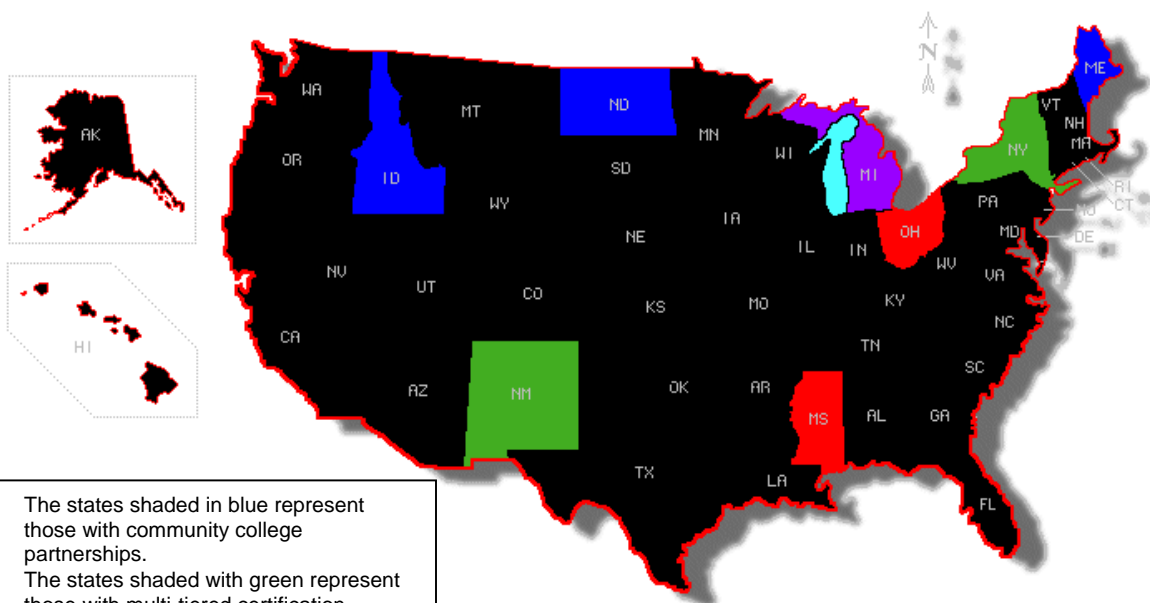




Professional Development for Paraprofessionals Across the States

By Kelsey Campbell
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Professional development has come to the forefront of the paraprofessional occupation with new requirements and timelines for “highly qualified” status under the No Child Left Behind Act 2001 (NCLB). There have been substantial efforts at the state and local levels to create professional development opportunities for paraprofessionals to reach the highly qualified status necessary for employment under Title 1, Part A. In addition to passing a formal evaluation of knowledge, the requirements for higher education have created the opportunity for states to establish partnerships with higher education community, set up multi-tiered certification, use online education systems and develop methods for paraprofessionals to reach full teaching licensure. These trends in professional development are highlighted in the following briefs regarding competency for paraprofessional requirements.



- The states shaded in blue represent those with community college partnerships.
- The states shaded with green represent those with multi-tiered certification.
- The states shaded in red represent those with paraprofessional-to-teacher programs.
- The state shaded in purple represents online professional development programs.

Source: This data was collected directly from DOE Web sites, local Administrative Code, General State Statutes, etc., at the state level and verified by each state. To review the data, or find links to the data source, go to the ECS [Online Interactive Paraprofessional Database](#).

Higher Education and State Partnerships

Three states have established programs through partnerships and collaborations to provide the opportunities for paraprofessionals to attain the necessary requirements for the position. The College of Southern Idaho has created the Paraeducator Training Center (PTC) to help paraprofessionals and those seeking to become paraprofessionals reach the level of education required by NCLB. The center is a centralized location for paraeducator training opportunities for Idaho and the Pacific Northwest. The curriculum is aligned with Idaho state standards for paraprofessionals and trains students through career-lattice certificates and degree-seeking approaches. The steps involve curriculum offered in a three-step process. The first is the general curriculum developed by the PTC and offered by all participating schools. The second involves credits in general education as well as in the area of specialization in which the individual is seeking the degree. The third step is the completion of the Associate of Applied Science degree with the opportunity to finish the educational core credits to obtain an associate of arts or science degree.

North Dakota has taken a different approach to making professional development available for paraprofessionals. The two-year college consortium has been working with the state Title 1 office to create a two-year Associate of Applied Science degree program to allow paraprofessionals to meet NCLB requirements. In addition to the degree, the partnership also has established a paraeducation certification program to allow individuals to meet the obligation of demonstrating knowledge of reading, writing and mathematics, as well as allowing students to take courses applicable to their employment situation.

Maine has followed the same path as North Dakota in creating a degree program offered in the Maine Community College system. The institutions offer an associate's degree in paraeducation with 9% of students enrolled in early education and paraeducation programs. Northern Maine Community College offers a program that specifically focuses on paraprofessionals that are already in the education system trying to meet NCLB requirements as well as those seeking to become paraprofessionals.

