



WILLIAM

Learning the Ropes and Regulations

I am a parent of an amazing seven-year-old high-functioning autistic boy, William. He loves to work on computers and code games. His knowledge in these areas surpasses most adults. I'm almost apt to say he has a dual exceptionality, making it difficult to acknowledge other areas of developmental delay.

William has been within the State system for developmental delays since 19 months of age. Upon entering school he was granted an Individualized Educational Plan at three years of age and things seemed great. Two years later, with a change in administration and school personnel, things become turbulent. We were not seeing eye-to-eye with the IEP team and services were being removed without parent input. I'm not a child psychologist, a therapist, or even a trained advocate. As a parent, I knew things weren't right, I began to watch him regress and struggle psychologically with massive anxiety. He begged not to go to school, developed phobias, isolated himself socially and basic daily living skills began to suffer ultimately leading to medical problems. Those problems spilled over into school causing some dire circumstances.

When we had to go into the IEP meetings, it was intimidating to sit across from four to six persons with whom I had lost trust. I was at my wit's end. I knew what I was being told wasn't right, I knew William was being written off. I made arrangements for expensive outside testing only to be told by the school they would not accept anything outside their own assessments. I was deflated being at the mercy of the IEP school representatives and felt I was failing my son as a parent.

I had heard of Families Helping Families from the owner of a local business. I reached out to Ms. Laura Nata at FHF of GNO. She was a blessing. I was fortunate to have a background in navigating regulations, but I didn't know anything about Federal and State regulations associated with the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Ms. Nata was brilliant at helping me navigate the rules, understanding the background of the persons on the IEP team, and when to seek the assistance of others within the school system.

The last IEP meeting was a completely different tone, as I am hopeful now that we are on a corrected course of maintaining services for William to ensure his successful development. While retaining what therapy services we have, we are now getting a re-evaluation for removed services, a health plan is in place, an increase in special instruction, and the addition of psychological and counseling support. I no longer sit at the IEP meeting feeling at a loss. I have learned to educate myself on the very rules they use to push back for needed services. I don't dread the meetings now, I feel empowered and blessed that I can be an effective advocate for William. I cannot thank Ms. Nata and FHF of GNO enough for their time and support.

St. Charles Parish Resident