

#ParaPower Manifesto

- 1) **Paras need a living wage.** We need a pay increase that goes beyond the \$30,000 max and keeps up with inflation. Paras cannot focus on students if they are worried about paying bills or rushing to their second job to cover their bills. We often eat lunch with our students, not compensating us feels like wage theft, and we are often asked to stay late or come in early to handle students with issues at drop-off and pick-up, yet we are not being compensated for that time. We often perform the jobs of many other people in the district - hall monitors, professional translators, counselors, nurses - but we are not being compensated at the same rate as these other employees.
- 2) **We need a locker.** Every para should have a locker in a designated spot in either a classroom or teacher's lounge. That way their items are secure and they can focus on their students and not whether their belongings are safe. While this is contractual, it is a promise that is often broken.
- 3) **We need a desk AND a chair for every classroom assistant.** Every classroom assistant needs space to work with students in small groups or individual students.
- 4) **The positions of classroom assistant and 1:1 need to remain two different positions.** Too often students are not being serviced because classroom assistants are being pulled to be a 1:1 if no one is available, and 1:1's who are assigned to a student in a self-contained classroom are being pulled from their student to service another student whose 1:1 is absent. This is simply unfair.
- 5) **Paraprofessionals need to be actively included on building committees with time made for them to participate in building committee meetings.** If there are para related issues that need to be addressed, those can only be addressed by paras. Also, paras must be informed of any changes in the school and how it affects them and their students.
- 6) **Paraprofessionals need reimbursement for items purchased for a classroom or a specific student.** When a paraprofessional purchases items specifically for use with students, a yearly reimbursement of \$50 should be given. Without the reimbursement, students may miss out on help specifically geared towards their education.
- 7) **Paraprofessionals need advancement beyond step 6.** We need a new position - Senior Career Paraprofessional - for paraprofessionals with more than six years in the school district. Paras who choose being a paraprofessional as a career should be rewarded for their services.
- 8) **Paraprofessionals need more pathways to certification as teachers and counselors.** Paras should have access to college classes and education pathways with low cost or free tuition to get their teaching certification. There is a need for black and brown teachers. In studies it is shown that children work harder and succeed at higher rates with teachers that look like them, and we are seeing an exodus of experienced teachers of color. It is also beneficial to both schools and students to have teachers with experience working in a classroom. For those reasons, creating a paraprofessional to teacher/counselor pathway is an important priority.

- 9) **Paraprofessionals need real professional development and relevant trainings that pertain to the work they actually do.** We need training on small group instruction, and working with a special needs population. If no professional development is available at any given time, do not give us busy work! Allow us time to seek professional development on-line.
- 10) **We want you to show us respect.** We have formal job descriptions, and we don't want to be asked to do things outside of our job description. Asking us to do the jobs of secretaries or nurses - such as tube feedings - goes outside our job description, especially when we are not being compensated appropriately for this work. Firm up the language around our roles formally, so that bilingual counseling assistants are not monitoring lunchtime, and classroom assistants are not acting as security guards.
- 11) **We want our Bilingual Counseling Assistants to have a salary that it is competitive when compared to other interpretation jobs in Philadelphia.** Our job description has evolved, but our compensation remains the same. We are required to provide interpretation services at a top professional level. We are expected to translate documents in our schools. We are required to deliver at least 10 workshops to parents and community every year. We are expected to handle updated information regarding immigration issues and to be aware of community organizations and resources for immigrant families in Philadelphia. Low compensation creates high turnover and affects our schools and students, who see new BCAs every year.
- 12) **Bilingual Counseling Assistants need to stop getting translation requests from the Office of Translation and Interpretation at 440.** We already have our own overwhelming jobs in our schools. Having to translate documents from 440 during our workday on top of that doesn't let us work with our families, students and school staff. Any translation job sent by 440 should be optional and paid as overtime. It's not fair that we are helping keep the Translation and Interpretation Office afloat and we haven't been compensated for it.
- 13) **Bilingual Counseling Assistants need to get reimbursed for travelling when sent to other schools to serve as interpreters.** There has to be a system to refund us our mileage, as in other schools district jobs.
- 14) **Bilingual Counseling Assistants need to be protected by a professional code for interpreters.** This professional code needs to be included in our contract. Same as any professional interpreters in the US, we need breaks during our interpretation services, time for pre-sessions, and we need to get documents with some days in advance in order to best serve as interpreters between our schools and families. We also need the role of the interpreter to be respected by staff, administration and school community.
- 15) **Bilingual Counseling Assistants need office space to keep educational materials and have confidential meetings with parents.** Although, this is officially part of our current contract, most of the BCA's don't have an appropriate space to work and end up sitting in corridors or in the main office, where they are used as administrative staff.

Paraprofessionals work hard every day to meet the needs of our students, and we want to be treated as the professionals we are - worthy of your respect and consideration!