



Testimony of
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Program Review and Investigations Committee
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School Paraprofessionals Staffing Committee

Good afternoon Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky and members of the Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Steve McKeever and I am First Vice President of AFT Connecticut, a diverse state federation of union of nearly 29,000 public and private sector employees including state employees, nurses, healthcare workers, teachers, other school personnel, including paraprofessionals. Prior to this position I was a Chemistry and Biology teacher at Middletown High School for seventeen years. I am here today to bring to you a teacher's perspective of paraprofessionals and the role they play in educating our children.

Paraprofessionals are an integral part of the daily education of students. Among their many duties is to assist in the direct instruction for students who need individual support. This support comes in many area; academics, behavioral and social just to name a few. These are all crucial components for the education of the whole child. The teacher is responsible for implementing the curriculum and making sure the students get the attention and education they deserve. However, it is very, very difficult for one person to do it all. In many cases, class sizes are large with increasing numbers of students who need special education or special attention with particular concepts. This is where paraprofessionals provide invaluable support to the student. They help deliver individualized education, giving students additional help and additional supervision.

Unfortunately, this is not always happen as it should. Too often paraprofessionals are “pulled” from a class to cover another student who has an IEP requiring a one to one, or they being asked to double and triple cover students, because districts do not or cannot hire additional paraprofessionals. This leads to a number of questions. Are IEP’s being met with fidelity? Is the State Department of Education is overseeing the implementation of the IEP’s? Have districts begun to rewrite IEP’s in order to avoid the use of paraprofessionals?

According to the Staff Update report of the PRI Committee, between 2002 and 2013 non-certified instructional staff (NCIS) increased in special education by 30%. At the same time NCIS in other areas decreased. Kindergarten decreased by 12.1%, Reading decreased by 17.7% and regular education by 19.3%. This emphasizes the point I made earlier that paraprofessionals are being pulled from one area to work in another. This practice of “Robbing Peter to Pay Paul” is becoming an epidemic that undermines the promise to deliver quality education to all students. There is statewide push to have all students reading on grade level by third grade. How can this be achieved if we continue to pull the support from our Kindergarten and reading classes?

Thank you for your attention to this very important matter. I will be happy to answer any your questions.