

Mr. & Mrs. Matthew Bratina

May 3, 2016

The School District of Philadelphia
440 N Broad St
Philadelphia, PA 19130

Dear Ms. Sonya Berry:

As you have been painfully made aware, James Dobson having over twice the % of other schools Special Education students impacts not only the school, but the entire neighborhood.

For a variety of reasons, the parents are very concerned. The # 1 reason is equity. Students who live in James Dobson's "Catchment Area" are being turned away.

Last fall the Parents of our 6th grade class expressed concerns around the 6th grade classroom environment, behavior and safety after parents found their children in what they felt was a very unsuitable classroom environment. 25% of the classroom was, and still is, special education. This classroom in particular is still struggling unnecessarily, placing an inordinate strain on a fantastic teacher, who is unable to effectively teach. This serves no one.

As a direct result of a violent action of a Special Education student, we have lost good teachers in the past. Our daughter has an IEP, and I object vehemently to her being "protected" from reasonable consequences if she acts out as a result of her disability. When someone does something wrong, there should be reasonable resulting consequences. This practice of not being able to reasonably discipline these students appropriately does not serve them well. What happens when they get jobs? Their bosses will say "Oh well, you had an IEP in school, so you won't be fired." ??? NO. These children know FULL WELL there are no consequences and some manipulate the system. I know, I did. My background is not all that different than some of these children. Well meaning, sympathetic people absolutely did more harm to me than good. Of that I am certain.

Please do not add anything to what I am saying or take what I mean out of context. I have no hidden agenda, I mean what I say and say what I mean. I am simply stating that in life, we have consequences for our actions and schools should be preparing students for life, not some unrealistic system that ends when one graduates from High School. It does not serve the students. It does not serve our daughter.

Further, placing our 1st grader in the same school as over 20% of the population being unsustainable, potentially violent students does not serve the school, or the community.

James Dobson previously had a 3-5 grade program, but not 6th grade. In late August 2015, we were made aware that children slated for another school, had returned to Dobson for 6th grade.

At that time all the Philadelphia School District Administrators assured us that it was a temporary measure and that they were actively finding the children a permanent home. That solution never materialized and now we understand that Administration is not only continuing the program, but increasing the % at James Dobson and filling up to 8th grade.

If the School District couldn't keep its promises last year with fewer students, how are we to expect them to provide the appropriate support this coming year? State minimum staffing does not provide enough staff for the Special Education students. Several teachers have commented to me that a large % of their attention is given to certain unnamed *well behaved* students, which takes away from the General Education class.

Many studies have been done, and in order for an Inclusion Program to be successful, there are minimum requirements to be met, which has not happened in the past resulting in Teachers AND students being physically assaulted, regular, unchecked harassment, and repeated foul language in the halls - and no one is able to effectively correct these students as they are protected under an IEP, like our daughter.

I am NOT saying I don't want ANY of these Special Education students. Of course, everyone deserves an education - What I AM saying is that overloading one school with a % exceeding double that of successful schools, and subsequently not providing basic supports like STAFF, DOES NOT SERVE THE STUDENTS. Being set up to fail is UNACCEPTABLE.

We are a small school and cannot accommodate a Special Education Program of this size. We are currently struggling at 21% Special Education.

Some research on schools in our area:

SCHOOL			Total Enrollment #
CookWiss	12%	Special Ed Enrollment	442
Shawmont	15%	Special Ed Enrollment	525
Mifflin	11.3%	Special Ed Enrollment	292
Henry	12.5%	Special Ed Enrollment	504
Roosevelt	16%	Special Ed Enrollment	572
Jenks	14%	Special Ed Enrollment	450

The highest rated schools in the District don't even come close

Penn Alexander	4%	Special Ed Enrollment	557
Greenfield	9%	Special Ed Enrollment	609
Meredith	5%	Special Ed Enrollment	587

It's clear to see that James Dobson is already inequitably absorbing twice what most other schools in our area have and 4 times as much as many High Performing schools.

Please keep your promise from the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year and have these 6-8th grade special education children moved to a school with a lower % to make things more equitable?

We think the children living within the catchment area should have priority over students who do not.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Matthew M. Bratina

Denise Bratina