

Dear Editor,

Special needs students in Missouri need and deserve a decent education. They have the capability to succeed; some may simply need more options. These children may not have access to the schools that can properly educate them, and that is a shame. The parents deserve better educational options for their children. As a parent, I understand the desire to have your children receive the best education possible. While there are several ways to attain this; I think we need to pay close attention to the legislative bills that could affect special needs education.

House Bill 993 and Senate Bill 1886 are worth a look, even for those of us who don't have special needs children. It says "Hey, we recognize that having a special needs child is often hard—financially and personally—and we want to give those parents a real option about the best education for their child, because they deserve a chance to succeed."

These bills create a scholarship tax credit so individuals and companies can support a scholarship fund for special needs kids across the state and receive an 80% tax credit for their donation. Special needs families can then find the best public or private school for their student and have the tuition or transportation costs supported through the scholarship. We have a smorgasbord of great services in Missouri for special needs students, and instead of trying to replicate the state's diversity in every school district, we can give parents a choice of the best program for their child. Support these bills with a quick call to your legislator—let them know this tax credit strengthen, not dilute, our special needs programs, caring staff and great facilities.

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor:

I am a parent of a special needs child. First and foremost, I would like to give hope to all the other special needs parents out there. Our child, who was diagnosed with _____, now is receiving a wonderful education from the most amazing teachers. Seeing a smile on your child's face, seeing your child's grades improve, and seeing your child connect with other children lights up any parent's heart. For a parent of a special needs child, it is more than anyone could imagine. It has meant the world to me to have finally been able to give this to my child.

Our family has struggled for years to get our child the best education possible. We tried to gain access to the neighboring district's schools, but this was not available. We tried to improve the special needs area in our school, but that did not succeed. As a family, we decided we would have to find a way to send our child to the private school, even though it was way out of our budget. We manage, but sometimes it is not easy. What makes it worth it is knowing that we are finally giving our child a chance to succeed in life. Without a decent education now, children with special needs may never gain the skills and knowledge to be successful in the future.

I am here to urge people to support the special needs legislation. House Bill 1886 and Senate Bill 993 will give special needs children the opportunity to attend schools that can provide them with the services they need—every child deserves that chance to learn.

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor:

My child's education has gone through major transformations recently. Currently, we are incredibly satisfied with the education my child is receiving in this new school. Previously, our home district could not give us the education our child needed. As a special needs student, he/she required specialized services, special needs teachers, and more attention. Our previous district could not adequately give us those. We decided, for the benefit of our child, to pack up and move in order to gain access to better schools in a neighboring district. Not only is our child thriving academically now, he/she is a much happier child. I cannot express the differences I have seen in the short amount of time we have been here. There is no greater pleasure than seeing your child ecstatic about going to school every morning, no greater joy than knowing your child is truly learning, and no greater happiness than knowing you made the right decision to make this happen.

While we are so thrilled everything is going as it is, it did take us uprooting not only ourselves, but our other child from her school and her friends. We have all adjusted quickly to our new neighborhood; however, if we were only given a choice in where to send our children based on necessity and not street address, it would have saved time, energy, and money.

Nevertheless, we are so blessed to have made the move and finally given our child the chance he/she deserves. As a community, I hope everyone can join with me supporting the special needs legislation, House Bill 1886 and Senate Bill 993. Contact our legislators and show your support for these bills. There are thousands of other parents in Missouri whose children can be helped now.

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor,

Many other states around the county have passed legislation that gives special needs children a chance at a decent education. While there are many variations of ways this can be accomplished, at least those states are willing to give it a chance. Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Ohio, and Utah are all great examples of states willing to do what is right for these children. Wouldn't it be nice if Missouri would follow in their footsteps and pass something similar?

According to the CDC, one in every 150 children born will have Autism. Unfortunately, we have not figured out a way to decrease that rate. Our ability to diagnose Autism is being refined, and diagnoses are happening at a younger age, and this is a small piece of good news: it means we have the chance to stave off many symptoms in early years. While not all children with Autism will need special education services, the majority of them will, and it will be very important.

I am a firm believer that every child deserves a decent education, one that can be their stepping stone to success. It should not matter if they have a disability or where they live, they should be given the chance.

I urge every Missourian to watch House Bill 993 and Senate Bill 1886 for the scholarship opportunity it gives for parents of special needs children. Contact your legislators and let them know of your support for these bills—let them know that Autism has a voice in Missouri and that you care about giving those students the best education they can get.

