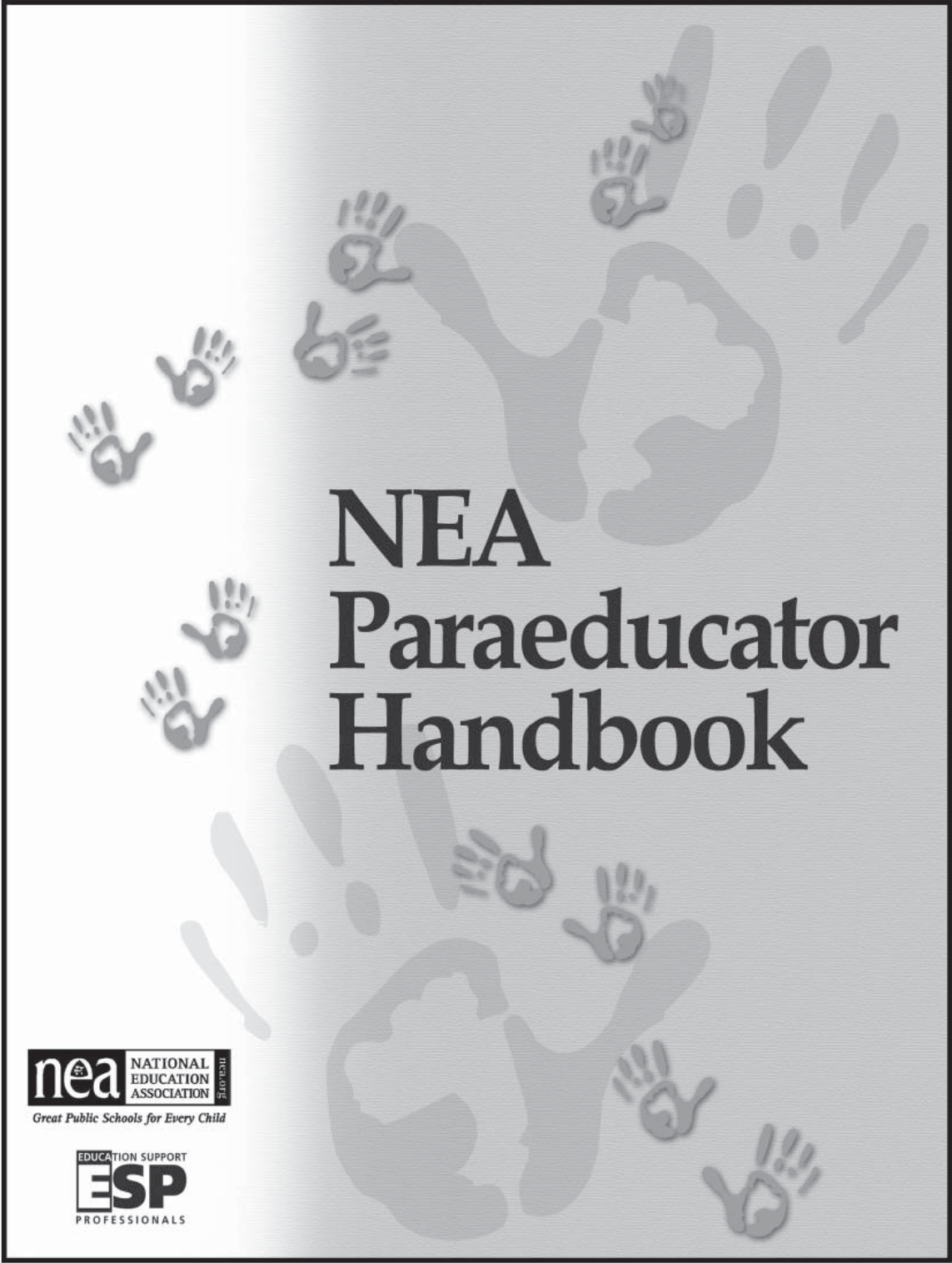


# NEA Paraeducator Handbook

**nea** NATIONAL EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

*Great Public Schools for Every Child*

EDUCATION SUPPORT  
**ESP**  
PROFESSIONALS

The background of the cover features a large, faint, light-gray handprint in the center. Surrounding this central handprint are several smaller, darker gray handprints of various sizes and orientations, scattered across the page. The overall design is clean and professional, with a focus on the theme of hands and support.

# NEA Paraeducator Handbook

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EDUCATION  
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PROFESSIONALS

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Fourth Printing

The National Education Association is the nation's largest professional employee organization, representing 2.8 million elementary and secondary teachers, higher education faculty, education support professionals, school administrators, retired educators, and students preparing to become teachers.

