

Findings and
Recommendations

School Paraprofessionals

Approved December 14, 2006

Legislative Program Review
& Investigations Committee

Introduction

School Paraprofessionals

In April 2006, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (PRI) voted to study “School Paraprofessionals.” Specifically, the committee was interested in those paraprofessionals working in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) in local public schools who perform instructional tasks. To clarify which employees were included within the scope of the study, the term “paraprofessional with *instructional* responsibilities” was defined as:

a noncertified, school-based employee who works under the direct supervision of a teacher or other certified professional educator and who assists the teacher or other professional educator with the delivery of instructional and related support services to students.

It was noted that local school districts might refer to individuals who matched that description by other titles as well, including paraeducator, classroom aide, teacher’s assistant, instructional aide, or tutor. It was the intent of the committee to include within the study all noncertified instructional staff who met the definition above, regardless of their job title.

Scope of Study

The primary focus of the committee’s review was on whether the state of Connecticut should establish statewide minimum standards for public school paraprofessionals who perform instructional tasks. The committee was also looking at whether different requirements should be established for different duties and what the estimated costs of any new requirements might be to those working as paraprofessionals, those employing paraprofessionals, and those overseeing compliance with the standards.

Methodology

Information about school paraprofessionals in Connecticut and other states was compiled from a variety of sources. Limited data are compiled at the state level so the primary tools used to gather Connecticut-specific information were two data collection forms and a series of interviews.

The first data collection form was sent to the superintendents of all local school districts in the state that operate one or more public elementary, middle, or high schools. Information was requested about the demographic profile of existing paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities, as well as the minimum qualifications, day-to-day duties, professional development, and compensation (i.e., wages and benefits) of these employees. A total of 119 of 169 forms were returned, for a response rate of 70 percent. The data from those forms were the major source of information about instructional paraprofessionals working in Connecticut today. Appendix A summarizes the responses to all of the questions.

The second form was mailed to the 19 labor unions that represent paraprofessionals in one or more school districts in Connecticut. That form sought complementary information about the distribution and compensation of paraprofessionals in the state. The response rate was 53 percent, but many of the questions were only partially completed for a lower response rate on individual questions. Consequently, the responses to that form were not included in this report.

Committee staff spoke with employees of the State Department of Education (SDE) and the State Education Resource Center (SERC), principals who belong to the Connecticut Association of Schools, the executive director of the Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, special education supervisors from two local school districts, and administrators from the state university system and the Connecticut Community Colleges. In addition, the Connecticut Education Association submitted a written statement on its position regarding paraprofessionals.

Program review staff met with three groups of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities from the three unions representing the largest number of instructional paraprofessionals in the state to obtain information about their roles and responsibilities, as well as their perspective on the issues under review. Those workers were employed by more than two dozen different districts. Staff also talked to several individual paraprofessionals, including a few not covered by collective bargaining agreements. In November, committee staff attended a full-day, annual statewide paraprofessionals conference sponsored by SERC.

On September 21, 2006, the program review committee held a public hearing regarding the issues in this and one other study. A total of 11 people spoke or submitted testimony related to the topic of paraprofessionals.

Information about federal requirements and the regulation of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities in other states was obtained from printed reports, regulatory websites, telephone conversations, and e-mail correspondence. Various national sources and literature about paraprofessionals were also used.

Report Content

This report is divided into two main sections. This opening section provides an overview of the study focus and methodology. The next section contains the program review committee findings and recommendations. Appendix A provides a detailed summary of the information in the PRI database of responses from local school districts. Appendix B summarizes statutory provisions in other states concerning paraprofessionals.

Findings and Recommendations

The general K-12 classroom in a local public school today is vastly different from the classroom several decades ago when schools started using the services of paraprofessionals. The volume of information to be taught is larger, and teaching methods have changed to incorporate greater use of technology and more small group activities. The skill levels of the students are more diverse, including a greater number of students with special needs who are being educated in the least restrictive environment possible. At the same time, there are added requirements for more rigorous academic standards, which must be measured through periodic, standardized testing.

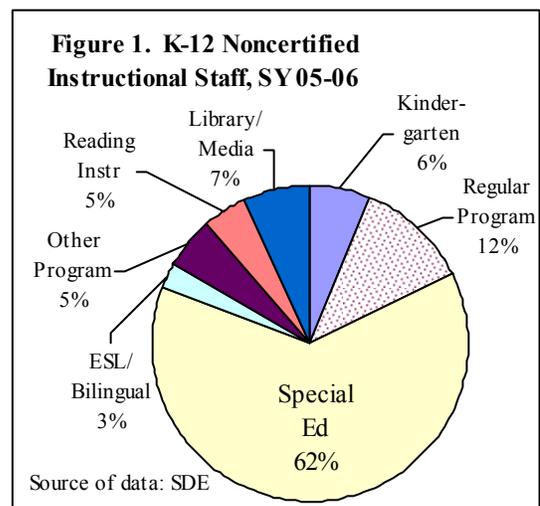
In that context, the ability of paraprofessionals to assist teachers help students learn takes on added importance. The program review committee recommendations with respect to paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities are intended to reflect the evolution of education in the Connecticut public schools of the 21st century. The specific proposals are guided by three primary themes -- increasing the professionalism of paraprofessionals, preserving local autonomy as it relates to education issues, and balancing state resources. The details of the recommendations and the rationale for each are presented later in this section.

Role of Paraprofessionals

The basic role of a paraprofessional remains that of assisting the teacher, but the specific ways in which that assistance is provided have expanded. Fulfilling federal requirements, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), means public schools must provide more individualized services to an increasing number of students. This has resulted in a greater use of paraprofessionals as a resource to assist teachers with student instruction, in addition to performing clerical and administrative tasks. In fact, the use of paraprofessionals nationwide has increased 123 percent over the last two decades alone, according to the federal Department of Education.¹

In Connecticut, according to data compiled by the State Department of Education, during School Year (SY) 2005-2006, approximately 37,000 noncertified full-time equivalent (FTE) staff were employed by local school districts to work in grades K-12. Of these, about 25,000 were noncertified *noninstructional* staff, while 12,046 were noncertified *instructional* paraprofessionals.

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the noncertified *instructional* staff subdivided into the seven groupings used by SDE. As indicated, nearly two-thirds worked in the area of special education.



¹ U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics (July 2005).

Based on an analysis of the data submitted by the 119 local school districts that responded to the PRI data request and conversations with dozens of individuals who perform work within the program review definition of a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities, it is clear that *the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in Connecticut are extremely diverse.*

The PRI data request sent to the school districts asked for information about the functions most commonly performed by paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities (as defined by program review) working in each district. Sixteen specific functions and an “other” category were listed on the data form, with the choices having been selected from descriptions of commonly performed duties described in national literature and Connecticut-specific reports. Table 1 contains all of the choices and the number of districts selecting each.

Only two functions in the list were chosen by a majority of the responding districts. Those were “Give individualized attention to one or a small number of students within classroom while teacher works with other students” and “Facilitate student’s inclusion in general education classroom.” One additional function -- “Assist with Individualized Education Programs” -- was chosen by slightly less than half of the respondents. At the same time, all but one function were selected by at least one school district. These responses demonstrate the variability of the duties and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in Connecticut, as well as the differences among districts.

Table 1. Functions of Instructional Paraprofessionals Identified by Local School Districts		
<i>Functions Most Commonly Performed by Paraprofessionals with Instructional Responsibilities</i>	<i>Among top three (N=100)</i>	<i>Among more than three* (N=15)</i>
Assist teacher with classroom management	31	12
Organize instructional materials	35	14
Modify or adapt classroom curriculum	20	8
Give individualized attention to one or a small number of students within classroom while teacher works with other students	93	15
Provide one-on-one tutoring outside normal classroom hours	3	2
Provide support in library or media center	6	8
Provide computer laboratory assistance to students	2	8
Provide speech-language assistance to students	0	2
Provide input into assessments and/or grades	0	2
Conduct parental involvement activities	0	1
Work with gifted and talented students	0	1
Act as a translator or interpreter	0	0
Assist with Individualized Education Programs	44	9
Facilitate student’s inclusion in general education classroom	57	13
Facilitate interaction with student’s peers	9	12
Visit home-schooled students	0	1
* Districts were asked to select the three functions most commonly performed. Some districts selected more than three, and those responses were coded separately. (Four districts did not answer the question at all.)		
Source of data: PRI database		

The paraprofessionals working in Connecticut with whom program review staff spoke noted that during the course of a single school day, they may be required to perform multiple functions, including some or all of those listed in Table 1. Furthermore, the tasks that comprise a given function may be very broad, and some may overlap other identified functions. For example, the duties that fall under the most commonly selected function “Give individualized attention...” could incorporate aspects of organizing instructional materials or the modification of curriculum. Indeed, the tasks performed by paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working with students might include:

- helping the students interpret and follow directions the teacher has given;
- conducting drills with the students to reinforce mathematical equations or reading vocabulary the teacher previously presented to the entire class;
- reviewing homework assignments with the students based on answers provided by the teacher;
- assisting the students during a test by reducing the number of questions that have to be answered, based on the teacher’s authorization; and
- providing the students with complementary, alternative activities appropriate to their level to keep them “on task” with the teacher’s lesson.

The locations where paraprofessionals are assigned to work also vary from district to district and school to school, depending on the programs offered and the students enrolled. Some paraprofessionals spend all day in a single general classroom or specialized resource room, while others move among multiple classrooms, which may involve different grade levels or teachers. Sometimes, the paraprofessional will accompany a specific student; other times the paraprofessional is transferring to work with different teachers and students. Additional locations where paraprofessionals work include computer labs and media centers.

In some schools, paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities also have to perform noninstructional tasks. Depending on the students they are working with, they may have to lift students, help with toileting, or accompany a student to an activity, such as recess or an assembly. At certain times of the day, some instructional paraprofessionals are required to monitor playgrounds and lunchrooms, while others may ride the school bus with specific students. The frequency of these assignments ranges from occasionally to regularly.

Many paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities in Connecticut are actively involved with students for the entire workday. Indeed, several paraprofessionals who met with committee staff expressed frustration that there is little or no time to confer with individual teachers about the progress of the students that the paraprofessional is working with or about overall lesson planning. Consequently, the paraprofessionals must rely on their previous experiences to guide them on how to adapt broad guidance previously provided by the teacher regarding the best ways to help students with their lessons.

At the same time, it should also be noted that *the total number of students who interact with paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities on a daily basis is low in many districts*. Less than one-third of the school districts in the PRI database that operate middle and high schools indicated 20 percent or more of their students work on a daily basis with an

instructional paraprofessional. At the elementary level, just over half of the districts indicated 20 percent or more of the students have that amount of interaction. (Only 15 districts indicated a majority of the students at any school level interact daily with paraprofessionals in an instructional capacity, with six of those districts indicating all of the students at one or more school levels have that type of daily interaction.)

Minimum Requirements

The changes evident in the modern-day classroom have brought increased attention to the issue of the quality of the personnel assigned to help students learn. As the learning environment becomes more complex, more attention has been directed toward ensuring that school personnel assigned to work with students are able to handle the basic and technologically advanced tools students will be using. As a result, more detailed standards for teachers are increasing. Given the close connection between the work of teachers and that of paraprofessionals, it is appropriate to consider to what extent similar types of standards should be applied to school paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities.

Before examining that issue further, it is important to reiterate that paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities are not replacements for teachers. The dictionary lists multiple definitions for the word “para,” including beside, near, alongside, and assistant. Each of those definitions reflects the fact that there is a connection between the “para” and another person. Thus, the school paraprofessional is not expected to work alone, but instead is part of a team, working under the supervision of the teacher.

Likewise, the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) prohibits paraprofessionals from providing any type of “initial” instruction to students in schools receiving federal Title I funds. This means a certified teacher must introduce a lesson or concept to students prior to a paraprofessional providing instruction on that same subject matter. The role of the paraprofessional is to augment the instruction or carry out lesson plans already introduced and taught by a certified teacher.

Similarly, Connecticut regulations (Regs., Conn. State Agencies Sec. 10-145d-401) require any person employed by a local public school district who provides instruction to students to have appropriate certification. Otherwise, they must work under the direct supervision of a certified professional employee. Appropriate state certification is also required for those school employees (i.e., teachers) responsible for planning instructional programs for students and evaluating student progress.

