

On Friday, April 2nd, one of BI's Board of Directors, Diane Hobaugh, and her daughter, Hannah, attended the 5th Annual Legislative Breakfast. They spoke about Early Start and Early Intervention programs to a group of Sonoma County service providers and Legislators. Here are Diane's speaking points:

Early Start...Early Intervention...Early Learning Institute and Easter Seals

By Diane Hobaugh, parent of a child with down syndrome

Early Start is *not*:

Therapy.... but it comforts parents.

A University.... but it is a catalyst of learning, prompting parents to want to learn more, and seek higher learning to help themselves and their child.

A Big Box Store... but it is a one-stop wonderland of instructors, specialists that promote best practices in early childhood education, bringing individualized education to the forefront.

Early Start is *not*:

Threatening and Isolating... It is warm and inviting, encompassing a body of families and children in a supportive learning environment.

Limiting... Parents ask questions and find answers while socializing.

To be taken lightly, or discarded... It builds the foundation of learning for children, encompassing entire families.

Save the programs that are essential to our children. Skills are taught and refined at the appropriate moments in a developing child's life. These teachers and programs are the very reason my daughter,

Hannah, is able to:

- Run on a soccer field with a beautiful gate and climb monkey bars with ease
- Write with a pencil and even play chords on a Ukulele
- Speak effectively and confidently to her friends
- Attend a first grade class as a fully included student with an assistant
- Read at the top of her class and laugh at the humor in the stories
- Share friends that she has known all of her life from her beginnings at Early Start classes

The funding of the early start programs is the reason parents believe in them and value them for their children. Given the option of co-pays, or other means of private pay...these programs won't be chosen. Support Early Start programs with legislature that supports parents and children. Give all children a chance to play the game and win!