



Good morning/afternoon. I'd like to thank you for the opportunity to share my story with you today. My name is Amanda Raymond and I am a mom of two children with autism, Olivia and Colvin, who are 14 and 10. Today, I'd like to tell you about my son. Colvin is genuine and loving, a typical boy who loves to be outside, run around and ride a bike, and of course, he loves electronics. Colvin has much greater support needs than Olivia. He has very limited

language and exhibits those typical self-stimulating behaviors that tend to be described as classic autism. He thrives on routines and known expectations, but he needs assistance in almost every facet of life.

Right now, Colvin receives special education services in a regional program and has been in the same classroom for five years with others who also have high support needs. Attending our neighborhood school was really important to us, but being in a regional program still comes at a cost: the cost of segregation. My son's classroom is at the end of a hall and within his classroom, there are partitions that divide each desk from the other. He has no typical peer models for communication or socialization. I have to strongly advocate for any interaction with his non-disabled peers; it is not offered or given freely. This regional school is a completely separate entity, right down to our principals, teachers and assistants. For over two years, we have been advocating for Colvin to be more included in the general education environment. I also know that for him to be successfully included with a true sense of belonging, we have to prepare the right supports, accommodations and modifications, which unfortunately has been repeatedly denied. Our school division does not have the funds and resources to provide the level of supports that my son needs to access a Free and Appropriate Public Education. Without additional funding, they may never be ready to offer him the same meaningful and enriching opportunities as his peers. In fact, our only other option is a Private Day School placement, which would be more restrictive and detrimental to the progress Colvin can make.

My husband is a commander in the U.S. Navy and we moved to Virginia from Colorado 5 years ago. Although we once fought against inclusion in Colorado, it was only after seeing the negative consequences of segregation here in Virginia that we fully saw the benefits of inclusion, which is supported by over 40 years of data. Now I am active in PTA, so that Colvin can be included in events and activities in our school community. I am also the chairperson of our division's Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC), I have made countless public comments, and I have done a webinar in support of inclusion for the Center for Family Involvement. I am not arguing against the continuum of placement outlined by IDEA. But I beg you to reconsider how CSA funds are distributed. Our schools need funding for training, personnel and resources to offer the same support and services provided by private day schools and regional programs. I want to give my son a chance to learn with his peers and be as independent as possible because life isn't contained inside the four walls of one self-contained classroom. Please give us the option to access CSA funding so that my son can have supports and services delivered in an environment that will prepare him for the real world and to live life fully.

*Thank you for your consideration,
Amanda Raymond*

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