

Dear Committee Members:

Bill#6380 Consolidation of Board of Education and Services for Blind will be devastating to my son. For the first time in his life he can participate in some typical teen activities...Because of BESB staff Alex was able to participate in an overnight camp. Camp Abilities was a life changing experience for Alex. Alex is a member of the Student Advisory Council for BESB. BESB has given Alex amazing life experiences.

To understand what Alex will lose you will have to understand what has been given to Alex through this stand alone agency.

To understand the greatness of this loss understand that Alex has a rare syndrome that along with multiple medical issues he is visually impaired and hearing impaired. Imagine how hard it is to participate in your own life if you have compromises in those senses. Imagine what it is like to learn when two of your senses are compromised. BESB provides Alex with people who are trained in Deaf/blind education. Can you guarantee that those people will be available? Understand that when dropping this unique program into a larger flawed agency things get lost. Do you really think that BESB will retain all that makes it great? I hope you are not naive.

- Access to friends.... The Public School under supervision of the State Department of Education did not feel it was their obligation to create social opportunities for a child who in a large group cannot actively participate due to his disability. The staff at the school, which is ultimately under the supervision of SDE, did not want to understand how difficult it is to access friends. BESB provided a one week camp where Alex has made lifelong friends. Seem simple but it is invaluable to him.
- When asked during a planning and placement team meeting the "Inclusion facilitator" (her job is to make sure Alex has access to classroom and community and yes under supervision of the very agency you now want to place BESB) if she planned on working on everyday living skills or community access her answer was " Uhh I don't work with Alex". Last June BESB offered a 2 day intensive program called Essential Skills which helped Alex want to explore more. Oh and yes he was with kids with similar issue and guess what each kid helped each other. WOW what a concept...Yet it would be OK to take that away???
- Now to Orientation and Mobility....The district said " Alex gets around OK does he really need it?" Again this is a district that is under the supervision of the very agency you want to place BESB in. Orientation and Mobility is not just the ability to navigate the school. Orientation and Mobility is about teaching the

ability to find environmental cues to help navigate everywhere. BESB provides O&M in school and home to help access his life and be more independent. Again something that would be lost for Alex.

- Alex reads in large print. The district was not clear on whether or not they needed to supply Large print to Alex enter Alex's Teacher of the Visually Impaired who gets his text books enlarged and is a wonderful resource to the team for large print. Under the auspices of the SDE would there actually be room to house the large print/Braille library? Leaving the district to find or order large print book. Did you know it takes 10-14 weeks to get? Since historically our district has waited until the last possible minute can we wonder when Alex can get an education...10-14 weeks into the year? Every other student can BEGIN his /her education on school day 1.

So let's recap....BESB has given Alex access to his school, community and his life....the district under the supervision of the SDE have provided a classroom with limited access, no everyday living skills and no friends. If it were your child which would you pick an agency that has run efficiently with scores and scores of positive outcomes or a district under the supervision of the SDE with very limited progress.

What needs to be understood by you is that through gathering or clarifying information I contact the State

Department of Education only to be told that the SDE can recommend "best practices" but the district does not need to follow the recommendations but that somewhere in time someone thought that giving "local control" to the districts was a good idea. There is no guarantee that housing BESB children's services at the SDE will provide Alex with any services.

Please consider how much Alex will lose.

Consider the above when making your decision. Our family will suffer tremendously under the current Governor's budget and the future for all our children will be challenging at least let Alex have a fighting chance to even the playing field for life with keeping BESB intact and separate.

Ellen Steinbrick

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Mom to Alex Steinbrick 13 years old, 7th grade CHARGE syndrome, open heart surgery at 10 days, 18 other surgeries, multiple hospitalizations but happy

Dear Committee members

This is what BESB Means to me...

They gave me powerful life choices

And throughout the last 11 months BESB has taught and guided me through things my school never gave me like...

Social skills

Physical active games for kids like me who can't see as well as others

They walked me through making friends and guess what while that happened I became

Friends with kids just like me

And that just goes to show you if you take them away you will leave me stranded with no friends like me and no achievements

Some of the skills that BESB has given to some of my new friends gave them the opportunity to go to college would like to have that same opportunity.

And moving BESB to a different agency will change all of the uniqueness of BESB

Please don't take these opportunities away from me

Respectfully

Alex Steinbrick