

Tonight I'd like to share Rachel's story with all of you.

Rachel Yehuda is 14 years old, and is currently in SLCD's high school program at Woodside, where she is in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade. This is her ninth year with SLCD, having started at Glen Cove in the first grade. She has been very fortunate to have continued through the middle school and now she is super excited about moving up to the new Richmond Hill Campus in September.

Rachel's primary disorder is a speech and language impairment. Her expressive and receptive language abilities were at the 1-2 percentile when she began SLCD, and now they range from the 2 to 7 percentile. Although this may not sound like a big difference to you, putting it in other words, she went from not being able to carry on a sustained conversation to being able to do so. She also went from sounding unintelligible to sounding intelligible. This is a big, huge difference. Rachel has also been diagnosed with other disorders, including central auditory processing disorder (or CAPD), hypotonia (which is a weak muscle tone throughout her body) and several visual processing disorders, including convergence disorder (where the letters, words and entire lines get mixed up or move, as she reads). In addition, she also has severe attentional needs, which impacts her learning greatly.

Before beginning SLCD, Rachel attended the North Shore University Hospital Preschool Development Program, which did address her special language needs, but she aged out of it in kindergarten. Before she aged out, I began to look at other programs and truthfully, I was very worried about the lack of options for her.

I was lucky enough to learn about SLCD from another parent that I met at a school function. When I observed a first grade class at SLCD, taught by Miss Gina La Bella, who is still with SLCD today, the children were sitting on the floor, gathered around an oversized calendar, learning about the days of the week. They were all within reach of the subject at hand. They were pointing, touching, raising their hands and shouting their out answers with great excitement. My mind was made up then and there, and I've never changed it since.

I'd like to tell you why we all need to continue to fight for SLCD. SLCD is unlike any other school for this particular student population. While other school programs try to fit students into a prescribed box and demand conformity, SLCD celebrates our children's differences... in an environment

that addresses individual learning needs. Teachers use differentiated instruction and a multi-sensory approach with our children, who all process information differently, in a variety of ways.

All of the administrators, teachers, aides, counselors, and rehabilitative staff are hardworking and dedicated professionals that serve as an inspiration for our children. Dr. T., Dr. Rad., Mr. Schmidt, Dr. Mermelstein, Karen Katzman, Theresa Mais, Michelle Matza, the other Dr. T. and of course Toya Davis all make sure that things run smoothly, and they are always available when you need them. They offer excellence with their curriculum and with their support services.

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And it is because of the excellence of the SLCD people, as well as the SLCD curriculum, that Rachel has come such a long way. I remember a time when her eye contact was almost nonexistent. Now she looks directly at just about everyone she talks to. I remember a time when Rachel would eye just walk away when a new person walked into the room. Now she will walk up to that person and say, hi I'm Rachel. What's your name? I'm sure that her Socialization class helped her to develop these skills.

I was truly surprised that she wanted to participate in two school plays, High School Musical and in Grease, because she really doesn't like to sing and dance. But thanks to the truly talented Music Teacher Miss Carla Mattia, who directs and choreographs the shows, all of the children were motivated to join and all of them performed successfully on stage.

Rachel loves to go to her school. In her own words, she has fun at SLCD, she has great friends and she has great teachers. She works very hard in school and also outside of it. She asks me, repeatedly over the weekend before a test, mom, can we study for my test? And after we study, she will ask me again, Mom when can we study again? When she talks about her current classroom teacher, Mr. Gorman, who she has been lucky enough to have for three years now, it is with love and admiration and respect, and gratitude for all of the support and nurturance and patience he has shown with her, in helping her learn and mature. All of the TA's have been very supportive as well, including her TA's this year, Mr. De Vivo, Miss Tacher and Miss Silver. This year, she has seen her best report cards ever and has proudly boasted about getting 92's and 102's on some of her tests.

I'd also like to give thanks to the entire SLCD team, including the active PTA, headed up by Nancy Rella, the school's board members, and the loyal and new supporters. Thank you all for your support and your hard work that has benefited our children so much. The school's latest endeavor, the new campus in Richmond Hill, allows us to have more space, accept more students, and give our High School students the opportunity to develop life skills and gain valuable workplace competencies, so they can have a good shot at gaining employment in today's competitive job market.

So, on behalf of all of the SLCD parents and the very eager SLCD children, thank you all for coming here tonight. It is because of all of you that they continue to feel confident in their abilities, and have a sense of belonging and purpose in their lives. Enjoy the rest of your evening.