

Common Barriers to Inclusive Education

Top tips for breaking down barriers to access, participation, progress and learning

Barriers are those situations, circumstances and attitudes that prevent us from reaching a true inclusive education. It is important to understand that a barrier in inclusive education will never be the capacities of children and youth, since education is their right regardless of what a person can or cannot do. For this reason, the barriers are not within the individuals or in their abilities, the barriers appear when the interaction with the environments prevents people with impairments from participating and developing fully.

Barrier	Action point
<p>Access barriers</p> <p>Some barriers are in the schools and can affect children's access to the education system. For example, schools (directors, teachers, psychologists, etc.) can ask for evaluations to disqualify admission, or they can give impossible tests to reject admission. They may also ask for children with disabilities to complete clinical requirements to be allowed to enter the school. In general, these barriers are based on the ignorance of individuals and on a fear based on false imaginaries about what people with disabilities are or are not, that is, on prejudices that discriminate. In other cases, schools request the payment of a "tutor" to accompany the student, making the possibility of access unattainable due to the cost for families.</p>	<p>It is important to remember that education is a right, and no one can take that away from any learners, including those with disabilities. Parents should advocate for schools to adopt non-rejection policies - that means that no one can be rejected from school.</p>
<p>Barriers to participation</p> <p>When we achieve access (the student is enrolled), it is necessary for the student to be taken into account and involved in all of the activities in the classroom and throughout the educational institution. It becomes necessary to facilitate and support their participation so that the student builds a sense of belonging to the group and feels part of the learning process, just like his classmates. If learners with disabilities don't feel that they belong in school, then this is a sign that there is a need for structural changes to avoid dropping out from the school system.</p>	<p>It is also important that families recognise situations of discrimination and reject them. Often, the forms of discrimination tend to show that the school is being fair and wants to "help" and they may say that the teachers are not prepared, or that the school does not have the tools to care for our children. Families must be clear that compliance with existing laws and regulations are required, and families may teach the school administration that discrimination on the basis of disability is a violation of rights and is punishable by law.</p>

Barrier	Action point
<p>Barriers to progression</p> <p>Other barriers have to do with progression, the transition from one grade to another and, of course, the promotion and graduation from all schooling. Parents being pushed to have their children repeat a grade is an argument linked to the old idea that all students need to be on the same level to be able to pass a grade, of thinking that it is possible for all students to have the same learning experience and outcome. This idea leads to children with disabilities being kept in the same grade for several years, then facing the issue of difference in age which leads to them feeling out of place when sharing a classroom with younger students. Schools often then suggest that the family take the student to segregated programmes that promote skills for occupational issues is a violation of the right to education.</p>	<p>Families must push back against schools pressuring them to have their children repeat grades – children belong with their peers of their own age, and their progression goals should be based on them as an individual.</p>
<p>Barriers to learning</p> <p>Getting students with disabilities to learn and teachers and families to raise expectations regarding their possibilities has to do with barriers that we find in traditional ways of thinking about education. Some teacher training has been given from the framework of integration, that is, allowing a student to stay in a class as long as they can keep up with the curriculum, without any adaptations. Some students are kept out of school based on a medical diagnosis, as if a diagnosis could determine the way students learn. Instead, teachers should be acting in line with Universal Design for Learning, whereby teachers must recognise the different learning styles that allow all students, with any characteristic, to learn and participate in classroom activities.</p>	<p>Parents can advocate for the idea that a curriculum is a framework for action, but it is NOT more important than the students and their prior knowledge which needs to be part of the teaching strategy.</p>

Your turn: Common Barriers to Education

Are there any barriers to education that are unique to your community? What actions can you take to start removing these barriers?

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