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# Table of Contents

Acknowledgments..... *iii*

CHAPTER 1:  
*Paraeducators—Providing  
Quality Educational Support* ..... *1*

CHAPTER 2:  
*Building an Awareness and Appreciation  
of Paraeducator Roles and Responsibilities* ..... *5*

CHAPTER 3:  
*Supporting Paraeducator Professionalism* ..... *9*

CHAPTER 4:  
*Being Aware of Laws and Regulations  
Affecting Paraeducators*..... *13*

CHAPTER 5:  
*Ensuring Appropriate Training and Supervision* ..... *21*

CHAPTER 6:  
*Providing Ongoing Professional Development* ..... *33*





## CHAPTER

## 1

# Paraeducators— Providing Quality Educational Support

**IN THIS CHAPTER,  
FIND ANSWERS TO:**

- *What topics are covered in this handbook?*
- *How do I use this handbook?*

*Ms. Rodriguez works as a paraeducator in a third grade classroom where she assists students who are struggling readers, offers extra mathematics review to students who need it, and provides ongoing support to the classroom teacher. Students love Ms. Rodriguez's sense of humor and positive outlook. As one student said, "Ms. Rodriguez helps us learn better. Learning is fun with Ms. Rodriguez!"*

*Books always held a fascination for Ms. Wilson. She carries a love of reading and learning into her job as a library aide. For Ms. Wilson, helping children find books and seeing their faces light up as she reads to them are special rewards of the job.*

*Working in the community where she grew up is a dream of Ms. Bui. As a senior high school job coach, she follows students into the workplace and assists them in applying their skills and knowledge. Seeing their success brings a great sense of pride to Ms. Bui, who believes in the importance of providing positive transition support as well as being a positive role model for young people.*



*As a paraeducator whose primary responsibility is assisting three middle school students with disabilities, Mr. Thompson is constantly on the go. Classroom teachers rely on Mr. Thompson to help the students participate in classroom lessons. Two of the children use assistive technology, which Mr. Thompson always makes sure is ready and working. Another child must be lifted and positioned for classroom instruction. Among his many responsibilities, Mr. Thompson serves as a scribe for one of*



*the students and provides students with personalized follow up support. Teachers agree that Mr. Thompson has made it possible for these students to learn along with their peers.*

**Paraeducators**—paraprofessionals who work in the field of education—have many professional titles. But, as the above examples show, they all *provide quality educational support*.

Paraeducators, whose numbers total more than 770,000 in public school districts across the country, play an increasingly important role in improving student achievement by supporting and assisting certified/licensed educators in instructional and other direct services. Historically, paraeducators often provided their services in isolation. Today, paraeducators are being recognized as equal and essential members of professional educational teams. Their contributions are respected and valued.

Like all professionals, paraeducators benefit from support—information, training, supervision, and professional development—in carrying out their roles and responsibilities. The *NEA Paraeducator Handbook* provides an overview of information about key issues related to supporting paraeducators, including:

- Building an awareness and appreciation of paraeducator roles and responsibilities
- Representing paraeducators in the work place
- Being aware of laws and regulations affecting paraeducators
- Ensuring appropriate training and supervision
- Providing ongoing professional development



## Using this Handbook to Support Paraeducators

The purpose of the *NEA Paraeducator Handbook* is to provide information that can serve as a basis for understanding the important roles paraeducators assume in supporting teaching and learning in the nation's schools. It also provides a look at how paraeducators may be supported in carrying out their responsibilities.

The handbook may be used by:

- **Paraeducators** to better understand the increasing nationwide recognition of their contributions to professional education teams.
- **Local Associations/unions** to help them represent paraeducator employees in collective bargaining and to ensure that paraeducators are included in district-wide and statewide professional development.
- **State government and local school district policymakers** to assist them in initiating, developing, and maintaining quality paraeducator programs, including those provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act—also known as IDEA 2004—and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB).

The contents of this handbook are not intended to be prescriptive. By raising a number of issues and posing questions for consideration, it provides a framework to assist paraeducators, education team members, and policymakers in providing relevant support for paraeducators.



## CHAPTER

## 2

# Building an Awareness and Appreciation of Paraeducator Roles and Responsibilities

**IN THIS CHAPTER,  
FIND ANSWERS TO:**

- Who are paraeducators?
- Who benefits from paraeducators?

*Para is a prefix derived from ancient Greek meaning alongside of or akin to. It has been used for many years to designate those who work with and assist licensed professionals in fields such as medicine and law. Like paralegals and paramedics, paraeducators are respected members of the professional team.*

**Who are paraeducators?** The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals coined the term paraeducator. NEA's Education Support Professional Quality department (ESPQ) adopted the term to refer to a school employee who works alongside and under the supervision of a licensed or certified educator to support and assist in providing instructional and other services to children, youth, and their families. The licensed educator remains responsible for:

- Overall conduct and management of the classroom or program
- Design, implementation, and evaluation of the instructional program
- Student progress



Paraeducators are an integral part of the educational process. A majority of paraeducators work directly with students in their formative

years at the preschool, kindergarten, and elementary levels. An even larger number work with special education students. Most have job responsibilities that relate to academic achievement and school safety.

Although they have many different job titles—as evidenced in the sidebar, *A Sampling of Paraeducator Job Titles*—all paraeducators provide valuable services to the total educational program. It is important that the work of paraeducators be acknowledged.

**The NEA Education Support Professionals Quality department has produced the brochure *Paraeducators that describes the work of paraeducators in helping students achieve, making teachers more effective, and protecting students who need extra care. It is available on the NEA Web site at [www.nea.org/esphome](http://www.nea.org/esphome).***

## Recognizing the Benefits of Paraeducators

Trained paraeducators can help a school district deliver the quality education the community demands. Everyone benefits from the work of paraeducators—students, teachers, administrators, other members of the education team, parents, and school board members.

Teachers and other licensed and/or certificated education team members—such as speech-language pathologists and occupational and physical therapists—find that paraeducators play an invaluable role in supporting their work. Paraeducators reduce the number of students to adults. This allows the teacher or service provider to offer more differentiated instruction, and students benefit from the individualized attention that paraeducators provide.

