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AUTHOR Pickett, Anna Lou; Likins, Marilyn; Wallace, Teri  
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## ABSTRACT

There is currently heightened awareness among policymakers and administrators at state and local levels about addressing more effectively issues related to the employment, roles, preparation, and supervision of paraeducators. Despite this increased scrutiny, catalyzed by provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Act of 1997 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, little progress has been made in finding viable solutions to these problems. The purpose of this report is to provide policymakers and administrators in state and local education agencies and in institutions of higher education, and other stakeholders, with information they can build on as they work together to address issues and practices that affect paraeducator employment, roles, training/education, and supervision. Part 1 of this report provides a historical overview of the factors that initially led to the employment of paraeducators. Part 2 describes contemporary concerns and events that have brought about increased reliance on paraeducators with greater emphasis on their learner support roles. Part 3 focuses on federal legislative actions, policy questions, and systemic issues related to producing a quality paraeducator work force. Part 4 discusses strategies policymakers and administrators can build on to improve teacher-paraeducator team performance and productivity. Appended are: (1) Scope of Teacher Responsibilities as Team Leaders; (2) Paraeducators Scopes of Responsibilities as Team Members; and (3) State Systems, Standards and Guidelines for Paraeducator Employment, Preparation and Supervision. (Contains 45 references.) (RT)

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Anna Lou Pickett • Marilyn Likins •  
Teri Wallace

# THE EMPLOYMENT & PREPARATION OF PARAEDUCATORS

## THE STATE-OF-THE-ART—2003

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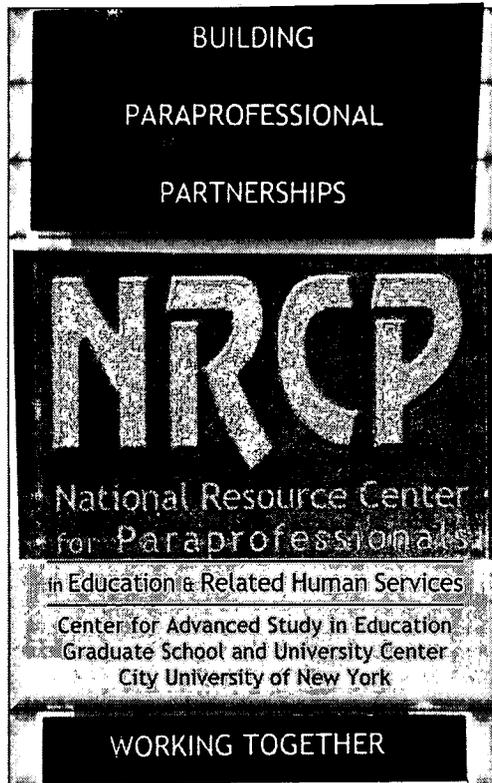
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# THE EMPLOYMENT AND PREPARATION OF PARAEDUCATORS, THE STATE OF THE ART

By: Anna Lou Pickett, Marilyn Likins, and Teri Wallace

## INTRODUCTION

This is the 7th in a series of State of the Art Reports published by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services (NRCPS). Over the last three decades the series has provided snapshots of how federal, state and local education agencies have addressed issues that influence the roles, preparation and supervision of paraeducators. Earlier reports have shared several themes. They are the need for statewide and local policies, standards and infrastructures that will: 1) maintain the integrity of teacher and paraeducator roles and responsibilities in differentiated staffing arrangements, 2) assure the availability of a highly skilled paraeducator workforce to support the program and administrative functions of teachers and related services professionals, and 3) prepare teachers for their expanding roles as leaders of instructional teams and supervisors of paraeducators.

Currently there is a heightened awareness nationwide among policy makers and administrators at the state and local levels about the need to more effectively address issues linked to the employment, roles, preparation, and supervision of paraeducators. The most important reason for the increased interest is attributable to provisions in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA) and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The impact of these federal legislative actions and other factors that contribute to the increased interest are described more fully in section III.

Despite this increased scrutiny to “paraeducator issues” little progress has been made in finding viable solutions to the problems connected with the employment, preparation and supervision of paraeducators. Training for paraeducators, when it is available remains highly parochial and sporadic, does not recognize the similarities in the core skills required by the vast majority of paraeducators, nor is it competency based, or linked to systematic opportunities for career development. State education agencies (SEAs), local education agencies (LEAs), and other agencies responsible for administering teacher credentialing systems have not joined forces with institutions of higher education (IHEs) to establish standards for licensure to ensure that teachers

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have the knowledge and skills they require to supervise paraeducators. Nor have different education reform initiatives concerned with increasing the accountability and effectiveness of systems and practices addressed issues surrounding the utilization of paraeducators in the instructional process.

These issues cannot be addressed by a single agency. Because of their ongoing relationships with a broad range of stakeholders, leadership from personnel in SEAs is needed to develop and nurture partnerships across divisions within the SEA and among LEAs, other education provider agencies, two and four year IHEs, professional organizations representing different education disciplines, unions, and parents. Without this leadership, short term and long range solutions to these and other issues connected with strengthening the performance of teacher and paraeducator teams will not be created and maintained.

The purpose of this report is to provide policymakers and administrators in SEAs, LEAs, IHEs and other stakeholders with information they can build on as they work together to address issues and practices that currently impact on the employment, roles, training/education, and supervision of paraeducators: The newest but least understood members of education and related services teams.

The report is divided into four parts. Part I provides an historical overview of the factors that initially led to the employment of paraeducators. It continues with a look at education reform initiatives that have contributed to the need to prepare teachers to supervise and work effectively with paraeducators. Part II describes contemporary concerns and events that have brought about increased reliance on paraeducators with greater emphasis on their learner support roles. Part III centers on federal legislative actions, policy questions, and systemic issues requiring cooperation among agencies in different jurisdictions with different responsibilities for ensuring the availability of an effectively supervised, well-prepared paraeducator workforce. Part IV discusses strategies policy makers and administrators in SEAs, LEAs, other education provider agencies, and IHEs can build on to overcome barriers to improving the performance and productivity of teacher and paraeducator teams. It concludes with a series of appendices.

## **I. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE: The 1950s-1980s**

To assist those of you concerned with creating and maintaining policies and systems to more effectively tap the resources of paraeducators, the report starts with an overview of events and

trends, including education reform efforts that have caused administrators to employ in growing numbers, paraeducators (teacher aides, paraprofessionals), to support the program and administrative functions of teachers.

In the mid-1950s, a need to alleviate post WW II shortages of licensed teachers and the fledgling efforts of parents to develop community based services for children and adults with disabilities stimulated interest in the employment of teacher aides. During this period, two research projects were undertaken to assess the appropriateness of employing teacher aides as one way to provide teachers with more time to plan and carry out instructional activities. The first, sponsored by the Ford Foundation, took place in the Bay City, Michigan schools. College educated women who were not licensed teachers were recruited and trained to perform clerical, monitoring, and other routine classroom tasks (Fund for the Advancement of Education, 1961). At about the same time, Cruickshank and Haring (1957) documented a project conducted at Syracuse University designed to evaluate the efficacy of utilizing teacher aides/assistants in the special education programs that were beginning to emerge across the country. Although the results of both projects showed promise, it was not until the late 1960s and early 1970s that the potential benefits of employing teacher aides to work along side teachers in both general and special education would be more fully tested (Gartner, 1971; Kaplan, 1977).

