



THE KNOWLEDGE WE GAINED GAVE US THE COURAGE WE NEEDED TO FACE A ROOM FULL OF PEOPLE

I am so grateful for Families Helping Families of Greater New Orleans (FHF) and our advocate and new friend Nicole Desroche. Our family lives in Northeast Louisiana. Jack our son has autism and he is mainstreaming virtually during this pandemic.

Jack had thirty-one accommodations/modifications last year, but this year the IEP team decided he would only have nine accommodations/modifications. We were not aware of this change until we received a copy of his IEP. The school said it was because of parent preference of virtual learning we could not receive FAPE. We knew this was not right but felt powerless.

One day after listening to a webinar from FHF about ambitious IEP goals, I decided to reach out to them. Nicole called us and said that she could help. She said I was not alone and it just felt so good to hear that. I did feel so alone and I was in tears when she said that. She understood autism and the needs that came with it because she has experience with her son. We talked for many days and hours. I was emotional and Nicole supported me with all of my anxieties. She informed us that FAPE is an unbreakable promise made by Congress even during a pandemic. She sent me information and went over all of our paperwork. She helped us with preparing for our meeting and she gave us the knowledge to be able to have the courage to face a room full of people.

We had our IEP meeting by Zoom and she was there with us. When we had a question during the meeting, we would turn to Nicole and ask her. She also explained to the team concerns we were not able to express. She was there to support us and to show the respect the IEP team should give to parents. Our meeting was long and contentious, but we were able to get all of Jack's supports back into place.

When you stand up for something you believe in and for someone you love with all your heart, you feel so empowered. Having the knowledge and confidence to be prepared made all the difference. This IEP meeting was the first of many, but without the help of Nicole and the wonderful organization of FHF, my son would still not be receiving the support that he needed in school.

Our story is not over and we have many more meetings to follow, but we now have the guidance to get Jack where he needs to be. Nicole is a brilliant and lovely person. She has the knowledge and passion for helping others. She has influenced our lives and helped change Jack's path as he makes his way through on his own.

Our family is forever grateful.

Alicia Mayeaux

