



# **Development of Special and Inclusive Education in China**

---

Prof. Dr. Meng Deng  
Research Institute of Inclusive Education  
East China Normal University



# OUTLINE

---

- Historical Review
- Parallel Development of Special Education Schools and LRC
- Conflicts between Special and Regular Education
- Where is the Future



---

# I Historical Review



# Basic Data of Disability Population

---

- National Survey in 1987: 51.64 million (5% of the whole population) persons with disabilities, and 8.17 million at school age.
  - National survey in 2006: 82.96 million (6.34% of the whole population) persons with disabilities;
  - About 10 Million at school age.
- ✓ Largest population with disabilities
  - ✓ Largest scale of special education



# Basic Data (continued)

---

- Seven legal disability types: visual impairment, hearing impairment, Speech and Language Disorder, physical disability, intellectual disability, psychiatric disability, and multiple disability.
- Focusing on three types: ID, VI, and HI, and recently Autism has been a rising issue.
- Enrollment: less than 6% in school in 1988, and over 85% by far.
- 1988 (57, 600); 2003 (364, 700) students at school
- Approximately 65% of students with disabilities were studying at general schools based on 2003 data, and now around 50%.

# Inclusive Education Initiative

- Early inclusive education attempts after 1980s.
- Influenced by Mainstreaming from the West.
- Responding to the needs of going to school for children with disabilities who were denied schooling
- It is called “Learning in Regular Classroom” (LRC).
- Access was the first priority





# Universalization momentum

---

- *Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China* (National People's Congress, 1986), the first specific law for compulsory school attendance, and it stated that all children who have reached the age of six shall be enrolled in school and receive compulsory education for the prescribed number of years.
- the *Suggestions on Developing Special Education* (State Council, 1989) presented that: Special education development should combine the principle of universalization with enhancement, and put the emphasis on universalization.

# 1980s Practice in rural areas



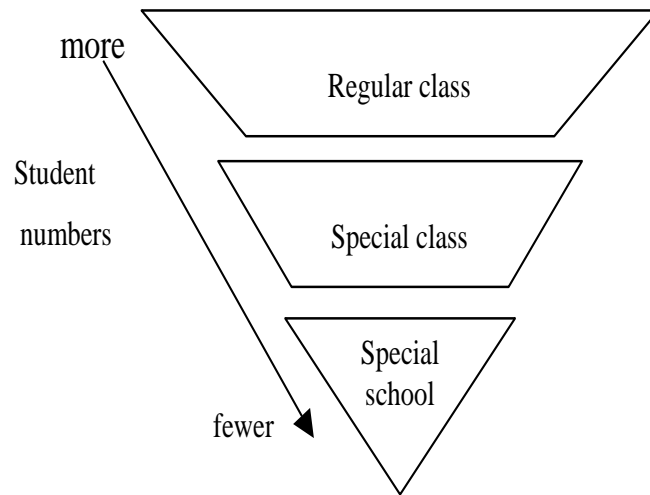
Welcoming blind students to school





# A multiple-level continuum:

---



- Home Schooling
- Community Education
- Distant education



---

## II Parallel Development of Special and Inclusive Education



# Number Changes of Special Schools and LRC:

---

- 292 special schools serving 33,055 students 1980
- no formal schooling for students with intellectual disability till 1979.
- 1,077 special schools, 1,550 special classes with 129,400 students 1992.
- In 1992, 28% (36,558 students) of them were at general classrooms
- 2228 special schools, 919,800 students at school, in 2021
- Accelerating speed.
- Compulsory Education mandate.

