

**Fairfield Public Schools
Board of Education
December 9, 2008**

**STATEMENT FOR PUBLIC COMMENT:
Assessing the Real Value of Fairfield's Paras**

Chairwoman Albin and Members of the Board of Education:

My name is Tara Montaine-Varga and I live at 150 Larkspur Road in Fairfield. I am here this evening to talk about the value of our district's paraprofessionals as the mother of three children that have benefited from their hard work and dedication.

When my husband and I moved our family to Fairfield 15 years ago, we were excited about raising our children in a town with a reputation for providing an excellent education. At that time, we were living in Bridgeport, and our eldest son was just beginning kindergarten. My second child, Christopher, had recently been diagnosed with a rare genetic disorder and we were pregnant with our third.

The Fairfield School District was highly recommended to us by our pediatrician, as well as the many specialists we brought Christopher to, primarily because of the special education services that this district provides. We were told that Fairfield recruited the best and brightest, and had a staff of dedicated professionals -- and as far as we were concerned, that included the paraprofessionals assigned to assist my special needs child throughout the school day.

Rearing a child with special needs is very challenging, especially when it comes to their education. Not knowing what your child is capable of learning, or that he even can,

causes an anxiety that is indescribable. Knowing that he is well-cared for during the day -- that he is provided the best possible access to the curriculum, due largely to the role of the para that works with him every day -- provides my husband and I peace of mind.

Without these invaluable staff members, Christopher would not be able to attend mainstream classes, assemblies, or community-based outings or field trips throughout the school year.

Let me stress that paras are with my child all day -- every day -- and in collaboration with his Special Ed and mainstream teachers, ensure his IEP goals are addressed and met.

It angers me as a parent that the Board does not seem to care enough about my special needs child -- not to mention all of the other Special Ed students -- to offer competitive wages to retain highly-qualified individuals needed to ensure that they all have consistency in their daily lives.

How do we determine the value of a person's work? I'm not sure how to answer that, but I would begin with dedication and selflessness; two qualities that are demonstrated on a daily basis by the paraprofessionals in this district.

Thank you for your time this evening.