By William Henderson, Ed.D, Principal, Patrick O'Hearn Elementary School, Boston Public Schools

An educator since 1974, Bill has served since 1992 as principal at the O'Hearn School, a small urban elementary school serving children with diverse ethnic, linguistic and ability profiles in early childhood classes through grade 5. The O'Hearn is an integrated learning community where students with moderate to significant disabilities learn side by side with students who are gifted and talented. Teachers and support staff team to work with all students in integrated classrooms.

Willy: Willy is a fifth grade boy with autism. When he was three, his pediatrician recommended a school that enrolled only students with autism, but Willy's mom wanted him to be in a regular elementary school with kids his own age. While he's been with us, Willy has needed speech therapy and support for certain behaviors. Willy excels in reading and math. In writing, we've worked with him to establish more 'voice' as he struggled somewhat to incorporate descriptive and creative words in his stories. We've provided socialization opportunities through a lunch group and participation in our school drama club. By providing the supports and services very early in his life, he has grown into one of our top students and is a blossoming actor at our school.

Kaylo: Kaylo is a fifth grade boy who was born to a mother addicted to drugs. He has received early intervention and other supports and services from birth. Kaylo has mild cognitive delays and emotional disorders. He receives speech and occupational therapy and has been retained in one grade. Physically, Kaylo can keep up with his peers, but he struggles with reading, writing and math. We provide universally-designed books on a computer to keep him engaged in grade level content, however the material has become increasingly too difficult for him to manage at the same pace as his peers. As a result, he has become embarrassed and frustrated and has acted out in the classroom. In fourth grade, his IEP team decided that rather than taking the regular assessment with non-standard accommodations, he would take the alternate assessment. Kaylo excels in soccer and also works in the school store to strengthen his functional math skills and develop social skills.

Maria: Maria is in fourth grade and was born with vision impairments. Because she is mostly blind, her parents started her in a school for blind children, but in the first grade she came to O'Hearn. She has continued to learn Braille and we provide mobility instruction during school. She needs a little extra support in math, but has joined the math club and loves our dance program. She is an
inspiration to those around her and just shines.

**Carla:** Carla started with us in kindergarten and by first grade it was evident that she was having real difficulty with language processing. Like her dad, she has dyslexia. We have provided phonics-based instruction during and after school, we also provide a Kurzweil reader so she can hear and see the content. With the reader, she is working above grade level. Without it, she would be reading at about the first grade level. We continue to provide the research-based programs to support and strengthen her fluency in decoding and reading comprehension. Carla takes the regular assessment with accommodations. She is a terrific athlete and is an artist.

**Avery:** Avery is a third grade girl born with multiple disabilities who continues to be significantly delayed. She came to us through mediation between the parents and the school district. And although the parents originally wanted Avery in a private school due to safety and medical concerns, the family is now very happy with her progress. With the help of a full-time nurse, Avery is learning to walk, and can communicate by pointing, making noises and using basic signs. She loves to listen to books and enjoys performing on stage with her peers. When it's her turn to say a line, she pushes a button and a pre-recorded line plays for the audience.

Of course, this is just a snapshot of the students at my school, but they, along with the other 225 children in the building have the following in common:

1. **They are supported by a committed team that strives to collaborate on effective strategies to teach diverse learners and ensure all students learn and succeed.**

2. **They have access to universally-designed curricula, textbooks and assessments as well as appropriate accommodations -- for both instruction and assessment.**

3. **They are encouraged, along with their families, to strengthen their artistic, athletic and other talents through music, dance, physical fitness and modern day technology.**

*All three are critical to the success of my students now and in the future.*

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