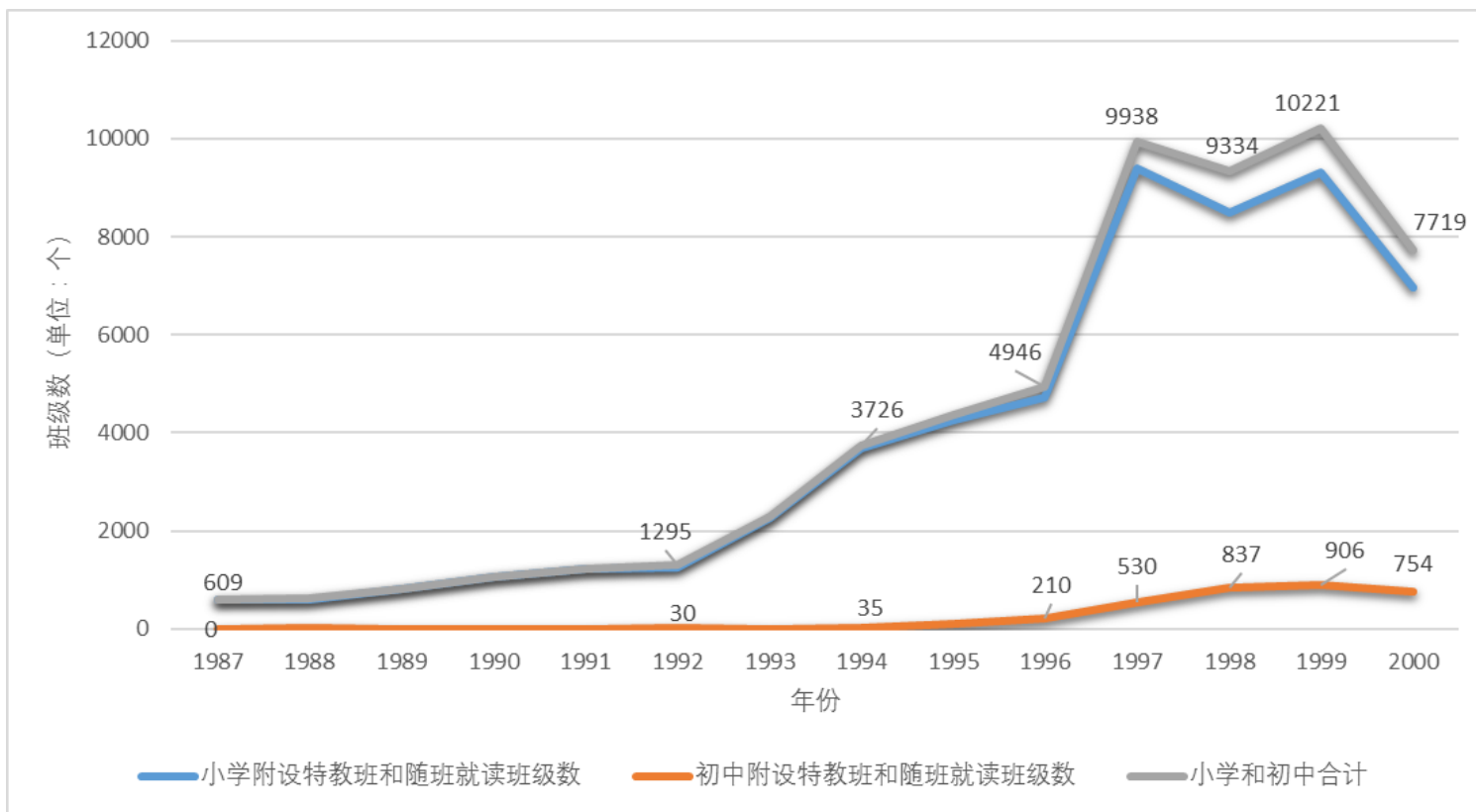
# New Development Data

- **In 2009, the number of special schools increased to 1,672, and to 2053 by 2015.**
- **In 2010, LRC served approximately 65% of all students identified with disabilities (300,000) in regular schools.**
- **The number remains around 60% afterwards**