In the 1960s and 1970s demands from many constituencies for change in economic, social, health care, education and other human services systems led to federal legislation that established and supported instructional and other direct services for learners who came from educationally and economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Many of the programs created by Congress to provide these services, including, Title I and Head Start, provided funding for schools and other community organizations to employ and train paraprofessionals. In the mid 1970s parents and other advocates for the rights of children and youth with disabilities achieved one of their major goals with the passage of PL 94-142, the landmark Education for all Handicapped Children Act, now titled the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

At the heart of each of these laws was a recognition of the importance of learner centered instructional services to meet the needs of children and youth with diverse abilities, learning preferences, and other education needs -- although only PL 94-142 specifically mandated individualized education plans. As a result of the need to provide teachers in pre-school, general, compensatory and special education with the support they required to provide individualized/

personalized education services for all learners who could benefit from them, the employment of paraprofessionals began to gain momentum and significant changes began to occur in their roles and responsibilities. While they still performed routine monitoring, clerical, and housekeeping tasks, paraprofessionals increasingly reviewed and reinforced lessons and assisted students with other learning activities initiated by teachers (Bowman & Klopff, 1967; Jackson & Acosta, 1971; Pickett, 1989). Paraprofessionals who shared the cultures, traditions, and language backgrounds of learners and their families served as liaisons between schools and homes as one way of reducing an emerging lack of confidence between the two (Gartner & Riessman, 1974).

At the same time that paraprofessional employment was expanding, there was also a growing recognition of the need to reduce obstacles that prevented people from multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-lingual heritages from entering the professional ranks. Then, as now, paraprofessionals were primarily women who were (re) entering the workforce, who lived near the schools where they worked, and who represented the cultural and ethnic populations in their community (Kaplan, 1977; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996). Throughout the 1960s and 1970s the federal government played a key role in supporting and providing access to teacher education for paraprofessionals and other non-traditional students. In his comprehensive report *From Aide to Teacher: The Story of the Career Opportunities Program (COP)* George Kaplan (1977) described the results of a seven-year project supported by the U.S. Office of Education. The most significant goal of COP was to a) develop flexible degree programs that would not diminish the quality of teacher preparation programs, and b) would attract and support “teacher aides” in low income urban and rural areas who wanted to enter the professional ranks, but needed to work full time while they earned academic degrees. LEAs recruited talented and committed paraprofessionals and other employees they felt could contribute to improving the quality of their community’s schools. IHEs scheduled under-graduate courses to accommodate worker-student needs, tutored candidates for high school equivalency tests, provided intensive academic counseling to help students navigate college bureaucracies, conducted study groups to help reinforce learning, and offered classes off campus near students’ homes.

Kaplan’s analysis of the various components of COP found that although it proved to be an effective approach for recruiting and preparing more than 20,000 non-traditional students from under-represented racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds to enter education professions, when the federal funding ended, the majority of these programs also ended. Currently we are

seeing a resurgence of interest among teacher educators in the recruitment of paraeducators, and many of the lessons learned through COP are serving as a foundation for contemporary teacher preparation programs (Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

At the same time that LEAs and IHEs nationwide were actively engaged in developing the COP models, a few SEAs began to develop credentialing procedures that established criteria for paraprofessional employment and preparation. The states that developed paraprofessional credentialing systems in the late 1960s and 1970s were Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin. With the exception of Kansas, these credentialing systems were more administrative than regulatory in nature. As a result, they were not mandatory and, therefore LEAs were not required to train paraeducators or employ individuals who could meet the criteria set by the SEA. They did, however, provide standards for LEAs to voluntarily follow if they decided to create opportunities for career advancement through different levels of paraprofessional positions. Rather than develop credentialing systems, the remaining states chose to establish guidelines that outlined duties for paraprofessionals and placed the responsibility of setting standards for paraprofessional employment, roles, training and supervision with LEAs. Moreover, with the exception of Kansas, no states provided technical assistance or financial resources to support the development of systematic training for paraprofessionals (Fafard, 1974; Pickett, 1989.)

In addition, despite the increased participation of paraprofessionals in all phases of the instructional process, only minimal references were made to teacher supervisory roles in state policies, regulatory procedures, and standards e.g. “teacher aides work under the direction of licensed/certificated teachers”. Of even greater significance was the practice established by an overwhelming majority of LEAs of designating principals as the supervisors of paraprofessionals; indeed this practice is still part of most contractual agreements or administrative guidelines in today’s schools. As a result the roles of teachers as planners, directors, and monitors of the day-to-day activities of paraprofessionals were not recognized and they were not prepared for these supervisory responsibilities--a practice that continues today (Pickett, in press).

The decade of the 1980s was a time of vigorous debate about how to end a perceived decline in the quality of education services throughout the United States. Reports issued by governmental agencies, IHEs, and other stakeholders in the private and public sectors were concerned with the need for significant reform in education policies and practices. Initially these concerns

centered on two issues: 1) the need for higher standards for learner performance and increased teacher accountability for learning outcomes, and 2) the need to attract and prepare a highly competent teaching force (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). Later in the decade advocates for better schools added other items to the reform agenda. They were connected to a growing realization that by enabling school staff and parents to participate in identifying the learning needs of the children and youth in “their schools” and deciding which programs would best meet identified learner needs the performance and the quality of education could be improved. As a result, leaders in education reform movements began to reassess the practice of governing schools from central offices, and the concept of creating opportunities for site based management began to take shape (Bauch and Goldring, 1998; Carnegie Forum on Education and the Economy, 1987; Phipps, 2000). The efforts that began in the 1980s laid the groundwork for contemporary activities to strengthen the team leadership and program development roles of teachers. For the most part however the need for differentiated staffing arrangements to support and enable teachers to carry out new, more complex program and administrative functions has been ignored. The failure of these initiatives to recognize the growing reliance on paraeducators has contributed to a lack of understanding of the need to prepare teachers for their expanding roles as supervisors of paraeducators. In fact, throughout the 1980’s, only the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCP), a collaborative effort between the Nebraska Department of Education and the University of Nebraska at Lincoln, and to a limited extent the Council for Exceptional Children were urging SEAs, LEAs, and IHEs to establish standards and develop curriculum content to prepare teachers to plan for, direct, and monitor the day to day activities of paraeducators. Initially these efforts focused on special education programs, and did not recognize the need to prepare teachers in Title I or other programs and disciplines for their supervisory roles (Heller & Pickett, 1981; Pickett, 1981; Pickett, 1986; Vasa & Steckleberg, 1987.) It was not until the early 1990s that a few more IHEs began to follow the lead of the Department of Education and Communication Disorders at the University of Nebraska, and added curriculum content to their programs to prepare teachers to supervise paraeducators. (Lindemann & Beegle, 1988; Salzberg & Morgan, 1995; Pickett, Vasa & Steckelberg, 1993).

Moreover, limited federal support for paraprofessional preparation during the 1980s, was another factor that led to a decline in interest in the broad range of issues that influenced the performance of teacher and paraprofessional teams in the delivery of instructional and other

direct services. Thus career development programs for paraeducators that began in the 1970s had all but disappeared or had not been changed to reflect the evolving roles of both teachers and paraeducators. So by the close of the decade of the '80s, paraeducators had become the "forgotten members of education teams" (Pickett, 1994, p. 2).

