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Julianne Mayo
1148 S. New St.
West Chester, PA 19382

Jim Buckheit, Executive Director
State Board of Education
33 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

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**PA. STATE BOARD
OF EDUCATION**

7/30/2007

Dear Mr. Buckheit,

I am writing to express my interest and concern about the proposed revisions to Chapters 14 and 16.

I am a lifelong resident of Pennsylvania. I have been a Special Education teacher for 22 years. I am a parent and grandparent of children in Pennsylvania public schools. Within my extended family are children who have required Special Education services due to physical handicaps, learning disabilities, and giftedness. It is from the perspective gained from all of these experiences that I express my opinions about the proposed legislation.

Chapter 14

Paraprofessionals

The Intermediate Unit for which I work struggles to fill all the paraprofessional openings. Their annual wages are insufficient to lift them above the poverty line. The two-year post secondary requirement for employment seems premature. I don't understand why the State Board does not recognize the amount of training and in-service paraprofessional staff receives now on a yearly basis. This should be considered as meeting the requirements set within the latest draft of Chapter 14.

Please clarify the word "instructional" before paraprofessional in the personnel section. The duties of paraprofessionals vary with the structure of the program and the needs of students. Are we going to a system of multiple classifications for paraprofessionals? The reality is that paraprofessional support varies with the needs of students, reflected in the decisions of the IEP team.

I am concerned that hard-working paraprofessionals I know will be deemed unqualified due to new requirements that disregard their years of experience and training. The post-secondary requirement imposes a burden of financial and time commitment prior to employment that would close the door to most of the paraprofessionals I have worked with in my years of teaching.

Please consider specifying the types of training and skills required, for all or for each category of paraprofessional support, and allowing a variety of means for this to be achieved. The accepted training should include training provided by the employer.

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Paraprofessionals should be able to receive their training during the workday and it should be available to them free of charge.

Caseload

I support the draft caseload chart concept. The instructional day needs to be clarified to prevent the confusion the current language will generate as different interpretations are made by individual entities with varied motivation, knowledge and perception of this concept. The instructional day should include the time in the school day professional staff have for IEP, Evaluation and Reevaluation meetings, team meetings, correspondence with parents, and report development.

Please consider lowering the caseload for Speech Therapists, and including a chart recognizing the increased time necessary for low incidence populations and support of greater intensity. The Speech and Language Therapist with whom I work provide individual, small group and large group direct service to each of my students. Students' needing intensive support, as well as the accompanying required documentation, places an overwhelming burden on Speech and Language Therapists. To classify all students as the same in determining caseload is to ignore the reality of the wide variation in the type and degree of support needed by these children.

For similar reasons, please consider adjusting the Level II caseload to 20 students. The increase in graphing and progress monitoring of academics and behavior goals, as well as the duties described in the preceding paragraph, have increased the paperwork requirements of serving the needs of the students, with no reduction of other requirements.

Hearing Interpreters

Hearing interpreters should be able to receive their training during the workday and it should be available to them free of charge.

Transition

Thank you for your recognition that starting transition at age 14 makes a difference in outcomes for students with disabilities.

LRE/Gaskin

Maintain the full continuum in the special education plan so that it affirms that we have placement options available to IEP teams based on student needs and the level of support that is necessary. Chapter 14 should reflect the federal law and not go beyond the federal law's intent. I am concerned that the LRE language in the draft language goes beyond federal law. The current draft language should be reviewed and rewritten to reflect IDEA.

I support your recommendation that the special education plan must have behavior training figured out and outlined in the document.

LEA

I recommend that the Local Education Agency representative be required to be an administrator. I endorse the language that does not excuse the LEA representative from attendance at the IEP meeting.

Evaluations:

I suggest you allow educators the ability to request an evaluation of students. Allowing professional staff the opportunity to request an evaluation and to have that request followed through would be very effective in helping students get the services they need promptly.

School Days vs. Calendar Days

Evaluation timelines should be maintained at 60 school days. It is essential that we work with the students in their instructional setting to effectively evaluate and monitor the effectiveness of interventions. Extending the timeline beyond school days will result in professional staff being required to evaluate students who are not in school for all or part of the 60-day period. Being able to see students during the school day, and to communicate with other education professionals involved in the evaluation process, requires the process be done during the school calendar.

Autism

Under the regulations we have in Pennsylvania and IDEA, it appears students with autism have all the rights and privileges of students in any other category except mental retardation. Including them in the additional requirements of the PARC decree is unnecessary.

School Policy

I support your position that school districts can establish their parental visitation guidelines.

Behavior/Use of Restraints

Within the behavior section of Chapter 14, you have described what is a restraint and what is not. This is helpful to IEP members and the staff responsible for implementing behavior plans and interventions.

Written notice to staff

I recommend written notice be given to staff when IEPs are revised. Every teacher and service provider needs to know when changes are made to ensure compliance and timely implementation of the changes determined by the IEP team.

School Nurses

In the section specifying "injuries requiring treatment by medical personnel" does that include the school nurse? Is it assumed to be anyone with an appropriate licence in that field?

RTI

I appreciate the language in reference to Specific Learning Disabilities. One addition would be to ensure that a school psychologist is involved in the Response to Intervention process.

Chapter 16

I support lowering the gifted teacher's caseload, but am disturbed at the increase in class size.

I agree that the single indicator of IQ score is not sufficient to determine giftedness.

Thank you for your attention to my opinions about the proposed regulations. I know I have a lot to say. I hope I have made it easier to digest by listing my concerns by topic.

Thank you for your dedication to developing regulations that best serve the needs of the students we serve.

Sincerely,

Julianne Mayo