

March 10, 2023

Dear Dean Long,

As an alum of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, experienced public school leader, and advocate and consultant on inclusive education, I am writing to express my extreme concern with two of the candidates HGSE is considering for appointment to the Special Education/Disability Policy Faculty Search.

One candidate's curriculum vitae boasts of the paper, "Whose IDEA Is This? The Cost-Effectiveness of the Federal Emphasis on Inclusive Education," stating that "little is known about whether inclusive education is effective for these students or their nondisabled peers." Meanwhile, another candidate has authored, "Has Inclusion Gone Too Far? Weighing Its Effects on Students with Disabilities, Their Peers, and Teachers." This candidate's biography notes their work "has examined if teaching students with disabilities is associated with general education teacher turnover."

While universities must always seek faculty that bring diverse perspectives and viewpoints, a child's worthiness of an education should not be up for debate. The simple advancement of two candidates with these philosophical orientations to the final round of interviews is in direct conflict with the diversity, equity and inclusion mission statement posted on the HGSE website which states:

*"We believe in the importance of education for all. Our community recognizes the inherent worth and value of each person regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, political views, immigration status, ability, socioeconomic status, and other identities or characteristics. While we encourage research and debate on how best to accomplish the goals of education, we are committed to this work regardless of identity or background."*

One of your candidates questions the basic right of students with disabilities to be *present* in the general education classroom while another believes that inclusion has "gone too far" and is driving teachers out of the field. It is hard to reconcile how the appointment of either of these individuals aligns with HGSE's stated commitment to the work of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Rather than appointing a faculty member who questions the efficacy of the inclusion of students with disabilities in our classrooms, I urge you to employ a professor who challenges the inequitable structures and systems that lead to disparate outcomes. While healthy discourse is part of academia, the right to an inclusive education must not be up for debate.

Throughout history, the system of education has sought to remove and separate students based on difference. Black students were segregated from Whites, Native Americans were removed from their families to be "civilized," and women were viewed to be less capable and worthy of education. Over time, we have rejected these arguments that seek to segregate children based on race, gender, or religious and ethnic background. No one would dream of asking if the inclusion of any of these groups is detrimental to our educational system. I implore you then, to consider the message you will send by appointing a faculty member questioning the worthiness of students with disabilities to be included. Systems and structures may be debated, basic rights may not.

Respectfully,



Dr. Jenna Mancini Rufo