

“PAAP Season”: Good intentions and unintended consequences for students with significant cognitive disabilities

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Abstract

PAAP Season is the implementation story of Maine’s Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio (PAAP). Students previously considered “too disabled” for academics were federally mandated to be assessed on academic standards. Implications were potentially transformative—unsettling historical beliefs about ability and enabling new instructional practice. Results showed remarkable academic gains but missed opportunities as the PAAP changed the content but not the context, of teaching students with significant disabilities. Multiple sources of data collected over a decade illustrate how state assessment was used to push change in the status of disabled students from recipients of care and compassion to equity and inclusion. However, policy intent was not uniformly understood, and the strength of existing norms regarding these students was underestimated.

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

“She’s a nice young woman and she’s doing a nice job with those kids.” This is the complete and unedited transcript of my first teacher evaluation in rural Maine in the late 1980s. Students with intensive physical and intellectual disabilities were being welcomed into the district for the first time. My principal, a kind man at a loss to know exactly what to think about this new situation, completed my evaluation by simply appreciating that I was there. The expectations for students with significant cognitive (historically called severe or profound) disabilities were low, our portable classroom behind the school made us largely invisible, and our equipment and atypical bodies and behavior were a mystery to other teachers and administrators. Fast forward to the present: federal law now requires that students such as those in my first class have access to the general education curriculum and be assessed on the same academic standards as their nondisabled peers. Such a radical shift in policy is remarkable and represents a complicated journey of social advocacy, litigation, and legislation. This chapter tells one part of an epic policy narrative, the implementation story of the Personalized Alternate Assessment Portfolio, hereafter, PAAP.

Introduction to the PAAP

The PAAP served as Maine’s Alternate Assessment, the special type of test given to students who were previously exempt from state-wide proficiency testing. The Alternate Assessment was federally mandated, first appearing in the 1997 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act then clarified and expanded in No Child Left Behind (2002)¹. States were responsible for conducting the Alternate Assessments and reporting the results, but could design the particular format of the test. These assessments were intended to increase academic achievement by bringing students previously considered “not

¹ The regulatory language for students eligible for Alternate Assessment is “students with the most significant cognitive disabilities”.

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

ready” or unable to benefit from academic instruction into the same accountability system as the rest of the student population. Historically, students considered to have “severe” or multiple disabilities were exempt from state tests and rarely taught academics because it was believed they were unable to learn complex content and that independent living skills such as grocery shopping, cooking and brushing teeth were more important (Ryndak & Billingsley, 2004). The Alternate Assessment promoted “high expectations for academic learning and access to the general curriculum...”² by not only measuring progress, but calculating scores into school accountability reporting. This extraordinary policy statement legitimized students like those in my first teaching job, who were to this point relegated to secluded classrooms and required only that teachers be “nice”. The students would be assessed on academic material and their scores would count - their presence and the quality of their program began to matter. The implications of including students with significant cognitive disabilities in school accountability measures were potentially transformative—unsettling historical beliefs about ability and competency and enabling new educational practices as students were seen in this new light. But there was also the potential that these students could be pushed further to the margins and seen as responsible for low scores and districts’ so-called “failure”. Elation at what appeared to be a legislative impetus for inclusion and serious social change for students with disabilities lasted for a few years, then tempered as the implementation of the PAAP proceeded in both expected and unexpected ways. The PAAP pushed back against historically low expectations and gave students with significant cognitive disabilities recognition and validity. However, the PAAP also unintentionally marginalized the same students, and the

² www.ed.gov/parents/needs/speced/learning/opportunities_pg4.html

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

story of PAAP season offers lessons for those interested in equity for other under-represented groups through policy change.

A brief history of legislative intent

One way to appreciate the significance of the PAAP is by understanding that prior to 1975, there were at least one million children with disabilities in the U.S. receiving no education at all (Hehir, 2005). The Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975 opened the doors of public schools to all students, but Congress explicitly based the Act on access to opportunity and not upon any particular level of quality or achievement (Blau, 2007; Eckrem & McArthur, 2001). In other words, students were provided physical access to schools, but not necessarily academic access to content. Expectations changed incrementally as this first special education law was reauthorized over subsequent decades (and renamed IDEA in 1990).

