

1 **Parents Concerns Regarding Inclusive Education in Sierra Leone**

2

3 **Abstract**

4 The study centered on parents of children with disabilities concerns regarding their children in
5 the regular education schools through ascertaining whether the schools are adequately equipped
6 in terms of special learning materials, teaching methods, assistive devices and physical
7 provisions. It was initiated against the backdrop that little attention is placed on their views in
8 relation to their children's placement in inclusive schools. There is anecdotal evidence regarding
9 the inadequacy of special learning materials and physical facilities for this population. This
10 indicates an existent relating to parents' views on inclusive education. The study employed a
11 quantitative approach. The research population consisted of parents of children with
12 disabilities/special needs. Data analysis involved computation of numerical/statistical data. The
13 findings revealed that the schools lacked special learning materials. It also revealed that parents
14 were unsatisfied with the teaching methods for children. On physical provisions, findings
15 indicated that existing structures are not disabled-friendly attributed to the absence of disabled
16 students as a consideration preconstruction of the schools. The study concludes that, in view of
17 the shortfalls discovered, there is dire need for provision of special learning materials and
18 assistive devices in inclusive education settings. In addition, parents' of children with
19 disabilities inputs, positions, or viewpoint of the inclusive environment of their children/wards
20 are necessary to towards ameliorating their concerns inclusive practices in schools.

21 **Keywords:** *Assistive Device, Disabled-Friendly, Special Education Needs*

22 **1.0 Introduction**

23 Numerous international documents have addressed the rights of persons with disabilities
24 especially children to access education. The Salamanca Statement 1994 affirmed that regular
25 education schools with an inclusive approach provides the best opportunity to combat
26 discriminatory attitudes towards children with disabilities. Other instruments such as the
27 Organization of Persons with Disabilities (OPD), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with
28 Disabilities (CRPD), Persons with Disabilities Act (PWD) 2011 of Sierra Leone, the Education
29 Sector Plan (ESP) 2020–2025, and National Policy for Radical Inclusion (NPRI) 2021 and the
30 Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 4–quality education; have enabled children with
31 disabilities to attain right to quality education (GoSL, 2011, UN, 2015, MBSSE, 2021).

32 It is pertinent to point that Inclusive Education is an off shoot of Special Needs Education.
33 Several studies on Special Needs Education have revealed that placing children with disabilities

34 in special schools hurts and that there are limited benefits in placing them in a special learning
35 environment. The failure of special education has largely ignited the debate on inclusive
36 education. The boundaries that once separated special education from general education are
37 becoming blurred, thereby necessitating the inclusion of children with disabilities in the general
38 education classroom. Against this backdrop, there has been a shift towards Inclusive Education;
39 denoting the integration of children with disabilities or special needs into the general education
40 classrooms, rather than segregate and place them in special institutions (Wells, 2021). In practical
41 terms, in an inclusive educational environment, children with disabilities receive
42 their education alongside their non-disabled counterparts in the same setting (Becker et al., 2017).

43 The inclusion of children with disabilities in mainstream education has become a widespread
44 practice that has resulted in remarkable changes to schools in concept and operation. The
45 practice of inclusion in education has increased due to reported benefits. Bennet et al. (2018)
46 averred that learner with disabilities or special educational needs are able to learn better, improve
47 their academic skills, and develop adaptive behavior, in inclusive settings compared to special
48 institutions. The authors are of the view that for inclusive education to be successful, schools,
49 educators, administrators, parents and communities need to accept and adopt inclusive practices.

50 Parents play a crucial role in the lives of their children. Therefore, those with children with
51 disabilities are required to be fully onboard in order for inclusive education to
52 work. Yang (2019) echoed that disability is perceived negatively by many in society to the extent
53 that parents with children with disabilities are reluctant to send their children to school or even
54 allow them to mingle in the community. At the same time, parents of children without
55 disabilities tend to carry negative attitudes related to their children in the same learning
56 environment. Such attitudes result in social exclusion, restrictions and difficulties for children
57 with disabilities.

