

PARAEDUCATOR CERTIFICATE PROGRAM *FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQ)*

This document includes frequently asked questions from both school district implementation staff and paraeducators. This is supplemental material.

Before reading this document, please read the [implementation toolkit](#).

As this document is quite large, we recommend that you use either:

- The outline tab to the left;
- Direct search of a term (Ctrl + F if on a PC, or Cmd + F if on a Mac); or
- The shortcuts to a specific section in this document:
 1. [Minimum employment requirements](#)
 2. [Clock hours and tracking](#)
 3. [Certificate program general questions](#)
 4. [Fundamental Course of Study](#)
 5. [General paraeducator certificate](#)
 6. [Subject matter certificates](#)
 7. [Paraeducator questions](#)

If you are unable to find an answer to your question here, please email paraboard@k12.wa.us.

1. MINIMUM EMPLOYMENT REQUIREMENTS

Do paraeducators need to meet minimum employment requirements if there is no funding for the paraeducator certificate program training?

Paraeducators must meet employment requirements, regardless if training is funded.

What if a paraeducator cannot find and/or obtain a copy of their GED?

Paraeducators may submit an equivalent to a high school diploma or GED. For more detailed information, please read the [additional resource](#) document.

Does ETS provide online testing for the ParaPro test?

Beginning February 2, 2021, you can take the ParaPro assessment remotely from your own computer at home or another secure location. [Learn more about remote ETS testing.](#)

How do the state minimum employment requirements and Title I minimum employment requirements interact with one another?

School districts that receive Title I funds must meet Title I requirements, these supersede the state requirements. As an example, Title I funding has minimum employment requirements for substitute paraeducators.

Our paraeducators do not provide instructional support, do they need to meet the minimum employment requirements and training requirements?

A paraeducator who does not provide instructional support does not meet the definition of a paraeducator as defined in [WAC](#). We recommend providing a new title to the role and making sure the duty and activity code in S-275 is recorded accurately.

If the individual does not provide instructional support in their role as a paraeducator, they are not required to meet employment and training requirements.

Is there a minimum number of hours a paraeducator must provide instructional support before they are required to meet employment and training requirements?

No. If a paraeducator provides any instructional support, the paraeducator must meet employment and training requirements.

Does this training replace the special education recommended core competencies?

The core competencies are a recommendation and not a requirement in the state. That said, the knowledge and skill competencies of the paraeducator standards of practice and special education standards of practice do include [the core competencies](#).

Is the Paraeducator Certificate Program training only for state-funded paraeducators? What about local and federal?

This training is for all paraeducators who meet the definition of an instructional paraeducator, regardless if they are funded at the local, state, or federal level.

We have an 18-21 year old program, a Transition Outreach Program, or something similar. Do paraeducators serving these students need to meet the requirements?

Yes. These paraeducators are considered to be a part of the k-12 system, and as such have to meet the minimum employment requirements and go through the required training.

2. CLOCK HOURS AND TRACKING

Are the professional development hours paraeducators complete clock hours?

The Paraeducator Certificate Program requires the training provided to be Continuing Education Credit Hours (i.e., “clock hour”). ([WAC](#))

What is a clock hour?

“Clock hours”, a shorthand for Continuing Education Credit Hours, is defined in ([WAC](#)). This is the system of measurement for education professional development in the state of Washington, i.e, a “unit of currency”.

Is there a clock hour fee?

Some professional learning providers do have a clock hour fee. However, for the attainment of the Fundamental Course of Study and the Subject Matter Certificates clock hours are provided for in WAC and no fees need to be charged (this does not apply to certificate renewal). Note, this does not apply to tuition fees or recording fees which some providers charge. ([WAC](#))

How will paraeducators track their training?

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Certification Office (OSPI) has adapted “e-cert”, an online tool to track the completion of clock hours, to include paraeducators. It is the responsibility of the paraeducator, with the assistance of the school district, to file completion of the Fundamental Course of Study and training to meet the certificates through e-cert.

OSPI has published the Fundamental Course of Study [clock hour form](#). Districts and paraeducators will use this form to track any completed units or completion of the course. As paraeducators are new to the clock hour system, school districts should assist paraeducators with the submission and process.

How do paraeducators create an EDS account?

OSPI's certification office has created [a manual](#) to help paraeducators create an EDS account and file in e-cert the completion of the FCS, and for the subject matter, general and advanced certificates.