Despite these legislative advances, students with significant cognitive disabilities remained highly segregated and were provided with special teachers, separate classrooms, and an individualized and functional curriculum (Jackson, Ryndak, & Wehmeyer, 2008). If academic skills were taught at all, they were to be practical, such as reading a fast food menu or choosing clothing appropriate for the weather (Browder, Spooner, Ahlgrim-Delzell, Flowers, Algozzine, & Karvonen, 2003). When IDEA was reauthorized in 2004, Congress saw access to an academic standards-based curriculum as a potential avenue for increasing expectations and making special education more effective (Yell, Katsiyannis & Hazelkorn, 2007). Thus, 15 years after my first teaching job, students like mine were guaranteed “...*access to the general education curriculum in the regular classroom to the maximum extent possible in order to meet developmental goals*

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

and, to the maximum extent possible, the challenging expectations that have been established for all children. (20 U.S.C. § 1400(c)(5)(A) (2004).

The promise and excitement of the PAAP

The PAAP was a tool with the potential to uncover hidden academic capacity, revise perceptions of disability, and challenge the assumption that segregation was educationally necessary. The overall policy intent was accountability, but Maine also hoped to use the PAAP to improve instruction provided to students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The PAAP was piloted in four districts in 2000-2001 and then implemented statewide in 2002. The conceptual framework for the PAAP articulated by the state Department of Education³ included statements that the PAAP will “inform teaching and learning”, utilize multiple measures of learning, and provide understandable information to parents and educators.” Meeting notes and work samples from these years show the stakeholder group (representatives from state department of education, the state university, and special education administrators) working to create materials for teachers to guide implementation in a particular direction. In addition to compliance (meaning participation in the assessment) the aim was to simultaneously increase expectations for what students could accomplish.

Materials were developed to support implementation of the first PAAPs including rubrics that translated academic standards into student behaviors. These materials are quite important in the PAAP story because they illustrate attempts to alter the social status of students with disabilities through the PAAP. Essentially, to shape implementation in a way that changed long-standing assumptions that these students could attain only rudimentary daily living skills at best. The first rubrics were very comprehensive, spelling out activities that could be used to demonstrate mastery of content area standards. Every English Language Arts, Math, Science,

³ Personal records of committee document March 2000

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

and Social Studies standard had a rubric with “backed down” options and rubrics were bound into thick booklets by grade spans (k-2, 3-4, 5- 8 and 9-12). Each page listed the academic standard, then columns moved across the page with simplified and less complex versions, ending with a basic foundational skill, or what was referred to in PAAP language as the “lowest level of complexity”. For example, one of the first rubrics, (dated 12/14/01) contained an elementary math performance indicator: *Students will demonstrate an understanding of what numbers mean and how they are used.* This was accompanied by a sequential list of progressively more concrete expressions of performance culminating in: *Using objects, words or symbols, student can copy a model set with up to 5 members with support.* The aim was to convince teachers that even their students who were considered intellectually disabled, used eye gaze or other nonverbal communication, and/or had limited voluntary movement could be working on academic standards.

Similarly, a social studies indicator stated, *Students will understand that all nations have governments,* and the lowest level on the rubric for this standard is, *Student can identify the person in charge of a particular group, with prompting.* Again, the aim of providing such detailed indicators was to increase the likelihood that the PAAP would push instruction in a new direction. By explicitly showing how to make standards meaningful, the PAAP could serve as more than an assessment, it could deliberately drive changes in perceptions of disability.

Teachers were required to list the cues they gave while administering the PAAP to students. So, in addition to the rubrics, examples of potential prompts were disseminated to support implementation. For example, teachers were advised to: “Use verbal cues such as ‘*what strategies do you use to figure out a word you don’t know?*’”. This example represents a small difference in orientation at the beginning among the policy-implementers at different levels

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

(teachers, administrators, state personnel). This foreshadowed the emergence of a widening philosophical gap as the PAAP evolved and implementation proceeded. While well-intentioned, such examples revealed a lack of understanding about teaching students with complex physical, sensory and communicative disabilities. More extensive supports were needed such as tactile symbols, picture communication, and physical cues, i.e. gently stroking a child's cheek to indicate you were going to give her a bite of food, or a photo of the music teacher as a cue that a transition to music class was coming.

