

Taken you madam chair

I'm Ezzard Castillo, Administrator of River City Christian School in San Antonio, Texas. River City came into existence in 1995 when a family approached a pastor desperately seeking help for their children who were not having any success in the traditional schools settings. When I'm asked what I do? I respond that I see walking miracles everyday. The makeup of River City is as follows. You will see a diverse population. We are 50 % latino/hispanic, 15 % African American%, 10 % mixed, and 30% white. Socio economically the families are diverse. Several of my students are from single parent families, or are being raised by grandparents or another family member or adopted.

Before a student is accepted at River City there is an enrollment process. Our goal is to help the student and relieve the families of their frustrations. I usually begin the process by asking the parents how they hear about us. Most say, we have tried public , charter, home school, online schools, paid for tutors and nothing is working. Not being able to sleep I was up at 2-3am searching the internet and we came across your school. You are our last hope. Several families come with their suitcases packed.

Most of our students come to us at least two to three years behind academically. 99% of the students arrive with several diagnoses, such as ADHD, ADD, Autism, Aspergers, Anxiety and Language processing challenges. As one fourth grade told me Mr. Castillo, I have all the D's, dyslexia, dyscalculia, dysgraphia. Some enroll strictly because they are unable to do the work being asked of them, are overwhelmed by the size of schools, or are bullied.

Parents express that their child is the "forgotten one." They are doing their best, can't seem to get it, are good kids, not causing a problem so they're passed on. Unfortunately these children are the ones who lose hope and end up homeless, on drugs, incarcerated and committing heinous crimes.

What are the results of the aforementioned children when parents are given the ability to choose the educational path for their child.

Let me share what happens when parents and children choose. A single father brought his daughter to us who had been diagnosed with severe autism and was being bullied.. After reviewing her records, letting her visit for a few days and conducting some assessments we shared with the dad we were not sure we could help her academically. Dad insisted we take her because at least he knew she would be safe. She graduated with a completion certificate and two years later I ran into her after she completed taking her finals from the community college. She said I'm going slow Mr C but with God on my side and you helping me see I had more to give, I'm going to make something of myself. Then there's the young man who is teaching at one of San Antonio's premier Catholic High School who was told by a 3rd grade teacher he was too stupid to learn. Upon graduation he attended Our Lady of the Lakes, impressing the president of the Catholic University of America with a presentation that he gave him a full scholarship where he completed his studies. More recently is a brilliant young lady who did 4 years of high school and is in her second year of college and is currently a junior at UTSA. She was bullied and came home crying everyday. Not to be outdone, her sister who has Aspergers is attending Southern New Hampshire University majoring in Photography. Both sisters are maintaining a 4.0 grade average. Then there is Michael who in 5th grade was doing algebra, graduated from high school with honors and twenty five college credit hours, attended Marshall University, and became the ambassador for the college. Oh yes he had Aspergers and was bullied so badly that whenever anyone got close to him, he would start screaming to the point it would affect the entire school. Today he is a very successful real estate agent working with his mother. Then there's the young man who showed up from the ninth ward with his single mother. Unable to afford the tuition we provided some scholarship help and she did what she could. Mom told me the school told her he wouldn't live to see middle school. He graduated with honors, excelled at one of the community colleges, was starting guard for the basketball team and received a

scholarship to complete his medical studies at Texas Tech University. Since 2008 with the exception of one or two students our highest ranking graduate has been a student of color who is doing or has obtained a College degree. Besides these amazing success stories, last year we had seven of our culinary students obtain their food handlers license and this year four of them are on track to obtain their kitchen manager certification. Restaurants have told us , send them to us and we will hire them on the spot. Currently we are working with a young man who graduated two years ago to become a fire safety inspectors assistant. The inspector tells me he knows more than me. These forgotten students are graduating with vet tech certifications, becoming hair stylists, becoming entrepreneurs, and last year we entered into a partnership with a local nonprofit that will offer the opportunity of some of them to obtain a program manager certification. We also have several students learning coding through Amazon future engineers. This is all being done with a shoestring budget as those we charge our tuition is \$11,500. My teachers are underpaid and are equipment needs major overhauls. Yet we are determined not to let these children continue to fall through the cracks.

If given the time I could talk all day about the parents who made a choice to find a place that helps their child reach beyond what was shown on tests and evaluations. I will close with one last story to hopefully illustrate the potential this committee has to transform the lives of these precious children. Back in the early 1990's a young couple chose to adopt a child for the simple fact of changing the life of one. A little Mexican American child was placed in their home. After this child was in the couples home for over 21/2 years because of a glitch in the system they were told they had to give the child back. The couple decided to fight for the child. They contacted their state Senator and many friends submitted letters. That Senator was moved by the letter and the couple's story. A committee was formed to look into their situation. Based on the committee's recommendations, legislation was introduced, passed and signed by the governor. Senator Zafarini, the senator was you. Thank you for making it possible to adopt our little "pocahontas" Tiffany. Because of this experience, since 1996 I have dedicated my life to

these precious souls. What years I may have left, I am dedicated to help these amazing, precious souls achieve their dreams and see that they are not “the forgotten ones! One senator's action transformed the life of who knows how many children the day she took action. There are countless families who are desperate to have an equitable opportunity to place their child in an educational system that will meet their learning needs. Imagine the impact this committee can have on all the “forgotten children of Texas!”