Parents have yet another reason to feel secure that their children are receiving a quality education when trained paraeducators are in the school as part of the education team. Parents appreciate the individualized attention and support their children receive from paraeducators.

School board members and local administrators find that employing paraeducators helps them make more effective use of public funds while maintaining quality standards in their schools. Paraeducators extend the functions and flexibility of the education team. The support that paraeducators provide to other education team members goes a long way toward helping administrators retain staff and maintain a continuity of services to students.

## A Sampling of Paraeducator Job Titles

Paraeducators are known by many job titles, only a few of which are included in this list:

- Behavior Interventionist
- Career Specialist
- Classroom Assistant
- Early Childhood Education Assistance Program Family Support
- Educational Assistant
- Educational Paraprofessional
- Educational Technician
- English as a Second Language/Bilingual Assistant
- Guidance Specialist
- Home Liaison
- Instructional Aide
- Instructional Assistant
- Interpreter
- Job Coach
- Learning Assistance Program Assistant
- Media Center Assistant
- Occupational Information Specialist
- Outreach Specialist
- Paraeducator
- Paraprofessional
- Playground Assistant
- Secondary Programs Assistant
- Special Education Assistant
- Speech/Language Assistant
- Supervision Aide
- Teacher Assistant
- Teacher Aide
- Team Partner
- Technology Assistant
- Transition Specialist
- Tutor





## CHAPTER

## 3

# Supporting Paraeducator Professionalism

**IN THIS CHAPTER,  
FIND ANSWERS TO:**

- *Why is professionalism at the core of paraeducator work?*
- *How can paraeducators be represented in the workplace?*

*Paraeducators are committed to their profession. Consider these facts: On average, paraeducators have been working in the field for more than nine years, 70 percent plan to stay in the ESP field, and 56 percent intend to stay in their current jobs until retirement.*

*From the 2002 Status of NEA K–12 ESP Membership Study*

**P**araeducators embrace the professional values and goals of NEA, which place student achievement at their core. Professionalism is exemplified in the dedication paraeducators bring to their career. Full career partners in the quest for educational excellence and reform, paraeducators are an integral part of the instructional process. Like other members of the education team, paraprofessionals embody professionalism in all the settings in which teaching and learning take place.

Paraeducators have a strong professional identity. They advocate for their profession by maintaining positive, supportive, collaborative, and professional relationships with other members of the education team.





## Representing NEA Paraeducators in the Work Place

Paraeducators comprise the largest segment of NEA's Education Support Professionals membership and their numbers are growing. NEA supports paraeducators in many ways.

The NEA ESP Quality department provides ongoing support and resources for paraeducators. Paraeducators can keep up-to-date on issues that affect their work on the NEA Web site ([www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org)). NEA makes available print resources such as this handbook on many topics, including paraeducators and IDEA 2004.

NEA's support for paraeducators includes:

- Helping states develop their paraeducator programs;
- Working on behalf of legislative efforts that support paraeducators and informing members about requirements that affect them (e.g., NCLB and IDEA 2004);
- Including NEA paraeducators in efforts to develop partnerships within school districts and communities;
- Advocating for more precise job descriptions for paraeducators, which will lead to more appropriate evaluations and the enhanced quality of their work;
- Emphasizing the professional identity of paraeducator members;
- Informing paraeducators about standards, competencies, and professional development programs.

NEA local affiliates represent paraeducators' interests in collective bargaining. NEA believes that all paraeducators must have opportunities for professional development. Some states and school districts, acknowledging the importance of professional development for all, have built training into their standards for paraeducators.

In addition to professional development, paraeducators need formal job descriptions that accurately describe their work. The job description should state qualifications, duties of the job, and clarify who is responsible for certain tasks.

It also may include information on working conditions, equipment used, knowledge and skills, and relationships with other positions and employees.

NEA recommends the use of results-oriented job descriptions, which describe paraeducator tasks and results. NEA has published *Results-Oriented Job Descriptions: How Paraeducators Help Students Achieve*, which describes the development process and provides examples of paraeducator job descriptions. It is available on the NEA Web site at **www.nea.org**.

There are other issues affecting paraeducators that should be considered in collective bargaining. Questions involving these issues must be considered carefully before collective bargaining sessions take place. The sidebar, *Paraeducator Issues to Consider for Collective Bargaining*, presents a partial list of these issues.

## Paraeducator Issues to Consider for Collective Bargaining

### Seniority, Experience, and Prior Training

- How will seniority and/or experience be defined and applied when determining job placement and layoffs?
- How will previous training and experience be recognized in meeting NCLB requirements and qualifications?

### Job Description

- What are the entry level requirements?
- What courses can be taken for job placement or salary credit that relate directly to one's job description?
- Do job descriptions accurately reflect paraeducator skills, knowledge, roles, and responsibilities?
- Is the evaluation assessment process related to the job description? If so, how?
- Does the job description include suggestions or recommendations for ongoing professional development?

### Salary/Reimbursement/Benefits

- How will credentials and training be recognized on the salary schedule?
- How will levels of experience be addressed on the salary schedule?
- How will prior job experience(s) be recognized on the salary schedule?
- What are the criteria for reimbursement of professional development hours, training program certificates, degree attainment, CEUs, etc.?
- How will compensation for professional development be disbursed (e.g., hourly salary increase, yearly stipend, step-salary schedule, etc.)?
- How will types of leave be addressed (e.g., medical, maternity, personal, professional, etc.)?
- How will types of benefits be discussed (e.g., medical, disability, accident, association, etc.)?

