish doing things, such as walking, talking, and hearing, with little or no

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[7] Mauro, By Terri. "What Is IDEA?" *Parenting Special Needs Children*. New York Times Company. Web. 01 Nov. 2010. <http://specialchildren.about.com/od/specialeducation/g/IDEA.htm>.

[8] Unknown. "The Rehabilitation Act of 1973." *YOUR PREMIERE CONSUMER BIPOLAR D*. Bipolar World, 2010. Web. 04 Nov. 2010. <http://www.bipolarworld.net/job_school/js24.htm>.

[9] By Subject. "Protecting Students With Disabilities." *U.S. Department of Education*. 27 Mar. 2009. Web. 5 Nov. 2010. <http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.html>.

difficulty. Another qualification for a student to be eligible is having a record of their impairment or be taken into account by a professional as having that particular disability.[10] In the education system, the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 has the largest impact on the special education students, but when it was first passed most educators did not know that this law applied to the public school system. Section 504 covers the "hidden disabilities" of a child such has poor eye sight, or hard of hearing. Students that have physical disabilities, such as being in a wheel chair are also positively impacted. When they are eligible under the Act of 1973, they are provided with transportation that allows them to get to and from school safely along with the essentials of a proper learning environment that best fits their individual needs.[11] When a student doesn't qualify under the IDEA, they will usually qualify for Section 504.[12]

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 requires students with disabilities to receive an equal education compared to those without disabilities, because it is their civil right. A student with autism would be designated as someone with a disability. A child who is autistic can either be someone who needs help in all areas of life, while others are simply brilliant. Section 504 limits special education students to the same education and nothing beyond that. For the child who is extremely smart and autistic, but is designated as someone with a learning disability, the child, regardless if they are at the same educational level as their peers or not, cannot go beyond

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[10] Unknown. "Americans with Disabilities Act." *Mountain State*. 2010. Mountain State Centers for Independent Living. 5 Nov. 2010. <http://www.mtstcil.org/skills/ada2-b.html>.

[11] Unknown. "Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 - Texas Project FIRST." *Texas Project FIRST Home Page - Created by Parents, for Parents*. Texas Project FIRST. Web. 05 Nov. 2010. <http://www.texasprojectfirst.org/Sect504.html>.

[12] Interview with assistant superintendent of school district

the level of education of their peers, who are qualified as a student without a disability. As a result, in reality Section 504 does not benefit all students with autism.[13]

President George H. W. Bush asserted that "People with disabilities are the poorest, least educated, and largest minority in America."[14] This was his reason for signing the Americans with Disabilities Act. The ADA was signed on July 26, 1990. It was the first all-inclusive declaration that provided equality in the world for disabled people. The reason for the ADA was there were no legal protections people with disabilities. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act was signed that outlawed discrimination against race, religion, and/or national origin, but disabled persons were still left out.[15] Before the ADA passed in 1990, disabled people were ridiculed and often institutionalized because people felt that they could not contribute to society. Between 1920 and 1960, charitable organizations came about to help the disabled, but these establishments were often isolated and sheltered.[14] The goal of the ADA was to make American society a more accessible environment for disabled people.[16]

There are five titles that are included in the ADA. The first title gives people with disabilities equal employment opportunities. Companies must accommodate their disabilities in the work setting and provide the same wages and benefits as a non-disabled person. Title II targets public services. All public transportation must be accessible for people with disabilities. Title III's aim is public accommodations. All public services, including schools, offices,

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[13] Logsdon, By Ann. "Appropriate Education - Appropriate Education Under Section 504." *Learning Disability - What Is a Learning Disability?* New York Times Company, 210. Web. 05 Nov. 2010. <http://learningdisabilities.about.com/od/ac/g/504appropriate.htm>.

[14] Unknown. "Overview of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008." *ADA National Network by DBTAC: Your Resource on the Anniversary of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)* Web. 07 Nov. 2010. <http://adaanniversary.org/2009/ap02_ada_findings_history/ap02_ada_findings_history_09_natl.html>.

[15] Glass, Andrew. "George H.W. Bush Signed Americans With Disabilities Act, July 26, 1990 - Andrew Glass - POLITICO.com." *Politics, Political News - POLITICO.com*. Capitol News Company, LLC, 2010. Web. 05 Nov. 2010. <http://www.politico.com/news/stories/0710/40205.html>.

