



WHAT DOES
NORMAL MEAN?



Viewing Guide

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Introduction

American classrooms have gone through significant changes over the past 50 years. The first major change in the system of education occurred in 1954 with racial integration based on the knowledge that separate schools were not equal. Then, in 1975, legislation required that all students, regardless of ability, have the right to be included in public education. Since then, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act has ensured access to a free appropriate public education for all eligible students with disabilities.

It has been a difficult journey to change educational practices and individual perspectives. This 57-minute DVD provides eight poignant stories of inclusive education across the State of New Mexico. Even though the events occurred in New Mexico, there are countless other stories that could be told throughout the United States. The program is hosted by a young man, Phillip Contreras who also shares his story involving his life and educational challenges with cerebral palsy.

Student Stories



Rudy Via

Rudy is one of four children in his family. He has cerebral palsy and uses a wheel chair. The benefit of computer services and computerized communication boards has allowed him to access general education and be included in high school activities. He plays an active role in his IEP development and focuses goals on transition and socialization skills.



Brandon Via

Rudy's younger brother, Brandon, has Down Syndrome and has found his place in 6th grade in the sports program of his elementary school. Staff report that committed leadership has allowed Brandon to find his special talents. He is included on the sports team and is a valued participant by the other players.



Kade Gross

At the age of 13, Kade has learned much about life and developed the skills of a rancher and cowboy at the knee of his grandfather. He is one of over 3 million students who have trouble reading and writing. He was identified very early in school as having dyslexia. The approach that teachers have found to work with Kade includes building on his strengths and not letting him feel restricted in school activities because of his challenges in reading.



Tara Matzick

The first student who is blind to attend Sandia High in Albuquerque states that she has to educate people every day about how to work with and teach her. She meets the academic and social challenges with a positive outlook.

She has accomplished many firsts in her experiences in the high school, including being the first student who is blind to participate on the track team in shot put competition. Teachers who have worked with Tara are finding innovative and creative ways to teach her, and those strategies help them be better teachers for all students.



Rebecca Salazar

Rebecca is a young woman who requires support to breathe through a ventilator and needs assistance for all physical activity. Her cognitive abilities are normal, and she demonstrates her knowledge of chemistry by helping another student in this film. Technology has allowed

Rebecca to use an eye gaze system to work a keyboard so that she keeps up with academic requirements and maintains a 4.0 average.



Seda McLuckie

The early months of Seda's life were full of medical challenges, and physicians realize it is doubtful she will be able to learn typical skills. She has been included in the classroom with her peers, and the great benefit is that those children are learning compassion, tolerance, and the great reach of the

human condition.



Phillip Contreras

The host of the program shares his perspectives on education, transitions, and future goals with a graduate class at the University of New Mexico. Phillip has been part of the "class of inclusion" and sees that he can achieve a future like other young adults. Even with the opportunities of public education, less than 40 percent of students

leaving special education attend post-secondary programs, and the majority of special education students are not employed or looking for work leaving high school. Transition planning and support are critical in providing a future for Phillip and other students with disabilities.

Discussion Guide

The first five questions may be used following each of the vignettes as individual or group reflection. Or, a discussion leader may want to use these questions to compare the stories and identify issues and practices that are evident in the viewer's current setting.

1. What are the characteristics of good schools that promote inclusion of the student with disabilities?
 2. What challenges or barriers might each school face in the examples provided by these stories? What might the schools have had to implement in each case to remove those barriers?
 3. What personal characteristics did each of the students in the film demonstrate that enabled them to participate in an inclusive educational program?
 4. What did teachers identify as the primary consideration in developing IEPs for each of the students?
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5. What challenges did families face to support and encourage their students in each of the stories presented? How are those challenges similar or different from the family issues of students in your setting?
 6. Identify current attitudes, policies, or procedures that make inclusion effective in your current educational setting.
 7. Identify any barriers to inclusion in your educational setting at the classroom, building, or district levels. What strategies can be implemented to support inclusion of students with disabilities at each level?

Testimonials

If these schools, communities, and families have been able to offer a quality education and a future for the eight students in this film, every other school can do it too.

The gifts and talents of all students must be identified. Who they are and who they will become must be the central part of planning at all levels in the community education system.

This film is an important statement about the benefits of inclusion. It doesn't tell you how to do it, it tells you that you must. Remember "Normal" means the same as, not different, from others.

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Videography and Editing

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