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Ronald L. Gallo
1507 Carson, St.
Connellsville, Pa. 15425

My name is Ronald Gallo.

I live in Connellsville, Fayette County.

I am here for Tommy.

For years I was a volunteer for the Special Olympics program. You are all familiar with this program I am sure. As a volunteer I saw first hand, the devastating effect of neurological disorders on our children.

One of the most common effects of mercury poisoning.

Two years ago I helped form the Better Education Association in the Connellsville Area School District. The object of our group was to rein in runaway education cost and improve education by electing conservative, education minded school board members. We have been completely successful so far.

I have continued to watch school cost and ways to reduce them and improve education.

I came across an article about special education cost in our area schools in the local paper. It was an excellent in dept article.

Not only was the cost shown, but the numbers and percentages of students enrolled in the special education classes were there. I'll get back to this article in a minute.

Across the river from Masontown, Fayette County, in Greene County sits Allegheny Energy's Hatfield Power plant. It spews 290 million pounds of mercury containing pollution per year, or eight billion two hundred million pounds over the last thirty years into our air. Back across the river from Hatfield in Fayette County, Duke Energy has a power plant that spews another Three million pounds of pollution into our air each year.

Just a few miles south of Hatfield Power plant up river in West Virginia, is two more Allegheny Energy err Power Plants. A few miles down river of Hatfield Power plant is the Elrama Power plant. All three of these power plants are coal burners like Hatfield. What the amount of mercury laden pollution produced by these power plants must be astronomical. Between Hatfield and Elrama power plants lies the California Area School District. Down river from Hatfield, along the Monongahela river in sort of a hole, lies the Boro of California. It is the home of California State University.

Getting back to the newspaper article on special education.

Reading the article I was shocked to learn that one out of every three students in the California Area School District is in the special education classes. In the Connellsville School District twenty percent of it's students are in special education, the Uniontown school district has sixteen percent of it's students enrolled in special education. I believe eight percent is the national average. For your information the Connellsville and the Uniontown schools have failed the No Child Left Behind test for the last three years and are on the watch list to be taken over by the state,

At first my motive for looking at special education was to try and reduce the cost of education.

After seeing what I thought was a high rate of children with problems I begin looking for a cause. My resources for looking into things is extremely limited, mostly newspapers and the local library and legislative happenings picked up at my local representatives office.

I happen to get a copy of S. B. 1201 and decided to look into what all the commotion about mercury pollution was. I got interested in mercury pollution real fast when I saw what it did to children. I knew that this is probably what has caused thousands of children in my area to have problems learning. I could not obtain any information relating to mercury poisoning in my area as I believe no studies have been done here. I did learn that studies in other parts of Pennsylvania have shown an almost fifty percent increase in mercury contamination in areas close to power plants. I do know that Masontown has an unusual number of cancer deaths that so far have been past off as just a coincidence.

Ronald L. Gallo

We all know what mercury is and what it does to our children. To sugar coat mercury says a lot about those who are doing the sugar coating.

S.B.1201 makes mercury sound like a trivial pollution only effecting fish and aquatic life. When in fact it is one of the most toxic substance on earth, poisoning our most vulnerable , the unborn child, and our children. I would like to see our legislators who voted for S.B 1201 move their children to California Boro or Masontown. S.B. 1201 completely ignores the fact that mercury poisoning of thousands of our children , condemning them to a life sentence of mental disorders ,will cost the state billions to maintain them for life.

I believe that to kill a child is a terrible thing, but to turn thousands of our children into living vegetables Is horrendous . And to do it for a few thousand dollars in campaign contributions, our legislators must be made to answer for this. Check the Department of State campaign records to see who got how much and from who. Legislators who place money over the children of Pennsylvania must go. We no longer can except business as usual in Harrisburg. Our children are too important.

Fayette County is one of the poorest places in Pennsylvania, for decades. The rest of the state considers us welfare County , even our own elected legislators do nothing to help us.

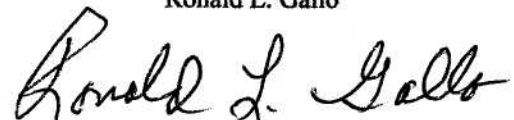
Well I am here to tell you that the people of Fayette are good , God fearing people, who struggle everyday to provide for our family's with only minimal , low paying, no future jobs. We have no industry, no nothing . Yet we are one of the most polluted places in Pennsylvania. The owners of the power plants surrounding Fayette have made large contributions to our legislators to not enact legislation to protect our children from mercury poisoning . The saving from not installing pollution control equipment has gone to construct low polluting power plants in other states The Federal pollution credits earned from these plants are then used to keep Pennsylvania in compliance with Federal regulations, while not reducing pollution by one pound. In our state. S.B. 1201 is proof that our legislators will do anything for money.

