

New High School for Children with AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

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Each fall thousands of teenagers and their families are filled with nervous excitement and anticipation for the first day of high school. This year, several families of children who have Autism Spectrum Disorders are celebrating the beginning of their high school years in a new school designed specifically to meet their needs. The Children's Home of Cincinnati launched a new high school for children who have diagnoses along the Autism Spectrum. They developed the new school in partnership with Linden Grove Academy, a K-8 school for children who have diagnoses along the Autism Spectrum. Parents voiced a need for a secondary school to meet the needs of their children as they graduate from the 8th grade. The Children's Home responded by creating a new high school that will provide students with a high quality, individualized education that supports the continued development of social and life skills in an academic setting. The new school meets Ohio's content standards for curriculum and offers credits toward a high school diploma. Students are also able to use Ohio's Autism Scholarship Program that gives qualifying families the choice to attend a special education program other than the one operated by their home school district.

Autism Spectrum Disorders are developmental disorders that can cause difficulty with understanding and using language, and relating to people, events and objects. Many children with Autism Spectrum diagnoses have difficulty dealing with stimuli related to the sense of smell, taste, hearing, and vision. Autism is a Spectrum Disorder, meaning that each person with the disorder is affected in





Left to right: (Step Dad) Jim Lehmann, (Mom) Dr. Marica Bowling and (Son) Bo Broadnux



different ways, and symptoms can range from very mild to severe. For children with Autism Spectrum Disorders, navigating a large school environment can be quite difficult. The Children's Home offers a smaller, more individualized educational opportunity to support their educational success.

On Orientation Day, Bo Broadnax and his parents toured the newly remodeled school building that was designed specifically to meet the sensory needs of children with Autism. It is structured to reduce echoes and sensory distractions since children with Autism can have extremely sensitive auditory and tactile senses and can be overstimulated in traditional school environments. Each classroom has computers to complement interactive smart boards on the classroom walls. Students like Bo will be able harness cutting edge technology and individualized curriculum to support academic success, but will also be able to tap in to community resources and have opportunities to interact with peers who attend other local high schools, giving students access to the best of both worlds.

"I heard about the new high school for children with Autism Spectrum Disorders from a fellow physician whose child attended one of The Children's Home's other programs," said Dr. Marcia Bowling, Bo's mother. "We are excited for Bo to have the

opportunity to attend a local school that will meet his needs." Bo previously attended an out-of-town boarding school for children with Autism and is excited to have an opportunity attend school closer to home. Bo and his family are not alone in seeking quality educational opportunities specifically for children with Autism. The need for quality, specialized education services has grown as the number of children with Autism Spectrum diagnoses has increased to about 1 in every 110 children born in the United States.

The Children's Home has a rich history of providing education and treatment services. Each year, they touch the lives of over 6,600 vulnerable children and their families, providing education and treatment services that build the skills and confidence to succeed in life. They follow the principles of the Teaching Family Model (TFM) to help children with social, behavioral, and learning challenges succeed in their home, school, and community environments. The Teaching Family Model is an evidence-based behavior modification practice that teaches children to improve their behaviors and social skills. This is done through individualized treatment and a highly structured motivational system, and is taught through modeling and positive relationships with highly skilled staff that have mastered the model through inten-

sive training, evaluation, and feedback. The Children's Home of Cincinnati is among the front runners of best practices in education and treatment, as one of only 16 organizations in North America that is certified in the Teaching Family Model.

The teachers at the new high school bring over 60 years of combined experience working with children with developmental disabilities. "Our goal is to help students become as independent as possible by earning a high school diploma, developing job skills, and learning the life skills that will help them succeed outside of the classroom," says Gary Robbe, teacher/Lead Intervention Specialist at the new high school. Robbe anticipates that many students who attend the new high school will go on to college with a few accommodations that will help to ensure their continued success. "One of the things that differentiates this school from other educational options for students with Autism is the regular presence of speech and language therapists and the integration of social and life skill development into our everyday

curriculum," says Susan Schmidt another teacher/Intervention Specialist on staff, "not to mention that students receive credits toward graduation."

With an eye to the future, the school will also focus on building job and independent living skills. "Since Bo will be able to attend a local school that meets his needs, we're glad that he'll be able to do things that were impossible at boarding school, like take piano lessons and even look for a local job," says his mother. And the staff at The Children's Home will be ready to support his growing independence through job-readiness training that will be part of the curriculum. "Children with Autism have great learning potential and families can see great improvement in their children when schools teach and model appropriate behavior and social skills," says Gary Robbe. ❖

For more information on The Children's Home of Cincinnati's new high school for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders, visit their website at www.TheChildrensHomeCinti.org, or call 513-272-2800.