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For Immediate Release:

Proposed State Fiscal Rules Will Put Special Education Services in Jeopardy

**Hamilton Square, NJ** – Scores of special education advocates, parents, and leaders from state organizations have come forward to oppose new state rules that would put services for the state’s most challenging special education students at risk.

If passed, these rules, developed by the New Jersey Department of Education and now being considered by the State Board of Education, will affect tuition rates and accounting practices at state approved private schools for students with disabilities.

ASAH, a statewide nonprofit organization representing more than 160 private schools, has opposed action on the rules. Child and disability advocacy organizations including Advocates for Children of New Jersey (ACNJ), The Arc of New Jersey, and Autism New Jersey have also asked the State Board of Education to delay adoption until such time as the rules can be more fully vetted.

“We support efforts to improve accountability and transparency, but these proposed rules would impede New Jersey’s ability to provide appropriate programs for more than 10,000 students with severe disabilities,” said Gerard Thiers, Executive Director of ASAH.

The proposal includes a number of new rules limiting training and staff salaries at private schools – including a seven-year salary freeze - that will make it nearly impossible for private schools to recruit, hire, retain and train the teachers, paraprofessionals and related services professionals that students need. These low caps are well below caps for public schools, and well below rates paid at other approved agencies and clinics.

According to ASAH, private schools are at risk of losing experienced therapists to agencies serving public schools, where they almost double their salaries, as a result of these discriminatory rules.

“Our students are among the most complex in the state –they have autism, medical and feeding issues, mental health challenges and other severe multiple disabilities. They need specialists,” he said.

Students are enrolled in private schools by their home school district when public school educators have determined that they are unable to provide an appropriate educational program within the local district. Students are placed at no cost to families. Districts pay tuition, and rates are set by the New Jersey Department of Education each year, based on a private school’s actual costs.

Private special education schools provide an extremely valuable – and irreplaceable – service to the State of New Jersey and its 611 school districts.

For decades private schools have been an integral part of the State’s continuum of programs for students with disabilities in accordance with state and federal statutes.

“New Jersey needs to support and encourage a variety of placement options –including private schools - that allow children with disabilities to receive the appropriate education required by law, not systematically erode programs and services that have decades of positive results,” added Thiers.

Data show that students with disabilities who graduate from private schools are more likely to have jobs, be engaged in the community, or be enrolled in higher education than comparable students with disabilities who graduate from public schools. And on the issue of costs - when ALL costs to taxpayers are considered, private special education schools in New Jersey are 20-30% less costly than comparable public programs.

“With positive results and lower costs, our members and the parents of nearly 10,000 students are left to wonder: ***Why is the State of New Jersey trying to close private special education schools and narrow options for parents and school districts?”***

ABOUT: ASAH is a nonprofit statewide association representing 160 private schools for students with disabilities. The schools serve roughly 10,000 students with complex conditions, including those who are medically fragile, on the autism spectrum, exhibit challenging behavior, have a mental illness, and those with multiple disabilities.

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