



# *ECS Policy Brief*

## From Highly Qualified to Highly Competent Paraprofessionals: How NCLB Requirements Can Catalyze Effective Program and Policy Development

### Guidelines from the ECS Paraprofessional Expert Panel

**Education Commission**

**of the States**

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*What does it mean to be a paraprofessional? What are the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and do they apply to all paraprofessionals? Does meeting NCLB requirements mean a paraprofessional is highly qualified? Does highly qualified mean highly competent? What programs can a district or state adopt to ensure their paraprofessionals are both highly qualified and highly competent?*

## INTRODUCTION

With the support of the National Center for Teacher Transformation (NCTT) based in St. Petersburg, Florida, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) invited distinguished professionals in multiple facets of the paraprofessional field to address these important questions and issues.<sup>1</sup> These individuals convened as an expert panel on paraprofessionals in late September 2005 to address the challenges states are facing and must face in the near future. The outcome of this meeting included suggestions for how districts and states can use the NCLB paraprofessional requirements to encourage effective policies and programs that will not only promote competency but also increase effectiveness in the classroom. This online policy brief presents a wealth of information on the subject of paraprofessionals, including a statement of NCLB requirements, a discussion and recommendations about the need to define paraprofessional roles, an outline of the knowledge and skills required for these roles, and the importance of providing professional development and a career ladder. This brief is intended to help policymakers understand the issues states face in helping paraprofessionals not only meet NCLB requirements and become “highly qualified,”<sup>2</sup> but highly competent as well.

## BACKGROUND

Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, the quality of paraprofessionals has become an important issue for states. The act outlined a set of federal standards for paraprofessionals who have instructional duties in the nation’s highest-poverty schools. All states are working toward meeting, and in some cases exceeding, the federal qualification requirements for paraprofessionals. This section outlines the individuals or entities to whom the requirements apply, the requirements specified by the NCLB Act and how states are responding.

### *In this Report:*

<b>Background</b>	1
NCLB Clarifications and Definition for Instructional Paraprofessional – Do the Requirements Apply to All Paraprofessionals?	2
NCLB Requirements for Paraprofessionals	2
What States Are Doing in Response to the Requirements	2
Additional Resources	3
<b>The Expert Panel’s Charge</b>	3
Going from Highly Qualified to Highly Competent	3
Recommendations To Help Your District or State Develop Effective Policies and Programs	4
Link Defined Roles with Knowledge and Skill Requirements	5
Proving Knowledge and Skills – Providing Various Ways Paraprofessionals Can Demonstrate They Are Highly Qualified and Highly Competent	7
How To Encourage Knowledge and Skill Acquisition To Meet Both Paraprofessional and School Needs – Creating Professional Development Options	7
Tie Knowledge and Skills to a Larger Career Lattice	8
<b>Stakeholders</b>	9
Overall Paraprofessional Expert Panel Recommendations	11
Additional Resources	11
<b>Funding</b>	13
<b>Conclusion</b>	13
<b>Paraprofessional Expert Panel Members</b>	13
<b>Endnotes</b>	14

### *Acknowledgments*

*The Education Commission of the States would like to thank the National Center for Teacher Transformation for their generous support of this work, and the members of the Paraprofessional Expert Panel for their energy and thoughtfulness in helping define the issues and opportunities addressed in this paper.*

## NCLB Clarifications and Definition for Instructional Paraprofessionals – Do the Requirements Apply to All Paraprofessionals?

In short, the answer is no. For the purposes of Title I, Part A, a paraprofessional is an employee of a local education agency who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds. Paraprofessionals who provide instructional support include those who:

1. Provide one-on-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher
2. Assist with classroom management, such as by organizing instructional materials
3. Provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory
4. Conduct parental involvement activities
5. Provide instructional support in a library or media center
6. Act as a translator
7. Provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher [Title I, Section 1119 (g)(2)].

Individuals who work in food services and similar positions are not considered paraprofessionals under Title I, Part A, and therefore are not subject to the requirements.<sup>3</sup>

### NCLB Requirements for Paraprofessionals<sup>4</sup>

New Paraprofessionals	Existing Paraprofessionals
<p>IN GENERAL – Each local education agency receiving assistance under Title I, Part A shall ensure all paraprofessionals hired after the date of enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 and working in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds shall have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education; or</li> <li>❖ Obtained an associate’s (or higher) degree; or</li> <li>❖ Met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing and mathematics; or</i></li> <li>• <i>knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness and mathematics readiness as appropriate.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Each local education agency receiving assistance under Title I, Part A shall ensure all paraprofessionals hired before the date of enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 meet the following requirements no later than the end of the 2005-06 school year:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education; or</li> <li>❖ Obtained an associate’s (or higher) degree; or</li> <li>❖ Met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing and mathematics; or</i></li> <li>• <i>knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness and mathematics readiness as appropriate.</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul>
General Requirements for all Paraprofessionals	
<p>Each local education agency receiving assistance under Title I, Part A shall ensure all paraprofessionals working in a program supported with funds under this part, regardless of the paraprofessional’s hiring date, have earned a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent.</p>	

### What Are States Doing in Response to the Requirements?

The NCLB Act requires that instructional paraprofessionals employed in Title I, Part A-funded schools become highly qualified by the end of the 2005-06 school year.<sup>5</sup> According to recent research intended to gauge the progress of states in fulfilling this requirement before the deadline, there is reason to be cautious. Several reports have outlined the extent to which states are on track in meeting the deadline as well as their efforts to do so. (Please see the link to the ECS Online Interactive Professional Database and the link to the American Federation of Teacher’s Paraprofessional Web site in the Additional Resources section on the next page). The deadline for Title I instructional paraprofessionals to become highly qualified is fast approaching; and for those individuals who have not already invested time and energy into meeting the federal requirements through postsecondary education, options are now limited.

