

Testimony by
Isaiah Foust, Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Coordinator
at The School at McGuire Memorial
To the House Special Education Subcommittee
December 14, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Ortity, Chairwoman Hill-Evans and the members of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives subcommittee on Special Education. My name is Isaiah Foust and I am a Board Certified Assistant Behavior Analyst who serves as the Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports Coordinator at The School at McGuire Memorial in New Brighton, Pennsylvania. The School at McGuire Memorial is an Approved Private School that serves children ages 3-21 with complex and significant needs that include autism, intellectual disabilities, and severe challenging behavior. The majority of our students are often unsuccessful in traditional classroom and educational placements.

The School at McGuire Memorial has a strong emphasis on the principles of Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA). ABA is an evidenced based practice that has been demonstrated to be highly effective with our student population. We believe that all behavior is learned and maintained through a history of consequences in the environment. We use thorough individualized assessments to identify skill deficits and we teach skills using only evidence based instructional procedures. We have a focus on teaching socially significant and meaningful skills. We ultimately strive for our students to live a happy and fulfilling life while reaching their greatest level of independence.

The past year has presented significant challenges and barriers in relation to our students and their education. The pandemic required our school to quickly develop an entire virtual platform that would be designed to meet the individual needs of our students. The students at The School at McGuire Memorial do not possess traditional academic skills and are unable to acquire skills through conventional teaching methods. Our students require hands-on and direct individualized instruction that includes various methods of prompt and prompt fading procedures that are based on ABA strategies. Prompt fading procedures include systematically reducing the prompts needed for a learner to perform a skill. Most virtual platforms designed for education do not take our types of learners into consideration and we have had to adapt and modify every virtual platform that we use to meet their individual needs. The school has been diligent in ensuring that we were providing FAPE while establishing and maintaining skills to the best of our ability.

We were surprised to see that many of our students made progress on IEP goals during our virtual instruction. This is due to the faithful commitment of our teachers, therapies, support staff, parents, and caregivers. We had the opportunity to work closely with families on how to teach specific skills to their child, how to incorporate various levels of prompts, and how to work through behavioral challenges. We had several of our parents come forward and express that they were pleased to have had the opportunity to learn how to implement tools offered

by the school to understand their child's learning process. Virtual learning was extremely difficult for our children and families and this success was only possible because of the dedication and engagement of parents and caregivers. This was the silver lining during the pandemic.

But while we have seen successes over the pandemic, we have also been left with several challenges. The back and forth of live and virtual instruction have been difficult to maintain consistent education for our students. In addition, families have reported increased behavioral challenges in the home setting which has been burdensome for the child and family. Currently, our school is down almost 20% of our required staff. Our students require consistent, hands-on, and meticulous training to acquire skills. By having irregular or inconsistent staff it is difficult to provide this depth of instruction. Staff are often used to cover unfamiliar classrooms and students and cannot provide the required support levels due to overextension. Regardless of these challenges, our teachers, therapists, and support staff are dedicated to providing our students with the best possible education.

Thank you for this opportunity to testify and I am happy to take any questions at this time.