Document review from the roll-out period (2000-2002) also foreshadowed later problems. The state asked for outside assessment professionals to review the PAAP development and the written feedback contained the following phrases: "very impressed with overall philosophy and thoughtful dialog", "a lot of pieces are here but there could be more structure", "this is a good start but need more structure" and the word structure is repeated several more times. As will be described later, the first PAAPs required teachers to develop evidence of student performance such as photos, videos, and models. As the PAAP was "structured" and streamlined over the years, however, teacher creativity, inventiveness, and choice were removed. Over time, the rubrics became more general and teacher-created tasks were replaced by an online "bank" of items developed by a test company.

The Emergence of PAAP Season

"PAAP season" was the way a teacher described the time spent putting the pieces of the PAAP together. The season began when she started organizing tasks in the late fall and ended in early spring when "everything's packaged up." An elementary teacher summed up the concept of PAAP season by reporting, "There's certain pockets of time you say OK let's just get this done!"

After being implemented statewide in 2002, the years from 2004-2008 were a critical and

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

somewhat chaotic time. Teachers struggled to accept and accommodate the PAAP and the state struggled to refine expectations and settle on a version of the PAAP that satisfied the growing Alternate Assessment movement across the country (Quenemoen, Kearns, Quenemoen, Flowers, & Kleinert, 2010). There were still early stakeholders from the state and the university trying to use the PAAP for social change but others (without a background in disability) began to lead the process guided by a vision of quality assessment. Everyone cooperated but differences were emerging in what each defined as a valued outcome. The advocacy position had been to persuade teachers that since they must now teach academics to students seen as “severely” disabled, why not teach those academics in inclusive classrooms alongside nondisabled peers? This position viewed the PAAP as a vehicle to increase inclusion and the status of students with very diverse abilities. The assessment position focused on bringing the PAAP into alignment with other standardized assessments. Although both agreed on the value of the assessment, different interpretations began to emerge regarding what successful implementation meant. As the state focused on technical validity, the PAAP became further removed from classroom practice (teachers were no longer creating tasks) and was therefore less able to influence desired philosophical shifts in those practices. The various state personnel directing the PAAP through this period had worthy intentions to meet the accountability requirement as well as provide helpful instructional feedback to teachers. These aims were at cross purposes however, as the measures that were taken to standardize the PAAP in the name of increasing reliability, resulted in the test being less able to provide any kind of personalized feedback. The significance of the term “PAAP season” was that it demonstrated compliance with the law but showed that educators were not necessarily seeing this assessment as representing anything more than a required activity to fit into already busy schedules.

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

Numerous variables contributed to producing “PAAP season” but one stands out as particularly significant: the evolving composition of the PAAP. Most notably, some element of the test changed every year. The standards were revised, or the required number of assessment tasks was changed, or the forms that accompanied the tasks were altered, or the process for submitting a completed PAAP was updated, or the scoring language changed...etc. The PAAP instruction manual was updated and reissued every year. The continual changing and “tweaking” kept the PAAP process just slightly chaotic and unpredictable.

The constant changes kept special educators struggling to keep up; one could not learn the elements of the PAAP and then move ahead to become proficient and thoughtful in its use because the following year it would be a little different. Teachers were frustrated and increasingly cynical as “the state” (teachers’ term for legislative requirements) kept changing what was expected. The “state” was continually responding to larger national conversations about standards and seeking more sophisticated technical validity (Kleinert & Kearns, 2010). Importantly, this is another unanticipated consequence of differing roles and perspectives among those navigating the implementation of a new policy. Teachers were sincere in their attempts to learn the PAAP and state personnel were sincere in their attempts to improve the PAAP. And yet, their very efforts served to inadvertently frustrate each other.

Another consequence of the continual changes was eventual resignation – a distancing from a personal investment in the assessment toward an attitude of “what is the state going to want from us next?”. Interviews conducted in 2009 suggested that special educators viewed the PAAP requirement from slightly different perspectives: as a consequence for underperforming teachers (“there are a few bad apples so we’re all being punished”) to a bureaucratic necessity, to an insult to their professionalism. However, none expressed a view that the PAAP was part of

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

social justice or related to the status of the students they supported. While some teachers did report re-thinking their academic expectations, many simply taught selected “PAAP” skills during PAAP season (Timberlake, 2011).

Three areas also contributed to the impression of continual flux and made the PAAP less attractive to teachers and less able to advance reform in special education: (a) format, (b) professional development and (c) sameness as equity.

