

Commentary

No question, inclusive education matters!

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Inclusive education is probably one of the most misused, misunderstood terms in education. Feared by many staff and parents alike, until you see it in action or better yet experience it first-hand.

Inclusive schools are strong connected school communities. It's not about being normal, or being ready to come in. It is about figuring out how to welcome you now, as you are, how to accommodate your needs, keep you feeling safe and fostering a sense of belonging and meaningful participation.

We have chosen the path of inclusive education for our son. He has been educated in his neighbourhood schools and in regular classes for the majority of his student life. There were a few blips here and there and some adjustments along the way, once he was in the regular class fulltime, he became engaged in learning, his

participation and sense of belonging improved drastically. He was no longer a visitor in the classes he attended, he was a student and his classmates understood he was part of the class.

We know everyone can learn. We know kids like our son can learn from his classmates in the regular classes. Equally important his classmates can learn from him. They learn everyone can contribute, they learn everyone has value and they learn people communicate, move and act in a variety of ways but that does not interfere with their value, their human qualities nor does it or should it impact the potential for friendships.

Inclusive education has fostered a sense of belonging for our son. He is a confident young man with his eye on his future, he cannot wait to get out there and live life to the fullest. The added benefit, he has a whole

community who knows him, cares deeply about him and his future. He is accepted, he is loved and he is viewed as a responsible hard working young man.

I see inclusive education as paving a path for a better future, not just for my son but for everyone. It paves the path for kids, from an early age to be with others, to experience the broad spectrum of diversity and difference in the human condition. The reason this is important, is because the students of today will be the adults of tomorrow. They will be our doctors and nurses, teacher, lawyers and trades people, they will be the neighbours and citizens populating our communities. If they learn from a young age, humans come in many forms, many abilities, move in a variety of ways, communicate in a wide variety of ways, they will be prepared to welcome, befriend, be the supportive neighbour, become the proud parent of a newly diagnosed child and be a professional representing, treating or caring for people of a wide variety of abilities and conditions and they will do it well, they will do it respectfully.

They will understand we all have strengths and abilities and we all have value. My son deserves a world where he will be accepted, welcomed for who he is, not avoided for who he isn't and be recognized as a valued human being. Inclusive education is the cornerstone for all of this and more. Children need to be with, educated with and play with children of all abilities. It is the right thing to do!

NO QUESTION, INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MATTERS!

Extend-A-Family is a Toronto wide community organization that seeks to ensure that children and youth with developmental disabilities develop meaningful relationships and participate fully in the community.

 www.extendafamily.ca