

New York, October 15, 2012

Members of The Commission:

I am a parent of twins, boy and a girl, who will be going to kindergarden next year. This is a transition that I am getting ready since January 2012, this is because my kids are currently receiving services through CPSE (Committee on Preschool Special Education). My boy is currently in an integrated classroom here at Bank Street Family Center, where he receives occupational, speech, and physical therapy as well as counseling and special education. My daughter on the other hand, is currently enrolled in a therapeutic nursery school at Child Development Center (part of JBFCS, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services) where she receives the same services plus music therapy.

This is a journey that my family started when the twins were infants. Thomas started receiving Early Intervention services when he was a month and a half old and my Maya when she was 13 months old. This was my inspiration to join the Statewide Early Intervention Coordinating Council last April, however, today I am here as a bilingual parent who is going through the arduous labor of finding the appropriated school for their kids within their school district.

At this point in our journey, I am being recommended that I should look into a couple of options, one of them is an ICT class for both of my kids. In one hand this is good news because it demonstrates that my kids are making great progress, thanks to their potential and all the intervention received so far, however, after the complete implementation of the Special Education Reform here in NYC and hearing from parents that are currently affected by this reform, I am scared of what will happen next year for my kids (I live in Harlem and our school district is D5, and our zone school is PS30. I visited the DOE web site, and the school progress report indicates the following grades for that school: Student Progress: C, Student Performance: D, Overall Score: C). The core of the reform is that a kid should receive their education in the less restricted environment in their zone school.

As you may know, this is a reform that was tested in some school for two years, unfortunately, there is not meaningful data available that measure the impact of this reform.

I was in the audience during the first meeting of this committee last June and it surprised me to see that this reform wasn't mentioned. Today, I want to take this opportunity to ask you to address in your recommendations how you envision the Special Education Reform will be included in The New NY Education Reform.

Another option that I considered was charter school. As a resident of Harlem and first time parent, I was enrolled in Harlem Children's Zone, I graduated from Baby College in 2008. I received the promise that my kids will be able to have access to a good quality of education. However, in our case, this is a broken promise. When I requested information about HCZ charter school (Promise Academy) I explained to them my kids' IEP's, the answer that I received is that I should consider other programs, so a charter school is not an option for us. After this experience, my perception of charter schools changed, I believe they do not want to take a chance to educate kids like mine, who may not have perfect scores in their test that will affect the overall score of the school and as a consequence their funding. The power of incentives is not the same for families with kids with special needs, in my case, my incentive is not a scholarship but rather to know that my kids will be receiving the appropriated services in a school that embraces them and accepts them.

My other option, and this is only for my daughter, is the ASD Nest Program. I learned about this program 3 years ago and I truly believe it is one of the few options that really works for kids like mine within the public system. This is an integrated Co-Teaching program for higher functioning children with Autism Spectrum Disorder that helps children learn how to function well academically, behaviorally and socially in schools and their community. Unfortunately, there are just a few schools that have this program and the ones that have the ASD NEST, only take 4 kids per class, so right now I am against the odds to find a place for my daughter.

I know that one of the goals of your Commission is to uncover successful models and strategies that will create significant savings while improving student achievement and providing a high-quality education, well ASD Nest is one of them. I encourage you to please look into this program and bring the experts who design it to the discussion so you will be able to hear from them directly.

Thank you,

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