

Education: A good IDEA?

Kimberly Smith, a 14-year-old with Down syndrome, had just graduated from 8th grade, and was excited about the new adventures awaiting her at Brookline High School in Massachusetts. During grade school, Kim was in all of the regular classes and sat right next to students without disabilities. She made many friends and enjoyed being treated “just like everyone else.” Before Kim was to begin high school, however, her parents met with the school administrators to discuss Kim’s educational opportunities.

Her parents wanted Kim to be included in regular classes. “Kim has always done so well in regular education,” said her mother. “Although she might not always know as much as the other students, she really benefits from the social aspects of being around people without disabilities.”

The principal, Mr. Stanislaw, and the special education resource specialist, Mrs. Janey, cautioned the parents against this. “Inclusion might have served Kim well in grade school,” says Mrs. Janey, “but high school is a different story. We fear that Kim will quickly fall behind in the regular classes. The material is tougher.” Mr. Stanislaw also pointed out that “students can be bullies in high school, and we would not want to see Kim get hurt.” Both Mr. Stanislaw and Mrs. Janey recommended that Kim be placed in special education classes, where she would be educated with 8 other students with varying cognitive and developmental disabilities.

- 1. What are the advantages of Kim being included in regular classes?**
- 2. What are the advantages of Kim being included in special classes?**
- 3. What happens when parents and school administrators disagree? Who gets the final word?**
- 4. What do you think Kim’s parents should do?**