

The Education David Deserves

THE ZANDERS FAMILY'S FIGHT FOR LEARNING

Imagine sitting in a classroom day after day, month after month, struggling to catch up. You are behind, frustrated and don't know what's going on. This was 15-year-old David's reality for years.

Like more than 12,000 DC children, David has special needs—needs his school ignored.

"I knew an individualized education program (IEP) would help David," his mom Keltisha Zanders remembers. "All I wanted was for David to be in an environment where he could truly learn. Instead, his school was throwing him out of the classroom every chance they got."

Though Ms. Zanders requested an IEP multiple times, school officials failed to provide one. In the meantime, David was suffering at school, being suspended and falling behind.

That's why Children's Law Center (CLC) and pro bono lawyers at Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison LLP joined the team—David's team.

CLC mentors, including Healthy Together program director Tracy Goodman, worked closely with Paul, Weiss pro bono lawyers to help David.

Together, the team refused to accept anything short of the right result. They initially helped get David an IEP and the necessary evaluations. When the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) failed to implement any of the educational services outlined in his IEP, the team fought to make sure DCPS complied. From securing counseling, extra hours in the classroom and individualized instruction to contesting unfair suspensions, they never gave up on David's right to learn.



Source: Storyblocks

"Tracy was a great guide and was there for our team every step of the way," Paul, Weiss associate Sarah Ripa says, reflecting on her work on the case. "We consulted with her about each strategy and every new development. We couldn't have done it without her."

The team finally achieved its biggest victory for the Zanders family—securing an order requiring DCPS to fund David's placement in a full-time therapeutic school that truly meets his needs.

David now attends class regularly, truly learning for the first time.

"David is doing great now," Ms. Zanders shares. "He hasn't been suspended since Paul, Weiss got him the services he needed. I'm no longer getting calls from the school every day. He's not getting kicked out of class. He's getting the education he deserves."

Children's Law Center works hard to protect our clients' confidentiality. David's image has been changed. All other details are true.