

JULY 2009

## SPEDWatch meets with Governor Patrick

### Special education concerns discussed

BOSTON – SPEDWatch Director Ellen Chambers and legal counsel Annette Hines traveled to Boston to meet with Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick in his State House office on July 23<sup>rd</sup>. The meeting was the result of comments and questions put to the Governor by SPEDWatch members during several town hall style meetings which he is holding in cities and towns across the Commonwealth this summer.

Chambers and Hines briefed the Governor on the “state” of special education in Massachusetts including: the high rate of



**Governor Patrick in his State House Office**

noncompliance with special education laws, the disproportionate failure rate of students with disabilities, and the fact that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) has refused to address this problem.

Chambers told the Governor about her daughter Sarah who became suicidal at the age of nine due to mishandling by her school. Hines shared a story about the time a special education director told her that her multiply handicapped daughter would never be anything more than a ‘class pet’. Hines also told the Governor, “I am an attorney. I have three degrees. Everywhere I go I am treated with respect. As president of the Massachusetts Association of Women Lawyers I even had lunch with your wife [Diane Patrick] on one occasion. Yet, when I walk into that IEP Team meeting I am met with complete disrespect. The very valuable information I have about my daughter and her needs is ignored.”

The Governor listened attentively and asked several probing questions. “I do think he took our concerns seriously,” said Chambers. “He allowed the meeting to run quite a bit longer than the 30 minutes originally scheduled.”

Patrick promised to get back to SPEDWatch in two to four weeks, saying he wanted to think things through and talk with DESE about what he’d heard.

“Do I think we’ll hear back in two to four weeks? Yes, I do.” said Chambers. “Will we like what we hear then? We’ll have to wait and see. The Governor did tell me as we were leaving his office that he found the stories he’s heard from SPEDWatch members ‘wrenching.’ I assured him those stories were the norm, not the exception.”