

August 18th, 2008.

## **The effectiveness of Public School Services for Special Education students with autism.**

Honorable Senate Education Committee:

We are parents of Nora. She is a 4 year old autistic girl.

At the beginning of a child's life there is a short window of learning opportunity in which great changes can be effected. To effect similar change later in a child's life requires a much greater effort.

Autism magnifies the need to take advantage of this early learning period – every minute of it. An autistic child needs structured learning environments year 'round, not only during the traditional nine-month school year. In the life of a three-year-old autistic child, three months of lost time is equivalent to a lost year later in life. Constant structure is also crucial in getting results from an autistic child. When you introduce big changes, such as the transitions out of and into the nine-month school year, it can often take a month or more for the child to adjust to the change. These disruptions hinder learning. They eat up that vital early learning opportunity.

Because of this it is very import that the State of Texas support having school year 'round with a consistent environment for young autistic children. The State will be rewarded later on by having to spend less money on adults who can't take care of themselves.

Teacher and parent training are of equal importance to year 'round schooling. What ever approach is taken, be it Hannen, DIR-floortime or ABA, the parents and teachers need to create a consistent approach so the child is not pulled in multiple directions. If the parents are doing it one way, and the teachers another, the child will learn nothing.

Finally, just like you can't throw most people into the deep end of a pool and expect them to learn to swim, you can't throw an autistic child into a class with multiple students and expect him to learn. Autistic children need to start off learning in one on one interaction. Then they can move to one to some, and finally, to one to many. One on one time is very important. It should be increased and not reduced.

Thank you very much for taking the time to read our statement.

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