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**Buckheit, James**

**From:** Robert Niemi [seapit1@comcast.net]  
**Sent:** Thursday, July 19, 2007 12:33 PM  
**To:** j buckheit@state.pa.us  
**Cc:** Judy Pamer  
**Subject:** New regulations

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Mr. Buckheit,

I just wanted to comment on the new proposed rulemaking. I am happy to see a requirement for the training and education levels for the paraprofessionals working with special education students. As a parent of a special education student I was surprised to find out there are no training requirements for the individuals working with my child.

The paraprofessional working with our daughter last year had no training from our school district, and no prior experience working with a child with special needs. We felt this was unfair to the paraprofessional and most of all our daughter. Since our district, (especially our neighborhood school) is new to inclusion, we realized that no one was prepared to educate our child. It's disappointing to see other school districts that are successful at including children with special needs. Our daughter has Autism and limited verbal ability. She requires the curriculum to be adapted to her needs. We think the training for the paraprofessionals is extremely important, but also for the regular education teachers. The special education teachers in our district never assist in the regular ed. classroom. All special education is provided in a separate classroom. The special education provided in the regular classroom is provided by an untrained aid. A big area of concern is behavior support, behaviors that are not addressed properly are reinforced, and the bad behaviors get out of control. The lack of training and preparation always hurts the child. It's easy to say, well, we did everything we could the child just doesn't belong here. The districts and the individual schools need to take responsibility to train their staff. We think the problem in our school is that the training has never been needed. Children with significant learning needs have not attended our local school.

Our older daughter is entering middle school and has had one child with special needs in her class. Six years of elementary school in the same school, one child. He was removed the next year. The regular education students also learn from inclusion. Our school has a sign at the middle school that says "Moon Area School District where every child belongs", my older daughter was confused by this since she knows the problems we have had including her sister. She said maybe they just meant the middle school.

We don't think the decision of what programs the district offers should be left to the school district. The decision should be based on the population of the students served. Our district only offers learning support or life skills. Although there is a high percentage of students with autism, of course this is increasing every year. The district also has a high amount of out of district placements. This just shows the lack of interest in providing education to all students within the district. The district is opening a new elementary school in the fall, it will have three learning support classrooms.

The way the ESY decisions are made is also important. I think the school district should be required to provide the parents with all of the criteria for eligibility. Our daughter was denied ESY because she didn't regress on her goals after the winter break. When we questioned this at the meeting they said that they only evaluated her on regression/recoupment. After further research we proved that she was eligible. However our fear is that other children are being denied. Parents are not given the information they need, and we feel that the districts should be required to provide it. A handbook of all of the rules and regulations should be provided. A list of all of the programs offered and services. We feel by not doing this they are withholding information from the parents. We have used the special education consult line many times. We don't think a lot of parents are aware of how easy and helpful that service is. It's a lot of work to find out what is out there to help. We think the department of education has a lot to offer the school districts and the parents, but you have to access it. We also work with an education advocate through Achieva, she has been an enormous help to us.

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We certainly understand the difficulty educating all students, and the costs involved. However in the end this is a public school system where all children have the right to be educated. As with any society it's easy to push aside the weaker group. The school districts have the responsibility to educate all students, and all students have the right to highly qualified individuals working with them. The special education students should have available to them programs that are up to date and that provide them with the opportunity for success. They should be provided with the materials they need to be successful in their education program. The math/ reading /science departments are always coming up with new ways to educate and motivate the children. Every year new ideas, and up to date programs, based on new research. We don't see this in special education. At least not in our school district.

Thank you for your time,

Bob and Lynn Niemi  
Parents in the Moon Area School District  
Moon Twp. Pa.  
[seapit1@comcast.net](mailto:seapit1@comcast.net)