I do not particularly care for Gov. Rendell , but must commend him on his mercury abatement plan , although it does not go far enough. Unlike the legislature , the Governor can see the tragedy being forced on the children all across Pennsylvania by the greed of our legislators. As things stand now, we are going to Allow our children to be exposed to mercury toxins with no idea of the effects if any, of previous exposure. This is insane. Does anybody in the legislature know what common sense is ? I urge this board to immediately have private non state involved laboratories , test special education students with neurological disabilities in the immediate area of power plants to determine the extent of mercury poisoning in these children , and all positive test, if any, be turned over to the parents to use to recover damages and remove the financial burden from the state. .

After these test have been completed, and if only a small number of random positive test are found, then and only then should S.B. 1201 be considered. And if S.B.1201 can not be justified by the test, then our legislators can give the money back.

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Ronald L. Gallo



Children with disabilities, their parents protected by law

Editor's note: The following is the last in a three-part series looking at how school districts in Fayette, Greene and Washington counties are dealing with revisions of a law that requires special education students be taught in a regular classroom.

By JOYCE KOBALLA
Herald-Standard
Pete Wright's elementary school teachers described him



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as social, self-reliant and eager to learn, but, at the same time, documented he was disobedient, immature and a waste of time.

And, Wright, a special education attorney from Richmond, Va., said he is still trying to figure out what his kindergarten teacher meant when she wrote

he was "fussy with his fists" on his report card.

After being diagnosed with dyslexia, dysgraphia and attention deficit disorder around 8 years of age, Wright's parents took immediate action to address his needs and found him a private tutor who literally changed his life over the next two years.

"I never had another problem with reading, writing and math since," said Wright. Just like the Wrights, parents

of children with disabilities always are searching for the proper services that will produce positive results for their son or daughter, entitling them to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under state law.

With FAPE, a child's rights as well as those of their parents are legally protected under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

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Law

Children, parents have protection

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The purpose of the law, which was enacted in 2004, is to "ensure that all children with disabilities have available to them a free appropriate public education that emphasizes special education and related services designed to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment and independent living and to ensure that the rights of children with disabilities and parents of such children are protected."

"This is the mission statement of the law," said Wright. Parents also need to know the law gives them power to make educational decisions for their child.

However, Wright suggested parents proceed with caution and never use the word "best" when requesting special education services for their child. Otherwise, said Wright, the school usually converts to using a "one-size-fits-all program" for the child and not one that is appropriate and tailored to meet their unique needs under the law.

According to the law, a child with a disability is eligible for special education services at no cost to the parents if it is determined the disability adversely impacts their educational performance.

This applies to all children with disabilities residing in the state between the ages of 3 and 21, including children with disabilities who have been suspended or expelled from school.

When it comes to any child, Wright said parents are the experts, but school districts often shuttler and tend to close doors when told what services or programs may work best for their child.

As the first step to keep doors open for communication between parents and school officials,

Wright and his wife, Pamela Darr Wright, a psychotherapist, strongly advise parents to obtain an evaluation of their child within the private sector followed by getting test data from school evaluations.

Once parents obtain the information, Pete Wright said test results can provide clear evidence whether the child needs additional educational services.

The evaluation determines the child's educational and placement needs as well as any weaknesses, which all should be addressed in the child's Individualized Education Plan (IEP), a document describing the special education and related services specifically designed to meet unique educational needs of a student with a disability.

An IEP is developed by the parents and school officials, and contains the annual short-term objectives based on the student's present level of educational performance required to place them in a proper setting along with a timeframe of the services to be rendered.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act, school districts are required to use "effective research-based reading remediation programs so all children are reading at their grade level by the end of third grade."

Wright suggested the evaluator attend the child's IEP meeting to explain to school officials what program they determined would benefit the child while letting them know at the same time it needs to be taught by a teacher who is trained in that particular method.

"This can really help in providing what the child needs," said Wright.

However, if the school continues with a one-size-fits-all program after the evaluation, Wright said they must provide parents with written notice as to why it was rejected.

According to Pamela Wright, the parents must always keep in mind that their best interests are to solve the problem and protect their relationship with the school district.

"All kids learn differently. That's why you need an evaluator," added Wright.

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Special education

Intermediate Unit 1 key player in Fayette, Greene, Washington counties

Editor's note: The following is the second in a three-part series looking at how school districts in Fayette, Greene and Washington counties are dealing with revisions of a law that requires special education students be taught in a regular classroom.

BY JOYCE KOBALLA
Herald-Standard

For the last three decades, Intermediate Unit 1 (IU 1) has continued to contract various special education programs and classes with the 25 school districts in Fayette, Greene and Washington

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counties.

With 34 preschool programs, 126 special education classrooms, 53 programs that require traveling to school districts and one alternative school, IU1 is currently one of the largest providers of special education services in the state, serving clients in the range of 3 years old to age 21.

The services range from social work and speech to psychological and hearing or visually impaired, with the exception of physical support

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Candace Dunn, Intermediate Unit 1 special education director, works in her Coal Centre office recently. Intermediate Unit 1 is currently one of the largest providers of special education services in Pennsylvania.

DAVE RAFFERTY/Herald-Star

Donations or good press?

