

TASK FORCE ON SPECIAL EDUCATION SERVICES AND FUNDING

Teacher/Paraeducator Panel Discussion

Location: CAPSS, 26 Caya Avenue, West Hartford, CT 06110

Date: September 10, 2024

Time: 4:00 PM – 6:00 PM

- I. Special Educator Panel to Discuss Teacher/Paraeducator Shortages
 - a. Welcome from Fran Rabinowitz
 - b. Introduction of Task Force Members
 - i. Fran Rabinowitz, Tri-Chair
 - ii. Andrew Feinstein, Tri-Chair
 - iii. Michelle Laubin, Tri-Chair
 - iv. Jennifer Luccier
 - v. Kathryn Meyer
 - vi. Patrice McCarthy
 - vii. Stephanie Wanzer
 - viii. Aimee Turner
 - ix. Karen Helene
 - x. Heather Tartaglia
 - xi. Bryan Klimkiewicz
 - xii. Alisha Bowman (online)
 - xiii. Sally Drew (online)
 - xiv. Jason Adler (online)
 - xv. Lisa Hammersley (online)
 - xvi. Susan Yankee (online)
 - c. Teacher/Paraprofessional Introduction
 - i. Elizabeth Guay – CREC Academy – Special Education Teacher
 - ii. Bonnie Lindsay – Retired in June – 35 years
 - iii. Shellye Davis – Paraeducator
 - iv. Rachel Barrows of HFT – Special Education Teacher & Department Lead – 20 years – 6 years in Special Education
 - v. Dawn - Paraeducator – Selected 2024 Paraeducator of the Year – Special Education Advisory Council

1. What do you believe are the primary reasons for the shortage of special education educators?
 1. Lack of training and support for new teachers.
 2. Adversarial atmosphere in schools.
 3. Disrespect from parents during meetings.
 4. Inadequate pay for educators.
 5. Increased workload due to shortages.
 6. Many special education teachers don't have their own room. They bring in their own resources from room to room.
 7. Teachers straight out of college don't realize how difficult these positions are and exactly what is involved. Student teaching doesn't give them the "big picture"
 8. Special Education Teachers and Paraeducators don't get respect.
2. Have you noticed any trends or changes in the field of special education that might contribute to this shortage?
 1. Inadequate training and support for new teachers,
 2. Adversarial school environments
 3. Disrespect from parents
 4. Insufficient pay
 5. Increased workload due to teacher shortages
 6. Burnout and high turnover rates among special education professionals
 7. Parents are asking for evaluations. When the teachers evaluate the student and the parents don't like the outcome, they get an attorney or advocate and outside evaluations to overturn evaluation/school decisions
3. Are there specific challenges in the day-to-day duties of special education educators that might discourage people from entering or staying in the field?
 1. High caseloads and increased responsibilities that are leading to burnout
 2. Lack of professional development and training for new systems (every district is different)
 3. Insufficient collaboration time between special and regular education teachers
 4. Special education teachers are now responsible for administrative tasks
4. How can we change this picture?
 1. Ensure adequate training and support for new teachers
 2. Foster a supportive and non-adversarial school environment
 3. Address disrespect from parents through better communication and guidelines
 4. Improve pay and benefits for educators to retain talent
 5. Manage workloads to prevent burnout
 6. Special education teachers need more professional development relevant to their duties
 7. Collaboration time should be built into schedules to allow for effective teamwork

8. Implement clear communication guidelines and provide support to educators during meetings
5. Role of Teacher Preparation Program
 1. Teacher preparation programs need to address case management responsibilities.
 2. Training should include co-teaching and collaboration skills.
 3. Paraprofessionals require specific training for their roles.
6. How do we get paraeducators to move forward to special education teachers?
 1. Many times, they have years invested in a position and do not want to lose their jobs as a new teacher if layoffs occur.
 2. They aren't allowed to leave their districts or their jobs to attend school etc.
 3. Having to wait to get an educator reimbursement is not feasible for paraeducators due to their low salary.
7. How do you get more paraeducators?
 1. Ensure adequate training and support
 2. Improve pay and benefits to retain talent
 3. Manage workloads to prevent burnout
 4. Address disrespect from parents, teachers, administrators
 5. Retain better communication and guidelines
8. What do you love about your job?
 1. The children
 2. Impact on students who wouldn't end up where they are.

Teacher/Panel ended at 5:00 PM

II. [Presentation of Results of CEA Survey on Special Education](#)

October 1, 2024 Next Meeting – 9:30 AM

Each of the subcommittees should submit their recommendations for the October 1, 2024 meeting.