Previous studies. *In Connecticut, the question of minimum standards for paraprofessionals is not new. Multiple state-level groups have examined the role of paraprofessionals, and several reports have specifically discussed the idea of establishing minimum qualifications.*

In 1974, the Connecticut Commission for Higher Education issued a statutorily mandated report regarding the development of programs for paraprofessionals that would allow them to fulfill state teacher certification requirements. The report recommended establishment of a higher education assistance program for paraprofessionals and funding for at least one career

development pilot project. The commission also noted that paraprofessionals had many other concerns not within the scope of its report, including the effectiveness of the selection, training, assessment, and utilization of paraprofessionals by schools. The commission recommended the periodic collection and publication of information about the training and use of paraprofessionals and their opportunities for employment.²

In 1990, a committee convened by the state commissioner of education issued a report on the role of school paraprofessionals that included a proposed definition, recommended minimum qualifications (i.e., a high school diploma plus specific skills and attributes), and discussed career ladders including the possibility of certification as a teacher. The committee indicated that it was not recommending a credentialing system for paraprofessionals at that time because there were no national models available and potential resources within the state were focused on implementation of new teacher certification requirements. The group proposed a demonstration grant program to enable paraprofessionals to become more effective in their delivery of services to students. The committee also encouraged SDE to continue gathering data on programs in other states and to reconsider credentialing in the future.³

In 1996, the state Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) Task Force on Paraprofessionals expressed support for establishing a statutory minimum entry level requirement (i.e., a high school diploma) for paraprofessionals and, if possible, an ongoing training requirement. However, the group concluded the timing was not right for such a proposal. Instead, it encouraged the exploration of other methods for developing paraprofessional standards and providing training.⁴

In 2001, at the request of the commissioner of education, the CSPD Council (which was described in the September briefing report) convened a task force to develop standards for paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities. In May 2004, the group issued *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals Working with Students Birth to 21: Working Draft*. The report sought to clarify instructional and support roles and responsibilities, as well as identify methods and resources for the training, supervision, and evaluation of paraprofessionals. The task force indicated it also considered whether to propose standards for paraprofessionals, but decided to postpone such discussions pending response to the guidelines and possible federal legislative changes. SDE provided resources to the task force and worked on the guidelines from the standpoint of special education, but never formally endorsed or adopted the guidelines. The department is presently using the document as a base to develop a broader training tool for paraprofessionals dealing with more than just special education.⁵

Current standards. Although no statewide standards for paraprofessionals currently exist in Connecticut, interest in standards for paraprofessionals was heightened by the imposition of federal requirements for some paraprofessionals in 2002. As part of the No Child Left Behind

² Connecticut Commission for Higher Education, *Paraprofessionals in Educational Fields and Teacher Certification Requirements: A Report on Public Act 73-324* (February 1974).

³ Connecticut State Department of Education, *Report of the Committee to Study the Role of Paraprofessionals to Commissioner Gerald N. Tirozzi* (March 1990).

⁴ Comprehensive System for Personnel Development Task Force on Paraprofessionals, *Summary* (Spring 1996).

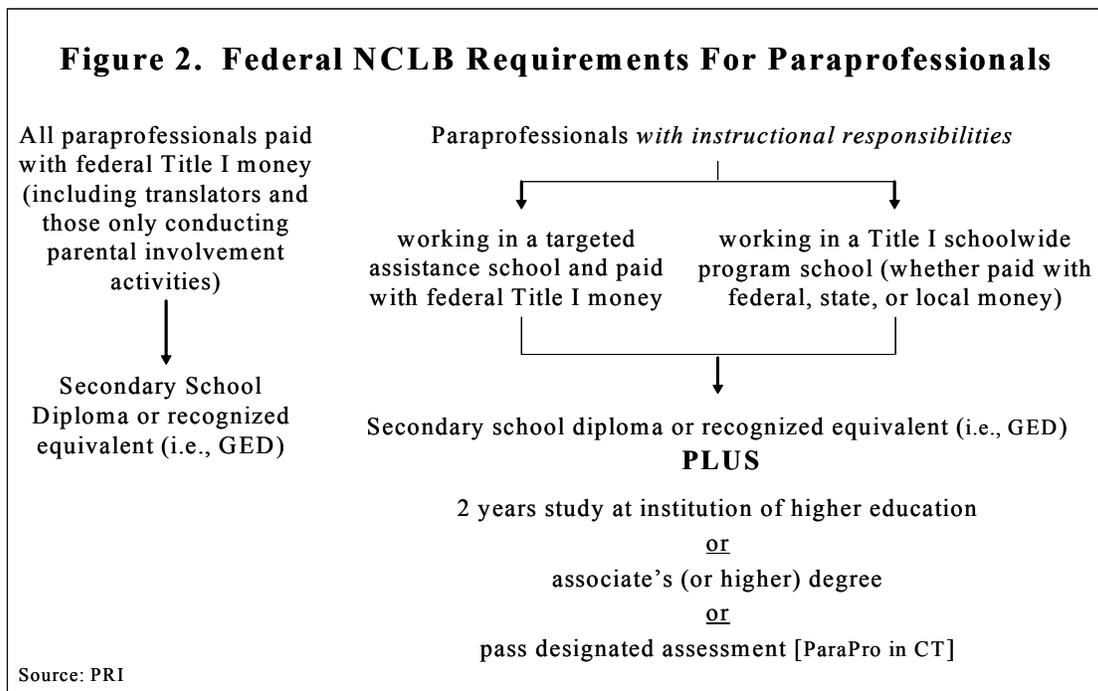
⁵ Connecticut State Advisory Council on Special Education, *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals Working with Students Birth to 21: "Working Draft"* (May 2004).

Act, minimum education standards were established for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working in certain programs or schools that receive federal Title I funding under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). A key finding of a federal education department study that led to the development of the federal standards indicated that paraprofessionals were being used in many Title I schools around the country for teaching and helping teach students, although their educational backgrounds did not qualify many of them for such responsibilities.⁶

As shown in Figure 2, the base minimum requirement established for all paraprofessionals paid for with Title I funding or working in a Title I schoolwide program school is a high school or General Educational Development (GED) diploma. Beyond that, paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities must meet one of three additional requirements:

- obtain an associate’s or higher degree;
- complete two years of study at an institution of higher education; or
- meet a “rigorous and objective” standard of quality that is demonstrated through a formal academic assessment (which in Connecticut is a score of at least 457 out of 480 on the ParaPro Assessment).

The high school diploma requirement took effect immediately for all paraprofessionals covered by the law. The deadline for the other requirements depended on a person’s date of employment, but as of September 2006 has been fully in effect for everyone.

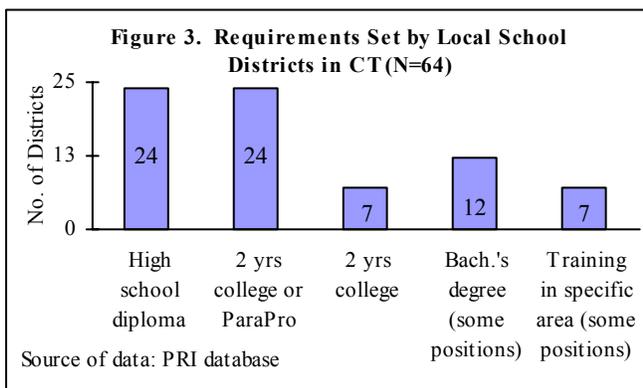


⁶ U.S. Department of Education, Planning and Evaluation Service, *Study of Education Resources and Federal Funding: Final Report*, by Jay Chambers, Joanne Lieberman, Tom Parrish, Daniel Kaleba, James Van Campen, and Stephanie Stullich, Washington, D.C. (2000).

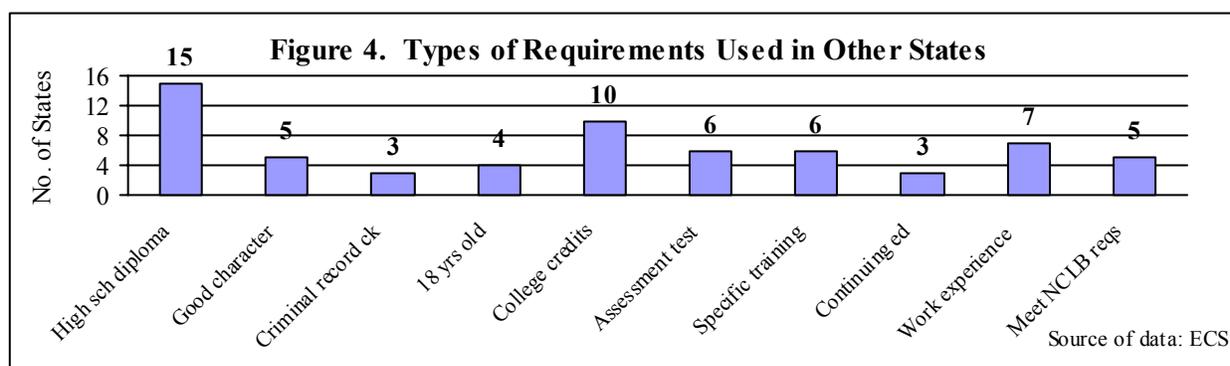
During SY 05-06, about half of the public schools in Connecticut received Title I funding. A total of 341 schools in 131 districts and 12 charter schools were funded as “targeted assistance schools,” while another 145 schools in 13 districts and two charter schools were designated as “schoolwide program” schools.

In terms of paraprofessionals working in Connecticut, 60 percent of the 119 school districts returning the PRI data form reported employing one or more paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities who had to meet the NCLB requirements. This amounted to 2,967 of the nearly 8,700 paraprofessionals in the PRI database.⁷

Sixty of the districts in the PRI database have established their own education or experience requirements for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities, while another four districts have “preferences.” Some districts now require all newly hired paraprofessionals providing instructional services to meet the federal NCLB requirements, even if the position is not covered by the federal law. Other districts indicated a preference for specific educational credentials, such as a certain number of college credits, or prior experience working with children. Figure 3 summarizes the minimum standards reported by those 64 districts.



Around the country, 17 states now have established statutory standards for individuals who are instructional paraprofessionals as defined by program review. (Several of the states refer to these workers as paraeducators, while others use the terms educational assistant, educational aide, or teaching assistant.) The provisions vary from state to state, and in a few instances are optional. The laws may include specific types and amounts of education and experience, as well as standards related to age, moral character, criminal history, and letters of recommendation. Figure 4 summarizes the types of requirements specified in those 17 states, while Appendix B contains the table previously presented in the staff briefing that summarizes the statutory provisions in each state.



⁷ As of June 2006, 13 districts had some instructional paraprofessionals with high school diplomas who needed to pass the ParaPro exam, which was being given again during the summer.

Credential Recommendation

As described, *the national trend in recent years has been toward the establishment of education and/or experience standards for at least some individuals working as paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities.* To date, however, considerable variation remains within the components of the systems established to oversee paraprofessionals and the extent to which standards are mandatory.

Meanwhile, one-third of the school districts in Connecticut have established some form of minimum employment standards for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working in their districts. However, the district requirements differ, based on decisions each district made about the needs of the students in its school system and the priorities of its local community.

During the program review committee study, a number of the Connecticut paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities who spoke with committee staff, as well as testimony submitted at the committee's public hearing, mentioned the desire of paraprofessionals around the state to attain more respect for the work they do and greater recognition of the important role they play in schools today. They believed one way to achieve those goals might be the creation of a statewide credentialing system.

Before deciding whether a statewide credential is warranted, the impact of paraprofessionals on student performance should be considered. Nationally, evidence regarding the relationship between credentials and student performance is emerging. Most research has focused on teachers, but some studies of paraprofessionals have been conducted. *There is evidence that minimum standards, including professional development requirements for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities, may enhance the educational outcomes of students. The results are not conclusive, however,* as highlighted below.

A Tennessee Department of Education study, published in 1990 and subsequently cited in other reports about school paraprofessionals, found that aides (i.e., paraprofessionals) who performed mostly instructional tasks did not enhance student performance any more than those who only performed clerical tasks. The study also reported that students in some regular classrooms with full-time aides had higher achievement scores, but the differences were small and not statistically significant, and they decreased as grade levels increased.⁸

As a follow-up to that study, however, a 1999 policy paper published by Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory noted that the paraprofessionals in the Tennessee study had not received instructions about their duties, and it was unclear whether they possessed the necessary skills and knowledge to help students learn. The policy paper went on to describe other research that found effective use of paraeducators increases student achievement, but the

⁸ Tennessee State Department of Education, *The State of Tennessee's Student/Teacher Achievement Ratio Project: Final Summary Report, 1985-1990*, p. 19.

paraprofessionals must be appropriately prepared and effectively integrated within the school, working with teachers as a team.⁹

A 1997 report prepared for the U.S. Department of Education also noted that paraprofessionals can make substantial contributions to help students meet academic standards, but a key indicator of effectiveness is the extent to which schools offer programs that challenge the students to work hard through high academic standards. The report noted that overall program quality influences the work of all school staff members, including paraprofessionals.¹⁰

The program review committee believes the recurring themes identified in past studies of paraprofessionals in Connecticut, the sentiments expressed by existing paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities regarding their place in the education system, and the recent creation of federal standards for paraprofessionals working in Title I schools justify the creation of a set of state standards.

Therefore, the program review committee recommends that the State Department of Education develop a state-issued credential for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working in Connecticut's K-12 public schools and submit a plan to implement the credential by January 1, 2008, to the legislative committee of cognizance over education. The State Department of Education shall require that any applicant seeking the credential be a citizen of the United States or an alien legally resident in the United States.

During the process of developing the credential for instructional paraprofessionals, SDE is encouraged to consider the model set out below as an example of the type of credential that could be established. The model as currently structured is based on a voluntary credentialing system, but similar elements could be used for a mandatory system.

