

Office of Health Care Access Statement on DCF Certificate of Need to Terminate Services at High Meadows

Commissioner Vogel and staff of the Office of Health Care Access;

Good morning and thank you for allowing us your time and attention. My name is Kathryn Fenton, and I am a Special Education Teacher with the Department of Children and Families at High Meadows School. I'm also a member of CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, the union that represents education professionals at the facility.

Today, I will be addressing the two distinct educational programs that currently exist at High Meadows. I have submitted a full statement that provides more background than I could cover in a three-minute presentation, as well.

Our students come to us with pre-existing educational deficits and challenges. Some boys have previously been diagnosed as school avoidant. A child is admitted to High Meadows for non-educational reasons. Most of them have multiple disabilities.

Many of our youth have exhibited severe and long-term behavioral difficulties in a traditional and alternative school setting. Due to the strong collaboration among the disciplines, many students have been successful in understanding and following the school behavior program.

We currently provide two separate learning programs on the High Meadows campus. One program offers the opportunity for students to earn high school credits and diplomas in preparation for attending college.

With the closing of The Lake Grove Facility in Durham, High Meadows designed a separate, specialized program to meet the needs of students with developmental delays and or social and emotional challenges.

The boys have volunteered at a local soup kitchen and ran a successful fundraiser during previous holiday seasons. The Community School program is a Life Skills based model. The boys receive career and vocational training, as well as academics in preparation for real-life experiences that prepare them to successfully re-enter into the community.

In thirty-six years of providing services to a constantly changing special education population, I can honestly say that while at the High Meadows facility, I have seen countless success stories. I have seen large and small changes in our boys. Changes that don't make the evening news, and they don't bring any money into the state. But, to a child who learns to read, make change, follow a recipe, read a bus schedule, or navigate the Internet, they are far more important.

When a parent tearfully thanks you for giving his or her son a new chance at learning, or when a child masters multiplication facts, or gets a 100% on a spelling test -- you know we have all made a difference at High Meadows.

Maybe it's just me -- or maybe it's the entire close, High Meadow family -- but there is no greater compliment than when a child feels so safe or so in need of comfort that he forgets his immediate issues and calls you "mom" or "dad."

Thank you for this opportunity to speak out for High Meadows' boys this morning.