



Theresa Staranchak

President, New Britain Federation of Paraprofessionals, AFT Local 2407

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SCHOOL PARAPROFESSIONALS STAFFING STUDY

Good Day, Senator Kissel, Representative Mushinsky and members of the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee. My name is Theresa Staranchak and I have been a paraprofessional for 18 years in the city of New Britain. I am also the President of the New Britain Federation of Paraprofessionals, a union representing 185 paraprofessionals throughout the district. I have held this office for some 5 years and have watched and witnessed many changes that have truly impacted our student population and our paraprofessional population too. Just 2 years ago, our district laid off 65 paraprofessionals. It has left us short staffed and in situations that are not safe. My testimony today will touch on the lack of proper paraprofessional staffing and to the services that are not rendered because of the insufficient number of paraprofessionals working in our schools. I would like to thank you today for listening to all our concerns and for perhaps realizing that this has to change.

When I first started working as a paraprofessional 18 years ago, I was hired as an Early Literacy Paraprofessional working with first graders in small groups, creating centers and meeting the needs of all special needs students. I even contributed to a higher level reading group that was able to produce reading levels beyond that grade level. I split my time between 2 first grade classes and was able to converse, create, and work alongside the teacher every day. It was a wonderful experience because I never left those 2 rooms unlike many of our paraprofessionals today who are scheduled in many rooms daily. Actually, today I visit 6 different classrooms providing services to many students. Meeting the needs of these students is a challenge, but it needs to be done. The lack of staffing definitely

contributes to these students' needs not being met. With large class sizes and the various levels of capabilities all students are not getting what their IEP's (Independent Education Program) are saying. If there were more paraprofessionals staffed at each grade level then the direct services they are able to provide could make all the difference in the world to the student who requires help. There is nothing more rewarding then seeing the smile on the face of a struggling student now able to work towards success. All students, without exception, deserve the right to a good public education.

On a daily basis paraprofessionals are spread thinly throughout a school because so many hours need to be covered. It becomes very unsafe when you are in charge of 2, 3 or 4 students especially when one is a runner (takes off for any reason). There is no way having this type of situation can be considered safe! For this reason we have had accidents which have resulted in workers' compensation cases. Paraprofessionals are then out of work and unlike teachers, there are no substitutes. Paraprofessionals instead are expected to take on extra students. Please explain to me how any student can really learn when in this type of situation!

When the most direct servicing staff, paraprofessionals, are cut from budgets it takes a toll on all our students. Paraprofessionals are the link between teachers and students. In many instances they are the adults that many students come to school for every day. They can provide something that no other staff can do and it is a shame that instead of hiring more, our district chooses to use its money hiring more administrators. Administrators aren't on the floor teaching lessons, tying shoes, helping in the bathroom, wiping a tear and getting the hugs that paraprofessionals get. Many of us have chosen this career because that is where we want to be, helping the neediest of students and helping students be the best they can be!

In closing, I want to ask that you look very closely at the situation the lack of proper paraprofessional staffing creates for all districts. Students and parents need the security of knowing that these individuals are there for them every day and we **need to know that these students' needs are going to be properly met.** The only way this can possibly be realized is if you demand that students have the number of paraprofessionals they need. Please help by making this happen and for ensuring that all students can learn and be successful. No exceptions! Thank you.