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What is a paraprofessional in education?

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If you're wondering "what is a paraprofessional's role?" in the classroom, let's put it into perspective. While teachers have the authority to make instructional decisions and are accountable for student learning outcomes, they can't always do it alone. That's where paraprofessionals (also known as teacher assistants) come in.

What is a paraprofessional's role in working with a teacher?

Teachers and paraprofessionals share some professional responsibilities, such as instruction delivery and classroom management. However, these roles also have many differences.

In terms of authority, as licensed professionals, teachers have the authority to make instructional decisions, assess student performance and manage classroom dynamics. Paraprofessionals operate under the supervision of licensed teachers and don't have the authority to make independent instructional decisions.

Becoming a licensed teacher typically requires a bachelor's degree in education or a specific subject area, completion of a teacher preparation program, and state certification or licensure. Schools hire paraprofessionals who have at least a high school diploma, an associate degree or a skills assessment certification. However, the more education a paraprofessional has, the more insight, skills and value they can bring to the classroom.

Additionally, teachers communicate with parents and administrators regarding student development. Paraprofessionals simply provide classroom support.

What does a paraprofessional do?

So, what is a paraprofessional's job exactly?

As mentioned, paraprofessionals work hand-in-hand with licensed teachers. They offer students personalized support and focused guidance, whether one-on-one or in small groups. They also help solidify lessons, establish understanding and create a positive, engaging learning atmosphere.

The day-to-day responsibilities for this role may include:

- Reviewing lesson material with students individually or in small groups
- Encouraging appropriate behavior by following and enforcing school and classroom rules
- Assisting teachers with administrative tasks such as taking attendance and tracking grades
- Preparing classroom materials and setting up equipment for lessons
- Supervising students during lunch, recess, field trips and between classes
- Providing feedback to help monitor student progress

In certain settings, paraprofessionals focus on specific tasks, such as supervising a computer lab or overseeing students during breaks.

Additionally, [15 states](#) allow paraprofessionals with the appropriate training to act as test administrators under the supervision of a licensed teacher. Their duties include overseeing test administration, ensuring adherence to standardized procedures and providing necessary accommodations to support students during testing.

What is a paraprofessional's role in special education?

Some paraeducators work inclusively with special education students and help adapt lessons to fit individual learning styles. They may also assist with basic care needs, such as personal hygiene, providing meal assistance or teaching life skills to students with disabilities.

How much do paraprofessionals make?

As of May 2023, paraprofessionals earned between \$24,200 and \$48,870, with a median wage of \$35,550, according to [the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics](#) (BLS).

While paraprofessionals typically work full time, part-time and summer roles are also possible.

Salary ranges are not specific to students or graduates of University of Phoenix. Actual outcomes vary based on multiple factors, including prior work experience, geographic location and other factors specific to the individual. University of Phoenix does not guarantee employment, salary level or career advancement. BLS data is geographically based. Information for a specific state/city can be researched on the BLS website.

What are the requirements to be a paraprofessional?

To become a paraprofessional, you'll need to meet specific education requirements. Some states may require you to have specialized training and certification.

Additionally, you should possess the following skills and qualities to help prepare you for this role:

- Clear communication
- Strong interpersonal skills
- Patience, understanding and empathy
- Adaptability when working with different learning styles

What is a paraprofessional's required education?

At this point, you may be asking "what is a paraprofessional's recommended educational background?" Requirements for this profession depend on the state you're in and whether you plan to work in a [public or private school](#). In a public school, you need at least a high school diploma or a GED. You also need at least two years of college coursework or an associate degree. However, private schools may have different requirements.

Associate degree programs for paraeducators focus on creating educational materials, observing students and supporting classroom teachers. While not required, a bachelor's degree in education or psychology can provide further skills that you can apply in the classroom.

Do paraprofessionals need to pass an assessment?

Paraprofessional certification requirements vary by state; some mandate certification, while others consider it optional. Additionally, you may need to obtain certification in CPR and first aid to qualify for a job in a public school.

Depending on which state you're in, you may need to pass a skills test to work as a paraeducator. If you're looking for a job in a Title 1 school (a federally funded institution serving low-income families), the Every Student Succeeds Act (formerly the No Child Left Behind Act) requires you to pass a qualifying assessment.

There are two assessments you may complete to meet state and federal requirements: The ParaPro Assessment and the ACT WorkKeys assessment.

The ParaPro Assessment is a computer-based test comprised of 90 multiple-choice questions covering reading, writing and math. You must complete this assessment in approximately 2.5 hours. Upon completion, you'll receive an unofficial score immediately and an official score mailed to you within two to three weeks.

The ACT WorkKeys assessment consists of three computer-based tests: applied math, graphic literacy and workplace documents. This assessment evaluates your proficiency in reading, math and writing, as well as your ability to apply these skills during classroom instruction.

What is a paraprofessional background check requirement?

All U.S. states require K-12 educators to undergo criminal background checks, and the majority extend this requirement to other school employees, including paraprofessionals.

Background checks include searches of state and federal criminal databases, such as the FBI's Interstate Identification Index and sex offender registries.

Depending on which state you're in, your background check may include the NASDTEC clearinghouse, which monitors educators who have had their teaching credentials revoked for misconduct.

What is a paraprofessional's opportunity for continuing education and professional development?

Once you've become a paraeducator, what is a paraprofessional's next step? For many, working in this capacity can be a good opportunity to gain classroom experience while furthering their education. Specifically, if becoming a licensed and certified teacher appeals to you, working as a paraprofessional can be a good way to see if the field suits your interests and talents. If so, you may choose to continue to work in that capacity while pursuing a bachelor's degree and learning skills you can apply immediately.

This is especially true for working professionals who opt for an online degree program whose flexibility makes it possible to work full time and go to school simultaneously.

For example, you can become a kindergarten and elementary school teacher by obtaining a bachelor's degree in elementary education, completing a teacher education program and passing the required state-issued exams to receive licensure.

To become a middle or high school teacher, you'll need a bachelor's degree in education or a specific content area such as mathematics, history, English or science.

The coursework you'll likely complete for your college education degree includes foundations of education, child development, classroom management, structured English immersion and other relevant courses.

Wherever your career journey may take you, working as a paraprofessional educator can help you develop important skills and insights you can carry into the future.

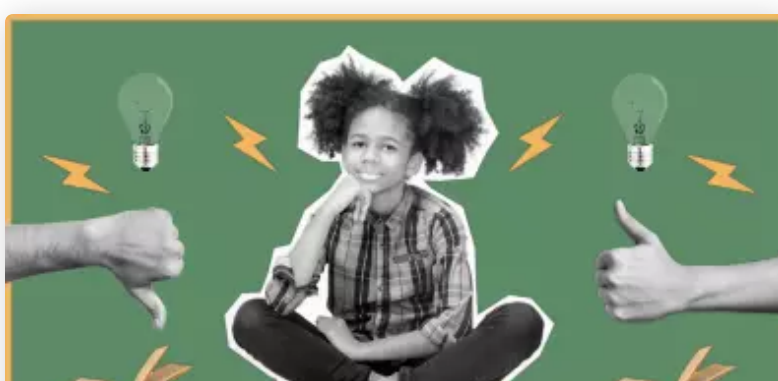
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dillon Price is a detail-oriented writer with a background in legal and career-focused content. He has written and edited blogs for dozens of law firms, as well as Law.com. Additionally, he wrote numerous career advice articles for Monster.com during the company's recent rebranding. Dillon lives in Western Massachusetts and stays in Portugal each summer with his family.



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