## II. THE PRESENT

A review of recent literature has identified several factors that have rekindled interest in paraeducator employment, roles, supervision, and preparation. In several cases federal legislative actions brought about surges in paraeducator employment (i.e. The Education of the Handicapped Act, 1986 that required LEAs to provide services to children ages 3 to 5 who have disabilities or chronic health needs that place them at risk, and IDEA, 1990 that recognized the need for vocational and other community based programs to prepare learners with disabilities to make the transition from school to work.) Throughout the 1990s amendments to various federal laws stressed the need for but did not mandate SEAs, LEAs and IHEs to strengthen and expand professional development opportunities to assure the availability of highly skilled personnel at all levels including, paraprofessionals. (Provisions in IDEA, 1997 and the NCLB, 2001 that require SEAs to set standards for paraeducator employment, supervision and preparation are discussed more fully in Part III.) Pickett (in press) has identified additional trends and issues that have led to increased paraeducator employment and increased need for standards for their role, preparation and performance. They include, but are not limited to:

- Ongoing efforts to more effectively serve children and youth with disabilities in learning environments that are centered on their inclusion in general education and community based school-to-work programs (Downing, Ryndak & Clark, 2000; Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli & McFarland, 1997; Marks, Schrader & Levine, 1999; Pickett, 1999; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Rogan & Held, 1999).
- Increasing numbers of learners nationwide, who come from diverse racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic heritages (Bureau of the Census, 2001; Bureau of Labor Statistics, DOL, 2000; Genzuck & Baca, 1997; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996; NCES, 2000; OSEPRS, 2000; Rueda & Monzo, 2000).
- Growing demands for improved and personalized instruction and compensatory education for learners who come from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds (United States Department of Education, 1999; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).

- Continuing shortfalls of licensed/credentialed teachers in virtually all program areas (American Association for Employment in Education, 1999; NCES, 1995 & 2000; OSEPRS, 2000; Recruiting New Teachers, 1997).
- Evolving roles of teachers as managers of instructional programs, leaders of instructional teams, and participants in school based governance and decision – making activities (Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; French & Pickett, 1997; Lieberman & Miller, 2000; Pickett, 1999; Pickett, Vasa & Steckelberg, 1993; Piphoo, 2000; Wallace, Jongho, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001).

## Teacher and Paraeducator Team Roles

***Teacher Roles.*** One of the most significant, but least appreciated reasons for increased employment of paraeducators are the new dimensions added to traditionally recognized teachers' functions. Efforts that build on various education reform initiatives to increase standards and accountability for learning outcomes have led to significant changes in teacher roles. Throughout the 1990s , in response to concerns, agreement began to emerge among professional organizations that represent different education disciplines and unions as well as the various researchers cited throughout this report about teacher responsibilities that may not be delegated to paraeducators (AFT, 1998; Drecktrah, 2000; French 2001; French & Pickett, 1997; 1999; NAEYC, 1994; NEA, 2000; NJCLD, 1999; Pickett, 1999; Pickett & Safarik, 2003; Snodgrass, 1991; Wallace, et al, 2001).

Those responsibilities include:

- Diagnosing learner needs,
- Consulting with colleagues to plan individualized/personalized programs for all learners who can benefit from them,
- Creating and maintaining learner-centered environments,
- Aligning curriculum with instructional strategies,
- Planning lessons,
- Modifying content and instructional activities to meet the needs of individual learners,
- Facilitating learning,
- Assessing learning outcomes, and
- Involving parents or other caregivers in all aspects of their child's education.

With the advent of site based decision making and governance, teacher roles have expanded to also include active participation along with principals, other staff, and parents in determining: 1) which programs will most effectively meet the needs of learners in “their schools”, and 2) how best

to allocate human, fiscal and technological resources to meet the program objectives. To carryout these varied tasks, teachers require the assistance of paraeducators and other support staff. As a result the team leadership and supervisory functions of teachers have increased significantly, to include planning paraeducator assignments, directing and monitoring paraeducator performance, and providing on-the-job training for paraeducators (Drecktrah, 2000; French, 2001; French & Pickett, 1997; Moshoyannis, et al 1999; NJCLD, 1999;Pickett & Safarik, 2003; Pickett, 1999; Pickett, Vasa, and Steckleberg, 1993; Wallace, et al 2001). Appendix 1 contains guidelines for a scope of responsibilities for teachers as team leaders and supervisors of paraeducators.

***Paraeducator Roles.*** The evolution in teacher roles has had a profound impact on the nature of paraeducator roles. Over the last forty plus years since they were introduced into our nation's schools, the roles of "teacher aides" have become more complex and demanding. "In today's schools, aides/assistants work along side and assist teachers with the delivery of instructional and other direct services for learners and/or their parents/caregivers. Indeed they have become technicians who are more aptly described as paraeducators just as their counterparts in law and medicine are designated as paralegals and paramedics" (Pickett, page 1, 1989). While they still perform clerical tasks, duplicate materials, and monitor learners in non-academic settings, under the supervision of teachers and in some cases related services professionals, paraeducators in early childhood, elementary, middle and secondary classrooms and programs:

- Engage individual and small groups of learners in instructional activities developed by teachers,
- Carryout behavior management and disciplinary plans developed by teachers,
- Assist teachers with functional and other assessment activities,
- Document and provide objective information about learner performance that enables teachers to plan and modify curriculum and learning activities for individuals,
- Assist teachers with organizing learning activities and maintaining supportive environments, and
- Assist teachers with involving parents or other caregivers in their child's education.

Appendix 2 contains a scope of responsibilities for paraeducators that provides a model for identifying knowledge and skill competencies required by paraeducators who work in different programs and settings.

**Paraeducator Demographics and Deployment: The Current State of the Art**

Determining the number of paraeducators employed by LEAs and the programs they are assigned to is not an exact science. Federal and state agencies concerned with the delivery of education services in different program areas use different approaches to data collection. Thus the data collected does not always provide a clear picture of how many full time equivalency (FTE) positions for paraeducator exist in our nation's schools or the programs they are assigned to (general and special education; Title I and other compensatory or remedial programs, multi lingual and ESL programs, early childhood and transition services programs). A report published by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in 2000 *Non-professional Staff in the Schools and Staffing Survey(SASS)and Common Core of Data (CCD,Working Paper No. 2000-13* acknowledges that limited information is available on education support staff (teacher, library, computer laboratory aides or assistants, secretaries, bus drives, custodians). .

Depending on the mission of a federal agency and its reporting mechanisms there may be a lag time of six to eight years before relevant data is available to stakeholders who can benefit from them. Moreover no single federal agency gathers and maintains data about paraeducators who assist teachers in the broad range of programs that provide instructional and other direct services for learners or their families. The following are examples of how data is collected and reported by different federal agencies.

Information published in the NCES Working Paper 2000-13 provided a comparison of data collected during the 1993-94 school year about teacher aides employed in programs including Chapter I, other instructional programs that were not specified, and library and media centers. In 1993-94 there were approximately 319,000 full time and 151,000 part time teacher aides other than Chapter I aides working in the nation's schools, and 96,000 Chapter I aides. (Although the NCES survey intended to count the Chapter I aides as a separate category, the paper indicates that it is possible that some or all of the Chapter I aides were also counted in the teacher aides category.) There were an additional 32,000 full time and 23,000 part time library and media center aides. These data *did not* identify the number of paraeducators employed in multi-lingual or special education programs. In 1999 another agency, the USDE Planning and Evaluation Service, reported that there were approximately 76,900 fulltime Title I paraeducators, however there was no indication of

the number of paraeducators assigned to special education, multi-lingual and other compensatory programs.

*The Occupational Outlook Handbook, 2000-01* published by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, an operating office of the U.S. Department of Labor, presents another picture of the number of paraeducators working in public and private schools, and early childhood education. According to self-reported data there are about 1.2 million teacher aides and assistants employed in these three settings. The paraeducators who provided the data reported that they are employed primarily in elementary and early childhood programs including day care centers. The *Handbook* also reports that a “significant number” of the paraeducators are assigned to special education (beyond that these data do not identify specific program areas where paraeducators work).