[16] Unknown. "ADA Library." *JAN - Job Accommodation Network*. Office of Disability Employment Policy, US Department of Labor. Web. 07 Nov. 2010. <http://askjan.org/links/adalinks.htm>.

restaurants, and others, must be altered in ways of ramps, elevators, etc. for people with disabilities.[17] Riverbank High School, a school in a small city in California remodeled their football stadium a few years back. I interviewed the former assistant superintendent of Riverbank Unified School District, Jacob Moreno, and he estimated Riverbank Unified School District spent approximately $150,000 on a special lift in order to make the press box handicap accessible;[18] this type of funding is a direct result of Title III of the ADA. Title IV's objective is telecommunication services in which communities must have relay services for people who are deaf, blind, or have a speech disability. The final title sums up the four previous titles, is states that the titles must be followed and people with disabilities cannot be discriminated against.[11]

Research shows that the ADA has had a positive impact on society, because it provides access to all public facilities so people who need special accommodations can go about living their life as easily as possible. The ADA tends to be more physically disabled related. As mentioned before all public facilities must be compliant to it including schools. All classrooms, buildings, and bathrooms have to be accessible for the disabled. In reality, not every school has a student that is physically disabled, but by law schools must use funding in order to make everything available to students with any impairment. For example, all fire alarms make noise to let students know to evacuate the building. Fire alarms are in every classroom and they must all have bright red flashing lights for those who are visually impaired. It is difficult for schools to make sure every facility is 100% accessible to every individual student.[19]

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act is probably the most well known law that targets the public school system and education to fit all individual's needs. The IDEA started to

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[17] Unknown. "ADA Library." *JAN - Job Accommodation Network*. Office of Disability Employment Policy, US Department of Labor. Web. 07 Nov. 2010. <http://askjan.org/links/adasummary.htm>.
[18] Interview with Jacob Moreno, superintendent of school district
[19] Interview with educator

progress in 1990 and was then re-approved in 1997, this is when the focus of inclusiveness within the classroom started.

According to the National Council on Disability there are six key elements to the IDEA. Believing in students with disabilities and upholding high expectations for them is crucial in order to help them achieve both in an academic and social setting. The second key element is encouraging teachers to try different ways of teaching so each student individual needs are met A key element for teachers is to encourage to provide precise instructions in order to allow the student to work as effectively as possible. Reports should be made tracking the student's skills, progress, results, and personality traits. This allows federal agencies to keep track of what is most effective for these students that require special attention. The fourth key element is the encouragement of hiring and holding onto special education teachers, because without them we are unable to fulfill the student's needs. Another crucial component of the IDEA is motivating schools to base the progress of the students with disabilities on more than just academics. A lot of these students' disabilities go beyond that of just learning. The final fundamental element is to increase funds for special education in our public school system. Without funding, we are unable to provide the proper services to the students who need them.[20]

The Individuals with Disabilities Act has proved to have a positive impact at schools and at home. The IDEA gives children with disabilities more independence. Chris Macfarlane, an Associate Professor of Special Education says that a child must learn to do things independently both at home and at school. This provides a relationship between the child's school and home life. The IDEA helps families see what they can do to help their child and what the teachers are

[20] Unknown. "NCLB and IDEA Progress Report Release." *American Youth Policy Forum*. Web. 08 Nov. 2010. <http://www.aypf.org/publications/NCLBandIDEAProgressReportRelease.htm>. Web. 2009.

doing to help them also.[21] "The tutors were with him in school helping him every day. They taught him behaviors in the classroom that he would bring home with him. This was really affective because it allowed him to make a habit of these behaviors and at the same time receive the kind of enforcement and repetition both at school and at home."[22] If a child brings the skills that he/she acquired at home and brings them to school and vice versa, then the child can successfully complete tasks time and time again with the skills that they have learned and practiced. Without the IDEA this wouldn't be possible.[21]

There are some key differences among the three laws. Although they focus on the same four goals they each have different purposes. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504 protects people with disabilities from discriminatory behavior that is based on them having a disability. The ADA elaborates on Section 504, by requiring industries and organizations to abide by the law stating they must not partake in discriminatory actions and not limit the accessibility of their businesses and buildings for people with disabilities. The IDEA's main purpose is to provide a disabled child with a free and proper education that is specifically designed to fulfill their individualized needs and prepare them for the future. All three provide something different for education. Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act shields disabled from being set apart from the students who are able to learn in a normal learning environment. The ADA provides special accommodations to the schools for easier accessibility for those who are disabled. The IDEA grants disabled students with an equal education, but one that also is uniquely designed to meet the child's individualized needs.[23]

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[21] Unknown. <http://www.uni.edu/coe/inclusion/preparing/parents.html>. Web. 2009.
[22] Interview with father of autistic child
[23] Unknown. "Key Differences Between Section 504, the ADA and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) by Peter Wright and Pamela Wright - Wrightslaw." *Wrightslaw Special Education Law and Advocacy*. Peter W. D. Wright and Pamela Darr Wright, 2010. Web. 07 Nov. 2010. <http://www.wrightslaw.com/info/sec504.summ.rights.htm>.

