SAMPLE PARENT TO PARENT LETTER - ADAPT AS DESIRED AND APPROPRIATE

Dear Parents,

Some of you already know our child, *(name)*. For those of you who do not, *(name)* has Down syndrome and is excited to be in class with your child!

We understand that you and your child may have questions about Down syndrome. Children with Down syndrome are now included in general education (typical) classrooms and achieving great academic and social success. It is only through supportive environments that these individuals will meet such success. We have the same expectations for our child as you do – we all hope our children will learn to the best of their ability, make lasting friendships, follow school rules, and be contributing members of the classroom and community. Your child’s role modeling and positive interactions will help our child to be successful in these areas.

Research on inclusion has shown that forming friendship with children who have Down syndrome or other special needs will have a positive effect on your child as well, including meaningful friendships, increased appreciation and acceptance of diversity, and respect for all people. Research further shows that this can translate to greater academic outcomes for typically-developing students.

We have shared information with *(teacher’s name)* about Down syndrome and some challenges our child and others with Down syndrome may face, along with some truths about Down syndrome. We have spoken to the *(teachers' name)* and the students about meaningful and simple ways to include and communicate with *(child's name)*. It's important for all of us to remember that just because an individual may not express things in the same manner, they can still understand and have plenty to say – they might just say it differenty. This information and access to resources is of benefit to all the students.

*(optional paragraph if presenting an ability awareness in the same timeframe):*

We have spoken to the students about *(child’s name)* and Down syndrome. We wanted to allow them a safe place to ask any questions as well as to understand why they may have noticed some differences. In the end, what we emphasized is that *(name)* is more like them than different. The teachers and I are using language with the students that emphasizes *(name)* first, rather than Down syndrome. We say “*boy/girl* with Down syndrome” as opposed to “Down’s *boy/girl*”. People first language is a somewhat subtle, but significant difference and we encourage you to follow our lead.

We hope this inclusive experience will give your child insight into the similarities of all children. We encourage you to talk openly with your child about these similarities to ensure a positive classroom environment for each and every student. We have included a bit of information about Down syndrome and hope that you contact us if your family has any questions.

Our child has really enjoyed the class so far, and hopes to become fast friends with all of your wonderful children. Children with Down syndrome have unlimited potential when given the opportunity and support.

Sincerely,

*(your name)*

**MYTHS AND TRUTHS ABOUT DOWN SYNDROME**

**Myth: Down syndrome is a rare genetic disorder caused by older parents and/or genetics.**

**Truth:** Down syndrome is the most commonly occurring genetic condition, with approximately one in every 700 births resulting in a child with Down syndrome. There are approximately 350,000 people who have Down syndrome living in the United States today. Eighty percent of children born with Down syndrome are born to women younger than age thirty-five. However, research has shown a link between the incidence of Down syndrome and maternal age. In general, Down syndrome does not run in families, and a sibling or aunt has no greater chance of conceiving a child with Down syndrome.

**Myth: People with Down syndrome have severe cognitive delays.**

**Truth:** Most people with Down syndrome have cognitive delays that are mild to moderate; however, IQ is not an adequate measure of the abilities and talents of people with Down syndrome. People with Down syndrome have great potential if given opportunities. Thanks to laws governing public education and greater opportunities, more and more individuals with Down syndrome are graduating with their peers and attending college.

**Myth: Adults with Down syndrome are unable to work.**

**Truth:** Businesses are seeking young adults with Down syndrome for a variety of positions. They are employed in small- and medium-sized offices, banks, corporations, nursing homes, hotels and restaurants. They work in the music and entertainment industries, clerical positions, and the computer industry. People with Down syndrome bring to their jobs enthusiasm, reliability and dedication.

**Myth: People with Down syndrome are always happy.**

**Truth:** People with Down syndrome have feelings just like everyone else in the population. They respond to positive expressions of friendship, and they are hurt and upset by inconsiderate behavior.

**Myth: There are no effective treatments for Down syndrome.**

**Truth:** Researchers are making great strides in identifying the genes on chromosome 21 that cause the characteristics of Down syndrome. Scientists now feel strongly that it will be possible to improve, correct or prevent many of the problems associated with Down syndrome in the future.

**Myth: Having a sibling with Down syndrome will be a hardship for “typical” children.**

**Truth:** Most families report that their “typical” kids are more compassionate, patient and tolerant of all people because of their experiences having a sibling with Down syndrome. The sibling relationship is generally a typical one — full of love, occasional arguments and just being together.

**Myth: Children with Down syndrome will never grow up to be independent.**

**Truth:** There are now many more opportunities for individuals with Down syndrome to participate in aspects of community life: education, recreation, employment, social, and family life. As the move towards community integration continues, we see more supports and services being developed that allow adults with Down syndrome to live on their own, with friends or on college campuses. Some individuals are even buying their own homes with their own money!

For more information on Down syndrome you can visit the Down Syndrome Connection of the Bay Area website at [www.dsconnection.org](http://www.dsconnection.org) or call their office at (925) 362-8660.