

How Special Education Services Have Helped Our Child

Our child is a blind middle school student and has received Special Education Services since he was a toddler. We are grateful for Special Education Services that have been critical to his ability to learn and grow academically and emotionally, to learn fine and gross motor skills, and to navigate using blind and cane skills.

Our child has a Teacher of the Visually Impaired (TVI) that provides academic materials in braille, accessible technologies and instruction (e.g., braille writer and voice control software with lessons to enable use of computers), and orientation and mobility lessons to help our child learn to navigate with the use of a cane. The TVI supports classroom teachers and aides with making lessons more accessible. Classroom aides help our child by adapting classroom materials, such as providing content in braille, describing visual concepts in greater detail, and providing manipulatives or tools to help our child understand and engage in lessons. The aides have also helped our child's social skills and his ability to manage his strong emotions. The support of the TVI and classroom aides has been critical in helping our child learn to read braille and improve reading fluency, to do mathematics with needed tools, and to learn how to use technology needed for work, school, and everyday tasks in the digital age. Our child and family would have struggled tremendously without the support of Special Education Services. Our child would be much less prepared for college, the workforce, and living more independently.

Our child said that the Special Education Services, "provide tools like a braille writer, talking calculators, and materials in Braille. These tools help me learn better and learn more. Over time, I will learn to use many of these skills where I can advocate for myself to get the tools I need to learn.... My classroom assistants help me by describing what's going on in the class and help me when I find assignments to be tough. They're helping me build more independence skills." Our child loves school, and we think the Special Education Services have been key to creating the love of school.

Outside of school, our child has benefited from Special Education Services provided by Northwest Association of Blind Athletes (NWABA), particularly Camp Spark. Camp Spark is a multi-day overnight camp for blind kids held in the summer. Our child said, "Camp Spark is not only a sports camp for people who can't see, it's a camp where you can socialize and have fun and most of all be yourself.... Camp Spark makes me feel happy to get out my energy and socialize, and not only helps me manage big feelings, when I go to Camp Spark, I feel like running, biking, swimming, and playing goal ball distracts me from other thoughts in my head. These are some immediate benefits it has on my brain and body." Here are several other thoughts our child shared:

“Long-term benefits are the encouragement to get out and socialize more often, try to participate in as many sports events and activities as possible, and keep my mind busy by getting outside and taking off on the track.”

“Another big benefit of Camp Spark is not only to encourage participation in sports, but also to improve my academic skills by the ability to stay more focused and the determination to get assignments done.”

“Camp Spark encourages me to keep going and doing activities. When things get hard, I keep trying and tell myself no matter how hard I try I will never give up, and I’m encouraged and inspired to do sports more often.”

The Special Education Services in and out of school have played a large role in the successes that our child has achieved. We have seen significant growth in our child’s confidence, focus, determination, academic abilities, and social skills. Special Education Services support remains critical as our child prepares for college and employment. Special Education Services will be crucial for setting our child up for success as an adult and helping him find joy in learning, as well as cultivating tools that will help our child achieve goals despite his challenges. We strongly encourage continuation and expansion of support for Special Education Services.

Thank you,

Suzanne and Simon de Szoeke