

## **Qualifications for Paraprofessionals**

An Oregon Department of Education facilitated workgroup, with representation from all ODE offices, education partners and a strong cross section of practitioners from the field, is attempting to provide helpful information to districts and schools based on our present understanding of the NCLB Act, as it relates to highly qualified staff. States are still awaiting final United States Department of Education (USDOE) Regulations and Guidance that will clarify many questions. The following answers reflect the best effort to provide information that will help practitioners make decisions until final regulations and guidance are received.

### **Why is there a focus on highly qualified staff in the NCLB Act?**

Traditionally underserved populations of students continue to struggle in their efforts to meet high academic standards. The NCLB Act emphasizes the need to have highly qualified instructional staff working in schools and classrooms that serve disadvantaged students. Students with the greatest instructional needs and challenges should have access to the most qualified educators. Specific requirements in the NCLB Act focus on the qualifications of paraprofessionals, including existing paraprofessionals and newly hired paraprofessionals, who work in programs supported by Title I.

### **What is the definition of an existing paraprofessional and a new paraprofessional? When do these required qualifications take effect?**

New paraprofessionals are district employees hired after 1/8/02 (for any position) who work in or transfer into a program supported with Title I funds. New paraprofessionals must meet the qualifications of a highly qualified paraprofessional upon their date of hire. Districts that have hired paraprofessionals after 1/08/02 (for any position) who do not meet the post-secondary requirements will be provided help with the development and/or selection of assessments. (This will be clarified in responses to assessment questions that follow.)

Existing paraprofessionals are district employees already working on 1/8/02 (for any position) who work in or transfer into a program supported with Title I funds. Existing paraprofessionals have until January 8, 2006 to meet the qualifications of a highly qualified paraprofessional.

### **What are the NCLB required qualifications for paraprofessionals working in programs supported by Title I?**

All paraprofessionals working in a program supported by Title I funds, regardless of hire date, must have a secondary school diploma or its equivalent.

The NCLB Act also states that paraprofessionals working in a program supported by Title I funds shall have:

*A.) completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education,[OR]*

*B.) obtained an associate's (or higher) degree, OR  
C.) met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment ---*

- i. knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics; or*
- ii. knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness, as appropriate.*

**What is a program supported by Title I, and which employees must meet these requirements?**

Schools receiving Title I funds operate either a Targeted Assistance Program or a Schoolwide Program.

In a Targeted Assistance Program, supplemental Title I services are provided to a targeted population of students identified by each school as being in the greatest need of support in meeting high academic standards. In a Targeted Assistance Program the requirements (based on draft Title I regulations) apply to any paraprofessional in an instructional support role funded (fully or partially) with Title I funds.

In a Title I Schoolwide Program, resources support the implementation of the overall school improvement plan and contribute to the success of all students. In a Schoolwide Program the NCLB requirements apply to all paraprofessionals in an instructional support role, regardless of the funding source of the position.

Unresolved at this time is how these requirements relate to paraprofessionals working in self-contained programs (life skills, behavior, severely handicapped learner, etc.) housed in a school operating a schoolwide program, either district or agency funded. The Oregon Department of Education has requested guidance from the USDOE on this issue.

**Are there any exceptions?**

Yes. The NCLB Act specifically exempts two categories of paraprofessionals from the new requirements, except that paraprofessionals must still have earned a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. The two exemptions are paraprofessionals:

- i. who are proficient in English and a language other than English, and primarily provide translation services to enhance the participation of children in school instructional programs, or*
- ii. whose duties consist solely of conducting parental involvement activities.*

NCLB Act 2001

## **How will paraprofessionals without two years of post secondary or an associates' degree meet the qualifications of NCLB?**

The High Quality Staff Workgroup believes that these assessments are best determined by LEAs to match local needs and recommended that the state not develop an assessment this year. Districts (or consortia of districts or ESDs) will develop or select assessments of their choice. The criteria for any assessment must include measuring:

- i.* knowledge of, AND the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics; or
- ii.* knowledge of, AND the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness, as appropriate

NCLB Act 2001

The Department will **identify** sample assessments that meet the criteria of NCLB, from which districts may choose if they don't opt to use locally developed or selected assessments.

A listing of Oregon school districts and/or ESDs having already developed (or in the process of developing) assessments for paraprofessionals will be available at [www.ode.state.or.us/NCLB/](http://www.ode.state.or.us/NCLB/) beginning September 17, 2002.

## **How will performance standards for paraprofessionals be set?**

Performance standards for paraprofessionals describe the level of proficiency expected in the assessment selected or developed by the district. Performance standards for paraprofessionals are established and assessed by local school districts.

The Department may review the degree of rigor of paraprofessional assessments and performance standards when a district/school is not making adequate yearly progress or is in Title I district/school improvement status.

## **Assistance to Districts**

The Department will **identify** sample assessments that meet the criteria of NCLB, from which districts may choose if they don't opt to use locally developed or selected assessments.

Upon request, the Department will assist districts in selecting professional development programs to help prepare paraprofessionals to be successful.

Each LEA that receives Title I funds may, under law, use such funds for assessment development and professional development activities to assist paraprofessionals and teachers in working to meet highly qualified standards. An LEA receiving Title I funds may use such funds to support ongoing training and professional development to assist paraprofessionals in meeting the requirements of the law.