

# **Paraprofessional Task Force**

*convened by*  
Illinois State Board of Education  
Illinois Community College Board

## *Final Report*

April 2003

# Report of the Paraprofessional Task Force

---

April 2003

## ■ Background

The reauthorization of the federal Elementary-Secondary Education Act, titled “No Child Left Behind” (NCLB), was enacted on January 8, 2002, and had a significant impact on teacher aides/assistants in Illinois and throughout the nation. Under NCLB, education paraprofessionals (teacher aides/assistants) hired after January 8, 2002, to assist in schools and/or programs that receive Title I funds must have either completed two years of study at an institution of higher education, obtained an associate’s degree or higher, or met a rigorous standard of quality through a formal state or local assessment. Title I paraprofessionals who are currently employed have until 2006 to meet these requirements. Though the option of a state assessment is available, it is believed that college coursework will also be pursued by paraprofessionals in the state to meet the requirements set forth in NCLB.

Currently in Illinois, paraprofessionals are required to have completed 30 semester credit hours of higher education. While this continues to be the standard for teacher assistants working in non-Title I programs, it is anticipated that the new requirements of NCLB will eventually become the standard for all paraprofessionals.

Numerous community colleges in Illinois offer programs to prepare paraprofessionals. The majority of programs are at the certificate level, since state requirements have not generated a demand for the associate degree. Recognizing the large role community colleges could play in assisting paraprofessionals to meet the new requirements of NCLB, staff from the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) and the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) met several times during the summer of 2002 to discuss the development of a statewide model associate degree curriculum. On August 12, 2002, the boards jointly hosted a focus group meeting comprised of representatives from the K-12 community and higher education. The purpose of the focus group was to discuss the issues and needs surrounding the NCLB legislation and seek input on the best way to meet those needs.

The focus group unanimously recommended the following:

- Development of two preparation tracks: one for an Associate in Applied Science degree for those preparing for immediate entry into the workforce; and a transfer degree (the AAT – Associate of Arts in Teaching) for those interested in pursuing teacher certification.
- Development of shorter preparation programs for paraprofessionals who already have some college credit.
- Development of mechanisms to recognize individuals with significant professional experience.

Based on this input, ICCB and ISBE staff convened a Paraprofessional Task Force on September 23, 2002. A list of members is attached to this report. Following discussion of the feedback from the focus group, the task force formed three subcommittees with the following charges:

1. **The curriculum subcommittee**, chaired by Margaret Lehner from Moraine Valley Community College and Bernard Ferreri from City Colleges of Chicago, focused its work on the development of an AAS model. The group believed that the current effort to develop an Associate of Arts in Teaching degree could be used as the transfer pathway for paraprofessionals interested in teacher certification.
2. **The policy and procedures subcommittee**, chaired by Denis Wright from Joliet Junior College, focused on developing recommendations/guidelines for currently employed paraprofessionals, such as credit for prior learning.
3. **The affordability/accessibility/delivery subcommittee**, chaired by Sandy Krsak from the Illinois Federation of Teachers, focused on developing recommendations for approaches to affordable tuition and leveraging monetary resources, accessibility of coursework and support systems, and delivery mechanisms for providing courses and programs.

During the months of October and November, the subcommittees met separately to work on crafting their recommendations. On December 2, 2002, the full task force convened to share and discuss the final recommendations of each subgroup. Margaret Lehner presented the work of the curriculum committee. The policies and procedures committee and the affordability/ accessibility/delivery committee joined forces to develop a combined recommendation. Denis Wright presented on their behalf. Following each presentation, consensus and endorsement of task force members was reached.

At the conclusion of the meeting, next steps were discussed. It was agreed that the work of the task force be disseminated throughout the K-12 and higher education community for review and reaction in mid January, 2003. After suggestions from the field were incorporated, a final report would be presented to the Illinois Community College Board and the Illinois Board of Higher Education at their respective spring meetings. The report would also be shared with the Illinois State Board of Education and the Illinois State Certification Board.

Recommendations of the Paraprofessional Task Force follow.

# Curriculum

---

## Proposal for the Associate in Applied Science (AAS) Degree and Certificate for the Paraprofessional Educator

The Paraprofessional Task Force is proposing for adoption the following program descriptions for the Paraprofessional Educator Associate in Applied Science Degree and Certificate.

It should be stressed that the AAS degree is not designed, nor intended, to transfer as a package. It is not the purpose of this proposal to suggest that this degree can be transferred into a teacher preparation program. In fact, the Associate of Arts in Teaching (AAT) degree, currently under development, has been identified as the appropriate transfer pathway for paraprofessionals pursuing teacher certification.

