
**Program Review and Investigations Committee
September 24, 2014
SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONALS STAFFING STUDY**

Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee:

My name is David Glidden and I serve as the Executive Director of CSEA SEIU Local 2001. CSEA is a labor union that represents approximately 2,500 ParaEducators working in school districts across our state.

The function of ParaEducators in our schools is greatly misunderstood. Many adults don't know what ParaEducators do because their widespread use is a relatively new phenomenon; a phenomenon that coincides largely with the mainstreaming of students with special needs.

Today's students on the other hand, know what ParaEducators do because paras are now a vital part of the delivery of education. Ask a special needs student who the most important person is in his or her life at school, and invariably the answer will be his or her Para. ParaEducators get involved with virtually every aspect of education from developing lesson plans to engaging in intensive one-on-one instruction. The truth is ParaEducators perform a lot of duties that are traditionally associated with teachers. And in regard to special education, they deal with everything from the development of an IEP to dealing with toileting issues. And it seems that every year there are new responsibilities and expectations for our ParaEducators. Because they are in this business for the kids, they take on their responsibilities with dedication and enthusiasm.

The problem is that despite the key role that ParaEducators play, they are often relegated to afterthought status in any policy discussion or priority setting on education. Though ParaEducators deal with some of the most difficult issues in the classroom, the training that they receive is often woefully inadequate. We also find that staffing levels are very inconsistent, with some school systems cutting significant amounts of ParaEducator positions despite the demonstrated need to maintain or increase staffing levels. Finally, in most school districts, there is only one job title for Paras, despite the fact that there is an extremely wide range of functions performed. There is a pronounced need for a ParaEducator career ladder with a graduated set of required experience and training. Such a system would ensure that the right person is performing the right job duties.

Thank you.

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