

M.O.R.E. Commission
Special Education Select Working Group
Monday, December 8, 2014
Victoria L. Morando Parent Testimony

Good evening:

My name is Victoria Morando and I am a parent of Steven, an 8 year old who is impacted by Autism, and Sensory Integration Disorder. Testing now being done for behavioral as well. It is my understanding Michelle Cook, Brian Becker and Terrie Wood that you are asking what systematic challenges we encounter in special education and what possible solutions we may have.

As I sat down to prepare for this session, I had to ask myself what is an effective special education program at this level we are at and where will it be in later years for him?

At this age my child needs to be academically, socially and emotionally able to handle what he encounters on a daily basis. Without these he can be bullied or be the bully. Looking forward we need to add psychological and behavioral abilities to take care of oneself.

From the time Steven was in Birth to 3 we have had Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy and Speech in his daily/weekly schedules so he can get what he needs to learn, work and succeed in life.

Today we have Occupational Therapy (inside/outside of school), Speech and a Special Education teacher with a para-professional part-time. These people are critical to him to succeed on a day to day basis. Our outside OT handles his day to day life outside of school, but will help when we are in need of doing something for school.

With this in mind, I would like to outline a few systemic barriers I have seen over these past few years:

Parent vs. Teacher noticing a problem:

- When we started our trek with Steven, we took it upon ourselves; with our doctor to get a pediatrician that handled developmental and behavioral reviewing and testing. Once he was diagnosed we proceeded through Birth to 3 and our school at our PPTs as to the services that would be needed to get through a day at school.

- During that PPT his tri-annual came up and their testing was consistent with our private doctors when it came to his academic requirements. Services were then put to where he needed them for the classroom. As of today we are still changing what Steven is required to have to academically succeed.
- Children who do have a disability and are not caught first by a doctor are usually found by a teacher. Good example of this is my daughter: Kristina was in 5th grade and she was getting anxious a lot, we thought this was normal for her so we just put up the barriers for her to concentrate. As years went on she seemed fine, but during Final Exam in one of her classes in 8th grade this surfaced again. It was enough for the teacher and me to talk and then get her doctor involved. Come to find out she had anxiety issues. We immediately asked her high school for help in getting her a 504 for a little extra when testing is being done, if she is out over a long length of time having an extended amount of makeup time. Today she still has her anxiety but we can work with the teachers and school on this by moving her to the library during testing, if she has an anxiety attach she can go to guidance (all noted in her IEP).
- Both the examples above show that not only do parents and doctors need to stay on top of what the child needs, but if a teacher sees something it should be mentioned to the parent so that parent can take appropriate action to fix what has come up.
- Schools have a form you can fill out to request a meeting, but parents can do this through a letter as well.

This leads us into funding:

We all know that to make something better we need to have the funding. Both IDEA and ECS are underfunded severely, but our municipalities are supposed to deliver quality, effective and efficient services. It's nice to say you need to do this, but is not always happening. From year to year there are teachers and para-professionals being cut from the classrooms, making our classes bigger. By doing this you not only put at risk of learning students with special needs but also A-Typical students.

Districts have to come up with ways in their budget to maximize the dollars for the increasing amount of students; with special needs including those ELL students, while being told that the budget is being cut even more.

IEP Challenges:

Since IEP's are now computerized they are no longer for the individual. There has been a time when our IEP has come in with information missing or wrong. It also does not allow for the

parent to sign off on what is agreed on. Goals and objectives on Page 7 need to be in a numerical form with a baseline so we know how our child is really doing, but it currently does not show this.

In conclusion:

As a mother of 1 child that needs multiple services and another that requires just extra time, I believe that if a child has a disability it should be handled by all; parents, schools and doctors as a team. This way all are on the same page as to what is needed to succeed academically, socially, emotionally as well as psychological and behavioral abilities.

Additionally, funding needs to be put into place so all students can succeed academically. Insurance companies already pick up quite a bit of expenses and some are even being double charged if you utilize outside services for your child, thus costing parents more than what the federal government and state governments were meant to budget and pay for.

Lastly, IEP's need to be written by the Special Education Teacher with all others on the PPT team understanding what each has tested on and input on. It would be nice to see all teachers educated not only on specific pages of the IEP, but the entire report.

Sincerely,

Victoria L. Morando
Parent