March 27, 2007

My name is William Cox, I live in Plano, Texas. My son Christopher is eight years old and is on the autistic spectrum. He is now in the third grade and attends a private school. In spite of the efforts made by the public school and our county's Early Childhood Intervention program it has always been necessary for Christopher to have a number of services in addition to what our school district and local ECI could provide in order for him to make adequate progress in school. The cost of these additional services has only been partially covered by our health insurance and some not at all. We have found it necessary to place our son in a private school so that he can learn in a smaller classroom setting. And it has been successful. He is now able to work on an independent level, where as in the public school he had to work with the assistance of an aide who does not even have a degree in education, nor any special education teaching. At his private school, because they understand the needs of children on the spectrum, he is able to have sensory breaks in a specialized gym area during his day, he is able to have speech as well as occupational therapy from the private sector during his school day so that he does not have to go to school all day then go to therapy, which is exhausting for a little boy his age. I believe that if our public school cannot provide the academic setting that our child needs to have the same chance as other children to learn but a private school is able to provide this then it is reasonable and appropriate that the funds which would have been provided to his public school instead be used where they will benefit him most.

I was educated in the Texas public schools, my daughter now attends public school, and I believe strongly that excellent public schools are vital to our state. Nevertheless as a parent my first priority is to try to meet the unique individual needs of my children and I believe that our legislature should do all it can to meet the educational needs of all Texas children. I understand that some may be opposed to using public funds for a private institution. However as a practicing physician I see daily how well public funding is put to good use in providing medical care at private facilities. Medicare and Medicaid funds are used to provide care for individual patients regardless of whether that care is provided at a public or private institution. Government resources fund vital research also without regard to whether the institution is public or private. In the same way if public funds are intended to provide education for an individual child and if that child's special needs are such that there education cannot be provided adequately at a public school but can be provided best at a private school then I believe the funding should go to the institution which can best meet those special needs.

By the way, our son wants to by a doctor when he grows up so that he can take care of children. He wants to work at Children's Medical Center in Dallas. Because we were able to get him early intervention we believe he has a chance at this. We urge you to support SB1000, so that our son will continue to have a chance at his dream.

William F. Cox
8413 Orchard Hill
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YAHOO! MAIL

Print - Close Window

Date: Sat, 24 Mar 2007 11:11:42 -0700 (PDT)

From: "Michael Gorlano" <mgorlano@sbcglobal.net>

Subject: My Michael

To: "bianca" <coxw@sbcglobal.net>

Hi, my name is Randy Gorlano, I am now a Texas resident but I am originally from New York. My dear friend Bianca Cox has asked me to participate, and write to you.

of Course, at this point where do I start?

After 9/11 my family (in 2004) came to Texas, when looking where to live we were told that Plano is the place. I was assured that my son Michael would receive all the help he needed. I came here to fine a school and a place to live. I was again told that Plano had the best schools and would meet all of his needs. My son Michael is now 10 years old and is P.D.D. (pervasive developmental disorder) which some believe to be on the autistic spectrum, he is classified as autistic here in Texas. Texas has a label problem. In New York when he was school age, he was classified as Multiply disabled. I was informed that he will be in an inter grated class with others like him and regular ed kids, this was one of my greatest fears, since he came from a special education class in regular public school. He attended a private special education day school from the age 2 till kindergarten, and then went into a special ed class in the public school My district paid for the special school after he aged out of early intervention.

The school he attended in New York had an Occupational Therapist at the school, as most do, they had some equipment, the districts OT services addressed fine motor and sensory processing concerns but the school did not have swings and other balancing equipment. Michael needed a sensory gym and the committee on Special Education agreed that outside OT was instrumental in facilitating his ability to process his environment and respond accordingly, it was for that this reason we were approved external OT services 2 times per week for 30 minutes that the district paid for. I also received extra speech, and a S.E.I.T. (special education itinerant teacher) who came to my house 2 times per week to tutor Michael, again paid by the district. When Michael needed to to reevaluated after being diagnosed only at the age of 2 my district paid for a Neuropsycoligical evaluation and report. Needless to say, I got excellent service from my district for my son.

I moved here to Texas and receive no service at all outside of school. Michael is in a regular ed class with an aid to help him when needed, he goes to resource room and receives OT in school which is really nothing. An occupational therapist comes to the school once a week and sees how many kids??????? and works individually with each child for how long????? As long as it it stated on the IEP but how much OT can you get with no equipment. Minimal, Not enough, that is so unacceptable. My son like so many other kids need REAL occupational therapy, swinging, brushing, vestibular and proprioceptive input etc. Outside of school I pay for Occupational Therapy. There are NO outside services paid for by the distric. or state.

I presently do not have medical insurance because in the state of Texas insurance companies will not cover autistic children, so we were told to try some kind of Risk Pool, and or Medicare. I am drowning here, I left my child's whole world behind, unbeknownst to me this would be a nightmare.

My son, also does not talk to anyone, he is not social, and like most has problems socially. The school would like to do a social skills program with him, but frankly I do not think they know what is a real social skills group. In New York we qualified for a social skills group that meets once a week by a professional social skills person, NOT a teacher who attended a workshop for an afternoon on "social skills for the autistic child" - I have no idea what they are planning to do but I am now seeking a social skills group, which I will have to also pay for.

The teachers in the school are great, but can't say a word to you about what the children need, the are under some kind of gag order. If I did not have the professionals, and all the teachers that have helped along the way I don't know where I would be at today.

I cry all the time about the lack of service here I have ulcers and I will go broke soon trying to pay for all he needs, so I have to give him the absolute minimum. Why should my child suffer here?????????? This is America, This is the year 2007, wake up Texas we need services for our kids. The are our future voters! These are the professionals of the future.

I suffer with many, for the lack of...........

My son goes to a great school, they really care about him, but it is not enough. I truly believe that if I came here when he was 3 I would be so much worse off, but I feel worse off as it is.

As for extended school year, this is nonsense, this should be free of charge for any child with an IEP. The criteria for this is cruel, my son loves school and comes back from a vacation, I am sure losing academics, but as long as he has a big smile on his face he will not qualify for ESY in the state of Texas. What a shame. In New York, anyone with an IEP goes to school from the start of the school year throughout the summer,

everyday, and receives services as well. Some districts even have set up a special summer program where after the academics are finished the kids are like in a camp, they go swimming do arts and crafts, play ball, all for a minimal fee, but ESY is paid for by the district. ESY is not for 4 weeks in the summer it is for the WHOLE summer with a brief vacation before school starts.
Every child deserves a free and appropriate education, key word is appropriate. You must provide help for these kids so that they will learn how to lead a normal life. Is this the best you can do????? I don't think so.
I hope you get my message.
Did you hear that 1 out of every 94 boys will be diagnosed with autism in the coming year, still want to not give needed service for our children? Surely, hoping your not waiting till it is 1 out of every 5.
What happended to no child left behind, why are our children being left behind????

I don't think that I can join you in Austin, but please try to help your children and mine. From the bottom of my heart, thank you so much. My sincerest regards to you all. Randy Gorlano