

Kathy A. Burd  
2352 Sandy Avenue Latrobe, Pennsylvania 15650

March 11, 2008

Dear Legislator,

I have two children currently identified as gifted who attend Grandview Elementary School in the Derry Area School District. I am writing to you concerning the proposed changes to Chapter 16. I am pleading to you, our legislators to protect the rights of the gifted children in our state, as they seem to be ignored currently. It has come to my attention through PAGE that there is no language in the working document with regard to procedures for compliance monitoring. The state is very concerned with "No Child Left Behind", but in my experience, our gifted children are being left behind, and for them, the case is more of "No Child Gets Ahead". Our school is so concerned with meeting the needs of No Child Left Behind that all of their efforts are concentrated on learning support students to bring up their PSSA scores, and the gifted and high-end learners are often left behind to flounder until the rest of the class catches up. I am also appalled by the consideration to leave the caseload number at 75 instead of dropping it to the proposed 60.

CHAPTER 16 ABSOLUTELY NEEDS TO INCLUDE LANGUAGE FOR COMPLAINT-DRIVEN MONITORING OF SCHOOLS. I have many complaints about our school's handling of gifted children, but often feel very alone in my fight to help them receive an appropriate education. My children, as all gifted children, deserve an appropriate and challenging education. It is quite intimidating to face the teachers, administrators and school district on my own. I do not have the means to pay for due process when the school district strays from Chapter 16, and am therefore left with little or no support from the state that sets the Chapter 16 regulations. We need to have monitoring of school districts on a regular basis and on complaint driven need. If the state will not enforce the regulations it has put in place, what is the incentive for the districts to comply?

CHAPTER 16 MUST INCLUDE A REDUCTION IN THE CASELOAD NUMBER. We have two gifted teachers in our entire district, and they are extremely overworked. Not only do they write GIEPs for each student, but they also have their own gifted pullout classes to teach in addition to assisting numerous regular classroom teachers with adapting work for the gifted children in their classrooms. They cannot be effective teachers when they are expected to handle a caseload of 75 students. A change to 60 would be a great improvement, although I believe it would be more effective if that number were 50 or less. We have seen children in our district, my child being one of them, who have had GIEPs written for them by a teacher they have never met. How can an appropriate individualized education plan be made for a child by a teacher who hasn't met them and has no idea what their needs are?

My family and I deal with the impact of Chapter 16 on our lives on a daily basis. This is why I am so concerned with ensuring that the changes to Chapter 16 include regularly scheduled compliance monitoring, a complaint process that is accessible by all parents, and a stricter limit to gifted teachers caseloads. These small changes can make things better for all of the gifted students and their families in Pennsylvania.

You have the power to make these changes possible. You have the power to make a positive impact on Pennsylvania's brightest students. These children need your help. Please make the right decision and give them the laws they need to achieve bright futures as leaders, business men/women, inventors, scientists, entrepreneurs and citizens of Pennsylvania. I am pleading that you use your power to affect positive change on these children, our gifted children, and not leave them behind as they are being left behind now.

A copy of this letter has been sent to the following: Governor Ed Rendell, Jim Buckheit, Karl R. Gorton, Gerald L. Zahorchak, Dr. Linda Rhen, Diane Castelbuono, Dr. Ed Volbrecht, John Tommasini, Mollie Phillips, Ms. Constance H. Davis, Mr. Larry A. Wittig, Luis Ramos, James R. Roebuck, Jr., Patrick J. Harkins, Lawrence H. Curry, Thaddeus Kirkland, Barbara McIlvaine Smith, Mike Carroll, H. Scott Conklin, Richard Grucela, Michael K. Hanna, Daylin Leach, Mark Longietti, John E. Pallone, Frank Andrews Shimkus, Chelsa Wagner, Jake Wheatley, John T. Yudichak, Jess M. Stairs, Beverly Mackereth, Bernie O'Neill, Kathy L. Rapp, Bob Bastian, Karen D. Beyer, Mike Fleck, Daryl D. Metcalfe, Duane Milne, Thomas P. Murt, Thomas J. Quigley, Sam Rohrer, Curtis G. Sonney, James J. Rhoades, Jeffrey E. Piccola, Raphael Musto, Joseph B. Scarnati, III, Lisa Baker, Patrick M. Browne, Mike Folmer, Robert M. Tomlinson, Andrew E. Dinniman, Vincent J. Hughes, and Gerald J. LaValle. If you know of anyone else who should receive this letter, please contact me.

Sincerely,

  
Kathy A. Burd

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