

Pilon, Janet

Subject: In-School Speech Therapy Service CONCERN - MEDIA

Importance: High

From: Szczotka Malwina

Sent: Wednesday, November 25, 2020 9:01 AM

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Good morning,

I hope this e mail finds you all well. I am e mailing you all in follow up to the e mail sent last Wednesday, November 19, 2020, to which I have yet to receive a reply from the majority of those it was sent to. As a tax paying citizen and a mother concerned for her son, I must say that it is shocking and concerning that those in a position of power and with the ability to offer help, such as yourselves, are choosing to ignore the pleas of a mother who is advocating for in-school speech therapy for her son. It is appalling actually and borders on negligence.

It does no harm to you to help us, but it does in fact harm the development of my child. If a child required medical assistance would that be withheld? If a child required hands-on assistance with ADLs would that be withheld? I think not. Then why is it, that speech services are being withheld from my son? The evidence is clear that children, such as Theodore, with a neurological motor disorder (Apraxia) REQUIRE intensive speech therapy and you, those in positions of power and in positions to offer help, are choosing to look the other way and ignore it.

This system is lacking and needs improvement. I pay taxes, quite a lot actually, and I chose the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board for my son because I was under the impression that it would provide him with the in-class speech services he needs. If the Niagara Catholic Districts School Board can manage in-school speech services for children with Apraxia then I cannot comprehend why the HWCDSB cannot follow suit.

I will not sit idly by and I will continue to e mail, to advocate, and to pursue ALL avenues until this service is offered for my son. The Glanbrook Gazette has made this concern front page (please see attached) and I can promise you I will not stop with there.

I am begging you to please reply and to take action and help Theodore. He does need it, despite what the school SLPs assessment was. Which in my opinion is grossly false, given that she stated in her report that he was 100% intelligible to her. That simply is false because he is NOT 100% intelligible to his parents who know him best. So how, I ask you, can he be that intelligible to her?

The hardest part of living with Apraxia is unpredictable speech errors. One moment you may be able to articulate a word "correctly," then the next moment unable to say that same word. It's a game of uncertainty and a battle just in everyday conversation. Many people don't have to think twice before they speak. So, if my e mail teaches you anything, it's to be aware of how Apraxia can indeed affect someone. It's so much more than a few speech errors now and then. This is why Theodore, and those like him, NEED speech therapy. Please know I am not the only parent struggling and advocating. I have well over 200 parents and supporters who stand by Theodore and my advocating for him.

Please find it in yourself to stop ignoring my pleas because I will not stop until you do just that.

With thanks,

Malwina Stemmler RN, BScN, BSc, RPN

GLANBROOK

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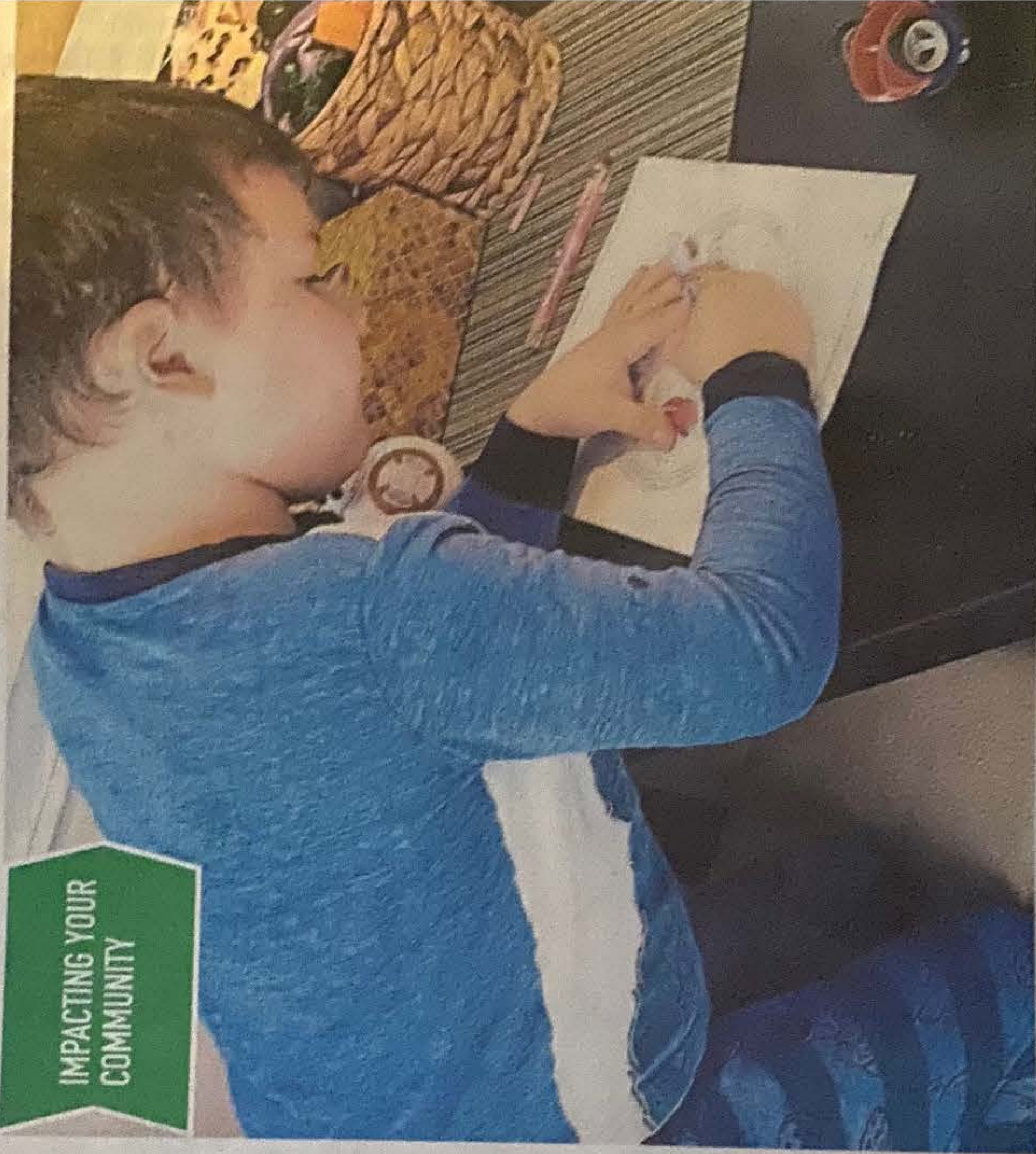
Malwina Stemmler is frustrated with the bureaucratic process she's had to navigate with the Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board to get speech therapy for her five-year-old son Theo.

