
Education Committee

HB 1115

Brief Description: Concerning paraeducators.

Sponsors: Representatives Bergquist, Muri, Ortiz-Self, Harris, Stanford, Stambaugh, Gregerson and Kilduff.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Adopts statewide minimum employee standards for paraeducators.
- Establishes a paraeducator board to administer policies and rules for paraeducator preparation, certification, and endorsement, including training and renewal.
- Provides for volunteer school districts to field test new paraeducator programs.
- Requires implementation of the paraeducator certification, and special education and English language learner endorsement, programs by September 1, 2019.
- Requires the Professional Educator Standards Board to design and implement a training program for teachers and principals as it relates to their role working with paraeducators.
- Requires the development of an advanced paraeducator endorsement, training modules, and renewal process by September 1, 2019.
- Adds new standards to the paraeducator associate of arts degree and apprenticeship program requirements.
- Requires a study on the effectiveness of paraeducators in improving student outcomes.

Hearing Date: 1/26/17

Staff: Megan Wargacki (786-7194).

Background:

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Paraeducators. Paraeducators work under the supervision of teachers to provide various levels of support, including performing instructional duties, assisting with classroom management, and acting as translator. The federal Every Student Succeeds Act, enacted in December 2015, directs the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) to develop minimum state standards that must be met by paraeducators who work in Title I, part A programs, which provide financial assistance to schools and school districts with high numbers of children from low-income families. Until the new standards are developed, the OSPI will continue to apply the federal paraeducator requirements used under the prior federal law. Prior federal law required paraeducators to have a high school diploma or equivalent, and complete one of the following tasks:

- complete two years of study at an institution of higher education;
- earn an associate degree or higher;
- pass an assessment that measures skills and content knowledge related to reading, writing and math; or
- complete a Washington paraeducator portfolio or apprenticeship program.

Individual school districts may require more education or higher credentials than are required by state or federal laws.

Community and technical colleges (CTCs) may offer paraeducator degree programs, apprenticeship programs, or certificate programs.

Paraeducator Standards Work Group. In 2014 the Legislature directed the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to convene the Paraeducator Standards Work Group (Work Group) to design program specific minimum employment standards for paraeducators, professional development and education opportunities that support the standards, a paraeducator career ladder, an articulated pathway for teacher preparation and certification, and teacher professional development on how to maximize the use of paraeducators in the classroom.

The Work Group submitted its first report to the Legislature in December 2014, recommending the following:

- appropriate minimum employment standards and professional development opportunities for paraeducators who work in English language learner (ELL) programs, transitional bilingual instruction programs, federal limited English proficiency programs, the learning assistance program (LAP), and the federal disadvantaged program;
- a career ladder that encourages paraeducators to pursue advanced education and professional development;
- an articulated pathway for teacher preparation; and
- professional development for certificated employees that focuses on maximizing the success of paraeducators in the classroom.

On January 10, 2016, the Work Group submitted its final report to the Legislature, additionally recommending:

- foundational employment standards for basic education paraeducators, and specialized standards for paraeducators who work in ELL and special education programs;
- a standard definition of paraeducator;
- a permanent paraeducator advisory board under the OSPI;

- a paraeducator professional development system and certificate of completion for ELL and special education endorsements;
- a cost effective statewide tracking system to support required coursework completed by paraeducators;
- certification renewal every five years that includes minimal cost professional development available via multiple pathways;
- a template for a paraeducator handbook for school districts;
- educator training that incorporates appropriate and effective use of paraeducators; and
- professional development for certificated employees that focuses on effective planning, collaboration, and supervision of paraeducators.

E-certification. Educators can apply or renew a Washington teaching certificate online through the OSPI's E-Certification application. E-Certification provides application services for state teachers, administrators, educational staff associates, and career and technical educators.

Washington State Institute for Public Policy. The Legislature created the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP) in 1983 to conduct non-partisan research at the direction of the Legislature or the WSIPP's Board of Directors. The WSIPP's Board of Directors is made up of sixteen members that represent the Legislature, Governor, and public universities.

Summary of Bill:

Definition of Paraeducator. A paraeducator means a classified school district employee who works under the supervision of a certificated or licensed staff member to support and assist in providing instructional services to students and their families. Paraeducators are not considered certificated instructional staff.

