

Dear Parents,

Some of you already know our child, _____. For those of you who do not, our child has Down syndrome and is excited to be in class with your child!

We understand that you and your child may have questions about Down syndrome. Children with Down syndrome are now included in general education classrooms and are achieving great academic and social success. It is only through supportive environments that individuals with Down syndrome will meet with success beyond the school setting. We have the same expectations for our child that you do for yours – we hope our child will learn to the best of his or her ability, make lasting friendships, follow school rules, and be a contributing member of the classroom and community. Your child’s positive interactions and role modeling will help our child become successful in these areas.

Research on inclusion has shown that forming friendships with children who have Down syndrome or other special needs has a positive effect on typically-developing children, such as meaningful friendships, increased appreciation and acceptance of diversity, and respect for all people. Research further shows that this can translate to greater academic outcomes for typically-developing students, as they gain additional mastery over subject areas by practicing and teaching others.

We have shared information with the classroom teacher about Down syndrome and some of the challenges our child and others with Down syndrome face. We hope this will give your child insight into the similarities of all children and help answer some of the questions he or she may have. We encourage you to talk openly with your child about these similarities in order to ensure a positive classroom environment for each and every student.

We are including information for you and hope you will contact us if your family has any questions. Children with Down syndrome have unlimited potential when given opportunities and support.

We know that you and your child will enjoy your year with _____ because _____ is a loving and dynamic child who has a lot to teach us about persistence, friendship and accepting people for who they are.

Sincerely,

For more information on Down syndrome, you can visit the Down Syndrome Association of West Michigan website at www.dsawm.org or call their office at 616-956-3488.

MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME

Myth: Down syndrome is a rare genetic disorder caused by older parents and/or genetics.

Truth: Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring genetic condition, with approximately one in every 700 births resulting in a child with Down syndrome. There are approximately 350,000 people who have Down syndrome living in the United States today. Eighty percent of children born with Down syndrome are born to women younger than age thirty-five. However, research has shown a link between the incidence of Down syndrome and maternal age. In general, Down syndrome does not run in families, and a sibling or aunt has no greater chance of conceiving a child with Down syndrome.

Myth: People with Down syndrome have severe cognitive delays.

Truth: Most people with Down syndrome have cognitive delays that are mild to moderate; however, IQ is not an adequate measure of the abilities and talents of people with Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome have great potential if given opportunities. Thanks to laws governing public education and greater opportunities, more and more individuals with Down syndrome are graduating with their peers and attending college.

Myth: The life expectancy of people with Down syndrome is age thirty.

Truth: Thanks to advances in medical and clinical treatment and opportunities to thrive, as many as eighty percent of adults with Down syndrome reach age fifty-five, and many live longer.

Myth: Behavior problems and depression are just part of having Down syndrome

Truth: Often, medical or mental health problems go untreated due to the assumption that it is typical of having this genetic condition. Complete examinations by appropriate health care professionals should always be pursued.

Myth: Adults with Down syndrome are unable to work.

Truth: Businesses are seeking young adults with Down syndrome for a variety of positions. They are employed in small- and medium-sized offices, banks, corporations, nursing homes, hotels and restaurants. They work in the music and entertainment industries, clerical positions, and the computer industry. People with Down syndrome bring to their jobs enthusiasm, reliability and dedication.

Myth: People with Down syndrome are always happy.

Truth: People with Down syndrome have feelings just like everyone else in the population. They respond to positive expressions of friendship, and they are hurt and upset by inconsiderate behavior.

Myth: There are no effective treatments for Down syndrome.

Truth: Researchers are making great strides in identifying the genes on chromosome 21 that cause the characteristics of Down syndrome. Scientists now feel strongly that it will be possible to improve, correct or prevent many of the problems associated with Down syndrome in the future.

Myth: Having a sibling with Down syndrome will be a hardship for “typical” children.

Truth: Most families report that their “typical” kids are more compassionate, patient and tolerant of all people because of their experiences having a sibling with Down syndrome. The sibling relationship is generally a typical one — full of love, occasional arguments and just being together.