

Introduction

Disabilities come in all shapes and sizes and have varying degrees of visibility. With visibility comes discrimination that stems from a lack of understanding, knowledge, or experience.

Discrimination against those with disabilities is only rising. Based on data analyzed by the Bureau of Internet Accessibility stated that “the U.S. Department of Education’s Office for Civil Rights (OCR) received 6,390 complaints related to disability discrimination over the 2022 fiscal year — the highest number of complaints in five years.” A national survey conducted by BMC Public illustrated that those with intellectual disability feel discriminated against more than those with physical disabilities.

While there is a wide array of intellectual disability, the one I believe needs the most attention is Down Syndrome. Down Syndrome holds a special place in my heart due to family connections firsthand, seeing the struggles and development of my cousin and the impact it has had on my learning and education of Down syndrome.

According to the Global Down Syndrome Foundation, the reason why people discriminate against those who have Down syndrome is due to outdated and or inaccurate information about the condition. As stated above, discrimination has been increasing in schools, which eventually leads to discrimination in other aspects of life, such as employment and the community. The way to reduce discrimination is to decrease the gaps in knowledge about the condition, starting with the inclusiveness of education and awareness about the condition.

Audience

While there are laws in place, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), Section 504, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) that don’t guarantee that education programs are appropriately implemented for the most effective learning of students, as I focused

on the topic of discrimination against those with Down Syndrome, especially students in schools, the audience of this topic would be district student specialists and administrators such as the superintendent and board of education. Having this specific audience be informed about this topic would create more awareness of the condition and inclusive practices around the school practices of those with disabilities. Increased awareness would lead district executives to understand the importance of providing and adopting more inclusive education practices that would cognitively and socially benefit those with and without down syndrome.

Message

The entire school is responsible for decreasing the stigma

Taking a holistic approach to reducing stigma around disabilities is multiple-facilitated and requires a scaffold approach, especially within the education system. Unicef stated in summary about Reducing stigma and discrimination against children with disabilities, “Effective interventions create a shared vision and shared responsibility for inclusion among the entire school, as well as an institutional scaffolding to support changes in attitudes and behaviors.” It illustrates that effective interventions can have an impact on discrimination. It is important to acknowledge how inclusive with a holistic approach can help students.

Mainstream classrooms are the most effective education for students with Down syndrome

Students with Down syndrome being in mainstream classrooms not only facilitate learning strategies for other students who need the learning support as well. The essential education group shows many benefits for students with Down syndrome of being in the classroom with peers without the condition. They state one benefit is the development of academics, “A study comparing those in special/mainstream schools showed peers in mainstream schools showed gains of more than two years in spoken language and 3 in reading and writing ability.” In addition, it creates awareness of the condition, “Being in mainstream schools will

also allow them to become friends with non-disabled students. This will have amazing benefits for everyone, as students will become aware of Down syndrome and help them form relationships.” Peer interaction yields not only social effects but also academic effects that help every student. Acknowledging this is important to help promote these students' interaction.

Best Practices For Teachers

There are many approaches to inclusive education and how to teach students with Down syndrome specifically. Sue Watson from ThoughtCo listed various categories for teachers to consider when helping students develop, including minimizing distractions, building self-esteem, and inclusion. This brushes the surface of effective practices to show district decision-makers what goes in the classroom to help students with Down syndrome.

All staff need to learn how to support Down syndrome students

Being able to help all students no matter is essential to promote effective learning. Still, when comes to disabilities and conditions like Down syndrome, all staff have the training that can help promote an inclusive culture. According to the National Down Syndrome International Guidelines for Inclusive Education, training for school staff is key, “School staff will need to understand the specific learning profile of youth with Down syndrome and inclusive strategies and interventions reflective of that profile. Training should cover specific needs and strengths associated with Down syndrome across settings and age groups.” While most licenses require special education about student development, not all staff in the school may be needed to do that but having everyone on the same page can increase understanding and reduce stigma.

References

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