



Education Reform Report

Profile: Representative Dwight Scharnhorst

A Rainbow of Hope for Special Needs Children

www.BrycesLaw.com

A simple glimpse of a rainbow instantly connects Missouri Representative Dwight Scharnhorst to his grandson's spirit and reminds him of little Bryce's blissful demeanor. Bryce was autistic and died of epilepsy at the age of 6. He spent every other weekend with his 'pa-pa' and though he could not speak he communicated with his big blue eyes.



Because of Bryce, Scharnhorst experienced first-hand the hopeless lack of options millions of parents face in regards to the education of their special needs child. Though in a high-quality school district, Bryce was not making any progress. It was only after being transferred to a costly specialized learning center was inspiring growth finally achieved. "When you see communication in an autistic child—taking instruction and paying attention—you know that you found education."

For this reason, Scharnhorst's first and top priority is re-filing Bryce's law. This bill gives scholarships to families with special needs children covering all or part of the costs to attend the public or private school of their choice. The money would be generated from a tax credit against a state tax liability equal to 80 percent of a contribution from an individual or company and donated to a scholarship-granting organization. To ensure efficiency, Bryce's Law outlines many specific details concerning the students, participating schools and non-profit associations. For example, the school is required to regularly report to parents regarding student progress. "Ultimately we're relieving the public teachers, who by law have to take these children but don't necessarily have the time or training to actually educate them." The creation of the Missouri Special Needs Scholarship Tax Credit Program will brighten the future for the approximately 130,000 children currently enrolled in public school special education that were previously left in the dark.

Passionately dedicated to the cause, Scharnhorst is a member of the newly established Missouri Commission on Autism Spectrum Disorders and the Office of Autism Services. The group will make recommendations, conduct and assess research and develop a state plan for training, treatments and services related to the disorder.

Profile continued

Other education reforms are also on his agenda. For example, Scharnhorst will sponsor legislation mandating an independent party be present during IEP meetings. Additional, he plans on taking an active role in financial and curricular improvements as well as increasing parental involvement.

"Bryce was my rainbow. He added joy and color to my life."

His personal goals right now are to maintain his seat in the House for the full eight years. Beyond that, he will keep his possibilities open. "With Autism there is no tomorrow, there is only now. Bryce's Law is my focus. No piece of legislation is more important or deserved then Bryce's law."

Scharnhorst considers the rainbow a symbol of his passionate promise to fight for these families and hope of a brighter future for special needs children. "You have to look inside your heart. These children need us."



More information can be found at BrycesLaw.com

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New State Coordinator Hired



Earl Simms has been hired as the new State Coordinator for CEAM. Earl has spent the previous four years at Strategic Public Partners Group, a full service public affairs firm based in Columbus, Ohio. There Earl was Project Manager for a Fortune 300 client on grassroots policy and communication strategy. Prior to that assignment Earl worked on a wide array of issues ranging from Social Security reform to healthcare legislation. Before joining Strategic Public Partners Group, Earl worked in the office of the Kentucky State Senate President as a Communications Assistant and has interned for current United States Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell.

Earl is a graduate of Murray State University in Murray, Kentucky where he double majored in Political Science and Public Relations. Originally from Louisville, Kentucky, Earl now lives in the St. Louis metro area with his wife Stephanie and their four-month-old twin daughters.

New Mission Statement

CHILDREN'S EDUCATION ALLIANCE OF MISSOURI is a non-partisan organization that is committed to educating business and civic leaders throughout the State about the urgent need for improvements to our educational systems and the importance of providing each child with access to a high quality education.

We believe that there is much to be done in the area of education reform in Missouri and will do all we can to encourage and support a broad-based and inclusive effort that initiates and bolsters systemic reforms, attracts and retains quality teachers and administrators, reduces dropout rates, and improves student performance.

Our goals are to educate business and civic leaders about the urgent need for education reform while supporting and encouraging widespread grassroots and community involvement in the process.



