

# Standards for a Profession

Produced by the  
Paraprofessional and School-related Personnel Division  
of the American Federation of Teachers





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PARAPROFESSIONAL DIVISION OF  
THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

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# AMERICAN FEDERATION OF TEACHERS

A F L C I O

## PARAPROFESSIONAL AND SCHOOL- RELATED PERSONNEL DIVISION

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**foreword**.....

**W**hen asked to single out one accomplishment of his long tenure as president of New York City's United Federation of Teachers, the late, great Albert Shanker proudly answered: "organizing classroom paraprofessionals." If similarly pressed, I would say that leading the movement to achieve professional certification for paraprofessionals nears the top of my own list of career milestones. It is work that has taken years to refine, but realizing certification standards for instructional paraprofessionals remains the work for which I take the greatest pride.

What do we mean by standards? It's very simple. We must define the role and responsibilities of instructional paraprofessionals; set criteria for basic skills required for entry into the profession; specify appropriate pre- and inservice training; and identify advanced skills for permanent certification. Does this mean that currently employed paraprofessionals should be required to return to school or take extra classes to meet new standards? No, ours is a field in which experience counts. The standards described here are for those entering the profession tomorrow, the day after or next year.

I'm extremely gratified to have been a part of the creation of this document and the accompanying resources. It has a long history in the AFT and in the education community. In 1979, I served on a national task force whose purpose was to establish criteria for employment and training of paraprofessionals. I have always regretted that I

didn't have the foresight, almost 20 years ago, to see where that effort could have taken us. Not that paraprofessionals haven't come far without it; but we could have been much farther along than we are now had we pursued this more aggressively.

With maturity comes wisdom. I recognized long ago that it is not too late to act. And act now we must. Public education today faces unprecedented attacks. Parents and the public are increasingly disenchanted with public schools. Politicians are pushing alternatives that will drain resources from public education. We have to do all we can to ensure that students attending public schools receive the best education possible. We must have the most highly skilled education workforce we can field. Standards for employment and training of instructional paraprofessionals will ensure that we do.

This document is the work of the AFT's Committee on Paraprofessional Certification. Twelve AFT leaders from the K-12 teacher and paraprofessional ranks collaborated on this effort, the first time the national AFT has combined the expertise of teachers and paraprofessionals to define the role and responsibilities of instructional paraprofessionals and cement their connection to the role of the classroom teacher. The committee has also produced a companion piece to guide leaders in pursuing passage of state legislation or local programs.

These two documents exemplify what the AFT is all about. The union's responsibility—AFT's responsibility—is to seek to improve the services provided by the institutions for which our members work *and* to improve members lives. Certification for instructional paraprofessionals can achieve both of those goals. It is our time to shine!

**Lorretta Johnson**

*AFT Vice President*

*Chair, Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel Program  
and Policy Council*

## Roles and Responsibilities

Basic Skills  
Training  
Advanced Skills

### definitions

**Role**—An instructional paraprofessional is a school employee whose position is either 1) instructional in nature or 2) who provides other direct or indirect services to students and/or their parents. The paraprofessional works as a member of a team in the classroom where the teacher has the ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of the classroom education program, the education programs of individual students and for evaluation of those programs and student progress.

**Responsibilities**—The paraprofessional's responsibility is to enrich the learning experience for students by assisting in the classroom and performing both administrative and instructional duties that complement and support the instructional plan and educational goals.

**Supervision**—The paraprofessional works under the ultimate supervision of the school principal and is assigned to work under the direction of a teacher or a team of teachers.

## Roles and Responsibilities

### Basic Skills

#### Training

#### Advanced Skills

**T**he real work of paraprofessionals is rarely broken down into these elements. There exists a misconception that the only skill required is a desire to work with children and an (innate) ability to do so effectively. It is true that part of this work is instinctive, such as listening to children and understanding their needs. To support the educational process, and to do so effectively however, paraprofessionals must also enter the profession with basic skills to function in the workplace and then be trained in techniques and knowledge (the competencies) that support the process. Paraprofessionals also must understand the needs of their particular workplace, their role in the classroom and how their skills are used in that role.

#### Content Knowledge

- reading
- writing
- mathematical computation
- mathematical reasoning

#### Thinking Skills

- creative thinking
- decision making
- problem solving

- integrating new knowledge
- reasoning
- organizing and processing information

**Interpersonal Relations/Human Relations**

- communication skills - listening and speaking
- leadership skills
- respect for cultural diversity
- respect for views of others
- ability to work as a team member

**Personal Qualities**

- responsibility
- self-esteem
- sociability
- self-management
- integrity/honesty

**Competencies with Advanced Training**

- human growth & development
- behavior management
- instructional strategies
- laws, policies & procedures

These skills are adapted from the report of the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (SCANS) of the U.S. Department of Labor. On the following pages are components of each of the broad areas outlined above.

