

The Cost of Inclusion
by Pat Jones

For the past several years, I have argued on many occasions that, if inclusion of children with disabilities into regular education settings were done with careful planning and creativity, it would be no more costly than segregated and separate special education models. I have always tried to admit when I am mistaken. There has been a dramatic change in my perspective this year, and I have come to know, first hand, that inclusion is very expensive, indeed.

Since our son has been included in his neighborhood high school, we have had to buy tickets to football games, tickets to basketball games, school yearbooks, tickets to the school mixers and the battle of the bands. We have had requests from him for the "in" clothing and the "in" haircut and twice as many wallet photos of his school pictures to trade with friends. We have had to financially assist him with dinner dates, corsages and homecoming dance tickets, an event that created the need for a new sport coat, khakis, shirt, tie, boxers (!) and socks. And now, before we've even paid for that, comes the news that he will need a letterman's jacket for his football manager's letter. And we're not even through the first quarter! For those of you who know how challenging our son's behavior could be both at home and school, we are thrilled to share an additional cost associated with this inclusion. We pay big bucks for "Outstanding" marks in Citizenship on report cards. When we made the deal, believe me, we did not anticipate ever having to pay up. This quarter, he presented us with an "O" in all six of his classes.

Don't let anyone kid you about the cost on inclusion. It's significant. It may even cost more when it's creative and well planned. And it seems the longer you do it, the more it cost. Someone even contacted us to join the parents' club and the football boosters. We're easy marks though...because it's the most fun we've ever had spending money.

P.S. I had hoped to enclose a picture of our son when he entered school the morning he wore his letterman's jacket for the first time. I took the camera, but he was quickly lost in a sea of purple and white. Only I could have picked out the one who looked six inches taller than the day before!

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