Optional Model for a State-Issued Credential for Instructional Paraprofessionals

The optional model described below seeks to balance the autonomy of local school districts, the resources of the State Department of Education, and the goals of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities. The proposed system as currently structured would create a voluntary state-issued credential for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities.

The elements of the model are summarized in the box on the next page. The details of each element are described in more detail in the text following the box. Information about the possible cost of such a model is also included.

⁹ Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, *Designing State and Local Policies for the Professional Development of Instructional Paraeducators* (November 1999), pp. 4-5.

¹⁰ Policy Studies Associates, prepared for the U.S. Department of Education, *Roles for Education Paraprofessionals in Effective Schools: An Idea Book* (1997).

Summary of a Model for a Voluntary State-Issued Paraeducator Credential

Type of Credential: Voluntary

Position Title: Paraeducator

Definition of Paraeducator: A non-certified, school-based employee who works under the direct supervision of a teacher or other certified professional educator and who assists the teacher or other professional educator with the delivery of instructional and related support services to students.

Categories: Paraeducator; Paraeducator with Additional Skills (e.g., special education, bilingual, state registered interpreter, etc.)

Duration: Five years (initial and renewal)

Minimum Requirements:

Paraeducator - must have high school diploma or GED PLUS two years of study at an institution of higher education OR an associate's (or higher) degree OR passing score on designated assessment test (e.g., ParaPro) with at least the minimum score required by Connecticut for NCLB purposes OR five years of paid employment as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities (based on definition of paraeducator) *and* 3.0 Continuing Education Units (CEUs) (30 hours) in courses pertaining to the application of skills and knowledge to classroom instruction PLUS fingerprinting and criminal record check.

Paraeducator with Additional Skills - must meet all of the requirements of the *Paraeducator* credential PLUS 9 semester hours of college coursework or 13.5 CEUs (135 hours) on topics related to the selected skill area OR two years paid employment as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities in the selected skill area OR successful completion of any state-recognized requirements in the selected skill area. (Employment, college coursework, or CEUs used to meet the basic requirements of the credential can also be used to demonstrate the additional skill, if the employment, coursework, or CEUs was in the additional skill area for which recognition is sought.)

Both credentials shall include a designation indicating whether the person met the NCLB criteria at the time the person applied for the credential.

Renewal: Every five years, if person completes 3 semester hours of college coursework or 4.5 CEUs (45 hours) of professional development on education-related topics; for paraeducator with additional skills, all 3 semester hours or 2.0 CEUs (20 hours) of the 4.5 CEUs must be in the selected skill area

System Administrator: State Department of Education (To facilitate development of the system, SDE shall be allowed to implement relevant policies and procedures as long as notice of intent to adopt regulations is published in the Connecticut Law Tribune within 20 days of implementation of the policies and procedures, with the proposed policies/procedures valid until final regulations are effective.)

Fee: \$75 initial; \$50 renewal

Type of Credential

The requirements in the model credential are based on the NCLB requirements already established by the federal government for Title I programs, but there would also be an opportunity for paraprofessionals in Connecticut to demonstrate competence acquired through education and experience.¹¹ Specifically, individuals who have been employed as instructional paraprofessionals for many years would be able to receive credit for that work experience.

The model recognizes the value that a state-level credential can provide to practitioners and the public as an acknowledgement of the professionalism within an occupation. Proposing that the state of Connecticut offer paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities an opportunity to meet specific qualifications through a voluntary mechanism was based on multiple factors.

A voluntary credential allows local school districts to maintain their autonomy with respect to local education and retain flexibility with regard to the qualifications of the noncertified personnel they employ in their schools. Equally important, it avoids creating an unfunded state mandate. Such a system would also allow districts to keep existing employees (not covered by Title I requirements) who perform well, even if they do not meet the new state-level standards. Alternatively, districts could choose to require employees to obtain the state-issued credential.

Likewise, in the short run, a voluntary system would impose less of a burden on people currently working as paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities. Individuals would not be required to apply for the credential, but if they wanted to do so they could provide proof of past employment working as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities in lieu of college courses or passing a written assessment. Obtaining the paraeducator credential could improve a person's ability to get or change paraprofessional jobs because possession of the voluntary state-issued credential would indicate to local school districts that the person had taken the initiative to achieve an increased level of education, experience, or both.

In the long run, it is possible that choosing not to obtain the credential would reduce a person's opportunities to work as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities. Should a number of local school districts establish the paraeducator credential as their minimum standard, then individuals who want those jobs would have to obtain the credential.

Ultimately, specifying a target set of standards for instructional paraprofessionals, even though the standards are voluntary, could increase the overall qualifications of the instructional paraprofessionals in Connecticut. The model credential might also reduce the disparity that currently exists among such employees, when some have to meet specific standards, while others do not (even within the same district). Offering a voluntary state credential would provide a framework of qualifications to guide people, which in turn might encourage greater professionalism and increase the level of respect accorded instructional paraprofessionals.

¹¹ It should be pointed out that the creation of the model voluntary system would not have any effect on federal NCLB requirements or any local provisions that mirror the federal law. Paraprofessionals in Connecticut who are covered by the federal law (or a specific local requirement) would still have to meet those standards.

With regard to the effects on the State Department of Education, a voluntary credential valid for multiple years would consume fewer resources than a mandatory regulatory system. At the same time, establishing voluntary target qualifications for school employees who assist with the instruction of students would support the department's goals of high expectations and standards for student achievement and teaching.

Terminology. As part of the process of defining the model voluntary paraeducator credential, various terminology to describe the credential were considered. The term "certification" is often used by government to describe a regulatory system under which individuals who (voluntarily) choose to demonstrate they meet specific requirements receive the right to use a particular occupational title in the performance of their occupational duties. Other people are allowed to perform the same duties, but they cannot use that particular occupational title. Such a description is comparable to the idea behind the paraeducator credential.

In Connecticut, however, certain public school employees, including teachers, cannot work unless they possess a statutorily specified certificate issued by the State Board of Education. Although such employees are referred to as certified staff, they actually are covered by a licensing system, since they cannot work in local schools unless they meet all of the requirements for the state certificate. To avoid confusion with state certification provisions for teachers, the model does not refer to the voluntary regulatory system for instructional paraprofessionals as certification. Instead, the designation is simply called a state-issued credential.

Position Title

As part of the model voluntary credential, there was a belief that a unifying job title was needed to describe noncertified employees who provide student instruction in local public schools. National literature uses multiple job titles and terms when referring to noncertified school employees who assist students with instruction. As a result, there is no consensus in the literature about which title to use, and frequently terms are used interchangeably.

This fact holds true in Connecticut, as borne out during the course of this study. *Although the term "paraprofessionals" has been used in this study to describe those noncertified school employees who assist with student instruction as part of their overall duties, a multitude of titles are used by districts across the state for such employees.* For example, information from the 119 school districts responding to the PRI data request revealed:

- 51 different job titles are used to describe noncertified school staff who have instructional responsibilities;
- the most common titles used by school districts are paraprofessional, paraeducator, teacher assistant, instructional assistant, instructional aide, and special education instructional aide; and
- individual school districts may use multiple job titles within their own district to describe noncertified school staff who have instructional responsibilities.

The fact that so many job titles exist in the state's local school districts for noncertified employees who instruct students indicates a lack of standardization in this area. There is

recognition, however, that school districts in Connecticut generally make their own decisions when it comes to local education issues, including what job titles to use for their employees. Some districts have also developed different job titles based on the overall duties and responsibilities of their paraprofessionals, such as paraprofessionals working with general education students or those working with special education students, resulting in multiple titles. Regardless, a unifying job title is desirable under the proposed credential.

The model uses the title *paraeducator* because it most aptly describes the type of school employee who would be eligible for the model state credential. As mentioned earlier, the term “para” means similar or near. When combined with the term “educator,” the resulting title best represents those school employees who are “similar to” teachers in that they provide student instruction based on teachers’ lesson plans, yet they are not state certified as teachers who provide direct instruction. (This term is comparable to “paralegals,” who work along side of licensed attorneys, and “paramedics,” who provide medical attention but are not licensed medical doctors.)

Given that noncertified staff with instructional responsibilities in Connecticut’s local public schools are required to work under the supervision of a state certified professional such as a teacher, the job title “paraeducator” better describes this type of staff person than broader titles such as “paraprofessional” or “aide.” Incorporating the word “educator” also makes the title more explicit that the credential holder works in the education field, not another unspecified field. Although several districts in Connecticut currently use the term paraeducator as their job title for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities, use of this term to describe someone who has obtained the model state credential, as opposed to another more general job title, would help differentiate employees who meet the voluntary minimum standards set by the state and hold the paraeducator credential from those who do not.

Definition

The proposed definition for the paraeducator credential, as provided in the model above, incorporates the primary components of the job of the school employees focused on during this study. The definition requires that such individuals are:

- not certified by the state as teachers;
- working in a local public school in grades K-12;
- assisting students with instruction; and
- working under the direct supervision of a state-certified teacher or other professional educator.

The definition, which is the same one used for data collection purposes during the study, is based on several sources. It includes the duties and responsibilities of paraprofessionals as defined in the federal No Child Left Behind legislation, and is a variation on the definitions developed by the Department of Education and several state task forces studying the topic of paraprofessionals in Connecticut over the years. The key source of the definition is the 1990 task force report to the SDE commissioner referenced earlier, which examined the preparation, qualifications, role, function, and ongoing development of paraprofessionals in Connecticut.

As discussed below, full implementation of the model credentialing system for noncertified school staff who provide student instruction would require the administering agency to develop regulations. Within the regulation development process, the agency would have the ability, if necessary, to refine the description of the types of school staff eligible for the credential.

Duration

The model recommends the paraeducator credential be valid for an initial five-year period with five-year renewals thereafter. This time period is consistent with those used by several other states that have credentialing for paraprofessionals, including Delaware, Georgia, Iowa, and Maine.

Although it is difficult to know the overall number of people who would apply for the model credential or when they would apply, the five-year cycle does not seem overly burdensome to SDE in terms of its recurring role in administering the credential process. Approximately 12,000 FTE, noncertified, instructional staff were employed in local public school districts during the 2005-06 school year. It is pragmatic to expect: 1) because the process is voluntary, not all eligible paraprofessionals would seek the state credential; and 2) of those who do seek the credential, not all would apply at the same time. Providing these two factors hold true, the overall initial impact on SDE's administration of the credentialing system would be lessened. In all likelihood, the department would experience its heaviest caseload during the first year or two following initial implementation of the credential.

Credential Types and Requirements

Providing paraprofessionals with the opportunity to voluntarily attain a state-issued credential based on specific standards would be a significant step toward enhancing the overall professionalism of paraprofessionals in Connecticut, while at the same time balancing the needs of local school districts. Acquiring the credential would show that a paraprofessional has taken the initiative to strengthen his or her overall skill set and gone beyond the basic requirements for being a paraprofessional. At the same time, school districts would maintain local autonomy in that the model credential system is voluntary on the part of the paraprofessionals and not state mandated.

Table 2 highlights the proposed credential categories of the model and their corresponding requirements. Candidates would be able to apply for a "paraeducator" credential or the more specialized "paraeducator with additional skills" credential.

The paraeducator credential is intended to be general in nature with wide availability to instructional paraprofessionals who meet the requirements, whether they work in a general education classroom, with special needs students, or in a media center or lab. Similar to the current NCLB requirements, applicants for the model paraeducator credential would have to have a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent (i.e., GED). Candidates also would have to have completed two years of college, or have at least an associate's degree, or have passed a state-designated assessment (e.g., the ParaPro exam).

Table 2. Minimum Requirements for Model Voluntary Paraeducator Credential

<p align="center"><u>Paraeducator</u></p> <p align="center">High School Diploma or recognized equivalent (i.e., GED)</p>	<p align="center"><u>Paraeducator with Additional Skills</u></p> <p align="center">High School Diploma or recognized equivalent (i.e., GED)</p>
<p align="center">PLUS</p> <p>2 years study at institution of higher education</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p align="center">Associate's (or higher) degree</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p>Pass state-designated assessment (e.g., the ParaPro exam, with a passing score at least meeting what is currently required by the state under No Child Left Behind)</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p>5 years of paid employment as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities (based on the definition for the paraeducator credential)</p> <p align="center"><u>and</u></p> <p>3.0 CEUs (30 hours) earned in courses pertaining to the application of skills and knowledge to classroom instruction</p>	<p align="center">PLUS</p> <p>2 years study at institution of higher education</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p align="center">Associate's (or higher) degree</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p>Pass state-designated assessment (e.g., the ParaPro exam, with a passing score at least meeting what is currently required by the state under No Child Left Behind)</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p>5 years of paid employment as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities (based on the definition for the paraeducator credential)</p> <p align="center"><u>and</u></p> <p>3.0 CEUs (30 hours) earned in courses pertaining to the application of skills and knowledge to classroom instruction</p>
<p align="center">PLUS</p> <p>Fingerprinting and criminal background check (as currently required by state law for school personnel)</p>	<p align="center">PLUS</p> <p>9 semester hours of college level coursework or 13.5 CEUs (135 hours) on topics related to selected skill area*</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p>2 years of paid employment as a paraeducator working in selected skill area*</p> <p align="center"><i>or</i></p> <p>Successful completion of any state recognized requirements in selected skill area</p> <hr/> <p align="center">PLUS</p> <p>Fingerprinting and criminal background check (as currently required by state law for school personnel)</p>

* Applicants may use a portion of the college coursework, five years of paid employment, and/or 30 hours of continuing education used for either the paraeducator or paraeducator with additional skills credential toward the additional education or work experience requirements of the latter credential, if that employment or education was in the selected skill area.

