

Douglas Conklin

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Dr. Warfield

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### Philosophy of Special Education

*"Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one."* -Malcolm Forbes

As an educator, my legal obligation is to provide all students with a free and appropriate education, as defined by the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Individuals with Disabilities Act. As one who loves being an educator, I have a personal obligation to ensure that each one of my students reaches his or her fullest potential. In order to achieve this goal, I will be open to any new, groundbreaking teaching methods while also implementing tried-and-true tactics to find the best balance to fit the needs of my students.

In an inclusion classroom, balance is a key word. An educator must find the balance between challenging gifted students, progressing average students, accelerating below-average students, and accommodating special needs students. Beyond these broad groupings, an educator must find the balance between learning styles. Too much focus on one specific learning style or type of learner impedes the progress of other students; likewise, ignoring a learning style causes those students to fall behind. A good educator realizes that no two students learn the same, and should begin developing a plan to meet the needs of each student from the moment the students enter the classroom on the first day of school.

This plan is not rigid, however. A good educator also realizes that learning styles change, and must be flexible with his teaching strategies. In the case of a special needs student, I will

view an IEP not as a restriction of freedom within the classroom, but rather as a guide to better adapting my lessons to meet the needs of yet another diverse learner. I will work with the IEP team to form plans to adjust to these students' needs, and will be willing to accept the input of parents, administrators, and other teachers.

The ultimate goal of education is to prepare students for the real world. My wish is that all of my students will be ready to take on the challenges present outside of the classroom by the end of my time with them, whether the challenge be furthering their education or finding employment in a competitive job market. For special needs students to be ready to face these challenges, I must ensure that they not only have a mastery of the content of the course, but also the social, emotional, and behavioral skills required to thrive in society. At no point, however, will I allow a special needs student to feel any different than the rest of the class because, in reality, his or her needs are unique, just like any other students'.

Beyond the classroom, I will make every effort to keep regular communications with the parents, guardians, or caretakers of special needs students, through either traveling notebooks, phone calls, or a newsletter, in order to ensure that their support system follows them home. I understand that each student's home life has a significant impact on his or her learning in school, and so parental communication is key.

If asked to sum up my philosophy of education in one sentence, I would say, "I believe that every child can learn." My expectations for special needs students will not be lowered because of any label. I realize that these students are capable of learning, and it is I who must adapt to meet their needs and learning styles in order to assure that they learn each and every day.