

Graduation Speaker Sued to Attend High School

When school district officials fought to keep Ryan Teed out of his neighborhood high school in Bloomington, MN, they likely didn't have a clue they were up against a future graduation speaker. The speaker who had to audition for a spot to represent his class — and then wrote the speech on his own. The speaker that got thunderous applause as he spoke to his fellow Kennedy High School graduates.

Four years ago, Ryan's parents, Barb and Russ Teed, were told that because Ryan had an IQ score of 46, he would be placed in a self-contained classroom in the district's other high school, Jefferson — which was miles away on the other side of town. Ryan, who had always been in a regular education classroom in his neighborhood school with support from a paraprofessional, would be forced to go to a school where he knew no one.

Ryan's parents spent a year going through conciliation, mediation and due process. The mediator ordered Ryan to attend Jefferson. Ryan was having none of that. He called a friend's mother and asked for her help. The mother put the Teeds in contact with an attorney who specialized in disability law.

Barb says, "The attorney told me just to put him on the bus to the neighborhood school because it would be illegal for the school to turn him away when he showed up at their doors. She was right, although the principal did have security eject me when I showed up to make sure Ryan was okay. In retrospect, I wish we would have gone to the attorney right away."

Ultimately, the case was settled. Ryan attended Kennedy four days a week and spent one day a week at Jefferson. The school district paid all attorney's fees and compensatory fees, which ultimately cost more than if the district had just paid for the necessary paraprofessional support in the first place.

As for Ryan? He'll go down in Kennedy High School history as a 2005 graduation speaker. (JA)