However, a key addition to the model credential process is the opportunity for candidates to substitute five years of paid employment as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities plus three CEUs (30 hours) in courses on how to apply skills and knowledge to classroom instruction, for either the college education requirement or passing the designated assessment. This is an important and valid alternative for candidates who want the credential and who have achieved a certain level of professional work experience and training as a paraprofessional, yet have barriers to either attending or completing college-level coursework or passing the assessment exam. As the final requirement for the paraeducator credential, applicants would also have to be in compliance with the state's current law for school personnel requiring fingerprinting and a criminal background check.

The second credential category -- paraeducator with additional skills -- acknowledges that some paraprofessionals have additional knowledge, skills, or abilities in specialized areas that distinguish them in their field of work. For example, some paraprofessionals may have additional education or extended work experience in areas such as special education or behavior management. At the same time, other paraprofessionals may be bilingual and have worked with children who speak languages other than English. As a result of their additional knowledge, skills, or abilities, such paraprofessionals can be expected to have an expanded understanding of a specialized area, which is beneficial when working with particular students. The model seeks to recognize such additional experience with a separate credential.

Table 2 also shows the requirements for the "paraeducator with additional skills" credential. Candidates applying for this credential would have to meet the same minimum requirements outlined under the broader "paraeducator" credential. Beyond those requirements, applicants would have to possess additional knowledge, skills, or abilities within a specialized area, such as special education. Completion of any state recognized requirements in a specific skill area (e.g., state registered hearing impaired interpreter¹²) could also be used to satisfy the additional requirements of this credential. Further, candidates could apply paid employment, college coursework, or CEUs used for the basic requirements of the credential toward the additional education or work experience requirements under this credential, if that employment or education was in the selected skill area.

The minimum standards for both of the proposed paraeducator credentials would not meet the requirements for paraprofessionals working in Title I schoolwide schools or targeted assistance programs if the option to obtain credit for previous work experience and CEUs is used. The proposal includes a provision that an identifier be included on the credential indicating the paraeducator has met the Title I requirements, if such requirements have been met. This would provide school districts with quick verification that anyone with the state paraeducator credential has or has not met the Title I requirements, which could save the district both time and money by not needing to make such a verification on its own.¹³

¹² C.G.S. Sec. 46a-33a requires all hearing impaired interpreters working in an educational setting to be registered with the State Commission on Deaf and Hearing Impaired and hold the appropriate credentials developed by the National Registry of Interpreters for the Deaf and the National Association of the Deaf.

¹³ A person who obtains a paraeducator credential based on the work experience option and subsequently completes the Title I education requirements or passes the ParaPro exam prior to renewal, would have to wait until renewal of his or her certificate to receive the Title I designation.

Renewals

The model credential process would require paraeducators to renew their credential every five years, provided they have successfully completed a specified amount of professional development. The main reason for placing the recommended conditions on credential renewal is to ensure paraeducators receive adequate training to enhance their skills over an appropriate period of time.

The five-year time period is consistent with programs in other states. Five years provide an adequate time frame for SDE to operate the program and for paraeducators to fulfill the recommended professional development requirements necessary for renewing their credential. Extending or decreasing the renewal cycle from the recommended five-year period would diminish the purpose of having a renewable credential with specified professional development requirements.

More frequent renewals would place a greater burden on paraeducators to complete the professional development requirements within less time, unless the requirements were reduced, which seems counterproductive. A greater burden would also be placed on the department if it had to administer the paraeducator credential caseload within more compressed time frames, which would not be an effective use of the department's resources.

The types and frequency of the professional development that instructional paraprofessionals receive are important factors in working with students. Professional development, as a way for paraprofessionals to stay current on education-related topics, takes on increased importance as the modern classroom continues to evolve, the needs of students change, and the level of technology used for instructing students expands.

The model requires paraeducators to complete a specific amount of professional development through formal training or college-level coursework as a condition of renewing their state-issued credential. Table 3 outlines the recommended levels and types of professional development. The levels are based on the professional development requirements for paraprofessionals in other states, within the context of current professional development requirements for teachers in Connecticut.

Table 3. Minimum Requirements for Renewal of Model Voluntary Paraeducator Credential	
<i>Paraeducator</i>	<i>Paraeducator with Additional Skills</i>
3 semester hours of college level coursework or 4.5 CEUs (45 hours) on education-related topics	3 semester hours of college level coursework in selected skill area or 4.5 CEUs (45 hours) on education-related topics, of which 2.0 CEUs (20 hours) must be in selected skill area

The table shows the credential renewal requirements vary depending on the credential category. Renewal of the “paraeducator” credential would require the person to satisfactorily complete three semester hours of college-level coursework or 4.5 continuing education units (45

hours). The requirements for the “paraeducator with additional skills” credential include satisfactory completion of three semester hours of college-level coursework in the selected skill area or 4.5 continuing education units, of which 2.0 CEUs (20 hours) must be in the paraeducator’s selected skill area. Requiring periodic training over a specified time frame provides paraprofessionals with the knowledge, skills, and abilities necessary to stay current on education-related topics involving students.¹⁴

As a way to ensure paraeducators meet the professional development requirements, SDE, as the oversight agency, would follow the model it currently uses for teacher certification renewals. Prior to the credential renewal, paraeducators would be required to submit limited information to the state Department of Education regarding the training or education completed, with a notarized statement that the work was completed. SDE would then issue the credential renewal. As a way of monitoring the integrity of the professional development submissions, SDE would use a random audit process. Individuals holding paraeducator credentials would be required to retain records of their professional development work, which would be used as part of the audit.

System Administration

The state Department of Education is the administrative arm of the State Board of Education and serves as the lead agency for education in Connecticut. *Currently, SDE’s oversight and regulation of paraprofessionals is minimal because paraprofessionals are not required to obtain any type of state credential prior to or as an ongoing condition of employment.*

SDE is responsible for implementing the state’s certificate program for teachers (and other school employees). As such, it has staff and systems in place to receive, review, process, and distribute credentials to all such individuals working in local public schools. In fact, the department is currently part way through a multi-year effort to establish a web-based system of certification, including on-line fee payments, for the teacher and school administrator certification system.

Given those existing responsibilities, the model is based on a belief that it makes sense to assign SDE responsibility for the voluntary credential for paraprofessionals. Development of the system to process the paraeducator credential could be consolidated within the department’s current certification project.

Specific tasks that SDE would need to perform to implement the new paraeducator credential include:

- drafting regulations to implement the program (including an appeals process);
- creating application and renewal forms;
- preparing informational materials about the application process;

¹⁴ In other states with professional development requirements, paraprofessionals have to complete between 15 and 100 hours of continuing education over varying periods of time. Teachers in Connecticut currently have to complete 90 hours of continuing education every five years.

- writing computer programs to process the credential;
- receiving applications submitted;
- processing fees;
- reviewing individual applications and verifying compliance with credential requirements;
- issuing credentials to eligible recipients;
- notifying individuals denied the credential; and
- processing appeals.

Recognizing that one of the tasks that can delay implementation of a new program is the adoption of regulations, the model proposes that SDE be allowed to implement relevant policies and procedures needed to operate the paraeducator credentialing system as long as notice of intent to adopt regulations is published within 20 days of implementation of the relevant policies and procedures. The proposed policies and procedures would remain valid until final regulations take effect.¹⁵

Fees

The proposed fees for the model credential are \$75 for an initial credential (valid for five years) and \$50 to renew the credential (for five years).

SDE charges applicants for educator certificates a minimum of \$50 to cover the cost of the initial review of the application and supporting materials. If a person is turned down, they do not receive a refund. If a person is granted a certificate, the \$50 is applied toward the total fee for the specific certificate, which range from \$100 to \$300. Currently, there is no charge for renewals, although SDE incurs expenses to review and process them. The proposed fees for the paraeducator credential are intended to cover a major portion of the cost of issuing the credential.

Estimated Costs

Regarding the issue of costs, regulatory systems clearly carry a price tag. The model voluntary paraeducator credential would affect those working as paraprofessionals, those employing paraprofessionals, and those overseeing compliance with the new system to some degree. However, the costs would undoubtedly be lower than those associated with a mandatory system. As described below, the greatest short-term expense would be to the state.

Employees. Individuals wishing to work as paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities who do not already meet the requirements for the model paraeducator credential, as well as everyone required to complete professional development provisions for renewal of the credential, would need to expend time and money to obtain those credentials.

For individuals seeking an initial credential, the cost would vary considerably, depending on the background of the person. Those with sufficient college courses or an associate's degree

¹⁵ This language mirrors language already in the statutes for several programs under the jurisdiction of the Department of Social Services, such as C.G.S. Sec. 17b-239b.

or higher would already meet the minimum requirements. Their only expense for an initial credential would be the state fee of \$75.

Those individuals without any or enough college courses and little or no work experience would have several options. They could take the ParaPro exam for \$40, and if they do not pass, retake it for another \$40 per test, until they do. They could enroll in college courses, which cost approximately \$150 per credit on the community college level, \$350 per credit within the state university system, \$500 per credit at the University of Connecticut, and \$550 (or more) at private colleges. (Additional costs related to taking college courses would include transportation, books, and child care expenses.) Their final alternative would be to obtain 3.0 CEUs in courses pertaining to the application of skills and knowledge to classroom instruction to combine with at least five years of paid employment as a paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities. The cost for CEUs would vary, but would likely be in the range of \$75 to \$150 per unit.

The cost of completing professional development requirements for renewal of the credential should be similar for all applicants. All credential holders seeking renewal would need to complete the same amount of professional development. The expense to meet that goal would depend on the mechanism used (e.g., college courses, continuing education units, and employer-sponsored programs).

Employers. Unlike some other states, the model voluntary paraeducator credential does not place any immediate financial burdens on local school districts to administer a credentialing program established by the state government. In fact, if districts choose to require their employees to obtain the paraeducator credential, some of the cost of verifying compliance with minimum standards would be eliminated because the state would be handling the paperwork for the credential and would have verified the person's education and work experience prior to issuing the credential. As a result, local school districts would only need to verify that an applicant or employee has the credential.

With regard to the level of compensation paid to instructional paraprofessionals who obtain the paraeducator credential, it is possible local school districts would have to increase salaries in the future. However, the date and size of such increases are difficult to predict, and would be subject to the collective bargaining process for most school districts.

Theoretically, salaries for credential holders and paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities in general should be affected by the supply of and demand for paraprofessionals at any given time. If there are more districts recruiting paraprofessionals (with specified education or experience) than there are available workers, then hourly wages should rise in order to attract enough qualified people for the jobs that need to be filled. When there are more people seeking employment as paraprofessionals than there are jobs, then wages should stabilize. Alternatively, employers could require higher qualifications for the same salary previously paid to those with lower qualifications.

In practice, based on information from the local school districts in the PRI database, during SY 2005-06, the existence of standards in Connecticut does not always result in higher wage rates. The median, minimum, full-time hourly wage paid instructional paraprofessionals working full time, based on all of the districts in the database, was \$11.49. The median

minimum for districts employing one or more paraprofessionals required to meet NCLB standards was \$11.32, while the median minimum in districts with their own standards was \$11.23. Districts without standards of their own had a median starting salary of \$11.78. Within each of those groupings, however, the range of salaries was wide, with the largest spread among the districts with their own standards.¹⁶

In the next few years, if some districts were to adopt the model paraeducator credential as their minimum standard and they increase compensation in recognition of that fact (either as a management decision or as a result of collective bargaining), it is possible other districts might be forced to follow suit to remain competitive. However, because the model paraeducator credential is voluntary, and the job of a paraprofessional is generally an entry level position within the local education system, it is likely districts would continue to find new people to work in those jobs. Likewise, there will always be some people who want to remain in their immediate geographic area and be on the same schedule (i.e., school-day hours and vacations) as their children, regardless of the pay scale.

In the long-run, if the creation of the model paraeducator credential led to a higher skill level for the pool of people willing to work as paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities, then a corresponding increase in salaries and benefits could be expected. If the purpose of the work of instructional paraprofessionals is to help educate students, then having a higher quality workforce available for those positions should be worth the higher cost, and be reflected by an increase in school district demand for those paraprofessionals.

Regulators. Additional work and expenses are anticipated for the State Department of Education to implement the model voluntary paraeducator credential. Some of the activities required would be one-time efforts, some would require periodic activity, and others would be ongoing.

