

Four years ago, my husband and I set out to find a preschool where our daughter would receive the best experiences and a solid introduction to education. Kevin and I are both teachers, so we clearly realize the value of a quality education and the importance of developing a love of learning. We quickly found that both of these elements and so much more could be found at the Augustin's Children's Center at CP Rochester.

Augustin's Children's Center services children with special needs in an inclusive setting alongside their "general" education peers. This is a setting that benefits all students involved. The students with special needs who struggle in various areas gain an education from a qualified staff of specialists who foster their individual growth. Just as important, they receive quality interaction with same-age peers, who serve as role models to help them develop skills that cannot always be fostered by adult interaction alone.

The aforementioned benefit for special needs students is one that many can see, but often forgotten is the positive impact that this inclusive setting has on the "general" education students. These students not only learn acceptance of difference, but they learn appreciation of those differences and find the strengths in all people. These students clearly do not learn less as a result of the inclusion setting. They receive the benefits of working side-by-side with the many trained adults (teacher's assistants, music therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, etc.) whom they might not come into contact with in another school.

My daughter, Taylor, attended Augustin's for 2 years as a "general" education student. She grew socially, emotionally, and academically during those years. Just like each child in the program, Taylor was not expected to fit a mold. The teachers take each child for who they are and help them to reach their own potential. Taylor is now thriving as a first grader and we definitely thank Augustine's Children's Center for giving her such a jumpstart.

The year after my daughter graduated, my son, Carter, entered Augustine's as a special education student. Carter has spina bifida and was clearly developmentally delayed in PT, OT and other learning and social areas. Carter has been a student for a little over a year now and he has grown exponentially and is no longer classified as a student with special needs. The supportive and highly trained teachers and staff at Augustin's played a significant roll in his rapid development. Just like Taylor, Carter loves school and thrives on learning and growing.

If sending two of our children isn't testament enough for the program, next year, when Carter graduates, we plan to send our third child, Lincoln, for his preschool experience. Augustine's Children's Center is a quality educational environment filled with caring and capable staff. The array of difference in the students only serves to create a unity that most schools can only hope to achieve.

Kevin and Marcia Biata