



ESEA Information Update

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Topic: Paraprofessionals – Frequently Asked Questions

1. Who is a paraprofessional under ESEA?

The law defines a paraprofessional as an individual with instructional support duties. Individuals who work solely in non-instructional roles, such as food service, cafeteria or playground supervision, personal care services, and non-instructional computer assistance are not considered to be paraprofessionals for Title I purposes.

2. What is meant by instructional support duties?

The act also specifies the duties of the instructional support paraprofessionals. These duties may include:

- Providing one-on-one tutoring for students if tutoring is provided at a time when the student did not have access to a teacher;
- Assisting with classroom management;
- Providing assistance in a computer lab;
- Conducting parental involvement activities;
- Providing support in library or media centers;
- Acting as a translator; or
- Providing instructional support services to a student.

Teacher assistants in Wisconsin perform most of these duties.

3. What is meant by direct supervision?

The term “direct supervision” means the paraprofessional and the teachers are in the same location during the time of providing assistance to students.

4. How are paraprofessionals impacted by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001?

New criteria for employment has been implemented for paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals in schools funded by Title I federal programs have to meet higher standards. These standards include completion of two years of study at an institution of higher education, an associate’s (or higher) degree; or meeting a rigorous standard of quality and demonstrate, through a formal assessment, knowledge of and ability to assist

in reading, writing, and mathematics instruction. Newly employed paraprofessionals in Title I funded programs need to meet these criteria prior to employment.

5. What are the requirements for newly employed paraprofessionals in schools with Title I funds?

NCLB employment criteria applies to paraprofessionals in schools supported with federal money. Paraprofessionals hired after January 8, 2002 working in a Title I Schoolwide program or in a Targeted Assistance Title I program must have completed two years of higher education, an associate's degree, or passed a formal assessment of skills prior to employment. Paraprofessionals working in a School-wide program must meet these requirements regardless of the source of funds used to pay their salaries. For paraprofessionals in Targeted Assistance programs, only those paid with Title I funds must meet these new requirements.

6. What exactly is a Title I school?

A Title I school is one that receives special federal funds because a larger percentage of its students are from families with low incomes. Title I is the largest elementary and secondary education program in the federal education budget. Funding is provided for students in high-poverty schools to enhance instruction and services for children. Individual schools with poverty rates above 40 percent may use Title I funds along with other funds to operate a School-wide program. Schools with poverty rates below 40 percent or those not choosing to be declared School-wide programs, are Targeted Assistance program schools.

7. How can a person know if they are employed in a Title I school?

Contact the school principal or federal program manager in the local district office. The Wisconsin School Directory is posted at <http://dpi.wi.gov/schldist.html>.

8. Are paraprofessionals employed in non-Title I funded schools affected by the law?

The requirements for two years of higher education, an associate's degree, or successful completion of a formal assessment is not required for paraprofessionals in non-Title I schools under the ESEA No Child Left Behind Act. But, each local education agency (LEA) that receives Title I funds must ensure that all paraprofessionals have a secondary high school diploma or its equivalent.

9. Can paraprofessionals work under the supervision of any teacher?

Yes, a paraprofessional can work under the direct supervision of any teacher who meets the definition of highly qualified.

10. Are there any exceptions to the employment criteria for paraprofessionals?

Yes. The requirement for two years of higher education, an associate's degree, or completion of a formal assessment does not apply to paraprofessionals involved only with translation or parental involvement activities. Paraprofessionals whose primary task is to act as a translator or whose duties consist solely of conducting parental involvement activities are excluded from the education or assessment requirements.

11. Do these employment requirements for paraprofessionals apply to Even Start or kindergarten paraprofessionals?

Yes. If these programs are supported in any part by Title I funds or are located in School-wide or Targeted Assistance schools.

12. Are paraprofessionals who assist students with disabilities required to meet these requirements?

If paraprofessionals who work with special education programs are employed in School-wide Title I programs, they must meet the same requirements as other paraprofessionals in Title I programs.

13. What does the law mean by two years of higher education for paraprofessionals?

Two years of higher education equates to at least 48 semester hours of college, technical college, or community college coursework. This is based on a full-time student academic load of 12 hours per semester for 4 semesters.

14. Are paraprofessionals required to have completed 2 years of higher education or an associate degree specifically in education prior to the first day of employment.

The law does not specify the field of education. Therefore, the completion of 2 years of higher education or a degree in any field will satisfy the hiring requirements.

15. What is meant by a “rigorous assessment” for paraprofessionals?

DPI developed assessment guidelines for paraprofessionals in the state of Wisconsin. This system consists of three options: Test, Interview, or Document Performance. A paraprofessional will be deemed highly qualified by meeting any two of the three options. The three options will assess one’s knowledge of and ability to assist in instruction, particularly in reading, writing, and mathematics. The Wisconsin Assessment Guidelines are available on the DPI website at <http://dpi.wi.gov/esea/pdf/paraguid.pdf>.

16. Can a paraprofessional substitute years of experience or staff development activities in lieu of education or degree requirements?

There is no present indication in the federal law that experience can substitute for meeting other requirements. It may be used as a component of the portfolio option of Documented Performance within the DPI Paraprofessional Assessment System.

17. Can an LEA require that the same qualifications for employment be extended to all paraprofessionals in the district?

That is a local decision. If the local board wishes to adopt the same employment qualifications for all paraprofessionals, it has that option. If the new standard is applied to current employees, the change may be subject to the collective bargaining process.

18. Will paraprofessionals receive higher salaries as a result of the higher qualifications?

The law does not speak to salaries. Salaries for employees are a local decision.

19. Will additional funding be available to assist paraprofessionals in meeting the requirements for employment?

Title I funded LEAs must use at least 5 percent of their Title I funds but not more than 10 percent of the funds received in 2002-03 to ensure that all paraprofessionals and teachers become highly qualified. In subsequent years, at least 5 percent of the funds must be used to ensure that teachers become highly qualified. In other areas of the legislation, considerable flexibility is given to allow the combination of Title I funds with others for staff development purposes. Other programs such as Title II, Part A funds can be used for training teachers, principals, and paraprofessionals.

20. How will the employment of paraprofessionals be monitored?

In verifying compliance with the law, each LEA must require that the principal of each school operating a program with Title I funds attest in writing on an annual basis as to the school's compliance with the law. In addition, the ESEA on-site monitoring will also monitor compliance with the Title I paraprofessionals hiring requirements

21. What happens if a paraprofessional working in a Title I funded program was hired after January 8, 2002, without meeting all the ESEA requirements?

Failure to meet the criteria of the legislation can result in the loss of Title I funds for a school. The law indicates that the new requirements are in place immediately and are to be applied.

22. What happens if a paraprofessional is unable to meet the ESEA requirements after four years?

A paraprofessional who fails to meet the NCLB requirements is unable to serve in a Targeted Assistance school program whose funding is Title I funds, or in a School-wide program regardless of the funding source.

23. Has DPI developed professional growth standards for paraprofessionals?

Yes. DPI developed and published the [Paraprofessional Competencies and Professional Development Options](http://dpi.wi.gov/cal/pdf/paraprofessional.pdf) at <http://dpi.wi.gov/cal/pdf/paraprofessional.pdf> in 2005.

Paraprofessional Resources

[National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals](http://www.nrcpara.org/) at <http://www.nrcpara.org/>.

[Paraprofessional Guidance](#)

Specific questions related to this bulletin should be directed to:

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