It is expected that the department's experience overseeing teacher certification requirements would provide it with knowledge and expertise that would expedite the creation of the model paraeducator credentialing system (and possibly mitigate the cost of creating the system). However, during the first few months of authority for the program, likely expenses would include staff time for the development of regulations, forms, and computer programming. The cost of those activities would likely have to be borne by the department out of its existing appropriation.

On a permanent basis, implementation of the model paraeducator credential would add to the overall workload of the Bureau of Certification and Professional Development, which currently has 13 certification analysts to handle about 30,000 applications a year from individuals covered by mandatory certification requirements. SDE staff indicated the bureau could not absorb a new program without additional resources. Therefore, when the department began reviewing applications and issuing paraeducator credentials, it is likely an additional

¹⁶ It should be noted that these numbers are based on median, minimum hourly wages paid. Some districts pay more, and some pay less than these amounts. Furthermore, in terms of actual compensation paid, three-quarters of the paraprofessionals in the PRI database have been working for their districts for more than two years. Given that most districts have multiple steps in their pay plans, those individuals are paid more per hour than the minimum hourly wage used for their respective districts in these calculations.

person would be needed within the bureau to implement the program. Given the bureau's other regulatory responsibilities, however, it is expected that the new person would not be employed solely to operate the paraeducator credential program. Instead, as in other states, the person would become involved in processing multiple types of credentials, and others in the bureau would be available to provide advice and assistance regarding the new program.

If the bureau added one certification analyst in a mid-level position¹⁷, the starting salary for that job in 2008 would be approximately \$68,000. The estimated cost of fringe benefits would be approximately \$39,000 (based on a state rate of 58 percent), for a total annual cost of about \$107,000.

In terms of workload and fees, it is difficult to know the exact number of individuals who would apply for the model paraeducator credential because it is voluntary. Indeed, over time, it can be expected that SDE would need to adjust the resources assigned to the paraeducator program, depending on demand for the credential.

For example, if one-fifth of the individuals currently working as paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities applied annually during the early years of the program, there would be about 2,400 applicants per year. (This is based on SDE's count of approximately 12,000 FTE instructional paraprofessionals in SY 04-05.) At a fee of \$75 per person for an initial credential, this would raise approximately \$180,000 in revenue, two-thirds more than the estimated cost of the new classification analyst position.

If that estimate turns out to be too high, and only 10 percent of the existing paraprofessionals apply annually, then there would be about 1,200 applications a year. That level of activity would generate approximately \$90,000 in revenue, about 85 percent of the cost of the new position. Alternatively, if half of the existing paraprofessionals applied during the first year, then SDE would have to process 6,000 applications. That volume would produce revenue of \$450,000, an amount adequate to pay for several additional staff, if necessary.

¹⁷ SDE refers to all of the staff in the bureau who process the various components of existing certification processes as certification analysts. The actual job title of the position used to develop the estimated costs in this section is an Education Service Specialist.

Other Program Review Committee Recommendations

In addition to the main recommendation directing the State Department of Education to develop a state-issued credential for paraprofessionals, the program review committee makes several broader recommendations. As this study progressed, several areas needing improvement became clear, and are highlighted below. The recommendations concern professional development for instructional paraprofessionals, the use of such paraprofessionals to provide direct instruction, recently developed guidelines for instructional paraprofessionals, and data collection efforts by the state education department.

Professional Development

In discussions with paraprofessionals, school principals, and special education supervisors, *there was general consensus that professional development and training for paraprofessionals needs to be strengthened.* Concerns were also raised by some that: there is not enough relevant training for paraprofessionals; some districts do not pay the cost of the training for paraprofessionals; and paraprofessionals have to attend training on their own time outside of regular school hours without pay.

The committee believes some aspects of these issues are part of the collective bargaining process between local school districts and those paraprofessionals belonging to unions, and thus beyond the scope of this study. A specific amount of professional development would be required under the model paraeducator credential process described above, but the issue of training for paraprofessionals extends beyond the credential requirements. The committee believes adequate and appropriate training should be available to paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities, regardless of whether it is part of the paraeducator credential process. Consistent with the main themes outlined earlier, however, any state requirements in this area should be balanced with the needs of paraprofessionals and the autonomy of local school districts.

Current requirements. There are no state-level standards in Connecticut regarding the type or amount of professional development for instructional paraprofessionals. Local school districts are responsible for setting their own professional development guidelines for paraprofessionals.

As a way of gauging the current level of professional development for instructional paraprofessionals at the local level, school districts were asked as part of the committee data request about training efforts for paraprofessionals. Districts were provided a list of five actions and asked to choose which of the actions they take regarding professional development. Districts could choose more than one answer, if applicable. Table 4 shows the results.

Table 4. Paraprofessional Professional Development Options of Local School Districts	
<i>Option</i>	<i>Percent of Districts Offering Specified Option (N=116)</i>
Require attendance at periodic training	77%
Offer voluntary programs specifically for paraprofessionals	72%
Allow attendance at programs for teachers	77%
Encourage paraprofessionals to continue their education	78%
None of the above	0%
Source of data: PRI database.	

As the table shows, 77 percent of the 116 districts responding to the question require their instructional paraprofessionals to attend periodic training. Seven in 10 districts offer voluntary training programs specifically for paraprofessionals, and three-quarters allow their paraprofessionals to attend training offered to teachers. Just under 80 percent of the districts encourage paraprofessionals to continue their education.

Based on this information, a high percentage of school districts responding to the program review data request are cognizant of professional development for paraprofessionals and are addressing the issue. What is not indicated by the results, however, is the specific nature of the training, the overall quality of the training, whether the training helps instructional paraprofessionals become more effective in their profession, or the paraprofessionals' satisfaction level with the training they receive.

The issue of "overall satisfaction" with professional development came up in discussions with paraprofessionals represented by three of the state's largest unions representing paraprofessionals. While not a scientifically selected group, the general sense of the paraprofessionals whom committee staff interviewed was that their training was not adequate. There was also frustration among some paraprofessionals that the training in their districts was not geared toward their work as paraprofessionals, while others commented that the training offered was not conducive to their schedules.

Similar to other states, a key source of training for paraprofessionals is the community college system. Until recently, at least one community college in Connecticut offered certificate programs for paraprofessionals – one certificate was for "Educational Paraprofessional" and one was for "Bilingual Educational Paraprofessional." Those programs were discontinued because of low demand and, at present, there are no programs offered by the state's community colleges strictly for paraprofessionals. Granted, community colleges aim to design their programs in the most effective way possible and to meet a given need or demand in a particular area. If that need is not present, then presumably the programs are not offered. The committee believes, however, the potential exists for community colleges to be a beneficial resource for paraprofessionals in the future, particularly within any paraeducator credentialing system. If there is a demonstrated increase in the need for professional development programs statewide to satisfy the requirements of a paraeducator credential, then the community college system should play a key role in providing such training.

As such, the program review committee recommends the Department of Higher Education begin working with institutions of higher education in Connecticut to establish a network of programs within the community-technical college and state university systems that will provide instructional paraprofessionals with career development opportunities through relevant, accessible, and affordable programs.

The committee believes the community college system in Connecticut could serve as an important part of the overall professional development structure for instructional paraprofessionals. Community colleges are generally viewed as being able to offer students accessible, affordable, quality courses and programs in diverse areas of study. Along with other public and private higher education institutions in the state, community colleges have the potential to help paraprofessionals receive appropriate and adequate training.

SDE role. The committee understands that since no state standards exist regarding professional development for paraprofessionals, it is up to local districts to set their own policies. At the same time, state government needs to have an understanding of the issues regarding training for paraprofessionals and be involved in the overall coordination of such training as a way of achieving its goals of high expectations and standards for student achievement and teaching referenced earlier. While the state education department should not be the sole provider of professional development services for paraprofessionals, the department should maintain an overall coordinating role for such training.

SDE currently works with various groups to ensure that professional development for paraprofessionals is offered. For example, SDE assists the State Education Resource Center in coordinating several types of professional development programs under SERC's Paraprofessionals as Partners Initiative. Under SDE's contract with SERC, the department both funds and assists with SERC's annual conference for paraprofessionals. (In fact, such conferences are typically attended by 250 paraprofessionals from across the state.) The conference offers information on various topics applicable to paraprofessionals. The department is also helping SERC coordinate a statewide conference on the supervision and evaluation of paraprofessionals. The conference, planned for Spring 2007, is designed for school personnel responsible for supervising and evaluating paraprofessionals.

The department, however, does not currently assess the overall professional development needs of paraprofessionals from a statewide perspective. Although the department works in conjunction with SERC on training for paraprofessionals, additional emphasis is needed at the state level to identify and coordinate the training needs of paraprofessionals.

Therefore, the program review committee recommends the State Department of Education periodically contact a sample of paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators -- through unions, school districts, the State Education Resource Center, and Regional Education Service Centers -- to identify the professional development needs of instructional paraprofessionals and any problem areas that may exist. Following such an assessment, the department should begin coordinating, from a statewide perspective, professional development offerings that meet the needs of instructional paraprofessionals. As part of that effort, SDE should report the results of the assessment to the Department of Higher Education.

Teachers. Another key area brought to the committee's attention during this study was the fact that *there is variability in training provided to teachers regarding the overall duties and responsibilities of instructional paraprofessionals*. Some school districts (or individual schools within a district) have programs in place to inform teachers about the role paraprofessionals play in their district or school. Similar to other aspects of the paraprofessional field in Connecticut, such programs are not standardized as to their content or their use.

Despite the lack of standardization, the committee believes teachers, particularly new hires, should be made aware of the purpose of instructional paraprofessionals and how to interact with paraprofessionals, especially within the classroom setting. Such training can be an important component in developing overall relationships and team building between paraprofessionals and teachers, with the ultimate goal of providing more effective and better coordinated instruction to students.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education encourage all local public school districts to provide training to teachers, particularly new teachers at the beginning of each school year, on the role and effective use of instructional paraprofessionals. The department should also encourage school districts to develop intradistrict methods and strategies whereby paraprofessionals, teachers, and administrators periodically discuss issues or concerns involving the use of paraprofessionals in providing effective student instruction.

Supervision

Connecticut Regulations Section 10-145d-401 requires anyone employed by a local public school district who is not directly supervised in the delivery of instructional services to have appropriate state certification. Program review committee staff heard of instances where *paraprofessionals may be put in situations that could be considered "teaching" without the presence or guidance of a certified employee*. For example, paraprofessionals may be directed to take over the classroom for a teacher who is absent for periods of time. In some cases, a substitute teacher is present, but the paraprofessional takes on more of an instructional role. Alternatively, a paraprofessional may work in a lab or media center that is only visited by a certified staff person once or twice a week. When these assignments are questioned, the paraprofessionals are told either that they should rely on instructional guidance previously provided by the teachers they work with or that on-site administrative staff is supplying the required supervision.

While the information shared with committee staff was anecdotal, and there is no way of knowing how widespread an issue this is, the committee believes it is important that local school administrators make certain that noncertified staff are not placed in situations that violate the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. Likewise, the State Department of Education should take steps to ensure that restrictions on the use of noncertified personnel are adhered to.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education periodically remind local school districts that existing regulations prohibit the use of noncertified personnel in an initial teaching role. Further, the department should develop a mechanism to periodically monitor local school compliance with this requirement.

Guidelines

In May 2004, the “working draft” of *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals Working with Students Birth to 21* was released. Work on the document began in 2001 when the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Council convened a task force with representatives of the education community (e.g., administrators, regular and special education teachers, and paraprofessionals) as well as parents. *The task force report (i.e., “the working draft”) was intended to provide guidance for instructional paraprofessionals whose primary responsibility is working with children with disabilities, but it was suggested that the document might be helpful to a broader audience.*

SDE provided resources to the task force, but neither the department nor the State Board of Education ever formally endorsed or adopted the guidelines. The guidelines were subsequently distributed through SERC to each local school district in the state. During 2006, SDE and SERC staff have been working to adapt the contents of the working draft in order to develop a broader tool that can be used by those working as or employing paraprofessionals outside of the special education area. Their target completion date is the spring of 2007.

Now that the guidelines are being modified to incorporate all paraprofessionals, the committee believes it is appropriate for state education authorities to indicate an official position on the preferred roles, responsibilities, and training of school paraprofessionals working in Connecticut. The availability of a written guide, in conjunction with the other program review recommendations in this report, should help local school districts better identify and define the overall role of paraprofessionals.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education finalize those portions of the May 2004 *Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals Working with Students Birth to 21: Working Draft* concerning roles, responsibilities, and training that it believes would be helpful to all paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities in Connecticut and submit that document to the State Board of Education by September 2007 for its approval.

Data Collection

Until school year 2006-2007, the State Department of Education collected limited information about paraprofessionals employed by local school districts. For October 1 of each school year, districts had to and still do report the number of full-time equivalent, noncertified staff positions. The information is separated into eight categories, only three of which cover noncertified *instructional* staff, the employees included in the program review study. The three noncertified instructional categories are instructional assistant, reading instructional assistant, and library/media support staff. The instructional assistant category is broken down further into six subgroups -- pre-kindergarten, kindergarten, regular program, special education, ESL/bilingual, and other program.