"It's been definitely a roller-coaster ride," she said.

When Theo was 18 months, it became apparent to Stemmler that he was different, as he didn't have the vocabulary or make the sounds that their oldest child had done at the same age.

"We were turned away initially from a pediatrician who called the 'second child syndrome,' essentially meaning that he was la-

See FAMILY, page 4



Five-year-old Theo Szczoika has been diagnosed with apraxia, a neurological disorder that affects brain pathway. Theo requires speech therapy.

Malwina Szczoika




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FAMILY WAITED OVER A YEAR FOR ASSESSMENT

Continued from front

zy and that his speech would come around," said Stemmler. "But then by age two, he'd actually lost words."

After seeing multiple pediatricians and a neurologist, Theo was diagnosed with apraxia, a neurological disorder characterized by the loss of ability to execute skilled movements — despite having the desire and the physical ability to do so.

In Theo's case, apraxia meant he has difficulty planning and producing the specific series of movements that are necessary for speech.

Stemmler paid for private speech therapy. Theo also received help from Early Words, a publicly funded speech and language program. This meant he was receiving four half-hour sessions a week, with excellent results.

"His growth in speech just blossomed," said Stemmler. "He flourished."

She said when he reached the stage of making developmentally appropriate errors, he was discharged from Early Words.

He entered junior kindergarten last year with the Hamilton Wentworth Catholic School Board, and that's when the hiccup really began, Stemmler said.

The process for assessment in that board is similar to those of other school boards: a parent initiates contact with the school to request speech-language pathologist services.

With informed parental consent, the school board's speech-language pathologist reviews assessment reports and results, as well as any treatment plan, recommending strategies to the classroom educator team — the teacher and designated early childhood educator.

"Each student is unique," stated board spokesperson Marnie Jadon. "Depending on the request, (the speech-language pathologist) will assess (the) student using formal and/or informal measures."

"In addition, (the speech-language pathologist) may observe (the) student interacting with peers in the school environment, as well as interview the teacher."

From there, a classroom plan may or may not be developed.

Stemmler said she was initially thrilled when Theo started school in 2019.

"I was very optimistic because we received a letter from the school speech language pathologist that he qualified for services," she said. "I didn't even know he was being assessed, so I was ecstatic."



Malwina Szczotka's five-year-old son, Theo Szczotka, has been diagnosed with apraxia, a neurological disorder that affects brain pathways. He requires speech therapy.

But the very next day, she received another letter saying that Theo hadn't qualified for services.

"The therapist even said that she felt that maybe he had been misdiagnosed and that it's not apraxia or that he's outgrowing it," said Stemmler. "You can't outgrow it's a lifelong condition."

Stemmler was furious. Then the coronavirus hit and suddenly it was a left school year.

Stemmler said she contacted the speech therapist and her manager multiple times and was told Theo's speech errors weren't atypical of the age and they could reassess when he was six.

Theo is five-and-a-half. "So why not be proactive and see him now?" asked Stemmler.

She said she continued to push, and now they have agreed to another assessment.

"So, it's actually sitting with him and going through an assessment that's designed for children with speech disorders to see where you fall," she said.

Hamilton Wentworth Catholic District School Board did not respond to the Clarbrook Gazette's questions about potential gaps in its speech and language therapy assessment process.

Stemmler, a nurse, said she learned along the way how to be a strong advocate for her son.

"I worry for the children left behind because their families don't know any better," she said. "I didn't know any better, either."

STORY BEHIND THE STORY: Since coronavirus pandemic hit, we've been wanting to know how families are obtaining supports for children with special needs in the school system.

I PICKED A MIGRANT EVERYTHING

J.P. ANTONACCI,
LOCAL JOURNALISM
INITIATIVE REPORTER

The message came I was driving through early-morning darkness

"Rain delay," the Simcoe farmer Schuyler. "Probably noon by the looks of it"

My mission was spend the day picking apples with a crew of migrant farm workers. That night getting to Schuyler Farm by 6:30 a.m., being in the orchard by 7, and putting down my bucket at 5 p.m.

Mother Nature, who actually in charge of farm scheduling, had other ideas.

In past years, Schuyler might have tried sending crews out. At harvest every minute counts, since the snuffles can prompt a COVID test not worth risking a worker catching a cold and taking a whole bunkhouse of commission.

Picking apples rocket science, but the skill to it.

ON

