

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS REGARDING PARAPROFESSIONALS REQUIREMENTS

22 PA Code Chapter 14.105 Personnel
July 1, 2008

Please Note: The term “public entity” is used in this document and includes school districts, intermediate units and Mutually Agreed Upon Written Agreements (MAWA) Agencies.

Questions and Answers Regarding 20 hours of Staff Development

1. When does the 20 hour staff development requirement begin?

Twenty hours of staff development would be required between July 1, 2008 and June 30, 2009, and each school year thereafter while the individual is employed in the role of paraprofessional.

2. Are public entities expected to offer the 20 hours of staff development that is required for instructional paraprofessionals and personal care assistants?

The intent is for the public entity which employs the paraprofessionals to be responsible for providing the 20 hours of staff development on an annual basis; because the training must be “related to the assignment,” the employing agency is best suited to ensure the training will be relevant to the assignment.

3. Must each school district and other public entity provide the training directly? Will PDE offer staff development through PaTTAN for paraprofessionals to meet the 20 hour requirement?

The decision on who will provide the staff development to paraprofessionals is a matter for local discretion. There are a number of options an employer may utilize to provide this professional development, including arranging for intermediate units or other consortiums to provide the staff development or participation in appropriate PaTTAN staff development offerings. Additionally, PDE via PaTTAN, will continue to offer staff development for paraprofessionals. These programs have been, and will continue to be, developed to assist employers in providing high quality staff development to paraprofessionals.

4. Will a statewide record-keeping system be organized for tracking the 20 hours of staff development, or will this be a local responsibility? Will paraprofessionals show documentation of 20 hours to the state or to the employer?

There will not be a statewide tracking system of the 20 hour staff development requirement. The public entity which employs the paraprofessional will need to set up a system to track the hours during 2008/09 and each school year thereafter. The paraprofessional will be required to show documentation of 20 hours to the employing public entity annually.

5. Will meetings to coordinate ACCESS paperwork and learn the documentation process be considered appropriate professional development hours for personal care assistants for this 20-hour requirement?

No, the time spent in training on paperwork and documentation does not fall within the intent of the requirement for 20 hours of staff development related to the assignment. However, time spent in training in CPR and First Aid, as required by the School-Based ACCESS Program, are appropriate for this requirement.

6. Must the public entity receive state level approval of the staff development to be offered?

No. However, the public entity is to include in its special education plan or Early Intervention Training Plan the activities to address the staff development requirement. The Department of Education will define the format and content for the plan.

7. How will PDE address the issue of paraprofessionals who are instructional or personal care aides who stop working for reasons such as military service, maternity/child bearing or child rearing leave, disability or long term illness?

Beginning with the 2008/09 school year, the 20 hours must be met by individuals who are employed in the role of instructional paraprofessional, personal care assistant and educational interpreter for that year. If, for an entire school year, an individual is not employed/working in this role, for example, when the individual takes a one year leave of absence for military service or child rearing leave, the individual would not be required to show evidence of meeting the 20 hour requirement for that school year.

8. Does the 20 hour staff development requirement apply to substitute paraprofessionals?

Whether the requirement for 20 hours of staff development applies to substitute paraprofessionals is a matter of local discretion. However, PDE encourages that consideration be given to the length of time for which the person is substituting in making this determination.

9. Does the 20 hour staff development requirement apply to instructional paraprofessionals and personal care assistants who:

- **Work in a special education classroom or Early Intervention program?** – Yes
- **Provide one-to-one or other specific assistance in accordance with an IEP (in a general education classroom or preschool, special education or Early Intervention classroom or community-based setting)?** – Yes
- **Work in a general education classroom or preschool with both regular and special education students?** – No, unless specifically identified with a special education assignment

This requirement was not intended for, and does not apply to, individuals whose role is to serve in a general education classroom with both regular and special education students, and who do not have any specific duties delineated in students' IEPs. If such individuals fall into the category of Title I paraprofessionals, the Title I requirements would apply.

Questions and Answers Regarding Qualifications (and “Rigorous Standard of Quality as Demonstrated through a State or Local Assessment”)

1. Will the state or local assessment be more than a test? If so, give examples. Will the credential program offered by PDE via PaTTAN satisfy the requirements?

The current Pennsylvania Special Education Paraeducator Credential of Competency will satisfy the requirement. It is based on ten performance-based standards identified by The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) as necessary for a special education paraeducator to know or be able to do in order to work effectively with students in special education programs. PDE has endorsed the use of these ten CEC performance-based standards and their corresponding required knowledge and skills, as they define the basic content for the initial preparation and practice of special education paraeducators. Training covers a broad range of topics, such as the special education process, including assessment and progress monitoring, supporting the use of assistive technology in the classroom, effective behavior management and supporting students in inclusive settings.

The performance-based standards include statements of the knowledge and skills needed by paraeducators to work successfully in educational environments. Any “rigorous standard of quality as demonstrated through a state or local assessment” should at a minimum address the 10 standards (below). If the employing entity uses a local assessment, it is to be based on the 10 standards and reflected in the entity’s Special Education Plan or Early Intervention Training Plan. No specific approval from PDE is needed for the local assessment.

- Standard # 1: Foundations of Special Education
- Standard # 2: Development and Characteristics of Learners
- Standard # 3: Individual Learning Differences
- Standard # 4: Instructional Strategies
- Standard # 5: Learning Environments & Social Interactions
- Standard # 6: Language
- Standard # 7: Instructional Planning
- Standard # 8: Assessment
- Standard # 9: Professional & Ethical Practice
- Standard # 10: Collaboration

These rigorous standards of quality, as demonstrated through a state or local assessment, are detailed in the materials and resources available on the PaTTAN website, and may be accessed at www.pattan.net

- 2. How does PDE plan to address paraprofessionals moving in from out of state? What if an individual passed some sort of requirement in another state; will there be reciprocity?**

This is a matter for local discretion and will not be addressed by the Department. The local public entity would have discretion to determine whether previous training would count toward the 20 hour staff development requirement, and whether previous credits or credentials would meet the “rigorous standard.”

- 3. Do the paraprofessional qualifications apply to substitute paraprofessionals? If so, what is their timeline?**

This is a matter of local discretion; however PDE will encourage local entities to consider the length of time for which the person is substituting in making this determination.

- 4. When a school district or other public entity uses different terminology and job titles than those described in the regulations, do the regulations apply to those different names and titles?**

Districts, staff and other public entities should not rely on their own specific titles, but compare what the individual does in the position to the definitions of instructional paraprofessional and personal care assistant, as outlined in Section 14.105. Individuals whose job descriptions match those definitions must satisfy the requirements.

- 5. Must every instructional paraprofessional have completed two years of post secondary education by 2010?**

By July 1, 2010, there is an option to (1) take two years of post secondary education or (2) complete an Associate’s Degree or (3) Meet a rigorous standard of quality as demonstrated through a state or local assessment. PDE has determined that 48 credit hours would constitute two years of post secondary education as described in Section 14.105.