### Time/Release Time

- Will there be on-the-job training time?
- How will time be built into the daily schedule for paraeducator/teacher planning?
- How will time before and after regularly scheduled work be compensated?
- Will professional development time be provided during the school year?
- Will release time be granted for internal and external professional development programs?
- Will the paraeducator receive regular work pay while attending programs?
- Will the local school district provide substitute coverage?

### Evaluation

- Who will conduct the evaluation?
- What evaluation method or instrument will be used?
- Will evaluation be linked to local and state standards or competencies, job description, and professional development plan?



## CHAPTER

## 4

# Being Aware of Laws and Regulations Affecting Paraeducators

**IN THIS CHAPTER,  
FIND ANSWERS TO:**

- What does IDEA 2004 say about paraeducators?
- What should paraeducators know about NCLB?

*The National Education Association strongly represented its members' interests as the U.S. Congress was considering amendments to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act in 2004. The Association is assisting members through bargaining, providing information and workshops, and working with school and state officials to make sure implementation of NCLB and IDEA 2004 is fair and equitable.*

In recent years, two federal laws—IDEA 2004 and NCLB—have acknowledged the role of some paraeducators. In both laws, the term *paraprofessional* is used instead of paraeducator. Paraeducators who are referenced in IDEA 2004 and NCLB need to be aware of the requirements and opportunities pertaining to them.

Many state and local Associations are working to meet the requirements for paraeducators in IDEA 2004 and NCLB. Paraeducators are encouraged to contact NEA, their state Association/union, or their UniServ director for specific information. Following is a brief overview of how the two laws affect certain paraeducators.



## Learning about IDEA 2004 Requirements

IDEA 2004 guarantees a free, appropriate public education for all students, regardless of the nature or severity of their disability. IDEA 2004—which uses the term *paraprofessionals* to refer to paraeducators—acknowledges the important role that paraeducators play in helping students with disabilities maximize their achievement (see the sidebar, *Why IDEA 2004 is Important to Paraeducators*).

First in the 1997 amendments to IDEA and now in the 2004 reauthorization, paraeducators who are appropriately trained and supervised (in accordance with state law, regulation, or written policy) are recognized as personnel who may assist in the provision of special education and related services to students with disabilities [20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)]. IDEA 2004 does not define the term paraprofessional nor does it define what paraprofessionals do.

IDEA 2004 makes clear that states must have written policies, regulations, or laws regarding the certification of paraeducators who provide services to students with disabilities. States must establish qualifications to ensure that paraeducators are appropriately prepared and trained to serve children with disabilities.

### Why IDEA 2004 is Important to Paraeducators

- It continues to recognize the role of paraeducators in providing services to students with disabilities. Prior to the 1997 amendments, there was no recognition of that role in federal legislation.
- It highlights the necessity for standards in the training and supervision of paraeducators.
- It supports the involvement of paraeducators as part of the team that provides educational services to children with disabilities.
- It encourages professional development opportunities for paraeducators.



IDEA 2004 allows school districts—which the law refers to as local education agencies (LEAs)—to use paraeducators to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities, provided the paraeducators are appropriately trained and supervised. IDEA 2004 stops short of defining paraeducator training and supervision, leaving that determination to the respective states.

States, however, must adopt a policy that requires school districts to take measurable steps to train qualified personnel. Such training must comply with personnel standards for paraeducators in accordance with state law, regulations, or written policy.

IDEA 2004 authorizes State Personnel Improvement Grants [20 U.S.C. §1415]—a new program that provides federal funds through a competitive grants program to states. Funds may be used to improve paraeducator knowledge of effective educational practices. These grants require states to include a plan that identifies and addresses state and local needs for preparation and professional development of personnel—including paraeducators—who serve students with disabilities.

Additional funding for paraeducator training may be available in school districts that use IDEA 2004 funds to provide early intervening services for students not identified as needing special education or related services but who need additional academic and behavioral support to succeed in a general education environment. Training activities include professional development.

## **Becoming Aware of NCLB Requirements**

NEA has consistently sought to guarantee every child an equal opportunity to succeed in our nation's public schools. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), enacted in 1965 to provide guidance and funds to K–12 schools, was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). At the heart of NCLB is the goal of ensuring that students, especially those who need the most help, are taught and served by highly qualified teachers and paraeducators.

In general, paraeducators should be familiar with:

- Who is covered under the definition of paraprofessional
- General NCLB requirements for paraprofessionals
- Funding support for paraprofessionals under NCLB
- Local's/district's policies and plans

## Definition of Paraprofessional

All paraeducators who work in programs funded by Title I of NCLB are affected. The requirements do not apply to paraeducators in local education agencies or schools that do not receive Title I funds. Paraprofessionals are generally those education support professionals who work with students in an instructional role. For the purposes of Title I:

*A paraprofessional is an employee who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds.*

According to NCLB [Title I, section 1119(g)(2)], this definition applies to paraeducators who:

- Provide one-to-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher;
- Assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials;
- Provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory;
- Provide support in a library or media center;
- Act as a translator; [*Note: There are special requirements for paraprofessionals who are proficient in English and a language other than English and who act as translators to enhance the participation of limited English proficient children under Title I, Part A.*]
- Conduct parental involvement activities; [*Note: There are special requirements for these paraprofessionals.*]
- Provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a teacher who meets the highly qualified requirements of NCLB, working in close and frequent proximity to the teacher.