In some cases, the instruments used by the Federal agencies to collect the data can add to an already confusing state of affairs. For example, data collected by the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (OSERS), U.S.D.E. asks states for information on the number of “teacher aides” who are either *certified or uncertified*. Respondents to this question overwhelmingly report that the majority of “teacher aides” in their state are certified, even though the vast majority of the states do not have certification/licensure systems for paraeducators, teacher aides/assistants, transitional or early childhood assistants.

Although paraeducators are employed in different categorical areas of special education OSERS does not collect data on the number of aides or assistants who are assigned to work one-to-one with individual learners in self contained classrooms or to facilitate inclusion into general education programs, those who are assigned to transition services programs, those who work in self-contained or resource classrooms, and those who are assigned to early childhood programs. Currently the total number of teacher aides reported by OSERS to be providing services to children and youth with disabilities or other special needs, ages 3-21 totals approximately 250,000. Paraprofessionals assigned to early intervention programs serving infants, toddlers and their parents/caregivers are the only category reported separately, and that number is approximately 3500 (Annual Report to Congress, 2000).

In an effort to gain a more accurate picture of the programs and working environments where paraeducators are assigned, as well as SEA policies and regulatory procedures that impact on their roles, supervision and preparation, the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in

Education and related Services (NRCP) periodically conducts surveys of Chief State School Officers (CSSOs) in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. Territories, the Department of Defense (DOD), and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). On the surface it would appear that this should be a fairly easy task to accomplish. In reality it is not. First, most states collect data only about paraeducators assigned to programs receiving federal funds and keep the information in separate data bases rather than maintaining a central data bank about the numbers of paraeducators employed in all programs administered by LEAs; many states do not gather information on paraeducators who provide instructional services or work in libraries and media centers who are usually supported by local tax levy funds (in some cases they provided estimated numbers). Second, finding a single individual in an SEA who can provide data on the numbers of paraeducators employed in the state and who is also aware of state laws, written policies, and regulatory procedures can be a daunting chore. Indeed over the last three decades, in many cases, the person completing the survey has reported that the state does not have policies, guidelines or a credentialing system for paraeducators, even though the authors know that they exist.

The research questions in the most recent survey by the NRCP were designed to gather the following information:

1. *The total number of full time equivalency (FTE) paraeducator positions in general, special and compensatory/remedial education and related services.* (Although we are aware that many paraeducators work part-time, we chose to gather information on FTE positions in order to provide a better understanding of the number of paraeducators LEAs require to assist teachers with the delivery of instructional and other direct services to all learners who can benefit from individualized programs or personalized attention.)
2. *The number of paraeducators deployed in different instructional programs:* Title I, multi-lingual, inclusive general and special education programs, libraries, computer laboratories and other education settings.
3. *Current written policies, standards and systems required by state law, administrative guidelines, or regulatory procedures in the following areas:* a) paraeducator employment and roles, b) similarities and differences in the knowledge and skill competencies required by paraeducators working in different programs or position levels, c) standards for paraeducator pre- and in-service preparation and career development, d) credentialing

**systems for paraeducators, e) standards for paraeducator supervision, and f) standards for preparing teachers for their supervisory roles.**

**All fifty states, the District of Columbia, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Guam, American Samoa, and the Department of Defense responded to the NRCP survey. The survey was initiated in the 1999-2000 school year and was completed in 2001 using follow up phone calls or re-sending surveys to individuals we had identified in a state who could provide more complete information. Even so the information provided by many states is not complete and thus is only approximate.**

**The results of the survey with regard to paraeducator employment contained the following information. There are more than 525,000 paraeducators currently employed in FTE positions nationwide. Of that number approximately 290,000 are employed in inclusive general and special education programs, self-contained and resource rooms, transition services and early childhood settings serving children and youth with disabilities. (One critical piece of information that is very difficult to obtain are the number of paraeducators who are assigned to work one-to-one with individual learners). Approximately 130,000 paraeducators are assigned to multi-lingual, Title I or other compensatory programs. The remainder work in pre-school and elementary classrooms and other learning environments including libraries, media centers, and computer laboratories. Again it is important to stress that all of these numbers are only approximate, because most states do not maintain central data bases, some gather only data required by federal programs, and some states report that the data are not available by program areas.**

**While the data gathered by the NRCP provide an incomplete picture of paraeducator employment across the country, they do help to identify the gaps in information that make it difficult for federal policy makers and administrative agencies, SEAs, LEAs, IHEs, and other stakeholders to identify and set appropriate standards for paraeducator employment, roles, supervision, and of critical importance, to create viable systems for the preparation of a well trained and appropriately supervised paraeducator workforce. To facilitate the development of standards and systems and build on the resources of different stakeholders, SEAs need to systematically gather and maintain information about the number of paraeducators employed in all education and related services agencies as well as the program areas and grade levels where they are assigned. In addition Federal agencies and law makers should encourage and provide incentives to states to gather this information.**

Without the availability of accurate, up-to-date information, state and local needs cannot be determined, priorities cannot be established and systems cannot be developed; and in far too many cases, legislative and administrative actions are taken without complete knowledge and understanding of the needs and issues that impact on the performance of teacher and paraeducator teams.

### **III. STATE POLICIES, STANDARDS, AND SYSTEMS FOR PARAEDUCATOR ROLES, PREPARATION AND SUPERVISION –THE STATE OF THE ART**

Increased reliance on paraeducators with greater emphasis on their instructional and learner support roles has not resulted in the development of policies and systems to improve their performance, supervision, and preparation; in many states where they do exist, written policies, regulatory procedures, and administrative practices have not been evaluated and revised since they were established in the 1960s and 1970s.

The continuing efforts of the NRCP and the work of other investigators indicate, that in addition to establishing a central database with employment and deployment information about all paraeducators, there are other critical issues requiring the attention of policy makers and SEA administrators working in concert with LEAs, personnel developers in IHEs, professional organizations, unions, parents, and other advocates for better schools. These issues are connected with the fact that while the majority of paraeducators spend all or part of their time assisting teachers, early childhood educators, and transition specialists in the instructional process they are rarely adequately trained to carry out their assigned tasks (Blaylock, 1991; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Fafard, 1974; Killoran, et al, 2001; Miromontes, 1990; Moshoyannis et al, 1999; Pickett, 1999; Passaro, Pickett, Lathem & Hongbo, 1994; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Rogan & Held, 2000; Rueda & Monzo, 2000; Snodgrass, 1991).

Analysis of the most recent NRCP survey of CSSOs and a comparison with earlier surveys provides ample evidence of why it is so important for SEAs to join forces with other stakeholders to address issues that influence the performance of teachers and paraeducator teams. They can be summarized as follows:

- During the past 20 years SEAs, LEAs, and IHEs have paid scant attention, either together or on their own to a) determining core skills and knowledge for all paraeducators and the specialized skills required by programs/positions they are assigned to, b) defining experiential and education qualifications for entry level employment, c) establishing criteria for advancement to paraeducator positions that require higher levels of knowledge and skill competencies, and d) setting standards

and developing indicators for assessing paraeducator knowledge and ability to demonstrate mastery of skills required to assist teachers with the delivery of instructional programs.