At this point, the most feasible option for states to ensure NCLB requirements have been met is to have existing paraprofessionals pass a local- or state-approved assessment. The most popular assessment test among the states is the ETS Parapro. Information on this and other assessment options approved and in use by states is available through the ECS Online Interactive Paraprofessional Database.

### **Additional Resources:**

- ❖ ***ECS Online Interactive Paraprofessional Database*** –  
*provides 50-state information on numbers of paraprofessionals, efforts to meet NCLB requirements, and professional development programs.*  
[www.ecs.org/ParaprofessionalDatabase](http://www.ecs.org/ParaprofessionalDatabase)
- ❖ ***ECS Issue Brief Instructional Paraprofessional Statistics and Trends*** –  
*provides highlights of the online interactive paraprofessional database.*  
[www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/63/52/6352.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/63/52/6352.pdf)
- ❖ ***ECS Paraprofessional Policy Brief Training for Paraprofessionals: The Community College Role*** –  
*provides an overview of the NCLB requirements, how paraprofessionals can meet the requirements and how states can meet the deadline.*  
[www.communitycollegetpolicy.org/html/toolkit/downloads/paraprofessionals.pdf](http://www.communitycollegetpolicy.org/html/toolkit/downloads/paraprofessionals.pdf)
- ❖ ***Community College Teacher Preparation Toolkit*** –  
*provides background information, quick facts, policy suggestions and additional resources on the issues of associate degrees, credentialing and licensing, and testing paraprofessionals at the community college level.*  
[www.communitycollegetpolicy.org/html/toolkit/paraprofessionals/default.asp](http://www.communitycollegetpolicy.org/html/toolkit/paraprofessionals/default.asp)
- ❖ ***U.S. Department of Education, No Child Left Behind Web site*** –  
*provides the legislation, updates and additional information.*  
[www.ed.gov/nclb/](http://www.ed.gov/nclb/)
- ❖ ***American Federation of Teachers, Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel*** –  
*provides information and resources on paraprofessional standards and certification, and access to state-level paraprofessional certification.*  
[www.aft.org/psrp/](http://www.aft.org/psrp/)
- ❖ ***National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals*** –  
*provides a great deal of information for paraprofessionals as well as for state and district administrators on skills standards and program development.*  
<http://www.nrcpara.org/resources/>

## THE EXPERT PANEL'S CHARGE

### Going from Highly Qualified to Highly Competent

The value of paraprofessionals was first recognized in the 1950s when there was a teacher shortage and aides performed clerical and student monitoring duties so teachers could spend more time on instruction. As class sizes and teachers' duties increased, so did those of paraprofessionals, while their education requirements and qualifications largely stayed the same.

NCLB brought new attention to paraprofessional roles, their varying duties and necessary qualifications. NCLB requirements, however, do not address the specific knowledge and skill sets needed for the different roles that paraprofessionals play. However NCLB does provide the opportunity for states to use the highly qualified requirement as basis for developing a program that ensures paraprofessionals in instructional roles are also highly competent. The federal legislation also permits states to clearly define roles, responsibilities, requirements and career paths for all paraprofessionals to create the best possible classroom environment.

The expert panel convened by ECS unanimously agreed that for paraprofessionals to be highly competent and an integral part of the classroom, district and states should:

1. Define the roles for paraprofessionals, and the roles of teachers and principals in their interactions with paraprofessionals
2. Define the knowledge and skill requirements for various paraprofessional roles
3. Provide paraprofessionals with ways to establish and develop knowledge and skills
4. Integrate the knowledge and skills into a larger career ladder that provides both vertical and lateral career paths.

### Recommendations To Help Your District or State Develop Effective Policies and Programs

#### *Clearly Define Roles for Paraprofessionals, Teachers and Principals*

The first step for districts and states in achieving the goal of preparing highly competent paraprofessionals is to have a clear definition of the paraprofessional's role in the classroom and the related roles of the teacher and administrator. Clear delineation of expectations and responsibilities for all educational professionals will provide a system and structure that avoids duplication and inappropriate extension or delegation of roles and responsibilities to paraprofessionals. With these definitions in place, the following desired outcomes are obtained:

- Resources are used efficiently
- Programs function with optimal effectiveness
- Learning opportunities are enhanced
- Potential for liability is limited.

#### *Examples of Paraeducator Definitions:*

**Clerical Aides/School Assistants:** School employees who primarily do clerical work such as filing, typing, copying, mailing, phone calls and scheduling appointments or meetings.

