

## **Increasing school diversity through the inclusion of kids with autism**

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“You’re r\*tarded! Why do you talk like that? Why were you born this way?” These are common slurs/insults that almost every autistic child hears, and unfortunately, are most prevalent in school settings. These derogatory words not only emotionally impact these children, but it also hinders their performance in schools. Autism is a spectrum of diseases that primarily revolve around the underdevelopment of basic cognitive functions, such as social interaction. Besides having to suffer from the symptoms associated with autism, these children have to constantly confront discriminatory behaviors by others, thereby separating them from the “normal” students.

For every teenager, the years spent in high school and college are the foundational layers that guide them towards finding and excelling in the career they choose. Receiving quality education plays a vital role for students to excel in these years. This becomes especially important for students with autism; teachers need to be well-prepared before handling such students. However, autistic students become less and less prepared as they advance in their educational route. Only 72% of students with autism graduate high school; while experiencing an abrupt shift to college, statistics worsen as only one-half of autistic kids enter college. Numbers exacerbate as a staggering 38.8% of autistic students who attend college graduate. What factors generate the negative trend of these numbers? Lack of quality education, a sudden shift to college, the absence of informational programs, and the exclusion of autistic students from the school environment sparks this downward trend.

The numbers discussed in the previous passage indicate a dire need for educational reform for autistic students. Not only is a fix necessary, but the fix also needs to come quickly and efficiently: "The number of young people diagnosed with autism in the last 14 years has risen from one in 152 in 2002 to an estimated one in 68 today." Therefore, we propose Plan **PACE** to produce smooth changes in the school life of a kid with autism.

Programs are a big factor that is lacking in the education of an autistic student. Schools/universities have low to none programs dedicated towards informational programs for autistic students. This results in not enough information provided to autistic students about coping with their everyday problems. Therefore, we believe that there needs to be at least one program in every school/university that can guide these students towards dealing with autism.

In contemporary society, students with autism are excluded from the learning environment. As discussed in the Introduction, most of the autistic students are being mistreated through the use of offensive phrases. Not only that, rarely any high schoolers interact with these students, making them feel lonely during school hours. The addition of autistic students will allow them to be engaged. This aspect of the PACE plan can be achieved by strictly restricting the usage of any insulting slurs and creating an organization that constantly interacts with students with autism.

Change is a concept that these students find difficult to cope with as the transition does not resonate with their emotions. Instituting a program wherein they are able to adjust to the drastic change from high school to college is a potential solution that can tackle this problem. The key components of this program would comprise a series of activities that educate these students about the different real-world situations they may deal with in the future.

Research has shown that 70% of teachers who teach autistic students don't feel comfortable when teaching students as they have very minimal experience. This suggests that the level of education involved in enhancing autistic students' education is not as advanced or developed as it should be. This is where the solution for improved education comes into play. By creating intricate teaching programs for adults who wish to pursue a career in special education, more teachers are likely to be experienced in guiding these students. These programs would consist of resources and tools that can be utilized by teachers to show them various methods of teaching students with autism.

By implementing the Plan PACE, we aim to increase diversity in a school environment - a plan that includes and provides more opportunities to students with autism.

## Bibliography

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