However, it *was* the intention of the curriculum subcommittee to include as many *potentially transferable* courses within the curriculum as possible. The task force recognized that some students, after completing the AAS degree and working with children in the classroom, would decide to pursue a teacher preparation program. For those students seeking to apply AAS credit in transfer, it should be understood that determining the acceptance of any of the courses within the degree, apart from IAI approved general education courses, will be the right and responsibility of the institution to which the student intends to transfer. Accurate advising by all institutions offering paraprofessional preparation is critical.

### **The AAS degree and certificate were designed with the following premises in mind:**

- Because the state does not have standards for paraprofessionals, the task force chose to investigate standards from a variety of professional organizations that were specifically designed for paraeducators. After an extensive review, those from the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) were incorporated in the proposed degree and certificate programs in order to make a meaningful connection between paraprofessional standards and curriculum. A list of AFT standards is provided in Attachment 1.
- The degree and certificate programs are broadly defined to accommodate students at all levels. Students may have no college background or may have completed some course work and/or be in various stages of certificate or degree completion.
- Components of the Illinois Articulation Initiative (IAI) were incorporated wherever possible.
- It is assumed that each community college offering the paraprofessional degree and certificate programs will provide students with appropriate advisement in terms of the options available to them.

## Expected Student Learning Outcomes and Assessment

According to No Child Left Behind, “paraprofessionals should be able to demonstrate knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing in the areas of reading, writing, and math, or in school readiness;” therefore, “paraprofessionals are expected to have working knowledge of these academic areas.” The guidelines further state, “Given that understanding, the State may determine what requirements, if any, it may choose to place on the coursework taken during the two years of study.” (*No Child Left Behind, Title I Paraprofessionals, Draft Non-Regulatory Guidance, page 3, November 2002.*)

While the Paraprofessional Task Force identified general education, professional education, and elective coursework they believed would be most effective in preparing paraprofessionals, those courses should not be viewed as state requirements. The Illinois State Board of Education has endorsed this degree model as an effective method of preparation, but specific curriculum is not being mandated.

Because paraprofessional assistance varies from setting to setting, only broad learning outcomes can be applied to this statewide model. *When individual institutions apply to offer the program, they will provide details regarding their specific degree proposal, along with a description of how learning outcomes will be assessed. Applications should include assessment of student outcomes based on the AFT standards in Attachment 1.* The AFT standards are nationally recognized and were specifically designed to align with NCLB outcomes, as described below.

Students completing the AAS Paraprofessional Degree will have knowledge and skills in:

- Reading, writing, mathematical computation and mathematical reasoning;
- Critical and creative thinking, decision making, problem solving, and reasoning;
- Communication (listening, speaking and writing);
- Child/human growth and development, behavior management, instructional strategies and laws, policies and procedures;
- Technology;
- Respecting cultural diversity and the views of others;
- Working as a team member.

Another integral part of the curriculum is diversity (ethnic, racial, socioeconomic, etc). Applications should specify where diversity is being addressed in coursework; whether embedded across the program or delivered in a focused class.

As with all community college programs, it is expected that students will undergo appropriate assessment and placement procedures.

# Component 1: General Education

## AAS Degree Model

The general education component is designed to provide a broad, basic foundation. Fundamental skills in oral and written communication are stressed. The student is given the opportunity to explore mathematics, science, and social and behavioral sciences and can begin to develop an appreciation for the humanities and fine arts.

### General Education Core

Course Title	Semester Hours	IAI (if applicable)	AFT Standard
Composition I, II (composition course must contain a research component) Speech I	6-9	C prefix C1 900, C1 901, C2 900	CK, TS, PQ, IR, IS, BH
Social Science	6	S prefix S7 903D: Cultural Diversity, or other course with D/N* designation and S6 900: Introduction to Psychology recommended	CK, TS, IR, BH, HG, PQ, IS
Humanities/Fine Arts	3	H, F, or HF prefix	TS, IR, PQ, IS
Math/Science	3-4	M, P, L, or LP prefix	CK, TS, PQ, IS
<b>Total</b>	<b>18-22</b>		

\*D — courses designed specifically to examine aspects of human diversity within the United States

\*N — courses designed specifically to examine aspects of human diversity from a non-U.S./non-European perspective

## Component 2: Professional Education

---

### AAS Degree Model

In order to be the most effective supplement to learning and teaching, the paraprofessional needs a broad core of knowledge that draws its content from existing professional education curriculum and skills and standards unique to the occupation. Every effort was made to ensure that the recommended Professional Education Core requirements meet these criteria. From understanding their role in the classroom and the legal and policy implications of their actions, to the social, emotional, physical, and intellectual development of the learner, paraprofessionals are asked to master a comprehensive skill set in a brief period of time.

