

Deya Velasco
394-9458

I am a Parent of two children diagnosed with PDD-NOS, my daughter is 16 and my son is 14. I've been an advocate for more than 10 years now, helping mainly minorities, families in poverty level and ELLs, all in special education. I also served in special education advisory committees in our local school district.

My children are doing remarkably well. They are both approaching their transitions and I expect my daughter to continue her secondary education and more (she wants to go into medical sciences). My son is doing well as well, catching up in his development but we cannot tell still how far he may go when it comes to secondary education.

Both of my children have had very talented and committed teachers, therapists and administrative staff around them for the most part, but they also had their share of unresponsive, uncaring, incompetent and plain mean staff to deal with as they struggle with their disability.

Generally speaking, I would say that if we measure the success of Special Education in public schools, using as criteria an end product that would look like a person having an independent meaningful safe life, fully included in the community, then Special Education is basically working for very few. Special Education and the school system have been always difficult to navigate for parents. Every school year has brought challenges, but always the same ones I must say.

Basically Special Education Services are inconsistent from teacher to teacher, school year to school year, from school to school within the same school district, etc.

Trying to organize my thoughts and experiences as parent and as advocate, I grouped the problems I've encountered in two major groups:

LACK OF ACCOUNTABILITY & LACK CONTINUITY AND CONSISTENCY OF SERVICES

Lack of accountability:

IDEA, (individuals with Disabilities Education Act) has provided me as a parent and an advocate with a framework to guide my decisions, but is very common still to find school staff in charge of students with disabilities, that

are either not knowledgeable of this law and its implications for the schools district at best, causing conflict with parents or don't have an idea of their responsibilities and duties towards their student needs at worst leaving the child with disabilities w/o appropriate intervention.

Special Education Departments can be full of trained talented staff, with years of experience under their sleeves that can go to schools and give the best of advice for students with special needs. Still they have not the power to make things happen if administrative staff at campus level doesn't follow up or making teachers follow up with recommendations or training needed to support a student with disabilities (because school teachers respond to their principals, not the Special Ed director).

The organization structure of school districts and accountability system need to change so IDEA can happen for all students consistently, for ALL staff around these students, both special education and regular staff, to be responsible.

Problems that would fall under this category:

- Lack of training for regular staff and campuses administrative staff about disability, inclusion or special ed law compliance.
- Training not being mandatory.
- Very specialized staff such as bilingual-special ed certified staff not being able to address ELLs students.
- Lack of knowledge at campus level of resources and support services available within the school district to serve students with disabilities.
- The culture of special ed students not belonging to the main body of students and put away in units away from the main building.
- Regular staff not complying with IEP modifications for students at grade level. This affects heavily children with high functioning autism, adhd, ld.
- Lack of training and knowledge on transitions and resources in the community.
- Principals can decide if they want a Special Education unit in their campus or not, if they want a particular special education student in their campus or not.
- Staff hired to support special ed students used for other tasks at each campus administrative staff's discretion.

- ELL-special ed students and their families lack of services or appropriate interventions aligned with bilingual education rigor and standards.
- Lack of cross cultural competent training for parents in the special education process and special ed law, so they can actively participate in their child's education

Continuity and consistency of services

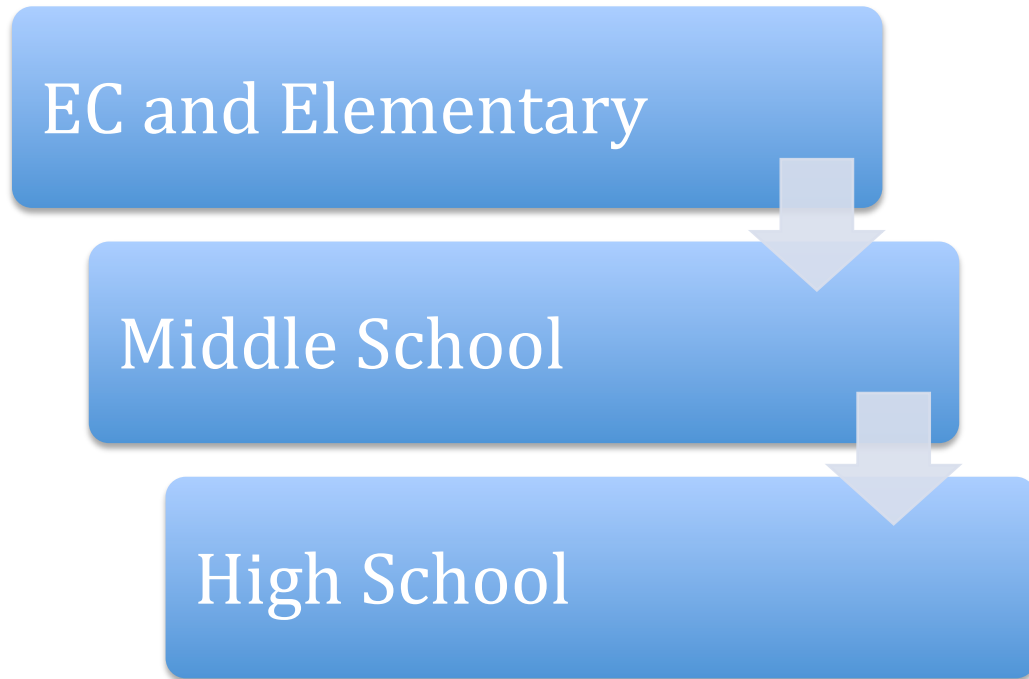
A successful transition to adulthood starts in PPCD units. Socialization and inclusion need to start early in the life of our children with disabilities so they have ample opportunity to address issues, to teach and master skills, to modify behaviors. More than academic achievement, it is widely documented that the success for students with disabilities is going to be limited by their social abilities.