The decision to change the PAAP from teacher developed portfolios to a paper and pencil test occurred during this period. Teachers were directed to stop creating tasks and choose from a selection of assessment items created by a test company. Special educators gave this change (from teacher- created to standardized tasks) mixed reviews, but agreed that it de-personalized the process as well as “made it easier”. Later, the option to select from an array of tasks was discontinued. Teachers were instructed which test items to administer and did so by downloading them from a secure website using a confidential password.

Secondly, professional development focused heavily on procedural compliance and the mechanics of assembling a PAAP. Attendance was required at state workshops at least annually to learn the most recent years’ new process for preparation and submission. Early workshops brought together hundreds of teachers each time, and although there were negative reactions expressed toward the PAAP, the focus of professional development remained on the test itself. Much of the reaction came from a fierce protective instinct and concern that the standards were inappropriate for the targeted students. It is possible to see in hindsight, that discussing feelings and expectations (in addition to forms) may have made a difference. The focus on the mechanics of the PAAP left teachers to process a range of emotions and make meaning of this extraordinary change without discussing the bigger picture - the evolution of disability in society.

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

In addition, while the early annual professional development was provided at multiple locations and in-person, it was changed after 2010 to an on-demand video with procedural updates. This is another key moment. It shows how a policy with such monumental potential for social change did not sustain the vision or commitment. The direction of the PAAP moved away from trying to influence teacher beliefs, values and instructional choices to simply ensuring the assessment was submitted correctly.

Third, “sameness as equity” refers to the original policy intent, that using the same standards for students with disabilities would remedy historical inequities. The academic standards, while increasing students’ participation in state assessment, could not, in and of themselves, change the segregation of students with complex disabilities. The PAAP was being guided by assessment experts with sincere concern for students but a strong belief that compliance and participation equaled equity. The early emphasis on teaching via detailed rubrics in order to convince teachers that academic standards could be a good thing was replaced by a focus on assessment expertise. This allowed the PAAP to be redesigned for efficiency (the booklets of rubrics became thinner every year and were eventually discontinued) and honed to a more streamlined process. Every student taking the PAAP was given the same choice of items, the items were evaluated by statisticians for technical validity and this stage of implementation began to close with the perception that the work was “done” – compliance with the Alternate Assessment policy had been achieved, all students were working on standards, and progress was being measured and reported.

PAAP Season Winds Down

As the PAAP approached ten years of age, the novelty wore off and the social justice mission stalled as PAAP season became a routine part of the special education process. Looking

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

back, delivering the PAAP to teachers rather than inviting their expertise was problematic. The most immediate way to enact such a large-scale policy change was to provide materials and instructions to those responsible for implementing it. However, research conducted after more than a decade found no evidence that participants recalled a social change agenda. Districts were complying and students with disabilities were part of the accountability system as envisioned in the federal laws. Although research showed some lingering resistance to the PAAP, teachers' reasons were about autonomy and not about the social status and isolation of the students (Timberlake, 2016).

Today, in 2017, there is little remaining of PAAP season. English language arts and math tasks are computer-based and part of a multi-state assessment no longer unique to Maine. The PAAP consists solely of science items that teachers (with the required confidential password) download and administer. The story of the PAAP began with an enormous policy shock to the entrenched system of providing often caring, but mainly custodial and segregated, educational programming for the most disabled students. The story peaked with statewide implementation and the struggles, opportunities and insights obtained by such an ambitious project, and ends with the PAAP functioning as one of a multitude of special education provisions.

The Legacy of PAAP: Intended and unintended consequences

The story of PAAP season shows positive outcomes for students with disabilities but at great cost. The largest gain was in bringing an academic focus to the education of students historically considered unable to benefit, the greatest loss was in reifying segregation and inadvertently providing a new rationale for separateness.

The overall policy intent was achieved. All students participated in state assessment, assessment tasks were aligned with academic standards, and students who may not previously

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

have had access to academics received at least some instruction in reading, math and science. Students with significant cognitive disabilities were visible in policy and on spreadsheets, they were identified at the district level as eligible for the PAAP and their scores were reported. Such results were unimaginable when my first students and I entered the portable classroom behind our elementary school decades ago. This policy outcome is deeply valuable and should not be underestimated. However, participation was accompanied by missed opportunities and the inadvertent reification of segregation. Paradoxically, while academic access increased, academics often came to be treated as perfunctory and devoid of real expectation and context. Teachers complied and “fit” the PAAP into their existing routines and minimized disruption by putting the PAAP together efficiently but with little change in the context surrounding academic instruction. As one teacher explained, “If through the course of the year, say from Oct-March I have to give 12 ELA and 12 math, these tasks are short...seriously, I can give them in study hall, they don’t impact anything at all...” While the intended accountability outcomes were achieved, the legacy of marginalization remains. And a new complacency emerged as PAAP season receded into recollections told by veteran teachers about “that time the state got involved” with kids with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

