

To the Integration task force:

Here is a summary of the statement I gave on Tuesday January 10th. What follows should be bit less emotional than I was during my testimony. (In my defense, I'd just left the funeral of a family member). I thank you for the energy and time spent to help our children.

I was grew up in the St. Paul Public school system in the Midway area from K through 5th grades. I am currently a practicing dentist in the Twin Cities. My husband spent K-12 in the Moundsview school system and now is a professor of physics in the MNSCU system. We understand how important a good education is to a productive life.

The main issue begins with confusion regarding the definition of "integration". EMID has a unique environment that is not duplicated in the twin city area. The specialized training of the staff in both schools has led to a very interesting byproduct. The schools have moved from basic racial integration to a more expansive definition that includes children from different environments and abilities. There is an expectation of success, with college bound goals for all students.

My son is an example of a child with a unique learning situation. He joined Crosswinds in 7th grade of this year. The year-round option for him is ideal. He has reading issues and has needed moderate support in the past to keep up with his class. He utilizes private tutors and has been approved for targeted services throughout his elementary years to keep on task. The option of a nurturing, year-round school is perfect for him. He will actually get to take smaller breaks throughout the year instead of going from the school year into summer school. The school calendar also provides breaks for his main support system (his parents!!). I'd happily send him to a private school, but his IEP and reading issues make that nearly impossible. I finally feel as if he will be able to learn to his potential at Crosswinds.

At the beginning of the year I was hoping for an overall improvement in my son's grades, understanding of the classes he was taking, and demeanor. Additionally, I was hoping that his IEP needs would stabilize or decrease. I was hopeful that I would notice a change by the end of the year. Instead, the EMID schools integrated methods of teaching have made Austin feel like a normal kid. His reading and learning disabilities have been addressed and are monitored. There has been a confirmation of Dyslexia and we are moving forward. Last year his grades were barely in the "C" range (and he really should have been held back). Half way through the second term he has all A's and B's. He is engaging in his classes and tells me that he is smart. He is starting to talk about going to college. You need to look at the CHANGE in scores and grades for these kids. I really think many of these kids are high risk for dropping out or becoming statistics. EMID is helping them see a road that leads to a productive life. I believe the training the integrated teachers receive is critical to the success behind why kids that learn differently are successful in EMID model. Crosswinds has already made him a success. What more can they do in the 3 years he has left? We need to find a way to make the EMID system succeed.

I also ask you to think about why any parent would have their child spend an hour commute if there was any other choice.

Again, thank you for your time,

-Jennifer

Dr. Jennifer Marker Johnson