

3/27/07

Dear Senate Education Committee,

I am writing to you, my testimony in favor of SB1000.

In 2004, my three year old, non verbal girl was diagnosed with Autism. She immediately was registered with the Austin ISD, into their summer school program. It seemed at the time, a great lifesaver because I did not know what to do. Everyone was very cheerful and happy to see her- very upbeat.

Then the honeymoon ended. She started her first year at Pam elem, where things went down hill fast. Teachers did not seem happy to see her in the AM, she cried every morning when I dropped her off. I became worried. I would visit her classroom unexpectedly from time to time finding her on two occasions, in a plastic, empty swimming pool. The teacher said she was " happy there".

Only later did I realize it was because they did not want to deal with her behaviors. Granted, even I did not know what to do back then.

Soon after that, I spent many, many hours researching on therapies, learning about Central Texas Autism Center. We spent a great deal of money there but it was well worth it. They had her signing" movie" (American Sign Language) in 20 min.! It was a miracle! She can communicate.!

With the help of MHMR(our saving grace financially) we were able to afford a young woman who was familiar with Applied Behavior Analysis and she began working with Emily.

We learned about Lovaas Skinner's behavior methodology and began using it with very positive results.

Emily is now almost 5 yrs. old. She is still non verbal and has some behavior issues. When she began school this past August at Perez Elem. We thought everything would be much better. I spent hours preparing a 8 page document all about Emily and what scientific based methodologies we use at home, her idiosyncracies, her likes and dislikes. We had a three hour "pre-ard" (admissions review and dismissal). Later during the first ard, in which I requested she continue with her sign language, they told me "Who would understand her?" I was dumbfounded by the comment!

Anybody knows that a non verbal child needs to learn sign language! The school district wanted to use a system called PEC's (Picture Exchange System). I disagreed saying she demonstrated her ability to learn preferred items and activities easily using sign. This alone was a 3.5 hour battle. The

ARD was tabled for another two weeks to resume in which we had a fundamental disagreement on reinforcing behavior which lasted another 2.5 hours.

Our last ARD we asked for Emily's sensory needs to be met, which is a huge part of Autism. This we received, and happy to note we concur with the outcome of the evaluation, but I had to write a letter to the Special Education Department a direct letter in which they had to respond yes or no to an Occupational Evaluation.

The latest battle is for them to use a scientifically based method to draw out verbal sounds from my daughter called Applied Verbal Behavior. They do not even know what this is, let alone how to do it. Emily's Speech Therapist at school is all into visual performance skills not vocalization! This I must battle as well! Is there no end to this madness? This is our first year of advocating and I am exhausted already!

Many parents do not have the time or stamina to endure this level of minutia on a daily basis. The parents who yell and scream the loudest get the most basic of services for their child, or they give up. This is truly a sad state of affairs. The schools professionals are the ones who should know what is best, based on research. This is **not** how it is!

I am for SB1000 for a way out. Central Texas Autism Center can do more for my girl in six hours in one week than the AISD can in a whole year. I have proof! But there needs to be updated standards to those who chose to stay in the public system by passing the recommendations of the Texas Autism Council. Many of which are now being written.

I am for both Autism scholarships and for improving public school systems. Our children have a chance of living independently not in institutions.

The latest numbers I heard were for females 1: 127 and for boys 1: 96. Just two years ago it was an overall 1:166. What are we to do when it is 1:50?

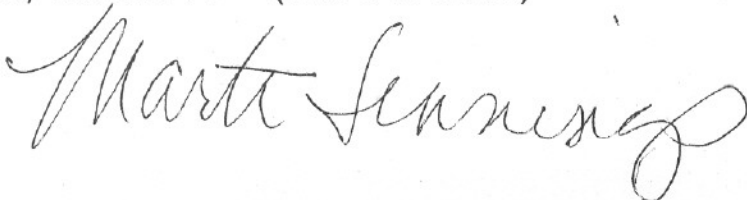
I have a choice for my child as an American citizen and soon, if things do not change, my choice for her will be Home School, because I know I can do a better job than my daughters public school. And this is the truth!

Thank You.

Marti Jennings

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A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marti Jennings". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the typed name and address.