**F**or the purposes of Title I, a paraprofessional is an employee who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds.

Individuals who work in food services, cafeteria or playground supervision, personal care services, noninstructional computer assistance, and noninstructional positions are not considered paraprofessionals under Title I. Title I paraprofessionals may perform certain functions outside those listed above for the benefit of all students, such as lunchroom, playground, or study hall monitoring. However, the portion of the time they spend on these general duties may

not exceed that of a non-Title I paraprofessional at the same school.

### General NCLB Requirements for Paraprofessionals

NCLB became effective on January 8, 2002. Paraprofessionals hired after that date (who are working in a Title I funded program) must meet these requirements immediately. **Paraprofessionals hired before that date must prove that they are highly qualified by the end of the 2005–2006 school year.** [Note: Originally, the deadline for paraprofessionals to meet this requirement was January 2006. NEA was successful in getting the deadline extended, which was a major accomplishment.] New requirements concerning the duties of paraeducators went into effect when the act became law.

**NEA** has prepared a brochure that explains and interprets the NCLB definition in more detail. It is available on the NEA Web site at [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org). Look for the document, *ESEA: Title I Paraprofessional Non-Regulatory Guidance—General Requirements*.

All Title I paraprofessionals—including those paraprofessionals who serve as translators or who conduct parental involvement activities—must have a high school diploma or the equivalent. Those paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support and who were hired after January 8, 2002, must prove that they are **highly qualified by meeting one of the following requirements** [Title I, section 1119(c) and (d)]:

- Completed at least two years of post-secondary study at an institution of higher education;
- Obtained an associate’s (or higher) degree;
- Met a rigorous standard of quality and demonstrated through a state or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in teaching reading, writing, and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness).

The sidebar, *NCLB and the Paraeducator: Steps to Take Now*, presents suggestions that will help paraeducators prepare to meet the NCLB requirements. In addition, the NEA brochure, *ESEA: Title I Paraprofessional Non-Regulatory Guidance—Requirements for Paraprofessionals*, describes the specifics of these requirements in greater detail. It is available on the NEA Web site at [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org).



## NCLB and the Paraeducator: Steps to Take Now

The National Education Association and state Associations encourage you to:

- Check with your school district to see if you work in a program funded by Title I. If the school has a school-wide Title I program and you work in an instructional capacity, you are probably included under NCLB. If the school receives targeted assistance, you are included only if your position is funded by Title I.
- Meet the NCLB qualification requirements even if you do not currently work in a Title I program. This will greatly increase flexibility and job security.
- Determine whether you were *officially* hired before or after January 8, 2002.
- Collect documentation relating to your education, including high school diploma or GED certificate and transcripts for college courses.
- Document conference and workshop attendance as this may help you attain highly qualified status.
- Submit documentation to the school district. [*Note:* Make sure to keep copies.]
- If you do *not* currently meet the requirements to be highly qualified, find out what assessment the state or school district has decided to use.
- If you decide and are allowed to meet requirements by taking additional college courses, contact local colleges to find out about programs that may help you become highly qualified.
- Ask your local Association/union what financial assistance the school district provides to employees pursuing additional education.
- Contact your local Association/union to find out how you can help elect lawmakers who support positive changes in NCLB.



**T**he NEA brochure, ESEA: Title I Paraprofessional Non-Regulatory Guidance—Funding Issues, describes in greater detail the specifics of these requirements. It is available on the NEA Web site at [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org).

### **Funding Support for Paraprofessionals**

Local school districts may use federal funds to help paraprofessionals meet the new requirements of the federal law. For example, local education agencies (LEAs) must allocate funds for professional development activities to ensure that paraprofessionals meet the qualification requirements. LEAs also may use their general Title I funds to support ongoing training and professional development to assist paraprofessionals.

In addition, LEAs may use Title II, Part A (Improving Teacher Quality State Grants) funds to provide training for paraprofessionals in certain cases. These monies are intended to provide professional development activities that improve the knowledge of teachers and principals relating to academic subjects taught and/or effective instructional strategies, methods, and skills. Paraprofessionals may be included in such activities, as appropriate.



## CHAPTER

## 5

# Ensuring Appropriate Training and Supervision

**IN THIS CHAPTER,  
LEARN ABOUT:**

- *Paraeducator knowledge and skills*
- *Special requirements*
- *Formal preparation*
- *School district orientation*
- *Opportunities to become teachers*

*NEA believes that paraeducators play an increasingly critical role in improving student achievement by supporting and assisting certificated/licensed educators in both instructional and other direct services. Further, NEA believes that all paraeducators, not just special education paraeducators, should be appropriately trained and supervised.*

**Properly trained paraeducators** play an important role in reinforcing and enhancing a teacher's effectiveness in the classroom. In preparing for their professional roles and responsibilities, paraeducators should have sufficient preparation and training.