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor:

I would like to gather support for the recently announced legislation that will affect special needs children all over Missouri. Parents of special needs children, those mentally handicapped, speech and language impaired, physically impaired and those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, are constantly frustrated by the lack of educational options available for their child in their district. Parents need to be able to transfer their child to another public school or a private school that really serves that disability. Senate Bill 993 and House Bill 1886 would give parents this choice through a scholarship. The bill allows an individual or corporate taxpayer to claim a tax credit against the taxpayer's state tax liability in an amount equal to 80% of the taxpayer's contribution to a scholarship granting organization. It's really an opportunity to raise the bar on special needs education everywhere in the state.

Please, for the sake of these children, encourage your legislators to support this bill. Write a letter or make a phone call to show how you feel. Special needs children and their families need our support.

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor:

All readers need to pay attention to the legislative bills, Senate Bill 993, and House Bill 1886. These bills have a chance to greatly impact the special needs students of Missouri. Parents of special needs children are constantly struggling to find the appropriate schools for their children and public schools cannot feasibly provide excellent service for every type of special needs student. School districts use their money most wisely when they specialize, but the burden goes back to the parent who may have to move to take advantage of that, or to the parent who has different children with different needs. This bill will grant the students (and the parents) a scholarship that can be used for any public or accepting private school, including transportation.

This allows taxpayers, individual or corporations, to donate money into scholarship granting organizations which will then grant money to the students. In turn, the donors will be able to claim a tax credit against the state tax liability in an amount equal to 80% of the taxpayer's contribution. The students will positively benefit and donors will be even more enticed to donate. It will allow parents to simply choose which school *best* meets the needs of their special and deserving child.

We need to collectively show our support for these bills by calling, emailing, or mailing letters to our legislators. They need to know of our passion for these bills, which will encourage them to support them as well. The special education children of Missouri not only deserve this, but need it!

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor:

Currently, there are over 130,000 special education students in Missouri. Most of these students require special classes, services, teachers, and attention. Many have the possibility of living a normal and successful life, but they need the proper tools to get them there. An appropriate education is one crucial tool every child needs, especially those that have developmental disabilities. Parents of special needs children are constantly struggling to assure their child receives the proper education, but unfortunately, not every school is equipped to do so. Instead of struggling with a school to make their existing programs fit an individual child, parents should have the right to simply find the program that is already tailored to their child's particular needs.

Two legislative bills create the Missouri Special Needs Scholarship Tax Credit Program. Senate Bill 993 and House Bill 1886 may be able to alleviate some of the issues parents may face. These bills will grant more choices to parents by providing scholarships to the children/parents. They can use these scholarships to attend public or private schools. Those taxpayers, individuals or corporations, who donate to the scholarship granting organizations, will be able to take a tax credit up to 80% of their donation.

The special needs children truly do need more choices for their educational needs. We need to support these children and their future by supporting these bills. I urge everyone to contact your legislator and show your support for SB 993 and HB 1886!

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor:

Currently, parents around the state are struggling to find a school that can adequately educate their special needs child. Not every local public school district is capable of educating special needs children. I would like to encourage residents of _____ to find ways to support some recent legislative bills that will help special needs students get a proper education. Senate Bill 993 and House Bill 1886 create a Special Needs Scholarship Tax Credit program. When this bill passes, it will give parents more choices in their educational decisions. It would allow taxpayers, businesses, and corporations to contribute to a charitable foundation that would grant scholarships to special needs students to attend public or private schools.

This legislation would serve K-12 students who are mentally handicapped, speech and language impaired, physically impaired and those diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder. The money granted to the parent and child will allow the parent to choose another public school or a private school to send their child to—one that works best for that child and that family. The parents and the children deserve the right to choose a school that is equipped in servicing special needs children. Contact your legislators and show your support for this bill.

Sincerely,
Name

Dear Editor,

Statewide, there are over 130,000 children classified as special education students. St. Louis City School District reports 6,166 special education children and Kansas City District reports 3,203 special education children. These numbers were calculated by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) in 2006 and only count children age 5 and above. There are most likely more special education students now, especially given that autism rates are constantly on the rise. While it is upsetting these numbers are so high, it is something we must face head on: we must not assume that the current system will simply expand to accept all these children (some with very new diagnoses) and yet maintain excellent programs. These children may need some different services than the rest of the children, but this does not mean they are not capable of the same successes nor does it mean they deserve less of a chance to get there.

Now that the legislative session has begun, I think we all need to watch out for bills that can affect how these children are educated and the choices they are given. We need to support those bills that can positively affect these children and at their chance to thrive. Even if you are not a parent of a special needs child, your legislator is a phone call away—ask what he or she is doing to make Missouri a leader in educating ALL children. Special needs children deserve a chance and they need everyone's support.

Sincerely,
Name