



New York State
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November 7, 2007

Times Union
Letters to the Editor
Box 15000
Albany, NY. 12212

Dear Editor:

I write in response to your article, *Privatizing Batavia school studied*, in today's Times Union. Your article barely scratched the surface of a very complex issue that has wide ranging implications for the educational opportunities afforded to New York State's visually impaired children.

The New York State School for the Blind in Batavia affords a unique educational opportunity for visually impaired children, providing an environment where the children can be educated among their peers by staff with specialized skills that will enable them to lead productive lives and take advantage of other educational opportunities when they leave the school. The Public Employees Federation and parent groups at the school have been fighting to preserve the school and its educational programs, programs that would undoubtedly be lost if the school were privatized and its mission changed.

Yes, there was a report in 2005 that identified some deficiencies in the Intensive Care Facility, the seven-day residential facility, at the school, nearly all the deficiencies dealt with paperwork. The reality is that Rebecca Cort and the State Education Department (SED) have used, and continue to use this as an excuse to move forward with a misguided plan to privatize the school, first by eliminating the seven-day educational program and then choking off admissions. Despite their efforts, enrollment at the school has rebounded. In fact, 56 children now attend the school and another is being evaluated for placement. This will put the population near all-time highs for the day-program and five-day program.

Parents across the state understand the value of the State School for the Blind and the unique programs the school offers, it is too bad that Ms. Cort and SED do not.

More should be done to ensure that this invaluable resource for the blind and visually impaired children of New York State stays open and its mission as New York's only state operated school for the blind be enhanced. It should not be abandoned so callously. SED's central office should become more actively involved in promoting the school. SED should be investigating opening up a seven-day residential program that is not an Intensive Care Facility so that parents are not forced to send their children out of state.



Leslie Underwood, an alumna of the school, who was quoted in your story said it best. "The school prepared me so well." That is what the school is all about and just because a bureaucrat no longer wants the responsibility of running the school is not a good enough reason to shut it down.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Kenneth Brynien". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Kenneth Brynien
President