Because a key requirement of NCLB is “the ability to assist in instruction,” a strong focus on this component should be addressed in coursework whenever possible. In addition, skills in problem solving, conflict management, communication, and relationship-building should be stressed throughout the curriculum. If a separate class is desired to address these issues, it could be offered through elective coursework. Specialization in a focus area (e.g. special education, ESL, library assistance) can also be achieved through elective coursework.

Another important component within the curriculum is diversity. If diversity is not embedded throughout the program, students are expected to take a focused course in this area.

*It should be noted that this core can be slightly altered to suit an early childhood education focus.*

### Professional Education Core

Course Title	Semester Hours	IAI (if applicable)	AFT Standard
Introduction to Education	3	ECE 911; EED 901; SED 901; SPE 911	BH, IS, LP, PQ
Pre-Clinical (concurrent with Introduction to Education)*	1	EED 904; SED 905; SPE 914; ECE 914	IR, PQ, BH, HG, IS
Exceptional Child	3	ECE 913; SED 904; SPE 915	HG, BH, IS, LP
Technology/Computers for Educators	3		TS, IR
Human/Child Growth & Development and/or Educational Psychology	3-6	EED 902 or 903; SED 902 or 903; SPE 913; ECE 912; PSY 901, 902, or 904	BH, HG, IS, LP, IR, PQ

Course Title	Semester Hours	IAI (if applicable)	AFT Standard
Children’s Literature and Reading, Language Arts, and/or Principles of Reading/Reading Assistance	6-9		CK, HG, IS, PQ
Math	3	M Prefix	CK, TS, IS, PQ, HG
<b>Total</b>	<b>22-28</b>		

**\*A critical component of the professional education experience is observation and field experience opportunities. Institutions may embed this component into professional education coursework or offer it concurrently with such coursework.**

## Component 3: Electives

---

### AAS Degree Model

Electives are recommended to help the student accomplish one of several objectives:

- acquisition of additional skills and knowledge that can increase learning in the classroom (workplace);
- reduction in time-to-degree for paraprofessionals who have already completed several semester hours of credit;
- concentration in a focus or specialty area (content, early childhood, special education, bilingual, etc).

#### Electives (suggested options)

Course Title	Semester Hours	IAI (if applicable)	AFT Standard
Classroom Management	3		IR, BH, PQ
Health	2-3	ECE 901, 902	IR, BH, PQ
Cultural Diversity	3	S7 903D or other course with D/N* designation	TS, IR, HG, IS
Science	3-4	P, L, LP or other IAI major science course	CK, TS, IS
Intro to Early Childhood	3	ECE 911	IR, HG, IS
Practicum	3		ALL
Art for Teachers	3	See IAI Art Education major course options	CK, TS
Observation and Guidance	3		BH, IS
Teaching Strategies and Styles	3		HG, IS
Foreign Language	3	H1 900	IR
Marriage and Family	3	SOC 912	IR
Child, Family, and Community	3	ECE 915	IR

Electives, continued

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Semester Hours</b>	<b>IAI (if applicable)</b>	<b>AFT Standard</b>
Abnormal Psychology	3	PSY 905	IR, BH, HG, IS
Rhythm Movement	3		PQ, IR
Juvenile Delinquency	3	CRJ 914	IR, BH, IS, LP
Substance Abuse	3		IR, IS, LP
Other choices per individual college			Varies
<b>Total</b>	<b>16-28</b>		

\*D — courses designed specifically to examine aspects of human diversity within the United States

\*N — courses designed specifically to examine aspects of human diversity from a non-U.S./non-European perspective

**Total Hours for Associate in Applied Science Degree: 62-64**

# Certificate of Achievement

---

## Curriculum Model

The certificate requirements are comprised of the Professional Education Core requirements supplemented with general education and elective components to bring the total to 31-37 semester hours. In the opinion of the subcommittee on Curriculum, the Professional Education Certificate addresses the most meaningful skills and standards for the paraprofessional.

The certificate has the potential to serve three groups of students:

- **Future paraprofessionals for non-Title I programs.** By completing this curriculum, students who have little or no college experience will have a set of courses in general education and teacher preparation to be certified as a paraprofessional in non-Title I positions.
  
- **Future paraprofessionals pursuing an associate degree.** Individuals can use the certificate as a stepping stone toward completion of the AAS degree. By completing the certificate program, they would achieve a credential at the half-way point of their program. (They would also be certified as a paraprofessional for work in non-Title I programs.)
  