## Preparing to Become a Paraeducator

NEA recommends that all paraeducators be given the chance to acquire the basic competencies, skills, and knowledge necessary for their positions. Competencies are identified skills and/or knowledge that an individual must have in order to perform a specific job. Core compe-



tencies are those knowledge and skills that *all* paraeducators should have. Examples include:

- Knowledge of roles and responsibilities
- Communication skills
- Behavior management skills
- Knowledge of growth and development
- An understanding of legal and ethical issues
- Instructional strategies
- An understanding of diversity and equity issues

In addition to core competencies, there are specialized competencies for specific job responsibilities. Specialized competencies might include skills and knowledge in:

- Early childhood/intervention
- Students with disabilities
- English as a second language
- Transition programs
- Technology
- Health and safety
- Physical therapy (for students with disabilities)
- Occupational therapy (for students with disabilities)

Some paraeducators may need to meet specific preparation requirements. IDEA 2004 states that personnel standards for paraeducators who provide services to children with disabilities must be in accordance with state law, regulations, or written policy (see Chapter 4). In addition, paraeducators who are covered under NCLB provision requirements for highly qualified paraprofessionals (see Chapter 4) should make sure that they have appropriate training as determined by the state.

**NEA** was a member of the Education and Training Voluntary Partnership that developed standards for paraeducators. The document, Skill Standards for Frontline Workers in Education and Training—Paraprofessionals, Paraeducators, Teacher Assistants, Child Care Workers—Working in General Education, Special Education, Early Childhood Care and Education, may be downloaded from <http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/psrp/SkillStandards.pdf>.

## Becoming Credentialed— Registration, Certification, and Licensing

Depending on the position, there may be state and/or local requirements that paraeducators must meet before they can practice. These requirements are called credentials. The most common credentials that paraeducators may need are:

- **Registration.** Paraeducators file their names, addresses, and qualifications with a government agency before beginning to work. Paying a fee or posting a bond may be required.
- **Certification.** Paraeducators who meet a state’s predetermined standards have the right to use an occupation title (right to title). Without certification, paraeducators can perform the occupational duties but may not use the occupation title.
- **Licensing.** Under these regulations, it is illegal for paraeducators to work without meeting state or federal standards.

Requirements typically vary from state to state, and the terms “registration,” “certification,” “licensing,” and “training program completion” may have different connotations from state to state.

## Completing Formal Training

In addition to registration, certification, and licensing, paraeducators may be able to complete a training program—an entry-level program of structured learning—that satisfies requirements for specific competencies. Some technical colleges or community colleges offer programs of study for paraeducators that lead to a diploma or associate’s degree. Many such programs allow credit for appropriate related work experience.

Diploma programs can usually be completed within one year if the student is enrolled on a full-time basis. Classes that might be offered in such programs include:

- Managing classroom behavior
- Technology in the classroom
- Child and adolescent development
- Overview of special education

Associate's degree programs can usually be completed within two years if the student is enrolled on a full-time basis. Many of these programs focus on preparing individuals for careers as paraeducators in early childhood education. Some programs also provide the foundation for further study at a four-year college.

The sidebar, *Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs*, at the end of this chapter, provides examples of formal training programs. Although these examples are by no means exhaustive, they may be helpful to state or local Associations and school districts that are involved in organizing programs. Paraeducators should check with their state to determine the availability of programs in their area.

## **Orienting Paraeducators to Their Jobs—School District Preservice Training**

In addition to making sure that any applicable requirements set forth in NCLB are met, school districts will want to ensure that paraeducators are qualified for their positions.

Prior to beginning work with students, paraeducators should receive an orientation. Such preservice training should include information about job responsibilities, district policies, and other relevant information. The sidebar, *Preservice Orientation Training Topics*, provides examples of topics that school districts might consider when planning orientation programs.

During the first two days at the job site, paraeducators should receive orientation training. At a minimum, they should be provided with the following:

- Introduction to building site policies
- Review of procedures and services

- Opportunity to observe and work alongside a mentor in the same position (job shadowing)
- Introduction to classroom curricula, rules, and procedures
- School behavior management plan
- Specific student information

## Deciding to Become a Teacher

For many individuals, being a paraeducator is their chosen career. However, the experience may lead some to a desire and determination to become a teacher. In fact, school systems increasingly are finding the ranks of paraeducators to be an excellent source from which to recruit teachers. In such cases, paraeducators may choose to participate in traditional teacher education programs or to pursue alternative pathways that lead to teacher certification.

In programs that do not involve school districts, paraeducators may take evening, weekend, and summer classes at a college or university to earn a bachelor's degree, or they might opt for a teacher education program that leads to certification. Other programs involve a collaborative effort among a school

district, the local Association or union, and a college or university. Some of these programs may allow paraeducators to use their current employment situation as a practicum, thereby gaining college credit for the work they perform. Check with your local/state Association regarding programs. It is important to note that IDEA 2004 provides some funding for alternative route special education teacher certification programs that serve qualifying paraeducators.

### Preservice Orientation Training Topics

New paraeducator orientation prior to working with students should include:

- Paraeducator roles and responsibilities
- District overview
- District policies and procedures
- District discipline policy
- District educational jargon
- Confidentiality
- Safety and emergency procedures
- Employment or contract information





## Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs

### California

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**California State University, Long Beach.** The university offers three programs for paraeducators.

#### **Paraeducator to Educator: A School-University Preservice Partnership Program**

**Goals:** To recruit paraeducators from underrepresented populations and prepare them to teach students with disabilities at school district sites; to provide support to paraeducators that ensures their ability to remain in school; and to refine the relationships among the school districts, local community colleges, and the university. The program leads to a B.S. degree and eventual teaching credential.

