



Section 504 and Learning Disabilities

What is Section 504?

Section 504, also known as Rule 504, is named for its position in the Rehabilitation Act. Rule 504 has been in place under the Rehabilitation Act for about three decades. However, because of the fact that it is not covered by any federal funding (as is IDEA), Section 504 is rarely enforced at schools. If you have a school that is reluctant to provide services for teens with learning disabilities, you might have to take legal action in order to help your teenager get the help he or she needs. The idea behind Rule 504 is to break down barriers, "leveling the playing field," in order to help students with physical or mental impairments.

Inclusion: Imperative for our Children's Future

(Sandra Siguenza)

Why is inclusion so important for children with disabilities, it is because the environment offers something that cannot be done at home or in the community alone. Within a general classroom we have everything we need to foster high expectations, peer modeling and social interaction, all of which gave our son a true chance to develop his strengths, self-esteem and gain confidence to work towards his dream—

which could have never been reached within a self-contained classroom. All the support from the team that was in place paired with high expectations from teachers on the special education and general education side was key in his success.

All of the years in Inclusion gave our son the ground to achieve his highest academic level. For any of this to have been possible there were many elements that had to be in place; which were for a strong team consisting of a Para professional, related service providers, an inclusion teacher, a general education teacher, and a pro-Inclusion principals. Our son had the benefit of the services coming to him within the classroom; continuing in the vein of an inclusive education; the mountain comes to the child not the other way around. Another element is an open-line of communication between team members and parents in order to adjust the curriculum to meet the child at his level, and work our way up from that starting point. The last piece for the program to be successful is for all team members to be flexible and understanding. We all know that our child's disability is individual, such that rigid and general plans are generally ineffective. The flexibility and openness of the inclusion team leads to more effective and positive outcomes. Such that our son is currently attending a community college, with other peers soon to begin their college experiences as well. Inclusion opened doors for our son, and for many other children to have a broader and complete inclusive experience in life at school as well as within the community. Being included in any club or sports team within the school; going to the movies, going bowling, to

museums, taking art classes at MOMA with peers becomes natural for our children-a transition into a social and community life is not then a transition but a NATURAL step!

I truly believe that if all the components of inclusion are in place we could have more positive outcomes, as we have had with our son. I can't help but think of what the outcome would have been if our fears would have stopped us from taking the chance that an educator suggested so many years ago for our son.

What I would like to see happen is to have Inclusion in every school in NYC, and to see more of our children included so that there may be even more stories of success and achievement to tell. Thank-you so much for reading our story, and truly supporting the continuation of the Inclusion program.

**When is the right time to tell your child
he/she has a disability?**

(Written by: Diana Mendez)

Hi my name is Diana Mendez and I was just at my parent group support meeting for students with disabilities.

This support group has been a blessing to my son and all his new friends, you see these students never had friends until now and they just turned 15 years of age.

Our meetings are quarterly and just last Wednesday we saw a video tape on Rick Lavoie. Richard is an instructor who helps parents, advocates, teachers and principals reach the child with learning disabilities. I recommend every parent go on line and you-

tube this instructor, he has valuable information for parents, Tudors and teachers and has many work-shops to be viewed on you-tube as well.

After watching the video one parent began sharing her experience with us, she mentioned the word "when I told my son he has a disability" at that moment I realized that there were 2 parents in the group who had younger children, so I decided to ask them both when they planned on telling their children they have a disability?

From my personal experience telling a child he or she has a disability is one of the hardest tasks any parent can endure, but must be done whether we like it or not to help the child move on and accept his or her disability. I asked my son who is Autistic. His response was "wait for the child to get diagnosed first". He also said "video the child so he can see that he is different around his peers".

One parent went on to say "my child had many meltdowns in school his frustration was due to the fact that the school work was very hard for him, he'd say "mom I just can't do it, this went on for many years until the parent said" it took many more meltdowns but that was the turning point for her to tell the child "Yes son you can't do it because you are like me we both have a learning disability". She went on to tell her child all about her personal downfalls and her difficulties with school. Within time the child learned to work with and accept his disability.

Here are some personal tips I'd like to share with you that has helped me with my son.

When my son was around 11 years of age, I asked him if he felt different than the kids in his class his answer was "yes mom". I explained to him that he had a disability called Autism. I was clear to tell him that there were no cures only interventions, I also taught him to accept his disability and work with it.