- **Training for paraeducators when it is available is usually highly parochial, is rarely competency based or part of seamless systems of career development that include: a) systematic on-the-job training, b) opportunities for competency based pre- and in-service training, and c) access to flexible degree programs that enable skilled, talented paraeducators to continue to work while they earn academic credentials.**
- **Only fourteen states have credentialing or licensure mechanisms for paraeducators. They range from multi-level systems that define roles, competencies, training and career advancement criteria to one-dimensional systems that do not specify role or training requirements. As we noted in the section on the history of paraeducator employment many of the systems were non-binding and LEAs were not required to provide training based on either statewide or local standards. This is still true today. The states with licensure/certification systems are found in Appendix 3.**
- **Another thirteen states have chosen to establish standards or guidelines for paraeducator roles and competency based training. Some, but not all of these states provide support and assist LEAs with the development of training models. The assistance may be in the form of material development, sponsorship of statewide conferences for paraeducators, or technical assistance. Because these standards are not always part of the state's regulatory procedures, LEAs are not mandated to follow the guidelines for developing and maintaining standards. The states that have established standards for paraeducator employment, roles, knowledge and skills, preparation are contained in Appendix 3.**
- **Although contemporary education reform initiatives emphasize the team and program management functions of teachers, they have overlooked the supervisory responsibilities of teachers. Currently two states, Minnesota and Washington require as part of their teacher credentialing systems that special education teachers be prepared to supervise and work effectively with paraeducators. Eleven other states report that they have established standards for teacher responsibilities as supervisors of paraeducators. Analysis of the "standards" reveal that with the exception of Rhode Island and Utah, most are minimal at best. As a result, the overwhelming majority of teacher education programs do not provide their graduates with an understanding of the components of the instructional process they may not delegate to paraeducators and which tasks may be shared with paraeducators. Nor do they prepare them to 1) plan paraeducator assignments, 2) monitor the day to day performance of paraeducators, 3) provide on the job training to paraeducators, 4) objectively share relevant information with principals about paraeducator strengths and training needs..The states with standards or guidelines for paraeducator supervision are contained in Appendix 3.**

- **The need to recruit and prepare committed highly skilled teachers for all education disciplines is well documented. The need to attract men and women from diverse ethnic, cultural and multi- language heritages is particularly acute throughout all geographic regions and demographic areas across the country (Bureau of the Census, 2001; Genzuk and Baca, 1998; NCES, 1995& 2000; Recruiting New Teachers, 1997). An important but overlooked resource for addressing these continuing shortages is the paraeducator workforce (Genzuk & Baca, 1998; Rueda & Monzo, 2000; Haselkorn & Fideler, 1996).**

**In response to these and other issues that impact the quality of education for all learners, Congress has amended both the IDEA, 1997 and NCLB Act, 2001 to include significant provisions that acknowledge the evolving roles of teachers and paraeducators as members of instructional teams. The amendments to these two federal laws call for higher standards for paraeducator preparation, improved supervision of paraeducators and opportunities for career development for paraeducators.**

**The 1997 reauthorization of IDEA was the first federal legislation to proactively recognize the critical need to prepare paraeducators to assist with the delivery of special education services and the need to prepare teachers for their emerging supervisory roles. This is reflected in provisions that allow LEAs to employ paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised in compliance with state laws, regulations, or written policy to assist with the provision of special education and related services for school age children and youth with disabilities (Part B, section 612 [a]). Part C (section 635[a]) is concerned with personnel who work with infants and toddlers and their families and mandates the preparation of professionals and paraprofessionals in areas of early intervention with the content knowledge and collaborative skills needed to meet the needs of infants and toddlers with disabilities in accordance with state approved or recognized certification, licensure, or regulations.**

**Amendments that are destined to have an even a greater impact on paraeducator preparation, roles and supervision have been made to Title I of the NCLB Act of 2001. The amendments set standards for the employment, preparation, and assessment of paraeducators, specify duties that may be performed by paraprofessionals, and require paraprofessionals who provide instructional services to be supervised by credentialed teachers. Although the amendments require paraprofessionals to work under the direction of teachers they do not require SEAs to set standards for preparing teachers for their roles in planning for, directing and monitoring paraprofessionals. There are amendments to several Titles throughout the bill that address paraprofessional roles and training. The most significant are found in Section 1119 in Title I.**

**They address qualifications for teachers and paraprofessionals. (Note throughout this section we use the term paraprofessional, rather than paraeducator because that is the term used in the NCLB Act.)**

**Subsection (1)(c) requires LEAs receiving assistance under this part of the No Child Left Behind Act to ensure that all new paraprofessionals or those employed prior to January 8, 2001 who work in positions funded by Title I have:**

- **A high school diploma or its equivalent-- no matter what their position is or their responsibilities. Paraprofessionals assigned to provide parent involvement or translation services are not required to meet any further education requirements beyond the high school diploma or a GED.**

**In addition all new paraprofessionals employed after January 8, 2002 in programs funded by Title I must:**

- **complete at least 2 years of study at an institution of higher education prior to employment; OR**
- **obtain an associate or higher degree prior to employment; OR**
- **meet a rigorous standard of quality and demonstrate through a formal state or local academic assessment (i) knowledge and the ability to assist in instruction reading, writing, and mathematics, or (ii) knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness, as appropriate.**

**Subsection (1) (d) requires LEAs to ensure that all currently employed paraprofessionals shall:**

- **not later than 4 years after the date of enactment satisfy the requirements of subsection (1) (c).**

**Subsection (1)(g) specifies duties paraprofessionals may be assigned. They may:**

- **provide one-to-one tutoring for eligible for eligible students;**
- **assist with classroom management;**
- **assist in a computer laboratory;**
- **provide support in a library or media center;**
- **act as a translator;**
- **conduct parent involvement activities.**

**Subsection (1)(g) also addresses supervision of paraprofessionals:**

- **paraprofessionals may not provide any instructional service to students unless they work under the direct supervision of a teacher.**

**SEAs have started to develop standards and procedures to meet the requirements of NCLB Act. Many of them are taking a big deep breath, stepping back and initiating a very thoughtful approach to establishing the standards and infrastructures. There is reason, however for concern about what the final outcomes will be in many states that are rushing to get something on the books to meet the objectives of the legislation; thus raising the possibility that systems will be put into place that will still be highly parochial, will not recognize the similarities in the roles of paraeducators working in all programs administered by LEAs, will not be competency based, and will not facilitate career advancement for paraeducators.**

**Other concerns are linked to the development of the academic assessment instruments required by NCLB. Will the academic assessments adequately reflect the ability of paraeducators to provide instruction in reading, mathematics, and writing, and reading readiness, mathematic readiness, and writing readiness? Will SEAs or LEAs develop and recognize other standardized methods that will enable paraeducators to demonstrate competence to assist teachers to carryout instructional activities. Still other unanswered questions center on how the exemptions from meeting education standards for paraeducators who provide instructional services will impact on paraeducators who assist parents and those who provide translation services. How will these exemptions impact on their continuing employment, on opportunities for career advancement, the development of standards for the skill and knowledge competencies they require to assist parents, learners, and teachers?**

**At the present time Congress and OSERS have started the process of amending IDEA. Work on the reauthorization process is scheduled for completion sometime in 2003. While we cannot predict what the final outcomes of the Congressional debate will be, there are indications that the requirements for paraeducator roles, supervision and preparation will be the same or similar to those established by the NCLB Act of 2001.**

#### **IV. DEVELOPING STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING THE PERFORMANCE OF TEACHER AND PARAEDUCATOR TEAMS**

**Commitments have been made at the federal, state and local levels to improve the quality of instruction and other education services for all learners and their families. On the surface the provisions in IDEA, 1997 and ESEA, 2001 would seem to be hopeful signs that will ensure the**

availability of a highly skilled and appropriately supervised paraeducator workforce. Assuring compliance with the intent and spirit of the federal legislative actions is not an easy task. Although there has been some progress in developing policies and standards to improve the performance of teacher and paraeducator teams since the passage of IDEA, 1997, in far too many situations these efforts have been piecemeal and have not led to infrastructures and policies that are integral parts of statewide systems of personnel development.

