

March 15, 2017

Sarah Brentano-Woodley, *Sublimity*



(Caroline at recess, March 2017- Sublimity Elementary)

My beautiful and brilliantly blue-eyed 6 yo daughter, Caroline, experiences cri du chat syndrome as well as autism spectrum disorder.

Sweet Caroline has a mountain of obstacles she faces daily-

- sleep apnea
- low muscle tone
- sensory difficulties
- Mobility constraints
- g-tube in her stomach for nutrition
- non-verbal
- ODE - "High Need" Category, of which, less than 4% of children receive the service level that is required for benefit.

From age 3-5, caroline was bussed 30 minutes from home to Willamette ESD specialized preschool in salem where she received only 5.5 hours of school per week

-Last year (2015-2016), moved to Aumsville Specialized Preschool

-with limited service levels, Individual Family Service Plan goals unmet and repeating year after year

-New skills not being learned, regressing in areas

-Denied access to typical peers

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- being set up for failure in future classrooms
- Can't tell you how many IFSP meetings I cried through, begging for more hours and services and was denied time after time.
- Caroline deserves the same educational opportunities as any of her peers, and she wasn't getting them.

In January 2016, feeling desperate, hopeless and frustrated, I wrote a letter to Dr. Novotney, superintendent of the Willamette ESD, and requested that Caroline's services be immediately brought to the standard level set forth by the Oregon Department of Education.

-My letter included:

- the enormous list of repetitive and/or reduced goals since the beginning of C's preschool career
- Caroline's limited and blatantly insufficient service level
- And a request for tuition to be paid at typical preschool during days/times not in specialized PreK

WED, Feb 17, 2016 Caroline's first day at Fruitland Elementary in Salem

- 3x/week, tripling her service level, giving her access to typical peers
- The dual enrollment scenario brought Caroline's service level to a standard in which she could develop necessary skills, build stamina and socialize with typically developing peers.

On May 5, 2016, not even 3 months after Caroline's service level increase, I wrote a thank you and update letter to Dr. Novotney and I'd like to read you a little excerpt.

-"Since Caroline received an increase in her services and began attending Fruitland Elementary, we have seen a dramatic increase in her skills and a true blossoming of our sweet girl. She went from never using a walker to walking 40 feet or more in one bout; She started using her Dynavox and communicating with it every day; She is more socially engaged; She is experimenting with new textures and foods; And she is accomplishing tasks and doing things that, as her parents, we only dreamed about."

2016-2017 school year

- now in general ed, full day K in her community school of Sub Ele
- taking independent steps
- sitting at the table and having snack with peers
- participating* in circle time
- working on colors, letters, numbers
- signing, verbalizing so much that dynavox is no longer needed
- She was even named the February Kindergarten Student of the Month for Self Control.

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Without Caroline's increased service level, she never would have been prepared for or accepted in general ed. Kindergarten. She is finally receiving an education with her local peers. These peers will be the same ones standing at Caroline's side *representing* her and helping her with the engagement of her rights in the future. They will also be the ones working alongside her when she enters the workforce and participates in the many community efforts and events that are in her future. I want Caroline's peers to connect with her on a personal level and to know her and her loving capabilities that she brings to their community." I am so thrilled that Caroline will have the opportunity to do all of those things.

Our sweet Caroline will accomplish amazing things in her life that will positively and dramatically impact others, and her educational experience finally supports this, but the road wasn't easy and I am continually having to advocate for her rights. Children with the highest level of need receive the least amount of support, yet are held to the highest standard. It is time for this failure to provide a free and appropriate public education to our state's youngest and most vulnerable citizens to come to an end.