**Paraeducators:** School employees who provide instruction and related services under the direction of a professional who holds ultimate responsibility for the outcomes of the program and of the students.

**Library/Media Aides:** School employees who provide instruction on the use of the library, manage circulation, help teachers and students locate books and resource materials, literacy skills, computer skills, use of other instructional equipment.

*(From PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center Policy & Research Special Interest Group Report on Skills Standards for Paraeducators in Colorado, [www.paracenter.org/PARACenter/library/documents/Paraeducators\\_Skills\\_Standards.pdf](http://www.paracenter.org/PARACenter/library/documents/Paraeducators_Skills_Standards.pdf).)*

Additionally, it is imperative to define the various titles and positions, both laterally and developmentally, that a paraprofessional fills in the classroom. The responsibilities of a paraprofessional can range from assisting in the cafeteria, library, on the playground or in special education programs to providing interpretation and translation to non-English speakers and individualized and small group instruction. There also may be multiple levels of responsibility within some of these positions. It is crucial the responsibilities associated with each of these roles are clearly identified to better permit a match with levels of experience and types of training.

The following is an example of role definitions for paraprofessionals:

### **Expert Panel Recommendations**

#### **For Paraprofessional Role Definition:**

- ❖ Assemble stakeholders to determine role definitions for paraprofessionals.
- ❖ Ensure you have buy-in from all required stakeholders on role definitions.

Each district or state will develop its own role definitions; however, school leaders may find it useful to build on what other states have created in these efforts. Links to other examples are provided in the Additional Resources section.

### *Link Defined Roles with Knowledge and Skill Requirements*

States are encouraged to link specific knowledge and skill requirements to the specific roles that a paraprofessional can fill. This is of utmost importance and promotes the following outcomes:

- Effective training without wasted time
- Decreased funding requirements
- Increased overall value of paraprofessionals
- Clearly defined roles linked to skill requirements allows administrators to best determine who to hire
- Clear indication of effective training and appropriate professional development based on roles and subsequent needed skills.

Paraprofessionals make up their own profession with specific responsibilities and tasks. Training and professional development should be geared specifically toward these responsibilities and tasks and not simply be lumped into professional development programs intended for teachers. Assessment and training of paraprofessionals that is tied directly to knowledge and skills that a paraprofessional has and needs will increase the effectiveness of the time and money spent.

The knowledge and skills paraprofessionals need may be broken down into several categories:

- Use of student instruction methods
- Interpersonal and teamwork skills
- Behavior management skills
- General professional responsibility
- Required NCLB academic proficiencies, where appropriate.

The following are examples of knowledge and skill requirements specific to diverse paraprofessional roles. (Taken from PAR<sup>2</sup>A in Colorado, a complete list is available at: [www.paracenter.org/PARACenter/library/documents/Paraeducators\\_Skills\\_Standards.pdf](http://www.paracenter.org/PARACenter/library/documents/Paraeducators_Skills_Standards.pdf)).

Skill Group	Skills Definitions
General Instructional Techniques and Methods	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Identifies major cognitive, affective, physical and communicative milestones of typically developing children and youth</li> <li>❖ Describes the risk factors that may prohibit or impede typical development</li> <li>❖ Identifies basic styles of human learning</li> <li>❖ Portrays subject-area content accurately to students in all relevant subject areas</li> <li>❖ Demonstrates ability to follow lesson plans completely and accurately</li> <li>❖ Carries out individual adaptation plans, changing and managing materials according to plan</li> </ul>
Behavior Management/ Support Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Uses techniques that are appropriate to the social-emotional development of students</li> <li>❖ Uses rules, routines and procedures established by supervising professional(s)</li> <li>❖ Establishes rules, routines and procedures for small groups consistent with supervising professional</li> <li>❖ Demonstrates basic principals of behavior modification</li> <li>❖ Demonstrates how to observe and record behaviors for use in functional assessments</li> </ul>
Assists with Special Education Students in Education Classrooms and Other Settings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>❖ Knows special education law</li> <li>❖ Implements inclusive practices</li> <li>❖ Respects rights of students/families under special education law</li> <li>❖ Articulates the values and rationale for inclusion of students with disabilities into general education</li> <li>❖ Promotes interaction and facilitates friendships among students with and without disabilities</li> <li>❖ Fosters independence and partial participation of students in typical school settings and activities</li> </ul>

This is just one example of state definitions. Several additional examples are noted in the Additional Resources section. The goal is to articulate the necessary knowledge and skills a paraprofessional needs to perform a specific job. Clear role and skill definitions also provide the basis for authentic performance evaluation, professional development and career advancement.

### Expert Panel Recommendations

#### For Knowledge and Skill Requirements:

- ❖ Determine whether your district or state has outlined the knowledge and skills required for specific paraprofessional roles. If the knowledge and skills have not been outlined, use existing resources as a basis for developing them for your district or state (see Additional Resources section).
- ❖ Articulate the knowledge and skills required for specific paraprofessional roles to paraprofessionals, teachers, principals and district administrators in an easy-to-understand format, and ensure their accessibility to all concerned.
- ❖ Determine how the articulated knowledge and skills will be integrated into district human resources, paraprofessional job evaluations, a career lattice (if one exists or is to be created) and professional development activities.
- ❖ Examine whether paraprofessional workforce in current positions meet knowledge and skill requirements.