Starting this school year, in addition to the information described above, *local school districts have to report how many Title I paraprofessionals are employed by the district, as well as how many of them are “qualified” (i.e., meet NCLB standards).* Those numbers must be

actual counts of all full-time and part-time employees covered by the law, not FTE conversions. This year's reports were due on November 30, 2006.

SDE will review the forms in mid-December. Following this review, the department will begin contacting the superintendents who report that some of their district paraprofessionals who are required to meet NCLB requirements have not done so. The superintendents will be informed that they must terminate the employees or, if non-Title I positions are available, move them to those positions. Subsequently, SDE will conduct audits to determine whether the local districts complied.

The program review committee recommends the State Department of Education summarize the information about Title I paraprofessionals that it will collect annually and post the information on the agency's website. At a minimum, the posted data should include the number of paraprofessionals covered by No Child Left Behind requirements, the number who have not met the NCLB requirements, the number of districts with paraprofessionals out of compliance, and the types of actions taken by those districts to comply (i.e., terminated staff, transferred staff, or did nothing).

APPENDICES



APPENDIX A

Responses to Local Public School District Data Collection Form

The Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee (PRI) staff compiled a database containing information about the geographic distribution, qualifications, day-to-day duties, professional development, and compensation of *paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities*¹⁸ working in kindergarten through twelfth grade (K-12) in Connecticut. The primary source of information was completed data forms returned by 119 of the 169 local school districts that were sent a data request, for a response rate of 70 percent.¹⁹ For the most part, the information was for School Year (SY) 2005-2006. Data requiring specific employee counts was primarily from October 1, 2005, an annual reporting date used by the State Department of Education (SDE) for many of its reports.

Although the information in the PRI database reflects self-reported information from less than the entire pool of school districts, the respondents appear to be proportionally representative of all of the districts sent the form, based on the characteristics listed in Table A-1. In terms of the total number of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working in Connecticut, the districts that responded employed 72 percent of the 12,046 full-time equivalent (FTE), noncertified instructional personnel reported to SDE as working in the state in October 2005.

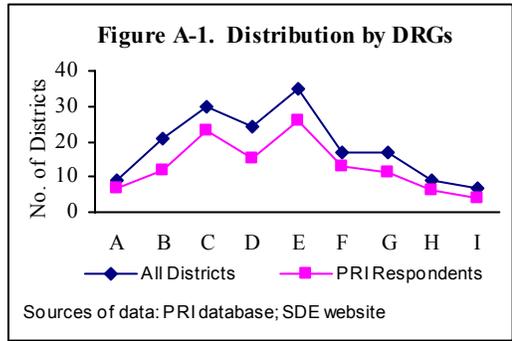
Table A-1. Characteristics of PRI Data Collection Form Recipients and Respondents		
<i>Number of:</i>	<i>Sent Data Form</i>	<i>Returned Data Form (% of all sent form)</i>
Districts in total	169	119 (70%)
Districts that operate elementary schools	158	113 (72%)
Districts that operate middle schools	121	85 (70%)
Districts that operate high schools	124	82 (66%)
K-12 students in public schools	~550,000	~403,000 (73%)
K-12 paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities	~12,000	~8,700 (72%)
Regional school districts	17	14 (82%)
District towns with populations < 5,000	25%	26%
District towns with populations between 5,000 and 11,500	25%	23%
District towns with populations between 11,501 and 24,000	25%	22%
District towns with populations >24,000	25%	29%
Districts where paraprofessionals are represented by unions	145	101 (70%)
Sources of data: State Department of Education, U.S. Bureau of Census, and PRI database		

Another characteristic used to compare the respondents and the total pool of local public school districts was the classification system developed by SDE to group students with similar socioeconomic status and need. Now known as District Reference Groups (DRGs), up until

¹⁸ The definition of a *paraprofessional with instructional responsibilities* used on the form was: “a noncertified, school-based employee who works under the direct supervision of a teacher or other certified professional educator and who assists the teacher or other professional educator with the delivery of instructional and related support services to students.”

¹⁹ The form was sent to the 166 local public school districts in the state plus the three endowed academies that serve as regional high schools for local school districts in their respective areas, making a total of 169 districts. (The form was not sent to any charter or magnet schools nor the state’s technical high school system.) As of October 2, 2006, 119 usable forms had been received. The names of all districts that responded are listed at the end of this appendix.

2005 the categories were known as Educational Reference Groups (ERGs). The respondents in the PRI database are distributed proportionately using both measures. Figure A-1 shows the distribution based on DRG classifications.



Summary Profile

Responses to the questions on the data request form are described in detail below. In summary, however, the database indicates that a *majority* of the approximately 8,700 paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities employed by the local public school districts that responded to the program review data request are:

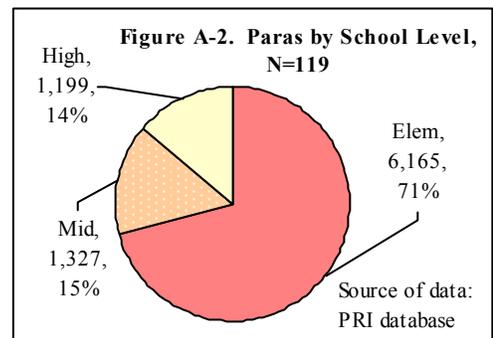
- working at the elementary school level;
- female;
- white;
- under the age of 50;
- high school graduates (and 47 percent have at least two years of college);
- working full time during the 10-month school year;
- not new employees, having worked for at least three years;
- earning a minimum of \$11.72;
- offered some type of health and dental insurance and the opportunity to participate in a retirement plan; and
- covered by a collective bargaining agreement.

In terms of the 119 local school districts that provided information to the program review committee, the database indicates that *on average* (using median numbers) the districts:

- employ 47 paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities;
- evaluate their performance annually;
- provide some form of periodic training;
- require those working full-time to work 32.5 hours per week;
- pay such full-time employees at least \$11.49 an hour; and
- retain at least 90 percent of existing paraprofessionals from year to year.

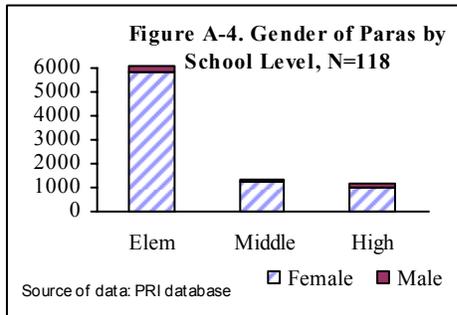
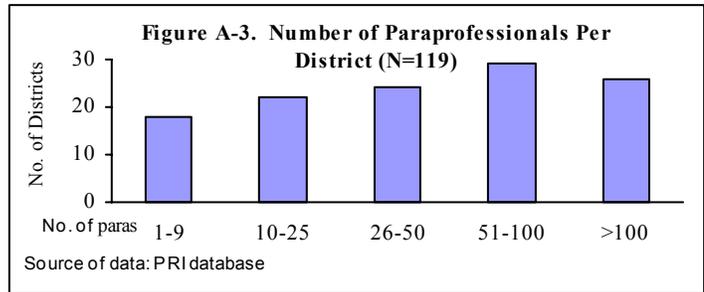
Demographic Data

The local school districts included in the program review database reported employing 8,691 K-12 paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities during SY 2005-06. The number per district ranged from one to 494. Figure A-2 shows the distribution of the paraprofessionals in the database by school level,



while Figure A-3 summarizes the total number per district.

Gender. Figure A-4 displays the distribution of male and female paraprofessionals in the database. Overall, 93 percent are female, and 7 percent are male. Broken down by school level, the percent of males



ranged from 4 percent at the elementary level to 8 percent at the middle school level to 17 percent at the high school level. Nearly half (46 percent) of the reporting districts that operate elementary schools employed no male paraprofessionals in their elementary schools, 47 percent that operate middle schools employed no male paraprofessionals in those schools, and 28 percent of the reporting districts operating high schools employed no male paraprofessionals at that school level.

Race/Ethnicity. Table A-2 presents data from October 2005 about the racial/ethnic makeup of the paraprofessionals in the program review database at each school level. Overall, 21 percent (of the 7,845 paraprofessionals for whom districts were able to provide data) were members of a minority group. The elementary school level had the highest proportion of minority group members -- 23 percent. The middle school level was 13 percent, while the high school level was 21 percent. Nearly half of the districts employed no minority group members as paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities.

<i>School Level</i>	<i>No. White</i>	<i>No. Black</i>	<i>No. Hispanic</i>	<i>No. Asian</i>	<i>No. American Indian</i>	<i>Total</i>
Elementary	4,340	649	596	32	4	5,621
Middle	1,017	86	55	7	0	1,165
High	835	116	101	7	0	1,059
TOTAL	6,192 (79%)	851 (11%)	752 (10%)	46 (1%)	4 (0%)	7,845*

* Information was unavailable for the other 846 paraprofessionals in the database.
 Percentages may total more than 100% due to rounding.
 Source of data: PRI database

Age. Table A-3 summarizes information about the age distribution of the paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities in the PRI database. Not all districts were able to answer this question, although some were able to do so by reporting all school levels together. For the 111 districts that did respond, almost half of the employed paraprofessionals were between 35 and 49 years old.

Table A-3. Paraprofessionals by Age, October 1, 2005 (N=111)					
<i>School Level</i>	<i>Number within specified age ranges</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>Under 35</i>	<i>35 - 49</i>	<i>50-59</i>	<i>60 and over</i>	
Elementary	692	2,360	1,394	427	4,873
Middle	137	397	306	111	951
High	143	331	294	111	879
Separated levels not available	157	406	304	78	945
TOTAL	1,129 (15%)	3,494 (46%)	2,298 (30%)	727 (10%)	7,648*

* Information was unavailable for the other 1,043 paraprofessionals in the database.
Percentages may total more than 100% due to rounding.
Source of data: PRI database

Work Schedules

Figure A-5 shows the proportion of paraprofessionals in the PRI database who work full time versus part time by school level. More than three-quarters work full time at each school level, with the proportion increasing as the school level increases -- elementary schools (78 percent), middle schools (87 percent), and high schools (91 percent).

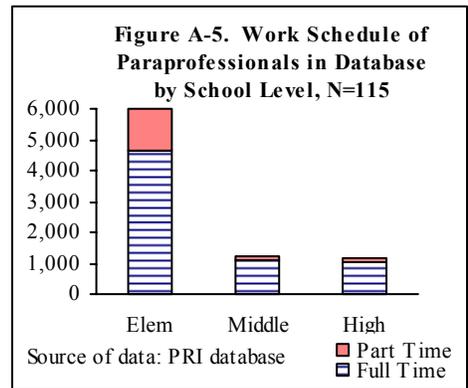


Table A-4 shows the number of hours per week that different school districts consider to be full time versus part time. The hours vary among districts and by school level. Overall among respondents, full-time employees work between 25 and 38.75 hours per week, with a median of 32.5 hours. The number of hours per week that part-time paraprofessionals work ranged from five to 32.5 hours. The median ranged from 19 to 19.5 hours, depending on the school level.

Table A-4. Hours Worked by Paraprofessionals by School Level (N=118)				
<i>School Level</i>	<i>Full Time</i>		<i>Part Time</i>	
	<i>Range of Hours</i>	<i>Median Hours</i>	<i>Range of Hours</i>	<i>Median Hours</i>
Elementary	25 - 38.75	32.5	12 - 32.5	19
Middle	27 - 37.5	32.5	5 - 32.5	19.5
High	30 - 37.5	32.5	10 - 32.5	19.5

Source of data: PRI database

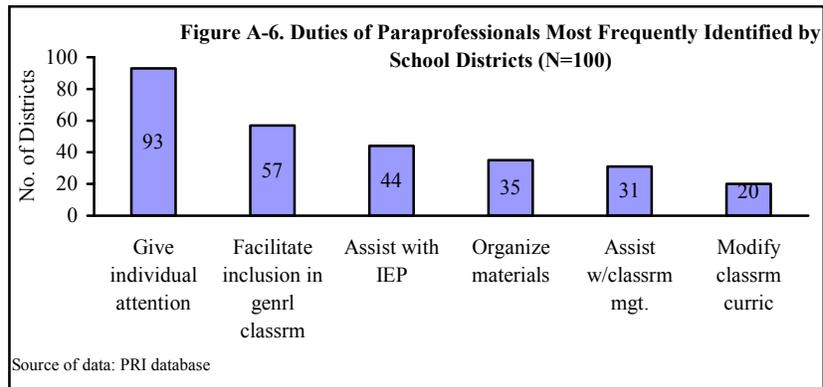
Overwhelmingly, paraprofessionals work the 10-month school year. The PRI database showed only a couple of people in six districts work other than a 10-month school year.

Duties

From a list of 16 duties, districts were asked to select the three functions most commonly performed by the paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working in their district.

Figure A-6 shows the six duties most frequently selected by respondents.²⁰ The duty “Give individualized attention to one or a small number of students within the classroom while teacher works with other students” was overwhelmingly the most commonly chosen duty for paraprofessionals in the database.

