

## Rep. Joe Courtney experiences day in the life of a para-educator

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Having U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney (D, 2nd District) working on a problem with him in his Mansfield Middle School computer lab was “pretty cool,” said eighthgrader Kyle Smith.

Courtney was at the school on Thursday, March 20, at the invitation of the school’s 86 instructional assistants, or para-educators, to spend the morning with them and their students in what was dubbed “Walk a Day in a Para’s Shoes.”

The event was sponsored by the Connecticut State Employees Association as a part of its continuing efforts to raise the awareness of public officials as to the vital yet unsung and under-funded work the assistants perform. Currently, there are more than 2,100 para-educators employed in 35 districts across the state.

“We play a critical role in the lives of the students we serve,” said Carlos Figueroa, an instructional assistant who has worked at the school for four years. “We provide academic and social education, we assist in traditional classroom instruction, and that’s why it’s important for elected officials to see the impact we have.”

Union Chapter President Janette Smith put it this way: “If our elected officials are expected to make responsible decisions about our future, we are partially responsible for providing them with the information they need to make informed decisions.”

Courtney was escorted to various classrooms during his tour. In a fifthgrade social studies class, student Jon Halle greeted him with a computer presentation in which he used skis,



**U.S. Rep. Joe Courtney spends time at Mansfield Middle School to walk in the shoes of a para-educator. Photo by Wally Robinson.**

ski boots and poles as a metaphor for the interaction of the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government.

When prompted by a teacher to tell the congressman what they might like to see by way of legislation, one of the students piped up with, “There ought to be a law against homework!”

Courtney thanked the CSEA members for inviting him to experience first-hand the difficult but rewarding work of paraeducators. “All students have unique needs, which our schools are better equipped than ever to address, but we have a long way to go to provide them with all the tools and resources they need to perform even better,” Courtney said. He underscored that last remark by saying that the No Child Left Behind program is currently under-funded by \$85 billion.