**Description:** Under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, this three-year program prepares selected paraeducators from selected school districts in Southern California to work with students with disabilities in regular and special education K–12 settings. Participants commit to teach for two years for every year funded.

#### **Paraeducator Partnership Project**

**Goals:** Sixty paraeducators from the Long Beach Unified School District will receive tuition and support for preparation to teach students with disabilities in special education settings.

**Description:** Due to the success of the Paraeducator to Educator project (described above) another grant was written, also funded by the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services. The four-year project assists paraeducators in attaining education and training through tuition coverage and support.



## Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs

### California (continued)

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#### **Paraeducator Training Course**

**Goals:** To provide training in a broad variety of subjects pertinent to working with students in school settings; to increase the knowledge and skills for paraeducators' present positions; and to act as a stepping stone for those wanting to continue their education and become teachers.

**Description:** A three-unit, upper division level college course, utilizing curriculum developed by the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services. Each course is tailored to meet the needs of the particular school district and is taught at district sites by faculty in the Department of Occupational Studies at California State University, Long Beach. Course topics include communication and problem solving, working as a member of an instructional team, the instructional process, human development, legislation, special education, working with families, appreciating diversity, and emergency procedures.

#### **Contact:**

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## Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs

### Maine

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#### **Educational Technician Authorization System: Approved Study**

##### **Maine Department of Education**

**Goal:** To enable paraeducators (known as educational technicians or ed techs) to obtain training required to perform certain types of professional work in Maine schools.

**Description:** Approved study is defined as inservice training or other training, as long as it is documented, new learning and related to the educational technician's job. Individual school districts may establish an educational technician's authorization system to be chaired and run by educational technicians themselves. Although the educational technician authorization is required for all paraeducators, it does not guarantee employment, nor does it guarantee a specific level of compensation, benefits, or course reimbursements for those who are employed. These are subjects for collective bargaining.

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## Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs

### Nebraska

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#### **Project PARA: Training Resources for Paraeducators**

##### **University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Teachers College**

**Goals:** To provide school-based preservice training programs for special education paraeducator personnel and to develop model procedures and materials to support school programs in providing systematic school-based preservice training.

**Description:** The program provides essential and accessible training for paraeducators through self-study focusing on preservice, inservice, and on-the-job training. Eight topic units are offered, including roles and responsibilities of paraeducators; developing instructional skills; observing and recording student performance; and effective communication with students, teachers, and other professionals. Communication via Internet is an integral part of the program. Two instructional videotapes for training paraeducators and supervisors are available for sale and may be ordered through the program contacts.

##### **Contacts:**

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## Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs

### New Mexico

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#### Teacher Education Program

##### College of Santa Fe

**Goals:** To provide an opportunity for teaching assistants to obtain a B.A. in elementary or secondary education. Students are supervised in their place of employment. Applicants already holding a B.A. degree qualify for elementary or secondary standard licensure and elementary, secondary, or special education alternative licensure. Applicants already holding an M.A. degree qualify for school counseling licensure, community counseling licensure, or educational administrative licensure.

**Description:** The program meets New Mexico entry-level competencies for licensure in each area. Classes are offered at special evening and weekend reduced tuition rates and take place in late afternoons, on weekends, and during the day in the summer.

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## Selected Paraeducator Preparation Programs

### Rhode Island

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#### Teacher Assistant Training Program

##### Rhode Island Department of Education

**Goals:** To enable paraeducators to meet standards for teacher assistants employed in Rhode Island school districts. This training is required for all teacher assistants who have not been employed previously in that position in Rhode Island public schools; do not hold teacher assistant certification in another state; do not hold a B.A. or associate degree; and have not completed training consistent with the teacher assistant program standards. Ongoing professional development is a condition of continued employment for teacher assistants in Rhode Island.

**Description:** Specific training programs for teacher assistants offered by a school district or other agency must be approved by the state department of education and must provide documentation or equivalent evidence that individuals who complete the program meet specific standards and indicators set forth by the department. The standards include professionalism in communication and collaboration with colleagues, families, and related agencies; support of teachers; support of a positive learning environment; and knowledge of health, safety, and emergency procedures.

##### Contact:

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## CHAPTER

## 6

# Providing Ongoing Professional Development

**IN THIS CHAPTER,  
LEARN ABOUT:**

- *Benefits of offering professional development to paraeducators*
- *Federal and state regulations addressing professional development for paraeducators*

*NEA believes that professional development should be required throughout the career of education support professionals. Professional development programs should provide equal opportunities for these employees to gain and improve the knowledge and skills important to their positions and job performance. Professional development programs should assure that appropriate education employees have a decisive voice at every stage of planning, implementation, and evaluation.*

There are many reasons why ongoing professional development—defined here as the process of enhancing one’s personal growth and job skills and improving one’s job performance in order to contribute to outstanding educational results for students—is important for paraeducators. One of the most compelling reasons is that student achievement depends on rigorous standards and a knowledgeable education team. To have high standards for students, there must be high standards for the staff members who work with them.



Appropriate training is vital to the quality of paraeducator participation in the entire program of any state or school district. Paraeducators are concerned about their access to professional development programs because they know that they need to keep up with changes in curriculum and technology just as other profession-



als must. Decision makers in every school district that employs paraeducators should understand that need and they should do all in their power to fulfill it.

## Conceptualizing Professional Development for Paraeducators

Professional development programs are meant to provide opportunities for paraeducators to gain knowledge and skills that will enhance their professional growth. In turn, paraeducators use their newly developed skills and knowledge, thereby increasing their contributions within the educational community.