The Upside of PAAP Season

The most encouraging outcome of PAAP season has been a lasting change in access to academics. During research interviews in 2009, a participant shared, “I have seen growth with kids where I didn’t expect I would, particularly around coin identification. Two of the kids I had - I really didn’t think they’d be able to i.d. coins, but I found when sort of being forced to identify coins, they could!” In a subsequent study, a special educator stated that “the days of not teaching academics are over” (Timberlake 2014). The lasting impact of PAAP was reinforced

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

when teacher participants were asked about their instructional planning and all described some form of standards-based academics. Although these results still showed a persistent level of self-contained instruction, academic access had remained more than ten years after the introduction of the PAAP (2014).

Another legacy of PAAP season is the teaching of science. Science was a content area not widely taught to students with disabilities prior to 2002 and appears directly attributable to the PAAP. Maine special educators were asked if they had added anything to their instruction because of the PAAP requirements and science was offered by multiple respondents. For example, “Things like some of the science concepts I wouldn’t have thought to teach. Now that the tasks have come along, I’ve had to add to my curriculum a little bit.” (Timberlake, 2011).

These outcomes are important, and mandating academics for students previously considered too disabled to benefit from it certainly improved the situation. However, the PAAP inadvertently served to cement existing inequalities by enabling academic access to be implemented in isolation from general education.

Unintentional segregation

The entire PAAP process - from choosing test items, conducting the assessments and scoring the tasks, was implemented separately from general education. Special educators began to use a new and more sophisticated vocabulary (i.e. AAGLEs LoCs⁴) but this change only served to provide a separate “language” spoken only by a few, again unintentionally cementing isolation of students whose status in schools was already very separate because of the complexity of their disabilities. Teachers and administrators began to refer to those eligible for the assessment as

⁴ Alternate Assessment Administration Manual 2007-08

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

“PAAP kids”, the required professional development as “PAAP training”, and the time spent on the test as “PAAP season”. Whereas earlier segregation could be challenged by arguing for students to be seen as competent learners, the PAAP inadvertently provided a sanctioned reason for segregation – the requirement to prepare for the PAAP.

Beyond disability: The broader lessons of the PAAP

The lessons of PAAP season can be understood as illustrating both the incredible power of policy as well as the incredible strength of resistance. When policy pushed too hard against the status quo by seeking substantial change in the status of individuals from lower (receiving charity and compassion) to equitable (receiving respect and inclusion) there were gains and losses. Why did the PAAP accomplish so much and yet fail to change the marginalization of students with the most complex disabilities? There is compelling evidence for two reasons: (1) the policy intent was not understood the same way by all involved, and (2) policymakers underestimated the strengths of existing norms regarding children and youth with complex physical and intellectual disabilities.

Interpretations of Policy Intent

Participant observation at PAAP professional development sessions, as well as investigations of teacher perceptions showed unequivocally that the policy intent was unclear to the teachers responsible for implementation. (Timberlake, 2011; 2014; 2016). Some saw value in the increased expectations, but there was also resistance and confusion. A key lesson is how teachers made their own meaning. In the face of ambiguity and continual change (the evolving PAAP structure), teachers created meaning and it was neither the advocacy nor the academic achievement that those in charge of the implementation envisioned. For example, one teacher created a story she could accept,

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

“You gotta get it done so the school can get money!...after the first few years getting fumed about it, I got it in my head that it’s a fund raiser. By doing this [PAAP] my school is receiving money and that helps a little bit to support my job and the kids. And that’s how I accept it, it’s kind of a fundraiser... without doing it [PAAP] & passing something in we won’t get as much money or we’ll be fined and be a ‘needs improvement’ school or whatever.”

This view wasn’t necessarily harmful but showed how the teacher complied with a policy she didn’t value. Her words also reflect previous theoretical work suggesting that regardless of policy intent, individuals make meaning of policy in the context of their daily work (Brodkin, 2003; Lipsky, 2010).

