

6501

March 3, 2011

Dear Education Committee,

My son, Michael, is 11 years old and in 6th grade. He is a child any parent would feel blessed to call their own. He is easy-going, sociable, and witty and loves history and science. He is compassionate, conscientious and strives to be the best son and brother he can be. He sets a very high standard for himself and worries that his best is not good enough.

Teacher comments on Michael's report cards, and to me in person, praise his good behavior, enthusiasm and dedication and that he is a hard-working, caring student. His teachers also recognized and documented his difficulty with spelling, reading and writing since 1st grade. I began to express concerns about Michael's academic progress when he was in 2nd grade. His teachers' responses were that he had to practice more and to not rush through his assignments. This is a lot to ask of a child who, even though he is rushing to complete an assignment, still needs extra time to do the work that the other students have already completed. Michael's school days were a constant struggle to try to keep up with the rest of his class.

After expressing concerns about Michael's progress for 3 years, I formally referred him for Special Education eligibility on June 17, 2008. I asked how they would know if Michael might have learning disabilities and they told me that "he would show progressive deviation below grade level, but he may have a processing deficit". At my request, Michael was allowed to attend summer school, at which time a screening was done. The District held a PPT meeting on September 24, 2008 at which eligibility was denied. Michael then began to receive Tier II SRBI services. He continued to experience great anxiety and frustration with his inability to keep up with his peers. The school continued to give him Tiered services for over a year, but did not recommend Special Education services.

By November of 2009, I was extremely concerned with Michael's struggle with schoolwork and he was beginning to not like school because it was "too hard". I was very frustrated in my belief that the District was not acknowledging the severity of Michael's difficulties, nor were they meeting his educational needs. I was frantic to see him so exhausted, both physically and emotionally, in his struggle to try to keep up and meet the expectations of both his educators and himself, that he was starting to give up and that the only thing that was keeping him going was his drive to live up to what he thought was expected of him and to keep up with his classmates. I hired an Advocate to help me through the process of having Michael again, referred for Special Education services. Independent Educational Evaluations showed that Michael has several disabilities and was falling further and further behind. For example, as a 9 year old, 5th grader, Michael had the vocabulary of a 17 year old and the spelling skills of a 2nd grader. His IQ is in the Superior range.

Finally, on February 5, 2010, after over 1 ½ years of not responding to SRBI, Michael was found eligible for the Special Education services that he clearly needed, that I formally requested twice, and that Michael had been denied since September 2008.

Michael now has an IEP and is making progress. He still holds himself to a high standard and works diligently. But still, I wonder, where would he be now if he had been identified for Special Education services the first time I requested it? Or even earlier, when all his teachers recognized that he was struggling.

I was of the belief that the District was trained to recognize kids with learning problems.

I trusted them to provide my son with the resources he needed for a successful education. After all, that is what they are there for. And that is what the teachers and administrators tell the parents in their beginning-of-the-year speeches and letters.

I shouldn't have had to hire an Advocate for my son, to quote laws, timelines and procedures to the School District. But I'm so glad I did. I hope other families don't have to go through an experience like this. But they are and they will, unless children like Michael are assured early recognition and identification for Special Education services and not left in SRBI.

I ask you, please amend H.B. 6501 to specify that the SRBI process not delay a comprehensive evaluation or Special Education eligibility determination.

Thank you,

Kathleen Tsou

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