What's Next for CEAM

- Recruiting and retaining high-quality teachers and administrators
- Implementing a merit pay policy for teachers and administrators
- Reducing drop-out rates
- Executing the best practices in schools for all Missouri children
- Remaining active in favor of school choice

Local Outreach

Speakers Available

CEAM is available to present across Missouri on the importance of parental choice in education and the need for school reform. If you are interested in having a speaker address your organization or business, please contact Executive Director Laura Slay at 573-441-0430 at least one week in advance.



Education Q & A

Q: What is involved in helping an Autistic child?

Research with children who have, or are at risk for, various disabilities has shown that effective early intervention can substantially reduce their need for specialized services later on. To be effective, however, Guralnick (1998) and Ramey and Ramey (1998) found that early intervention must be (1) comprehensive, (2) intensive, (3) extended over time, (4) individualized, and (5) delivered directly to children.

Q: What is teacher merit pay?

Merit pay is a general term for policies that adjusts salaries or otherwise compensates to reward teachers and administrators who perform higher. Merit pay reforms effectively produce many benefits including: improving classroom instruction, attracting and retaining high-quality individuals, motivating professional growth, rewarding superior performance and generating accountability measures. It comes in many proposed forms. All merit pay policies include: program objectives, eligibility criteria, a standardized procedure process, evaluation/documentation methods, a merit pay schedule, an appeals procedure and a periodic review plan. Increased earnings for teaching effectiveness can be based on input (teacher performance) or output (student performance) criteria. Many teachers unions seek to maintain their unjustified control using uniform pay schedules—arguing against accountability though compensation. Merit pay will be a key component of comprehensive educational reforms to motivate teachers and improve student performance—both in Missouri and nationwide.

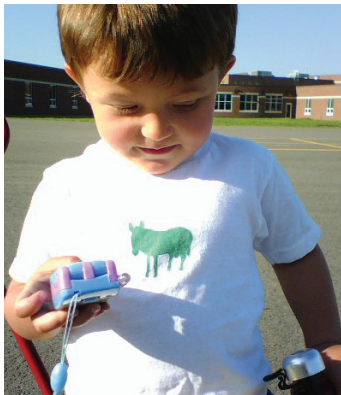


The Magnanimous Miles

www.milesalfonsodiminotherapy.blogspot.com

It is impossible, in the space of this short profile, to share all of the character and verve that Miles Alfonso Dimino possesses. It is likewise impossible to capture the full dedication and spirit of his family: Joe, Carrie, and Zen. What helps is that Joe Dimino, Miles' father, maintains a wonderful blog, milesalfonsodiminotherapy.blogspot.com, which follows the progress of Miles, an extraordinary child who is now 3 years old.

Miles entered the world and the Dimino's life 3 years ago, their second child. In the beginning, he was by all means a typical child, if one can call any child typical. But as Miles grew, it became apparent that he had a different way of interacting with the world. "By the time he got to the age of one, anomalies were popping up," says Joe. Miles had problems with balance (ataxia) and he didn't seem to want to speak (first diagnosed as aphasia). He was especially sensitive to certain sounds. "I was kind of in this Forest Gump ignorance phase, being optimistic" says Joe, not wanting to believe that these things were happening. Though the optimism that first produced denial, later provided acceptance and a drive to find solutions for his son.



Miles began physical, occupational, and speech therapy. Later came behavioral therapy. Though not autism, Miles exhibited some similar behaviors. First Steps, an early intervention program, came in and took blood to run genetic tests. "It's a long arm on the 15th chromosome, which means it's a developmental delay," says Joe. But this did not complete the diagnosis process. Miles' diagnosis has changed several times and has otherwise remained nonspecific. In the meantime, the Diminos just did whatever they could to meet Miles' needs.



Lovers of the urban life, the Diminos had lived in midtown Kansas City and, later, South Kansas City. But with a limited income and Miles' education at stake, they made the decision to move to an area with a better early childhood education program, knowing these were critical years for their son. "Initially, if we had our druthers, we would have stayed in Kansas City," remarks Joe. But he says they are

very happy now in Belton, especially with "Grace Early Childhood Center," a remarkable "stand alone facility dedicated to special needs children and run by the school district." This was not an option for them where they lived in Kansas City.

