

The promise of a public education for all students.

Nowhere has the challenge of educating *all* of our children been more tested than in the field of Special Education. District 203 is committed to identifying and providing an appropriate educational experience for the many special education students in District 203 schools. The fundamental belief of our school district is to provide educational opportunities, supports and services that meet the learning needs of each and every individual student. *Each* student is important.

The construction of a dedicated Early Childhood Center is but one part of District 203's commitment to this growing challenge. Special Education costs represent one of the largest percentage increases in District 203's costs in the last ten years. The changes that have increased costs have been due to the complexities of student needs, the innovations in technology that are now being used which are more costly, and the specialized services that have become more prevalent.

Consequently, District 203 has a far larger special education infrastructure (teachers, aides, technology, and administrators) now than it did ten years ago, and is much better equipped to meet the specialized needs of this growing population.

This is why beginning at age 3, for students with identified needs, as mandated by law, District 203 operates an Early Childhood Program. Early intervention, instead of the old "wait to fail" model, has changed the face of special education. However, truly effective early intervention cannot be accomplished without a strong, centralized early childhood program. By bringing these children to one school, a dedicated Early Childhood Center, instead of having them remain at the 5 different locations used currently, their educational experiences will be enhanced, teachers and staff will be more efficient, needed space will be freed up at the five elementary schools, the program will be able to handle more students, and all will benefit from an age and skill-appropriate setting.

All District 203 schools serve this special community, and another of the needs this referendum hopes to address at Naperville Central High School, is again the need for specific, and specialized facilities there, to serve its disabled student population, most of whom are required to be educated until they reach the age of 22 and are a more medically fragile group than the similar students attending Naperville North High School.

The District is committed to insuring that *each* student graduates with all of the attributes embodied in 203's mission statement and that students with disabilities

have their needs met in the spirit of the IDEA act. That said, even in our school district many imaginative, creative concepts of educational opportunities face limitations of available funding. Our district administration, teachers and staff, and our Board of Education strive for optimality, and strive for the best possible within available funding.

The amazing growth in special education can be traced to The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), first enacted in 1975 and reauthorized in 1997, and 2004. It is the federal law that guarantees all children with disabilities access to a free and appropriate public education and the related services thus supporting their right to achieve to their highest ability. IDEA was created to help states and school districts to meet their legal obligations by paying part of the expenses of educating children with disabilities.

Unfortunately, IDEA has never been fully funded by the federal government, and these costs, which are far greater on a per student basis, are borne mostly by local taxpayers.