

Introduction to *Public Policy, School Reform, and Special Education*

Lenny is a brilliant student of mathematics and **Sarah** is the best chess player in her hometown, perhaps in the country. **C.J.** and **Bobby** are students with physical disabilities, one with and one without special learning needs. **Terry** is known as a “living legend” at Magnolia Middle School and is a student who repeatedly engages in disturbing behaviors. **Xong** migrated from Cambodia and is more than two years below her fifth-grade classmates.

Among these students, who should receive special education services?

What is education in the U.S. all about, and what are its goals? Should the goals be the same for Lenny, Terry, C.J., and Xong? Should the curriculum be easier for some of these students than others? Special education services are costly. Are educators’ time and society’s money better spent remediating Xong’s language difficulties and experience deficits, or enhancing Lenny’s outstanding math skills? Will society be better if Sarah builds her math skills to specialize in satellite telecommunications, or if Terry stays out of jail?

The delivery of educational services to students who are exceptional is a dynamic enterprise. Between the time we write this module and the time you read it, major changes will have

6 Public Policy, School Reform, and Special Education

taken place. Changes in society, legislation, general education, special education, related services professions, and community agencies bring about change in delivery of educational services to all students, including those who are exceptional. The educational professions are driven by social, political, and economic factors. When there are major changes in availability of resources, in attitudes of the public toward education or toward people with disabilities, or in the federal government, there are changes in special education.

In this module, we consider broad social trends, national school reform, and public policy. We look at the current scene in education with a focus on the delivery of educational services to students who are exceptional. On occasion, we take a glimpse at the origins of current activities, and we discuss questions that educators will face in the future.