SECTION III-THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES ACT

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires two things: a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and learning in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). A school must provide an appropriate education and services to children with special needs at no cost to the student or the student's family. FAPE includes providing services and accommodations within the classroom that meets the individual's learning and social needs.[24] Least Restrictive Environment contains the idea of inclusion, where a child with a disability should be educated in the most ordinary environment that is probable. The services that are provided ensure that each child will get an appropriate education to the maximum extent of the child's ability. Inclusion takes the pressure off the child when trying to keep up with his or her peers within the classroom because this requires teachers and other students to realize that there is a diverse population of students and everyone has their strengths and weaknesses.

Inclusion within the IDEA has many goals which include all students within the classroom will increase their social skills along with their academic skills.[25] It's crucial that students are encouraged to be active learners, not passive learners. A goal of the teacher is to allow students to have difficulty making decisions, because if a student, with a disability or not, is counted on to make a decision for him or herself, they are going to learn from their mistake if they make the wrong decision.[26] Inclusion came about in order for individuals to respect one another and to recognize the different rates of learning. Inclusiveness within the classroom

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[24] U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, *Free Appropriate Public Education for Students With Disabilities: Requirements Under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973*, Washington, D.C., 2010. 08 Nov. 2010. < http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/docs/edlite-FAPE504.html>.

[25] Unknown. "Goals of Inclusion." *Inclusion: The Right Answer?* Web. 08 Nov. 2010. <http://xruffrydr9.tripod.com/inclusiontherightanswer/id19.html>.

[26] Watson, Sue. "The Inclusional Classroom, What Is the Inclusive Classroom?" *Special Education*. New York Times Company, 2010. Web. 06 Dec. 2010. <http://specialed.about.com/od/integration/a/inclusional.htm>.

allows the individual with a disability to gain a sense of confidence and self worth. The IDEA developed inclusion within the classroom so the disabled students would have a chance to feel like they are a part of something. [25]

The Federal Law insists on children with disabilities should not be put into a restrictive and abnormal environment when being educated, but does not require inclusion. In order to see if a child has a learning disability he or she will be put into a regular classroom and be analyzed to see if the least restrictive environment will be appropriate for the child's particular needs. [27] Schools have placed these children with disabilities within the regular classroom in order to ensure there are equal opportunities and duties for each student in the school.[28] There are certain factors that are looked at when determining the placement of a child. These include a student showing low achievement, inadequate responses to efficient, research-based intervention, and having disabilities counted as achievement deficits.[29]

There is a long spectrum of learning disabilities in which fall under the IDEA. Some of these include speech or language impairment, when a child has a stutter or a lisp, or if English is a second language. Another learning disability would be when a child suffers from mental retardation or is emotionally disturbed. Autism, which is having problems with communication and social skills, also falls into this category. In order to be eligible under the IDEA, a student must be thought to have a certain disability. That disability is then confirmed after a required

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[27]Unknown. "Special Education Inclusion | Special Education | Resource Pages on Issues | Issues & Advocacy | WEAC | Special Education | Resource Pages on Issues | Issues & Advocacy | Wisconsin Education Association Council." *Wisconsin Education Association Council*. 15 Mar. 2007. Web. 08 Nov. 2010. <http://www.weac.org/Issues_Advocacy/Resource_Pages_On_Issues_One/Special_Education/special_education_inclusion.aspx>.

[28]Gaillard, Pam. "What Is Inclusion?" *The Inclusion Classroom*. Web. 10 Nov. 2010. <http://techinclusion.tripod.com>.

[29]Oswalt, Angela. "IDEA Categories of Qualifying Disabilities - Child Development and Parenting: Middle Childhood." *Mental Health, Depression, Anxiety, Wellness, Family & Relationship Issues, Sexual Disorders & ADHD Medications*. CenterSite, LLC, 16 Mar. 2010. Web. 11 Nov. 2010. <http://www.mentalhelp.net/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=36217&cn=1262>.

federal evaluation is done by a team of professionals. This team must include a special education teacher, a licensed school psychologist, a regular education teacher, and administrator among others. If it turns out that the child does have a learning disability then that child will undergo an Individualized Education Program or IEP. From there, the child receives the Free and Appropriate Public Education in the Least Restrictive Learning Environment in which they deserve.[30]

The benefits of IDEA outweigh the drawbacks for students in the public education system. For the individual with the special needs inclusion gives them the chance to be educated with their peers of the same age. It provides peer models and facilitates the development of friendships. For the general education population, inclusiveness gives all students the chance to acquire respect for others that have different and unique personalities. It also provides students to develop a sense of awareness of others drawbacks.[31] The children that enter the inclusive classroom with an already designated disability realize that everyone struggles, and everyone asks questions or for the teacher's help.[32] Another benefit inclusion gives everyone in general education the capability to help and teach all classmates. Teachers also benefit from inclusion. Teachers develop an awareness of children's different skills, and realize the significance of direct individualized teaching. It increases their creativity skills when it comes to addressing different challenges of different students. It also helps the teacher develop problem solving abilities within a group. As far as the general public goes, inclusiveness within the classroom benefits society

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[30] Winter, Wally, and Larry Parham. "Illinois Pro Bono | The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)." *Illinois Pro Bono*. Illinois Legal Aid Online, 2010. Web. 15 Nov. 2010. <http://www.illinoisprobono.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=home.dsp_Content&contentID=409>.

