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Sent: Thursday, February 16, 2017 9:02 PM
To: Office of the Legislative Counsel; Brendan Maguire; Brendan Maguire
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Subject: Gifted Education in the current climate

Hello,

I wish the Legislature were allowing more time for input. I wish I could address my concerns as a parent in person.

I have a Gifted child. I have a child with disabilities. My Gifted child has disabilities.

My child does not have ADHD or fall somewhere on the Autism Spectrum. My son has several small, almost insignificant issues that combined, slow him down but don't stop him. Fifty years ago he would have been a target for bullies - he limps, wore glasses and had eye surgery, and has a "grapho-motor deficit" (a fancy way of saying he has the handwriting of a doctor). Worse, he knows the answers to all the questions, making him a know-it-all and the teacher's pet...unforgivable!

It was identified by Resource and his teacher in kindergarden that something was out of sync. It was suggested that he be tested, but then every year from primary onward he was "bumped" by more urgent cases, and the travelling school psychologist tested the "more needy students." After all, my son was reading, and understood the necessary math concepts, and more importantly, was not disrupting the class. I finally spent my tax refund paying for a private psycho-educational assessment because the school board or the school or the province (I'm still not clear upon whom the burden falls) did not have the resources to test my son.

My son tested in the 99th percentile for his cognitive abilities, but for his grapho-motor he fell into the 8th percentile. This meant extra work for the teacher, Resource and the school because my son requires an "enriched" curriculum (laid out on the provincial education website) as well as technological support and resource for his poor fine motor skills - he can't write down a fraction of what he's thinking as fast he can think it. And the school promised, on behalf of the teachers he would have from then on, to provide all of this.

He used his birthday, Christmas and another birthday's money to buy his own laptop when it became clear that him having a dedicated school laptop meant the other children had to give up time on the computer - not the path to popularity. However, when will any teacher find the time to make a more challenging, electronic-appropriate version of the curriculum for one student? Before entering data, photocopying, attending assessment meetings for other students or after putting their own kids to bed?

I wish there were a way to show you what a Gifted child, unsupported, experiences in the classroom. But, maybe you already know? Have you worked the late shift in a fast food restaurant when there are hardly any customers? Have you cleaned rooms in a hotel? Ever been the bottom-most clerk in an office? When there's no surface left to clean and no more cups to stack...you've stripped fifteen beds and there are twenty more to go...there's a project coming up and they need a hundred copies of the training manual, all put in binders...? Not the kind of work where you can wander off, or pull out your phone and zone out (if you want to keep your job) but modern day drudgery.

So in a classroom where the teacher must allow seventy minutes to teach a math class in order to reach the struggling learners, what does the Gifted child do with sixty minutes he does not need? Ten more problem sheets than everyone else? Or if the classroom is disrupted more severely than usual due to an ill Educational Assistant, requiring more of the teacher's attention and resources, does the Gifted child grab a book and go read in the corner?

Why would my child deserve less of the teacher's time than any other student? If it's only about reaching levels, why can't a Gifted student simply test their way right out of elementary school? That almost seems more practical than what teachers are expected to do. It would definitely be cheaper for the province, if terrible for the student.

But then, why should he spend time in class without learning?

Whether it's a broken car, leg or photocopier, fixing it costs money. If the province can't provide the services promised in the Education Act at the financial rate of twenty years ago, maybe that just makes sense, and the government needs to reevaluate the budget.

Maybe we can't afford to loan corporations money if it means that we have to shift the cost to education.

Thank you,

Barb Burns-Bahadur