
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 Tim Riddle, I am a paraprofessional in the Brookfield School District and President of the CSEA Paraeducator Council.

Paraeducators are a vital part of the modern classroom. One of the phrases I hear a lot when discussing our work is "We are in the business of meeting the needs of the student." That is the truth. Paraeducators work in areas as diverse as clerical, guidance, library media centers, audio-visual, computer technology, one to one with students, ABA (Applied Behavior Analysis), and the vast range of Special Education positions providing support for students and teachers. One of our paramount goals is to socialize kids and get them ready for the future.

This study established to review paraprofessional staffing levels so that we can take a best practices approach to staffing and ensure that we have the proper number of paras in the classroom and provide the training necessary so that the needs of the students are being properly addressed. Professional development and trainings are essential for paraprofessionals to meet the needs of our students.

But many school districts are experiencing a very real and dangerous shortage of paraeducators, due at least in part to boards of education failing to properly fund paraeducator staffing. When it is suspected that a child would benefit from or require special attention, parents and school officials get together and develop what is called an Individual Education Plan or (IEP). The IEP lays out what parents and school districts agree are the services a child requires. The IEP is a legally binding document, but it is often compromised because of low paraeducator staffing levels. Due to these shortages, children with extreme higher needs (say if a child is non-verbal or neurologically challenged), who have been assigned individual one-to-one support are in many cases being doubled or sometimes tripled up with other needy students, and their lives are negatively impacted.

It unlikely we can meet the needs of those children until we address these staffing issues. There are staffing ratios for teachers to children, why isn't there a similar ratio for children with IEPs to paraeducators?

Most of us have a connection to someone dealing with a special needs child; whether through a coworker, a friend, or family member. We know how hard it can be to have a needy child and those needs extend into the classroom. If we are to meet the needs of our students, we need appropriate staffing today, and in the future. We recognize that there are no easy solutions to funding the staffing that is required, but it is required and it must be done.

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