A more troubling response was when the policy intent was misinterpreted and inadvertently created more resistance. This was the case with teachers who believed that there would be more attention paid to their efforts than simply recording their students’ participation. Several teachers felt that the early portfolios (before the task bank and standardized administration) allowed students to showcase their work. These teachers expressed disappointment that “the state” seemed unimpressed. An elementary teacher lamented,

“Really, in the beginning I had hope because - I thought “well, we’re showing things kids were using... they [PAAPs] were mammoth size! I thought OK, people really want to take a look at what kids are doing - what they’re really doing in classrooms and I made these big beautiful PAAPs that took an enormous amount of time to complete.”

And another teacher shared,

“You know earlier on it really seemed like wow this is great, this portfolio really

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

shows what my kids can do! It's a huge amount of work—but I really felt when it was all done, wow—it was a thing of beauty. I mean some of those earlier PAAPS were amazing and then...last year I just had to shake my head....”

These responses reveal unfortunate differences in understanding policy intent. Unfortunate, because if a teacher thought he or she was going to showcase student work, they might understandably be disappointed to realize that the state was less interested in viewing “beautiful work”, and more interested in whether the student was making progress toward achieving the standards. The Maine Department of Education’s written policy articulated the purpose of the PAAP (achievement of standards and accountability for results) but the evidence suggests teachers formed their own ideas.

The strengths of existing norms

The history of severe disability is a complicated one including neglect, fear, and pity (Baynton, 2013). One of the most enduring norms is segregation for “one’s own good” Special education for these students is rooted in caregiving, and policymakers and state personnel underestimated the attachment to specialization that was challenged by implementing the PAAP. Teachers were motivated by care and concern for students they perceived as vulnerable and were fiercely protective at the suggestion that students be taught academic content, or as some called it “a waste of time” (Goldstein & Behuniak, 2012; Restorff, Sharpe, Abery, Rodriguez, & Kim, 2012; Timberlake, 2014).

The PAAP requirement shook many teachers’ core beliefs about their students and their role. Professional development focused mainly on the mechanics of putting the PAAP together, and without the opportunity and support to reflect on what it meant to expect academics in individuals where it was considered unlikely, the policy could not lead to progressive

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

philosophical changes. The shift in values that was hoped for with the advent of the PAAP was actually threatening to traditional roles and identity. What some called seclusion and segregation, others called safety and protection.

Additionally, if the students who look, act and communicate very differently than “normal” students can be out in the mainstream, working on academic standards, then the implications are significant. Such a monumental change in perception would impact the entire system of schooling. If the PAAP was not just assessing, but questioning the status of students, then it was also indirectly questioning the job description of those teaching the students. Research with special educators more than 10 years after the introduction of the PAAP showed that protection was a core element of professional integrity, and care and concern for students was a core part of job identity (Timberlake, 2014). Teacher reactions to the PAAP were consistent with other research findings that workers in social service professions cared deeply and were motivated by values, oftentimes more strongly than by rules (Evans, 2004; Maynard-Moody & Musheno, 2003).

Despite the strength of existing norms, there are points in the PAAP story where actions that seem small in the face of systemic change, may have redirected the path of the PAAP and increased social inclusion. Requiring that a general educator participate in a minimal way (i.e. complete one social or communication task) could have decreased student isolation. For example, the special education law, IDEA, requires a general educator attend every IEP (Individualized Education Program) meeting. While attendance does not guarantee participation, the requirement makes participation more likely. This same recommendation – to merge the PAAP with general education initiatives - could alleviate some concerns about protection. The

PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

participation of their general education colleagues would be necessary if special educators were to be convinced that the mainstream could be a safe welcoming place for vulnerable students.

Conclusion

While the PAAP was responsible for significant change, something was missing from the entire policymaking and implementing process: individuals with disabilities. Despite the noble aim, policy that was designed to decrease marginalization of students with significant cognitive disabilities did not invite such individuals or their families or caregivers to help design or provide feedback about the PAAP. Including parents, caregivers, and disability advocates in developing ways to implement education policy would be logistically challenging, but the challenge is also the very reason to do so. Speaking about disability as “other”, even when trying to better the circumstances for the “other” presaged the outcome. The lesson of PAAP Season is not to diminish the importance of caring. Almost 30 years after my first teaching job, “nice” still matters. But, policy is a powerful way to ensure that care for others comes from a position of equity and inclusion.

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PAAP SEASON: GOOD INTENTIONS AND UNINTENDED

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