

May 21, 2019

Dear Task Force on Bullying Members:

The ACLU of Kansas reports that while our disabled children, (kids with IEPs) make up nine percent of state enrollment, they account for 30% of school arrests. This information was taken from the 2015-2016 data from the U.S. Department of Education's Civil Rights Office and I write to advocate for this vulnerable population as two of my children had IEPs and were bullied by their peers and teachers in USD 501 elementary schools.

My youngest was born with severe Apraxia of Speech. In his tender years, other than attacks from his peers, one teacher laughed at his reading in the classroom, then had the nerve to send him to the principal's office when my son refused to read one day. The teacher claimed that my son was being 'insubordinate.' It hurts too much to recount all of their experiences, but please know that when our children suffer, parents suffer too.

I humbly submit for your consideration a couple of ideas that might promote diversity in the classroom and keep these children from acting out later from a place of hurt and betrayal. I support tactics that use a team approach, foster peer relationships and help students develop empathy such as:

- Engaging students in developing high-interest activities in which everyone has a role to play in designing, executing or participating in the activity.
- Providing general up-front information to peers about the kinds of support children with special needs require, and have adults facilitate peer support.
- Create a buddy system for children with special needs. Involving students in adaptive strategies in the classroom so that they participate in assisting and understanding the needs of others.
- Conducting team-based learning activities and rotate student groupings.
- Implementing social-emotional learning activities.
- Rewarding positive, helpful, inclusive behavior.

As nearly half of our student population qualifies for free or reduced lunches, I appreciate that their parents might be struggling and have a great respect for the

teachers and ancillary staff that are picking up on their needs. However, I also wanted to share that the abuse at the hands of peers and teachers at this young age requires years of psychological therapy to recover from. Please consider the above thoughts to help these kids and thank you.

Sincerely,

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