



From the Desk of
Jennifer Cinelli-Miller

September 8, 2014

Dear Lt. Governor Denn,

I want to start by thanking you for all you have done for the Special Education services in Delaware. I was unable to attend the first IEP Taskforce meeting but will certainly try to be at future meetings. My experiences with Special Education in Delaware for my daughter with Autism have been both frustrating and rewarding.

The beginning is always the hardest step. Transitioning from Child Watch - who failed to identify my child, to the school district - who tried to refuse services I requested was horrific. I was fortunate enough to find an attorney that was well versed in Special Education services who started to attend my child's IEP meetings. Since then, I have been able to obtain services for my daughter by just mentioning running it by my attorney. It's unfortunate that it has to come to that. What about the parents that can't afford an attorney? Or the parents who don't understand the laws? Or the parent's who don't speak English and a translator isn't provided?

For all of those reasons, I volunteered to participate in the University of Delaware's Statewide Autism Plan, specifically as a parent participant on the Autism Education Planning Committee. In my opinion, one of Delaware's biggest issues in Special Education is the lack of knowledge and skills educators - from paraprofessionals to Administrators - have in being able to work with children with special needs in an inclusive environment. I found more often than not that I knew quite a bit more about services and educational tools for my child than anyone in the district did. I would forward materials and information to my child's teachers and providers in hopes that they would have a better understanding of her disability and needs. Last year was the first year I actually felt the teacher got it and we were fortunate that this teacher looped up to the next grade to stay with my child. This teacher is the perfect example of the educators that should be the leaders in the quest for better training and understanding of working with special needs children in an inclusive environment.

Another prevalent issue across the state is lack of consistent services for children with similar

needs. If my high functioning child with Autism is provided an iPad – why isn't the child across the street from us who has similar needs provided the same when he is in the same district? Additionally, districts try to use materials such as rubrics, not authorized by the state, to determine if services are appropriate. In my opinion this is an attempt to deny services to children. You attended the launch of the plan crafted through the University of Delaware and were so eloquent in your statements about special education in this state. I am hopeful that the tool that was crafted – ***Blueprint for Collective Action*** which can be found here: <http://www.udel.edu/udaily/2014/jul/cds-autism-072913.html> will be a useful tool for this taskforce and in the final report out. I am willing to provide any help I can to you, your office or this taskforce to make sure all special needs children are provided with the “Cadillac” of services in this state.

Warmest regards,

Jennifer Cinelli-Miller