- **Incumbent paraprofessionals.** This curriculum will serve those who possess college credits that, when combined with or applied to the certificate requirements, total 60 or more credit hours. These individuals would then meet the requirements of NCLB and be eligible to work in Title I positions.

### Suggested Certificate Program for Paraprofessional Educators

Course Title	Semester Hours	IAI (if applicable)	AFT Standard
Introduction to Education	3	ECE 911; EED 901; SED 901; SPE 911	BH, IS, LP, PQ
Pre-Clinical (concurrent with Introduction to Education)*	1	EED 904; SED 905; SPE 914; ECE 914	IR, PQ, BH, HG, IS
Exceptional Child	3	ECE 913; SED 904; SPE 915	HG, BH, IS, LP
Technology/Computers for Educators	3		TS, IR

Suggested Certificate Program for Paraprofessional Educators, continued

<b>Course Title</b>	<b>Semester Hours</b>	<b>IAI (if applicable)</b>	<b>AFT Standard</b>
Human/Child Growth & Development and/or Educational Psychology	3-6	EED 902 or 903; SED 902 or 903; SPE 913; ECE 912; PSY 901, 902, or 904	BH, HG, IS, LP, IR, PQ
Children's Literature and Reading and/or Language Arts	3-6		CK, HG, IS, PQ
Math	3	M Prefix	CK, TS, IS, PQ, HG
General Education	6 (from Gen Ed Core)		Varies
Electives	6 (from electives)		Varies
<b>Total</b>	<b>31-37</b>		

**\*A critical component of the professional education experience is observation and field experience opportunities. Institutions may embed this component into professional education coursework or offer it concurrently with such coursework.**

# Policies and Procedures and Affordability/Accessibility/Delivery

---

## Recommendations

### ■ Program Components

The Paraprofessional Task Force is proposing the following recommendations concerning the components of a successful paraprofessional program:

- Recommend that the state adopt (and set a baseline score for) a standardized test, such as the ETS or ACT exam, for paraprofessionals hired prior to January 8, 2002. If a test is approved, the community colleges should take an active role in preparing current paraprofessionals for the test. It is also recommended that community colleges take an active role in becoming approved sites for administration of the test. *(It should be noted that ISBE endorsed the ETS and ACT assessments in February 2003, and approved cut scores for each test in March 2003. Staff from ISBE and ICCB are currently working in partnership to bring together a comprehensive group of education stakeholders to collaboratively create a statewide model for test preparation. It is anticipated that the model, both on-site and on-line versions, will be completed in December 2003.)*
- Recommend that community colleges develop or utilize a mechanism — such as a portfolio process — to evaluate and award credit for prior learning for current paraprofessionals.
- The joint subcommittee fully recommends and supports the curriculum subcommittee's recommendation of an AAS in Paraprofessional Studies.
- The joint subcommittee fully recommends the continuing work on an AAT degree.
- A key component of the work of community colleges in this initiative is to build a full continuing education network for current and future paraprofessionals, including collaborating with union training programs.
- A comprehensive advertising campaign should occur to heighten awareness about courses offered, financial aid opportunities, and other program information. Union newsletters, school district publications, and other commonly circulated documents should be used as conduits of information.

## ■ Delivery Methods

The joint subcommittee encourages community colleges to provide courses onsite (in the elementary/middle/high schools) as much as possible. This coursework should be delivered in a timeframe appropriate for working paraprofessionals to take full advantage of all opportunities (i.e. use teacher in-service days to structure courses spread out over the whole year; offer courses immediately following the regular school day).

The development and use of online courses is strongly encouraged in those areas of the curriculum that would support this non-traditional delivery method. The joint subcommittee encourages ICCB, IBHE, and ISBE to develop funding sources which promote online course development.

## Members of the Paraprofessional Task Force

<b>Name</b>	<b>Institution/Agency/School District</b>
Jill Urban Bollis	Illinois Valley Community College
Sheila Burns	Regional Offices of Education 27,28,49
Linda Childers	Member, Illinois Education Association
Kai Conway	Regional Office of Education, Lee/Ogle Counties
Deborah Curtis	Illinois State University
Gregory W. Dlabach	Waubensee Community College
Bobette Dodson	West Chicago Elementary School District #33
Judith Fell	Lake County Federation of Teachers
Bernie M. Ferreri	City Colleges of Chicago
Bob Jones	Lewis & Clark Community College
Bill Kling	Ancel, Glink, Diamond, Bush, DiCianni & Rolek, P.C.
Lanita Koster	Illinois Federation of Teachers
Sandy Krsak	IFT Local 943, School District #111
Rich Lake	Parkland College
David Laubersheimer	Lincoln Land Community College
Jeanne Legan	Joliet Junior College
Margaret Lehner	Moraine Valley Community College
Bob Marshall	Illinois Valley Community College
Paul McCarthy	Prairie State College
Connie McKenna	IFT Local 1811, School District #105
Kathleen Medder	Lewis & Clark Community College
John Noak	Lincoln Land Community College
Jody O'Connell	De Paul University
Kathleen Pampe	Illinois Eastern Community Colleges
Cyndy Rice	School District #100
Neala Schleuning	Illinois Board of Higher Education
Susan Shea	Illinois Education Association

