



Four Grade Levels in Two Years: Fort Wayne Student Flourishes with INESA

Once anxious and depressed in school, Zach is now a happy-go-lucky teenager. He is thriving with INESA, both academically and emotionally, despite learning disabilities.

INESA Students: Zach Reichard, followed by siblings Julia and Nathaniel

Location: Fort Wayne, IN

Zach has epilepsy, dyslexia, and dysgraphia. Extreme stress and performance anxiety led to diagnoses of generalized anxiety disorder and major depressive disorder.



“*It's not often that a government-run program hits the nail on the head like this one has. Two years ago, we weren't sure if Zach would ever graduate high school or leave home successfully, but now everything has changed. The ESA program is the reason for that.”*

- Nicole Reichard, mother of INESA students Zach, Julia, and Nathaniel Reichard

“I remember that day – I cried and cried, feeling like an utter failure to my son,” says Nicole Reichard. Even with two incomes, the price tag for executive functioning sessions with Mindcap was far beyond what the Reichards could pay. But Zach’s academic and emotional challenges were escalating.

Problems began when he had a life-threatening seizure at 17 months-old. “I thought that was going to be the hardest day of my life as Zach’s mom, but I was wrong,” says Nicole. “As he grew, we knew he

wasn’t developing like other kids. Every milestone was a struggle.”

No Rest in Sight

In kindergarten, Zach struggled with every new letter and word. He especially struggled to write. By first grade, Nicole was certain he had a reading and writing disorder. She requested an IEP, but because Zach tested on the low end of average, he didn’t qualify.

Despite a teacher’s generous offer to tutor him over the summer, an ADHD diagnosis and medication, and an

ADHD research study with Mindcap and Purdue, Zach made little progress.

In third grade, he had regular “shutdown episodes” in school and regularly fell behind his peers. The pressure to “catch up” was intense, and long homework sessions often ended in defiance and tears.

Nicole’s Breaking Point

Eventually, the school decided an IEP was in order, but school got much harder for Zach over the next few years as the reading and writing load expanded. He was

always anxious and depressed. They tried changing schools during his sixth-grade year – from public to private, but it didn't help.

One fateful day, the school called Nicole to come and pick up her son. When she arrived, she found Zach in a catatonic state, muscles tight, trembling all over.

When she discovered he'd been like that for over three hours, she decided to educate Zach at home. That decision required a job change for Nicole and reorganizing the family to accommodate her new job schedule.

A Sigh of Relief

Fortunately, a friend told her about the Indiana Education Scholarship Account (INESA), which provides scholarship funding to K-12 students with disabilities. Nicole went online to find out more. When enrollment opened, she applied and was relieved when Zach was accepted.

The first year of using the ESA was busy. Neuropsych testing revealed a processing disorder, anxiety, dyslexia, and dysgraphia (no ADHD as previously thought). The Reichards chose Specialty Tutoring in Fort Wayne to provide four hours a week of one-on-one academic support.

"Zach does really well when he gets to know one person and works with them," she says. "He's worked with the same lady, Becca, for the last few years. This year, we've been able to decrease tutoring because he is doing so well."

He also finally got those expensive Mindcap sessions. Three to four hours

a week with Vicky and Nathan have helped him improve his executive functioning and processing skills.

"His processing speed is really slow, which was a big part of his problem in school. He couldn't respond quickly. They would keep asking him questions, then he would shut down," explains Nicole. "Mindcap worked with him on processing better and saying to people, 'Give me a minute, I'm thinking.'"

Finally, learning at home has provided a much-needed respite from the constant stress and pressure of school. Zach's anxiety and depression have decreased substantially.

Stunning Results: Academics and Beyond

The most stunning result of customized education for Zach has been progressing through four grade levels of reading and writing in two years.

"Giving parents the ability to choose what is best for their child is the best way to see kids like Zach succeed," Nicole asserts. "Zach has never fit the mold of a successful student in a classroom setting, but is now completely successful educating at home with the resources he needs on the side for his learning disabilities."

The impact has extended far beyond academics, though. "The most important thing is that my child is happy," Nicole says. "He laughs. He's confident. He has a good friend. He went to camp two years in a row and didn't have a single shutdown either time."

The positive changes in Zach's life were so evident that his siblings took notice. "Zach is so happy that two of my other kids begged me to pull them out of school to homeschool," Nicole shares. "When we found out that siblings could be added, I again sat and cried, but this time tears of joy." Older sister, Julia, and younger brother, Nathaniel, have since joined INESA.

"It's not often that a government-run program hits the nail on the head like this one has. Two years ago, we weren't sure if Zach would ever graduate high school or leave home successfully, but now everything has changed. The ESA program is the reason for that."

Nicole's Tips for INESA Parents:

1 Talk to other families.

I'm more than happy to help another family get started and talk them through it. We have been so blessed by this and we want to bless other families.

2 Just get in there.

It's going to take some work and a lot of time to search out options – who and what is available in your area.

3 Prioritize.

You have to prioritize what your kid needs first, second, and third. For us, the tutoring comes first, then the curriculum, then the extras. Also consider the timing of when the money comes in, because it's spaced out and you need to budget for that.