## *Proving Knowledge and Skills – Providing Various Ways Paraprofessionals Can Demonstrate They Are Highly Qualified and Highly Competent*

Creating effective ways for paraprofessionals to exhibit the appropriate knowledge and skills is essential to implementing a program that is both authentic and likely to lead to improved classroom outcomes. Ideally, these should not be overly labor-intensive on the part of the paraprofessional or the supervising teacher and principal, and may include the following:

- Ongoing job performance evaluation that addresses knowledge and skills
- Portfolios that exhibit knowledge and skills
- Assessments, either stand-alone or following professional development.

## *How To Encourage Knowledge and Skill Acquisition To Meet Both Paraprofessional and School Needs – Creating Professional Development Options*

A well-integrated, high-quality professional development program will help paraprofessionals develop the knowledge and skills necessary to have the greatest impact on the classroom and student success. The paraprofessional professional development curriculum must account for the increase in responsibility and autonomy as well as changing type and style of teaching. In order for programs not to be viewed as yet another requirement, the curriculum must be authentic and include the following hallmarks of quality, as taken from the NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education requirements for high quality teacher professional development programs<sup>7</sup>:

- Has the goal of improving student learning at the heart of every school endeavor
- Helps teachers and other school staff meet the future needs of students who learn in different ways and who come from diverse cultural, linguistic and socioeconomic backgrounds
- Provides adequate time for inquiry, reflection and mentoring and is an important part of the normal working day of all public school educators
- Is rigorous, sustained and adequate to the long-term change of practice
- Is directed toward teachers' intellectual development and leadership
- Fosters a deepening of subject-matter knowledge, a greater understanding of learning and a greater appreciation of students' needs
- Is designed and directed by teachers, incorporates the best principles of adult learning and involves shared decisions designed to improve the school
- Balances individual priorities with school and district needs, and advances the profession as a whole
- Makes best use of new technologies
- Is site-based and supportive of a clearly articulated vision for students.

Districts and states must consider the personal and professional circumstances of paraprofessionals when expectations for their qualifications are increased. Many paraprofessionals have families and consequently do not have additional time to invest in professional development. Additionally, there is no correlation between meeting NCLB requirements and increases in salary. With the average hourly income for a paraprofessional around \$10 per hour, states need to be aware that time and money are often scarce resources and therefore stumbling blocks for paraprofessionals when attempting to meet additional qualification requirements.<sup>6</sup> Professional development programs should be designed with recognition of time and resource restrictions.

### **Expert Panel Recommendations**

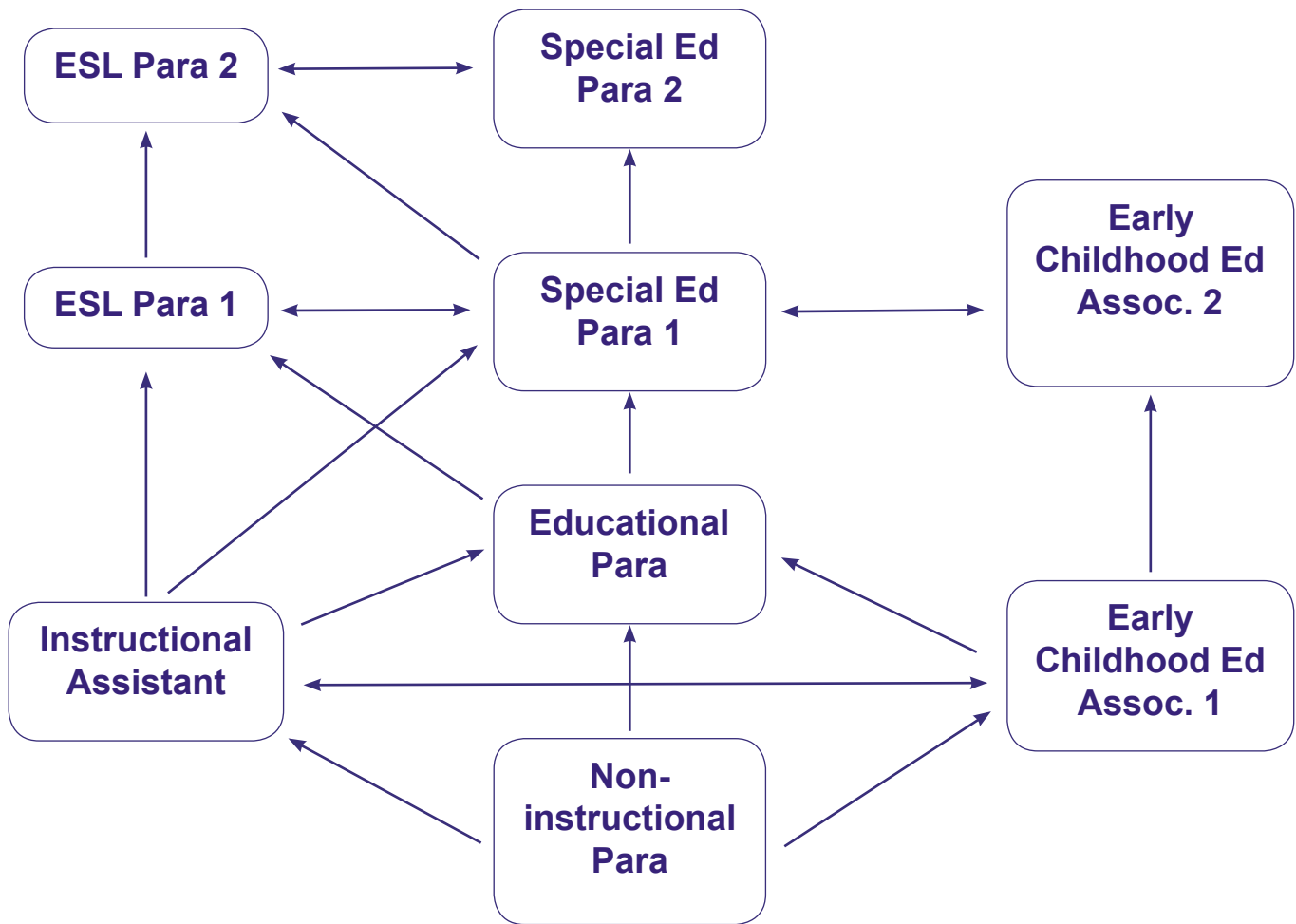
#### **For Paraprofessional Professional Development:**