58 Family members especially parents, play a major role in the education of their children.
59 Therefore, their views need to be heard and are to be encouraged to involve in decisions relating
60 to their children. Instead of despising them, parents should be encouraged to be active
61 participants in the education of their children (Tippet & Milford, 2017). Parents are to be seen as
62 partners who want the best for their children (Wells, 2021). In line with Wells, (Jennings 2015)
63 reiterated that parents should be empowered to be active participants in all aspects of the
64 education of their children.

65 **1.1 Research Problem**

66 Despite efforts to move towards a more inclusive educational environment, challenges still
67 exist, especially parents' concerns towards inclusion. Bonding new "inclusive" policies with prior
68 traditional segregation policies run contrary to countries' commitment to implement Article 24 of
69 the CRPD which affirms that states parties recognize the rights of persons with disabilities to

70 education. It is relevant to note that whereas parents of children with disabilities are concerned
71 regarding the availability of learning materials, teaching methods, physical provision and
72 assistive devices, those with non-disabled children have raised eyebrows relating to their
73 children's placement in the same learning environment. In addition, some existing policies
74 legitimize operation of special education schools such as the School for the Blind, Deaf and
75 Dumb. In addition, policy framework relating to disability labels as deficient, dependent, and
76 incompetent. Instead of inviting parents to participate in decisions relating to the education of
77 their children, they are viewed as obstructionists to their education. Against this backdrop, there is
78 an existing gap in relation to parents' concerns towards inclusion, thus, it is fitting that an
79 investigation on their concerns regarding support for, or opposition to inclusion be conducted.
80 Also, required are parental views relating to practices that promote or hinder inclusion such as
81 the availability of teaching and learning materials, assistive devices, physical provisions
82 discrimination/marginalization and other forms of accommodations.

83 The study addressed the following questions:

- 84 1. What are parents' concerns regarding the availability of special learning materials and
85 teaching methods for their children with disabilities in the regular education schools?
- 86 2. What are parents' concerns regarding the availability of physical provisions and assistive
87 devices for their children with disabilities in the regular education schools?

88 **2.0 Literature Review**

89 **2.1 Inclusive Education**

90 In an inclusive educational environment, children with disabilities or special needs attend school
91 and learn alongside their nondisabled counterparts. (Aboud & Proulx, 2019) echoed that an
92 inclusive school system integrates special education and related services into aspects of its
93 program which makes it possible to address the needs of both those with and without disabilities.
94 Therefore, it's imperative that teachers in an inclusive educational setting have the requisite
95 skills and training relating to special education (Chen & Wolf, 2021) and also cooperate with
96 paraprofessionals or special staff to support the unique learning needs of all students (Rao et al.,
97 2022). Zubairu and Rose (2017) reechoed that teachers in inclusive schools are required to have the
98 requisite knowledge to apply different methods to meet the learning needs of all children. In
99 addition, they should develop positive relationships among children, family members and staff to
100 enable every child for life-long learning (Ndiaye (2020)).

101 Inclusion embodies the values, policies, and practices that support the right of every child
102 regardless of ability to participate in a broad range of activities and contexts as full members of
103 community (Wells, 2021). The desired results of inclusive experiences for children with

104 disabilities isa sense of belonging, membership, positive social relationships, friendships,
105 development and learning to reach their full potential (Rao et al., 2022).

106 **2.2 Parents'Concernson Special Learning Materials and Teaching Methods**

107 The issue of learning materials raised serious concerns for parents of children with disabilities
108 especially the availability of text books and other materialsand human resources. (Zubairu &
109 Rose, 2017) maintained that inadequacy of instructional materials and other resource materials
110 affect learners' academic performance. These resources are required for effective teaching and
111 learning. Dowd et al. (2016), asserted that insufficient resources result in teachers handling
112 subjects in an abstract manner thereby portraying things dry and non-exciting. This matter is
113 extremely crucial regarding children with special educational needs and implementation of
114 inclusive education. Against this backdrop (Piper et al.,2022) suggested that intervention
115 measures are required to address provisions of instructional materials in inclusive education
116 setting. In line with Piper, (Rao et al.,2022) reechoed that scarcity of teaching resources hamper
117 successful implementation of inclusive education. In addition, Dowd et al. averred that suitable
118 instructional and learning materials, teaching methods and human resources are required for
119 successful implementation of inclusion.

