

# Scope of Study

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## School Paraprofessionals

Within K-12 schools, non-teachers perform a variety of duties that directly and indirectly involve students. Instructional functions include assisting with classroom management, providing instructional support services to students, tutoring students one-on-one, conducting parental involvement activities, acting as a translator, and providing assistance in computer labs, libraries, and media centers. Non-instructional functions include clerical tasks, monitoring school lunchrooms, and driving buses.

The individuals who perform these duties are given a variety of titles, including paraprofessional, para-educator, teachers' aide, instructional aide, school aide, teaching assistant, and tutor. One of the most commonly used terms is paraprofessional, and it is the one used by the federal government in the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001.

According to the State Department of Education, in October 2004, there were 37,586 full-time equivalent paraprofessional positions in Connecticut. Approximately one-third (13,576) provided instructional services; the rest (24,010) performed non-instructional duties. However, the actual number of individuals employed as paraprofessionals was likely larger because many paraprofessionals are employed on a part-time basis.

Under the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act, paraprofessionals who perform instructional assistance and are paid with federal Title 1 funds or provide instruction in Title 1 school-wide program schools must meet certain requirements measured through educational achievement or testing. Paraprofessionals in applicable positions must have a high school or General Educational Development (GED) diploma plus two years of college credit, an associate's degree, or have passed a paraprofessional assessment adopted by the State Board of Education. The assessment must examine content knowledge in math, reading, and writing, and an understanding of how to assist in the instruction of those topics. (Individuals already employed when the federal law took effect were given until 2006 to meet the requirements, if they wanted to retain their jobs.)

In Connecticut, the State Board of Education designated the ParaPro Assessment, offered by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), as the assessment to meet Title I requirements. That test consists of 90 multiple-choice questions that have to be answered within two and one-half hours. The test is available in paper and internet-based formats.

The state of Connecticut has not established any requirements of its own for school paraprofessionals. A couple dozen states do have requirements beyond those mandated by Title 1, but the details vary considerably and, in some cases, only apply to paraprofessionals working in special education.

## AREA OF FOCUS

The study will focus on whether the state of Connecticut should establish statewide minimum standards for public school paraprofessionals who perform instructional tasks and whether different categories should be established for different duties.

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## AREAS OF ANALYSIS

1. Define the scope of duties performed by school paraprofessionals, noting work performed one-on-one with children versus jointly with other school personnel as well as the role of paraprofessionals in mainstreaming students.
2. Determine the number of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities employed by public school systems in Connecticut, including the number who work part time versus full time, and calculate how this has changed in recent years.
3. Develop a demographic profile of public school paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities employed in Connecticut and, to the extent possible, compare it with the profiles of the student population and the other instructional staff.
4. Summarize the range of existing wage structures for school paraprofessionals in Connecticut, including salary and fringe benefits.
5. Examine the overall role of paraprofessionals in efforts to improve performance for various types of students, including those in special education and home schooling programs.
6. Describe existing education and experience requirements for public school paraprofessionals in Connecticut, and indicate the proportion of people currently in those jobs who meet the requirements.
7. Identify the types of assessment mechanisms available to measure the qualifications of public school paraprofessionals, noting which ones are used within Connecticut.
8. Determine the level of state and local education resources devoted to recruitment, training, retention, and oversight of public school paraprofessionals.
9. Examine paraprofessional turnover rates within Connecticut schools, and, to the extent possible, identify the reasons for such turnover and any accompanying effects on school systems.
10. Describe models used by other states to hire, train, and compensate school paraprofessionals who perform instructional tasks.
11. Review national and academic literature and the experiences of other states regarding whether minimum standards for school paraprofessionals make a difference in student performance outcomes.
12. Estimate the cost of requiring minimum standards for public school paraprofessionals in Connecticut who perform instructional tasks.