- ❖ Tie professional development curriculum to knowledge and skill requirements, while being realistic of time commitments of all involved.
- ❖ Include all necessary stakeholders – paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, district administrators, unions and local professional groups – in developing programs, adopting the curriculum and implementing the professional development program.
- ❖ Provide incentives for paraprofessionals to take part in professional development.

Districts, states and schools must provide incentives for paraprofessionals to participate in professional development. Incentives can be a stipend for time spent in class, career advancement, portfolio development, or even gift certificates (for example, coffee, lunch, books, etc.). Through increased knowledge and skills, paraprofessionals can gain increased respect in the school, rise to leadership roles, have increased job security, and earn awards and scholarships. Districts and states also have the incentive to provide professional development programs to “grow their own” paraprofessionals in shortage areas such as English to Speakers of Other Languages or special education.

*Tie Knowledge and Skills to a Larger Career Lattice*

A paraprofessional career ladder must account for both horizontal (lateral) and vertical career moves. Paraprofessionals may choose to pursue teacher licensure or even higher levels of paraprofessional certification as offered in some states. Other paraprofessionals may choose a more horizontal move to a different position that requires similar responsibility levels, but perhaps different skills and knowledge. States that offer teacher licensure programs to paraprofessionals generally have found better program completion rates and graduate teacher retention rates (see ECS Paraprofessional Policy Brief and Paraeducator-to-Teacher Programs from the National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse in the Additional Resources section).



The following diagram illustrates a limited example of a career lattice. It provides for both lateral and vertical moves, although professional development and experience requirements may exist in order to make such moves. For instance, it may require one year of experience and 20 hours of professional development to move from “educational paraprofessional” to “special education paraprofessional 1,” or three years experience and 35 professional development contact hours to move from “instructional assistant” to “special education paraprofessional 1.” Similarly, a paraprofessional may require professional development



contact hours to move laterally from “special education paraprofessional 1” to “early childhood education associate 2.” Whatever moves the career lattice makes possible, an increase in responsibility, education and skills should be rewarded with incentives such as increased pay, leadership opportunities and/or job security. Some states have acted on this recommendation. For example, New Mexico has passed innovative legislation paying paraprofessionals based on their certification, which is dependent on their education and professional development history and can lead to teacher licensure. New York has a similar program to provide paraprofessionals incentives to seek additional professional development and education.

