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STUDY SCOPE

School Paraprofessionals Staffing

Focus

This study will focus on instructional paraprofessional staffing policies and practices in Connecticut K-12 public schools. In particular, the study will describe the range of responsibilities paraprofessionals are hired to perform and examine how the number and use of paraprofessionals has changed recently.

Background

Within K-12 schools, employees who are not certified staff perform a variety of duties that directly and indirectly involve students. Over one-third of all non-certified school employees perform instructional functions, including assisting with classroom management, providing instructional support services, one-on-one tutoring, acting as a translator, and assisting in computer labs, libraries, and media centers. The non-certified individuals who perform these instructional duties are commonly called paraprofessionals, but are also given a variety of titles, including paraeducator, teachers' aide, instructional aide, school aide, teaching assistant, and tutor. This study concerns solely those paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities.

According to the State Department of Education (SDE), in October 2011 there were 14,111 full-time equivalent (FTE) instructional paraprofessional positions in Connecticut, a 14 percent increase from the level in 2002. However, all of that growth happened between 2002 and 2007, as the amount of FTE paraprofessional positions remained stagnant from 2007 to 2011. The number of certified teachers also has remained relatively flat over the same time period, resulting in little change in the ratio of certified teachers to paraprofessional.

Paraprofessionals are not certified in the state, and only a subset of the group (i.e., those paid for with specific types of federal funds) is subject to federal requirements. Some states have developed paraprofessional education and training requirements, but the details vary considerably and, in some cases, only apply to paraprofessionals working in special education. In 2006, PRI conducted a study of paraprofessional education and training standards. A key PRI recommendation that SDE develop a state-issued credential for paraprofessionals with instructional responsibilities working in Connecticut's K-12 public schools was not adopted by the legislature. However, since the study's conclusion, SDE finalized guidelines for paraprofessional training and support, which include information regarding paraprofessional hiring and use. Still, employment requirements, job responsibilities, and staffing levels may differ between school districts in the state.

Areas of Analysis

1. Determine the scope of instructional paraprofessional job responsibilities in Connecticut.
 - a. Compare paraprofessional job responsibilities across school districts.
 - b. Examine paraprofessional responsibilities described in student individualized education programs (IEPs).
2. Analyze trends in the overall number of paraprofessionals employed in public school districts statewide; compare with the number of certified teachers.
 - a. Identify trends in types of paraprofessional employment (e.g., special education, tutoring).
3. Review hiring, training, and professional development practices for various paraprofessional roles including comparisons to federal requirements, Connecticut guidelines, and the range of district standards.
4. Examine how paraprofessional staffing levels are determined by districts.
 - a. Describe the interaction between certified teachers and instructional paraprofessionals.
5. Determine the frequency or duration of common responsibilities and the number of different responsibilities a single paraprofessional may routinely perform.
 - a. Compare time spent within and outside of paraprofessional job responsibilities.
6. Review the State Department of Education's role in regulating paraprofessional use.
 - a. Describe the state's monitoring of paraprofessional use and the alignment of district practices with state use guidelines.
7. Identify ways to measure the impact of paraprofessionals on individual, classroom, school, and/or district outcomes using an RBA approach.

Areas Not Under Review

The focus of this study is on paraprofessionals working in K-12 settings. This study will not examine non-instructional paraprofessionals or paraprofessionals working in early childhood settings.

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