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SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONAL STAFFING STUDY

Good afternoon, Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky and members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Marcia Cattanach. I have been a Kindergarten Classroom Paraprofessional for 24 years, and member of the State of Connecticut Paraprofessional Advisory Council since it was established, 6 years ago. Thank you for investigating the staffing concerns facing paraprofessionals. With your indulgence, I'd like to highlight for you a few scenarios that paraprofessionals face on a regular basis in our public schools.

- **Paraprofessionals Used As Substitutes**

Adult Support Paraprofessionals are often asked by their school principals to substitute in a class, other than their own, when there is no coverage. This is not a problem when the student/students to whom the paraprofessional is assigned, are absent. However, in almost all cases, the paraprofessional's student/students are present, and are taken to the class in which he/she was asked to substitute in for the day. There are two problems in this situation:

1. The paraprofessional is now assigned two jobs; those of the teacher and the paraprofessional.
2. The student/students are not in their assigned class or grade level.

- **Students Assigned to Paraprofessionals**

There are no limits or regulations on the number of students that can assigned to a paraprofessional. There also seems to be no guidelines or regulations as to the combination of students assigned to a paraprofessional. For example, an Adult Support Paraprofessional can be assigned to three special needs students; one with Down syndrome, one with Autism, and another with behavior issues which is a “Runner.” There have been incidents where a paraprofessional has had to make the decision to either run after her/his student before they run out of the school, leaving other students unattended or remain with the other students.

Also, when a special needs student enrolls during the school year, administrators will typically identify the room where an Adult Support Paraprofessional is assigned, and if it is the appropriate grade, will then assign that new student to that classroom. It is a decision based on cost rather than the needs of the student. Rather than assign/hire another paraprofessional to a different classroom, they will place the student with the other special needs students.

- **No Substitutes for Paraprofessionals**

When a paraprofessional is absent, there are no substitutes to take over her/his responsibilities for the day. The students assigned to that paraprofessional are left with the teacher. If the student is placed with another paraprofessional in another classroom, then he/she is taken out of his accustomed environment, which for special needs students, poses a problem. Also, the paraprofessional is now assigned to more students, which refers back to my earlier concerns.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns with you today. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you.

Respectfully submitted,

Marcia Cattanach
Kindergarten Classroom Paraprofessional