[31] Unknown. <http://www.uni.edu/coe/inclusion/philosophy/benefits.html>. Web. 2009.

[32] Unknown. "Benefits of Inclusion." *University of Northern Iowa*. U.S. Department of Education. Web. 11 Nov. 2010. <http://www.uni.edu/inclusion/benefits_of_inclusion.htm>.

because it sustains societal importance of equality and creates encouragement and interdependence. Also, it protects the civil rights of every person within the society. [28] Although the IDEA is supposed to fit every student's individual needs within the least restrictive environment, sometimes the needs get overwhelming for the educator, and all these needs become impossible to fulfill, which is a violation against the law. In the public school system the population of children with learning disabilities, such as autism, keeps growing. If a classroom has two children with autism, one child with Asperger's syndrome and three children have PDD-NOS that would be six children with different needs that vary from others that are able to learn from the standard curriculum. This scenario is more common than one might think. If the IDEA demands that all children's individual needs must be met, the needs of this child along with the other children's start to clash, and it is extremely difficult for the teacher to teach all these children that think differently, and impossible to work with them one at a time. Also, if a child requires an aide within the inclusive classroom every day, that can be extremely expensive, especially if it is a regular occurrence. Public school systems have tight budgets, and these services can easily drain parts of their funding. Although the IDEA means well, in reality, it can become a financial and physical strain on schools and their educators.[33]

SECTION IV-AUTISM

Many children in America suffer from autism. As mentioned before, autism is a disorder that is eligible under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. According to the California

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[33] Roberts, Megan. "THE INDIVIDUALS WITH DISABILITIES EDUCATION ACT: WHY CONSIDERING INDIVIDUALS ONE AT A TIME CREATES UNTENABLE SITUATIONS FOR STUDENTS AND EDUCATORS. -- Britannica Online Encyclopedia." *Encyclopedia - Britannica Online Encyclopedia*. Carmen E. Pagán, Copyright Manager, Apr. 2008. Web. Nov.-Dec. 2010. <http://www.britannica.com/bps/additionalcontent/18/32146019/THE-INDIVIDUALS-WITH-DISABILITIES-EDUCATION-ACT-WHY-CONSIDERING-INDIVIDUALS-ONE-AT-A-TIME-CREATES-UNTENABLE-SITUATIONS-FOR-STUDENTS-AND-EDUCATORS>.

Department of Public Health a child is autistic when they show signs of having "a hard time relating to and communicating with other people, experience difficulty in social situations, and repetitive behaviors and unusual interests."[34] Autism has three main characteristics that are based on observation. The first trait is signs of showing discrepancies in social responsiveness; a child may lack how to properly respond in social settings. The second observational characteristic is behavioral discrepancies in communication skills, meaning an autistic child has a different way of communicating to what is considered "normal" in society. The final characteristic is excessive and repetitive behavior.[35]

The structure of our society enforces the idea of "normal." More and more people are being diagnosed with autism every year. It is so common that some, like Denis Campbell a health correspondent in the United Kingdom says that autism should not be labeled as a "disorder" because it is just a different way the brain functions. Anna Kennedy, an online journalist believes society has two groups. There are the "stable, steady people" that are labeled as "normal" who have been the basis of our education systems and society in general. Then there is the other group, the "inspirational, obsessive people," who are labeled as having disorders. She believes that both groups are equal contributors to society because you need the "normal" people to keep things running smoothly, but you also need the inspirational people to create new and uncommon ways of going about doing things within society. Unfortunately though, main stream society does not value these differences.[36] I interviewed Julie*, the mother of an autistic child on

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[34] Unknown. "Autism." *California Department of Public Health*. State of California, 2010. Web. 14 Nov. 2010. <http://www.cdph.ca.gov/HealthInfo/discond/Pages/Autism.aspx>.

[35] Neitzel, Jennifer. "Positive Behavior Supports for Children and Youth with Autism Spectrum Disorders." *Preventing School Failure* 54.4 (2010): 247-55. *Education Resource Information Center*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=11&hid=17&sid=12d00442-f4ff-4857-a257-82ac3950d535%40sessionmgr14&bquery=%28TI+%28Positive+Behavior+Supports+for+Children+AND+Youth+with+Autism+Spectrum+Disorders%29%29&bdata=JmRiPWVyaWMmdHlwZT0xJnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZQ%3d%3d>.