120 According to (Wells, 2021), parents could also contribute towards the education of their children
121 through provision of resources such as blackboards, electronic resources, books multimedia and
122 recorded teachings. Apart from parents, institutions of learning have a role to play. In Sierra
123 Leone, the Ministry of Basic Senior Secondary Education (MBSSE2022) affirmed that
124 educational institutions have both moral and legal obligation under the Persons with Disabilities
125 Act (PDA 2011) and NPRI 2020 to provide alternative formats such as large print or Braille of
126 documentation upon request for students with visual impairment. Whitebread (2022), maintained
127 that simple changes and adaptations to resources would make them easy to use. Wells (2012) is of
128 the view that making resources accessible from the onset provides a more inclusive learning
129 experience for children and make conversion to alternative formats quicker and easier. Apart
130 from teaching and learning materials, (Chen & Wolf, 2021) argued that for successful inclusive
131 education, classrooms need to be colorful and interesting to enable learners to feel welcomed and
132 enthusiastic.

133 Teachers are central in both special and inclusive education especially in relation to teaching
134 methodology, Lamin (2022). They play a crucial role in implementing both approaches and
135 without their input the entire process will be futile. It goes without saying that in an inclusive
136 educational setting, teachers must know what inclusion entails and the same time willing to meet
137 the learning needs of all children irrespective of their conditions Lamin (2022). Nabasa (2014)
138 argued that because many trainings related to teacher education fail to provide the requisite skills
139 and knowledge related to teaching methods, teachers find it difficult to meet the learning needs
140 of all children in an inclusive educational environment.

141 2.3 Parents' Concerns on Physical Structures and Assistive Devices

142 It has been postulated that children with disabilities face stumbling blocks in accessing education
143 especially in the areas of physical provisions and assistive devices. Such barriers limit their
144 learning and achievement in different activities that take place within the classroom setting.
145 Lamin (2022) averred that students' face physical barrier as result of encountering difficulties to
146 access school structures such as routes, toilets, ramps and curb entrances. The author is of the
147 view that the unavailability of these structures hamper inclusion and exclude children from
148 society and education in general.

149 Another area of concern for parents of children with disabilities is assistive device. It is a generic
150 term for all systems related to the use of assistive products. According to the USA Assistive
151 Technology Act of 1998, it is "any item, piece of equipment or system, whether acquired
152 commercially, modified, or customized, commonly used to increase, maintain, or improve the
153 functional capabilities of persons with disabilities". Stevens et al. (2023), posited that
154 assistive devices can increase a person's capabilities so that their abilities balance out the effects
155 of any disability. They could also provide alternative means to approach tasks so that disabilities
156 are compensated.

157 An assistive device provides an alternative for the interaction between learners with disabilities
158 and the new device. Devices such as Braille Machine, wheel chairs, crutches, prosthesis,
159 communicators and telecom services compensate for functional limitations, facilitate
160 independent living, and enable older people and those with activity limitations realize their full
161 potential (Ndijuye, 2022). Assistive devices also include equipment and services to
162 access information for seeing, hearing, reading, writing, interpersonal communication and control
163 of the environment (Stevens et al., 2023).

164 Assistive devices are divided into low-end and high-end technologies. Low-end technologies do
165 not require programming such as magnifiers and pencil holding devices. On the contrary, high-
166 end technologies like computer requires programming. Wells (2021) claimed that assistive devices
167 are categorized as low or simple device and high and complex. Low or simple devices are often
168 low cost and easy to create or obtain. They require a simplified process for operation such
169 as pencils, calculator loupes, paper and communication board. On the other hand, complex
170 devices such as computers, electronic communication board, and electric wheel chairs have or
171 incorporate technologies.

172 A systematic review conducted on assistive devices for learners with disabilities identified four
173 analytical themes: assistive devices as facilitator for academic engagement; barriers to effective
174 assistive device use can hinder academic participation; transformative possibilities of assistive
175 devices from a psychological perspective; and assistive devices as a facilitator for participation
176 (Manu et al., 2019). Based on the foregoing, (Chen & Wolf, 2021; Wells, 2021; Wagner et al.,

177 2019) posited that use of assistive devices could promote inclusion, enhance learning and decrease
178 stigma (Chen & Wolf, 2021; Wells, 2021; Wagner et al., 2019). Despite the benefits of assistive
179 devices, (UNESCO, 2021) raised a cautionary note regarding limitations such as a lack of
180 proper training for teachers to assist children, negative attitudes,
181 inadequate planning, assessment processes, inadequate funding, difficulties in managing
182 equipment, and time-related barriers.

