

## School Committee Testimony, January 13, 2023

My name is Lisa Jeanne Graf, and I am a BPS parent and a self identified autistic person. I am also a recent LEND fellow who champions alternatives to Applied Behavioral Analysis - also known as ABA.

This January, Pyramid Educational Consultants will offer four workshops to BPS educators around inclusion. This group centers ABA in their training.

This is very concerning because some caregivers opt out of ABA for their children, on purpose. If an educator was taught to use ABA on ALL students in their classrooms, this could violate the IEPs and 504 plans of some of their students. Also, the caregivers of general education students have not requested that ABA be used on their children.

For some background, ABA was initially designed as a conversion therapy to eliminate autistic traits. Research has shown that autistic children who have had their autistic traits targeted for change are at a higher risk for negative mental health outcomes, including a higher incidence of [PTSD](#), [anxiety and depression](#).

Many autistic adults advocate for this practice to end, including parents of autistic children, as they consider it abuse. Caregivers of autistic children are more often supporting an alternative approach that prioritizes acceptance, access and responsive accommodations.

Although more BPS caregivers are opting out of ABA for their children the district has not acknowledged this or been responsive to this shift. For instance, autistic children with high needs *only* have **one** substantially separate option that groups autistic students. This option, called an “ABA Classroom”, embeds ABA into classroom practices. With the expansion of inclusion, I am concerned that inclusion classrooms will **also** start to embed ABA for **all** students too.

I propose that teachers are not trained to apply ABA to *all* students in classrooms, but *only* the students who request it - including in substantially separate classrooms. Also, teachers should receive training on neurodiversity affirming approaches. Please hire an organization like [PINE](#), the [Therapist Neurodiversity Collective](#), or [Autistics Unmasked](#) to provide this training.

With the expansion of inclusion in BPS there is the potential for the district to be a leader in providing educational innovations that originate from the disability community. I hope that the mayor, and the school committee will be allies in moving the disability rights movement forward.

Thank you for listening.