

FINANCIAL & BUSINESS SERVICES



ADMINISTRATOR TOOLS

QUALIFICATIONS FOR PARAPROFESSIONALS

Establishing A Rigorous Standard of Quality Through Formal Assessments

NOTE :: Paraprofessionals employed after January 8, 2002 must fully meet the NCLB requirements before being employed in a Title I school-wide program or targeted assistance program. (Updated September 19, 2002)

The No Child Left Behind Act attempts to increase the quality of educators by addressing the qualifications for employment of paraprofessionals and teachers. For many paraprofessionals employed in schools supported with Title I funds, employment criteria changed immediately upon enactment of the law and others must meet employment criteria by the end of the 2005-2006 school year.

All paraprofessionals hired after January 8, 2002 must have either completed two years of study at an institute of higher education, which has been determined to be 48 semester hours at an institute of higher education, or have obtain an associate's degree. A third option is provided for paraprofessionals. A paraprofessional may qualify for employment by meeting a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal State or local assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in the instruction of reading, writing and mathematics. Although the formal education requirements are well defined, the assessment component was left for the State and local educational units to resolve.

In order to provide assessment options available for paraprofessionals, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction created a committee of various stakeholders and practitioners to examine the issue. Serious consideration and attention were given to meeting the needs of the schools, students and paraprofessionals. Factors such as available human, material and financial resources were considered, and there was an expressed desire to provide school units and paraprofessionals with options to meet the criteria for employment. The final proposal is a menu of opportunities available that takes into consideration the career plans of the employee, the available school system resources, and the rigor necessary to provide for, or have the paraprofessional demonstrate, the professional competencies needed by paraprofessionals.

Local boards of education and paraprofessionals may select from the menu of options those assessment opportunities that best meet the needs of the school system, the career goals of the paraprofessional and the resources that are available from the local educational agency.

For paraprofessionals hired after January 8, 2002 one of the following must be selected:

- Paraprofessionals who are planning to pursue a formal post secondary educational program of study may complete the community college placement tests. These paraprofessionals will need to earn a satisfactory score on one of the North Carolina Community College System placement test(s). Paraprofessionals may select either the **COMPASS** tests or the **ASSET** tests developed by ACT or the **Accuplacer** test(s) developed by the College Board. Test(s) include a mathematics assessment to the pre-algebra level, and assessments in writing and reading. Upon successful completion of the assessments, the paraprofessional will be required to complete at least 48 continuing education hours (the equivalent of a three hour credit community college course) of targeted staff development in each of his or her first two years of employment for a total of 96 hours of staff development.
- Paraprofessionals may successfully complete the ACT developed **Work Keys Occupational Profile Assessments for Teacher Aides**. This testing option is available for all paraprofessionals. Assessments in Reading for Information, Writing and Applied Mathematics are to be completed for the Level I Teacher Aide Occupational Profile. Upon successful completion of the assessments, the paraprofessional may be employed. However, the paraprofessional will be required to complete at least 48 continuing education hours (the

equivalent of a three hour credit community college course) of targeted staff development in each of his or her first two years of employment for a total of 96 hours of staff development.

For paraprofessionals hired prior to January 8, 2002, several assessment options are available. The paraprofessional and local administrator should review the options available and select the assessment that best meets the individual's career intentions. Those that are considering a career pathway that may lead to an associate's degree or matriculation to a university teacher preparation program are strongly encouraged to select the **COMPASS**, **ASSET** or **Accuplacer** assessment options.

For paraprofessionals employed prior to January 8, 2002, one of the following options must be selected:

- Paraprofessionals may select one of the two options provided above (either the community college placement tests or the occupational profile tests) for paraprofessionals hired after January 8, 2002. Since these paraprofessionals were employed prior to January 8, 2002, the effective date of the legislation, these individuals have until January 2006 to meet all requirements including the continuing education requirements. If test scores are not sufficient to meet the minimum requirements, the paraprofessional will be provided prescriptive staff development opportunities through local school systems, school system approved staff development opportunities provided by professional organizations, approved Regional Education Service Alliance programs, or courses at the community college/university level to address deficiencies. Upon completion of the staff development opportunities, the paraprofessionals shall retake the assessment exam(s) until a successful score is earned. There is no requirement to retake the full battery of tests, only those that did not meet minimum score requirements must be retaken. Paraprofessionals will also be expected to earn all continuing education requirements by January 2006.
- Successful completion of the **North Carolina Department of Labor Teacher Assistant Certification Program** that includes formalized training through related instructional opportunities, on-the-job training and competency evaluations. Formalized training includes coursework through the North Carolina Community College System. Specific courses in Educational Foundations, Childhood Development, Teaching Methods, Technology and Electives are required. In addition each paraprofessional shall earn at least a "Competent Rating" in areas related to documentation, instruction, discipline, and health. The building level principal or supervisor shall complete competency evaluations for paraprofessionals.
- Successful completion of the **North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants' Professional Development Program for Instructional Associate Certification-Level I**. Formalized training includes a minimum of 18 college semester credits (or its equivalent in continuing education units). Training must include community college courses in English, mathematics or math for elementary students, public speaking, and reading and writing methods or introduction to education. Additional course credit or continuing education units offered by the school system, school system approved opportunities provided by professional organizations or approved Regional Education Service Alliance programs are to be earned in areas related to job duties. In addition each paraprofessional shall earn at least a "Competent Rating" in areas related to documentation, instruction, discipline and health. The building level principal or supervisor shall complete competency evaluations for paraprofessionals.