



February 2017

A Message From

Ryan C. Eisenberg, Executive Director



Education in the News

Education is front and center on both state and national levels. As we look towards the future of public education, one central question comes to the forefront: What are our expectations for the system? Ask most parents, and I am sure they would agree, having strong educational systems is essential to the progress of our communities. Beyond that, having quality education for our own children is a priority that impacts many decisions within our lives.

Special education as a system has been debated for years, and recently it has found itself at the center of both state and national discussions. Within California, the governor has called for an in-depth review of our special education system, and an alignment with the Local Control Funding Formula. The goal would be to give more local control to special education dollars and to enhance accountability around special education outcome. At the heart of the debate is how aligned do our general education and special education systems need to be, while preserving the specialized support system for our most complex learners.

On the National level, the Supreme Court is arguing a case that looks at special education benefit, and what is the appropriate level of service to meet the needs of learners. *Endrew F. v Douglas County School District* represents a case that could have implications for 6.7 million students with disabilities. At the heart of the case is the discussion over what constitutes meaningful benefit, a topic that has been disagreed upon within the court system for years. Prior lower level court decisions have defined this as "more than de minimis" or slightly more than trivial progress under their IEP. Others have felt that standard is not adequate and looked to provide benefits that align with non-disabled peers.

With arguments opening this month, Justices have admitted to these definitions being nuanced, and that the "Blizzard of Words" makes this case complicated beyond its nuanced nature. They seem to agree that the minimum benefit is not sufficient, but struggle with how to clearly define a standard that can be measured and worked upon. Beyond this discussion is the balance between procedure and people. There is a desire to see students grow within schools, but that can get lost as they attempt to set up a clear definition in the system.

As a proud special educator, I am glad to see such debates and discussions happening, so we can enhance our system of support, and be critical over what has been determined as acceptable practice. Too often our industry has not served our ultimate purpose of creating access and meeting the needs of students with disabilities. We get trapped in disagreement and lost in financial impact, which defers our focus from teaching and learning. We have designed systems that have placed families and districts at odds instead of building partnerships. My hope is that as a community we begin to look at how we can better meet the mission of special education, how we can provide quality educational experiences for students in our schools, and how we reestablish a system of partnership so that families, districts, and communities work together to enhance our education for children.

Let's Achieve!

Ryan C. Eisenberg, Ed.D.

Executive Director



PLEASE MARK YOUR CALENDARS NOW!



6th Annual **Reach for the Stars BBQ**
Saturday, June 17th, Palo Alto Campus
5:00 – 9:00 p.m.
STAR award honoree: **Leland D. Levy**

Student Spot Light



Dayshawn Franklin started at AchieveKids in November, 2012 at the age of 6. He struggled with learning, following directions, and interacting appropriately with peers in a public school setting. He was easily frustrated with classwork, staff directions, and peer altercations. He often responded to these situations with aggression, running away, or property destruction. He was referred to AchieveKids as a result of these behaviors.

Our staff was very consistent with expectations and consequences. We broke tasks down into smaller, more manageable pieces in order to prevent Dayshawn from getting overwhelmed. We encouraged him to use coping tools, such as deep breathing, asking for space, and going for walks. We held him accountable for his actions, no matter how long it took or how difficult it was. We used verbal and tangible praise to encourage him when he did things appropriately. Dayshawn was also motivated by his peers in class. He enjoyed playing with others and earning community outings. Services such as speech, occupational therapy, and mental health sessions also played a big part in Dayshawn's success at AchieveKids.

By 2016 Dayshawn was a model student in his classroom, often encouraging other students to make good choices and use coping tools. Students looked up to him and his confidence grew as a result of his success. He made huge gains in the area of academics as well. All of our staff are very proud of Dayshawn and we are excited to hear about his future progress now that he has returned to public school with the tools he needs to be successful.

For more information on how you can sign up for a school tour or to learn more about our program please contact: Karin Klarreich, Director of Development at 650.213.5286 or kklarreich@achievekids.org

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