

MEMORANDUM

To: Leah Voorhies, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support
From: Utah Special Education Advisory Panel (USEAP)
Subject: Paraeducator Training and Supervision
Date: July 13, 2021

In our role as an advisory panel, we would like to provide input and recommendations to the Utah State Board of Education (USBE) to improve services for students with disabilities in schools. In a meeting on March 26, 2021, the members of the USEAP panel met to discuss the priority area of paraeducator training and supervision.

Utah schools have a challenge with special education teacher recruitment and retention. As troubling as this is, it is doubly frustrating that this same challenge exists for schools hiring and training paraeducators to support the implementation of specially designed instruction for students with disabilities under the direct supervision of a licensed special education teacher/professional. Below are listed challenges and proposed solutions identified by the panel in our discussion.

Challenge 1: Paraeducator recruitment and retention are interfering with quality educational services. Until we understand the reasons why paraeducators are leaving jobs in special education we cannot accurately address the problem.

Solution 1: Conduct a study to identify reasons paraeducators stay, leave, or move within education. This information can be used to help identify effective solutions to the challenges special education is facing related to retention of quality staff. Share the findings with LEA's and USBE advisory panels.

Challenge 2: Besides a reference to the USBE paraeducator standards and a need for LEAs to document training, there is no clear policy and guidance from USBE on the definition of "adequate training and supervision" (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14) (USBE Special Education Rules 2020 IX.E.2).

Solution 2: Expand the USBE Paraeducator standards to have a special education-specific set of competencies. Create a clear definition of "adequate training and supervision" within the USBE special education rules and create a technical assistance manual for LEAs to reference in support of a minimum standard of training and supervision, along with reporting requirements, and a high-quality example of evidence-based procedures for training and supervision of paraeducators.

Challenge 3: Teachers are not always, and cannot always be, adequately prepared to supervise paraeducators during their preservice training. As a result, many teachers enter the field unable to manage personnel, to supervise others, and to have difficult conversations with paraeducators. This can impact retention of both teachers and paraeducators, as well as affect the quality of instruction that occurs in the classroom.

Solution 3: Administrators should be supported by USBE to provide ongoing training to newly licensed professionals who are tasked with training and supervising paraeducators. This training should include strategies for providing direct feedback to paraeducators after training is provided, for monitoring implementation of educational and behavior programs that are implemented by paraeducators, for how to resolve conflict and communicate difficult conversations, and for how to provide reflective supervision to paraeducators. Because training is the administrators' responsibility and supervision usually falls to the classroom teacher, this ongoing professional development should take place in a triad.

Challenge 4: Paraeducators in special education are the frontline workers of education. Paraeducator is a non-certified position in most LEAs. Salary schedules and benefits for paraeducators are widely varied and cannot be dictated by USBE. Within schools, the role of a special education paraeducator is often more demanding and stressful than many other non-certified positions in an LEA.

Solution 4: USBE does not have a say over salary or benefits at an LEA level and requiring specific training similar to Title I may significantly impact an LEA's access to qualified paraeducators. However, if USBE supported a certification/licensing structure similar to the leveled certifications in nursing, then it may have the power to support the development of more quality educators. In nursing, to obtain certification, a certified nursing assistant (CNA) completes coursework and field experience *while* working. A licensed professional nurse (LPN) requires an associate's level education with field experience, including more complex responsibilities. A registered nurse (RN) requires at least a bachelor's level education with field experience, including additional complexity in responsibilities. Leveled structures to certification increase recruitment into fields, bring professionalism to positions, and allow institutions of higher education to adopt and create programs supporting and preparing candidates for the field. We recommend USBE explore the development of a certificated teaching assistant (CTA) level to accompany the associate teacher and professional teacher licenses in all areas, but especially special education.

*(For additional certification structures you can look at the model adopted by the Behavior Analysis Certification Board: <https://www.bacb.com/>)

Thank you for your time in considering our recommendations. Please contact the USEAP chair or co-chair with any questions you may have regarding our recommendations:

Summer Gunn: summer.gunn@usu.edu

Steve Phelps: phelpss@gmail.com