It is very well known and I experienced it with my children, how inconsistent the intervention practices are when it comes to students with disabilities. Schools seemed not to be ready for students with disabilities on a consistent basis. Even when there is an IEP to document and follow each student, when the administrative/support staff is the same, there is chaos and surprises and regressions at the beginning of every school year.

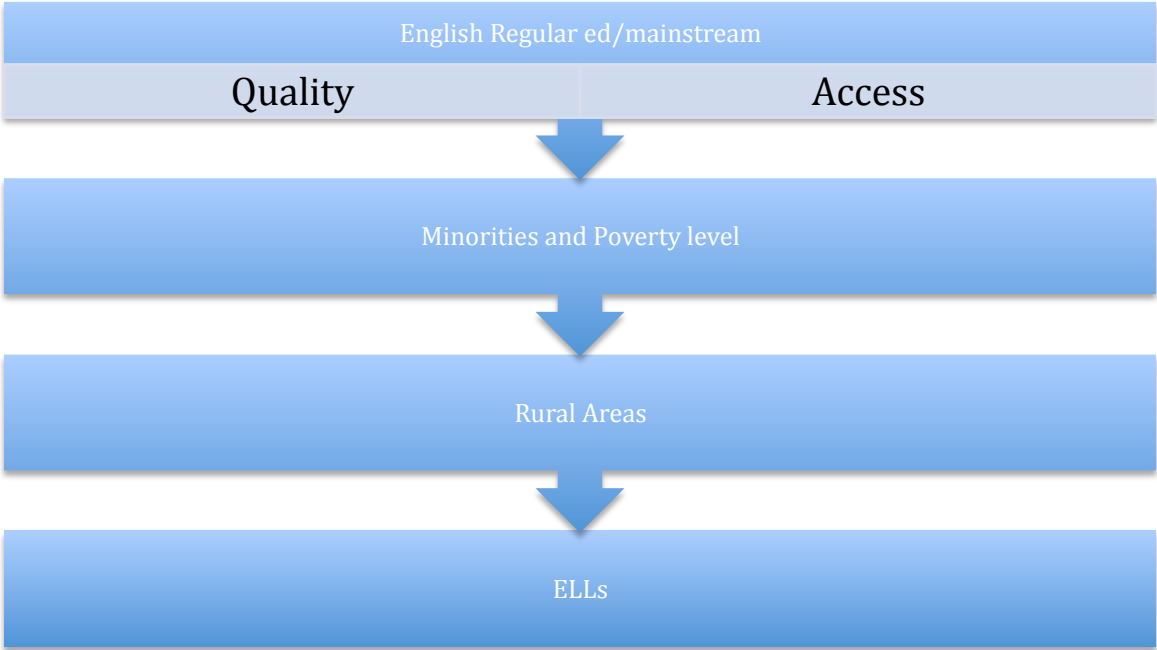
Problems that fall under this category:

- Turn over of special ed staff at campus level, and agencies that coordinate to serve students with disabilities.
- Lack of support for special education staff.
- Special education staff hired locally on campuses w/o special education department input.
- Lack of mandated standardized practices for special education units such as life skills units, autism support units, behavioral support units, etc.
- Special education units moved around every year affecting students socialization and inclusion.
- Special education support staff utilized to train parents (in-home training) or for direct student support having minimal qualifications (GED) or appropriate training.

- As students move from PPCD to Elementary, to Middle School, to High School there is less and less inclusion, trained staff, accommodations or consideration for their needs.
- Transition process varies widely from campus to campus, as knowledge of how to do it. Availability of trained staff and quality of special education decreases as the student moves from early childhood services to high school.



Quality and access to special education services deteriorates as we move down in the graph



Combining the two graphs, the best situation for a special education student happens when they are English speakers with economical advantage. The worst would be for a poor ELL in high school, in a rural area.