**NEA** has produced an excellent resource on professional development for education support professionals, *The ES Professionals—An Action Guide to Help You in Your Professional Development*. It is available on the NEA Web site at [www.nea.org](http://www.nea.org).

There are a variety of ways in which professional development can be obtained, ranging from a smorgasbord model to a systematic approach to learning. In the smorgasbord model, participants take classes or workshops on many different topics. These experiences are often of short duration, do not cover material in depth, and are not sequential.

A systematic approach provides an organized way to structure learning. Educational opportunities begin with a foundation of basic knowledge, skills, and competencies, followed by more purposeful learning that builds on previous experiences. This model of professional development enables the paraeducator to take part in classes that become progressively more focused, in-depth, and tailored to the individual job situation or career goals.

NEA supports a professional development continuum for paraeducators. The continuum provides pathways of professional growth. Whereas a career ladder implies only one accepted route to continued learning for everyone, a career continuum allows individuals to choose from among different routes that meet their needs and interests.

The career continuum can be broken into two main parts:

- **Programs that are required of all paraeducators.** Required pathways involve qualifications and preservice training, basic competencies, skills and knowledge, and ongoing professional development.

- **Optional programs that allow individuals to choose their own routes to continued professional growth.** Optional pathways might include credentials (such as state registration, state licensing, or certification), degrees (either one-year diploma programs or two-year associate's degree programs), or teacher certification.

## Making Ongoing Professional Development Available

*There are many ways in which paraeducators can grow in their professions. A variety of professional development options should be provided in order to support paraeducators' work and the diverse needs of students and to allow for career mobility and flexibility.*

Paraeducators are team members who are responsible for assisting in the delivery of instruction and other direct services. This requires systematic communication, on-the-job training, inservice training, teacher/paraeducator training, and conference activities. In addition, career development and advancement, including financial support for further education, should be elements of a comprehensive professional development approach.

Potential delivery systems for professional development include:

- Paraeducator inservice sponsored by the school district
- Teacher inservice, sponsored by the school district, in which paraeducators are full participants
- Universities, community colleges, and technical institutes
- Educational service districts
- Business, professional, and community organizations
- National, state, and local Associations
- UniServ offices or councils
- Private vendors

Districts may wish to partner with other organizations to establish professional development programs. The sidebar, *Examples of Professional Development Programs for Paraeducators*, at the end of this chapter, contains brief descriptions for two programs. Although these examples are by no means exhaustive in form or detail, they may be helpful to state or local Associations and school districts involved in organizing programs.

It is particularly important that paraeducators receive the training necessary not only to assist in ongoing programs, but also to become knowledgeable about their responsibilities and rights. The sidebar, *Suggested Topics for Paraeducator Professional Development*, presents a listing of possibilities.

## Being Knowledgeable about Federal and State Regulations Related to Professional Development

Some states and school districts, acknowledging the importance of professional development for all education profes-

sionals, have built training into their standards for paraeducators. It is important to remember that in states where ongoing training is part of an authorization program for paraeducators, no matter how the training is offered, it must be appropriately documented.

As was discussed in Chapter 4, in some cases, states and/or local districts working in collaboration with the state may provide professional development opportunities for paraeducators who qualify under NCLB and/or IDEA 2004 provisions. Paraeducators may want to investigate whether their state and/or school district offers such opportunities.

### Suggested Topics for Paraeducator Professional Development

- Child development
- Ethical, medical, and technical issues
- Behavior management and discipline
- Developmentally appropriate practices
- Instructional strategies
- Team building skills for teachers and paraeducators
- Confidentiality and ethics
- Stress management
- Basic computer skills
- Data collection
- Conflict resolution
- Reporting child abuse
- First aid
- Characteristics of specific disabilities
- Suctioning
- Intermittent catheterization
- Blood-borne pathogens
- Specialty care (lifting, back care, etc.)
- CPR



## Examples of Professional Development Programs for Paraeducators

### Peer Assistance Program

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#### Shoreline School District

**Goal:** To provide training for paraeducators who wish to assist those peers who are struggling in their job performance.

**Description:** This is an example of a paraeducator peer mentor training program worked out by agreement between an ESP bargaining unit, Shoreline Educational Support Professionals Association, and its school district. Education support professionals who apply for membership in a peer mentor pool are given training focused on responsibilities of peer mentors, coaching techniques and strategies, confidentiality, communication and feedback skills, and appropriate roles of those employed in secretarial and paraeducator positions. A paraeducator or supervisor may request peer assistance, which is available according to need, and the employee's performance is monitored as the peer monitoring progresses.

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## Examples of Professional Development Programs for Paraeducators

### ESP Certificate Program

**WEA Professional Development Academy, Inc.** (a non-profit corporation affiliated with the Wisconsin Education Association Council)

**Goals:** To provide education support professionals with professional development that is high quality, structured, and relevant. Multiple levels provide a learning process that is rigorous and progressively focused.

**Description:** Level I consists of 40 hours in core curriculum areas and electives. Core areas include such topics as communications and legal and ethical issues. Electives include such topics as professional roles and responsibilities and technology. Level II consists of an additional 80 hours in the completion of an individual learning plan, specialization in one or two areas of interest, and a final project. The academy administers the program and the instruction is provided by school districts, technical colleges, universities, cooperative educational service agencies, and professional associations.

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