

Paraprofessional Advisory Task Force Findings and Recommendations for Meeting ESEA Title I Requirement

A Paraprofessional Advisory Task Force was established in July 2002 to investigate issues related to the Title I staff qualification requirements of No Child Left Behind and to identify pathways for paraprofessionals to meet the requirement.

Based on discussions at these meetings, a need to establish short- and long-term goals was identified. These goals are (1) to meet the intent of the law, and (2) to provide a comprehensive support system for a group of professionals who are delegated with providing learning assistance to children.

Identification of Goals

Short-Term Goals

Short-term goals are best described as how the intent of the law can be fulfilled and how to address the immediate impact for Washington paraeducators. These goals include:

- Clarification of the definition, and roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals who are funded with Title I or employed in a Title I schoolwide school.
- Identification of what paraprofessionals should know and be able to do related to their knowledge of reading, writing, mathematics, and assisting with instruction (and readiness in these areas when applicable) and the practical application of this knowledge when interacting with teachers and students.
- Identification of programs and educational efforts that meet the requirements.
- Identification of assessment options that meet the intent of the Title I requirement.
- Establishment of an assessment option that honors the work and professional learning of experienced paraprofessionals.
- Establishment of professional development opportunities to ensure that paraprofessionals are prepared for successful completion of the requirements.

Long-Term Goals

Long-term goals are related to the components of a systemic approach to ensure meaningful, long-lasting educational and support services for current and future paraprofessionals to promote quality instructional support and services to students in the classroom.

- How do we establish or increase the capacity to provide current and accurate information to support the members of this profession?
- How can the knowledge, skills, and competencies of a paraprofessional be aligned with the continuum of teacher knowledge, skills, and competencies to create a

- stronger instructional support team for students? How can a career ladder be established for paraprofessionals who may decide to become teachers?
- What kinds of educational or professional development opportunities are needed to ensure instructional support for students is aligned with Washington's learning standards and assessment practices? How do we ensure these learning opportunities are equitable and accessible?
 - What structural supports or infrastructure must be in place to guide a coordinated and comprehensive support system for paraprofessionals as a profession?

Solutions to Meet Immediate Needs (Short-Term Goals)

A paraprofessional, for purposes of the Title I requirement of No Child Left Behind, is described as an employee who is assigned responsibilities that include assisting with instruction. Section 1119(g) lists these responsibilities to include:

- One-on-one tutoring, if the tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher;
- Assisting with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials;
- Assisting in a computer laboratory;
- Conducting parental involvement activities;
- Providing support in a library or media center;
- Acting as a translator, or
- **Providing instructional services to students while working under the direct supervision of a teacher.**

Working under the direct supervision of a teacher is interpreted to mean the **teacher prepares the lesson and plans the instructional support activities the paraprofessional carries out, and the teacher evaluates the achievement of the students with whom the paraprofessional is working, and the paraprofessional works in close and frequent proximity with the teacher.**

All Title I paraprofessionals must have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. This also includes paraprofessionals who serve as translators or who conduct parental involvement activities.

Additionally, Title I paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support must meet at least one of the following three options:

- 1. Completed two years of study at an institution of higher education.*

For Washington, two years of study is established as 72 quarter or 48 semester credits. The institution of higher education must be a nationally recognized accrediting agency that is public or non-profit and provides an educational program for which the institution awards a bachelor's degree or provides not less than a two-year program that is acceptable for full credit toward such a degree. Transcripts from

an institution or institutions of higher education will suffice for documentation. Copies of transcripts are permissible. There is no time limitation on when credits were attained.

2. *Obtained an associate's (or higher) degree.*
3. *Met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, (1) knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics, or (2), as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness.*

Three options are available for paraprofessionals to meet the formal assessment option. Paraprofessionals who do not qualify either through two years of study at an institution of higher education or an associate's degree must qualify to meet the requirement through one of the following options designated as the formal assessment of rigorous standard of quality.

- ParaPro Assessment developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), **or**
- A portfolio assessment process, **or**
- A process whereby school districts can evaluate their current assessment procedures to determine if they meet the rigorous standard of quality as defined by Section 1119 and the non-regulatory guidance for Title I paraprofessionals.

In addition to the above options, completion of the Education Paraprofessional Apprenticeship Program (approved by the Washington State Apprenticeship and Training Council registered with the Washington State Department of Labor and Industries) is also recommended as an approvable route to meet the formal assessment option.

The task force recommends accepting the recommendation of ETS to set the passing score at 461. The ParaPro Assessment by ETS will be available this summer for paraprofessionals to take online through their school districts and possibly some Educational Service Districts. OSPI will be sending information to school districts explaining this process soon.

Beginning in fall 2003, the following sites will be available for paper and pencil testing:

Bellingham	Western Washington University
Ellensburg	Central Washington University
Seattle	University of Washington
Spokane	Gonzaga University
Vancouver	Evergreen High School
Walla Walla	Whitman College

Educational Service District staff will also be available to provide professional development prior to taking the assessment.

The portfolio assessment, the school district assessment process, and the paraprofessional knowledge and skills criteria are in continuing development and refinement stages and expected to reach completion by September 2003. Detailed information—including criteria, templates, and scoring procedures—will be released to all school districts as soon as it becomes available. The portfolio assessment will be a process to honor the successful work and professional learning experiences of “existing” paraprofessionals. “Existing” paraprofessionals, identified as paraprofessionals hired on or before January 8, 2002, will have until January 8, 2006, to meet the Title I requirement.

Paraprofessionals who are funded with Title I or employed in a Title I schoolwide building and hired after January 8, 2002, will now be required to meet the Title I qualification requirements. School districts needing to ensure that paraprofessionals hired after January 8, 2002, meet the Title I requirement will find the ParaPro Assessment (ETS) to be the most appropriate for this requirement.

Preparing for the Future (Long-Term Goals)

One major area of concern that continues to be experienced is the lack of a strong communication process to provide information directly to paraprofessionals. An accessible communication tool must be in place to provide all stakeholders current information such as regulations, best practices, and learning opportunities. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) is exploring viable options to strengthen the existing communication process. In the meantime, updated information concerning paraprofessionals continues to be included on the OSPI website (<http://www.k12.wa.us>) through the ESEA link.

The need to look at the Title I requirement in the bigger picture of how to ensure that all educational staff who have responsibilities related to classroom instruction are working in concert to provide the best learning environment for children has also become increasingly evident. To help promote this philosophy, the following areas need further exploration:

- Alignment of the paraprofessional’s knowledge and skills within a continuum of knowledge and skills related to teachers.
- Promotion of a career ladder for paraprofessionals to become certificated teachers.
- Formation of a permanent governing/guidance/advisory council to form an infrastructure of support and guidance to provide coordinated, equitable, high-quality learning opportunities and a single accountability system for future regulatory requirements.