183 Some requisite physical structures and mechanisms for children with disabilities in inclusive
184 schools include:

- 185 • Reduction of the noise level: Use carpeting on the floor, or a portion of the floor, or put
186 tennis balls or carpet pieces on the ends of the legs of desks or chairs.
- 187 • Assessment of the soundscape of the classroom: Note bothersome noises and take steps
188 to reduce them, e.g., buzzing or humming lights and heating pipes, the sounds of passing
189 traffic, and noises from other classrooms.
- 190 • Providing headphones for learners to use to block sound during quiet time: Some students
191 are unable to block out background noises and are distracted by a teacher talking with
192 another student or even a ticking clock.
- 193 • Setting a relaxing tone: Try using relaxing music when learners are working individually
194 at their desks.
- 195 • Considering furniture layout: Arrange classroom furniture and partitions to create traffic
196 patterns that encourage easy mobility, discourage running, and decrease learners'
197 tendencies to bother/disturb each other while they work.
- 198 • Reducing distractions: Consider using window coverings to reduce the effects of noise,
199 temperature, light and visual distractions (UNESCO, 2021).

200 **3.0 Research Methodology**

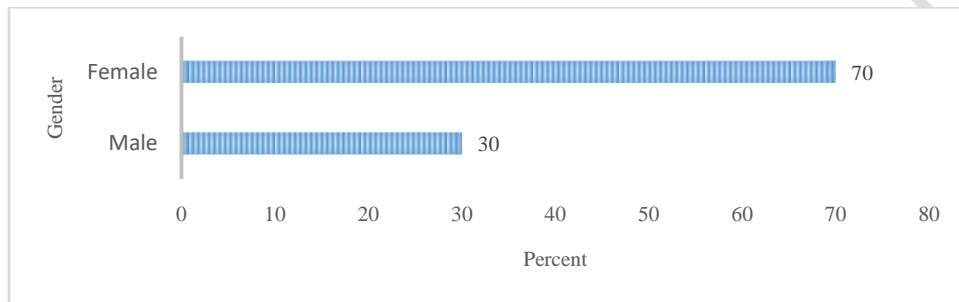
201 The study employed quantitative method to inquire parents with children with disabilities
202 perspectives regarding their children in the regular education classroom. Every parent of a child
203 with disability or special needs from the four (4) targeted schools was eligible as a member of the
204 population. Thus, the study's population comprised 800 parents. Convenience sampling was used
205 to select respondents (parents) mainly due to their availability, willingness to participate, and
206 accessibility to provide data during the period of the study. Correspondingly, a definite number of
207 parents from the targeted schools who were available at the time to collect data numbering 20
208 individuals constituted the sample, and resultant respondents to the research tool, which was a
209 standardized questionnaire that was subjected to content validity and consistency (Cronbach
210 Alpha coefficient = 7.5). Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained the consent of
211 respondents before administering the questionnaire. Data analysis involved computation of
212 statistics, mainly relative frequencies and percentages. The analyzed data were presented and

213 interpreted via visual means using tables and charts. Ethical considerations adhered to included
214 voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and scientific honesty.

215 4.0 Data Analysis and Interpretation

216 4.1 Demographics

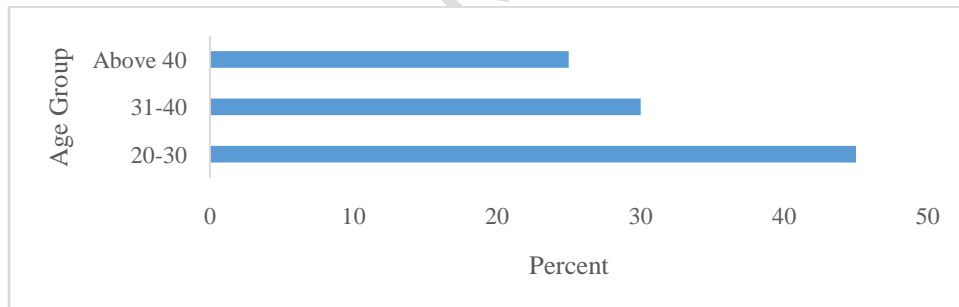
217 Several demographic variables were taken into consideration in the investigation; these include
218 gender, age and marital status. The ensuing is a presentation of the results



