

# Frequently Asked Questions for Paraprofessionals

- **Who is a paraprofessional?**

The law does not define a paraprofessional. However, the act does specify the duties of paraprofessionals. These duties may include:

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

Teacher assistants in Utah perform most of these duties.

- **How are paraprofessionals impacted by the legislation?**

New criteria for employment have been implemented for paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals in a local school district receiving money from Title I federal programs will have to meet higher standards. These standards include completion of two years of study at an institution of higher learning, an associate's (or higher) degree; or meeting a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal assessment, knowledge of and ability to assist in reading, writing and mathematics instruction. Some paraprofessionals need to meet these criteria prior to employment. Others have four years to complete the requirements.

Also, all paraprofessionals in schools supported by Title I funds must have a secondary high school diploma or its equivalent, and provide instruction under the direct supervision of a teacher. These criteria have been in place for several years in Utah.

- **For new paraprofessionals located in schools with Title I funds, what are the requirements for employment?**

The first item is to identify those schools that are considered to be Title I schools. New employment criteria apply to paraprofessionals in schools supported with federal money. Newly hired (hired after Jan. 8, 2002) paraprofessionals working in a "schoolwide" Title I program, or in a Targeted Assistance Title I program, must have completed two years of higher education, or an associate's degree, or passed a formal assessment of skills prior to employment. Paraprofessionals working in

the "schoolwide" program must meet these requirements regardless of the source of funds used to pay their salaries. For paraprofessionals in Targeted Assistance programs, only those paid with Title I funds must meet these new requirements.

- **For currently employed paraprofessionals in schools with Title I funding, are the requirements the same?**

For paraprofessionals hired prior to Jan. 8, 2002, the same criteria must be met as above. However, these paraprofessionals have four years to meet the requirements.

- **What exactly is a Title I school?**

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

- **How can a person know if they are employed in a Title I school?**

The individual should contact the school principal or federal program manager in the central office. There is also a list on this website of all Title 1 schools in Utah. See [http://www.useautah.org/usoe\\_information.htm](http://www.useautah.org/usoe_information.htm)

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

The requirements for two years of higher education, or an associate's degree, or successful completion of a formal assessment is not a requirement for paraprofessionals in non-Title I schools under the No Child Left Behind Act. But, each local educational agency (LEA) that receives Title I funds must ensure that all paraprofessionals have a secondary high school diploma or its equivalent. Moreover, a paraprofessional must work under the direct supervision of a teacher **who meets the definition of a highly qualified teacher. If the supervising teacher does not meet the criteria as a highly qualified teacher, the paraprofessional cannot work under their direction.**

- **Are there any exceptions to the employment criteria for paraprofessionals?**

Yes. The requirement for two years of study, or an associate's degree, or completion of a formal assessment does not apply to paraprofessionals

involved with translation or parental involvement activities. Paraprofessionals whose primary task is to act as a translator or whose duties consist solely of conducting parental involvement activities are excluded from the education or assessment requirements.

- **Do these employment requirements for paraprofessionals apply to Even Start or kindergarten teachers?**

Yes, if these programs are supported in any part by Title I funds or are located in schoolwide or Targeted Assistance schools.

- **Are paraprofessionals in all exceptional children's classes required to meet these employment standards?**

At this point, paraprofessionals in exceptional children programs must meet the same requirements as those in other Title I supported schools.

- **What does the law mean by two years of higher education for paraprofessionals?**

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

- **What is meant by a rigorous assessment for paraprofessionals?**

At this time, the U.S. Department of Education has not completed all the details for an assessment. We do know that the assessment is to be developed at the State or local level and must assess one's knowledge of and ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics. **A statewide committee is currently looking at options or recommendations to meet this requirement.**

- **If a currently employed paraprofessional has to meet the requirements in four years, does time spent in training or the classroom count as time on the job?**

This is unclear. This is a Fair Labor Standards Act question that has not been resolved at the federal level at this time.

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

There is no present indication in the federal law that experience can substitute for meeting other requirements.

- **Can a local school system require that the same qualifications for employment be extended to all paraprofessionals in the district?**

That is a local decision. If the local board wishes to adopt the same employment qualifications for all paraprofessionals, it has that option.

- **Will additional funding be available to assist paraprofessionals in meeting the requirements for employment?**

Title I LEAs must use at least 5 percent of their funds but not more than 10 percent of their funds in 2002-03 to ensure that all teachers become highly qualified. In subsequent years, at least 5 percent of the funds must be used to ensure that teachers become highly qualified. The law does not specifically include or exclude paraprofessionals. In other areas of the legislation, considerable flexibility is given to allow transfers of Title I funds for staff development purposes.

- **What happens if someone was hired after Jan. 8, 2002 without meeting all the employment requirements?**

This is not specifically addressed, but failure to meet the criteria of the legislation can result in the loss of Title I funds for a school. The law is specific that the new requirements are in place immediately and are to be applied.

- **Can a paraprofessional employed after Jan. 8, 2002 be hired with the understanding they will meet the requirements before the start of the next year?**

No. After Jan. 8, 2002, paraprofessionals (as outlined previously) hired in schools impacted by this law must meet the employment eligibility criteria prior to being employed.

- **Will paraprofessionals receive higher salaries as a result of the higher qualifications?**

The law does not speak to salaries. Salaries for employees are a state or local responsibility.

- **What happens if a paraprofessional is unable to meet the employment criteria after four years?**

Although the law does not specifically state the consequences for failing to meet the criteria, it is clear that they would be unable to serve in either a Targeted Assistance school program or in a "schoolwide" program.

- **How will the employment of paraprofessionals be monitored?**

In verifying compliance with the law, each local educational agency (LEA) must require that the principal of each school operating a program with Title I funds attest in writing on an annual basis as to the school's compliance with the law. Utah will use the CACTUS database system to assist school administrators with keeping track of the employment status of paraprofessionals.