

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6082

As of January 24, 2024

Title: An act relating to increasing compensation for Washington paraeducators.

Brief Description: Increasing compensation for Washington paraeducators.

Sponsors: Senators Nobles, Wellman, Kuderer, Lias, Lovick, Mullet, Pedersen, Randall, Saldaña, Stanford, Valdez and Wilson, C.; by request of Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/24/24.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Increases the state allocation for paraeducator salaries to provide an additional average of \$7 per hour per full-time equivalent.
- Specifies that the allocation must be adjusted by the same inflationary increases given to certificated educators and by the regional differences in the cost of hiring staff.
- Establishes minimum hourly wages for paraeducators based on training and certification, with staggered starting dates for each grouping.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Benjamin Omdal (786-7442)

Background: Paraeducators. Paraeducators provide instructional services to students while working under the direct supervision of instructional certificated staff. These services can include direct instruction of children in small and large groups, individualized instruction, testing of children, recordkeeping, and preparation of materials. Paraeducators are categorized under Washington law as classified instructional employees.

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

Federal law generally requires that paraeducators who work in programs supported by certain federal funds have a high school diploma or its equivalent and either:

- have completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education;
- hold an associate's or higher degree; or
- meet a rigorous standard of quality, and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Under state law, paraeducators must be at least 18 years of age and hold a high school diploma or its equivalent. Paraeducators must either:

- have received a passing score on one of the assessments approved by the Paraeducator Board;
- hold an associate of arts degree;
- have earned 72 quarter credits or 48 semester credits at an institution of higher education; or
- have completed a registered apprenticeship program.

Paraeducator Fundamental Course of Study. The paraeducator fundamental course of study (FCS) is a four-day course on the state paraeducator standards of practice. School districts must provide the FCS to paraeducators who have not completed the course, either in the district or in another district within the state.

At least one day of the FCS must be provided in person. School districts must use best efforts to provide the course before the paraeducator begins to work with students and their families.

School districts are only required to provide to paraeducators the number of days of the FCS for which state funding is specifically provided. Since the 2019-20 school year, the state has appropriated funding for school districts to provide two days of the FCS each year.

Summary of Bill: State Allocation for Paraeducator Salaries. Beginning in the 2024-25 school year, the state allocation for paraeducator salaries is increased to provide an additional statewide average of \$7 per hour per full-time equivalent (FTE) paraeducator hired by school districts as reported in the 2022-23 school year. The statewide allocation for paraeducator salaries must be adjusted by the same inflationary increases provided to certificated educators and for regional differences in the cost of hiring staff in the same manner as certificated educators.

For school districts who receive additional funding a school district's average ratio of FTE-paraeducators-to-students may not be less than the average ratio from the 2018-19 school year.

The Superintendent of Public Instruction may grant waivers to paraeducator-to-student ratio

requirements on the basis that a school district is at risk of entering into binding conditions, has experience double levy failure, or is found to be in significant financial distress.

Minimum Hourly Wages for Paraeducators. Minimum hourly wages for paraeducators are set as follows, to be adjusted for regional differences in the cost of hiring staff:

- paraeducators who have completed the fundamental course of study: \$22.69 per hour—beginning in the 2026-27 school year;
- paraeducators with a valid general paraeducator certificate: \$29.12 per hour—beginning in the 2027-28 school year; and
- paraeducators with a subject matter certificate, advanced paraeducator certificate, or certified behavior technician credential: \$35.56 per hour—beginning in the 2028-29 school year.

Minimum salary requirements are to apply to all paraeducators regardless of full-time or part-time employment status.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: Paraeducators are a valuable part of our K-12 education system and should be supported by the Legislature. Compensation for many paraeducators are not livable wages. This bill would result in the retention of more paraeducators and allow them to work in the communities in which they live. Paraeducators are the tutoring workforce for our state, but over a five-year period there has been 48 percent turnover. An investment must be made for wages to remain competitive with similar occupations. Paraeducators are crucial in children's education but are underpaid. The last few years, paraeducators have felt the whiplash of increasing cost-of-living. Some paraeducators stretch every dollar but are still unable to make ends meet. Paraeducators are critical for students with disabilities and can bring diverse perspectives to students. Paraeducators do things for students that others are not willing to do, especially for students with disabilities. One-on-one paraeducators are able to break things down for students with learning struggles and give students the skills to be able to educate themselves. Experienced paraeducators have left their jobs not because they don't love their work but because they cannot afford to live with paraeducator salaries. Paraeducators are stuck at a crossroads of staying with a job they love versus being able to afford living costs.

CON: The bill is the wrong approach for investing in paraeducators, in particular the required ratios for paraeducators. Set ratios would reduce district flexibility. A better approach would be to increase funding through the prototypical school funding model.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Senator T'wina Nobles, Prime Sponsor; Julie Salvi, Washington Education Association; Chris Reykdal, Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI); Davina Diaz; Bay Knight; Leslie Maxwell; Leonardo Salas Ramos; Mahad Dahir, Open Doors for Multicultural Families; Khalid Sirad, Open Doors for Multicultural Families; Christy Tautfest, paraeducator, Marysville Schools.

CON: Dan Steele, WA Assn of School Administrators & WA Assn of School Business Officials.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.