** Names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.

how she feels on the relationship between autism and society's definition of being "normal." She said, "My biggest concern is the way main-stream society wants everyone to be very cookie cutter, but we need to embrace the diversity and realize how important it is."[37]

The autistic population is larger than one might think. Autism in children is as common as diabetes. Professionals have approximated that between one in 500 children and one in every 166 children has autism or some form of it. If there are four million births per year, 24,000 of those children will eventually be diagnosed with autism at some point in their life. Females are four times less likely to be diagnosed with autism than males.[38] No one knows exactly why this is, but studies have shown that the male carries a specific adjustment in the X chromosome that could lead to a higher risk. This modification is called the PTCHD1 gene. It is a part of a passageway that affects growth process of a human embryo. John Vincent, who led this study, is the head of the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health Molecular Neuropsychiatry and Development Laboratory stated, "We believe that the PTCHD1 gene has a role in a neurobiological pathway that delivers information to cells during brain development – this specific mutation may disrupt crucial developmental processes, contributing to the onset of autism."[39]

In 1991 autism was added to the directory of special education eligibility. In America, it is the number six on the most common classified disabilities list. Thanks to recent developments and awareness we are finally able to diagnose autism before the age of three in most children.

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[36] Miller, Jan. "Autism and Society's Definition of 'normal' - The Guardian - Science | E! Science News." *E! Science News | Latest Science News Articles*. Guardian News and Media Limited, 29 Sept. 2009. Web. 04 Dec. 2010. <http://esciencenews.com/sources/the.guardian.science/2009/09/29/autism.and.societys.definition.normal>.
[37] Interview with Julie*, mother of autistic child
[38] Unknown. "Autism Statistics." *Autism Home Page*. Clinaero, Inc., 16 Jan. 2009. Web. 11 Nov. 2010. <http://autism.emedtv.com/autism/autism-statistics.html>.
[39] IB Times Staff Reporter. "Gene Mutation behind Higher Autism Rate in Boys: Study - International Business Times." *IBTIMES.com: International Business News, Financial News, Market News, Politics, Forex, Commodities - International Business Times*. International Business Times, 4 Dec. 2010. Web. Sept.-Oct. 2010. <http://www.ibtimes.com/articles/63231/20100917/autism-asd-gene-mutation-ptchd1-gene.htm>.

It's crucial that autism is diagnosed as early as possible so steps can start to be taken in order for that child to have as normal life as possible and make the necessary resources available early on.[40] Autism diagnosis has been rising steadily in past decades, but there is still not a set curriculum because of the large variation of characteristics and special individual needs of people with autism.

There is a distinguished set of autistic characteristics, regardless of the large amount of difficulty professionals have making a proper diagnosis. These identifying characteristics include the child being resistant to change and showing large amounts of agony for reasons others can't explain. An autistic child tends to be a loner and standoffish, and as a result, they show no interest in being a part of large social groups. Also, temper tantrums are more common among those with autism along with fixations on certain objects. As Christine*, the mother of an autistic child explains, "Sam* was obsessed with fans, vacuums, and lights. He would cry and throw extreme fits if a fan wasn't turned on in a room. I would take him to Costco, and he would point out a fan on the top shelf. He also showed recurring behaviors with his toys. He wouldn't play with his toys; he would just line them up. He wouldn't play with his toy cars and push them across the floor to make them go. He would just turn them upside down and spin the wheels instead."[41] Those with autism tend to lack in the areas of motor skills and responsiveness to verbal signals. "`When Jake* was younger he didn't respond to his name. Every time I would call him over, even if I had something for him, he wouldn't answer. He just went about with

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[40] Unknown. "Autism Statistics." *Autism Home Page*. Clinaero, Inc., 16 Jan. 2009. Web. 11 Dec. 2010. <http://autism.emedtv.com/autism/autism-statistics.html>.

* Names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.

[41] Interview with mother of autistic child Sam*

whatever he was doing at the time."[42] Another identified characteristic is showing over sensitivity or an extreme lack of sensitivity.[43]

The Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a scale that includes a number of disorders that fall into the category of experiencing difficulties in the following three areas: trouble with social advancement, verbal contact with others, and stereotypical behavior. There are five disorders including autism, that are categorized as an Autism Spectrum Disorder, Asperger's syndrome, Rett Disorder, Childhood Disintegrative Disorder, and Pervasive Developmental Disorders-Not Otherwise Specified. Children with Asperger's syndrome don't have as much of a problem when it comes to social interactions compared to those with autism. A lot of times a child with Asperger's syndrome will build relationships with his/her parents and certain family members. Only among their peers is it obvious that they have difficulty with social development. These children also may be extremely occupied by certain subjects while showing an immense amount of knowledge about the particular item.[44] My little brother has high functioning Asperger's syndrome. He is social with my parents and me, because we are his immediate family and are around him most of the time. When he was young, he had taken a special liking to one out of our 14 cousins. He is nine now, and he still has that particular relationship with her, but doesn't really give any of his other cousins the time of day. Whenever we attend family gatherings, she is the only one that he will go up to willingly and give a hug to or say hi. He has a few friends that he sees on a regular basis, one which is autistic. Although he has made progress in social settings among his peers, a lot of times, he would rather sit in the corner and play his hand held video game. As he gets older it is happening less and less, but it is still a regular occurrence for