**content knowledge** .....**READING**

- Locates, understands and interprets written information in prose and documents - including manuals, graphs and schedules - to perform tasks
- Learns from text by identifying the main idea or essential message
- Identifies relevant details, facts and specifications
- Infers or locates the meaning of unknown or technical vocabulary
- Judges the accuracy, appropriateness, style and plausibility of reports, proposals or theories of other writers

**How Assessed:** H.S. Diploma or GED Proficiency Test

**WRITING**

- Communicates thoughts, ideas, information and messages in writing
- Records information completely and accurately
- Composes and creates documents such as letters, directions, manuals, reports, proposals, graphs, flow charts
- Uses language, style, organization and format appropriate to the subject matter, purpose and audience
- Attends to level of detail and includes supporting documentation
- Checks, edits and revises for correct information, appropriate emphasis, form, grammar, spelling and punctuation

**How Assessed:** H.S. Diploma or GED Proficiency Test

**MATHEMATICAL COMPUTATION**

- Performs basic computations
- Uses basic numerical concepts such as whole numbers and percentages in practical situations
- Makes reasonable estimates of arithmetic results without a calculator

Uses tables, graphs, diagrams and charts to obtain or convey quantitative information

**How Assessed:** H.S. Diploma or GED Proficiency Test

### **MATHEMATIC REASONING**

- Approaches practical problems by choosing appropriately from a variety of mathematical techniques
- Uses quantitative data to construct logical explanations for real-world situations
- Expresses mathematical ideas and concepts orally and in writing
- Understands the role of chance in the occurrence and prediction of events

**How Assessed:** H.S. Diploma or GED Proficiency Test

## thinking skills .....

### **CREATIVE THINKING**

- Uses imagination freely
- Combines ideas or information in new ways
- Makes connections between seemingly unrelated ideas
- Reshapes goals in ways that reveal new possibilities

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

### **DECISION MAKING**

- Specifies goals and constraints
- Proposes alternatives
- Considers risks
- Evaluates and chooses best alternatives

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

**PROBLEM SOLVING**

- Recognizes that a problem exists (recognizes that there is a discrepancy between what is and what should or could be)
- Identifies possible reasons for the discrepancy
- Devises and implements a plan of action to resolve it
- Evaluates and monitors progress
- Revises plan as indicated by findings

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

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**INTEGRATING NEW KNOWLEDGE**

- Recognizes and can use learning techniques to apply and adapt new knowledge and skills in both familiar and changing situations.
- Involves being aware of learning tools such as personal learning styles (visual, aural, etc.); formal learning strategies (notetaking or clustering items that share some characteristics); and informal learning strategies (awareness of unidentified false assumptions that may lead to faulty conclusions)

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

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**REASONING**

- Discovers a rule or principle underlying the relationship between two or more objects and applies it in solving a problem (for example, uses logic to draw conclusions from available information, extracts rules or principles from a set of objects or written text, applies rules and principles to new situations, determines which conclusions are correct when given a set of facts and a set of conclusions)

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

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## ORGANIZING AND PROCESSING INFORMATION

- Organizes and processes symbols, pictures, graphs, objects or other information and envisions the final product (for example, sees the flow of work activities from a lesson plan; a building from a blueprint, a system's operation from schematics or the taste of food from reading a recipe).

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

## human relations.....

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### LISTENING

- Receives, attends to, interprets and responds to verbal messages and other cues such as body language in ways that are appropriate to the purpose - to comprehend, to learn, to critically evaluate, to appreciate or to support the speaker

**How Assessed:** H.S. Diploma or GED / Job Interview

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### SPEAKING

- Organizes ideas and communicates oral messages appropriate to listeners and situations
- Participates in conversation, discussion and group presentations
- Uses verbal language and other cues such as body language appropriate to style, tone and level of complexity to the audience and the occasion
- Speaks clearly and communicates a message
- Understands and responds to listener feedback and asks questions when needed

**How Assessed:** H.S. Diploma or GED / Job Interview

**LEADERSHIP SKILLS**

- Understands when leadership is required and takes initiative
- Maintains control of self and others when necessary
- Assumes responsibility for actions

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

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**RESPECT FOR CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

- Recognizes when the actions of others are based on differences in culture/background
- Displays a willingness to learn about differences and is willing to share information about own culture

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

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**RESPECT FOR VIEWS OF OTHERS**

- Responds to difference of opinion with openness and respect
- Can interpret and clearly state the views of others

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

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**ABILITY TO WORK AS A TEAM MEMBER**

- Understands role in relation to other members of team
- Shares ideas and participates in team decision-making process

**How Assessed:** Observation during Preservice Training

## personal qualities .....

### RESPONSIBILITY

- Exerts a high level of effort and perseverance toward goal attainment
  - Works hard to become excellent at doing tasks by setting high standards, paying attention to details, working well and displaying a high level of concentration even when assigned an unpleasant task
  - Displays high standards of attendance, punctuality, enthusiasm, vitality and optimism in approaching and completing tasks
- Seeks advanced training and professional development

**How Assessed:** References / Job Interview / Observation during Preservice Training

### SELF-ESTEEM

- Believes in own self-worth and maintains a positive view of self
- Demonstrates knowledge of own skills and abilities
- Is aware of impact on others
- Knows own emotional capacity and needs and how to address them

