

## THE STATE STANDARD FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION

**Expert commentary** – by Viacheslav ZASENKO, the Deputy Head of Scientific and Coordinating Council on the Development of the State Standard for Special Education of Children with Special Needs, the Deputy Director on Research Work of the Institute of Special Pedagogy, the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences of Ukraine

**(Zasenko, V. (2004). The State Standards for Special Education: Expert Commentary. Defectology (Ukraine), 2, 2-5.)**

### ▣ ***Why is the State Standard for Special Education needed in Ukraine? What is the educational background of its development?***

The idea to develop this document is not accidental. In its present social, political, and economic conditions Ukraine faces the need for changes in special education system due to the changed public attitude towards children with special needs, the new understanding of personal development of such children and their efficient socialization and integration into society.

The existing special education in Ukraine is a complicated, multi-branched, and differentiated system of correctional institutions, rehabilitation, medical, and psychological centers, educational institutions, special classes in regular schools, etc.

At the same time, the increasing number of children with special needs in various regions of the country, the scarcity of necessary special (correctional) institutions and qualified personnel demand that the existing system of special education have qualitative changes.

The target task of its improvement is to create optimal conditions for developing and realizing educational needs of such children while taking into account the abilities of each personality. Therefore, it is important to outline the educational demands the society raises before the educational level of each person with special needs, in particular, children. Thus, the state-defined standard norms of their educational level should be developed.

It should be noted that the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine together with the Institute of Special Pedagogy at the Academy of Sciences of Ukraine, scientists and educators from several higher educational institutions have significantly improved the educational content for children with special needs during past several years in connection with the introduction of new content and structure in comprehensive schools.

This activity has been done in the framework of certain decrees and resolutions.

Thus, on February 12, 2000, the decree “On the Development of the State Standard for Special (Correctional) Education of Children with Special Needs, its Provision with Curricula and Teaching Materials” was adopted to fulfill the Laws of Ukraine “On Education”, “On Comprehensive Secondary Education”, and the decisions of the Collegium of the Ministry of Education and the Presidium of Ukraine’s Academy of Pedagogic Sciences. The process was finalized with the decree on the State Standard for Special Education, adopted on January 23, 2003, to implement the Decree of President of Ukraine “On the National Doctrine of Education Development” and the decisions of Ukraine’s Cabinet of Ministers “On the Measures to Implement the National Doctrine of Educational Development in 2002-2004.”

### ▣ ***What were the peculiarities and difficulties of developing the State Standard for Special Education?***

The development of the State Standard for Primary Education of Children with Special Needs was based on:

- ☞ the conceptual provisions of the State Standard for Comprehensive Secondary Education in Ukraine;

- ☞ the concept of the content components (educational lines) in the State Standard for Primary Comprehensive Education;
- ☞ the concept of the State Standard for special education of children with special needs;
- ☞ the conceptual ideas on the education, curricula provision, potential abilities of children with special needs, explored and compiled by foreign and Ukrainian defectology scientists;
- ☞ modern progressive ideas and practical achievements in educating the children with special needs.

Achieving the main goal required defining and solving a number of particular tasks raised by the challenges of development of this category of children. The main issues are:

- ☞ prevention, correction of deviations in physical and psychological development of children with special needs;
- ☞ formation of compensatory forms of activity as a vital condition of preparing for studies in the main school;
- ☞ taking into consideration the individual features and potential personal abilities, as well as the chances of relying on the remaining analyzers in educational process;
- ☞ development of self-regulation and self-development skills through social interaction based upon the knowledge and skills of speech activity (in particular, communicative activity) and creative work;
- ☞ psychological and methodic preparation of teaching staff to implement the educational standard as the ultimate result of educating the children with special needs.

Special attention has been paid to the correctional section in the Standard of Special Education, in particular, to correctional and developing lessons, as well as correctional content lines that go through all educational spheres.

Crucially important is the possibility of using, or, to be more precise, orienting the education of children with disorders at the State Standard for Special Education, regardless of the status and subordination of an educational institution.

Concerning the difficulties, it should be said that anybody doing at least something in life knows: any work has its difficulties. No exception was the drafting of the document discussed here.

In general pedagogy, the most prominent scientists of the country had been long working to develop the standard. Their work was facilitated with the following factors:

- ☞ the definite level of education (complete comprehensive secondary education);
- ☞ the definite school structure;
- ☞ the defined structure of the State Standard for Comprehensive Secondary Education (Law of Ukraine "On Comprehensive Secondary Education", Article 32).

Before we started developing the standard in special pedagogy, all the above-listed factors were absent.

The development process was further complicated with the absence of the Law on Special Education, the new Provision on the special comprehensive school, etc.

That is why, under such conditions the conceptual settlement of the special education standard meant taking into account a series of specific issues and aspects:

- ☞ definition of the concept "a standard for special education" in structural, functional, comparative, and terminological aspects;
- ☞ special interaction and inter-influence of such components in special education system, as: a curriculum – a program of studies – a technology – an assessment system;
- ☞ definition of the concepts "a standard(norm) of educational level", "correlation between studying and development", "correlation between the necessary educational level and the level of life competence" (the latter term has not been adopted yet by defectology science although it is vitally important).

There are 8 types of special schools, for 8 categories of children, which means different structures, terms of studies, different level of education, etc.)

Besides, the last decree mentioned above shortened the deadline for drafting the State

Standard for Special Education from December 2004 up to June 2003, which certainly made the task for the Institute of Special Pedagogy (the main participant of the drafting process) very complicated and responsible.

