

## **Autism Institutes – SB 100 – Lucio**

### **02.24.09 – E1.028**

Clay Boatright, wife and I live in Plano, three daughters

- Typically developing 12 year old, 8 year old identical twins with severe autism and other developmental disabilities.
- President of The Arc of Dallas, board of directors for The Arc of Texas.

This is an excellent bill, and my daughters can prove it.

When Paige and Mia entered Kindergarten, we immediately knew there were problems:

- It seemed as though their teachers were grasping at straws on how to teach them, <sup>and</sup> They seemed to be making it up as they went along.
- There was very little organization, the teachers were frustrated, we were frustrated, and our children were not progressing.

Six months into the year, their principal called and told us about a new program which had recently opened at an elementary school two miles away:

- As a special needs parent, my defense mechanisms went up, and I asked why her school could not teach my children
- She told me that this new program had teachers specifically trained on teaching kids with severe autism, and asked that we consider it.

Out of professional courtesy, my wife and I visited the program:

- Within one minute of walking in the door, we knew this was the right place for our kids.
- The teachers were confident in working with the students.
- When something didn't work, they had a Plan B and Plan C already defined as alternatives

As a result, our children have flourished in this program

- We believe the ELC program at Saigling Elementary is the platinum standard for teaching kids with severe autism
- It is due to the focused training their teachers and paraprofessionals have received.

Including the paraprofessionals is vitally important.

- Until this year, our twins teachers received training, who were then responsible for training the rest of the team.
- Today, their paraprofessionals are receiving training specifically for them, thus developing the unique skills they need.

As these institutes are activated in every district, I hope:

- There are requirements on who should attend
- Accountability metrics for the state commissioner, districts, and teachers on utilization of these institutes.

~~The point is that~~ matching students with unique learning differences, with teachers trained to deal with those specific differences, is the formula for success of any child.

Thank you for your time.