With the reauthorization of NCLB 2001, development of statewide standards that clearly define distinctions in teacher and paraeducator roles, identify knowledge and skill competencies for paraeducators, create standards, academic assessment instruments and other methods that enable paraeducators to demonstrate skill mastery is critical. As SEAs begin their efforts to address these and other issues connected with paraeducator preparation and supervision, these efforts are not always going forward systematically, and unfortunately many are being developed in isolation.

SEAs should not develop the standards and infrastructures alone. They need to work in concert with LEAs, IHEs, professional organizations, unions, parents and other stakeholders to establish standards for paraeducator roles, preparation, and supervision that reflect best practices. After that is accomplished, they need to move on and develop systems to ensure that the standards are met by providing pre- and in-service training for paraeducators, and that teacher education programs prepare graduates for their roles as planners of paraeducators assignments and directors and monitors of paraeducator's day-to-day performance.

The lack of access to meaningful data and other information about paraeducator employment, roles, preparation and supervision within a state adversely affects the capacity of SEAs and their partners to improve the quality of paraeducator performance. It is the responsibility of SEAs to gather relevant data about all aspects of paraeducator employment in the various programs administered by LEAs and to maintain it in an accessible centralized database. When this is done, the different partners will have the information they need to make informed decisions about how best to address the needs of their state. Pickett (in press) has identified a series of issues that require the attention of SEAs working in concert with their partners, they include:

- Delineating teacher responsibilities that *may not be delegated or assigned to paraeducators, and the responsibilities that may be shared with paraeducators;*
- Determining similarities and distinctions in the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators working in different programs or positions;

- **Identifying a common core of skills required by all paraeducators, and hierarchies of knowledge and skills for paraeducators working in programs where they have greater independence and require more advanced complex skills;**
- **Establishing standards for paraeducator supervision;**
- **Establishing standards for paraeducator performance as team members in different programs and positions;**
- **Developing and implementing competency based, comprehensive systems of pre and in-service training for paraeducators tied to opportunities for career advancement;**
- **Identifying the knowledge and skill competencies required by teachers who supervise paraeducators; and**
- **Establishing standards for preparing teachers to carry out their supervisory responsibilities.**

## **CONCLUSION**

**Administrators in SEAs and LEAs are confronted with many challenges as they continue their efforts to achieve higher performance standards for all learners. One of the most important strategies for meeting these challenges includes: 1) developing standards for paraeducator roles, preparation and supervision, and 2) embedding the standards in state rules or regulatory procedures. Incorporating the standards into the rules and procedures will ensure the creation and maintenance of infrastructures for delivering competency based paraeducator training and career advancement. Central to strengthening the performance of instructional teams is the need to prepare teachers to supervise and work effectively with paraeducators. To accomplish these goals, SEAs and LEAs must work in partnership with IHEs and other stakeholders. Establishing and nurturing these partnerships takes time and commitment. It is therefore, important for all partners to be willing to stay the course and complete the process of developing the standards and systems to strengthen the performance of teacher and paraeducator teams.**

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## APPENDIX 1

### SCOPE OF TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES AS TEAM LEADERS

The parameters for scopes of responsibilities for teachers and paraeducators as team members were developed by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCP) through a grant of national significance funded by the Division of Personnel Preparation, Office of Personnel Preparation, Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). Although OSEP funded by the project, one of the primary goals was to identify the similarities in the responsibilities of teacher and paraeducator teams serving learners with diverse instructional and related services needs in early childhood settings, elementary, middle and secondary schools. The NRCP was assisted by a taskforce representing: SEAs, LEAs, professional organizations, two and four year IHEs, unions and parents. The proposed scopes of responsibilities developed by the taskforce and the standards for knowledge and skill competencies teachers and paraeducators required to carry out their responsibilities were validated and revised using a mail survey conducted among administrators in state and local education agencies, teachers, paraeducators, personnel developers in 2 and 4 year IHEs and other stakeholders. The scopes of responsibilities for teachers are divided into six areas of responsibility. They along with standards for skill and knowledge competencies required by teachers to effectively lead instructional teams and supervise paraeducators are contained in: *STRENGTHENING TEACHER/PROVIDER- PARAEDUCATOR TEAMS: GUIDELINES FOR PARAEDUCATOR ROLES, SUPERVISION AND PREPARATION* (Pickett, 1999). The same publication contains scopes of responsibilities, knowledge and skill competencies, and performance indicators for paraeducators.

#### RESPONSIBILITY 1: TEACHERS ARE LEADERS OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION TEAMS WITH SUPERVISORY RESPONSIBILITY FOR PARAEDUCATORS.

The scope of responsibilities for teachers as supervisors of paraeducators includes:

1. Preparing assignments for paraeducators based on program needs, learning objectives for children and youth, and paraeducator skills.
2. Involving paraeducators in various components of the learning process to support teacher administrative and program functions.

3. Providing on-the-job training and feedback to paraeducators to prepare them to carry out team decisions,
4. Monitoring the day-to-day performance of paraeducators,
5. Sharing relevant information with principals about paraeducator strengths and professional development needs.

## **RESPONSIBILITY 2: AS TEAM LEADERS, TEACHERS CREATE AND MAINTAIN LEARNER-CENTERED SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS**

The scope of responsibilities for teachers in providing supportive learner-centered environments includes:

1. Implementing, with the assistance of paraeducators, district policies and procedures for protecting the safety, health, and well-being of learners and staff.
2. Involving paraeducators in learning activities that provide supportive and inclusive learning environments that respect differences among children, youth, their families, and staff.

## **RESPONSIBILITY 3: AS TEAM LEADERS, TEACHERS PLAN AND ORGANIZE LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

The scope of responsibility for teachers for planning and organizing learning experiences include:

1. Planning lessons,
2. Aligning curriculum content with and performance standards,
3. Developing behavioral plans to achieve learning objectives and performance standards,
4. Modifying learning plan and instructional strategies to accommodate difference in individual children and youth,

Involving paraeducators in planning and organizing learning experiences based on paraeducator qualifications to carryout the tasks.

## **RESPONSIBILITY 4: AS TEAM LEADERS TEACHERS ENGAGE CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN LEARNING EXPERIENCES**

The scope of responsibility for teachers for ensuring that children and youth are actively engaged in learning experiences includes:

1. Providing, with the assistance of paraeducators, learning experiences that take place in different environments (classrooms, libraries, study halls, playgrounds, worksites and other community based settings and center and home-based programs for infants and young children and their parents).