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[42] Interview with mother of autistic child Jake*

[43] Unknown. "Autism Society of America: Characteristics of Autism." *Autism Society of America:*. Convio, 23 Jan. 2008. Web. 18 Nov. 2010. <http://www.autism-society.org/site/PageServer?pagename=about_whatis_char>.

[44] Unknown. "Autism Glossary." *Autism Society Of Prince Edward Island*. Google Sites. Web. 06 Nov. 2010. <http://www.autismsociety.pe.ca/Home/autism-glossary>.

him. As I mentioned before, children with Asperger's can be fixated on a certain object and know a lot about it. For example, my brother will be watching a television show on Animal Planet about dogs (he loves dogs), he will remember everything that was said, and then after the show is over he will engage in a full conversation about it with one of my parents or me. He will then talk about it all day, because he is so preoccupied by that particular subject. This often changes from day to day.

Another Autism Spectrum Disorder is Rett Disorder. This is a disorder only found in females, and is said to be the result of a genetic mutation that happens by chance. Their mothers have a normal pregnancy along with a normal birth. The first five months the child grows normally, but after that her head will grow at a very slow pace than the standard growth rate. Increased deficiency in hand movements, along with the decrease in thought processes and bodily movements are also symptoms. The expected life span for these females is around 40 years. This disorder would fall on the most intense side of the spectrum because it is extremely rare along with Childhood Disintegrative Disorder. Childhood Disintegrative Disorder is the easiest diagnosis for medical professionals. It is most common among males. The child normally develops up until about the age of three and a half. They will then lose their verbal communication skills and their ability to socialize at a remarkable rate. Also, often times the child will experience seizures as a result of the disorder. Pervasive Developmental Disorders-Not Otherwise Specified (PDD-NOS) is extremely common. The child will show one symptom of autism or Asperger's without the other, or have extremely mild symptoms of the identifying characteristics. A doctor is unable to give the child a specific diagnosis, and as a result their

disorder is not otherwise specified, until a more accurate conclusion can be made as times progresses.[45]

As an autistic child develops and grows, their symptoms tend to shift. In an ideal situation, the child would be diagnosed before the age of three and then seek early intervention services as soon as possible. When the child reaches school age he/she will often have a difficult time in the classroom because of the lack of responsiveness to normal teaching methods. In some cases it might be too hard for the child to understand, and at other times, the child could be bored and not challenged enough. At this age, the child has various social issues, such as having trouble making and keeping friends. They also have difficulties with accepting changes, and often show a lack of verbal communication with their peers. As time progresses and the child reaches adolescence, the social awkwardness and communication issues are still present, but they also start having a difficult time understanding other people's point of views, and are often closed minded. A child's communication issues are quite similar. When an autistic child is of school age they will often repetitively recite things they've heard on television, the radio, and so on. They have trouble starting conversations and have trouble understanding if someone is serious or not with what they say. They are very literal in communication as well. It is difficult for them know when someone is telling a joke or being sarcastic. As adolescence approaches the autistic teenager prefers to only engage conversations that revolve around them. They also have an unusually apt way of speaking as if they were a highly educated adult.[46]

Family involvement is crucial for autistic children and their education. When Stephanie's*, daughter Cara* was born she quit her job, she explains, "I don't know how two

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[45] Unknown. "Autism Spectrum Disorders - Rett's Syndrome Childhood Disintegrative Disorder Autism Asperger Syndrome Pervasive Developmental Disorder." *Summer Camps and Academic Programs for Kids with Asperger's Syndrome*. Web. 06 Nov. 2010. <http://www.yourlittleprofessor.com/spectrum.html>.

[46] Unknown. 2010. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=5&hid=15&sid=6f9aaed9-beb4-46ee-bc8c-0271cf7cf6c2%40sessionmgr14>.

parents working full time are getting the crucial and proper services for the child who has autism. Having a child with autism takes being an extremely proactive parent with much patience."[47] Having a child with autism can be hard on a family. Parents with an autistic child want what is best for their child and at the same time want their child to live as normal life as possible. This is where the Individualized Education Program (IEP) comes in. In the IEP not only are the child's educational goals included but the family's goals also. This gives parents the opportunity to be a part of the child's learning process and gives them knowledge on the effective teaching methods that are being used and can be used with their child on a regular basis. This will help immensely with the achievement of both sets of goals. By knowing these things, it allows them to be the best parent possible and gives the child a chance to respond to the same type of learning methods throughout the entire day both at school and at home. It is imperative the teacher isn't enforcing one rule while the parent is enforcing another. It is important for an autistic child to be given a set of guidelines that are consistent because that is the way he/she will learn how to properly respond to different situations.

