



What Do Parents Want for Their Children?

What parents want is really quite simple. They want equality for their children. In more specific terms this means they want:

1. The right to have their sons and daughters receive an education at public expense.
2. Continuity in schooling. Parents do not want their children tossed around like political footballs, from one program to another depending on where there is space or funding.
3. Real integration in the mainstream of school life. Parents of students with disabilities do not want to feel that their children are attending public school on an experimental basis. They want to feel they have the right to be there, that they are accepted as "regular" members of the school.
4. Parent integration. Parents of students with disabilities want to participate in school events and activities alongside parents of typical students. They do not want to be made to feel different, unusual, freakish.
5. Their sons and daughters to be treated as individuals, not as stereotypes of "the disabled".
6. Their children to be regarded as assets, not burdens. No parent feels good about his or her child being cast as a burden on the taxpayer or as an impediment to other children's speed of learning. Parents of students with disabilities want other parents, school and the public to regard special education and mainstreaming as in the societal interest and not just in the interest of their children.
7. Open dialogue. Parents of students with disabilities want to have people ask them questions about disabilities and about their children's needs. They want people to be willing to learn about disabilities and about their sons and daughters who have disabilities. They do not want people holding them at arm's length with such seemingly kind, but actually harmful phrases such as "I don't know how you do it. I could never do it."
8. A shared commitment to rooting out prejudice. Parents of students with disabilities do not generally feel that the mission of rooting out prejudice toward people with disabilities, what we have called "handicapism" is theirs alone. The task of fighting handicapism belongs to all. The goal of equality for people with disabilities should be the goal everyone shares.
9. An informed school. Parents often know more about the rights of students with disabilities than do many school personnel. While most schools have a few staff who are well informed, parents frequently feel that their children suffer from a general lack of awareness on the part of many staff about disability rights, about the experience of having a disability and about ongoing efforts, locally and nationally to overcome barriers to equality. Parents want schools to become informed.
10. Cooperation. While many parents have to resort to conformation tactics in order to secure needed services for their children, most want to work cooperatively with schools. Parents want schools to know that they have much to offer the schools.

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