2. **Preparing paraeducators to use the methods, materials, and equipment required to carryout learning activities and how to document learner performance.**

#### **RESPONSIBILITY 5: AS TEAM LEADERS, TEACHERS ASSESS LEARNER NEEDS, PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS.**

**The scope of responsibilities for teachers in the assessment process includes:**

1. **Administering and analyzing, with the assistance of other team members, results of standardized instruments for assessing learner achievement.**
2. **Developing functional (informal) assessment tools to document learner performance.**
3. **Analyzing the results of functional assessment activities.**
4. **Keeping records documenting learner performance required by federal laws and state and district policies.**
5. **Involving paraeducators in assessment and record-keeping activities for which they are prepared.**

#### **RESPONSIBILITY 6: AS TEAM LEADERS, TEACHERS PRACTICE STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL CONDUCT**

**The scope of professional and ethical responsibilities for teachers connected with the supervision, evaluation and preparation of paraeducators includes:**

1. **Adhering to the ethical and professional standards of conduct related to the supervision and evaluation of paraeducators established by the professional organization representing their discipline and/or the district or state.**
2. **Modeling standards of professional and ethical conduct for paraeducators (i.e., maintaining confidentiality, demonstrating respect for the cultures and human and civil rights of learners and their families).**
3. **Ensuring that paraeducators follow guidelines established by the district and/or state to protect the health, safety and well-being of learners and staff.**
4. **Participating in opportunities for professional development that improve supervisory and team building skills.**

## APPENDIX 2

### PARAEDUCATOR SCOPES OF RESPONSIBILITIES AS TEAM MEMBERS

The scopes of responsibilities for paraeducators as members of instructional teams developed by the NRCP project of national significance are divided into the same six theme areas as those for the teachers. The analysis of the validation survey, identified a common core of knowledge and skills required by all paraeducators. The common core of competencies serves as the basis for the scope of responsibilities for a level 1 paraeducator position. The scopes of responsibilities for the levels 2 and 3 paraeducator positions are based on analysis of paraeducator functions that require more complex knowledge and skills.

The level 2 scope of responsibilities applies to paraeducators who work in pre-school, elementary, general and special education programs including self-contained and resource classrooms. For the most part these are paraeducators who for the most part work under the supervision of one teacher. The primary distinction in the responsibilities of levels 1 and 2 paraeducator positions is that greater emphasis is placed on the instructional functions of paraeducators in level 2. Moreover level 2 paraeducators participate in regularly scheduled on-the-job training sessions with teachers. And when required by learner needs or program requirements, level 2 paraeducators participate in IEP, ITP, and IFSP team planning meetings.

There are also several distinctions in the roles of levels 2 and 3 paraeducator positions. The first is that level 3 paraeducators, who facilitate inclusion of learners with disabilities into general education programs work along side of more than one teacher. The same is true for paraeducators who work in ESL/multi-lingual programs, transition services programs for learners who are moving from school to the adult world. Level 3 paraeducators who work in Title I, multi-lingual and special education programs may help teachers involve families in their child's learning experiences and activities. Level 3 paraeducators may have some discretionary authority to modify learning activities developed by teachers. Level 3 paraeducators may if appropriately prepared administered standardized tests. And because state and local policies connect with documenting and maintaining learner records are becoming more demanding and time consuming level 3 paraeducators may assist with these activities (Pickett, 1999).

**RESPONSIBILITY 1: PARAEDUCATORS ASSIST TEACHERS WITH BUILDING AND MAINTAINING EFFECTIVE TEAMS.**

## **LEVEL 1**

The scope of responsibilities for level 1 paraeducators includes;

1. Carrying out team decisions as assigned by the teacher;
2. Sharing relevant information about learners with teachers to facilitate problem solving, decision making, program planning and other team activities.

## **LEVEL 2**

The scope of responsibilities for level 2 paraeducators includes the responsibilities of level 1 paraeducators, **plus:**

3. Assisting teachers in activities that engage children and youth in learning experiences.

## **LEVEL 3**

The scope of responsibilities for level 3 paraeducators includes the responsibilities of level 2 paraeducators **plus:**

4. Assisting teachers with planning and organizing learning experiences.
5. Attending IEP, ITP, and IFSP team meetings to assist with the development of programs for learners they work with.

## **RESPONSIBILITY 2: PARAEDUCATORS ASSIST TEACHERS WITH MAINTAINING LEARNER-CENTERED SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENTS.**

### **LEVEL 1**

The scopes of responsibilities for level 1 paraeducators includes:

1. Assisting teachers with the implementation of district and state policies and procedures for protecting the safety, health and well-being of learners and staff.
2. Implementing strategies, developed by teachers, that support inclusive environments, respect individual differences among learners, their families, and staff, and protect the human and legal rights of all individuals.

### **LEVEL 2**

The scope of responsibilities for level 2 paraeducators includes all of the responsibilities for level 1 paraeducators.

### **LEVEL 3**

The scope of responsibilities for level 3 paraeducators includes all of the responsibilities for level 1 and 2 paraeducators, **plus:**

3. Assisting teachers with involving families in their child's learning experiences.

**RESPONSIBILITY 3: PARAEDUCATORS ASSIST TEACHERS WITH PLANNING AND ORGANIZING LEARNING EXPERIENCES.**

**LEVEL 1:**

The scope of responsibilities for level 1 paraeducators include:

1. Duplicating learning materials.
2. Maintaining learning centers.

**LEVEL 2:**

The scope of responsibilities for level 2 paraeducators includes all of the responsibilities for level 1 paraeducators, plus:

3. Gathering and sharing relevant information about the performance and behaviors of individual learners that supports the planning process.
4. Assisting teacher with the preparation of learning resources.

**LEVEL 3:**

The scope of responsibilities for level 3 paraeducators include the responsibilities for level 1 and 2, plus:

5. Assisting teachers with modifying learning strategies to accommodate different learning preferences ability levels and other learning needs of individual children and youth.
6. Inventorying supplies and ordering materials selected by the teacher.

**RESPONSIBILITY 4: PARAEDUCATORS ASSIST TEACHERS WITH ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN LEARNING EXPERIENCE:**

**LEVEL 1**

The scope of responsibilities for level 1 paraeducators include:

1. Following lesson plans and learning strategies developed by teachers.
2. Reinforcing learning activities introduced by the teacher.

**LEVEL 2:**

The scope of responsibilities for level 2 paraeducators include the responsibilities for level 1, plus:

3. Implementing behavioral programs developed by the teacher for individual learners.
4. Assisting children and youth with individualized learning activities or independent study projects assigned by the teacher.

**LEVEL 3:**

The scope of responsibilities for level 3 paraeducators includes the responsibilities for level 1 and 2, plus:

5. Carrying out learning activities for children, youth and their families in homes, work sites, and community based settings.
6. Assisting occupational and physical therapists, speech language pathologists, and nurses in the delivery of related services.

**RESPONSIBILITY 5: PARAEDUCATORS ASSIST TEACHERS WITH ASSESSING LEARNER NEEDS AND PROGRESS.**

**LEVEL 1:**

Level 1 paraeducators do not participate in assessment activities.

**LEVEL 2**

The scopes of responsibilities for level 2 paraeducators includes:

1. Carrying out functional assessment activities to assist teachers in documenting information about learner strengths and needs.

**LEVEL 3.**

The scope of responsibilities for level 3 paraeducators for level 2, plus:

2. Administering standardized test based on district policy and the protocol for administering the tests and the paraeducator's demonstrated ability for performing the tasks.
3. Assisting teachers and other team members with maintaining learner records required by federal, state and district policies.

**RESPONSIBILITY 6: PARAEDUCATORS MEET STANDARDS OF PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL CONDUCT.**

**LEVELS 1,2, and 3**

The scope of responsibilities for levels 1, 2 and 3 paraeducators includes:

1. Assisting school administrators and teachers with protecting the civil, legal and human rights of learners and their families.
2. Practicing the standards of professional and ethical conduct approved by the district or state for education and other human services personnel.
3. Performing tasks that are within an identified scope of responsibility for paraeducators in different position levels.

- 4. Following the chain of command established by the district to address policy questions, systems issues, and personnel practices.**
- 5. Following guidelines established by the district to protect the health, safety and well-being of learners.**
- 6. Respecting individual difference among learners, families, and other staff.**
- 7. Participating in opportunities for continuing education and professional growth.**

### **APPENDIX 3**

## **STATE SYSTEMS, STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES FOR PARAEDUCATOR EMPLOYMENT, PREPARATION AND SUPERVISION**

Information in this appendix is based on the results of the most recent NRCP survey and follow-up phone calls to chief state school officers. The survey was designed to answer questions about the following policy and systemic issues.)