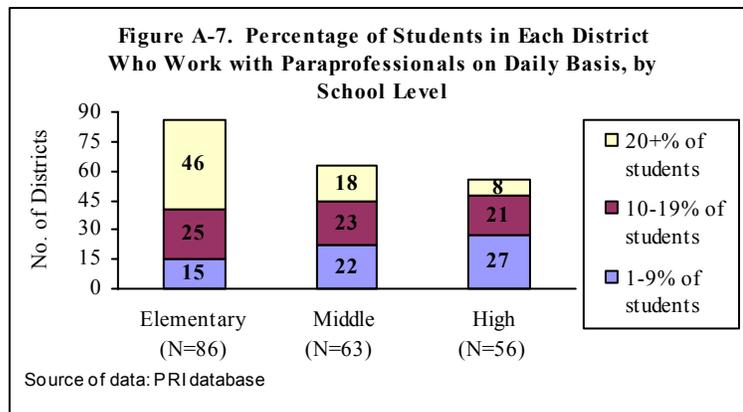
The only other duty chosen by more than half the respondents was “Facilitate student’s inclusion in general education classroom,” which was selected by 57 percent of the districts that limited their answer to three choices. The remaining duties chosen by more than 10 districts were “Assist with Individualized Education Programs” (44 percent), “Organize instructional materials” (35 percent), “Assist teacher with classroom management” (31 percent), and “Modify or adapt classroom curriculum” (20 percent).



Interaction with Students

Figure A-7 illustrates by school level the extent of the interaction between students and paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities for those districts that reported specific numbers to program review. (The numbers provided for each school level are based on the number of responding districts that operate schools at the specified level.) As shown, the proportion of students varies considerably from district to district as well as by school level, with the portion decreasing as grade level increases.

Slightly more than half of the 86 districts with elementary schools that responded indicated 20 percent or more of their students work on a daily basis with instructional paraprofessionals. Among the 63 districts operating middle schools that responded, just over one-quarter indicated 20 percent or more of the students receive instruction from paraprofessionals daily, while only 14 percent of the 56 districts operating high schools that responded indicated 20 percent or more of the students at that level had daily contact.



²⁰ The data in Figure A-5 do not account for the 19 districts that either made more than three choices or did not choose any of the listed duties. It is worth noting, however, that all 15 of the districts that selected more than three duties included the top choice shown in Figure A-5 among their selections.

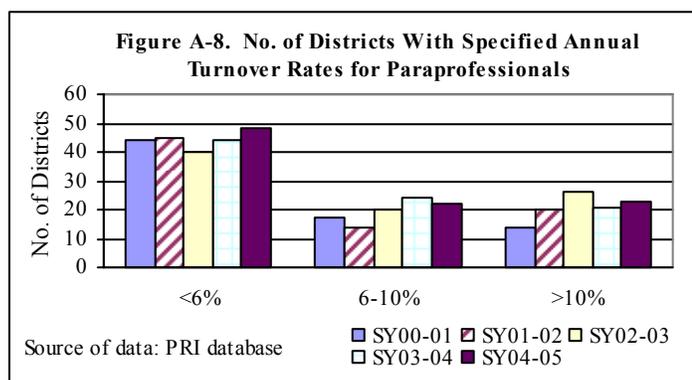
Tenure

In terms of length of employment, Table A-5 shows the paraprofessionals employed by the districts in October 2005 were fairly evenly distributed among the four ranges indicated in the table. Nearly equal proportions worked “five years or less” and “six or more years.”

<i>School Level</i>	<i>Number with specified length of employment</i>				<i>Total</i>
	<i>2 years or less</i>	<i>3 - 5 years</i>	<i>6 - 10 years</i>	<i>>10 years</i>	
Elementary	1,515	1,223	1,405	1,320	5,463
Middle	310	267	281	250	1,108
High	273	217	292	239	1,021
Separated levels not available	199	204	179	261	843
TOTAL	2,297 (27%)	1,911 (23%)	2,157 (26%)	2,070 (25%)	8,435*

* Information was unavailable for the other 256 paraprofessionals in the database.
Percentages may total more than 100% due to rounding.
Source of data: PRI database

The PRI data request also asked districts about the percentage of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities who had not returned the following fall, after each of the past five school years. Fewer districts were able to provide data for the earlier years, but in all years, the average rate of turnover was less than 10 percent. (Seventy-five districts provided information for SY 2000-01 versus 93 for SY 2004-05.) Figure A-8 summarizes the responses.



Compensation

Most school districts in the PRI database reported wage information for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities using hourly rates. In most cases, salary ranges for part-time and full-time employees were the same, but some districts paid all part-time paraprofessionals a flat hourly rate. Table A-6 shows the range and median hourly rates paid by the districts in the database.

	<i>Range of Minimum</i>	<i>Minimum median</i>	<i>Range of Maximum</i>	<i>Maximum Median</i>
Full Time	\$7.50 - \$17.13	\$11.49	\$9.29 - \$23.96	\$14.97
Part Time	\$7.89 - \$17.13	\$10.76	\$8.68 - \$23.96	\$14.36

Note: If a district provided an annual rate, the hourly rate was calculated based on the number of hours per day and estimated days per year that the paraprofessionals in that district work.
Source of data: PRI database

Wages by subgroup. In an effort to better understand the variation in compensation provided by local school districts included in the PRI database, the data were examined in

several additional ways, focusing on minimum full-time hourly wages. All responses were grouped by: (1) District Reference Groups²¹, (2) the overall top 10 and bottom 10 payers, and (3) whether or not any paraprofessionals in the district had to meet local or federal education and experience standards.

Table A- 7 lists the range of starting salaries for full-time instructional paraprofessionals and the *median*, minimum, full-time, hourly wage rate paid by the districts in the database during the 2004-2005 school year, based on the DRG they are assigned by SDE. The spread between the median, minimum full-time rate paid by the highest and lowest groups was \$2.56. The highest median rate was in DRG A (\$13.22); the lowest was in DRG E (\$10.66).

Table A-7. Minimum, Full-Time Hourly Wage Rates by District Reference Group, School Year 2004-05 (N=109)				
DRG	No. of Districts in Database	No. of Paras Employed by Those Districts	Range of Minimum Full-time Hourly Wage Among Those Districts	Median Minimum Full-time Hourly Wage for Districts in DRG
A	6	472	\$11.69 - \$16.80	\$13.22
B	12	1,004	\$9.74 - \$13.98	\$12.15
C	21	715	\$8.87 - \$17.13	\$11.35
D	12	1,165	\$9.18 - \$16.83	\$11.48
E	23	381	\$8.00 - \$13.59	\$10.66
F	13	642	\$9.21 - \$13.70	\$11.23
G	10	901	\$9.17 - \$13.76	\$10.88
H	6	941	\$10.12 - \$13.58	\$11.46
I	6	1,992	\$7.50 - 16.36	\$12.63
Total	109	8,213	\$7.50 - \$17.13	\$11.49
Source of data: PRI database				

Table A-8 summarizes the salary ranges for the 10 districts in the database paying the highest and the 10 paying the lowest minimum full-time salaries. The differential among the top paying districts was \$3.15, while the spread among the bottom districts was \$1.70.

Table A-8. Top and Bottom 10, Minimum Full-Time Hourly Wages Paid, SY 04-05			
Districts	Range of Minimum Full-time Wage	Median Minimum Full-time Wage	DRGs Represented (# of districts)
Top 10	\$13.98 - \$17.13	\$15.40	A(3), B(2), C(1), D(2), and I(2)
Bottom 10	\$7.50 - \$9.20	\$8.89	C(2), D(1), E(5), G(1), and I(1)
Note: The minimum wage in Connecticut in the fall of 2004 was \$7.10. It increased to \$7.40 on January 1, 2006; it will become \$7.65 on January 1, 2007.			
Source of data: PRI database			

²¹ District Reference Groups is a classification system that measures the characteristics of families with children attending public school. The groups range from very affluent, low-need suburban districts (Group A) to high-need, low socioeconomic status, urban districts (Group I). For a detailed description of the variables used to form DRGs and the characteristics of the individual DRGs, see Connecticut State Department of Education, Division of Teaching, Learning and Assessment, Bureau of Research, Evaluation and Student Assessment, *Research Bulletin*, School Year 2005-06 Number 1 (June 2006).

The data were then segmented to look at the differences between districts in the PRI database with and without education and/or experience requirements. The median minimum rate paid in the 60 districts with their own standards (and wage data available) was \$11.23. The median rate in the 55 districts without specified standards of their own (and for which wage data were available) was \$11.78. A total of 71 districts in the database, including some from each of the two categories just described, indicated one or more of the instructional paraprofessionals they employ must meet NCLB standards and provided wage data. The median, minimum, full-time hourly wage paid to paraprofessionals in those districts was \$11.32.²²

Annual salary. In order to convert any of these hourly wage rates into larger blocks of time, information about the hours per week and the number of days per year that full-time paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities work must be taken into consideration. The number of hours per week reported by the districts in the database varied somewhat by school level, but the median was the same.

The median number of hours that full-time paraprofessionals at all school levels worked was 32.5 hours per week. Based on that number and the overall median, minimum salary of \$11.49, the full-time minimum weekly salary paid by the districts in the database would be \$373.43.

On a 52-week basis, that would equal \$19,418 per year. In actuality, the annual wage paid to the paraprofessionals in the database would be lower because nearly all only work during the school year. Furthermore, the exact number of days they are paid within those 10 months varies. The number of school days per district may differ, and some districts pay paraprofessionals for professional development and sick days, while others do not. To calculate the approximate number of days paraprofessionals work annually, committee staff took 182 school days and added the eight major holidays between September and June for an estimated work year of 190 days (or 38 weeks). Based on that number, the median, minimum amount paid during SY 04-05 to paraprofessionals in the PRI database would have been \$14,190.

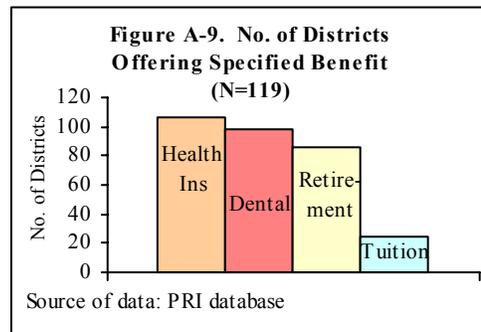
Wages earned. The median, minimum hourly wage *earned* by the paraprofessionals in the database is different than the median wage *paid*, which was shown in Table A-6. To determine the median minimum *earned*, the number of people actually receiving each wage rate has to be taken into consideration. Depending on whether more people work in the districts paying higher or lower wages, the median *earned* wage will be higher or lower than the median wage *paid*. Based on the hourly wage information in the database available for 6,590 of the approximately 6,800 paraprofessionals working full time, the median, minimum hourly wage earned during the 2004-2005 school year was \$11.72.

Fringe benefits. Figure A-9 summarizes the extent to which the districts in the PRI database offer fringe benefits to paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities. A high percentage offer health insurance (90 percent), dental coverage (82 percent), and retirement plans

²² It should be noted that these numbers are based on median, minimum hourly wages paid. Some districts pay more, and some pay less than these amounts. Furthermore, in terms of actual compensation paid, three-quarters of the paraprofessionals in the PRI database have been working for their districts for more than two years. Given that most districts have multiple steps in their pay plans, those individuals are paid more per hour than the minimum hourly wage used for their respective districts in these calculations.

(72 percent), but there are variations in the scope of the individual benefit programs. Only 24 districts offer any type of tuition reimbursement or education assistance.

The opportunity to receive benefits differs between full-time and part-time workers. In most districts in the database, an employee must work a minimum number of hours per week to qualify for benefits. The specific number of hours ranged from 12 to 37.5 hours.

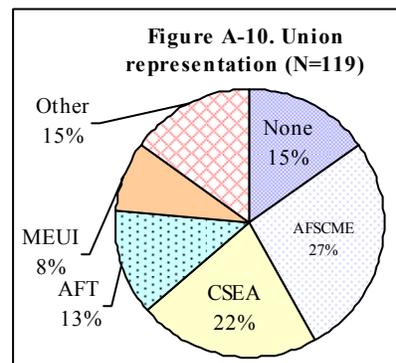


In terms of the scope of benefits, in some districts, only the district employee is eligible for insurance coverage or the employee may have to pay the entire cost of the insurance. In terms of retirement benefits, the types of products ranged from municipal pension plans to 401(k) style programs.

With regard to the total package of compensation that instructional paraprofessionals receive, an examination of the data indicates nearly all districts at the top and bottom provide some combination of the benefits. One notable exception was the district paying the top salary; it did not provide any of the major types of fringe benefits.

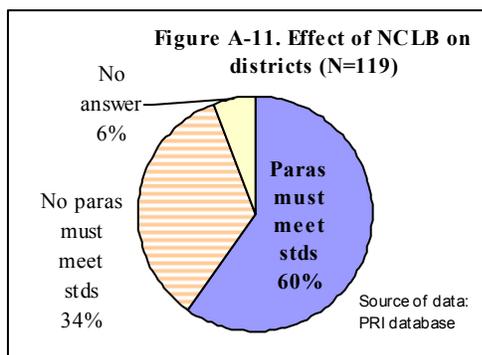
Union Representation

Paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities are unionized in 85 percent of the 119 school districts in the PRI database. Figure A-10 shows the distribution of the unions. Three unions combined -- the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees (AFSCME, Council 4), the Connecticut State Employees Association (CSEA, Local 760), and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) -- represent paraprofessionals in 62 percent of the districts in the database.



