

LETTERS

Rethinking education

At his public school, Mason, who has autism, was always at the bottom of his class. He was being bullied daily and had zero friends. Now, in the specialized environment at Access Group, he is getting A's in math, always talks about his friends and how kind everyone is, and has shown dramatic improvement in his social and pragmatic skills.

Similarly, Katie hated her public school and started having behavior issues both there and at home. Now, she comes home singing and dancing as she shows her family her work from Compass Academy. She is proud of every A+.

Drake was also constantly teased in public school, but is learning more now at Easterseals Academy at Riverdale. He is more confident; in fact, he feels like a leader.

These stories from parents are just three examples of the lives being transformed by the Succeed Scholarship, but there are many more. Students who once hated school, even frustrated to the point of misbehaving, can learn to love learning when they find the right environment. The key is remembering no two students are the same.

Student-focused programs, like ours, put more emphasis on individualized instruction and on building up students' self-esteem. We do this because students are more engaged, and therefore learn better, when they see evidence of improvement.

And it's working! Every year, in The Reform Alliance's survey, Succeed Scholarship parents report their children are growing socially and academically. While only 16.6 percent of parents were satisfied with their children's academic progress in public school, 97.9 percent were at their Succeed Scholarship schools.

It would make a monumental difference in Arkansas if we rethink how we do education so that it focuses on students and if we give more students access to educational opportunities like the Succeed Scholarship.

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Fully fund preschool

Instead of suggesting that people go outside with a net and catch the federal money falling from the skies, Arkansas' voters need to educate themselves on the failures of our state government to fully fund preschool.

The state support for preschool only reaches 32 percent of 4-year-olds and 19 percent of 3-year-olds (except for Fayetteville, which fully funds). Compare that to our neighbor to the west, Oklahoma, which fully funds preschool for 4-year-olds.

Fully funding preschool would be the greatest bang for the buck, especially if you want to address the high school dropout rate and boost more children attending college. So stop the red herring idea that future

generations will look back on the debt that would be added to do the things that are hard. Instead, imagine that they will look back and see that we as a state simply didn't step up to the plate when we could have.

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