

In small Trenton poll about private paraprofessionals, not a single negative review

The Times By Matt Fair
on February 14, 2012 at 7:45 AM



http://www.nj.com/mercer/index.ssf/2012/02/in_small_trenton_poll_about_pr.html

TRENTON — Members of the city’s school board last night criticized a survey of parents, teachers, and administrators who have worked with recently hired private paraprofessionals, calling the evaluation half-cocked.

Representatives from Mission One Educational Staffing Services, a private, Cherry Hill-based company hired this year to supplement the district’s work force of in-house paraprofessionals, presented the survey to the board last night after months of complaints about their employees.



Times File Photo –
Trenton High School West Campus

Paraprofessionals work one-on-one with students who typically have special education or disciplinary needs that require individual attention.

“It strikes me as odd that in an independent survey you didn’t get one parent who gave you a good cuss out,” board President Toby Sanders said. “Some of these children are the most troubled children that we have in the district and odds are, if you talk to five of these parents they’d have some serious complaints. The smallness of the sample size suggests that it is not necessarily to be taken as being statistically significant over the whole body.”

The survey was requested by the board at its last meeting as part of a motion adding \$200,000 to the company’s original \$500,000 contract. The board was originally asked to vote on doubling the company’s contract, but refused to do so after hearing complaints about the private workers from representatives with the district’s paraprofessional union.

Board members, however, criticized the survey’s small sample size and quick turnaround time. According to officials with Mission One, only about 35 people responded to the questionnaire and only nine of those were parents of students with the company’s aides.

“At the request of the board, we had an independent company administer an independent and anonymous survey to the principals, vice principals, child study teams, and parents of the students who are receiving our Mission One aid,” said Brian Scharle, the company’s vice president of operations.

The results of the survey showed that 73 percent of principals rated the company’s workers as “good” or “excellent.” Six of the nine parents who responded to the survey said their child’s aide was “excellent,” while two felt the aide was “good.”

“That survey was a bunch of baloney to me,” paraprofessional union head Betty Glenn said. “Most of their people cannot handle our students.”

Glenn has been providing the board with monthly recaps of complaints she's heard from her workers and district teachers. They include the company's workers taking unauthorized lunch and cigarette breaks, leaving their students unattended, and talking on their cell phones during the workday.

"I was deeply concerned about the information that we were given because I cannot condone anything that looks like neglect of our children," board member Denise Millington said. "There were several teachers who commented about the one-on-ones being on the telephone, and I do believe we have a district policy against personal cell phone use during the day and if it applies to our people then it has to apply to your people too."

Kevin Bush, the company's president, said that he didn't have any evidence to suggest that his workers were doing anything wrong but that he was taking precautions to make sure they knew the rules. He said all his workers in the district have gone through retraining.

As of last month, the company was providing the district with 33 aides and was expected to overrun their original \$500,000 appropriation by \$178,000. Mission One's sister company, Source 4 Teachers, was hired this year to provide substitutes for the district. The company last night won an additional \$1.6 million on its original \$500,000 contract.

Bush said he hoped to better facilitate communication between his company and the district so that any complaints could be addressed as quickly and efficiently as possible.

"We'd just ask that you instruct teachers to give complaints to the principals so they can funnel them back to us," Bush said. "Good or bad, we want to hear it. That's the only way we can improve."