

## PARAEDUCATOR WORK GROUP

In June 2014, the Legislature passed Substitute Senate Bill 6179 authorizing the Professional Educators Standards Board to convene a Paraeducator Work Group to make recommendations related to the employment and professional development of paraeducators. After 18 months of convening experienced paraeducators, teachers, school and district administrators, parents, and experts from community and technical colleges and higher education to provide input, the Work Group released their final report to the legislature on January 10, 2016. WASA members and staff served on the work group as well as subcommittees to fulfill the legislative mandate. WASA was in agreement with these recommendations predicated on receiving funding from the Legislature and, if not provided, these recommendations are not able to be implemented.

The Paraeducator Work Group prefaced the legislative report with this statement:

We believe paraeducators are an integral and necessary part of the instructional process of the public school system and must be recognized as partners in the quest for an equitable education for all students.

As such, state funding to build the Paraeducator Professional Development System is critical and must come before the recommendations can be implemented. Once paraeducators meet the proposed categories of employment standards and complete the proposed professional development, compensation and the associated costs must be addressed at the state and district level. In light of the recent McCleary decision, those costs must become part of the definition of basic education and, therefore, funded by the state.

### Summary of Recommendations include:

- 1) Adopt and fund new employment standards and a common definition for all paraeducators which would require paraeducators to receive professional development based on the revised standards and identified core competencies in both knowledge and skill areas. Completing the required professional development would lead to a Paraeducator Certificate of Completion. Paraeducators who work with English Language Learner students or Special Education students would be required to receive additional professional development that would lead to a specialized endorsement in ELL or Special Education.
- 2) Establish and fund a Paraeducator Advisory Board, under the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, to oversee new requirements and provide continued budget to develop the statewide Paraeducator Professional Development System and Certificate of Completion process. School districts would be responsible for implementing the professional development modules and can partner with Educational Service Districts, Community and Technical Colleges, Universities or other approved entities to deliver approved course work via multiple platforms (e.g. online or in person) to their paraeducators. A five year timeline is being recommended. Additional statewide funding will be required to ensure equal and equitable access for all paraeducators.
- 3) Implement and fund a Certificate of Renewal process every five years to ensure paraeducators are continually updating their knowledge and skills to support student success; allow school districts to provide training to meet district specific requirements; provide opportunities for teachers and paraeducators to attend training together for joint clock hour or credit sessions; and offer recognition to paraeducators as professionals consistently striving to improve.
- 4) Incorporate appropriate and effective use of paraeducators into the knowledge and skill standards required for all teacher and principal preparation programs and into the career benchmarks for teacher and principal continuing education.
- 5) Provide and fund statewide Professional Development Modules for current teachers, principals, and administrators via an online learning system designed to update their skills to effectively manage and supervise paraeducators.

A link to the full report can be found at: <http://www.pesb.wa.gov/home/para-work-group>.