I proceeded to turn the computer on to show him how his brain was wired differently than mine, and most importantly I explained that many bright people with Autism are gifted and that we would find "the special gift he had". I also typed and googled "famous people with Autism". First person that came up was Albert Einstein.

Currently if you type in Albert Einstein there is a young boy around 11 who is Autistic and is now challenging Einstein's theory. All of this positive feedback helped my son. I believe there is a special time to tell your child and I also say the sooner the better.

I believe a good age is 11 through 15 years of age. My son was around 11 years old. After the talk he said, "Mom it all makes sense to me now thanks for explaining this to me I feel better". As a parent I will tell you that when you tell your child they will experience anger, sadness, confusion and maybe even depression. They will tell you "why me, take this Autism out of my head, when will it go away?" Yes it is very hard for a parent to watch and hear their children say all of this, however it is also very important that you seek a school guidance counselor or psychologist at this time, the child should get

support from family members and professionals who are accustomed to dealing with this sensitive subject.

There is nothing worse than feeling like there's something wrong with you but you're afraid to share those feelings with anyone. What the child is just waiting for is for the parent to confirm their worst fears. When they are finally told of their disability, many may feel like a sense of "Enlightment". They knew along something was not quite right but they were waiting for you to confirm what they already knew. Study your child; does he seem mature enough to understand his disability? This was not an easy task for me as I mentioned earlier, but eventually the child does have the right to know. It's important for the child to know because that way the family can help the child to accept the disability and learn to embrace it, within time that child will experience peace and serenity because it is now in the open, or as my son always tells me "I may be different but that 's what makes me so special".

Quote

(Marc Anthony Mendez's)

People Who Have Disabilities Like Autism, Intellectual Disabilities ADHD And Many Other Disabilities Are Put Into This World To Remind Regular People That Everyone In This World Is Not Perfect.

Understanding AUTISM The above art is Erik's universal interpretation of the genesis (DNA) of AUTISM



DISCOVERING THE JOY OF WRITING

By: Terry Passione

Shyness is one of those personality traits that make my daughter who she is. Her quiet nature makes it a challenge to make friends. As a very young child and, to some degree, even now, she struggles with some language issues. Being in inclusion increased her opportunities to improve her communication skills by leaps and bounds. If she wanted to make friends and keep those friendships, she had to step up her efforts to communicate. She also needed this to succeed academically. Her educational journey took her through inclusion and then decertification. Becoming part of the

general ed population, meant even more work in this important area of communication. It was at this time that she realized communicating through one's written word was just as fulfilling as any verbal communication. She wrote for her drama and English classes. Then shortly thereafter came her "bingo" moment. This was when she became a writer for her school newspaper, eventually getting a column dedicated to her. It was called "Lea's Corner", with her specialty being reviews of Broadway shows.

She has become absolutely passionate about writing for the school paper. She spends a lot of time re-working her articles to make sure they are written exactly the way she wants. I don't read them unless she asks me to for fear of changing the "flavor" and unique quality of her style. This passion has translated into her desire to major in journalism. Yes, college is the dream that is right around the corner. She will be graduating in June and will be joining the ranks of thousands of young adults who are preparing for their careers. I hope you will indulge me, as her proud mother, by allowing me to share one of the articles she wrote for the school paper.

The Best Broadway Shows of this Decade

By: Lea Passione

Wicked (2003 – Present)

What more can describe this show other than... well...“Popular”. True the show about the back story of *The Wizard of Oz*'s witches may have gotten mixed reviews but look audiences LOVE this show. Everyone knows *The Wizard of Oz* and maybe a few who read the Gregory Maguire novel *Wicked: The Life and Times of the Wicked Witch of the West* (I got to admit (having skipped to the middle of the book) the book and the musical are very different from each other). Now in its 7th year on Broadway (with productions all across North America and around the world) with its theme of friendship, *Wicked* remains an audience favorite as of today (it is mine too having seen it four times and love it and I will see it again and again. Even if their ticket lottery is tough) and I won't be surprised if it lasts as long as *The Phantom of the Opera*.

Next to Normal (2009 – 2011)

The Tony nominated musical that took home this year Pulitzer Prize brought up a very unique topic. The show about a mom dealing with bipolar disorder and how it affects her family in their lives brought a balance of drama and rock music. It is almost like previous Pulitzer Prize winner *RENT* (directed Michael Greif who also directed *Next to Normal*) with music that has moving lyrics. It will leave audiences in tears (hint: You

needed tissues if you are seeing this show). I went to see this show twice and it is a good show with the balance of drama and rock music and I felt like I needed to cry. This show is an emotional roller coaster. The show closed in January of 2011 with married Broadway couple Jason Danieley and Marin Mazzie as the husband and wife. The tour just began touring U.S. with its original Tony Award winning star Alice Ripley.

