



49 Old Solomon's Island Road, Suite 205,
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
Annapolis (410) 571-9320, Baltimore (410) 974-6139
Fax: (410) 974-6021
www.thearcmd.org

Together We're Better

Essay Contest Winners

2007



“Together We’re Better”

by Austin Fry, grade 7, Oklahoma Road Middle School

Inclusive schools are very important to everyone especially to those who have disabilities. These schools help prove that together we are better and can make a difference. Inclusive schools are those that make every student feel welcome and provide the support needed for all students to learn. These schools understand the fact that every student is unique and learns differently, and the schools collaborate with the families to make a greater difference in their education or extracurricular activities. These schools welcome children with disabilities and then try their best to help them overcome their personal obstacles by focusing on those student’s personal needs.

Inclusive schools include everyone, no matter their disability, that’s why they are great models for other schools. These schools are important because they show us that everyone is equal and deserves a chance to show people what they can do. These kinds of schools make sure that no one is ignored due to any reason. Inclusive schools give everyone a chance to make a difference in themselves or others around them by getting stronger in a weak area or by assisting another person.

Disabled students are the same as every one else. We all have different abilities and disabilities, but these students help us see things not as disabilities, but as different abilities. These students make us realize that if we work together then we can turn disabilities into abilities and help prove that together we’re better. Students such as the ones in my school show us that one can overcome anything by working hard and following and using helpful advice from students or tutors. Many disabled students share emotions willingly so that even just a smile from them can brighten one’s day. People are proud to be friends with students such as these. These students show us that anyone can make and keep true friends. The disabled students in my community open people’s eyes to the fact that all people can be anything they want to be and can overcome any obstacle and turn it into a personal strength.



“Together We’re Better”

By Meg Heffner, grade 7, Oklahoma Road Middle School

Inclusive schools are not only important for those with disabilities but also for those without them. The blending of students in the school system has obvious advantages for students of all strengths and weaknesses, inclusive education, I believe, means that all students in a school regardless of their abilities or disabilities become part of the school and community.

Children without disabilities are sometimes unaware that there are children who have disabilities. Most times exposure to those with disabilities sometimes bewilders and puzzles children causing them to treat disabled children differently. Attending schools that blend children of all abilities helps all children have a better understanding of others. Inclusion is based on the belief that people work in inclusive communities. They work with people of different races, religions, beliefs, and disabilities; therefore, children of all ages should learn and grow in environments that resemble the environments that they will eventually work in.

On the other hand, it is also important for the disabled child to feel as if they belong and "fit in" to the school. Attending an inclusive school from an early age helps those with disabilities more easily adapt to their environment and be accepted by their peers.

In conclusion, inclusive schools offer great benefits for all those who attend. They are the “stepping stones” to inclusive communities where people of all abilities work, live and play. After all, the philosophy behind the inclusive school system is “Children that learn together, learn to live together”.



“Together We’re Better”

by Sammy Showman, Grade 7, Oklahoma Road Middle School

Schools are an important part of the community. Why? Well I think they are because they educate children from all ages and help them grow and develop into mature adults. You see, throughout school children have to deal with learning, whether it is learning math or English or learning to climb a rope, yet something we don't think about when we hear school or learning is children learning to develop and deal with other aspects of the adult world... like different people. That's where inclusive schools come in.

One might ask, what are inclusive schools? To answer that question, an inclusive school is a school that includes. Who do inclusive schools include? Well Once again, inclusive schools include every child that is eligible to go to school .Inclusive schools really help children be interactive with children may be slightly different than them, for example, the partners club, at Oklahoma Road Middle School has a program called the Partner's Club. The Partners Club helps children from all over the school to interact with some other children who are disabled or have learning disabilities. In the Partners Club, the children get to play games, work together read a book or play a letter game. Overall the Partners Club is very fun and teaches students to work together and that every child is unique and equal. Inclusive schools don't just have children from different places of the school work together, they also have children that are disabled or have learning disabilities in class with other children who may not have any learning disability. Having a wide variety of children in a class room can teach children to accept diversity on a high level.

So far I have talked about how inclusive schools help children who aren't disabled or mentally challenged, but now I want to add how inclusive schools help children with learning disabilities. You see it used to be that children who had a learning disability were thought of to need more help than other children who did not, now disabled children can get just as much of an education as any other child and make friends and become very social. Grant it, the child may need some special education classes or an assistant to stay by their side, but having such a diverse class can be an inspiration to every person in the classroom, and it can enlighten children and broaden their view of there world. One can see how much of an impact inclusive schools have on the community. We are the future and the more we can learn right now the more we can understand later in life, and the more we can all help the world become a better place, it will become a more inclusive place.



“Together We’re Better”

by Sabrina Biddinger, grade 11, Tuscarora High School

During National Inclusive Week we need to show the value and raise awareness to the importance of inclusion.

