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Sent: 2/4/2015 5:37:03 PM
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Subject: The Education Killer- Occupational Diplomas Are a Dead End

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Message:

First of all thank you for taking five minutes of your time to hear what I have to say. I started my education career in South America. I started regular Preschool classes with my brother at age three. This was impressive and a big accomplishment for me because doctors had said that I had mild Cerebral Palsy, because I didn't breathe when I was born. In class, I learned my ABC's, adding, and subtracting like all my friends (by the way I had a lot). But when we moved to the United States, I had to begin first grade.

I was very excited to start school, but when I started I noticed a big difference in how people saw me. They saw me as a kid who was not smart enough to be with my regular peers. They put me in special education classes. I was in and out of special education throughout elementary school, but in middle school they put me in there for good and did not give me a chance to prove that I could be in regular classes with all of my friends. They said that I needed to be in a self-contained class; I did not like this because I knew I could be challenged more in a regular classroom. In special education, I noticed something: there were people like me that were put in this class just because they looked different. I started to notice in high school that many of the special education students started using drugs and drinking because they wanted to fit in.

Special education did not allow me and the other kids to earn a high school diploma. We received an occupational diploma that is supposed to allow students to go from high school to work right away. However, if you want to go to college or get a job other than a minimum wage job, you have to have a high school diploma or get a GED. I propose that special education students be offered classes that concentrate on working toward getting a GED in self-advocacy, or alternatively, giving special education students the opportunity of getting a high school diploma for those four years. This would decrease the rate of school dropouts as well as providing the opportunity for a successful life. In my experience, the Occupational Diploma caused kids to be more exposed to drugs and criminal activity. The Occupational Diploma is more like a prize for not using drugs in high school, rather than recognition for the work we've done. I came out of high school being forced to start over and preparing to take a GED test that no one prepared me for. Thank you again for reading my story and I hope that we can make this change for future students like me.

<https://www.change.org/p/mick-zais-the-education-killer-occupational-diplomas-are-a-dead-end>