What is the necessary documentation needed for e-cert?

We recommend using the [FCS clock hour form](#). Paraeducators can either email the completed form to cert@k12.wa.us or mail in a physical copy. Paraeducators can also wait to upload FCS documentation when they file for the general certificate.

Are there more resources available to help with creating an EDS account and filing completion in e-cert?

OSPI's cert office is available to provide e-cert training to your paraeducators. If your school district is interested in having the cert office train your paraeducators on how to create an EDS account and how to file the completion of the FCS, please contact Tonya Bartlett (tonya.bartlett@k12.wa.us)

Will district administrators be able to log into e-cert and see the progress of paraeducators in our district?

Yes, to an extent. School district administrators will be able to view a list of all the paraeducators in their district who have completed the FCS.

Is there an approved provider list for the certificate program?

Yes. Not including the FCS (an organization does not need to be a WA state approved clock hour provider) or subject matter certificates, there is a Professional Educator Standards Board approved clock hour provider list.

Who keeps track of all of the training hours we provide to paraeducators in our district or that the paraeducators have completed?

It is the responsibility of the school district and paraeducator. When the FCS is complete, the paraeducator can notify e-cert. Likewise, when training is completed towards the certificates, the paraeducators can notify e-cert. E-cert will assist the school district, but it is not a catch all. The district is required to ensure that paraeducators in their district complete the Fundamental Course of Study and attain the General Paraeducator Certificate.

Is the training transferable from district to district in Washington?

Yes. It is the responsibility of the paraeducator, with the assistance of the school district, to file completion of the FCS and clock hours towards the certificates on e-cert. By filing, this allows for districts and paraeducators to track completed training.

3. CERTIFICATE PROGRAM GENERAL QUESTIONS

When did the Paraeducator Certificate Program begin?

The program began July 1, 2019. No training before this date counts to meeting program requirements.

What certificates can paraeducators complete training on?

Paraeducators may complete professional development clock hours towards their General Paraeducator Certificate and the Subject Matter Certificates beginning with the 2019-2020 school year. However, a paraeducator may not attain one of these certificates until after they complete the Fundamental Course of Study and listed the completion on eCert.

How do districts decide which component of the certificate program to provide?

- If you hire a new paraeducator, you must train them for two days (14 hours) of the FCS.
- If a paraeducator has received their first two days (14 hours) of FCS training, you must provide them with the second two days (14 hours) of FCS training to complete their FCS.
- If a paraeducator has completed four days (28 hours) of FCS training, you must train them for two days (14 hours) on the general certificate, until the paraeducator earns the certificate.

4. FUNDAMENTAL COURSE OF STUDY

What is the Fundamental Course of Study (FCS)?

The FCS is the foundational training to the certificate program that all paraeducators must receive before the paraeducator begins to work with students. The course is a total of 4 days, which has been defined as 28 hours.

Are there assessments to the certificates or the Fundamental Course of Study?

No. The Fundamental Course of Study and the certificates are trainings of completion, not assessment. There are no tests or grades.

What documentation is required for the FCS?

The Paraeducator Board requires providers to provide paraeducators with written documentation of the FCS unit and course completion. To assist in the accomplishment of this requirement, the OSPI certification office published the [FCS clock hour form](#). Districts and providers may use this form to verify clock hours for completing units of the FCS or completing the entire course. Paraeducators and districts are responsible for maintaining records of unit and course completion.

Are digital signatures allowed on the clock hour form?

Digital signatures are acceptable on the FCS clock forms.

Transcripts from the district with the FCS units listed are acceptable, but districts must be clear on the units completed. If the certification office cannot clearly understand that the units and hours are complete, they will ask for additional documentation. This can be frustrating for the paraeducators who are not familiar with the system and do not understand why they need to submit more paperwork.

We already provide Safe Schools training; can this be used for part of the FCS, and if so which part?

Yes. Safe Schools can meet the unit (FCS09) titled “Emergency and Health Safety”, which is one hour of training. The corresponding Safe School units to complete are:

- Sexual Misconduct Staff to Student,
- Child Abuse,
- Discrimination Awareness in the Workplace,
- Bloodborne Pathogen Exposure Prevention,
- Health Emergencies: Asthma Awareness,
- Health Emergencies: Life Threatening Allergies.

We already provide Right Response training; can this be used for part of the FCS, and if so which part?

