

LETTERS

Full inclusion

To the Editor:

Our family has had the exact opposite experience of the families writing against mainstreaming/inclusion. Our child is an 11-year-old boy with autism. He has lots of language, adjectives and awareness, and he loves being with children. He attended a small, integrated early childhood program at the local public school and was transferred to a private school that did not meet his needs. All the children at that school had special needs and after only a few weeks his behaviors deteriorated. Why? Because of a strong lack of knowledge of autism amongst the staff, and the unwillingness to deal with inappropriate behaviors effectively.

In less than a semester, we decided to bring our son back to our town where he attended a regular all-day kindergarten program with a special education teacher. That year was so successful, that he started first grade in our brand new elementary school and has been there ever since. He enters 5th grade next year. His language and social skills have improved every year, he comes home and talks about the children by name, he participates in a regular gym class, eats with his class in the cafeteria, goes to music and the library and spends at least four hours of his day in the regular classroom.

I totally disagree that private schools for people with autism can possibly benefit children like our son, who otherwise would not have the peers to teach him social skills, how to play and how to learn appropriate behavior.

Barbara A. Veal
Sunderland, Massachusetts

To the Editor:

My daughter recently left a private school for autistic children, in which she had made excellent progress in self-help skills, academic skills, and behavior. We felt she had made enough progress to try a mainstreamed program, so she was enrolled in a special ed class at a regular campus, with a very good teacher and good staffing ratio.

We were happy with this setting until this year, when I learned that her class size had been increased and one of the aides had been let go. This means that one teacher and one aide will be working with a dozen children. Several of the students are wheelchair-bound and will need extensive physical assistance. Obviously there is no way that the needs of these students can be met by two people, no matter how skilled they are.

Our experience is not unique. More and more parents and teachers who believed school districts actually had a sincere interest in the benefits of mainstreaming are finding that we've been conned by bureaucrats far more interested in reducing costs than in providing a quality education for autistic students. Parents considering mainstreaming should be aware that the program their child is offered this year may bear little resemblance to the program he will wind up in a year later.

Anonymous

Facilitated Communication

To the Editor:

I read your articles about facilitated communication and the uncovering of alleged sexual abuse with great interest. Sometimes we get so excited about a new idea that we forget our common sense (and the proverbial "grain of salt"). Here is an example of this in our own lives which may provide a chuckle:

We had been trying a modified form of F/C with our then-11-year-old daughter Carolyn. The speech therapist at school was, too. She would type and ask a question, and Carolyn would type or orally spell out an answer. One day I received a rather frantic note home. Carolyn had looked upset and—through this technique—communicated "feel bad." The teacher asked/typed "Why do you feel bad?" Carolyn spelled "v-a-g-i-n-a." Well—panic reigned. There was only one new person in her life—this person seemed above reproach. Who? What? How? Questions flew.

A day later, as I spoke to my husband on the phone long distance, it hit me. He was in Richmond on a business trip. Richmond is in Virginia, and he had given Carolyn a T-shirt with "Virginia" printed on it after a trip a year or two ago. Carolyn missed her dad and she spelled "Virginia" wrong.

Moral of the story—sometimes there's a misspelling.

We need to use care when we interpret what a person writes—especially when that person thinks in a very different way from "the rest of us" and has not been able to communicate openly.

Patricia Mooney
Branford, CT

DMG/B6

To the Editor:

Let me start by telling you that I am skeptical by nature. I am a practicing attorney in Los Angeles and have also acted as a Judge Pro Tem for the Los Angeles Municipal Court. I have heard every possible story, excuse and fabrication imaginable. I do not believe in single solution answers or magic bullets to complex problems.

I am also the father of a 3-1/2 year old autistic son. During my son's short life, I have never had a single meaningful one-word conversation with him other than his definitive "no." I could never understand what, if anything, was going on inside his beautiful head. It has been the most discouraging and frustrating event of my life.

To get to the point, my wife and I started Matthew on a regimen of DMG last Thursday. As instructed by the literature, we told no one of our doing this. We would then send him off to pre-school as always.

Yesterday, I was summoned away from an important matter when a telephone call was received from Matthew's preschool director. She said it was very urgent and had to speak to me immediately. When I finally spoke to her, she seemed out of breath and I was bracing myself for some type of terrible revelation that Matthew was either injured, missing, or something equally nightmarish.

Matthew was observed walking by himself on the play yard. The director approached him and asked (knowing full well he would not answer) "Where are you going, Matthew?" I heard her stop for a deep breath, and then she said, "...your son stopped, looked me straight in the eye and said, 'I'm getting a towel for swimming.'"

Of course, I could think of nothing else the rest of the day. So when I got home I went directly to my son to see if he could answer a simple question. I asked, "Did you eat dinner?" He gave me that blank look I've come to know so well. I asked again, "What did you have to eat?" This time, he looked at me and said, "Chicken." I asked, "Anything else?" He said, "And grapes."

[Today] my wife called from her car to say that she and Matthew were on their way to my mother's when they saw my office building from the freeway (a distance of approximately one half a mile). All of a sudden and out of nowhere, Matthew came to life and started saying, "Look, Daddy's office, I want to go see Daddy." My wife said that she was near tears and had to pull onto the shoulder of the highway to regain her control.

Once more, I am not a believer in a magic bullet or single solution answer to my son's dilemma. I'm still not sure what to make of this sudden change. My wife and I are doing nothing except adding the daily dosage of DMG to Matthew's intake.

Los Angeles attorney

To the Editor:

I am writing to tell you about the experiences we have had with DMG and our son. He has been on DMG for one month now.

Jack's eye contact has improved remarkably as has his speech. He also has stopped completely the teeth grinding and toe walking. His day care teacher noted his "babbling" and also said for the first time when she said "Good morning Jack," he turned, looked her in the eyes, and smiled. At therapy for the first time, he pushed a car across the floor and made the "brmmmm" sound . . . he also said "bye bye" to Big Bird when I said it was time to leave. This happened all at one session . . .

Thanks for your help because we face "brick walls" here with the exception of our pediatrician who has been very open-minded...

Sandy Valentine
E. Peoria, Illinois

To the Editor:

I have some good news! The vitamin B6 and magnesium powder from Oregon now tastes good! My son Ricky has been on the Super Nu-Thera powder for eight months, and it really helps him, but it was a struggle to get it down him. They are now using a better method of flavoring, so now I just mix it with juice and he drinks it right down. If you tried Super Nu-Thera before and had to give it up because of the poor taste, you can call the company and they will send you a free sample so you can try the new taste. Their number is 1-800-245-8282.

Nancy Harrington
New Jersey