How Paraeducator Education Support Professionals Make Public Schools Great for Every Student

The use of paraeducators has grown steadily and our functions have changed dramatically since we were first introduced into classrooms as teacher aides. Our duties are no longer limited to recordkeeping, preparing materials, or monitoring students in lunchrooms and other settings.

Today, paraeducators contribute to great public schools by assisting with classroom instruction and providing direct services to students and their parents. A large number of us work with students with special needs, and all of us have job responsibilities that contribute directly to academic achievement and school safety.


NEA’s Paraeducator Members Are:

Well-trained: Twenty-nine percent of us have a two-year college degree, 20 percent a bachelor’s degree, and 5 percent a master’s or higher degree.

Committed: On average, NEA paraeducator ESP members have been working as education support professionals for 11 years. Seventy-four percent of us plan to stay in the ESP field, and 61 percent plan to stay in our current jobs until we retire.

Active in the school community: Seventy-five percent of us live in the school districts in which we work. Forty-seven percent have supported a parent organization. Forty-seven percent have volunteered to read books to students. Fifty-six percent have taught or supported art or musical activities. Thirty percent have coached or supported a sports program. Seventy-one percent of us have spent our own money to purchase food or school supplies for students.

Focused on safety. Eighty-three percent of NEA paraeducator ESPs have job responsibilities promoting school safety. Sixty-four percent of us have intervened to stop bullying behavior in school. Forty-six percent have intervened to stop school violence such as harassing, threatening, or intimidating others.

Workplace Conditions and Issues

In many cases, paraeducator jobs need to be better defined. Twenty-one percent of us do not have a job description. For those of us who have one, 15 percent feel that it does not accurately describe what we do. Forty-six percent are asked to perform duties outside of our job descriptions. Not having an accurate job description can lead to inequitable pay and to working outside our job classifications and legal authority.

Paraeducators are often asked to step in for teachers, but often are not compensated for preparation time, parent conferences, or in-service days. We would like more participation in decisions that affect our work, and more opportunities for advancement and to improve our qualifications.

We are concerned about our own health and safety. Paraeducators often work with medically fragile students, administering medications and performing sensitive medical procedures. We may be susceptible to muscle strains from lifting and caring for physically challenged students.

Fast Facts about NEA’s Paraeducator ESPs

Paraeducators are the largest ESP group within NEA, making up 48% of NEA’s K–12 ESP membership.

91% of us work directly with students in a school.

58% work at preschool, kindergarten, or elementary levels.

75% of us work with special education students.

81% work full-time.

94% of us are female, and 80% are married.

Our average age is 50.