Compliance With Federal Requirements

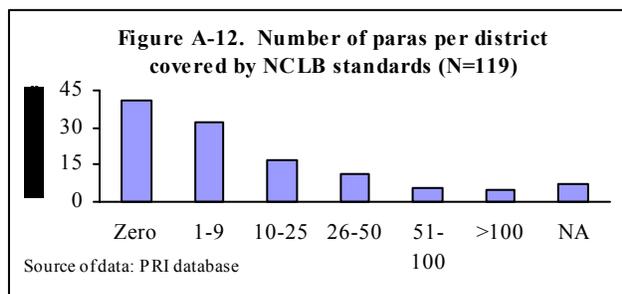
Local school districts in Connecticut are responsible for verifying that school personnel required to meet the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) education requirements for paraprofessionals do in fact meet the standards. As shown in Figure A-11, 60 percent of the 119 school districts returning the PRI data form reported employing one or more paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities who had to meet the NCLB requirements. In one-third of the districts, no paraprofessionals had to meet the standards, while seven districts did not answer the question.



In October 2005, a total of 2,967 employees in the database had to meet the NCLB standards. Nearly half of the 71 districts with such employees had nine or

fewer people required to meet the federal requirements; only 11 districts had more than 50 employees who had to meet the requirements. Figure A-12 summarizes the number of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities per district whose compliance with the federal standards had to be confirmed.

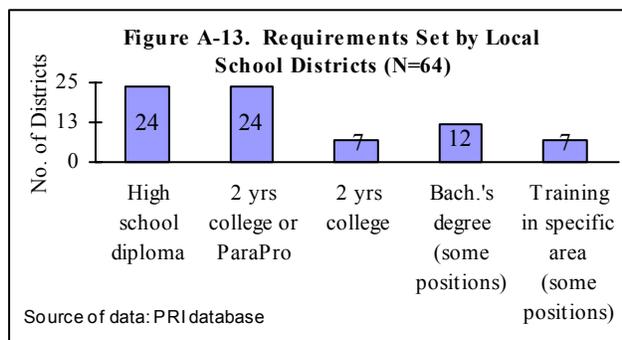
According to the responding districts, the staff most commonly involved in the verification of employee compliance with the federal standards are school principals, human resource directors, directors of pupil services, superintendents, and assistant superintendents. The method most commonly



used to confirm that individual employees meet the standards is requiring the submission of ParaPro test results or college transcripts. Other methods include telephone calls to verify information or a personal interview. Thirteen districts in the PRI database indicated that as of June 30, 2006, some of the staff with high school diplomas who needed to pass the ParaPro exam had not done so. (However, the exam was being offered again during the summer.)

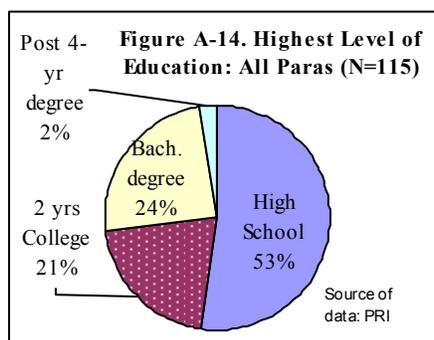
Local District Requirements

In Connecticut, local school districts can establish their own education and experience requirements for the public school employees they hire. Sixty districts responding to the PRI data request currently have specific requirements, while four other districts have preferences. Figure A-13 summarizes the minimum standards reported by those 64 districts. In some cases, districts impose additional requirements only for certain positions, such as a bachelor's degree for tutors. The two requirements most frequently listed by respondents were a high school diploma and two years of college, with successfully passing the ParaPro test an acceptable alternative in some districts.



One hundred districts were able to provide detailed information about the highest level of education achieved as of

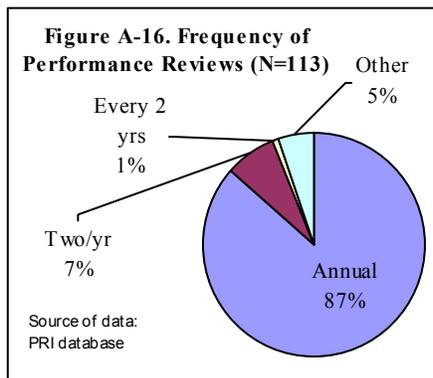
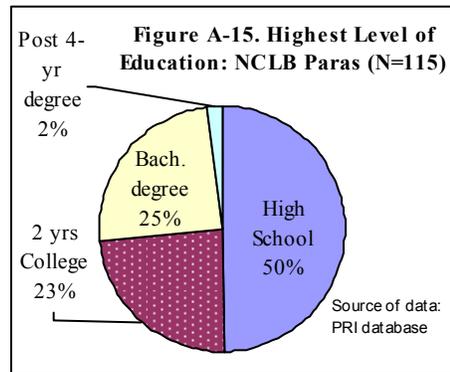
June 30, 2006, by at least some of their paraprofessionals, while another 15 districts provided more limited information. Figure A-14 provides a summary of this data for the 6,013 paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities for whom educational information was available. Nearly half (47 percent) had some college, with 26 percent holding at least a bachelor's degree. (Only three people did not have a high school diploma.)



Separating out only the paraprofessionals required to meet the NCLB requirements, the distribution shows a slightly higher portion of the staff (50 percent) had at least two years of college. Figure A-15 summarizes the data for

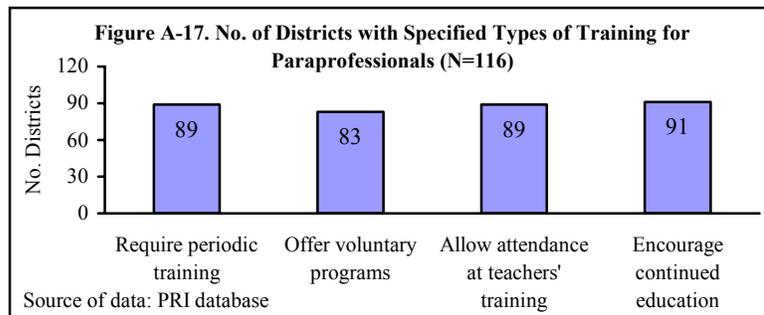
the 2,900 individuals in the database for whom information was available as of June 30, 2006.

Performance evaluations. Nearly all (95 percent) of the districts that responded to the PRI data request have a system in place to regularly evaluate the performance of paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities. Figure A-16 summarizes the frequency of those reviews, which in most schools occur annually. Some districts also conduct an initial review within 90 days of a person being hired.



In 63 percent of the districts, the person conducting the evaluation is the school principal, either alone or with other staff. In 21 percent of the districts, the teacher whom the paraprofessional works with is involved in the evaluation, usually in conjunction with a school administrator or supervisor.

Professional development. As shown in Figure A-17, three-quarters of the local school districts that responded to the PRI data request provide some form of professional development or training for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities. A similar number also encourage these employees to continue their education.



Performance results. Twenty-two districts in the PRI database indicated they have established academic benchmarks or other measures to assess the performance of students who work with paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities on a daily basis. However, one-third of those districts limited their measurements to paraprofessionals working with students in the special education area. The benchmarks mentioned were usually ones already in place as part of the on-going plan for a student, such as in his or her Individualized Education Program. Other measurements mentioned were Connecticut Mastery Test/CAPT results and reading and math assessments in general.

School Districts Responding to the Program Review Data Request

Andover	Meriden	Sprague
Ashford	Middletown	Stafford
Avon	Milford	Stamford
Barkhamsted	Monroe	Stonington
Bethany	Montville	Stratford
Bloomfield	New Britain	Thomaston
Bozrah	New Canaan	Thompson
Bridgeport	New Hartford	Tolland
Bristol	New Haven	Torrington
Brookfield	New London	Trumbull
Canaan	New Milford	Vernon
Canton	Newtown	Voluntown
Chaplin	Norfolk	Wallingford
Chester	North Canaan	Waterbury
Clinton	North Haven	Waterford
Colebrook	North Stonington	West Haven
Columbia	Norwalk	Westbrook
Cornwall	Orange	Weston
Coventry	Oxford	Westport
Cromwell	Plainfield	Wethersfield
Deep River	Plainville	Willington
Derby	Plymouth	Winchester
East Granby	Preston	Windsor
East Haddam	Putnam	Windsor Locks
East Hampton	Redding	Wolcott
East Hartford	Regional School District #1	Woodbridge
East Haven	Regional School District #4	Woodstock
East Lyme	Regional School District #5	Woodstock Academy
Eastford	Regional School District #7	
Easton	Regional School District #8	
Enfield	Regional School District #9	
Essex	Regional School District #10	
Fairfield	Regional School District #12	
Farmington	Regional School District #13	
Gilbert School	Regional School District #15	
Granby	Regional School District #16	
Griswold	Regional School District #17	
Groton	Regional School District #18	
Guilford	Ridgefield	
Hampton	Rocky Hill	
Hartford	Salem	
Hartland	Salisbury	
Hebron	Scotland	
Kent	Sharon	
Ledyard	Sherman	
Manchester	Somers	
Marlborough	Southington	

Note: The number of towns listed is greater than 119 because one returned form could not be used and another response was on behalf of more than one district.

APPENDIX B. Summary of Statutory Requirements For Paraprofessionals In Other States

<i>STATE</i>	<i>Designation</i>	<i>Issuing Entity</i>	<i>Requirements</i>
Delaware	Permit (Title I Paraeducator, Instructional Paraeducator, or Service Paraeducator)	Department of Education	high school diploma; can renew with 15 hours of professional development
Georgia	Certificate	Professional Standards Commission	high school diploma and satisfy federal requirements appropriate to designated position; can renew if still employed by Georgia school system and have six hours college work, 10 Georgia Professional Learning Units, or 10 continuing ed units
Illinois	Statement of Approval	State Board of Education in consultation with State Teacher Certification Board	good character, U.S. citizen or legally present, free from communicable disease, and high school diploma PLUS for teacher aide: 30 hours college, complete approved training program, pass ParaPro test or Work Keys test (with classroom performance evaluated); if under Title I, meet that standard
Iowa	Certificate (Paraeducator Generalist, optional area of concentration, and Advanced)	Board of Educational Examiners	high school diploma, 18 years old, not convicted of child or sex abuse or felony, and 90 hours training in specified areas; if completed paraeducator program, recommendation from official
Maine	Authorization (Educational Technician I, II, or III)	Department of Education	good moral character, 18 years old, criminal record check, and high school diploma (Tech I), 60 college credits or two years relevant paid experience (Tech II), 90 college credits or three years relevant paid experience (Tech III)
Minnesota	Credential	Board of Teaching	high school diploma PLUS two years of college, associate's degree or higher, or pass statewide assessment
New Hampshire	Certification [optional]	Department of Education	Title I requirements; can renew with recommendation from superintendent and 50 hours continuing education
New Mexico	License (Educational Assistant I, II, III, or IV)	Public Education Department	high school diploma, 18 years old, and completion of orientation session pertinent to assignment (Level I) PLUS two years experience (Level II), 48 hours college and passing score on state designated test (Level III), associate's degree (Level IV)
New York	License (temporary) Certificate (continuing, Teaching Assistant I, II, or III)	State Education Department - Office of Higher Education	high school diploma PLUS training/experience appropriate to position ("license"), six hours college and one year experience (continuing certificate), satisfactory score on NY state assessment of teaching assistant skills (Level I), six hours college and NY assessment (Level II), 18 hours college, NY assessment, and one year at Levels I or II (Level III)
North Dakota	Certificate of Completion (serve students w/disabilities)	Department of Public Instruction	20 hours of in-service training within one year of employment; if under Title I, meet that standard
Ohio	Permit	State Board of Education	good character, high school diploma, and employer recommendation; if under Title I, meet that standard
Oklahoma	Credential	State Board of Education	high school diploma, criminal record check, and state-approved career development program; if under Title I, meet that standard
Oregon	Requirements	--	moral character and high school diploma or such knowledge/experience determined sufficient by local superintendent
Rhode Island	Qualified	Department of Education	good character, high school diploma PLUS two years college, associate's degree, or pass state/local assessment
South Dakota	Requirements	Department of Education	high school diploma PLUS two years college, associate's degree, or pass state/local assessment
Texas	Certificate (Educational Aide I, II, or III)	State Board for Educator Certification	high school diploma and experience working with students/parents (Level I) PLUS two years at Level I, 15 hours college, or demonstrated proficiency in specialized skill area (Level II), three years at Level I/II or 30 hours college (Level III)
West Virginia	Certificate	Department of Education	high school diploma, 18 years old, one year experience, and 36 hours of post-secondary education

Source of data: Education Commission of the States, "50-State Scan of Instructional Paraprofessional Certification Requirements," Updated July 2006.