



**Proud Aspy Mom Newsletter**  
**November 2022**

## Just Getting Started!

I learned about Aarushi Pratap from my Spelman Sister, Celeste Davis, the new Director of Arts, Culture and Tourism for the City of St. Petersburg. We recently connected and I shared that my daughter has Asperger's Syndrome, is a rising artist and desires to become a costume designer. Celeste sent me this amazing profile on Ms. Pratap from WEDU. This young lady is not only talented- but she is also ABSOLUTELY driven!

Ms. Pratap is neuro-diverse, (she has autism) and describes being on the SPECTRUM as an asset because it means she sees in color. Like my daughter, she loves to sew and design. It is clear her vision allows her to embrace her creativity and empowers her to advocate for herself. Her passion for sewing led to her opening her own small seamstress/tailoring business. Starting her business and learning how to lead and survive confirmed that she could live a life independent of her family and protected circle. The skill set she obtained led her to Southeastern University College for people with disabilities. Aarushi is the epitome of discipline, determination, and RESILIENCE! She is just getting started. Thank you for sharing, Celeste. Inspiration Matters!



### **Celeste Davis is the City of St. Petersburg's new director of arts, culture, and tourism**

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### **Aarushi Pratap**



Young Tampa artist Aarushi Pratap finds her voice through her artwork, by designing and sewing clothes and contributing to the logo design for Special Olympics USA.

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## Christine Guerrier Joseph, LMHC

Currently an Adjunct Professor, Ms. Joseph teaches Human Development and Principles and Practices of Expressive Arts Therapy at Clinica Artesana.

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## Inclusive Colleges



Southeastern University is not the only college committed to inclusive curriculums. I just learned from another friend and colleague,

Christine Guerrier Joseph that the state of Massachusetts made history by incorporating autistic students into the college system. Governor Baker signed a bill that allows neuro-diverse persons to attend public colleges and universities. It is an important first because it extends higher educational opportunities to students with IDD, (Intellectual Developmental Disabilities) and Autism Spectrum Disorder. This means students will have the opportunity to engage in enriched academic courses and engage in INCLUSIVE college life.

Many neuro-diverse students need guidance to select career paths that not only meet their respective talents but take into account sensory challenges that may inhibit success. Encouraging higher level educators and more importantly funding universities and colleges provides a strong incentive to meaningfully work with the IDD and ASD population. As we debate workforce opportunities and what areas enhance independent living, we should also thank leaders who do not treat those with neurodiversity as a monolithic population.



SPECIAL NEEDS TRUSTS  
ONLINE

Massachusetts First in the  
Nation to Open Colleges to  
Students with IDD and Autism



Budget Summary  
FY2023 ENACTED

### **Inclusive Concurrent Enrollment 4**

Section 30A. (a) In order to ensure that individuals with severe intellectual disabilities, severe autism spectrum disorders or other severe

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developmental disabilities  
participate as non-matriculated  
students in undergraduate.....

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## The Time is Now

So, our daughter surprised us this Thanksgiving week. She decided to fly to Chicago- to see her sister WITHOUT her parents. It felt like an absolute quo! Apparently, she called her sister and together THEY decided it was time to trust them. OH, THE STRESS! First, my husband and I said NO. Then, we debated the pros and cons about supporting her need to act independently at this juncture and finally, we said yes. Of course, this brought on an entirely new level of questions.

1. Does she qualify as an unaccompanied minor? Answer no!
2. Are there special supports in place for persons with disabilities? Answer at the time- I do not know. Answer now- yes!
3. Can we walk our daughter to the gate? Yes
4. Will she be able to board early? Not really!
5. What will happen on the other side when our daughter, who is not her guardian, attempts to pick her up? We have to hope they are NICE on the other side!
6. What if she panics on the plane-how will the team respond? Who KNOWS!

We did not have a lot of time to explore these questions. We packed every snack we could think of. Loaded her phone with emergency numbers, provided extra batteries, books and comfort animals- WAY WAY TOO MUCH. I think looking back, although we were literally riddled with anxiety-we simply understood that it is time to start letting her go more and prepare for the next phase of life.

She did FINE! For what it is worth, I did some research after the fact, and it turns out there is significant guidance that we should all know. Most of it is common sense. However, as advocates, it is our responsibility to stay informed and understand what accommodations exist for our loved ones. The more YOU KNOW - right!

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TSA Travel Special Procedures for Individuals with Disabilities and Medical Conditions



[Visit the TSA Website](#)

Tampa International Airport Accessibility Services guide.



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