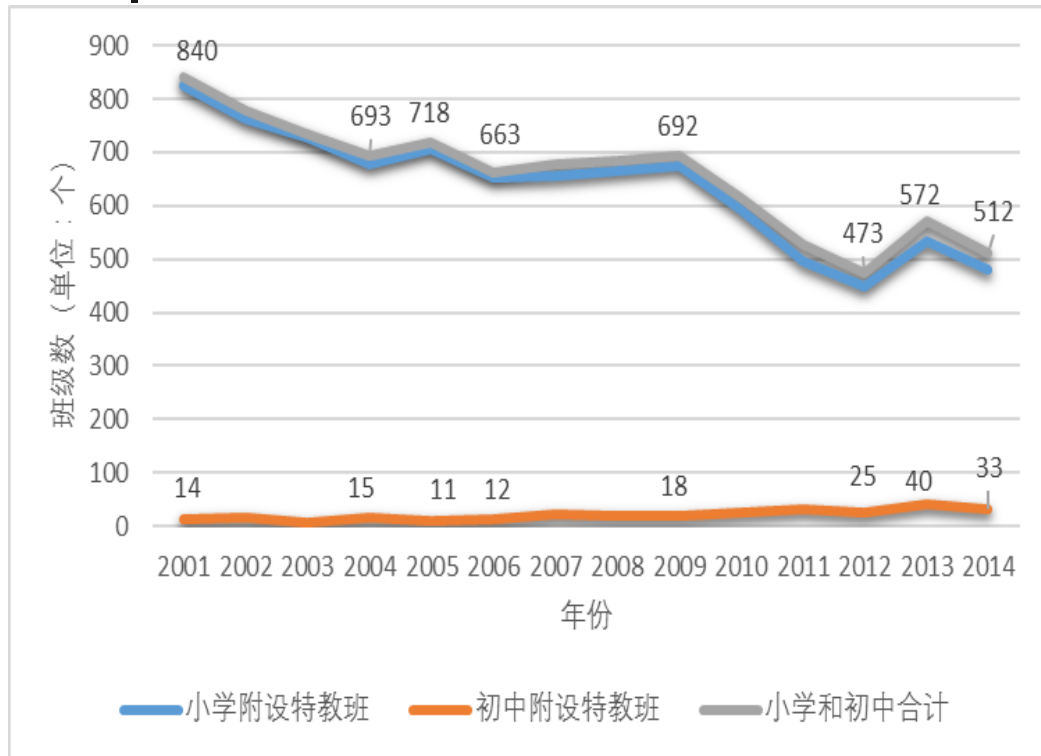


# Data Changes

- 1987-2000 Number of Special classes and LRC classes



# 2001-2014 Number of Special Classes



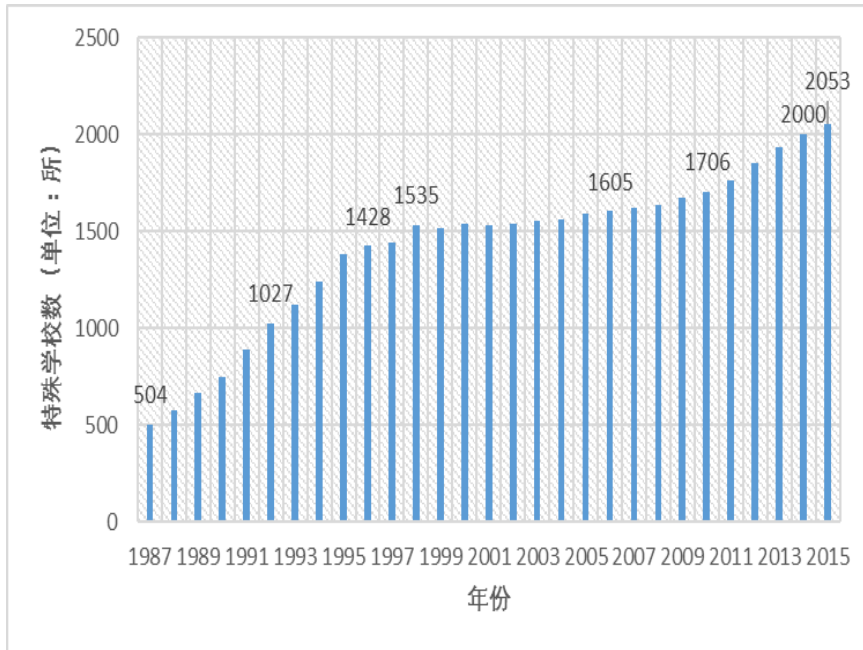
**In 1979, 12 special classes attached to regular schools were opened for 137 students with intellectual disabilities, and the number of the classes reached 599 drastically in 1988.**

**About 6148 special classes were established in 1998 reaching the peak of expansion, but declined very fast to 684 in the year 2008**

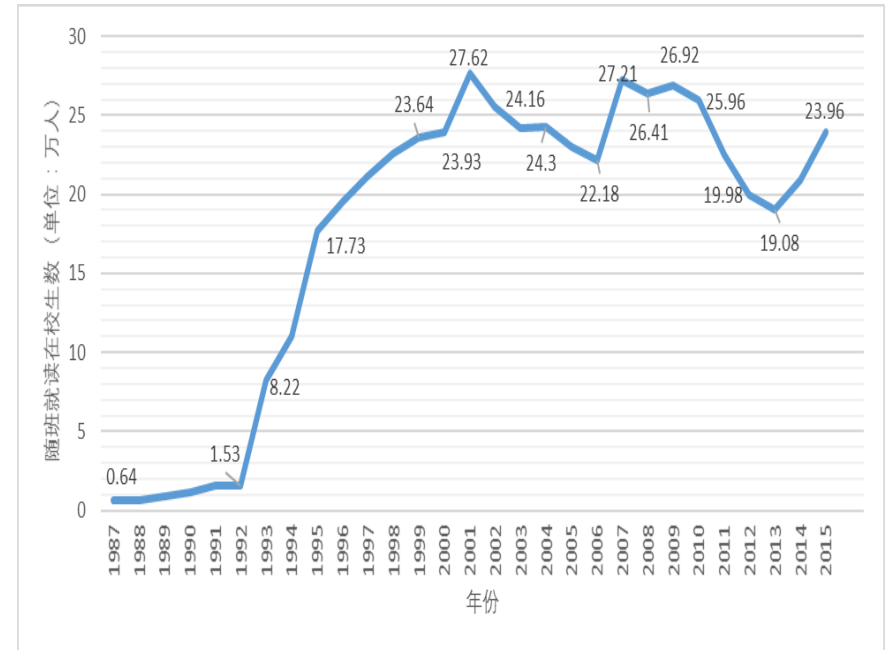
Resource classroom take place of special classes