### Expert Panel Recommendations

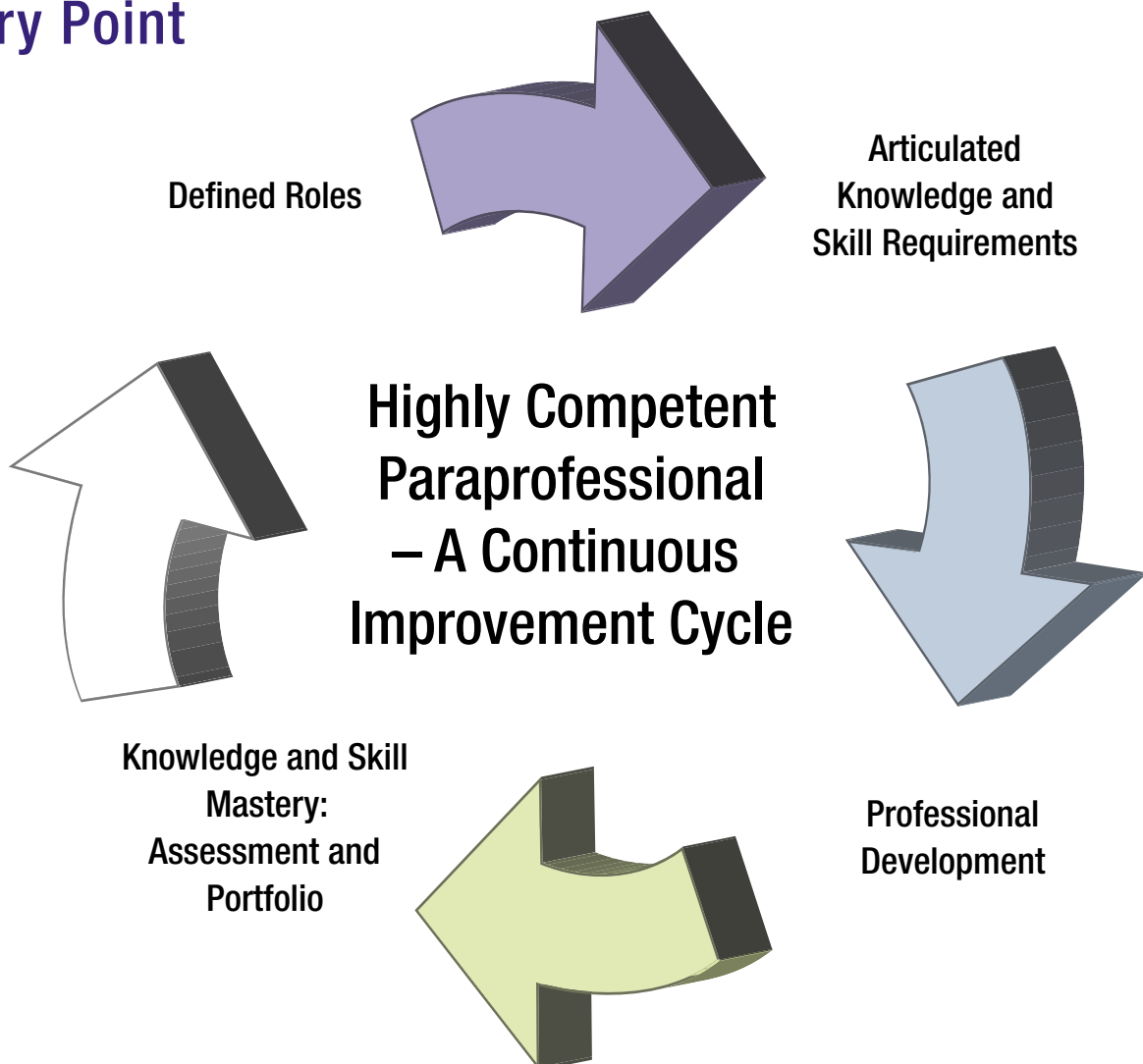
#### For a Paraprofessional Career Lattice:

- ❖ Incorporate both lateral and vertical moves on the career lattice. It must be easy to understand and articulated throughout the district or state.
- ❖ Vertical moves on the career lattice should be accompanied by increased pay, leadership opportunities and/or job security.
- ❖ All stakeholders must be involved in creating the career lattice.

As with the development of the knowledge and skills requirements and professional development programs, all stakeholders – paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, district administrators and unions – must be involved in creating and implementing the career lattice. Additionally, states must ensure the lattice and navigation of career moves within it are both articulated and transparent to paraprofessionals.

The diagram below outlines how articulating roles, knowledge and skills, plus the creation of professional development

## Entry Point



## Overall Paraprofessional Expert Panel Recommendations

### Define Roles:

- ❖ Assemble stakeholders to determine role definitions for paraprofessionals.
- ❖ Ensure you have buy-in from all required stakeholders on role definitions.

### Articulate Knowledge and Skills:

- ❖ Determine whether your district or state has outlined the knowledge and skills required for specific paraprofessional roles. If the knowledge and skills have not been outlined, use existing resources as a basis for developing them for your district or state.
- ❖ Articulate the knowledge and skills required for specific paraprofessional roles to paraprofessionals, teachers, principals and district administrators in an easy-to-understand format, and ensure their accessibility to all concerned.
- ❖ Determine how the articulated knowledge and skills will be integrated into district human resources, paraprofessional job evaluations, a career lattice (if one exists or is to be created) and professional development activities.
- ❖ Examine whether paraprofessional workforce in current positions meet knowledge and skill requirements.

### Provide Professional Development:

- ❖ Tie professional development curriculum to knowledge and skill requirements, while being realistic of time commitments of all involved.
- ❖ Include all necessary stakeholders – paraprofessionals, teachers, principals, district administrators, unions and local professional groups – in developing programs, adopting the curriculum and implementing the professional development program.
- ❖ Provide incentives for paraprofessionals to take part in professional development.

### Develop Career Lattice:

- ❖ Incorporate both lateral and vertical moves on the career lattice. It must be easy-to-understand and articulated throughout the district or state.
- ❖ Vertical moves on the career lattice should be accompanied by increased pay, leadership opportunities and/or job security.
- ❖ All stakeholders must be involved in creating the career lattice.

