

CAP Presentation

Emily Mondschein

I am the Executive Director of GiGi's Playhouse, which is a Down Syndrome Achievement Center that provides free educational, therapeutic, and social supports for individuals with Down syndrome as well as their communities. I have the unique opportunity of working with the largest Down syndrome population in WNY as we are the only place that really offers this type of service.

I am also the mother of two boys, one who has Down syndrome and autism.

Finally, I was an educator and worked within the public school system for 15 years prior to being an executive director, which is where my passion for this work comes from.

As I began researching best practices for the Down syndrome population, I discovered tons of research and data around the general education setting being the most effective setting for students with Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome are visual social learners, and they excel alongside their peers when given the proper supports. However, I discovered a vast discrepancy between what is actually happening in the state of New York and what experts in the field recommend. So, a work group of experts in the field formed to create the first guidance document that exists for this population which is

My ask is that NYSED disseminate the "Inclusive Education Guidelines for Students with Down syndrome" on their list serv that educators and administrators subscribe too. The real change isn't going to start happening until the people at the top start getting these resources into the hands of our school districts across the state. These people will follow the sentiments of NYSED. This is one solid concrete example of how NYSED could endorse inclusion for students with disabilities. And of course, I would be happy to do any work necessary on this, even if NYSED was interested in creating a guidance document specific to NYS. Thank you, on behalf of the disability community, for hearing my testimony today. I look forward to next steps.