Lobbying firm turns gifts into good publicity for legislators

BY ALISON HAWKES
Herald-Standard

Educational Improvement Tax Credits

Iran ac of Wes

TEHRAN, Iran (A said Sunday that it some parts of a Wes

Special education funding

Key provider's services detailed

Continued from A1

services.

"We cover the whole gamut," said Candance Dunn, IU special education director.

In some instances such as in the Frazier School District, Dunn said the IU1 only operates a classroom for the hearing impaired with the district taking on the responsibility of all other special education classes.

The Connellsville Area School District followed suit last year in hiring its own speech and language therapists instead of renewing its contract with the IU 1, for what the school board agreed was financial reasons.

Dunn said in some situations, school districts can't afford to operate a special education class for only a few children who may have the same diagnosis, so the students receive services at other schools where more students are served for that specific need.

Dunn noted the IU 1 staff also has specialized training in certain areas, including in severe disabilities, whereas the school district may not be financially able to hire the proper staff to provide such services.

One example, said Dunn, is children with neurological-based learning disabilities. "We teach them strategies to deal with the (disability) so they can function better."

Dunn said the law requires school districts to educate children with disabilities in the regular classroom with their non-disabled peers with appropriate supplementary aids and services. However, if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education can't be achieved in the regular classroom with those aids and services the student is placed in another classroom that meets their needs.

While the IU 1 may have to modify its services to include more traveling and co-teaching, Dunn said it also would be in need of more staff to do so. Paraprofessionals or personal aides are another service Dunn said the IU 1 provides to

Special education funding for school districts in Fayette, Greene and Washington counties:

Fayette County

	2005-06 estimated	2006-07 proposed
Albert Gallatin	\$2,584,755	\$2,664,008
Brownsville	\$1,172,984	\$1,208,076
Connellsville	\$4,153,775	\$4,272,438
Frazier	\$607,295	\$625,588
Laurel Highlands	\$1,970,997	\$2,021,543
Uniontown Area	\$1,928,786	\$1,983,238

Greene County

Carmichaels Area	\$705,053	\$725,805
Central Greene	\$1,542,119	\$1,581,777
Jefferson-Morgan	\$573,005	\$589,220
S.E. Greene	\$461,860	\$475,269
West Greene	\$626,603	\$639,741

Washington County

Bentworth	\$675,071	\$692,582
Beth-Center	\$856,130	\$880,704
California Area	\$560,151	\$576,207

the school districts, along with social workers and psychologists and occupational and physical therapists.

While school districts such as Uniontown and Laurel Highlands contract their own psychologists, Dunn said the IU provides supplemental services in that field.

Dunn said the IU 1 also bills the state Department of Public Welfare through its School-Based ACCESS program (SBAP) for the eligible services it provides to all 25 school districts.

Dunn said those entities permitted to enroll as SBAP providers include the state's 501 school districts, intermediate units, state-owned schools, approved private schools and charter schools.

The program was initiated by the state Department of Education during the 1991-1992

school year as an avenue for school entities to receive additional federal funding through Medicaid for medical and health-related special education services.

It applies to students that qualify for the state's medical assistance of ACCESS program. Services covered under the SBAP program include assistive devices, audiology, Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings, interpreter, nursing, occupational therapy, personal care assistant, physical therapy, physician, psychiatric, psychology, social work, speech, language and hearing, teacher of the hearing impaired, special transportation and vision.

The IU 1 also provides an orientation and mobility process that prepares a blind or visually impaired student to be able to move safely and inde-

In 2005-2006, the IU received \$1,602,379 in special education funding from the state, the most out of the \$49,531,000 distributed among Pennsylvania's 29 intermediate units.

Additional funding is generated through its member school districts as well as state and federal grants.

In the local school districts, special education subsidy is distributed by the state based on the district's wealth and its enrollment or Average Daily Membership (ADM).

According to Tom Shetterly, business manager at Frazier, each school has its own formula.

Brian McDonald, state Department of Education deputy press secretary, said the amount of special education funding schools receive each year is calculated by giving them last year's subsidy as a base in addition to receiving a pro-rated share of new funding based on the district's market value/personal income aid ratio.

From there, McDonald said the state then applies 16 percent of its ADM to that figure, a number agreed upon by the general assembly based on the assumption that 16 percent of a district's students receive special education services across the board.

This year's proposed budget includes a 4 percent increase in special education subsidy of \$38,123,000 for the state's 501 school districts.

According to state figures, the proposed special education funding for 2006-2007 include \$12,774,891 for Fayette County's six school districts, \$4,011,810 for Greene County five school districts and \$15,116,302 for 14 school districts in Washington County.

In Fayette County, Albert Gallatin is scheduled to receive \$2,664,008; Brownsville \$1,208,076; Connellsville, \$4,272,438; Frazier, \$625,588; Laurel Highlands, \$2,021,543 and Uniontown, \$1,983,238.

Shetterly said while that figure looks promising, it isn't enough for school districts to keep up with the rising costs for special education that increase, as an example, an average of \$150,000 a-year at Frazier versus the \$16,000 increase the district receives annually from the state.