

Senators:

My husband and I have a 17 yr old son, Ian, with autism. Ian is moderately involved and has some sporadic but extremely challenging behavior. From age 3 to 12 our son was in public school. We now home school. On Ian's educational team I have a 35 year retired teacher who we have had to train in the principals and application of ABA, a BCBA who is a doctoral candidate whose area of expertise is the reduction of challenging behavior and autism, and a Masters of Education, BCBA candidate. Ian gets 36 hours a week of 1 to 1 instruction in the home, community, and at his 2 job sites. We apply the principals of ABA to all we do. Data is collected on all objectives and graphed daily. All educational decisions are based upon best practices and hard data.

Some background:

From an early age Ian had severe temper tantrums. At age 4 a teacher wanted to hold his head to the desk to "teach him not to yell". She was not a mean teacher, she just was not well informed. At age 5 the restraints were started and he learned to bite. At age 6 he learned to run away. I would pick him up at school and judge the day by the volume of sticks and leaves in the teacher's hair. As time progressed and he got moved from teacher to teacher (15 in 10 years) and campuses (8 in 10 years), behavior got worse and worse. 1-person restraints turned into 3-person restraints, Ian would come home with blood shot eyes, bruises on his wrists, and broken veins on his chest from having his arms pulled criss crossed tightly across his chest in a seated or prone position. In retrospect, we are lucky he was not killed. Eventually, the school chose to build Ian his very own seclusion closet. To stop this we had to file for due process. Needless to say by this time, we did not have a positive relationship with the district.

My husband and I have no dog in this fight. There are no private school options for a student of Ian's age with Ian's needs here in Central Texas. When this bill passes we will still home school and pay for it out of our own pocket. But we strongly believe that families, and more importantly the growing numbers of children with autism, need this bill to pass. Families have got to have options to seek appropriate educational services for their children with autism.

I find it interesting that the very organizations that say they advocate for people with development disabilities are not willing to support this bill. It shows me that even these groups do not truly understand the uniqueness of autism and I am tired of the right thing not being done because it might set a precedent for something else down the road.

I am here to day because I have stayed connected to the autism community and too often I find other families have to fight the exact battles that me and others had to fight years before. Despite all the money that has been given to public education, despite all the small changes that may have been made over time, despite what we know about educating these students, the fact remains that public education is for the masses and it is not set up to deal with the educational uniqueness of many children with autism and too many kids are not getting the level of services they truly need.

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I know with every fiber of my being that if we would have had any options besides continuing to try to get the public school system to truly implement IDEA and provide a Free and Appropriate Education for our son, we could have saved ourselves, our son, and the school district years of misery and lots of money and our son would be so much further ahead than he is right now.

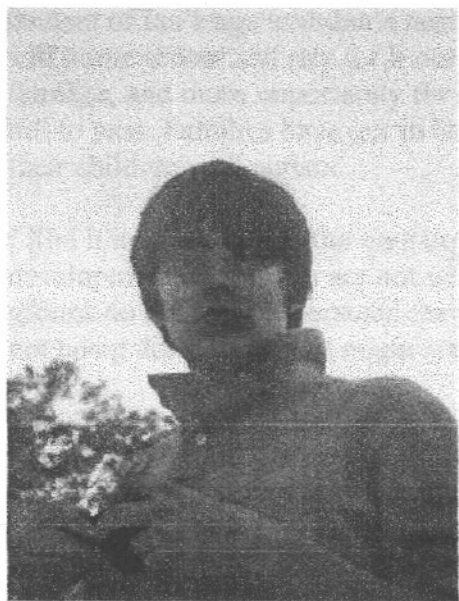
It is important to remember IDEA came about because kids like Ian were not getting any education services. Parents do not get hung up on procedural safeguards or the number of minutes of some service their child may or may not be getting unless they feel their child is not being adequately served. Most people I know would gladly give up a bus ride to have their child in a quality program. Most people I know will let the little things go to accomplish the bigger more important goals.

SB 1000 is about the child with autism who has very unique needs. It is about helping families meet their child's unique needs. SB 1000 is a win-win for ISD's that cannot and are not meeting the unique needs of some of their students with autism and for the child with autism.

Respectfully,

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Ian Schleiss, 2006 age 16

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