

## Acceptance of Special Ed Students

Written by Ginny Grimsley  
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### Special Ed Students, Diversity & the Benefits of Inclusion

*Friendship, Learning are a Two-Way Street, Says Doctor*

For orthopedic surgeon Sean Adelman – a father of three, including Dev, a high-school age daughter with Down syndrome – life lessons are not the exclusive province of the young.

“As a dad, I have often been reminded of the poet William Wordsworth and his line, ‘The child is father of the man,’ ” says Adelman, author of *Sam’s Top Secret Journal* ( [www.raiseexpectations.com](http://www.raiseexpectations.com) ), the first in a the first in a Nancy Drew-style children’s book series featuring a protagonist with Down syndrome.

“I think most parents have this experience that, while it’s our job to teach our children how to grow up and function in a society, we are constantly learning ourselves. They force us to rethink the basics as we help mold them into mature human beings.”

Of course, much of a child’s development is out of the hands of parents, he says. School and other social functions provide many first worldly experiences that are so important to developing students. And that makes *diversity* so important.

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Various studies have shown that not only do those with learning challenges benefit from “inclusive education” – a movement that integrates special-ed students with non-special-ed students – but also the rest of the student body.

Adelman explores how inclusion benefits the entire student body:

• **Empathic development:** To a significant extent, society is a social contract among citizens. That means, at the very least, good behavior is required of individuals. At best, however, citizens recognize that we are social creatures who need each other, and the best way to a better society is to have empathy for our fellow human beings. During the 1990s, inclusion of special-ed students jumped from 48 percent to 70 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Education. Despite concerns at the time about teachers’ ability to attend to the needs of all their students in such classes, a Zigmond and Baker study showed teachers did not lose their effectiveness. The famous study also showed that the students treated each other better in general. Children learn that everyone needs help from time to time, and it’s as gratifying to provide it as to receive it.

• **Diversity and the real world:** Children who attend inclusive schools, where all children are mainstreamed, are better able to navigate the complexities of our diverse adult society. Students with and without special needs benefit from exposure to classmates who face different life circumstances. Studies from the National Center for Special Education Research, among others from throughout the world, support claims of mutual benefit from special-ed and non-special-ed students with integration. For a well-rounded character and personality, young people need to be exposed to the many faces of humanity in terms of race, economic background and those with special needs. In addition to this personal edification, a professional career demands social grace and comfort in a diverse work environment.

• **The meaning of friendship:** Children need to develop social skills and to know how to create and sustain meaningful friendships for a healthy adult life. We may lose wealth, youth, health, and spouses. Friends, however, are often the most reliable emotional resource in life. Friends must learn to accept one another’s limitations and flaws, and to complement one another’s weaknesses by contributing their strengths. Friends also quickly learn that superficial differences are far less important than shared values, trust and humor.

### About Sean Adelman

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Sean Adelman is a practicing orthopedic surgeon and advocate for exceptional kids in Seattle. He and his wife, Susan, have three children. Adelman wrote the "Sam's Top Secret Journal" series to show the similarities the protagonist shares with other children, and to explore how differently-abled individuals benefit society.