

JOB CUTS FOR WAGONER SCHOOLS



There were many professionals who devoted their time and energy to the Wagoner Public Schools. One of those professionals, Becky Milton, dealt with a number of children, many of which suffered from different kinds of handicaps and disabilities. Milton, a paraprofessional, says that she did just about anything imaginable, ranging from changing diapers for children, feeding them, and helping them to learn different tasks, including walking. Milton was not just a helper and a teacher; she was also a motivator who worked with plenty of autism students, helping them to gain confidence in their own abilities. However, Milton's job is now on the line. Milton, along with nearly 40 different teaching assistants and paraprofessionals are most likely not going to be hired for the next school year. The school district has had to deal with a reduction, which means that many employees were notified on the 5th of June that they would not be re-employed for the next school year. Each of the employees were given a little over a week to appeal the final decision that was made but in order to do so, they would have to request a hearing. The superintendent, Monte Thompson, says that cuts had to be made because of a tight budget. With the budget being so tight, it was impossible to keep all of the employees and pay them fairly. Milton is not the only one being let go. A teaching assistant, Lesli Wilson, had plenty of experience working as an assistant and helped to care for a number of kids, all of whom had special needs. Aside from caring for kids, she helped the teachers as well by making copies, taking charge of recess and lunch duty, and even operating as a substitute teacher when other teachers were absent. Another teaching assistant, Christi Stroud, says that while the district believes parent volunteers can make up for the lack of assistants, she does not think that is going to happen, especially when many parents have jobs to attend to and are not always available. Another employee, Melanie Harris, is upset because assistants are getting cut and being laid off while some of the other employees are receiving raises. Some of the other employees are concerned because now they will not be receiving health insurance or any other important benefits. They are also upset because a number of important positions are being eliminated or facing elimination within the next few months. Those who are being cut argue that the cuts are not being made with the interest of the children at heart because they are the ones who are going to suffer, with less staff available to help each of them on an individual basis.

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