## Additional Resources:

- ❖ **ECS Online Interactive Paraprofessional Database** –  
*provides 50-state information on numbers of paraprofessionals, efforts to meet NCLB requirements, and professional development programs.*  
[www.ecs.org/ParaprofessionalDatabase](http://www.ecs.org/ParaprofessionalDatabase)
- ❖ **ECS Paraprofessional Issue Brief** –  
*an overview of the NCLB requirements, how paraprofessionals can meet the requirements, and how states can meet the deadline.*  
[www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/63/52/6352.pdf](http://www.ecs.org/clearinghouse/63/52/6352.pdf)
- ❖ **Community College Teacher Preparation Toolkit** –  
*background information, quick facts, policy suggestions and additional resources on paraprofessionals.*  
[www.communitycollegepolicy.org/html/toolkit/paraprofessionals/default.asp](http://www.communitycollegepolicy.org/html/toolkit/paraprofessionals/default.asp)
- ❖ **PAR<sup>2</sup>A Center** –  
*paraprofessional center based at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center; Web site provides a great deal of information and links to resources for paraeducators, trainers, administrators, researchers, teachers and parents.*  
[www.paracenter.org](http://www.paracenter.org)
- ❖ **American Federation of Teachers (AFT) “Standards for a Profession”** –  
*provides a good example of paraprofessional knowledge and skills standards*  
<http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/psrp/Standards-small.pdf>
- ❖ **AFT’s “Paraprofessional and School-Related Personnel” Webpage** –  
*provides a great deal of information in addition to the one on standards above.*
- ❖ **Education and Training Voluntary Partnership, Skill Standards for Frontline Workers in Education and Training** – [www.aft.org/pubs-reports/psrp/SKUStandards.pdf](http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/psrp/SKUStandards.pdf)

## State Standards and Guidelines Examples:

- ❖ **Rhode Island Department of Education “Program Standards for Teacher Assistants”** –  
[www.ritap.org/ta/legal/RIDESTandards&Guidelines.pdf](http://www.ritap.org/ta/legal/RIDESTandards&Guidelines.pdf)
- ❖ **“Washington State Paraeducator Guidelines”** – [www.k12.wa.us/Paraeducators/default.aspx](http://www.k12.wa.us/Paraeducators/default.aspx)
- ❖ **Utah** – [www.utahparas.org/standards/nclb.htm](http://www.utahparas.org/standards/nclb.htm)
- ❖ **Montana Consortium/OPI “Paraprofessional Standards and Competency Checklist”** –  
[www.opi.mt.gov/PDF/CSPD/Nov03PStandards.pdf](http://www.opi.mt.gov/PDF/CSPD/Nov03PStandards.pdf)
- ❖ **National Teacher Recruitment Clearinghouse, Paraeducator Programs** –  
[www.recruitingteachers.org/channels/clearinghouse/findteacher/1411\\_paraeprograms.htm](http://www.recruitingteachers.org/channels/clearinghouse/findteacher/1411_paraeprograms.htm)

opportunities and a career lattice are part of a continuously improving professional program for paraprofessionals.