Minimum Employment Standards for Paraeducators. Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, effective September 1, 2017, the minimum employment standards for paraeducators working in a special education program, basic education program, LAP, federal disadvantaged program, and ELL programs require that the paraeducator:

- be at least age 18, hold a high school diploma or equivalent, and have received a passing grade on the Education Testing Service's Paraeducator Assessment;
- hold an Associate of Arts degree; or
- have earned 72 quarter credits or 48 semester credits at an institution of higher education; or
- have completed a registered apprenticeship program.

Paraeducator Board Established. By September 1, 2017, a paraeducator board (Board) must be established to administer policies and rules for the preparation and certification of paraeducators who work in special education, basic education, LAP, the federal disadvantaged program, ELL programs, the paraeducator career ladder, or the pathway to teacher certification, subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature.

The Board must be composed of a paraeducator, a teacher, a principal, a parent whose child receives instructional support from a paraeducator, a representative of a community and technical college, a representative of an institutions of higher education, and a nonvoting facilitator from the OSPI. The OSPI must be the administrator of the Board.

Piloting of Paraeducator Certificate and Endorsements. Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, the Board must distribute grants in the 2018-19 school year to districts that volunteer to field test the implementation of the paraeducator certificate, and the special education and ELL endorsement for paraeducators.

Paraeducator Certificate. Beginning September 1, 2019, subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, all school districts must implement paraeducator certification for paraeducators working in the special education, basic education, LAP, the federal disadvantaged program, or the ELL program. Paraeducators have three years to acquire certification.

Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, the Board must adopt certification standards, including supporting instructional opportunities, demonstrating professionalism and ethical practices, supporting a safe and positive learning environment, communicating effectively and participating in the team process, and demonstrating cultural competence aligned with the standards developed by the PESB. The Board must develop competency-based testing to allow paraeducators to use their prior experience or training to meet paraeducator standards.

Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, the Board must also develop a training practicum and ensure that paraeducators have multiple methods to access certification training. The Board may establish the paraeducator certification fees. However, the Board must adapt the current teacher E-Certification process to be used for the paraeducator certification.

The OSPI must be provided with the funds necessary to administer the Board, and the paraeducator certificates and endorsements. The OSPI must also charge an application processing fee for paraeducator certificates and subsequent actions, which must be sufficient to defray the costs of administering the paraeducator certification program.

Paraeducator Special Education and English Language Learner Endorsements. Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, beginning September 1, 2019, paraeducators working in special education and ELL programs must obtain a paraeducator special education or ELL endorsement within three years. The Board may adopt rules to implement the endorsement and training standards, and must ensure that training is made available to paraeducators by multiple means that will limit cost and improve access.

Advanced Paraeducator Endorsement. Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, by September 1, 2019, the Board must develop rules for an Advanced Paraeducator Endorsement, training modules, and a renewal process. The rules must include provisions that allow advanced paraeducator endorsement-holders to replace a teacher for a short time in districts that experience difficulty finding substitute teachers. The responsibilities of an advanced paraeducator are specified as mentoring or coaching other paraeducators, assisting in highly impacted classrooms, providing short-term substitution, and assisting in specific specialized instructional support and technology applications.

Paraeducator Endorsement and Certificate Renewal. Paraeducators must renew their certificate or necessary endorsements every five years by completing the clock hours determined by the Board. The Board may develop training modules and ensure that clock hour training is available by multiple means that will limit cost and improve access.

Teacher and Principal Training. Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, the PESB must design and implement a training program for teachers and principals on how to direct a paraeducator working with students, and how to supervise and evaluate paraeducators.

Paraeducator Certificate or Degree Requirements. Paraeducator Associate of Arts degree, certificate, and apprenticeship programs at CTCs must include training in the minimum paraeducator certification standards, subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature.

Study on the Effectiveness of Paraeducators. Subject to funding appropriated by the Legislature, the WSIPP must conduct a study on the effectiveness of paraeducators in improving student outcomes in Washington, and nationally. The study must examine variations in the use of paraeducators across schools and districts, and analyze whether any differences in academic progress can be attributed to the use of paraeducators.

The OSPI and the Education Research and Data Center must provide the data necessary to conduct the analysis. The WSIPP must submit a final report to the Legislature by December 15, 2017.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill takes effect 90 days after adjournment of the session in which the bill is passed.