Inclusive schools throughout Maryland are so important because they can help both kids with and without mental or physical disabilities understand each other and work together. I use to be in the "special ed" classes with people with mental and/or reading disabilities. I have now worked my way out of that, but I do help people that I know have problems. It is important for non-disability students to understand where the disability kids are coming from, to understand their problems, and see what they may be able to do to help assist. I have a friend that doesn't comprehend some of the stories we read in English, or she doesn't know how to spell certain words. Since I understand her situation from my own experience, I try and make an effort to help her. I wasn't as lucky when I needed help and I don't want her to have the same trouble.

People in our community also have physical disabilities. Everyday we see different type of people. Instead of making fun of the way that they walk or look, we should make an effort to try and understand them. Instead of walking away from the person, you could help them out and maybe make a new friend. I see too many kids in high school that make fun of the way someone's physical appearance or the fact that they can't spell normal words. What you should do is ask the person if they would like some assistance. It won't hurt you to help but you may hurt them by not at least offering.

Tuscarora High School is excellence as making all the students feel valued. In our school, we have an elevator for those students with physical disabilities whether just a temporary situation or long term disability. We have clubs and groups in which anyone can join. By joining the clubs and groups, non-disability and disability students help each other to understand one another, and work together to complete tasks and goals. Our school is good at not separating the disability students into different classes. They have all of us mixed together, which I think is important so you get everyone's opinion and perspective.

Both students with and without disabilities should value each other. They can teach each other different things. For example, whenever I tell my friend how to spell a word, I have just taught her something she didn't already know. I learned some new things about baseball from a disability student in my class last year. He taught me things that I never knew. I have learned how to use my imagination more from another student. He would think of the craziest stories and share them with the class.

During National Inclusive Week, it is important to remember every person is valuable and has something to contribute to any community, including schools. By combining disability and non-disability in schools and classrooms students learn early in life to appreciate everyone.



“Together We're Better Essay”
by Alyssa Fowler, grade 11, Tuscarora High School

I never knew that kids with disabilities used to have to go to different schools and ride different buses. I think it would not have been fair if I had to go to a special school away from my brother, or not ride the same bus like the rest of the neighborhood. I would have felt like I was being punished for doing something wrong. People who have a disability did not do anything wrong and should not be treated any differently than regular students.

Inclusive schools accept students of all abilities and disabilities into their classrooms. They are very important because it makes students like me with a disability feel like they are accepted with normal students and that they are a part of the community. Students who are blind, deaf, sit in wheelchairs, or have autism are all considered to be a part of the general education settings in these schools. Characteristics of these schools make all students feel important. Students with disabilities are able to receive help from their teachers and members of the staff. Students with and without disabilities are able to value each other in inclusive schools. They are able to help each other in subjects that they are having trouble with. They learn more about what kind of people they are, and they also learn how to work together and become friends.

The lives of children like me, who have a disability, would be very different if there weren't any inclusive schools. I don't think I would have the opportunity to join Chorus, Spanish club or Key club. I don't think I would be going to football games, school plays or be in the homecoming parade. I don't think I would be taking the PSAT or getting ready to take the SATs. I don't think I would be planning on going to college and having a career. All of these things are really important to me, just like any other high school student.

I feel like being in an inclusive school, I have been able to teach people about autism. I have taught teachers that they can teach all students. I have taught students to be more patient and understanding with people who are different. I think I have showed them not to judge others by their weaknesses, but by their strengths.

Being in an inclusive school has helped me overcome many of my problems caused by autism. I have had wonderful teachers and have been able to spend time with my friends and learn important information for my future. I will graduate from high school with a diploma, and I know I will be able to accomplish my goals in life.



"Together We're Better"

by David Dulburger, grade 12, Middletown High School

For the past two years I have actively been involved in volunteer work with the local Arc (of Frederick County) organization. The hours I spend with developmentally disabled individuals has strongly influenced the character in which I naturally portray myself to be today. I have worked with individuals of a variety of ages and disabilities and have found one common factor among them all. Their positive outlook on life and desire to learn creates an optimistic environment in which anyone will smile and see "the glass as half full."

Many of my first few volunteer hours with the Arc included tutoring a gentleman of age twenty one in the subjects of math, reading, and writing. Jonathan, later nicknamed by myself as "Johnny Boy", was a hard worker who never seemed to give up. Judging by his patience and dedication, Jonathan would make a good companion in a public school classroom setting. In all public schools, peer pressure and tendency to follow other peer's actions has always been prevalent. No matter the age group students are bound to follow any individual if he or she is demonstrating an aptitude for loyalty as well as perseverance towards one's school work. Students will generally follow all obedient peers, even disabled students, who produce good quality work.

During this current semester of my senior year I have witnessed, from a third person perspective, an inclusive school setting. For my fourth period class I am a Student Service Learner at my hometown elementary school for a first grade class that has an incredible and outstanding little girl named Diana. Although Diana has a severe case of Autism, she participates rather well in a first grade public school classroom setting. With nineteen other boys and girls in the class Diana has made many friends. Her influence on the class has been positive for the past few weeks and her classmates have helped her to mature in all aspects. Similarly, Diana gives motivation to her first grade peers when they become frustrated or upset.

Inclusive schools are in no way interference to any children's education, and if anything they are certainly beneficial. More importantly we must work towards allowing disabled students to learn in public schools. In and out of a learning environment disabled students help us see the good in life without even knowing it.