Beacon of Hope (By: Nancy Leynes)

Inclusion Program is the beacon of hope for my son, Cris. I remember when he was just starting to attend kindergarten at a private school. He was five years old. My heart sank when he was pulled back to Nursery. They said that he needed to socialize first but he was a well behaved boy.

I was told that he would be moved back to kindergarten after half of the school year. But the year ended and he was still in Nursery. Then he was placed in Pre-K the year after. Now my son is seven years old. I thought that there should be something done about it. But I didn't know what to do.

The school told me about special education. They were not equipped to handle such situation. But they said that there's no way that my son can get into the Inclusion Program because it's hard to get a seat. So I left with a heavy heart...bewildered.

Then I came across an acquaintance who told me to call somebody who could

help. Her name is Terry and I am ever so grateful for her. I knew that I was in the right direction. She talked to me about wonderful things regarding the Inclusion Program. With his situation I knew that my son would benefit more from it than the self contained class because positive behavior can be patterned in a regular class.

I am so thankful with all my heart that he was able to get in the Inclusion Program in Kindergarten. He had wonderful teachers. To top it all he was awarded "Student of the Month" two times in elementary and one award during graduation. He also had his art displayed at Guggenheim Museum together with other public schools. In Middle School he received a Science Fair Award and also a Language Award during Graduation.

Now Cris is 16 years old, a freshman in High School. He continues to learn in an inclusive setting and getting the supports that he needs. Like a plant that is cared for he continues to grow in his own unique way. Each day we hope and we are filled with gratitude.

Inclusion, the New Utopia
(By Rintaro Mori P.177Q)

**Inclusion is the world
Birth of peace and prosperity**

**A world of opportunity
A world of love**

**Where there is no hate
Inclusion is the utopia**

**Inclusion, a new heaven
A world where the light shines**

**Inclusion is heaven on earth
Inclusion is paradise**

**Without Inclusion is a world of
great depression
where darkness roams the streets**

**But Inclusion is happiness
where many people smiles**

**Inclusion is heaven
Inclusion is utopia**



Since inception, PIE has maintained a strong working and collaborative relationship with the DOE throughout the years. We have collaborated on such projects and issues as:

Current Projects:

The Inclusion Contest and Celebration (2010 and 2011)

The parents' toolkit website Working with OFEA on a powerpoint presentation for

parents of all students on demystify special education.

Special education videos with Linda Wernikoff

PIE's mission

to ensure inclusion is a viable option to all students with disabilities in NYC. Included with this mission is ensuring that inclusion is appropriately supported at all levels and by all personnel level to the administrative and policy levels) within the Department of Education..

Inclusion Newsletter Compiled by Jose & Sandra Siguenza for the Inclusion Community.

Email: sisnufil6@aol.com

We appreciate the generous contributions from the Inclusion community parents & Students:
 Diana Mendez, Yoko, Nancy Leynes, Teresa Passione, Erik Siguenza, Mark Mendez, Lea Passione & Neville Waldron (PC-993) many others

Past Projects:

The addition of a specific question to the parents' survey to assess the inclusiveness of community schools

Advocating for the creation of a choice process for students in D75 entering high school

The creation of a Frequently---Asked---Question Guide for students with disabilities transitioning to high school

Initially advocating for improving the Turning Five process and better informing parents of students with disabilities about the process

PIE has welcomed the opportunity to work with Laura Rodriguez and others who has listened and implemented many of our ideas. We look forward to continuing our relationship with the DOE as a collaborative partner and voice for parents of students with disabilities, especially with regard to improving inclusive opportunities. We are also a voice of parents who can provide valuable input to the DOE in this regard

NAME NUMBER	PARERENT C	TELE
P811	DINESE JORDAN	718-224-8060 347-563-5160
P255	JUDY BRODERICK	718-380-1247 347-563-4490
P224	SUSAN GELLMAN	718-831-4024 347-563-4474
P177	VERONICA	718-357-4650 347-563-5169
P4	VANESSA MILES	718-264-0916 347-563-4487
P993	NEVILLE WALDRON	718-224-0490 347-563-4390
P233	NELLIE GUTIERREZ	718-286-4715 347-563-4153

Although April is Autism month... in our heart Autism is always present as long as our love ones are alive.