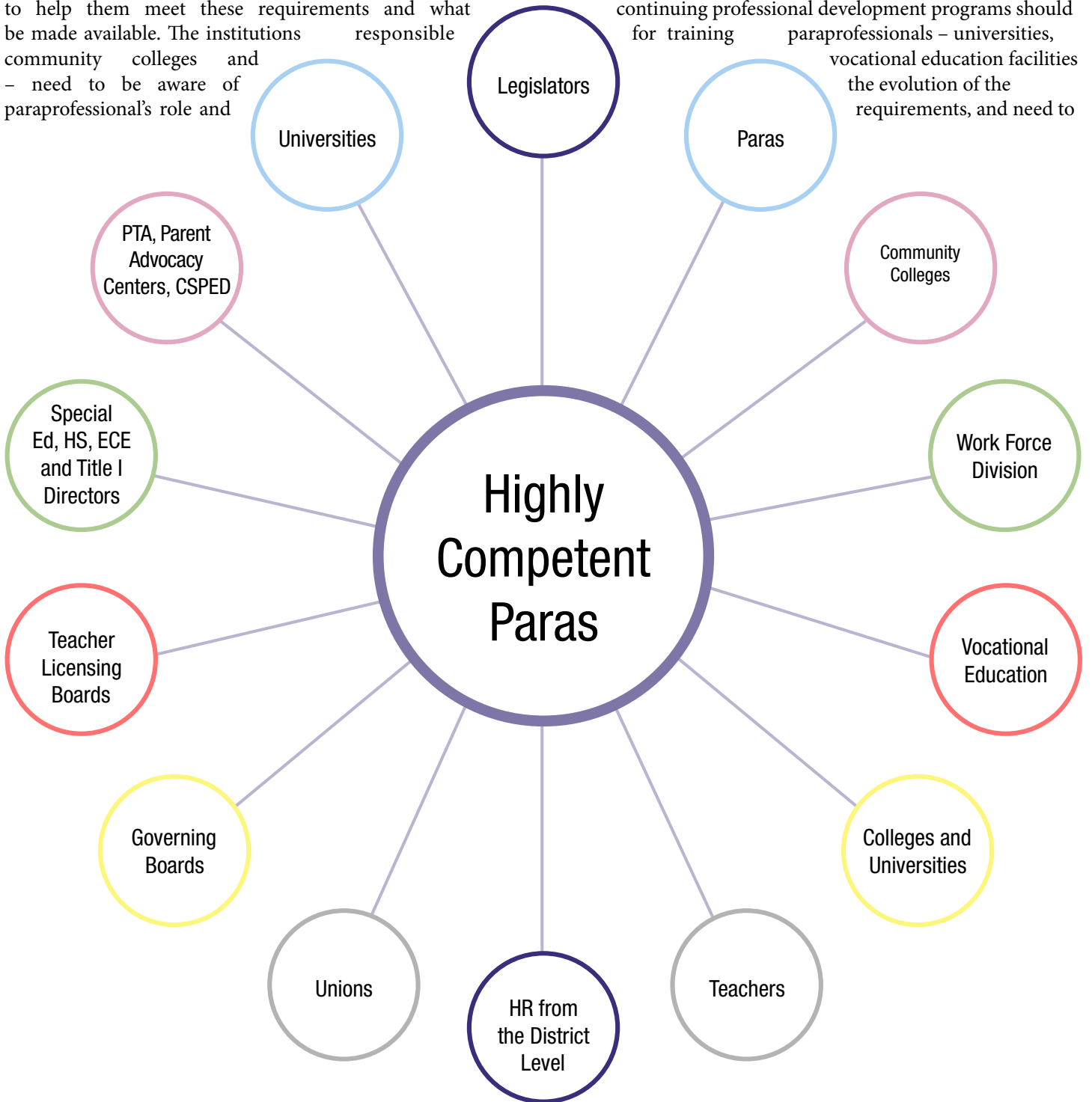
## STAKEHOLDERS

*Who needs to be at the table when decisions about the definitions and roles of paraprofessionals, requirements for paraprofessionals, professional development and other relevant issues are addressed?*

To implement sustainable change in an economically viable, timely and realistic way, the many different interested parties need to

cooperate and share knowledge to help paraprofessionals become highly qualified.

Teachers are intimately connected to this issue and should be involved in making decisions that affect the quality of the classroom learning environment. Paraprofessionals, as well as the unions representing them, need to be invested in the process of determining the roles and qualifications of paraprofessionals, what programs should be instituted to help them meet these requirements and what continuing professional development programs should be made available. The institutions responsible for training paraprofessionals – universities, community colleges and vocational education facilities – need to be aware of the evolution of the requirements, and need to



be willing to re-fit existing programs to realistically prepare paraprofessionals.

The following figure illustrates a fairly comprehensive collection of the different groups of people that should be involved in the advising and implementation of role definitions, training, qualification requirements and professional development programs for paraprofessionals:

## FUNDING

Convening the right stakeholders to articulate the roles, define appropriate knowledge and skills, create professional development opportunities and implement a career ladder for paraprofessionals requires both time and money. Some states have additional funding to develop part or all of a paraprofessional professional program, but the majority already do more with less funding. Ongoing professional development programs, provision of incentives for paraprofessionals and performance management does require some funding. Many states are finding funding to support needed programs for paraprofessionals through federal, state, local and private options. These can include federal Title I dollars, Reading First, Math and Science programs, special education, federal and state workforce dollars, state enhancement grants, private foundation grants and organizational support. All stakeholders should be encouraged to brainstorm funding options.

## CONCLUSION

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The expert panel convened by ECS in September 2005 felt strongly that while the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 required states to provide highly qualified instructional paraprofessionals, states need to take additional steps to ensure a *highly competent* paraprofessional in every classroom. This paper does not suggest a one-size-fits-all program but contains recommendations for states to examine what policies and practices they have in place, what they can develop with help of appropriate stakeholders, and recommendations for key conversations and milestones that will lead to effective policy development. By implementing a program that includes defined roles and skill requirements, professional development and career opportunities, states and districts have the best opportunity to positively impact classroom management and student success.

## PARAPROFESSIONAL EXPERT PANEL MEMBERS

### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Expert panelists listed above.

<sup>2</sup> NCLB uses the term “highly qualified” to reference the requirements for the teacher workforce. Only in one specific instance is the term “highly qualified” used in reference to paraprofessionals in the federal legislation (Title II of the NCLB Act of 2001). Generally the law simply says “requirements” when referring to paraprofessionals. The expert panel, however, generally felt the term “highly qualified” helped quickly label the requirements of the law for purposes of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> U.S. Department of Education Non-Regulatory Guidance Report, March 1, 2004.

<http://www.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/paraguidance.doc>.

<sup>4</sup> Source: This information was collected from the federal Title I Paraprofessional Requirements; NCLB, Sec. 1119 (2001), NCLB Guidance (2004) available through [www.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/qual/paraprofessional.html](http://www.ed.gov/admins/tchrqual/qual/paraprofessional.html), and the letter outlining the deadline extension for paraprofessionals to become highly qualified, which is posted on the National Education Association Web site.

<sup>5</sup> This date is the result of an extension of the original deadline of January 8, 2006, approved by the Department of Education in June 2005.

<sup>6</sup> Salary and career advancement on the AFT Web site: <http://www.aft.org/psrp/careeredpara.htm>.

<sup>7</sup> Renyi, Judith. *Teachers Take Charge of Their Learning: Transforming Professional Development for Student Success*. The NEA Foundation for the Improvement of Education, Washington D.C., 1996. [http://www.neafoundation.org/publications/takecharge\\_exec.htm](http://www.neafoundation.org/publications/takecharge_exec.htm) (accessed March 7, 2006)

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