Yes. Right Response (the full program) may be used to meet the unit titled “Behavior management strategies including de-escalation techniques”, which is two hours of training.

Is completing the FCS a minimum employment requirement?

No. The minimum employment requirements are described above. The FCS training is in-service training provided by the school district or chosen provider.

If a paraeducator transfers districts prior to completing the FCS, what happens?

It is the responsibility of the paraeducator and the school district, or another provider, to maintain records of training. Providers are required to give paraeducators written documentation of unit completion and course completion. These documents will assist the new school district to determine what training the paraeducator still needs to receive.

A paraeducator has completed the FCS in school district X, and is transferring to school district Y; does the paraeducator have to complete the FCS again?

No. Once the paraeducator has completed the course, the course does not have to be completed again. However, a school district may still require the paraeducator to go through specific training, such as an orientation.

Our district would like to download and incorporate the online course “Paraeducators: what we do matters” into our own learning management system, is this possible?

Yes. You can download the course for free after submitting your user login information [online](#).

When does the FCS in-person emergency rule expire?

The Paraeducator Board extended the in-person emergency rule allowing for synchronous online learning to count for the seven-hour in-person requirement for the FCS. It now expires September 1, 2022. [Learn more.](#)

5. GENERAL PARAEDUCATOR CERTIFICATE

Can paraeducators use college credit towards their general certificate?

Yes. Paraeducators enrolled in college courses can use their college credits towards their general certificate. Any credit taken on or after July 1, 2019 can count towards their general certificate.

Paraeducators will enter credits in their e-cert account towards the general certificate the same way they enter clock hours. In the e-cert panel labeled “educator professional development hours”, there is a drop-down menu where educators can choose credits or clock hours. Paraeducators should maintain transcripts showing credits earned in the same way they maintain their clock hour forms.

Can a school district require paraeducators to complete Subject Matter Certificate training towards the general certificate?

Yes. Although the training is online and free, if a district requires a paraeducator to complete the online courses outside of bargained time, the paraeducator must receive compensation for their time. Each online course is 20 hours of training.

Does the general certificate need to be completed in three years?

No. Due to partial funding, the Paraeducator Board amended WAC and removed the three-requirement for the general certificate.

Does the general certificate expire?

No, it does not.

Is there an in-person requirement for the general certificate?

There is no in-person training requirement.

Does the general certificate have a curriculum?

No. The only requirement is that the paraeducator must complete clock hour training that meets in-service education approval standards ([WAC](#)) ([WAC](#)).

Are there suggested general certificate training topics for the 2021-22 school year?

During the November 2020 and March 2021 paraeducator listening session, paraeducators expressed interest in receiving the following training:

- Social and emotional learning
- Technology (e.g., learning management system, G-Suite, SeeSaw, and more)
- Collaborative training with both teachers and paraeducators

Who must provide training on the general certificate?

If funded, it is the responsibility of the school district to provide training, and ensure paraeducators complete the training. The school district may partner with providers to make sure this training is provided. Providers must be PESB-approved clock hour providers, and could include community colleges, ESDs, and unions.

If we counted training towards the FCS last year, can we count it towards the general certificate this year?

No. The FCS and general certificate are separate components and paraeducators must complete different and separate training towards their general certificate than towards their FCS.

If a paraeducator transfers districts prior to completing the general certificate, what happens?

It is the responsibility of the paraeducator and the school district to maintain records of completed training. The paraeducator, with the assistance of the school district, is responsible for filing completed training on e-cert. The completed training “follows” the paraeducator throughout the state.

Are there online courses for the general certificate like the FCS?

No. However, you could complete the online courses for ELL and Special Education Subject Matter Certificates to meet up to 40 hours of the general certificate.

If my district provided paraeducators with clock hour training before the 2021-22 school year, do I still need to provide them with 14 hours of general certificate training?

Yes. Paraeducators are welcome to apply any clock hours they’ve earned after July 1, 2019 towards their general certificate. Unless they have met the entire 70 clock hour requirement, districts must provide them with 14 hours of general certificate training between July 1, 2021 and September 1, 2022.

6. SUBJECT MATTER CERTIFICATES

Is there a way to track coursework for the subject matter certificates?

The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) certification office adapted “e-cert”, an online tool to track the completion of clock hours, to include paraeducators. It is the responsibility of the paraeducator, with the assistance of the school district, to file completion of the Fundamental Course of Study and training to meet the certificates through e-cert.