Public schools have a legal obligation to educate an autistic child, regardless of the severity; the school district must make this Individualized Education Program for each child that requires one. This is a result of the student being eligible under the IDEA. Each autistic child has their own characteristics and individual needs, everyone is different. Within that IEP there are necessary needs that must be fulfilled in order for the child with autism to reach the goals of his/her specific program and to succeed. Most IEPs allow autistic children to learn in the least restrictive environment as possible. This can take place within the regular classroom with a regular teacher and possibly an aide. During a lesson, the teacher can work with the regular students, while at the same time, the aide works one on one with the autistic child because he/she

[47]Interview with mother of autistic child.

has trouble in that specific subject. Another way for the child to learn in the least restrictive environment as possible is to meet daily or every few days with a resource teacher. This resource teacher will take a small group of students at a time during the regular school day for approximately one to two hours and practice skills those particular students are having difficulties with.[48]

When an autistic child is placed in the public school system, there are general practices that are used, but there is no real specified approach on how to teach the student. There is not one practice that has been proven to work identically for each autistic student, and that produces the same results. The procedures that have been proven to work tend to be wide-ranging systems which are altered to fit the student's goals in their IEP. One thing that should be included in all autistic individualized programs is encouragement. These students need the highest levels of encouragement, because without the support of parents, teachers, and peers it is extremely difficult for the child to commit to finishing any type of task. One procedure that shows some potential in being affective among the autistic student population which is used by teachers is called Pivotal Response Training (PRT). Pivotal Response Training targets two different manners that autistic children often have trouble with; this includes their lack of awareness when it comes to various signals and their incentives. PRT also allows the student to gain new skills and also provides the encouragement to make use of them.

Without systematic instruction an autistic student has no guarantee of the intense amount of engagement that they need. As a result, the student has no preservation or simplification of newly taught skills. Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) is a type of systematic instruction that has demonstrated to work for autistic students. By taking part in this examination, the autistic

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[48] Unknown. "Individualized Education Plans (IEPs)." *KidsHealth - the Web's Most Visited Site about Children's Health*. The Nemours Foundation, 2010. Web. 06 Nov. 2010. <http://kidshealth.org/parent/growth/learning/iep.html#>.

student's specific needs are identified through observation and it is then decided what the most fitting intervention would be for the fulfillment of the child's necessities. It is proven that an autistic child needs to be in a learning environment that is predictable and gives him/her the opportunity to learn new skills. It has been demonstrated that visual aids and signals are one of the most effective teaching procedures for predictability. When autistic children are showing problem behaviors a different approach must be taken when addressing the issue compared to the students without a learning disorder. Positive behavior support and functional behavior assessment are proven to be the most effective tactics. Positive behavior support is focuses on the improvement of the child's everyday life and surroundings to decrease the problem behaviors and encourage affirmative behavior. Functional behavior assessment finds the underlying problem and reason for the child's acting out and tries to address the problem. This method tries to reduce the negative behavior by targeting the source of the predicament. Although each autistic child has his/hers own specific curriculum, there are a few bits that should be included in all their curriculums. The student needs to learn how to acquire new skills that allows them to become more self-sufficient and self-reliant. How to better gain management of their surroundings is also a crucial lesson that should be incorporated into the curricula.
For social and academic skills, inclusiveness within the classroom has proven to help autistic students in these areas.[49]

In the International Journal of Special Education, a study was conducted by Jennifer A. Kurth from Northern Arizona University and Ann M. Mastergeorge from University Califonia Davis on autistic students in the classroom. The point of the study was to portray an educational report on teenagers with autism and the effect that their learning environment (inclusive

[49] Interventions for Children with Autism. "Planning a Summary of Current Best Practices for Educating Autistic Children." *The Chalkboard Project*. EcoNorthwest, Sept. 2008. Web. 21 Nov. 2010. <http://www.chalkboardproject.org/images/PDF/Educating%20Autistic%20Children.pdf>.

