

Formal Written Correspondence to the Board

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PUBLIC

May 2nd 2024, 3:31:11 pm

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Change to the Learning Center Model at Arroyo Seco Elementary

* Comments

To the LVJUSD Board of Education,

I want to share my family's experience with the co-taught program at Arroyo Seco Elementary as they plan to move to the learning center model next year. My child has autism and requires more work and time to accomplish the same challenges as his peers. I am happy to share my child's experience in the co-taught program, but I also have to share his journey at Arroyo Seco Elementary with you to help you understand why I think that the co-taught program is why he is a successful enough student to move forward to a less restrictive learning center model in middle school.

My child started Arroyo Seco Elementary in the SDC program in kindergarten and remained with the same teacher until second grade. Here is where I started to see that he was not getting the grade level academics he needed in class, so we started to do work at home one-on-one to help him stay at grade level. This is when I started to ask the question why he couldn't be in a general education classroom more often. The response was that he didn't have the skills to be an independent student and he wouldn't have the support needed to be successful in a general education classroom, so he remained in a self contained SDC classroom where paraeducators could help him.

In third grade he got a new opportunity. He did not fit into the small groups in his SDC classroom for math and reading, so he was mainstreamed into general education classrooms for those subjects. I was so excited that he was spending more time in a general education classroom getting the grade level work and being in class with his peers. The downside that I found with this model was that there was not a paraeducator in the general education classroom with him, because the needs were higher in the SDC classroom so that is where the paraeducators were sent. This meant that there was only the one general education teacher to help my child that has special needs and the other 26 students. Even though he met with his SDC teacher afterwards, I do not feel like he had the skills yet to access the curriculum on his own in the larger classroom by himself. So we still had to do reteaching at home to keep him at grade level.

Fourth and fifth grade was when my child entered into the co-taught program. This is where I believe he learned the skills needed to be a successful student in a classroom with his peers. Having the extra eyes from the SDC teacher and paraeducators during lessons and peer interactions helped make sure he was understanding what was happening around him. They were also able to find out what he needed and that he had what he needed (graphic organizer, times table, decimal place value chart, plan for recess, etc.) to access the curriculum and interact with peers appropriately. This eventually, with the much prompting and time needed for a child with special needs, lead to an independent student that can have their supplies for class ready and ask for help when needed. Other skills that came out during co-taught was confidence in a large classroom, enough to stand in front of a class of 32 and talk. He has better interactions with peers, asking to join games at recess and having more than one friend to play with him. He is also able to take care of his personal needs without paraeducator assistance, he knows what he needs to do on his own and when he needs to ask for help. Overall the help of a SDC teacher and paraeducators constantly around while in a general education classroom, the co-taught program, taught my child how to be an independent student in a classroom with his peers.

Changing to the learning center model at Arroyo Seco Elementary next year will not affect my child, since he is currently a fifth grader. But thinking back on his journey and the different models that he has been a part of, I believe that the learning center model is more comparable to the experience we had in third grade. And thinking that if he had stayed in that model for another two years without the constant paraeducator support, I do not think that he would have obtained the skills needed to move on to the less restrictive learning center model in middle school. Elementary school is when students are learning to learn and be students, and for students with special needs they need a more watchful eye on them in the setting they need to learn to obtain these goals. My child got this, moving forward. Who is going to help the students with special needs in a general education classroom when the needs of other students is higher elsewhere? How are they going to learn the skills they need to access the curriculum if they don't know what they need yet? Are you going to teach them how to be a student now so that they can have a less restrictive model later? Or take the support away now and have them need more support later? I hope you are able to confidently answer these questions when making your decision.

Sincerely, Melissa Cottingham