Magnanimous Miles continued

The Diminos were supporters of Bryce's Law this past spring and continue to help CEAM in many ways. Like so many other parents with special needs kids and similar lives, they understand the important causes and action that must be taken for all children when it comes to good education reform in our state.

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Miles and the Diminos began communicating using sign language and have learned many different signs. Miles has begun to speak occasionally, though it has been hard for him. A description of Miles' speech therapy struggles is candidly captured by Joe in the Miles Blog: "For now, the sounds of 'da-da' blasting across some retail store as I try to find him and Carrie gives me goose bumps. I love his voice and some day the world will as well."

Miles rides the bus to school now and is doing well. He recently said "Hi" to a lady in a local restaurant. Joe says in the blog, "It's when you least suspect it, as I did, that Miles will bust something out and floor you with his ability." And so it is that the magnanimous Miles' abilities continue to abound.



Giant Steps

www.giantsteps-stlouis.org

Over the past 15 years there has been a rise in the number of children diagnosed with autism. This has created challenges on many levels. Schools often are not prepared, nor have the resources, to educate a child with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). Autism is a complex neurological anomaly that requires unique approaches to foster educational growth and development, approaches that an organization such as Giant Steps in greater Saint Louis specializes in.

Giant Steps is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1994 to provide therapy and educational support to children with ASD. With professionals ranging from educators to occupational therapists, Giant Steps offers K-12 instruction in multi-sensory formats. Instruction is conducted in small groups or individually, giving flexibility to the child's specific needs.

Alongside academic instruction, Giant Steps' school year program offers Music Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech Therapy, Social Communication Instruction, Art, and Physical Education. All students participate in Service Learning, an educational concept that links community service to curriculum. And older students learn vocational skills in community job placements with support from a Giant Steps job coach.



Camp Giant Steps, St. Louis' only full-day camp for children with autism, lets campers enjoy the same summer recreational opportunities as their peers.



Giant Steps is just one of the many important programs that is such an asset to our state and to parents with special needs children. "All parents want to insure that their child will receive the best education available," says Betty Berger, Giant Steps Director. "Many Giant Steps families support policy initiatives that have the potential to improve the lives of children on the autism spectrum."

Visiting with any of the many wonderful families at Giant Steps, it is apparent, the wonderful work this organization is doing to improve their

children's lives and, accordingly, their own. Many of these parents are a part of the Children's Education Alliance of Missouri, and helped us in trying to pass Bryce's Law this past session. Our hats are off to their efforts, given all the hard work they have done.

Giant Steps is located at 800 Maryville Centre Drive, Suite B, St. Louis, Missouri, 63017. You can visit their website at www.giantsteps-stlouis.org, or contact them at director@giantsteps-stlouis.org.

News

Fall Conference

The Summer Conference is being rescheduled from July 9 to a date to be determined in the fall. Several announcements will be made along with updates from education reform partners from around the State and Country. In addition to sharing ideas, successes, challenges and new information, the conference will focus on how we can work together to improve education for all Missouri's children. Watch the website and your inbox for the exact date. We hope to see you there.



2008 Legislative Session Wrap Up

The Missouri Legislature recently wrapped up the 2008 session with several notable strides forward for the quality of education in Missouri.

Highlights:

A bill sent to the governor would expand the state's "A-Plus" junior-college scholarships for students from unaccredited public school districts (St. Louis, Wellston) to help them attend Ranken Technical College, a private school.

A Teacher certification bill will allow career-changers to teach after being certified by the American Board for Certification of Teaching Excellence. (SB1066)

Bryce's Law, a tuition tax credit scholarship for special-needs children to attend private schools. The bill did not pass, but garnered widespread visibility for the challenges parents face with special needs education. The language was ultimately added to an omnibus education bill that, while met with opposition, was a milestone in making the issue of educational options a priority with lawmakers.