▣ ***What are the main characteristics of the State Standard for Special Education?***

The State Standard for Special Education is a standardized system of educational level indicators which take into consideration the potential of both a real person with special needs, and the special education system.

The State Standard for Special Education was developed in accordance with the abilities of children with special needs of primary school age, because this very period experiences most specific features of educating and bringing up the children with special needs. Later, providing basic and full comprehensive secondary education most types of special boarding schools (basic secondary and senior classes) use the curricula of regular schools (while preserving the correctional complex).

The content of education and the content knowledge requirements are represented in the Standard for Special Education on a branch basis – in six educational branches which naturally continue in relevant educational content of the basic secondary and senior school.

The content of educational areas is structured and realized through a system of relevant academic subjects and courses. Their programs are adopted by the Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine. Depending on teaching approaches, there may be different types of structuring.

The main parameters of the special, as well as comprehensive, educational standards are: the structure, content, amount of academic load and the levels of student knowledge. The Standard helps to ensure the stable educational level of students with special needs, regardless of the forms of their education; it allows for improving this level according to society development horizons and the personality's potential.

The structure of the Standard includes the basic curricula for primary school, the general description of invariant and varied components, and the state-required level of comprehensive educational results of students (for deaf, hard-of-hearing, blind, partially sighted children, children with musculoskeletal disorders, with psychic development retardation, with heavy speech disorders, for mentally retarded children.)

The basic curriculum for primary special school may give the entire idea of the content and structure of this level of education, the correlation in hours between educational areas, the maximum allowable academic load for students.

The invariant component of the basic curriculum is defined by the state and it is obligatory for all special comprehensive schools, regardless of their governance and property ownership. It includes the educational areas which are to provide the social competence necessary for each student. The invariant component of the basic curriculum also includes correctional and developing lessons necessary for the children with special needs to realize their educational and personal goals. Depending on the type and complexity of a child disability, these lessons aim at developing visual or aural perception, correcting the cognitive activity, speech and mental disorders, as well as physical disabilities, developing spatial, social and everyday orientation skills, etc.

The hours allocated in the basic curriculum for correctional lessons are not included in the maximum allowed academic load.

An educational institution plans the variable component of the curriculum on its own, taking into consideration the type of the institution and individual educational needs of its students. This component may include: additional studies of educational subjects in primary classes; optional lessons; individual and group lessons, etc.

What concerns the budget financing of special comprehensive schools, it is provided in accordance to the total hours for invariant and varied components allocated in the basic curriculum. It also takes into account the current norms for the number of students in classes (groups).

▣ ***What are the future prospects of this epoch-making document?***

At least, it can be noted that such complicated work as the development of the State Standard for Special Education was completed on time. And the Time will test its efficiency. Today we have a normative document whose concepts were published in the *Defectology* journal, several collections of research papers and teaching materials. Its main provisions were discussed at two all-Ukrainian scientific and practical conferences (Odessa, 2002; Pechynizhyn, 2003), several round-table discussions and seminars. We have received commentary from almost all regions of Ukraine. In general, they are positive (the suggested criticism was taken into consideration.)

The draft State Standard for Special Education was discussed at the meeting of the Council of the Department of Psychology, Age Physiology and Defectology (Academy of Pedagogic Sciences of Ukraine), as well as by the Collegium of Ukraine's Ministry of Education and Science. The relevant decisions were adopted. Finally, on July 2004, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine adopted the decree "To Ratify the State Standard for Primary Comprehensive Education of Children Requiring Correction of Physical and/or Mental Development."

Talking about the prospects, I would like this document to have "its fate, and its broadened way", as our classic poet (T.Shevchenko) says. All the more so since it ensures the integrity of the special education content and continuity between the stages of special school; it standardizes the academic load of students with special needs, creates the preconditions for differentiated learning.

The introduction of the State Standard does not mean subjection of academic process to a strict template; on the contrary, it opens broad possibilities for pedagogic creative work, designing variable curricula around the obligatory content, introducing diverse learning technologies.

▣ ***Who among the authors can be praised or criticized?***

There are as many opinions, as many different people. That is why, no matter how broad our public consideration of this document be and no matter how long we elaborate it, there will also be different, perhaps even diametrically opposed, opinions (although I do not see serious drawbacks.)

The State Standard for Special Education has been made possible owing to the enormous work of a big group of creative people who developed a crucially significant document in limited terms, often working for free. Here I would mention with pleasure several names. First of all, they are:

- ☞ the co-Heads of the Research and Coordinating Council for the Development of the State Standard for Special Education of Children with Special Needs: V.Ogneviuk, the Deputy Minister of Education and Science of Ukraine, and academician V.Bondar, the Director of the Institute of Special Pedagogy (Academy of Sciences of Ukraine); P.Poliansky, the Director of the Department for Comprehensive Secondary and Pre-School Education (Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine);
- ☞ the coordinators: L.Vashchenko, the Head of Office for Educational Content (Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine); A.Serednytska, the Head of the Department for Pre-School, Primary, and Special Education within the above-mentioned Office; G.Lobaychuk, the Chief Specialist of this Office;
- ☞ the administrators of the working groups: Heads of the Laboratories at the Institute of Special Pedagogy (L.Borshchevska, L.Vavina, T.Sak, O.Khokhlina); L.Drobot, Head of Department for Correctional Education at the Scientific and Teaching Center for Secondary Education (Ministry of Education and Sciences of Ukraine); M.Sheremet, the Deputy Director of the Institute of Correctional Pedagogy at Drahomanov National Pedagogic University, and others.