OSPI has published the [Subject Matter Certificate clock hour form](#). Districts and paraeducators will use this form to track any coursework towards either of the certificates.

Are the subject matter certificates required training?

No. The subject matter certificates are not a requirement for a paraeducator working in any program. That said, a school district may always require a higher standard. ([RCW](#))

Can subject matter certificates count towards the general certificate?

Yes. There are two considerations here. First, if the general certificate is funded, then school districts may use this funding for paraeducators to meet one or both of the Subject Matter Certificates, as long as they apply the completed certificate to the general certificate (i.e., if the paraeducator has already completed the general certificate, funds cannot be used in this way). Second, this deducts hours from the general certificate. The completion of one certificate deducts 20 hours and two will deduct 40 hours. A paraeducator will then only have to complete 30 hours to earn the general certificate.

If a paraeducator completes the ELL and/or Special Education subject matter certificates and uses the hours toward their general certificate, does the general certificate expire when the subject matter certificates expire(s)?

No. The General Paraeducator Certificate does not expire.

7. PARAEDUCATOR QUESTIONS

I do not consider myself a paraeducator or my district does not call me a paraeducator, how do I know if I need to go through training?

We do not define paraeducators based on titles, but instead on whether or not they meet the state definition of an instructional paraeducator. Paraeducators have many titles: classroom assistants, teacher's aids, etc. If you provide instructional assistance under a certified/licensed staff member at any point of their job, you must receive the training.

I completed paraeducator professional development before July 1, 2019 (or that as a school district we provided to paraeducators), will this count towards the Paraeducator Certificate Program?

No, July 1, 2019 is when school districts may begin to provide, and you may begin to train, on the Paraeducator Certificate Program.

The only exception to the above is for paraeducators who participated in the Paraeducator Pilot during the 2018-19 school year. ([WAC](#))

Will I earn a higher salary as they progress in the certificate program?

This is a bargaining issue between paraeducators, school districts, and unions.

I have an AA, BA, MA, or Ph.D. degree, or I am a paraeducator with multiple years of experience as a paraeducator, am I required to complete the FCS?

Yes. Prior experience and degree attainment do not defer training.

I was a former teacher, principal, or administrator, am I required to complete the FCS?

Yes. Prior experience and degree attainment do not defer training.

I have a valid Title 181 certificate (e.g., teaching certificate), am I required to complete the FCS?

Yes. Paraeducators with a valid Title 181 certificate are only required to complete the Fundamental Course of Study training. Once the FCS is complete, these paraeducators are considered to have met the general certificate requirement and will require no further training. You are then responsible for completing filing requirements with the certification office to file for the certificate.

The exemption to the above are educators who only hold limited certificates. If a paraeducator only holds a limited certificate, the paraeducator must complete the general certificate. ([WAC](#))

I feel I have a special circumstance. Can the board waive the minimum employment requirements or attendance of the FCS trainings?

The board does not waive any minimum employment requirements or training requirements for individual paraeducators. If you are an instructional paraeducator, you must meet the minimum employment requirements and attend the FCS training. Education, experience, or job title does not defer FCS training.

I would like to take the online course "Paraeducators: what we do matters", can I?

You should coordinate with your district before taking any online courses, including "Paraeducators: what we do matters". We do not recommend completing this course without district approval.

I have created an EDS account and filed the completion of the FCS. Will I receive a certificate?

The FCS is not a certificate so paraeducators will not receive documentation for the FCS. They should keep any documentation of the FCS, including a copy of the FCS clock hour form.

Can I start working on a subject matter certificate now?

Yes. Paraeducators can complete the online courses, or may take professional development that meet the standards, learning objectives, and course outline for the subject matter. Paraeducators who complete their subject matter certificates cannot earn their certificates until after they complete the FCS.

I work with special needs or ELL students, am I required to complete subject matter certificate training?

This is not a state requirement. That said, a school district may always require a higher standard.

I heard about the reimbursement rate for training. Will I receive this money directly?

These funds are not sent to paraeducators. They are sent directly to districts for training costs, including a paraeducator's wages and benefits accrued during their training time.

What do I need to do before pursuing the advanced certificate?

To complete the advanced certificate, you must first earn the general certificate. Only once the general certificate is earned, may you begin training to meet the advanced certificate.