The year 2008 was destined to be a landmark year in the development of special education in China. The success of the Paralympic Games directed attention toward the physically handicapped and the issues they sometimes face when seeking employment, getting an education, and integrating into the community. Special education is being spotlighted like never before.

According to a national survey of the physically handicapped in China, by April 1, 2006, 82.96 million Chinese citizens had been identified as physically handicapped. 940,00 had an educational background above junior college, 4.06 million had attended high school (including technical secondary schools), 12.48 million had gone to junior middle school, and 26.42 million had a primary school education. The illiteracy rate of the population older than 15 had reached 43.29%, or 35.91 million people. The number of physically handicapped children between 6–14 years old was 2.46 million, 63.19% of which were attending regular education schools or special education schools.1 According to the Ministry of Education, the enrollment rate for primary school-age children was 99.27% in 2006, and the rate for junior secondary education was 97%.2

There are 1,667 special education schools with 583,000 handicapped students in China and 19,000 rehabilitation centers. The government encourages physically handicapped children to study in mainstream schools and provides professional training for over 1.4 million students. The government has also trained 3.97 million physically handicapped men in the rural areas. The government strives to provide security for AIDS patients and their children via educational aid policies.3

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I. New Measures for Special Education in 2008

In 2008, the government put forward a series of legislation to promote education for the physically handicapped.

A. Government Support

On March 28, 2008, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council promulgated the “Opinions of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council for Promoting the Perspectives of the Physically Handicapped” (中共中央国务院关于促进残疾人事业发展的意见). The “Opinions” prescribed that efforts should be made to develop a special educational system for the physically handicapped, encourage society to become involved in special education, improve the quality of special education teachers, optimize the policies for physically handicapped students, guarantee free compulsory education for handicapped students, develop a preschool-level rehabilitation center, accelerate the development of secondary special education, improve the education system for children who are severely mentally handicapped, eliminate illiteracy, cultivate special education teachers in mainstream schools, implement subsidies for special education teachers, and eradicate discrimination during enrollment for handicapped students.

On April 24, the revised “Law of the People’s Republic of China for the Protection of the Handicapped” (中华人民共和国残疾人保障法) was issued and put into effect on July 1, 2008. Article 3 of the law regulated school fee exemptions, the quality of teachers and teaching materials for special education, and emphasized equal rights for handicapped students.

On June 26, the third meeting of the Standing Committee of the 11th National People’s Congress approved the Convention for the Rights of the Handicapped (残疾人权利公约). The Convention for the Rights of the Handicapped came into effect on May 3, 2008. China was one of the signatories of the convention. Legal documents, such as the Convention, were necessary bases for the construction of legislation protecting the rights of the handicapped in China.

B. Government Measures to Strengthen and Improve Special Education

On September 10, 2008, Teacher’s Day, President Hu Jintao visited the Zhengzhou School for the Blind, Deaf, and Deaf-mute. He promised