

## **Kalah's Discussion Post:**

### **What Does It All Mean and How Did We Get Here?**

What would education look like without the civil rights movements that lead to such big changes? What if parents just didn't care? It is mind boggling to think of how special education or education, in general, would look without everything that has lead up to what it all looks like NOW!

### **Special Education and Civil Rights Movement**

The *Brown v. Board of Education* case is the first case that comes to mind when thinking about differences made that made it possible for students with disabilities to have the same opportunities for education as anyone else. The case started as a case against segregation, but also covered students with disabilities. The *Brown v. Board of Education* case ruled that individuals segregated based on race or disability was not constitutional (Yell, 2019, p. 41). When thinking about how this case fits into the puzzle of school psychology, it is important to think about how evaluations are required to be unbiased. Standardized tests are normed with different races/ethnicities in mind, different socio-economic backgrounds, and even parent education in some cases. Other parts of the evaluation take into account teacher input, parent input, health, motor, communication and sometimes other concerns. The point of an evaluation is to be unbiased to prove that without a shadow of a doubt that the disability that the student meets criteria for is truly what the evaluation points to. The evaluation and the results help lead to interventions, accommodations, and modifications that are individualized to a student regardless of race or disability. A student may have a primary exceptionality, but if other services are needed then they aren't out of the realm of possibilities due to just a "label". Prior to the implementation of IEPs and even the civil rights movement, students would have been separated from other peers due to race, disability and possibly other reasons. This case led the way in desegregation and allowing for individuals to have equal opportunities. This case did not change everything, but was a big stepping stone to many other federal cases, how 504s came about, and what IDEA truly stands for. The civil rights movement was pivotal in opening up doors for so many people and changed the face of how individuals are employed, educated, excepted to higher education, and so many other important parts of peoples' lives.

### **Parent Advocacy**

Parent advocacy is extremely important when thinking about early intervention, but parental advocacy is a topic that should never just be pushed to the sideline at any point during a child's life. Parents, in most cases, want what is best for their child and they are typically the expert on that child. I would like to say all parents are purely there for the good of their child and that all parents will be there to advocate for their children, but there are cases when this is just not

what happens. When thinking about interventions that may fit a child within a classroom, possible evaluation, and even the creation of the IEP, parental feedback is extremely important. Parents know what motivates their child, the way the child deals with stress, if there are traumatic experiences, their sleep schedule, their dislikes and so much more. When thinking about early intervention, in particular, it is important to think about how often a medical provider actually sees a child and if the medical provider actually knows the child. In many cases, medical providers see a child for milestone appointments and parents are handed a survey where they answer what their child can and cannot do. Is this a truly effective way to obtain referrals if the child "appears" to not be reaching certain milestones? I, and many other parents I know, have noticed things about our child in between appointments. The parents I know and I have had to push for appointments in between those milestone appointments or even wait until the next appointment to really ask about concerns. Now that I know there are programs that assist with early intervention, this part does not seem so scary. I have been able to share with other parents what I have learned and they are not nearly as frustrated by having to find these resources through their child's primary care provider(s) who can be difficult to see due to scheduling.

There were several and still are several advocacy groups that are notable in the history and birth of special education. Prior to the turn of the 20th century, society had tried to ignore the needs of individuals with disabilities, especially in the classroom, but parents saw a need and really began advocating for their children (Yell, 2019). The first White House Conference in 1910 is extremely notable because it did not only have a goal of normalizing children with disabilities being in public schools, but also making a huge shift from institutionalizing them to moving many to a less restrictive environment (public school) (Yell, 2019). Although there were still certain classes that separated some of the students with disabilities, this was a huge movement started through parental advocacy, where the effects can still be seen today. The idea today is that students with disabilities are provided the least restrictive environment (LRE), which directly lines up with this particular conference. The conference was a huge move forward in making sure children receive education with their fellow peers and are not just institutionalized. There are several advocacy groups that have popped up since that first conference in 1910, whose goals were to always advocate for children. One group that sticks out, in particular, is The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) who's primary focus was focusing on the education of the exceptional child, establishing professional standards for teachers that work in the field of special education, and bringing together individuals interested in the issues of educating the exceptional child (Yell, 2019, p. 39). This group aimed to make sure that education is a priority for everyone and that education those with special needs may look different, which means that those teaching children with needs had specific training (Yell, 2019). School psychologists are in a great position to advocate for the school system, parents, teachers, the community and especially the children. Advocacy is what puts into motion all the changes throughout history.

When someone saw a need for change they began to advocate, which generally led to a following of others with the same beliefs, and in notable cases really pushed for a change.

### **Bringing it All Together**

If one thinks about what the country is built upon and what we look at as our guiding documents, *The Constitution*, being one we live by in almost all aspects of our lives, it is important to think about how that document plays into the history of education. Although there is not a true amendment that speaks directly about education, there are some that talk about the rights of individuals and how all individuals should have the same rights. People were segregated based on so many different factors, but there have been several important figures (individuals), civil rights cases, advocate groups, councils, and other federal movements that have broken down walls to get education/special education to where it is today. Without advocates who were not scared to speak up about the injustices being experienced by student with disabilities, there might not be students with disabilities in the same schools that we now see today. The students may still be institutionalized as they were decades and decades ago. If the civil rights movement didn't break down barriers in discrimination, equal opportunities would likely be the same as they were earlier on. Parents, teachers, stake holders, and students have all been a part of advocating for non-discrimination, unbiased evaluations, and the ability to have the same opportunities within education as the general population. After reading through the assigned chapters, I have gained more foundational knowledge on certain cases, understand better how to look up important legal information, and think about what the field of school psychology is based upon. I feel as if I could write a ten page paper over everything I've learned from the readings, but as a parent, parent advocacy stuck out to me and the pivotal cases that helped special education become what it is today truly interested me.

### **References:**

Yell, M. L. (2019). *The law and special education* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson.