

Chair Brenner, Vice Chair O'Brien, Ranking Member Ingram, and members of the Senate Education Committee, I bring you greetings From Cincinnati, Ohio.

I'll never forget a particular day that I sat across the table from the Head of Student Services at my local school district at my daughter's IEP meeting. My daughter had been using the One of the amazing Ohio Ed Choice Scholarship to attend St Rita's School for the Deaf in Cincinnati for a few years, and this administrator was trying to convince me that my daughter, Hannah, could receive a better education at her public school.

One of the diagnosis' my Hannah has been assigned is Apraxia. St. Rita's has the ONLY Apraxia Specific education program in the United States. Several of Hannah's classmate had moved their families from other area, such as Illinois, Mississippi, New Jersey and California, to bring their children to this school for this reason.

By this time Hannah was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. There were 5 kids in her class total. There were around 180 students from pre-k to age 21 in the entire school.

My local public school had over 700 students for grades 3 and 4.

Because St. Rita's is also known for educating children with hearing loss, all children and staff used American Sign Language in addition to speaking vocally if they were able to. Not only did this help with their learning by having an additional pathway to their brain to obtain and express learning and knowledge, ASL is a marketable skill in adulthood.

Every student at St Rita was in the same boat, so to speak. All of the children needed speech, OT and intervention services. All of the children were dealing with some type of disability that affected their learning. Because of this, students were not made to feel different, and bullying was almost non-existent.

Every member of the faculty and staff were highly trained and experienced to deal with children diagnosed with special needs.

Beyond that, because St. Rita's is a Catholic school, books, materials, curriculum or other items that featured non-Christian ideologies that went against my values were not permitted.

Keep in mind, I am not Catholic, so I do not agree with some of the religious teaching at St. Rita. I am not a mother that is intolerant to other religious views, nor am I one desiring to shield my children from other view-points. However, there is a major difference between differing Christian ideas, versus the anti-Christian ideologies being pushed in public education today.

This Student Services director asked me to come to my local public school so that she could show me what they were offering for my daughter's education. I took her up on her request. On the day we arrived for our tour, I was to meet with an intervention specialist. Upon my arrival, we were made to wait for a long time. This was because she had forgotten we were

coming. From our conversation, I quickly became aware that this lady had not read my daughter's IEP. She had no idea what kind of services my daughter would need, and was ill-prepared.

We began to tour this school and she explained to me that my daughter would likely be put in a classroom with 28-30 students with 1 teacher and 1 aid. That this school did project-based learning. She explained that meant they combine 2 classrooms, and put children in groups of 5-6 students to work on projects together, with the teachers and aids over seeing their work.

So now we are talking 50-60 students combined to work on projects together, and my daughter in one group that is the size of her entire class at St. Rita.

She went on to explain that my daughter would be pulled out of class and put in the resource room for small group education. This resource room had 10-14 students, which was their idea of a small group. This room had temporary divider walls that was only half way to the ceiling. On the other side of the room were 17-20 English as a Second Language students.

The other wall to this space was a floor to ceiling glass wall. On the other side of the glass wall was the library with about 30 students in there. From what I could see, being quiet in the library was not required, so you had 30 students in grade 3-4 who were essentially hanging out and/or playing video game on the other side of a glass wall.

Now imagine my daughter, who is also diagnosed with ADHD, Auditory, Visual and Sensory Processing disorder, mild autism, and cognitive delay, among other things, sitting in a room sandwiched between these two spaces be expected to focus and learn in that environment.

For brevity, I will not describe what I saw when she showed me the autism unit and psychiatric unit, but to say it was disheartening is an understatement.

I will also not go into the dilapidated condition of the building because they have since built a new building by forcing yet another tax levy through. My district has the highest local taxes for one of the lowest performing public school districts in Hamilton County and all of Ohio.

Rarely in my life have I felt the level of rage and heartbreak that I felt as I walked out of that public school that day. My heart was broken for all of the children, but especially broken for those children with special needs who were not receiving the education, attention or love they were entitled to. My heart was broken knowing that many, if not all of the parents of those children were unaware that they had a way to escape that situation through Ohio's School Choice funding.

I was astonished and dumbfounded that anyone put in a position to oversee the education of children with special needs would look me in the eye, and tell me with utmost confidence that their system could provide a better education than the one my daughter was already receiving.

But most of all, I was incredibly grateful that Hannah and my family was not trapped in that situation because we had access to Ohio's school choice funding.

Because of the freedom that School Choice provides, this school year we were able to move Hannah to Cincinnati Christian Schools. This give her the amazing opportunity to attend the same school her brother graduated from, and be educated in an environment with "typical" peers. This has greatly helped Hannah's emotional and spiritual growth.

Because school choice funding has been made available to more Ohioans, CCS has prioritized creating programs for children with disabilities from high function ADHD, all the way to a small specialized class room environment for children with higher needs like Hannah.

Because School Choice funding is available, the board and administrative leadership at CCS have prioritized making Christian Education available to children with financial need, as well as children with special needs, giving an incredible opportunity to make Cincinnati Christian Schools a significantly more inclusive environment for all!