

Difference...Sameness...Uniqueness
Unwrapping the Gifts of Diversity through the Lens of Inclusion

"It's hard work being a kid. First of all, there is school."
-Jon Agee, The Retired Kid

September heralds the beginning of yet another school year. For some parents it will be a first experience where for others it will not.

Parent/Guardians are filled with a touch of anxiety about the educational equivalent of the Swallows return to Capistrano. They are concerned about academics, conduct and spiritual formation. Questions might include:

Will my child learn?

Will my child have friends?

Will my child cope with the rigors of the school?

Will my child have a kind teacher?

Will my child grow in his/her faith?

These are indeed natural questions for parents to ponder. Our children are undoubtedly a gift we are entrusted with by the Good Lord and so it is natural to be somewhat anxious.

"Behold, children are a gift from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward."
-Psalm 127:3-5

Into each classroom a group of uniquely individual children will begin their new year of schooling. It is imperative that our schools view the students they serve as different and unique. The intersection of ability cannot be disassociated from the multi-faceted aspects of unique individuality. Teacher strategies and parent engagement initiatives need to be developed through the eyes of inclusive competency skills. Inclusion is built on the basis of respect for difference. Differences need to be affirmed by validating the whole person as one who is not totally defined by their characteristics or diagnosis.

Schools must examine the different abilities and shift the question of "How smart are you?" to "How are you smart?"

In the words of Haim G. Ginott "reading writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane". Incorporation of various gifts present within each student and will be identified and nurtured so that our schools validate a holistic model of instruction that affirms the differences and respects all student's individuality, and uniqueness within a socially just framework.

"Diversity is not about how we differ. Diversity is about embracing one another's uniqueness"
-OLA Joseph

I will conclude by wishing all a year filled with Blessings and by offering advice from Mother Teresa.

"Kind words can be short and easy to speak, but their echoes are truly endless".

Blessings.

Dr. Ashleigh Molloy aka " Dr. Ash."