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PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION

July 18, 2007

INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION
Dear Sir

I am writing in response to the PA State Board proposed "Major Changes for Para-professionals." I would like to make a few comments from my personal experience.

I have worked as an instructional aide for the past three years in our school district. Prior to this, I was a stay at home mother and also a TAC Aide for 13 years at a Therapeutic Activity Center for mentally and physically challenged adults. We prepared them for community living in all areas of their lives, functional academics, daily living skills, social/interpersonal skills to employment evaluations and job training. I do not have a degree but was given training on a yearly basis. They also incorporated our training into our work day.

Our school district also gives us training throughout the school year, usually done on in-service days. They give us information on additional training but it is usually after school hours and in a not so reputable part of town. It takes away from our personal responsibilities in the evening. We are not payed or reimbursed for our time or transportation.

The only incentive we are given is that it adds training hours to our portfolio in hopes that we can reach the set amount of training hours to keep our jobs. But now they want to add more rigorous standards which will only hinder all involved. This is ridiculous. As far as I am concerned, my work, past and present, speaks for itself. There are no specific training courses or tests that can address each student's individual goals and needs. That is why we follow IEP's and rely on the professional staff to assist us with questions or concerns.

Para-professionals is just a fancy job title. We are aides/personal care assistants, who work with the student and teacher, only to support their educational needs, physical needs, emotional needs etc. With more rigorous standards, the special needs students will be hurt. There is already a shortage of staff to fill these positions mainly because of the criteria required. We do not need more bureaucratic red tape for school boards to sift through. We need the focus to be on education,

in our school districts. I do not want to be disrespectful in any way, but let me walk you through some of my job duties during a day and you tell me if you need to possess a degree or just some basic common sense:

1. follow student to locker and classroom
2. Redirect student to attend to teacher, follow instructions, taking of notes
3. Redirect student to be socially appropriate
4. follow student to restroom/assist if needed
5. Help student at lunch
6. Keep an eye on student during recess
7. Check daily planner, make sure all assignments are written down
8. Assist to bus
9. Make copies
10. File records
11. Sort mail
12. Check in with teacher at end of day
 - give daily report
 - any paper work

Note: usually you have more than 1 student

I hope this will give you a little
insight into an instructional aides life
Thank you for letting me express
myself on this matter.

Sincerely,

Callie A DeSimone

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