

Thank you Senator for filing SB124. I support your efforts to study how we can effectively educate children with autism in Texas. I am here today from Allen, TX and I brought with me almost 100 letters of support from all around Texas. The autism community is proud to have your proactive interest in the education of these special children.



My son Mason who you see in this picture is six. He began public school when he was 3 yrs old. His first year was in a preschool program for children with disabilities or PPCD in Dallas ISD and unfortunately he did not accomplish a single objective on his Individual Education Plan. That summer we hired a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) to come into our house and educate us on Applied Behavior Analysis or ABA. The text book definition of ABA is the science in which procedures derived from the principles of behavior are systematically applied to improve socially significant behavior to a meaningful degree and to demonstrate experimentally that the procedures employed were responsible for the improvement in behavior. We had no idea what to expect from Applied Behavior Analysis but something had to be done.

Much to our surprise Mason quickly started learning but most importantly Mason's behaviors that interfered with his learning, were now decreasing and appropriate behaviors were increasing. Mason learned more in one short summer with ABA then he did the whole previous school year.

At the start of the next school year I was so excited to share the news of Mason's improvements using these teaching strategies. I thought for sure the teacher would be excited to learn these techniques so that Mason could be successful in her classroom. I was wrong. I was met with resistance from day one but most vehemently by the administrative staff. Someone from the school district said to me "Mrs. Scillian, what you are asking for is the Cadillac of special education. We only have to provide you with a Volkswagen."

The truth is, I don't care what car they are driving, as long as it gets to its destination. Unfortunately, in the case of DISD, the wheels were complete off of their Volkswagen.

After a few short weeks of public school my child reverted back to all of his inappropriate behaviors. We had to pull him out of school. This resistance to research based practice known as ABA has continued for the last two years in Mason's new school district. I have seen first hand how schools with the best intentions struggle for years trying to figure out how to teach my son. It is so unfortunate for Mason and his teachers because the solution is readily available through the services of a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. These professionals are capable of training, mentoring staff and analyzing the functions of behavior on DAY ONE.

TEA requires our speech Therapist to be licensed and our Occupational Therapists to be registered; they should also recognize the importance of a behavior specialist who is Board Certified. For children with autism this is of utmost importance. Their behaviors define their diagnosis and their behaviors interfere with learning which keeps them out of the mainstream environment.

Some forward-looking districts understand the importance of Board Certified support staff working with their teachers. These districts are quietly serving our children in TX. Unfortunately, they can't afford to let the word get out, because a mass migration of parents seeking the best for their children would be too large a financial strain on the few districts doing the right thing. What an unfortunate state of affairs in TX.

Mason is currently taken out 1 day a week from school to supplement his public education at a Learning Center that is supervised by a Certified teacher who is also a Board Certified Behavior Analyst. My school district will on March 4<sup>th</sup> determine whether or not I can continue to have a flexible school schedule for Mason which is obviously in his best interest.

According to the book, Educating Children with Autism, published by the National Research Council under the request of the U.S. Department of Education, "Education, both directly of children and of parents and teachers, is currently the primary form of treatment for autistic spectrum disorders. The education of children with autistic disorders was accepted as a public responsibility under the Education of All Handicapped Children Act in 1975".

AUTISM IS TREATABLE. It is imperative for this bill to pass so that TEA and parents of children with autism can work collaboratively to ensure that all these special children receive the most up to date and effective education possible. The parents in Texas have a deep desire to work with TEA on a fair and equitable committee. I guarantee you the effort we put into our children now, will pay off in the future, as they become a contributing members of society instead of a tax burden. Again please vote yes for sb124. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Liz Scillian  
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