

An Open Letter to Wake County Public School Systems:

I am writing to inform you that our daughter, Isabel S. De la Cruz, will NOT be returning to school as a Special Education student in Wake County Public School System this year, or any year after. Effective immediately. And I feel it important to share our reasons why...

If ever we had trust in WCPSS as an educational establishment charged by the federal government with providing a free and appropriate public education, that trust is long gone. Like, *can't-even-see-it-in-my-rearview-mirror* gone.

We do not feel that our daughter is safe in the care of Wake County schools, as indicated by historic patterns of unwillingness to adhere to even the most basic compliance with her IEP, patterns that persevere today – for instance: Wakefield's chronic instability of quality teaching staff within the classroom, disinclination towards making reasonable accommodations without constant battles, and the inability to properly and ethically follow the Diabetic care plan to responsibly manage Isabel's blood glucose levels. Moreover, we also do not believe that the upper echelon of WCPSS has our child's best interest at heart, educationally or otherwise. Quite simply, Isabel and her special classmates and peers, are NOT a priority within Wake County Public School System.

A wee example... As of today, August 29th, Wakefield High School *still* does not have a qualified teacher hired to fill a position that opened at the end of last school year for the ID Severe classroom – our daughter's assignment. The interim remedy of which is to add further responsibility and undue burden upon Ms. Adams, the special education teacher in the classroom next door (*who also happens to be a special mother*) to oversee both classrooms of special education students.

A position that was previously occupied in the 2014-15 school year by a woman so unmotivated and incompetent as to inspire complete discord among staff and students alike, causing behavioral issues AND self injurious behavior among every child in that room. Meanwhile, parents were denied access to our children's classroom and despite persistently raised concerns, the problems continued to be defended by Assistant Principal Bethial. It was not until the 4th or 5th IEP meeting (of approximately SEVEN), that my attorney husband and I were finally taken seriously when we presented hard evidence that not only was our daughter's Diabetic Care Plan for Type 1 Diabetes being negligently half-assed but also her records / insulin logs were deliberately, maliciously and intentionally falsified (despite appropriate training and efforts of school nurse, Stacy Helmandollar). A dangerous recklessness that could very well have resulted in our child's death.

It is due to the extraordinary command and attention of Assistant Superintendent, Karen Hamilton, that anything was resolved at all.

For the record, it is our belief that WHS EC Chair, Ms. Sherry Bethea does a remarkable job with what little resources and support she receives. In addition to the

brief 1 year godsend reprieve of having Ms. Lindsey Bowlin as Isabel's amazing teacher (2015-16), Ms. Bethea's empathy and heartfelt efforts are the only reason we stuck it out this long.

As a result of the ineptitude we, WHS special parents, have experienced over the course of our children's WCPSS career – with Wakefield High experiences being the cherry on top – you have lost THREE wonderful students, who under IDEA, have every right to continue their education until the age of 22, simply because their parents have lost faith in your ability to protect them, care for them, and to simply do what you're legally obligated to do – not *because* you're legally obligated, but because *it's the right thing to do and our children deserve it*.

Do not misunderstand, the disappointments experienced Wakefield are not isolated to WHS, but are merely the straws that broke the proverbial camel's back.

For over 13 years I have witnessed firsthand the dramatic shift from a flimsy, almost-but-not-quite-priority focus on collaborative teacher-parent partnerships to more of a "CYA corporate model," circling the wagons and leaving exhausted, overwhelmed and heart-aching special parents on the outside looking in.

What a foolishly self-fulfilling prophecy you have created for us all.

I could quite literally write volumes on my misadventures in Special Education advocacy with Wake County Public School Systems and the complacent resistance and irresponsible actions and rhetoric I've continually experienced over these many years between transportation, administration, and everything inbetween. And while I would love to spell it all out for you WCPSS "Powers That Be," I'm afraid that even hitting just the exhaustive "highlights" would be far more energy that I am willing to expend now that I've seen the light at the end of the tunnel. *That light being never having to subject our daughter and ourselves to the redundant and unnecessary WCPSS rigmarole ever again.*

If this letter strikes curiosity and inquiring minds really wanna know, I might suggest you start with the ginormous student file box on Isabel De la Cruz chocked full of meeting minutes, emails, comments, letters, IEP's and DPI mediated settlements. Of course, your attorney has a file too and if you ask him, I'm sure he'd be happy to share his thoughts off the record. And *then*, if you still have questions, please do feel free to call me; I'll be happy to enlighten you with a walk in my moccasins. But for now, I am committed to not beating the dead horse and won't be holding my breath that you'll give any of this a second thought.

Because, until you have been divinely entrusted with the care of an angelic being that you have been forced to fight for every damned day of your life against even the very systems designed to assist, support, and protect them by law, you cannot possibly fully understand. Because it's not your experience. You're on the inside looking out, peeking around those covered wagon wheels.

The good news is, should you chose to take note, it doesn't take a great deal of effort to care – that's where empathy and compassion comes in handy.

But that means, the generals need to get out into the fields and be accessible to the troops – know what is happening on the ground, in your schools and classrooms, know your teachers, your staff, your parents... And parents need to know you, know how to get in touch with the leaders who are responsible for their children's safety, wellbeing and education for 7 hours a day, rather than filibustering desperate attempts to successfully advocate for our special children.

Until we ALL recognize and understand, at our most soulful level, that we are ALL in this together, we are on a mission to fail. This is what these special children came to teach us. And we're all too busy pointing fingers and guarding misplaced priorities and ill-conceived assets because what? Somebody might sue us?

Guess what? Lawsuits happen when people are unwilling to be responsible for their actions and obligations, unwilling to honor commitments, and unwilling to adhere to their duty to educate, protect and care for the populations you serve.

It is our sincerest wish that every educator and administrator take heed of this message and commit to a far more positive change and collaborative effort with parents in your special education programs for the benefit of, not just special populations, current and future, but indeed for the good of all students entrusted you – *for this is the test* – and these children, ALL of them, are the foundational pillars you are grooming for the future of our society, our communities, our world. And yes, as research has continually proven, it makes an enormous difference for everyone when we ALL thrive.

I recognise that I may indeed be burning a bridge with this letter. As fellow parents, we know you understand. As education politicians, you may take offense. Irrespective, I no longer care and frankly, I'm not sure I have the fight left required of me to do this ridiculous special education advocacy dance again for the umpteenth time without going to jail. Either way, I'm done. We're done.

Please include a copy of this letter in our daughter's school record and send us our daughter's certificate of completion and / or confirmation of Isabel's withdrawal from Wake County Public School System.

Sincerely,

The committed and loving parents of a most amazing and beautiful young lady,
Isabel S. De la Cruz,
Crystal J. De la Cruz – Hopper and Kevin P. Hopper