



Information UPDATE

Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction/Tony Evers, State Superintendent/P.O. Box 7841/ Madison, WI 53707-7841

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TO: District Administrators, CESA Administrators, CCDEB Administrators, Directors of Special Education and Pupil Services, and Other Interested Parties

FROM: Carolyn Stanford Taylor, Assistant State Superintendent
Division for Learning Support: Equity and Advocacy

SUBJECT: Frequently Asked Questions About Special Education Paraprofessionals

1. What is the definition of a paraprofessional in the state of Wisconsin?

For licensure purposes, Wisconsin Administrative Code PI 34.01(4) uses the term “aide” and defines an “aide” as a school employee who works under the direct supervision of a licensed teacher in a district or school whose responsibilities include, but are not limited to, supporting the lesson plan of the licensed teacher, providing technical assistance to the teacher, helping with classroom control or management, and other duties as assigned.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 and No Child Left Behind 2001 use the term “paraprofessional.” Paraprofessional and aide will be used interchangeably in this document.

2. Must an individual hired as a paraprofessional to work with students with disabilities, including substitute paraprofessionals, obtain a Special Education Program Aide license (#0070)?

A paraprofessional who is assigned to support the provision of special education services pursuant to an individualized education program (IEP) must hold the Special Education Program Aide license (#0070), unless the individual holds any valid Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (WDPI) license.

3. How does an individual obtain a Special Education Program Aide license (#0070)?

The Special Education Program Aide license (#0070) must be requested by an employing school district. If a district hires an individual as a special education paraprofessional, a PI-1602-PA license application must be completed if the individual does not hold another license issued by the department. The PI-1602-PA application must be completed by an individual and includes a section for the hiring district to request the license. Hiring requirements are established by individual school districts and may include experience, coursework, or other relevant information.

The Special Education Program Aide license application (PI-1602-PA) is available at the WDPI Teacher Education, Professional Development and Licensing (TEPDL) website:

<http://dpi.wi.gov/tepd/licensing/types/special-ed-aide>.

4. What are paraprofessional and teacher responsibilities in the classroom?

Paraprofessional responsibilities include, but are not limited to, supporting the lesson plan of a properly licensed teacher, providing technical assistance to the teacher, and helping with classroom management. A district or school should train paraprofessionals in appropriate reading, writing, math, and social/behavioral strategies to ensure paraprofessionals are able to successfully support students with disabilities under the direct supervision of a licensed special education teacher.

Teacher responsibilities include planning and delivering instruction, diagnosing learning needs, prescribing content delivery through classroom activities, assessing student learning, reporting outcomes to administrators and parents, and evaluating the effects of instruction. Paraprofessionals cannot be assigned teacher duties.

5. What does “under the direct supervision of a licensed teacher” mean?

Direct supervision means regular, continuing interaction between a properly licensed special education teacher, or a licensed director of special education and pupil services, and a paraprofessional which includes the teacher’s time to evaluate the special education services provided. There must be sufficient contact between the special education teacher and the paraprofessional, and between the teacher and the student, to enable the teacher to diagnose educational needs, prescribe teaching and learning procedures, and evaluate the effects of teaching.

6. May a paraprofessional work as a substitute teacher?

A paraprofessional may not serve as a substitute for a licensed teacher, unless the individual meets the WDPI requirements for a substitute teacher. Refer to the TEPDL website at <http://dpi.wi.gov/tepd> for information regarding hiring a short-term or long-term substitute teacher.

7. If an individual is employed as an educational interpreter for students who are deaf or hard of hearing, is a Special Education Program Aide license sufficient?

No. Interpreters must obtain the Educational Interpreter – Deaf or Hard of Hearing license (#0020).

8. May a paraprofessional be assigned to work in a team teaching situation?

A paraprofessional who is under the direct supervision of a licensed special education teacher, or a licensed director of special education and pupil services, may support the instructional activities directly introduced to a student by the licensed special education teacher. Paraprofessionals cannot be assigned teacher duties.

9. May a paraprofessional be assigned to support the special education services for a student with a disability in a homebound or neutral site?

A paraprofessional may be assigned duties in a homebound or neutral site that support the instructional activities directly introduced to a student by the licensed special education teacher. There must be sufficient contact between the special education teacher and the paraprofessional, and between the teacher and the student, to enable the teacher to diagnose educational needs, prescribe teaching and learning procedures, and evaluate the effects of teaching in a homebound or neutral site. Refer to IDEA state complaint #00-033 at <http://dpi.wi.gov/sped/idea-complaint-decision-00-033> for a discussion of this issue.

10. Must an individual who supports students with disabilities in community-based instruction (e.g., job coach) obtain a Special Education Program Aide license (#0070)?

A paraprofessional who is assigned to support the provision of special education services pursuant to an IEP must hold the Special Education Program Aide license (#0070), unless the individual holds any valid WDPI license.

11. May a paraprofessional provide support services to students in a speech and language program?

The special education program aide license allows a paraprofessional to assist in a speech and language program under the direct supervision of a WDPI licensed speech and language pathologist. The support would be for review and reinforcement of the speech and language pathologist's instruction.

12. May a paraprofessional have access to a student's IEP?

Yes, a paraprofessional may have access to a student's IEP. A paraprofessional must be informed of his or her specific responsibilities to work with an individual student with a disability.

13. May a paraprofessional have access to a teacher's lesson plan?

This is a local district or school decision.

14. Should a student's IEP state who provides special education services?

The IEP generally does not name a specific individual who will provide support, as staff assignments are a local administrative decision. The IEP must be written so the frequency and amount of services and support are clear to all who are involved in the development and implementation of the IEP including the parents.

15. Must a special education paraprofessional meet the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) paraprofessional requirements?

Yes, if the special education paraprofessional works in a Title I School-wide program and supports academic instruction to students with disabilities.

No, if the paraprofessional provides personal care assistance to students with disabilities (e.g., feeding, dressing, toileting); that individual does not need to comply with the ESEA paraprofessional requirements.

No, if the special education paraprofessional works with students with disabilities in a Title I Targeted Assistance program and the position is not funded by Title I.

16. May a paraprofessional assist in proctoring the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) or the Wisconsin Alternative Assessment for Students with Disabilities (WAA-SwD)?

A paraprofessional may qualify as a proctor for the WKCE if he or she is trained in test administration procedures. A paraprofessional may not proctor the WAA-SwD.

For additional information, please refer to the following resources:

Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) 4 maintains a website designed for paraprofessionals. Refer to the CESA 4 paraprofessional website at <http://www.cesa4.k12.wi.us/programs/para.cfm>.

For questions about Special Education Paraprofessionals, contact:
Suzan Van Beaver at (608) 267-9168 or suzan.vanbeaver@dpi.wi.gov.

For questions about Title I Paraprofessionals, contact:
Abdallah Bendada at (608) 267-9270 or abdallah.bendada@dpi.wi.gov.

For questions about school nursing services and health services, contact:
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