

NATHANIEL ORELLANA



About the time Samuel started elementary school, Dan Habib wondered, “What does a school that is a model for inclusion look like?” He heard about Haggerty, a small public elementary school near Boston with a principal, Joe Petner, who has been committed to full inclusion for decades. Nathaniel Orellana, who has autism, is a student at the school, and Marlene Orellana is his mother.

“As soon as I walked in through the door with my husband, we said ‘This is it. It feels like home,’” Marlene Orellana said. Nathaniel is fully included at Haggerty alongside his peers without disabilities.

“I see the work of inclusion as probably the last frontier of desegregation,” Petner said. He views disability the same way he views ethnic and socioeconomic differences—as part of the

natural diversity of our society. Though the school district originally asked Petner to experiment with inclusion at the kindergarten level, he insisted on creating true inclusion in every grade. He also feels that inclusion helps the school academically.

Since the school implemented full inclusion, test scores rose. “I think everyone was helped by this because our teachers became better teachers,” Petner said.

“ I think that our goal is for him to be able to shine no matter where he goes—to show his strengths, and even his weaknesses. ”

– MARLENE ORELLANA

“ I see the work of inclusion as probably the last frontier of desegregation. ” – JOE PETNER



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ▶ When Nathaniel was placed in a separate kindergarten classroom for children with disabilities, his mother said that “Nathaniel was coming home with behaviors that he didn’t have at home.” Why do you think he developed new behaviors?
- ▶ Marlene trusted the school personnel to recommend the best educational program for her son but ultimately rejected the school district’s recommendation that he be educated in a classroom exclusively for children with disabilities. How do you think differences of philosophy and practice should be resolved in situations like this?
- ▶ Haggerty School Principal Joe Petner believes an entire school community must embrace the spirit of inclusion for it to work. Do you agree?
- ▶ Test scores actually rose as Haggerty School became more inclusive. Why do you think that happened?
- ▶ Petner says, “Inclusion is an easy thing to do poorly. And when we do it poorly, we reinforce the belief that this cannot work.” What factors make inclusion work well in a school system? What are the obstacles to inclusion?