

Note to readers: Though this letter, from a grateful parent, was sent to praise Martha Riley Smith, who is Secretary Riley's granddaughter and a special education teacher in Georgia, it could as well have been sent to many thousands of wonderful, dedicated teachers who work with all kinds of children in this state and across the nation. We are delighted to share it with you.

I would like to take this time to recognize what an outstanding teacher Ms. Martha Smith has been to my son Matthew Kelly. When my 4 year old son first started attending Ms. Smith's special education class, he was using about 3 word sentences, having a difficult time socially with peers his age and not open to new things and experiences. Today, my son speaks in full sentences, he can communicate events that occur during his day; he can add math problems, he can play games with his peers and have fun and he is open to trying new things that all four year olds should engage in. In 7 months the growth has been phenomenal and I know that it's because Ms. Smith has created and fostered an environment of patience, kindness and understanding in her classroom. My son comes home and at least once per week and tells me "I love Ms. Smith a lot". That tells me my son feels loved, wanted, understood and cared for by her. I have seen with my own eyes Ms. Smith's various attempts to help Matthew understand certain concepts using her knowledge and resources and then communicating what has been a success with him to me. One of the best aspects I have appreciated the most is her willingness to be available for me as a parent. Ms. Smith always welcomed a phone call, email and even text message to communicate a need for Matthew. Her detailed understanding of Matthew's challenges and strengths lets me know that this is a teacher who cares and is in tune with her children. The work she does and the barriers she has to face daily to teach and prepare special education children are not easy, at all. I want to recommend Ms. Smith for a special recognition and a special reward for the outstanding work she does every day. I'm sure that the school is full of wonderful teachers such as her, but I can't attest for them. I can only attest for Ms. Smith and I truly hope she does not go unrecognized for the gift of a teacher she has been to us. Thank you for your time and attention in reading this letter.