**How Assessed:** References / Job Interview / Observation during Preservice Training

### SOCIABILITY

- Demonstrates understanding, friendliness, adaptability, empathy and politeness in new and on-going group settings
- Asserts self in familiar and unfamiliar social situations
- Relates well to others
- Responds appropriately as the situation requires
- Takes an interest in what others say and do

**How Assessed:** References / Job Interview / Observation during Preservice Training

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### **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

- Assesses own knowledge, skills and abilities accurately
- Sets well-defined and realistic personal goals
- Monitors progress toward goal attainment and motivates self through goal achievement
- Exhibits self-control and responds to feedback unemotionally and non-defensively
- Is a self-starter

**How Assessed:** References / Job Interview / Observation during Preservice Training

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### **INTEGRITY/HONESTY**

- Can be trusted
- Recognizes when faced with making a decision or exhibiting behavior that may break with commonly-held personal or social values
- Understands the impact of violating these beliefs and codes on an organization, self and others
- Chooses an ethical course of action

**How Assessed:** References / Job Interview / Observation during Preservice Training

**Roles and Responsibilities****Basic Skills****Training****Advanced Skills**

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## **PARAPROFESSIONAL TRAINING RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **DAY ONE – District-Based Orientation for New Employees—How To Get Along in the District**

This preservice training should be provided before paraprofessional enters the classroom.

- I. Role and responsibilities as a paraprofessional
- II. Student Population (Nature of the students in the district and in assignment) including “jargon” used in education (IEP, ARD, ADD, etc.)
- III. Universal precautions
- IV. Building procedures/emergency procedures
- V. District discipline policy – discipline codes
- VI. Introduction to different problems they may face
- VII. Confidentiality
- VIII. Overview of the district
- IX. Employment issues/personnel policies/contract language (in conjunction with Union) including pay dates, liability issues, in-service, evaluation process, etc.

### **DAY TWO and THREE – Site-Based Orientation – Survival Skills for the First Day.**

Once a paraprofessional arrives at the school, he/she should have a day to observe someone in the same job. After the observation, school site training should include the follow:

- I. Curriculum used in the school and the classroom
- II. Rules and procedures for school and classroom
- III. Behavior Management Plan for school and classroom
- IV. Information on specific students with whom they will be working

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### **INSERVICE TRAINING FOR CERTIFICATION**

Once a paraprofessional is on the job, an inservice program is established that will lead to certification. Training should be provided by the district during the workday or at a regularly scheduled inservice day, not after school or on weekends. Current employees are grandfathered-in. New employees have two years to meet requirements for certification.

#### **Proposed Recommendation: Basic Requirement for Certification**

**12 hours/CEU Equivalent  
Courses/InService in Four Areas**

#### **General categories for training will include:**

- I. HUMAN GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT
  - A. Overview of Human Growth and Development
  - B. Developing Age-Appropriate Materials
  - C. Reinforcing the Skills Introduced by the Teacher
  - D. Understanding the Student Population

## II. BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT

- A. Knowing the components of a good behavior management plan
- B. Understanding of behavior management plan
- C. Knowing how to implement the classroom plan

## III. INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGY

- A. Interpreting lesson plans
- B. Developing activities to implement the plan
- C. Understanding specific curriculum
- D. Observing and recording skills
- E. Content Knowledge – Reading, Math, Special Education, Etc.

## IV. LAWS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

- A. Child abuse
- B. Discipline – Special Education
- C. ADA & Inclusion
- D. Chapter 1
- E. IDEA, IEPs and Modification Plans

Roles and Responsibilities

Basic Skills

Training

**Advanced Skills**

**competencies** .....

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**BEHAVIOR MANAGEMENT**

- Understands and translates for students the classroom and school rules for student behavior
- Can handle student behavior problems using procedures of classroom plan
- Can identify types of behavior problems in students and responds appropriately and consistently

**How Assessed:** Inservice Training leading to Certification, provided by District.

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**HUMAN GROWTH & DEVELOPMENT**

- Can select, use and develop age-appropriate materials for instructional reinforcement
- Understands and uses appropriate strategies for managing students of different age groups and ability
- Can identify signs of developmental delays in students and relate observations to teacher

**How Assessed:** Inservice Training leading to Certification, provided by District.

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## **INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

- Understands various instructional strategies and can apply strategies for reinforcement of skills introduced by the teacher
- Can identify problem areas in student comprehension and adapt instructional strategies
- Uses appropriate strategies for individual students and for small groups
- Interprets lesson plan and can develop activities to implement the plan
- Observes and records student progress both pre- and post instructional reinforcement
- Understands purpose of a specific curriculum and his/her role in implementing the curriculum

**How Assessed:** Inservice Training leading to Certification, provided by District.

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## **LAWS, POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

- Is familiar with laws governing reporting of suspected child abuse and can identify potential signs
- Is familiar with the general provisions of federal and state laws applicable to special-needs students including ADA and IDEA
- Understands the purpose of an IEP and can implement portions applicable to his/her assignment
- Understands the paperwork requirements for Chapter I funding and maintains accurate records, when necessary

**How Assessed:** Inservice Training leading to Certification, provided by District.







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555 NEW JERSEY AVE., NW  
WASHINGTON, DC 20001

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