

June 4, 2013

My name is Jennifer Karls and I am speaking this afternoon on behalf of the Bellevue Special Needs PTA Board of Directors.

Over this past school year I have made statements on behalf of the Bellevue Special Needs PTA and it's board of directors. We have submitted written input on a variety of topics that impact special education and all children in our district. We appreciate the opportunity to provide input to the school board and school district. We are also appreciative of the study that has been conducted and look forward to those results being presented at the next school board meeting.

I do want to be clear, that the BSNPTA Board of Directors, our members, now numbering at 120, and the greater parent community of children with special needs, continues to have significant concerns around the education and services that their children are receiving. To date we have not seen any discernable system wide changes to issues that we have brought to the forefront. Many issues that are in direct violation of IDEA, the nation's federal special education law, continue to be brought to our attention across the district in various schools. We hope that the study will address most, if not all, of these concerns. Over the summer we must begin to understand how systemic problems are going to be fixed and see significant movement in the district to make changes and improve practices.

In the event that the study does not encompass all of the issues of our parent community, the BSNPTA Board is also preparing a report based on our work over the past year. We need to be certain that all of these issues are clearly stated and documented as being brought to your attention. We feel confident in the ability of the PCG staff and it is our hope that all of the concerns will be addressed in the PCG report. I am sure you can understand that these are our children's lives. The quality and appropriateness of their education has a direct impact on their outcomes in school and in life. Yet another lost year is simply not acceptable.

You may also understand that when I hear the report of Instructional Initiatives, a 5-year strategic plan for the district, that seems to largely neglect to address the education of the 2000 students in special education in the district, I do not feel particularly confident that the education of these students is being thoughtfully considered. When a school board member remarks that students in special education do not seem to be represented in the report, the response that followed did not cause me to believe that the oversight would be corrected. These children that are being overlooked, some completely, are part of the ALL or EACH AND EVERY statements that you and the Bellevue School District administration make so often. I find this so disappointing and frustrating and personal as my daughter is one of the children left out. You might imagine that this shakes my confidence of real change occurring when even with all the conversations and attention on special education that we have brought to you, we still sit through presentations and conversations where special education is left out or set aside.

I sat in this room and listened as you contemplate interventions for an 11 year who may be prepared to take high school courses and how the district would accommodate and provide intervention that may be needed. In the same week at another district meeting the parent of a 6 year old, concerned about appropriate academic goals for her child on an IEP, is told maybe she shouldn't be so concerned because there are ways to get around being able to read when her child is older. That comparison may illistrate for you more specifically why my confidence is shaken.

We have been assured that change is coming and the BSNPTA has been patient in waiting for the study work to be done so that change can be implemented in a thoughtful manner. Please know that our expectation is that significant progress will be made in the coming months. We will be more than happy to support that change in any way possible. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with Dr. Mills and the Special Services Department to be sure that positive changes are taking place and that we will see real progress and growth for our children receiving special education and accommodations through 504 plans.

What our families need is to be able to trust the Bellevue school district and the special education department. Being honest, transparent, and respectful is a good place to start. You have heard of some stories from families as to how the lack of services and challenges with their child's IEP has impacted their family. For each story you heard, there are many more just like it that we have heard. School should first do no harm, and right now that is not the case for far too many children. I respectfully request that there is a great deal of thoughtful consideration of the impending PCG report and the need to move us forward in providing an exemplary education for Each and Every child.