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Figure 1: Gender Representation of Respondents

221 According to Figure 4.1, there were more females than males in the sample. Female
222 representation is 70 percent, compared to males at 30 percent.



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Figure 2: Age representation of Respondents

225 The ages of respondents were categorized into three groups: 20-30, 30-40, and 40 and above.
226 Between 20-30 is the highest representation at 45 percent; 30-40 at 30 percent; and 40 age group
227 a representation of 25 percent (Figure 4.2).

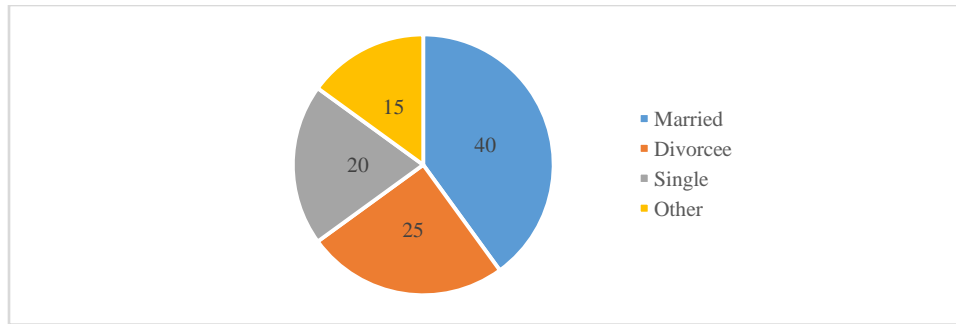


Figure 3: Marital Status of Respondents

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230 There were four categories on this variable. Respondents who are married have the highest
231 frequency at 40 percent. Those who were divorced constituted 25 percent and single couples at 20
232 percent, and other category (cohabitation) constituted 15 percent.

233 4.2 Special Learning Materials and Teaching Methods

234 The study investigated parents' perspectives in relation to special learning materials and teaching
235 methods. Table 1 indicated that most i.e., 65 percent, a large number of parents affirmed
236 inadequate learning materials for their children with disabilities in the schools. Conversely, 35
237 percent of them assented to availability of special learning materials.

238 Table 1: Special learning materials

Variable/Item	No. of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Availability of special learning materials	13	65	65
No availability of special learning materials	7	35	100
Total	20	100	

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240

Table 2: Teaching methods

Variable/Item	No. of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Use of special teaching methods	16	80	80
No use of special teaching methods	4	20	100
Total	20	100	

241 Table 3 highlighted that most of the respondents had serious doubts in relation to the impact of
242 the education provided to their children in the inclusive schools especially on teaching methods—
243 they aren't satisfied with teaching methods. Respondents with an unsatisfactory viewpoint
244 constituted 70 percent, whereas those who are satisfied or trust education delivery constituted 30
245 percent.

246 *Table 3: Satisfaction with education delivery*

Variable/Item	No. of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Satisfied w/education delivery	14	70	70
Not satisfied w/education delivery	6	30	100
Total	20	100	

247 **4.3 Physical Structures and Assistive Devices**

248 The study inquired parents' concerns regarding physical structures and assistive devices for their
 249 children with disabilities. In relation to accessing physical structures such as classrooms, toilets
 250 and buildings, 60 percent of them concurred that their children encountered difficulties to access
 251 structures since they are not disabled-friendly. On the contrary, 40 percent were of the view that
 252 it was easy for their children to access the schools' structures (Table 4).

