

(Continued)

Second grade began, and her teacher wasn't one who was "warm and fuzzy." My sense was that she felt inconvenienced by having Emily included in her class. During one of our many conferences, she remarked that Emily was unorganized; she wasn't able to come in, put her backpack down, and get her books out. She held the entire class up. The teacher told me that Emily's peers were pulling away from her, and she described a child with whom I was not familiar. She also told me that Emily would embarrass herself by responding to questions with answers that didn't pertain to the subject being discussed. I wanted to scream, "Don't you think I know this?" Fortunately, for me, the saving grace that year was Emily's instructional support teacher and her speech-language pathologist. Her instructional support teacher made laminated picture cues for Emily that visually showed her the correct sequence to follow upon arriving in class. I am proud to say that Emily got the hang of it. She learned! You see, Emily can learn. She just learns a bit slower and differently than most children, but nonetheless, she learns.

Blessings occurred many times in our lives, and another arrived the day Emily entered third grade. She had a new teacher. This teacher was new to the school system, and she was young. "Oh boy, I bet you she doesn't have a clue about language delay" was my initial reaction. In addition, Emily was assigned a new instructional support teacher. I thought, "Here we go again." I didn't want to have the typical three-month recoupment period that both Emily and I faced each year, so I decided to tell them how Emily learns. This third-grade teacher got it. She read my notes and focused from the beginning on Emily's abilities. She introduced me to a new concept called frontloading. She would take Emily aside and preteach her a subject while classmates were reading. When the teacher went over the lesson with the remainder of the class, Emily would be hearing it the second time. It helped to reinforce the subject. By far, this teacher has been the best teacher to date for Emily.

Her new instructional support teacher was also wonderful. Because she was familiar with receptive/expressive language delays, she taught concepts to Emily visually. She actually knew Emily and understood her struggles. She worked closely with the classroom teacher and gave her ideas to help Emily respond properly to questions. It was also done in a way that didn't embarrass Emily in front of her peers.

This instructional support teacher also challenged the school administrators about the Honors Day program. She asked, "Why can't children in instructional support be included on the AB honor roll? After all, they learn and do well at their level. Are only A students successful in life?"

Emily entered fourth grade; fortunately, her support team remained intact. Still the old, familiar three-month lag raised its ugly head. Her grades typically

slipped during this time frame as her teachers tried to understand and respond appropriately to her disability. E-mails and constant communication with her teacher and the familiarity of her instructional support teacher helped tremendously. Emily worked extremely hard, and her efforts paid off. She received the Principal's Leadership Award during the Honor Ceremony that year.

Emily is now in fifth grade. To be honest, this has been an extremely difficult year. Two conferences with her teacher were required, and things were still difficult. The issue is communication. The teacher assured the parents during orientation that all homework would be included on his website, and it was—partially. For instance, he would tell the class, "Do page 2 in your math book." Emily wouldn't bring the book home, or each unit in the book had a page 2. So which unit? While most kids could tell you which unit, Emily can't. Another example: She would often bring home books but didn't bother to write the assignments in her planner. The website would have homework assignments for the class that didn't pertain to Emily. During one of our conferences, the teacher remarked, "I told her several times to make sure that she had all her books to take home." (He didn't realize that all Emily heard was books.) Her instructional support teacher would tactfully remind him that this is a product of her disability.

A thirty-minute reading assignment is brutal for Emily. It takes Emily well over an hour to complete the assignment. She slowly sounds out the words, and then can't tell you one thing she just read. Once again, her instructional support teacher stepped in. Emily was given a notebook (to keep at home) that had short stories with questions to answer. Her teacher taught her to number the paragraphs and then break them down. Last night, we completed four stories in thirty minutes! Success!

It is helpful that the instructional support teacher e-mails me each Monday with the teacher's weekly plan. She answers my e-mails daily. She understands my frustrations. I lean heavily on her during these tough times. I have left her phone messages as I cried with frustration on trying to understand what the classroom teacher was expecting of my child.

My worries are now with the transition to the middle school. In life, the smart kids, the popular kids, and the enrichment kids are favored. Some teachers are inconvenienced that they have to teach another way to my child, and I get that. It has to be hard and time-consuming. But isn't that what the calling of a teacher is? To teach? Learning to teach students doesn't mean teaching only smart students. Emily will have to fight to make her way, to stand out in life. It is regrettable that it takes some teachers four months to get it. Will you be the type of teacher who extends his or her hand and pulls Emily to the top? Will you get it? I hope so. Emily and others like her need you.

—Anonymous