

Dear Senate Education Committee:

I am writing to provide input on Texas special education. Our son was effectively denied public education when our school district refused to accept his medical diagnosis of Asperger's Syndrome. He cannot "behave" in overwhelming situations, and a large classroom with a teacher untrained in autism spectrum disorders most definitely qualifies as overwhelming. Without IEP protection, it's unsafe for him to attend public school. We had to remove him from his public Kindergarten 3 months into the school year when the school began daily punishments, including suspensions, for behaviors that were induced by the educational setting. We had no other option.

He is 9 now, and our family has struggled. We cannot afford the type of private school he needs. We cannot move, and if we could - where do you go in Texas? This problem of ignoring medical diagnoses and marginalizing so many autistic children from public education is statewide. I am not a teacher, yet I have been home schooling him without even access to the curriculum of the public schools. The financial impact has been tremendous, our marriage has suffered with my husband working two jobs to supplement our household income, and who knows what kind of education I'm actually providing him. As I said, I am not a teacher.

There is a tremendous uproar over the type of education that would be provided by private schools if parents had a type of voucher - yet no one seems worried about my child, at home all day with a non-teacher who does not have a curriculum.

We have seen some bright lights in the past year. Texas Virtual Academy was created, and we enrolled our son. This has been a blessing. I am no longer up all night trying to think of ways to engage him, what I should be teaching him next, worrying that I am getting it all wrong. He is no longer accountable only to me. He enjoys the format, the school has proved to be very understanding of Asperger's Syndrome, and the minor modifications he has needed were easily achieved. I don't know of any due process cases against the Texas Virtual Academy, possibly because the children's needs are being met and academic success seems to be at the front of everyone's minds.

This is a huge step in the right direction. It's far from perfect. Our son is lonely and craves the interaction a classroom would provide. We're trying so hard to not leave Texas as so many other families have had to do. I'll admit, it's difficult hearing about the successes these children are seeing in public schools in other states such as New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Ohio, knowing we have so little here in our home state of Texas.

I would like to see the educational label game addressed in Texas. It's a baby step, but it's a huge one for families like ours whose children don't even have a shot at school without some assistance.

Some other thoughts:

I would also like to see a simple spreadsheet published showing how much money from each school district goes to law firms such as Bracewell & Giuliani and Walsh, Anderson, Brown, Schulze & Aldridge each year.

I would like to see the resumes of Special Ed Due Process Hearing Officers published online so that the employment backgrounds of the Hearing Officers are fully understood.

I would like to see a fund created so that an equal pool of money is available to parents who go to mediation, due process or appeals. For example, if a district spends \$5mm on special

ed attorneys in ARDs, court, etc, that district will provide a pool of the same amount, \$5mm, the following year for parents who have special ed disputes.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
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