# To integrate or to Separate?

## Special Schools increase



## LRC increasingly unevenly





# *Guidelines for Mid-term and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010–2020)*

---

- at least one special school should be established in each city or county with a population of 300,000 or more,
- and this goal mapping special schools nationwide should be reached by 2020.
- and LRC programmes should be expanded in a large scale meanwhile,
- State Council (2022) published the “*Fourteenth Five Year Plan*” *Special Education Development Improvement Action Plan*: one special school established in areas with a population of 200,000 or more





# Project on Developing Special Schools in Mid-Western Areas of China in 2008

---

- This project was implemented within two years to invest 5 billion RMB on establishing 465 new special schools and renovate 695 old ones,
- and purchase necessary teaching and rehabilitation equipment for them in the Mid-Western areas of China which are commonly known as socio-economically less developed areas

# What Happens to Special Class?

- Decrease very fast.
- Recently new special classes called “Satellite class” in Zhejiang Province will reach 100 by 2020.





# Two reasons were cited for the decrease:

---

- student population has reduced rapidly with the effect of one-child policy.
- students with disabilities vary in ages, abilities, and academic progress with grade promotion.
- Most students were reallocated to different classes in different grades studying together with their non-disabled peers through LRC programmes.
- A few of them were sent to special schools considering their level of severity.



# Policy mandate toward quality education

---

- the *Special Education Promotion Plan (2014–2016)* (State Council, 2014) and the *Special Education Promotion Plan (2017–2020)* ( State Council, 2017) outlined specific goals and strategies to enhance the quality of special education.
- State Council (2022) published the “*Fourteenth Five Year Plan*” *Special Education Development Improvement Action Plan*, calling for establishing a quality special education system and an initiated governmental momentum toward inclusive education
- School access and quality enhancement



- **III Conflicts between Special and Regular Education**
- 





# Special schools: to be or not to be?

---

- Fail to play such roles of “Backbone” due to the lack of resources and coordination between special and regular education systems.
- They lack professionals and expertise themselves due to the past neglect.
- Many special schools are new ones with a very fragile basis for capacity building, and lack resources.



# Also,

---

- Special schools have not been empowered explicitly to oversee regular schools' progress in LRC.
- No regulation has been mandated on how the roles of "backbone" of special schools should be played.
- Regular schools are reluctant to accept any assistance or professional guidance from special schools due to its arrogance and neglect of the education for students with disabilities

# Regular schools

- **Focus on preparing able students for better performance in various examinations.**
- **LRC has not led to systematic changes of regular education system yet toward a direction of inclusive schools responding to diversity.**
- **The complaints are that professionals from special schools do not understand the routines of regular education and often present as a barrier instead of a facilitator.**
- **regular schools are more interested in dumping 'bad' students to special schools.**







# On the one hand: Let's Merger

---

- they have to work together for students with disabilities.
- This actually has mixed the boundaries between the two systems, which has never happened before the practice of LRC programmes.

# On the other hand



- special schools develop to be more professional and special for the purpose of providing quality education and rehabilitation services to students with disabilities
- Regular schools has not reduced its examination orientation yet.
- the disparities between special and regular schools are enlarged as a matter of fact since special and regular schools operate in different models increasingly



---

# IV Where is the Future



# A bridge to link special and regular schools

---

- **Many special classes were consequently closed and a few of them were transferred to resource classrooms.**
- **Beijing developed 148 resource classrooms to support 5616 students with disabilities learning in 1091 regular schools by 2012.**
- **Resource classrooms have been experimented in other metropolitan cities as the major practice of developing support system for LRC.**

教育部办公厅关于印发《普通学校特殊教育资源教室建设指南》的通知[教基二厅  
[2016]1号]



# Proposed support structure

---

Urban:

Resource classrooms (school)

Resource Centre (district)

Special Education Support Centre (City)

Rural:

Resource classrooms (township)

Resource centre (County)

Special Education Support Centre (Province)

# Redefining Special Schools

- Chinese pragmatic practice of inclusive education in the Chinese context that special schools should be a part of, instead of apart from, inclusive education,
- and thus should be re-empowered with new roles to support and facilitate inclusive education.





# However,

---

- there have been worries and criticisms that the model of strengthening the roles of special schools could be against the prevailing trend of developing full inclusive education.

# Conclusion



- There have been few countries where high quality and resourced inclusive education can be said to be in place,
- and few of them can serve as the standard or at least as a generally accepted example of inclusion.
- The move toward inclusive education in China has been largely underpinned by its specific cultural values and unique education systems.





---

**Thank You!**