1. Does your state have a credentialing, licensure or permit system for paraeducators? Is the system incorporated in written rules or regulatory procedures that mandate LEAs to comply with requirements for training and employment, or is it an optional system?
2. Does your state have education standards or guidelines for paraeducator employment?
3. Does your state have standards for paraeducator roles and responsibilities?
4. Does your state have standards for knowledge and skill competencies for paraeducators who work in different programs and different positions?
5. Does your state have guidelines for paraeducator supervision?
6. Does your state have standards for preparing teachers to supervise paraeducators?

#### **STATES WITH CREDENTIALING SYSTEMS FOR PARAEDUCATORS (14)**

No two credentialing, certification, licensure, permit systems are alike. The only shared characteristic of the systems is that all are non-binding on LEAs. Currently, with the exception of requiring a minimum of a high school diploma or GED for employment as a teacher aide, there is little consensus among states with a credentialing system about what the components of a credential should be, let alone what the standards for paraeducator roles, skills and preparation should be. Moreover, the states that have established standards for paraeducator preparation that are not embedded in their rules or regulatory procedures have no way of requiring LEAs to provide training for paraeducators that meet the standards. The following are the states that currently have a certification system in place.

**ALABAMA** (in effect since the 1970s applies to all paraeducators, 30 clock hours of formal training are required, additional standards for knowledge and skills and training for special education paraeducators established.)

**DELAWARE** (original system established in 1970s, revised in the 1993, applies to all paraeducators, recognizes three levels of paraeducator positions, includes guidelines for training.)

**FLORIDA** (legislation enacted in 1998, includes guidelines for an optional career ladder, applies to all paraeducators.)

**GEORGIA** (two year licensure system applies to all paraeducators, includes guidelines for employment, LEAs are required to provide 30 clock hours for tier 1 teacher aide; and 50 clock hours for tier 2 paraprofessionals, renewable after 3 years upon completion of 50 additional clock hours.)

**ILLINOIS** (in effect since the 1970s. applies to all paraeducators, LEAs are required to provide in-service training that is approved by the state superintendent).

**IOWA** (established in 2000, two levels of paraeducator certification apply to all paraeducators, Level 1 is a generalist certification and requires completion of at least 90 clock hours of training, and level 2 requires paraeducators to have an associate degree or have 62 hours at an IHE, all level 2 paraeducators must complete two semester hours of coursework involving at least 100 hours of supervised practicum.)

**KANSAS** (established in the mid 1970s, applies to special education paraeducators only, 3 tiered system with standards for advancement based on training that recognizes both in-service training and an AA degree or a combination of both.)

**MAINE** (recognizes three levels of education technician positions; tied to in-service and post secondary education, applies to all paraeducators).

**NORTH CAROLINA** (established by the NC Department of Labor in 2001, the credential contains standards for the employment and preparation of all paraeducators.)

**NEW HAMPSHIRE** (in effect since early 1970s, recently revised applies to all instructional paraeducators; a three-tier system that requires LEAs to provide orientation for level 1 paraeducators, and additional training to enable paraeducators to advance to levels 2 & 3.)

**NEW MEXICO** (approved in 1990, four tier licensing process for teacher aides, assistants, and OT & PT aides.)

**NEW YORK** (includes certification for teacher aides who must meet civil service requirements and four levels of teacher assistants beginning with a provisional license, advancement to higher levels based on in-service training and completion of post secondary requirements).

**OHIO** (recently revised, applies to all paraeducators, requires high school diploma, includes a suggested career ladder, training is non specific and not competency based.)

**OKLAHOMA** (in the process of establishing standards for a certification system that was created in response to legislation enacted in 1999; standards for training and certification for paraeducators working in special education programs for learners with severe and profound disabilities have been in place for several years.)

**TEXAS** (in effect since the early 1980s, applies to all paraeducators, local options for employment and training standards prevail).

**WEST VIRGINIA** (licensure including standards for training established for a paraprofessional position, employees in these positions work at a higher level of independence than teacher aides and assistants; there are no standards for training teacher aides and assistants.)

### **STATES WITH STANDARDS FOR PARAEDUCATOR ROLES AND PREPARATION**

The knowledge and skill standards developed by most of the following states provide are non-binding guidelines for LEAs to follow as they develop training opportunities for paraeducators.

**ARKANSAS** (standards for special education paraeducator training have been established)

**HAWAII** (standards for a three tiered training program, initially developed for special education paraeducators in response to a court ordered consent decree: knowledge and skill competencies now being expanded to accommodate Title I paraeducators; orientation and intermediate level training provided by the SEA; advanced level (third level) provided by community colleges in collaboration with the SEA.)

**IDAHO** (knowledge and skill standards established in 2001 for special education and Title I paraeducators developed jointly by two divisions in the SEA.)

**MARYLAND** (knowledge and skill standards established for all paraeducators.)

**MICHIGAN** (standards for paraeducators in early childhood established.)

**MINNESOTA** (SEA developed knowledge and skill standards for special education paraeducators in 1997, state legislation enacted in 1998 requires LEAs to ensure that paraeducators employed in special education have sufficient skill to perform their assigned tasks, and to provide training opportunities annually.)

**MONTANA** (training standards based on identified skills and knowledge for special education paraeducators, SEA supports regional training opportunities.)

**RHODE ISLAND** (knowledge and skill standards for paraeducators established for special education and ESL/bilingual paraeducators established by the SEA in 1998 and 1999.)

**SOUTH CAROLINA** (SEA established standards for special education paraeducator skill and knowledge competencies.)

**UTAH** (established standards for special education paraeducator roles and preparation have been approved; work is currently underway to revise the skill and knowledge competencies to apply to Title I paraeducators as well.)

**VERMONT** (standards for special education paraeducator knowledge and skill competencies approved by State Board of Education in 2001 and have been incorporated in the state's rules for special education; the certification system that applied to all paraeducators established in the 1970s is no longer recognized.)

**WASHINGTON** (core knowledge and skill competencies established for all paraeducators; community colleges have developed standards and a curriculum based on the core competencies).

**WISCONSIN** (standards for special education paraeducators have been developed and are awaiting approval; the certification system established for special education paraeducators in the 1970s is no longer recognized.)

### **STATES WITH STANDARDS FOR THE *SUPERVISION* OF PARAEDUCATORS AND LICENSURE REQUIREMENTS FOR PREPARING TEACHERS TO SUPERVISE PARAEDUCATORS**

Only states that have standards for paraeducator supervision that go beyond stating “that paraeducators work under the direct supervision of teachers” are included in this section.

**CALIFORNIA** (standards for preparing special education teachers to supervise paraeducators have been established, but are not part of the state's credentialing system; legislation introduced in 2002 requiring that all teachers be prepared for emerging supervisory roles was not passed.)

**MINNESOTA** (standards for preparing special education teachers to supervise paraeducators are incorporated in the state's licensure system.)

**RHODE ISLAND** (standards for the supervision of paraeducators developed at the same time as the standards for paraeducator knowledge and skills competencies were approved.)

**UTAH** (standards for paraeducator supervision are established.)

**WASHINGTON** (standards for preparing teachers to supervise paraeducators are incorporated in the state's licensure system.)



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Organization/Address: <i>NRCF Utah State University 6526 Old Main Hill Logan, Utah 84322-6526</i>	Telephone: <i>435-797-7272</i>	FAX: <i>801-273-7026</i>
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