

Parents battle to get help for 'special son'

By Bruce Weintraub
staff writer

Jason Koller's vocabulary is comprised of several hundred words — each one special.

The 11-year-old Novi resident attends the Farmington Public Schools and has cerebral palsy. He is bright and energetic, but he is unable to talk and relies on a sign interpreter and a special chart for communication.

Unfortunately, Jason's progress has been restricted by a number of factors, among them a dispute between his parents and the Farmington Public Schools. Gloria Koller, Jason's mother, reports her son's sign interpreter was removed from the classroom nearly three weeks earlier than agreed upon by Koller and the Farmington district.

Farmington handles several, centralized special education programs for students throughout Oakland County. Farmington and Novi school officials say because of the special education appeals procedure, they are unable to comment on specifics of the case.

"In September 1989, after going through mediation to resolve the is-

sue for Jason to have a signing interpreter full time in his classroom, it was agreed upon to have the interpreter three full days per week," Gloria Koller said.

KOLLER SAID the agreement called for her son to have a sign interpreter from Oct. 2, 1989, to Nov. 17, 1989. However, Jason's interpreter left the classroom the week of Nov. 2 and returned to the district secretarial pool, she said.

Following the Nov. 17 date, Koller said her son's progress was to have been evaluated and a new plan of action defined.

The Kollers are waiting and hoping that a resolution can be reached soon. Meanwhile, Jason sits in silence, unable to go beyond the 500 words his current mode of communication — a signing board — will allow.

"Jason is already using over 500 words in signing, but where would choose from?" she asked her mother.

Jason also has the option of using a computer. However, Koller said, using the computer is "very complex," and Jason has trouble moving

the device around because he also uses a cane.

Koller said she and her husband spent 14 months trying to get Jason into an appropriate program. She said the family finally settled on Warner Middle School in the Farmington school district. "Finding the proper program may not sound big to some parents, but for parents with handicapped children it can be a major thing," Koller said.

ALTHOUGH JASON'S teacher at Warner Middle School "has been helpful," Kollersaid, her son has not reached his potential since the sign interpreter was removed. "Jason's teacher is learning sign language, but would any parent want their child in a class where he or she knew more about the subject than the teacher?"

A battle between the Kollers' attorney and the school district has ensued since the sign interpreter was removed. "We've retained an attorney and we plan to go to a hearing," Koller said. "We want a full-time sign interpreter for Jason or a teacher who knows sign."

A meeting to discuss the situation with Farmington school officials

was scheduled for Nov. 15. Koller said school officials would not enter the meeting room after learning that she had arranged for notes of the meeting to be recorded by a certified court reporter.

Doug Smith, supervisor/principal of Cloverdale Training Center who oversees the program at Warner, said both Novi and Farmington school officials are following the "due process" procedure deemed appropriate by state special education rules.

Meanwhile, Donna Tinberg, director of special education for Novi schools, said each child in special education is reviewed on a case by case basis. She noted that a student's needs, level of performance, goals and objectives are all taken into account when deciding which school is best suited for each child.

GLORIA KOLLER said her son is suffering most as a result of the dispute, and said, ideally, she would like Jason to attend school in Novi.

"We've lived here for 17 years and I would like to see Jason in the Novi schools," she said. "Right now Jason has an average bus ride of roughly

two hours per day. I want him to be with kids in the neighborhood.

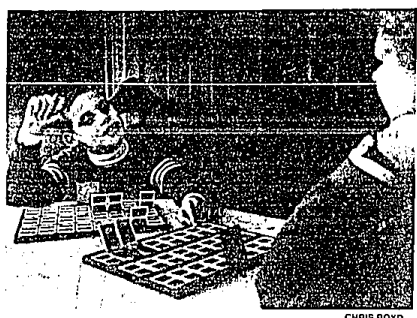
"The more handicapped people are mainstreamed into society and are placed with their peers in the neighborhood, everyone will have a greater understanding of one another," she added.

Koller said Jason is currently undergoing testing to prove his need for a sign interpreter. The testing is

"emotionally draining for Jason," she said.

"Our goal is to get Jason up to his highest level of potential," she said. "The signing board is limited, but the sign interpreter gives Jason unlimited potential."

"This whole situation is really sad because my son is the one who is losing out. Jason is the one who's suffering."



Jason Koller signs 'I' for his mother, Gloria, while playing "Guess Who" at home.

Hills OKs liquor license transfer

Farmington Hills has approved transferring ownership of a liquor license for the Roman Terrace and McFrocks Saloon.

It became necessary to seek transfer of the Class C (liquor by the glass) license when owner Robert McDonald of Farmington Hills changed partners, in turn forming a new corporation with Joseph Macheriattoli of Bloomfield Hills and

changing McFrocks' from a singles bar to McJoos, a hamburger sports bar in Southfield since 1973.

The city council approved transferring the 1989 Class C licensed business with dance permit at 27820 and 27822 Orchard Lake Road from PMP Corp. to MMR Inc. Remodeling of the 10,000-square-

foot, 560-seat dining complex will cost \$75,000, according to Macheriattoli.

The 17-year-old complex offers a full-service menu and also serves meeting, banquet and catering needs.

In considering the license transfer, city councilman Aldo Vignozzi noted that Mr. Joos was ticketed for sale a minor in 1975. He noted that

Roman Terrace and McFrocks were ticketed twice in 1981 for after-hours patrons, once in 1984 for after-hours consumption and once in 1986 for sale to a minor.

But Mayor Terry Sever noted that neither Roman Terrace nor McFrocks has not been cited the past three years. Police Chief William Dwyer recommended approving the license transfer.

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