



STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
*STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION*



Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee  
Testimony of the Connecticut State Department of Education  
September 24, 2014

School Paraprofessional Staffing

Good afternoon, Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky, and Members of the Committee. My name is Martha Deeds, and I am the special assistant to the Commissioner at the State Department of Education. With me is Iris White, an Education Consultant in the Turnaround Office, who works on issues regarding paraeducators. Thank you for this opportunity to be here this afternoon to provide information on the Department's role regarding paraeducators and to comment on your study of school paraeducator staffing.

Historically, the Department has been involved with the issue of school paraeducators primarily in two areas.

First, the Department has responsibility for overseeing the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. And under that federal law, school paraeducators with instructional responsibilities in schools receiving Title 1 funds must meet minimum education standards.

Secondly, the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, or IDEA, requires the Department to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the provisions of IDEA, including paraeducators, are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained.

State legislation, passed in 2007, expanded the Department's role to include collaborating with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) to promote and encourage professional development activities for school paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities. The Department collaborates with SERC on the annual Paraeducators as Partners Conference. The Department works closely with both the State Education Resource Center and the Regional Educational Service Centers to develop training and has provided state funding to expand capacity so that each Regional Educational Service Center has consultants trained in these modules which are then delivered in-district.

In 2008, the Department established the School Paraprofessional Advisory Council. The mission of the council is to gather resources, examine data, investigate and study issues, provide guidance and professional learning opportunities, and maximize results using current and relevant tools and strategies. Two Education Consultants from the Department sit on this Council and bring relevant recommendations back to the Department. The Council has been a driving force paraeducator issues in the state, continually informing the work of the Department and service providers, as well as collaborating with the University of Centers for

Excellence in Developmental Disabilities, Education, Research, and Science to develop a needs assessment on paraeducator professional development needs and establishing the Anne Marie Murphy Paraeducator of the Year Award. This award not only recognizes paraeducator contributions to positive student outcomes, but also is a showcase for the effective utilization of paraeducators. Also, in 2013, The National Resource Center for Paraeducators, for the second time, selected Connecticut as the host state for their annual conference.

Annually, the Department sends a request to each Local Education Agency for the name of a central office person who will serve as a district contact for paraeducator Issues. Each month, with the exception of July, a newsletter is sent to each district contact. The focus of this newsletter is to provide pertinent information and updates from the Department regarding the effective utilization, training, and supervision of paraeducators. This newsletter is also posted on the Department's Paraeducator webpage which includes additional resources, including legislation, professional development opportunities, and meeting notes from School Paraprofessional Advisory Council meetings.

In 2012, the Department revised the *Connecticut Guidelines for the Training and Supervision of Paraprofessionals* to include newly created resources, the Connecticut Paraeducator's Guide to Common Core State Standards, Frequently Asked Questions regarding paraeducators and updated data on the number of paraeducators in the state and nation. The guidelines define a paraprofessional as "An employee who assists teachers and/or other professional educators or therapists in the delivery of instructional and related services to students. The paraprofessional works under the direct supervision of the teacher or other certified or licensed professional. The ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation and evaluation of instructional programs, including assessment of student progress, is a collaborative effort of certified and licensed staff." The focus of the guidelines continues to be on instructional roles and responsibilities, supervision, evaluation, and supporting paraeducators. Guidance on orientation programs for paraeducators, their appropriate roles and responsibilities, and their supervision and evaluation are included in this comprehensive document.

Thank you again for this opportunity to testify and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.