

Sara Meays, Parent

Three years ago, my then kindergarten son Elliott came home and told me his "brain was too stupid for school." It was the single most heartbreaking thing any of my children have ever said to me. While my husband and I worked with our son's school to determine the best way to help Elliott, we watched our sweet son lose confidence in himself, and frustration turn him into a different person. Eventually, our school district's CSE recommended that he be placed in an 8:1:1 classroom for math and ELA instruction. During second grade, Elliott thrived in this setting--working in a very small group at his level allowed him to gain back confidence and make academic progress. Despite this, at Elliott's annual CSE meeting last spring, we were told that Elliott would be moved to an inclusion classroom in the fall for 3rd grade. When I questioned why the district would change something that was effective, the CSE chairwoman stated that "Elliott must be prepared to take the tests" (meaning the 3rd grade state assessments). In a heartbeat, it seemed as though our district's concern for Elliott switched for providing our son with an education that met his own personal level, and replaced it with a test prep curriculum for a test he is no where near developmentally able to read or comprehend. Last week, at Elliott's parent-teacher conference, I was told that fall testing revealed that Elliott's reading and math scores are significantly below grade level, and require "urgent intervention." However, while the special Ed teacher in his classroom often works with Elliott in a small group setting, it is most often on grade level, module lessons, not at the skill level he is at. For instruction at his level, Elliott receives approximately 30 minutes a day in a small group setting for his special Ed teacher to address that "urgent" need. This means 30 minutes a day to teach my son to read. This means that only a small fraction of his school day is meeting his educational needs. This means that the remaining school time is spent preparing him for a test which is developmentally beyond a typically learning 3rd grader, let alone my son (who, by the way, will NOT be taking the tests). My son is a thoughtful, kind, intelligent 9 year old. Daily, he tries his very best to "get smart" and asks, "Mommy, am I smart?" And every day, I pray that he does not come home again telling me that his "brain is too stupid for school." My husband and I know that Elliott will be able to do amazing things with his life, but in order to become a successful, contributing member of NYS, he first needs a solid foundation. It had been my belief that that foundation was built in elementary school, but I no longer believe that. Common Core, and its assessments, are depriving my son (and the vast majority of children in NYS) of an education fit to his learning level. We would not force every child, regardless of physical size, to wear the same sized clothing, yet NYS is imposing a one size fits all mentality on education. This in itself is a disgusting, heartbreaking tragedy, but the bigger tragedy is that the people who can change this mess refuse.