

# Full Inclusion for Nicholas

*Nancy Simmonds*

Ellington Public Schools provide educational, social, and emotional supports for students with disabilities at every grade level. Nicholas (Nick) Glomb, a student with Down syndrome, has flourished in Ellington. Sixteen year old Nick has been included in regular education classrooms throughout his elementary and middle school years. Now at Ellington High School, Nick receives all of his instruction in regular education classrooms, with curriculum modified by his regular education teachers. He functions very independently and the co-teaching model in place promotes inclusive beliefs and practices by the staff.

## **Supports and Services for Nick**

According to Bruce Brettschneider, Director of Special Services for Ellington Schools, the most important support system for Nick has been his parents, Walter and Laura Glomb. Together with his case manager, Andra Lucus, who coordinates the regular education and special education components of the program, the Glombs have been involved in planning and implementing Nick's Individualized Education Plan (IEP) and have maintained good communication with everyone involved with Nick. Lucus has maintained linkages between parents, regular and special education teachers, and community agencies. She has also made sure that everyone working on behalf of Nick does so in a collaborative way. Other important supports include Eileen Luddy, an inclusion specialist, who has helped teachers and parents keep a realistic and positive perspective as they implement the IEP; Virginia Karensky of Project Genesis, who has helped develop career goals for Nick; and instructional aides, who have worked with Nick through the years to help ensure the curriculum is implemented in the regular education classroom. Nick's parents agree that all of these educators and specialists have been a wonderful source of support for him. They stress that the cumulative effect of inclusion since preschool has been a major factor in Nick's success.

## **Transitioning to High School- Collaborative Planning**

Nick completed tenth grade in June, 2004. In middle school, he had a one-on-one instructional aide, but slowly this support was decreased at Ellington High School. In fact, it was Nick himself who decided he no longer needed a fulltime aide, and this proved beneficial for both Nick and his teachers. As he was now working on his own, regular education teachers dealt with Nick directly rather than working through his aide. This helped Nick develop more personal responsibility. He had become dependent on his one-on-one paraprofessional for help with his work and his navigation around the school. Now, Nick has become more self-reliant and is learning how to work things out with his teachers on his own.

Active advocates for their son, Walter and Laura Glomb were an integral part of shaping Nick's IEP goals and objectives, and they helped select Nick's courses. Bruce Brettschneider has worked with the family since Nick was in preschool and reports that the parents have developed trusting relationships with the professionals involved in his education. Now that Nick is functioning more independently in high school, his parents meet every six to eight weeks with the teachers to fine-tune the program and collaboratively problem solve. In the "Futures" meetings - in which the team plans for Nick when he is an adult - the

Glombs' input has been critical as they consider key questions: What are your dreams for Nick? What are his dreams for himself? These facilitated meetings can last several hours and may involve other family members, friends from the community, and workers from outside agencies.

The Glombs feel that one of the most helpful supports in the transition process was Eileen Luddy. Nick's dad says, "She's worked with us since eighth grade, and was very helpful in the transition to Ellington High School. The special education teacher was really important, too, in making the bridge between special education and regular education."

### **Promoting an Inclusive Philosophy with Teachers and Staff**

Bruce Brettschneider says that in his fifteen years in Ellington, he has always known all of the teachers to be very open to inclusion of students with disabilities. At the high school, regular education teachers embrace all students and are eager to provide a quality learning experience for students with disabilities. Regular education teachers do need suggestions and guidance about what approaches and strategies will work with students receiving special education services. Ellington provides that guidance.

Before Nick went to the high school, his teachers met with the inclusion consultant to talk about what could be expected. As Bruce Brettschneider explains it, "The case manager is also an important conduit as she meets with regular education teachers about modified curriculum and communication around the IEP. For example, if the class is discussing four issues involved in a historic battle and Nick can only remember and understand two of the issues, that is realistic and acceptable."

### **Supporting Nick's Participation in Extracurricular Activities**

As Nick transitioned into Ellington High School, his case manager talked with the baseball and football coaches to pave the way for his participation. As Nick has been fully included in school and community recreation programs, such as baseball, ice hockey, soccer, and scouting, since he was four years old, he was already known to the coaches and his peers in sporting activities. For the most part, they understood Nick and knew what they could expect in terms of his ability to participate. As Assistant Manager on the varsity sports teams, Nick is responsible for keeping the morale up and for keeping the players motivated in spite of setbacks in the game. He rides the bus with the teams, goes to all the games, joins them for pizza afterward, and is a full and valued member of the team.

Everyone agrees that Nick's peers are an important part of the success formula. When he moved into high school sports, Nick already knew his teammates, either through community sports or through his two older brothers, both of whom play varsity hockey. As Mr. Glomb says, "The kids and the coaches have all known Nick since he was a toddler; they know his personality, his limitations, how to communicate with him. He is treated with respect and tact, and everyone knows how to work with his impediments. The biggest support really is everyone's attitude - having the commitment and genuine desire to include Nick and let him discover his role."

Challenges for Grade Eleven and Beyond There are always a few students who are not friendly to Nick, much as they are not friendly to other students. Nick's brother, who is also at the high school, is understandably protective and keeps an eye out for him. But these are important life experiences for

Nick, as he has learned some very effective social and self-advocacy skills. The philosophy of inclusion at Ellington Public Schools has encouraged and sharpened these skills, and it demonstrates that inclusion is helpful for regular education students, as well as their peers with disabilities. Through exposure to their peers with disabilities, most regular education students begin to understand and accept individual differences.

When asked what, in particular, will receive special attention this coming year, Nick's junior year at Ellington High School, Bruce Brettschneider says that the team needs to continue planning for what Nick will do after he graduates. Pre-vocational skills and real-life workplace expectations will be examined by Nick's parents, his teachers and case manager, and those who work on his behalf in outside agencies. The Glombs will also be exploring whether college is a possibility for Nick.

As Mr. Glomb says, one of the biggest challenges for Nick at this stage is that "...at the end of the day, there are still deficits. As much as the other students are willing to spend time with him in the school setting, his circle of close friends outside of school is not that large. It's a challenge for Nick to keep up with his academic classes, and the school has the challenge of setting serious and realistic academic goals for Nick. There is no standard model for doing this, so it's not an easy thing for everyone. But we want to set the standards high because we don't want Nick to come up short."

### **Summing Up...**

Bruce Brettschneider says, "Inclusion is an attitude, and Ellington has the right attitude. The experience with Nick and his family is a good example of how we can take inclusion beyond the traditional scenario." Photos thanks to Ellington Public Schools. Bruce Brettschneider, Special Services Director, can be contacted at (860) 896-2300.

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