
Crisis of inclusion support at Bishop

1 message

Debra Wood <info@debrawood.com>

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To: kfitzgerald@arlington.k12.ma.us

Cc: jmorgan@arlington.k12.ma.us, whayner@arlington.k12.ma.us, pschlichtman@arlington.k12.ma.us, kallisonampe@arlington.k12.ma.us, lexton@arlington.k12.ma.us, lkardon@arlington.k12.ma.us, jthielman@arlington.k12.ma.us, Eva Liner <eliner@arlington.k12.ma.us>, Mark McAneny <MMcAneny@arlington.k12.ma.us>, Alison Elmer <aelmer@arlington.k12.ma.us>, aps_superintendent@arlington.k12.ma.us, rmacneal@arlington.k12.ma.us, ktassone@arlington.k12.ma.us, dweinstein@arlington.k12.ma.us, arlingtonspedalliance@gmail.com, ata@doe.mass.edu, arlingtonSEPAC@gmail.com

To the members of the Arlington School Committee,

I am writing to you as a parent of a fourth grader in Bishop School who has an IEP.

Our family chose the Remote Academy option because we feel as though it is the most predictably stable model. Given the option to have 4 days of in-school support with small classes, it was an extremely difficult choice. For our family, knowing that if our son became a point of contact for CV-19, then we too would become points of contact and I would have to close my business for a second time this year. That simply isn't an option for us.

We received a letter from Russell Johnson, the State Director of Special Education, dated 9/3/20. In it he states that "your school and district should **fully implement your child's IEP**...regardless of whether your child is learning remotely, in-school, or a combination of both."

We received a call from my son's SpEd Liaison on Tu Sep 22 telling me that they are working out the last details of my son's IEP scheduling and that everything is coming together.

We joined a video call with his general education teacher and she personally delivered a box of class supplies on Saturday September 19, 2 days before school starts. Everything is lining up.

Then, late Sa Sep 19 afternoon we received a voicemail from SpEd coordinator Kristin Burke saying that our classroom assignment was changed, that we have been re-assigned to a **new classroom in a different school**. We didn't see this voicemail until Sunday morning. The day before school starts. During a pandemic. So, proposing that our son now goes to a classroom with a teacher he has never met, and with no other students from his grade, and without the support or consideration of knowing in advance.

Even in the best of circumstances, in a normal world, with a child who has no learning challenges, changing schools is a stressful event.

We managed to speak with the Director of SpEd, Alison Elmer on Sunday morning. She was calm and matter of fact. She told us that we can stay in our home school, with our teacher, with his peers, but we must waive inclusion services.

Members of the School Committee, I understand that you are working under extremely trying circumstances. I understand that teachers and administrators are working with impossible challenges. I work with the good faith that you understand the sacrifices that parents are making every day as well. I have been a vocal advocate for the work you do and the pressure you have been under since March 2020. We have been patient, we have trusted, and we have supported the administration and school committee.

So I ask you to please understand what an awful and unfair and unjust and untenable position we were in on Sunday morning. The day before school. During a pandemic. Being told that we must either send our son to a new school with no familiar landmarks or faces but still get the inclusion support, OR staying with our semblance of normalcy, our sliver of stability, *our community*, and waiving our son's inclusion services. It was - and is - demoralizing.

Had we been informed 1 month or even 2 weeks before school that - "Hey folks, this isn't ideal, but you have a choice to stay in your home school and waive your inclusion services OR choose a classroom designed for students with IEPs that may or may not have a couple of your friends in it and receive full services" - we would have accepted that. We would have known we were considered, accepted the sacrifice, made the choice, prepared our son, and rolled with it.

This is not okay. This is a failure. We've had a catastrophic loss of faith in APS administrators because of this.

Arlington Public Schools do not have the resources to support both hybrid and remote learning programs. They do not have the financial or physical resources to pull this off. The decision to offer both the hybrid and remote option is spreading our valuable resources too thin and look who drew the short straw - children with IEP's! The choice to further go down this chaotic path promises chaos. (Pierce is already closed down.)

I ask you, School Committee Members, to immediately convene a discussion with the APS Administration to find out what is happening and to find out why APS Administrators failed to inform parents like me about our final schedules, teacher assignments, and services in a decent and timely fashion.

I further ask you, School Committee Members, to advocate for the families of SpEd. APS must restore and fully implement our son's IEP. But, if inclusion services are indeed not possible for remote families, APS must provide additional equivalent pull-out support.

If you made it this far in this letter, thank you. Thank you for your attention to this matter. And always, thank you for working for our children.

Sincerely,
Debra and Matthew Bellantoni
[8 Ivy Circle](#)
[Arlington, MA](#)
617-448-9440

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"Be well, do good work and keep in touch"

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