253 *Table 4: Physical structures*

Variable/Item	No. of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Easy access to structures	12	60	60
No easy access to structures	8	40	100
Total	20	100	

254 In terms of spatial accommodation, Table 5 indicates that 65 percent of the respondents agreed
 255 that classroom space is inadequate (to allow appropriate sitting arrangement or placing of
 256 assistive devices) to accommodate and foster ease of movement for their children in the
 257 classrooms. 35 percent had a contrary view regarding classroom space (ease of moving about,
 258 sitting arrangement, and using assistive devices) (Table 5).

259 *Table 5: Spacious classroom*

Variable/Item	No. of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Spacious classroom	13	65	65
No spacious classroom	7	35	100
Total	20	100	

260 In relation to assistive devices such as wheelchairs, braille writers and recorders, all of the
 261 respondents (100 percent) reported that the schools lacked these devices. In this case, the onus is
 262 on the parents and government to provide the devices for the children since they schools are
 263 unable to provide them.

Variable/Item	No. of Respondents	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Availability of assistive devices	20	100	100
Non-availability of assistive devices	0	0	100
Total	20	100	

264 5.0 Discussion, Conclusion and Recommendations

265 5.1 Discussion

266 Parents registered different views around special learning materials and teaching methods. A
 267 majority of them attested to inadequacy in special learning materials. Their concerns are in line
 268 with Lamin (2023) relating to inadequacy in teaching and learning materials for children with
 269 disabilities in inclusive schools. However, the majority of responses affirmed that teachers
 270 employ special teaching methods based on reports from their children. Findings also reveal that
 271 two thirds of respondents are dissatisfied with the quality of education delivered to their children.

272 On the issue of physical structures and assistive devices, more than half of the respondents
 273 reported that their children encountered difficulties accessing physical structures. In addition,
 274 parents reiterated that the classrooms are not spacious to ensure seating accommodation and easy
 275 movement for their children. In line with their views, Wells (2021) agreed that children with
 276 disabilities experience challenges in accessing physical structures due to the fact that disability
 277 issues were not in mind during the construction phase. In addition, report indicated unavailability
 278 on assistive devices leading to previous findings on dearth of equipment/devices to facilitate
 279 teaching and learning in both inclusive and special schools (Lamin, 2020; 2022)

280 5.2 Conclusion

281 The study sought the viewpoints of parents with children with disabilities regarding special
 282 learning materials, teaching methods, physical provisions and assistive device in the regular
 283 education schools. It was generally premised on ascertaining parents' concerns. Findings
 284 revealed variable and divergent views. It was apparent that most of the schools lacked special
 285 learning materials and assistive devices required to facilitate inclusive learning. These tools if
 286 available could accelerate the learning processes for children with disabilities. In relation to
 287 accessibility and accommodation, the existing school buildings are not disabled-friendly. That
 288 said, the promulgation of legal framework to promote inclusion requires adaption of physical
 289 structures such as classrooms to enable access especially for those who are physically
 290 challenged. It would be extremely difficult to carry a wheelchair bound student up a set of stairs
 291 within the school premises. In addition, it also hampers seating accommodation and
 292 arrangement and free movement in the classroom. Also, concerns were raised in connection to
 293 teaching methods. In general, participants were unsatisfied with education delivery. From the fore

294 going discourse, it is evident that the drawbacks highlighted are crucial matters that need to be
295 addressed. Against this backdrop, school authorities and duty bearers need to tackle them
296 urgently to ensure successful implementation of inclusive education.

297 **5.3 Recommendations**

298 Based on the findings derived, the following recommendations to address parents' concerns
299 regarding the education of their children with disabilities in the regular education schools are
300 proffered:

- 301 • Provision of special learning materials and assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, braille,
302 lens, crutches and other aids, to facilitate effective teaching and learning. Due to the
303 quantum of investment and most parents' limited income, this investment has to be
304 championed by the government, or development/charitable partners, or school
305 proprietors.
- 306 • Teacher training and in-service are required for them to acquire the requisite skills to
307 teach successfully in an inclusive educational environment
- 308 • Easy access to school structures and appropriate classroom accommodations thereby
309 catering to the mobility of children with disabilities.
- 310 • As a core partner in implementing education, schools are required to partner with parents,
311 incorporating their viewpoints and empowering them to address disability issues at home
312 and community level. Parents need to have knowledge of their children's disability and
313 the benefits derived from inclusion.

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