

# Mom keeps up fight for other students

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behind his peers.

"They put him a class with hand-capped children, autistic children. They stuck him there and just left him there," Ms Papas said.

The summer before he entered Grade 7, she was shocked to learn he couldn't read at all, despite past assurances from school staff he was doing fine. "He couldn't read, he couldn't write, he didn't know the days of the week," she said.

"Everything he had learned from Christ the King he had forgotten. He was acting like an autistic boy because he was in there with them. It was a nightmare having a boy who didn't know what day it was, he didn't know how to count or add and subtract."

Halfway through the school year, she pulled Demetre out of special education and home-schooled him, tutoring him in the back of the family's furniture store to bring him up to a Grade 7 level in about three months.

Today, Demetre, now 14, attends regular classes at Whitchurch Highlands Public School and his mother says he's never been happier.

"He feels normal, he feels happy and he feels like he's part of a classroom and he's not what he calls a loser," she said.

Now she's determined to ensure no other child has to go through the same thing. Through her pediatrician, she learned of a suit being launched by the Ontario Coalition for Education Reform, a group of teachers and parents concerned about the state of education.

Together with Toronto lawyer Donald Brown, Dr. Mark Handley-Derry prepared a legal brief earlier this year, stating his group's concerns about how the ministry and school boards identify

and deal with special needs children.

"The parents of these children with identified disabilities frequently experience frustration advocating for their children in the educational system," their position statement says.

"Much of the frustration revolves around the funding of special education programs, but this focus often distracts attention away from the procedures and processes for assessing and programming these children."

The group says placement committees, who assess children, often consist of the same administrators responsible for the distribution of funding and

"therefore, cannot be objective in their opinions about the pupil."

Currently, his group is seeking funding to bring the case to court and it's also taking its complaint to the Ontario Human Rights Commission.

Either way it goes, it will be a long process for Ms Papas and the roughly 30 other parents already involved in the suit, but she says she's determined to see this through. "It's not for us; it's for the other kids," she said.

"I put my full trust in the school system and the school system let me down. If they don't fix something now, what's going to happen to the rest of the kids?"

**la cherie**

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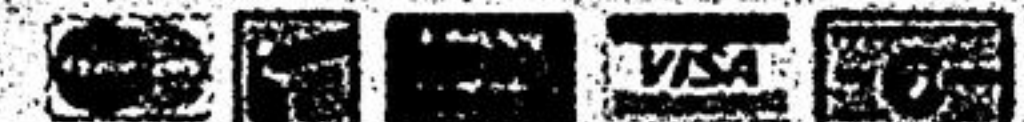


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