classroom versus special education classroom) had on their achievements of various academic skills. All participants had spent their entire educational career in one of these two environments. In this particular study, 15 students, from three different schools, all diagnosed with autism were involved. There were twelve males and three females all ranging from 12 years, 3 months to 15 years, 9 months, which categorizes them into the 7th, 8th, and 9th grades. For all 15, English was their first spoken language. All participants had around the same IQ scores along with similar accustomed behavioral skills. This study proved that in general, regardless of the educational setting, the autistic student's strengths lied in concrete assignments, while their weaknesses fell into the category of abstract assignments. Out of the 15 students, seven of them were spending less than 50% in a normal classroom per day, and learning math and language art skills in a self-contained environment. The remaining eight students spent at least 80% of the time in a normal educational setting while learning math and language art skills in an inclusive classroom. Although the sample size is small, it provides a broad overview of the effects of educational environments. The results of this study concluded that the children within the inclusive classroom showed a larger academic gain in all subject areas than those who were in the special educational setting. Although abstract tasks are notoriously more difficult for children with autism, the eight students experiencing inclusion had extremely higher scores in these areas than those in a self-contained environment. Although each child had his/her own specific needs, this study along with many others has proven that a child should be placed in an inclusive classroom whenever at all possible.[50]

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[50] Kurth, Jennifer A., and Ann M. Mastergeorge. "Academic and Cognitive Profiles of Students with Autism: Implications for Classroom Practice and Placement." *International Journal of Special Education* 25.2 (2010): 8-14. *Education Resource Information Center*. Web. 22 Nov. 2010. <http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/resultsadvanced?vid=13&hid=17&sid=12d00442-f4ff-4857-a257-82ac3950d535%40sessionmgr14&bquery=%28TI+%28Academic+AND+Cognitive+Profiles+of+Students+with+Autis

SECTION V-Conclusion

Ana is still struggling with the idea of whether or not to tell Joseph's* classmate's parents that he is high functioning autism. "I don't want others to label him. I also haven't told Joseph. I don't want him to use it as an excuse for not being able to do something. The day I tell him he is autistic will be the day he comes home crying to me asking, 'What's wrong with me? Why am I different?' It's a tough situation to grasp. I struggle with it every day. If you are the mother of an autistic child you definitely learn not to take things for granted. I see Joseph every day strive to do things that other people can do naturally. It has become a very eye opening experience" She references her situation to the poem by Emily Perl Kingsley called "Welcome to Holland," "You get ready for a trip to Italy that you have been planning for. You are so excited and can't wait to go, but you end up landing in Holland and there's no way of going back. Your trip to Italy has now turned into a trip to Holland. Everyone else has gone to Italy and comes back bragging about how great it was. It is painful to hear, because you had planned to go to Italy like the rest of them. You can't dwell on it though because you went to Holland for a reason, and you need to embrace the things that make Holland so special. This is like having an autistic child. You don't plan on it, but you accept it and enjoy it. It's hard at times, because you didn't get what you expected, but that's the beauty of it. I wouldn't change my experience with Joseph for anything. I have learned so much from him. I have learned how to be patient, how to enjoy life, and how to accept things I cannot change and value things for all their worth."[51]

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 504, along with the American with Disabilities Act and the Individual with Disabilities Education Act are the reasons why all schools accommodate special need students both academically and physically. When the three acts came about, it was a turning point for those who were disabled, whether it be a mental, emotional, or physical disability. Autism is an especially

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* Names have been changed to protect the identity of those interviewed.

[51] Interview with mother of autistic child.

important diagnosis that applies to these three laws, because the autistic child is provided with special services that meet their individualized needs, which are provided through school funding. It's a long process for the children and family, but is totally worth it in the end because of what the child accomplishes.

Albert Einstein, one of the most famous scientists in the world had trouble speaking until the age of three. Some believe that he had a mild case of Asperger's or autism.[52] Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft who is rated as the second wealthiest person in the world in 2010 has Asperger's syndrome.[53] Dr. Temple Grandin, is an animal scientist who changed our entire livestock industry while raising awareness of the inhumanity of slaughter houses. In 2010 she was voted one of the world's most 100 influential people by Times Magazine. She is autistic.[54] Between these most powerful people along with many others and our services we can raise awareness of autism and truly see that every single person can be a great contributor to society. Although the system isn't perfect, and has drained the economy of funding, it has truly made a difference for these children and their families. Without these funds for these children they would not be able to succeed to their highest potential and receive the individual services that they require for their specific needs because everyone is different and everyone struggles in different areas of life. We still have a long way to go, but we are moving in the right direction.

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[52] Isaacson, Walter. "20 Things You Need to Know About Einstein - Was Einstein a Slow Learner as a Child? - TIME." *Breaking News, Analysis, Politics, Blogs, News Photos, Video, Tech Reviews - TIME.com*. Time Inc., 2007. Web. 05 Dec. 2010. <http://www.time.com/time/2007/einstein/1.html>.

[53] Unknown. "Bill Gates Has Autism." *Autism and Behavior Management*. Web. 05 Dec. 2010. <http://autismmanagement.blogspot.com/2007/10/bill-gates-has-autism-in-case-you-didnt.html>.

[54] Unknown. "Temple Grandin, P.h.D." *Dr. Temple Grandin's Official Autism Website*. Future Horizons Inc., 2010. Web. 05 Dec. 2010. <http://www.templegrandin.com/>.