



Testimony By Pam Klipa, The Arc of Pennsylvania

Before the Senate Education Committee

Regarding Special Education Funding

November 1, 2011

Good Morning, Chairman Piccola, Chairman Dinniman and members of the Senate Education Committee. My name is Pam Klipa and I am the Special Education and Training Coordinator for The Arc of Pennsylvania.

The Arc of Pennsylvania is a statewide, nonprofit organization that provides advocacy and resources for citizens with intellectual and developmental disabilities and their families. The Arc of PA was formed in 1949 to advocate for the rights of children and adults with intellectual disabilities across Pennsylvania – today, we have 34 local chapters covering 51 counties and nearly 9000 individual members. Local chapters provide a variety of services, including advocacy services for families in need and many chapters provide services as well, such as residential services, housing, summer camps, respite, personal care assistance, and job training.

The Arc of Pennsylvania has a long and rich history in the educational opportunities for students with disabilities in the Commonwealth. The right to education for students with disabilities in PA was granted in the 1972 PARC agreement- brought forth by The Arc of PA- then known as PARC- on behalf of parents for their children. This law preceded the Federal ruling by 3 years.

The Arc of Pennsylvania believes that **all** students in the Commonwealth should be afforded the opportunity to receive the best educational program, including students with disabilities who have an Individual Education Program (IEP). In the school year 2009-10, the Commonwealth's public and charter school system served 270,150 students in its special education services. That's 15.17 % of the total school aged population. These children are students too, and should not be ignored or cut out of any new innovations within the educational system that are available to children without disabilities.

In addition, because The Arc of PA's mission is to work to include all children and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities in every community, we work to make sure students with disabilities are included in general education classrooms in their neighborhood schools with their peers without disabilities. Special education law requires that students be educated in the "least restrictive environment (LRE)." Federal courts have recognized that statutory LRE requirements - or inclusion - are a right and not a privilege. However far too many schools in Pennsylvania continue to unnecessarily segregate children with disabilities. In fact, PA ranks 40th in the country when it comes to how often students with disabilities are educated in general education classrooms with their peers without disabilities. We can and must do better.

The Arc of Pennsylvania joined 40 other educational advocacy organizations in 2008 to advocate for reform to the special education funding formula. The proposed formula provides an effective formula to distribute state funding for special education, increases the accuracy of the special education formula by using three weights and streamlines and strengthen school district accountability without imposing excess bureaucracy. If we do not fix the system, the upward pressures on local property taxes will continue. It costs more to effectively educate children with disabilities than other students. Students have a legal right to receive quality special education services and programs from their schools (and are more successful when they receive it). Districts must help to meet these needs.

For students to be included into regular education classes, they must be provided with the necessary supplemental aids and services for them to succeed. Susan Kluge- from The Arc of Lehigh/Northampton Counties will now discuss her experience as a parent and an

advocate, the difference in resources from district to district for students with disabilities, how the extra resources can be used and the added benefits from these investments.