

Hi, my name is Beverly Caldwell and I'm here today to speak with you about my experience with special education.

I have the privilege of being the mother of an amazing 8-year-old named Noah, who is smart, funny, imaginative, strong, determined, kind, loving, loyal, compassionate, and inquisitive, who just happens to be hard of hearing, wears hearing aids and is obsessed with paw patrol. Watching my son grow up to this point I have learned that labels and limits can make or break you. So, our children may be receiving special education, but they are more than special education and they can be everything that they should be, want to be, and dream to be because of special education not despite it.

My life changed forever when the first deaf person that I've met was in my arms and I named him Noah. I knew that I wanted him to have access to everything that was available to him. Noah received his first pair hearing aids at six months old and we begin the journey of learning American sign language.

By two years old he was a member of the toddler play group at Pennsylvania school for the deaf. Play group introduced us to the deaf community which lead to Noah a meeting other deaf children like himself, building early independence and friendships. And we both got to see deaf professionals in action. The connections I have made with other parents and teachers are helpful to this day for developing parenting strategies. These opportunities would not have been made available to us if it were not for special education programs like the toddler play group and preschool at PSD.

Pennsylvania school for the deaf is serving my son well giving him a foundation that will help him to succeed in the future. He started out as a scared, crying 2-year-old and has turned into an open, outgoing well-adjusted 8-year-old that can express himself through ASL and spoken English. I believe PSD will continue to be a great asset in his life in making him a proud deaf adult and an asset to our community.

He's made great strides academically, physically, socially, and emotionally as a PSD student. Removing or providing minimal education for our children will have a detrimental effect, developmentally, emotionally and academically. And will feed the awful stereotype that deaf can't when the truth is DEAF CAN!

With that said, parents should have the final say in their children's education because we know them best, their strengths, weaknesses, temperaments, triggers, likes, and dislikes we are the experts. So, to my surprise after blowing out the candles on my 4-year old's birthday cake I found out that he could potentially lose the benefits of the school that he was attending and thriving at. After a bunch of paperwork, evaluations and stress a year later I find myself sitting across the table from a person with a folder full of papers with statistics about my child and a mediator, all because I don't want him to change schools. All these strangers have a say and what's best for my child. It's not fair to the parents or students whose futures are in jeopardy. We need your support, not your dictation of what education is best for our children.