Multi-Tiered Certification

New York and New Mexico each have programs designed to pay or provide professional development based on the level of certification attained by the paraprofessional. New York Department of Education requires different levels of professional development depending on the certification the individual has received. The six certifications are:

- Temporary license
- Continuing certificate
- Level I teaching assistant
- Level II teaching assistant
- Level III teaching assistant
- Pre-professional teaching assistant

Certification determines the amount and extent of education or advancement for the occupation. The Pre-professional certificate acknowledges the paraprofessional is seeking to become a licensed teacher and thus recognizes the higher degree of education.

New Mexico has passed innovative legislation paying paraprofessionals based on their certification, which, in turn, is dependent on their education and professional development history. There are four levels of educational assistant licenses available with degree requirements increased as the level rises. The requirements grow substantially as the individual rises in the certification levels.

**Level 1 Educational
Assistant License
(9-year license)**

**Level 2 Educational
Assistant License
(9-year license)**

**Level 3 Educational
Assistant License
(9-year license)**

**Level 4 Educational
Assistant License
(9-year license)**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High school diploma or its equivalent ○ Be 18 years of age ○ Provide certification from the local superintendent or state agency that the person seeking the license has completed an orientation session pertinent to the assignment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High school diploma or its equivalent ○ Be 18 years of age ○ Provide certification from the local superintendent or state agency that the person seeking the license has completed an orientation session pertinent to the assignment ○ Certification that the individual has demonstrated the educational assistant competencies at level one for two years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High school diploma or its equivalent ○ Be 18 years of age ○ Provide certification from the local superintendent or state agency that the person seeking the license has completed an orientation session pertinent to the assignment ○ Complete 48 semester hours of academic credit by an accredited college or university and taken 3 hours language arts-reading, 3 hours writing, 3 hours mathematics, and 6 hours readiness education, professional education, classroom management, teaching assistance or special education ○ Obtain a passing score of at least 70% on a test administered pursuant to department rules 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ High school diploma or its equivalent ○ Be 18 years of age ○ Provide certification from the local superintendent or state agency that the person seeking the license has completed an orientation session pertinent to the assignment ○ Complete 48 semester hours of academic credit by an accredited college or university and taken 3 hours language arts-reading, 3 hours writing, 3 hours mathematics and 6 hours readiness education, professional education, classroom management, teaching assistance or special education ○ Obtain a passing score of at least 70% on a test administered pursuant to department rules ○ Have earned an associate or higher degree from an accredited college or university
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Paraprofessional to Licensed Teacher

Mississippi and Ohio are leading the way for professional development opportunities that allow the possibility of full teaching licensure for current paraprofessionals. Mississippi is using professional development to increase the number of highly qualified teachers in the state. It has established the Assistant Teachers' Scholarship Program to attract and retain quality teachers from mid-career professionals. In addition to supplying advancement opportunities, the Department of Education also has established ways to help paraprofessionals achieve the NCLB requirements. The department has acquired the authority to allow paraprofessionals to take the ACT WorkKeys test instead of college courses, provides training materials for WorkKeys, encourages local districts to use all available Title 1 funding for professional development and supplies assistance to paraprofessional groups to help understand NCLB.

Ohio has established the Educational Paraprofessional Associate Degree for individuals that wish to move into a fully licensed teaching position. These individuals go through a rigorous training program to ensure ample preparation for the classroom. Ohio also offers two different certifications for paraprofessionals who have taken differing routes to become credentialed. The five-year Educational Paraprofessional Associate License is awarded to those who go through the program outlined in Section 3301-24-05 of the Ohio Administrative code. A paraprofessional who uses any other route to complete the qualifications will receive an Educational Aide Permit. Ohio has developed a program of professional development to facilitate NCLB compliance, as well as allow paraprofessionals to become licensed teachers.

Online Professional Development

Michigan is using online professional development through an effective and available method. The state is using Michigan LearnPort (MiLP), an online professional development portal designed specifically for Michigan state standards and requirements. The program was created and implemented by the Michigan Department of Education and Michigan Virtual University and funded through Title II, Part A funds. The goal is to allow educators to maximize professional development time by making it available on any Internet connection. The site is designed for all educators but has specific content for paraprofessionals, including:

- Helps individuals maintain or develop instructional skills in all areas
- Provides learning anywhere, anytime
- Helps paraprofessionals meet the requirements of NCLB.

Conclusion

Professional development becomes more and more important as accountability in America's schools becomes the focus of reform. Results-based education has put an emphasis on teachers and paraprofessionals to increase their understanding and skills in the classroom. Paraprofessionals have also grown in importance as schools and teachers are held accountable for the success of their students. But as paraprofessionals become more important, so do the opportunities for professional development for these educators. States such as those discussed are taking steps to help paraprofessionals meet the NCLB requirements and help themselves to advance student achievement. Trends in the paraeducation professional development field are a result of more stringent requirements and of departments of education stepping up on a statewide basis to help these individuals promote student achievement.

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