

Cochran, Patricia (DCOZ)

From: Casey Seidenberg <casey_seidenberg@yahoo.com>
Sent: Friday, October 22, 2021 6:42 PM
To: DCOZ - BZA Submissions (DCOZ)
Subject: BZA Application No. 20472: The River School

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COMMENTS IN SUPPORT

We are writing in support of The River School. Our child was born mostly deaf and has benefitted in ways we never could have imagined from The River School's services, inclusive education, support and care.

Our daughter, Pippa, was born without an ear and with significant hearing loss and we spent months bouncing around DC looking for resources. Children's Hospital was incredibly helpful as we tested and understood her unusual microtia/atresia diagnosis. Her surgeon there, Dr. Preciado recommended The River School as he said he had seen the **best outcomes from the school's early intervention and inclusive education.**

When Pippa was four months old, we landed in The River School's Parent-Infant group which is a support group for parents with kids with hearing loss. We went once a week for emotional support and learning, and the vast and deep knowledge that the educators had astounded us. They had an answer for every question, lists of resources, research on outcomes, and the calmest way of assuring us everything would be ok. We also met a community of parents facing similar challenges and with similar worries. This community has remained one of our more special bonds.

Pippa began school there at 18 months which enabled us to exhale. We stopped worrying that we were missing something with her hearing or that we should be doing more with her speech. The River School had her. And they had us. We no longer had to drive all over the city for appointments, because her speech therapy was with a loving educator at the River School and her audiologist was there, who Pippa still affectionately calls DoctorOlogy - her name for the audiologist before she could pronounce the word "audiology". Her hearing aid sound checks, testing and speech therapy could be woven into the fabric of her school day instead of piled into hours of after-school appointments across the city.

When she needed three surgeries, The River School made sure she stayed connected to the students and teachers while in the hospital. When she was recovering and couldn't participate in PE or playground, they had her "working" with the younger kids, a role that made her feel special instead of different.

Pippa graduated from the River School at or above grade level in all areas of elementary education, a feat we couldn't have imagined was so seamlessly possible at her birth. This is entirely due to the school's educational philosophy, commitment to kids with hearing loss, and loving care. **The inclusive aspect of River School's approach is something that cannot be underestimated. Should Pippa have attended a school of all children with special needs, the focus would have been on her difference, and not her belief that she is just like every other kid at school - which she is, just with a hearing aid.** Also, being around typical-hearing children offered a superior speech environment.

Board of Zoning Adjustment
District of Columbia
CASE NO.20472
EXHIBIT NO.103

The River School is NOT just another private school as we have heard it called from opposers of this campus purchase. **It serves a purpose no other school in the district serves.** When we reached out to DCPS about special services for Pippa we did not get a response. There was nowhere else for her to land that would have provided what The River School could. **Keeping this unique educational opportunity in the District and helping it expand to serve a greater number of students with special needs should be a priority. Please support inclusivity and education for children with hearing loss.**

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