## Members of the Paraprofessional Task Force, continued

Name	Institution/Agency/School District
Georgia Sloan	West Aurora School District #129
Denis Wright	Joliet Junior College
Pam Yeager	Illinois Education Association
Art Zendejas	Chicago Public Schools
Mike Long Pat Ryan Nancy Patton Phylliss Jones Sue Burge	Illinois State Board of Education
Carol Lanning Rebecca Miller Tricia Broughton	Illinois Community College Board

---

### Paraprofessional Task Force Members by Subcommittee

#### **Curriculum Committee**

Margaret Lehner — Chair  
 Bernie Ferreri — Co-chair  
 Jill Urban-Bollis  
 Sue Burge  
 Sheila Burns  
 Kay Conway  
 Gregory Dlabach  
 Bobette Dodson  
 Jeanne Legan  
 Kitty Medder  
 John Noak  
 Jody O’Connell  
 Kathleen Pampe  
 Neala Schleuning  
 Art Zendejas  
 Debbie Meisner-Bertauski and Jill Wold also contributed as substitutes.

#### **Affordability/Accessibility/Delivery**

Sandy Krsak — Chair  
 Linda Childers  
 Deborah Curtis  
 Judith Fell  
 Rich Lake  
 Paul McCarthy  
 Connie McKenna

#### **Policies and Procedures**

Denis Wright — Chair  
 Bob Jones  
 Bill Kling  
 Lanita Koster  
 David Laubersheimer  
 Bob Marshall  
 Georgia Sloan

# Attachment 1

## American Federation of Teachers (AFT) — Standards for Paraprofessionals

### Content Knowledge (CK)

- CK1 Reading
- CH2 Writing
- CK3 Mathematical Computation
- CK4 Mathematical Reasoning

### Thinking Skills (TS)

- TS1 Creative Writing
- TS2 Decision Making
- TS3 Problem Solving
- TS4 Integrating New Knowledge
- TS5 Reasoning
- TS6 Organizing and Processing Information

### Interpersonal Relations/Human Relations (IR)

- IR1 Communication Skills – Listening and speaking
- IR2 Leadership Skills
- IR3 Respect for Cultural Diversity
- IR4 Respect for Views of Others
- IR5 Ability to Work as a Team Member

### Personal Qualities (PQ)

- PQ1 Responsibility
- PQ2 Self-Esteem
- PQ3 Sociability
- PQ4 Self-Management
- PQ5 Integrity/Honesty

### Behavior Management (BH)

- BH1 Understands and translates for students the classroom and school rules for student behavior
- BH2 Can handle student behavior problems using procedures of classroom plan
- BH3 Can identify types of behavior problems in students and responds appropriately and consistently

### Human Growth and Development (HG)

- HG1 Can select, use, and develop age-appropriate materials for instructional reinforcement
- HG2 Understands and uses appropriate strategies for managing students of different age groups and ability
- HG3 Can identify signs of developmental delays in students and relate observations to teacher

### Instructional Strategies (IS)

- IS1 Understands various instructional strategies and can apply strategies for reinforcement of skills introduced by the teacher
- IS2 Can identify problem areas in student comprehension and adapt instructional strategies
- IS3 Uses appropriate strategies for individual students and for small groups
- IS4 Interprets lesson plan and can develop activities to implement the plan
- IS5 Observes and records student progress both pre- and post-instructional reinforcement
- IS6 Understands purpose of a specific curriculum and his/her role in implementing the curriculum

### Laws, Policies, and Procedures (LP)

- LP1 Is familiar with laws governing reporting of suspected child abuse and can identify potential signs
- LP2 Is familiar with the general provisions of federal and state laws applicable to special needs students including ADA and IDEA
- LP3 Understands the purpose of an IEP and can implement portions applicable to his/her assignment
- LP4 Understands the paperwork requirements for Chapter I funding and maintains accurate record, when necessary