

# An Analysis of Special Education Paraeducator Staffing

Merrimack School District  
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## Priority School Board Goal for 2025-2026 School Year:

### **“Right-Sizing” of the School District in the Development of the 2026-2027 School Budget.**

#### Areas Reviewed

- Staffing
- Programs
- Services
- Special Education
- Operational Costs
- Enrollments
- Class Sizes
- Maintenance and Capital
- Compensation and Benefits

# Special Education Paraeducator Staffing: The Most Variable Budget Component

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Identifies 14 Categories of Disabilities under Which Children Ages 3-22 may be eligible for Services

Autism Multiple Disabilities

Deaf-Blindness Orthopedic Impairment

Deafness Other Health Impairment

Emotional Disturbance Specific Learning Disability

Hearing Impaired Speech and Language Impairment

Intellectual Disability Traumatic Brain Injury

Developmental Delay Visual Impairment

# Study Involved Both Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis

## Quantitative Analysis

(Conducted by Boothby Therapy Services, Laconia, NH)

Boothby Reviewed the Services and Service Minutes in Individual Educational Plans of 658 Students as of October 2025

(Note: About 3/5 of students with an IEP require paraeducator support)

IEP Service Minutes were Translated into Estimated Minimum Paraeducator Staffing Levels

## Key Variables That Impact Staffing Accuracy Noted by Boothby

- Data Reflected a Snapshot In Time with No Longitudinal Analysis
- Structured Nature of School Schedules would Realistically Limit Shared Paraeducator Efficiency
- IEP Minutes Do Not Always Align with Class Schedules
- Transition Grades (K, 5, 7, 9) Show Paraeducator Support Spikes
- Service Levels for any Student Can Change During the Year
- Some Students are Identified for IEP Services During the Year
- Move-in Students with IEPs Impact Staffing

## Qualitative Factors Impacting Paraeducator Staffing

A review of research, reports and articles that address special education paraeducator staffing have noted the following variables, beyond IEP minutes, that impact special education paraeducator staffing:

- The Nature of a Student's Disability and Needs
- Disability Profiles and Complexity
- IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act)
- Service Models
- Behavioral and Safety Considerations
- Teacher Workload and Instructional Demands
- School Schedule and Service Minutes
- Staff Availability, Turnover, and Consistency of IEP Services
- Comparative Metrics

## Comparative Metrics

In working to understand the “Rightness” of our special education paraeducator staffing, several other metrics were reviewed in addition to the Boothby quantitative data and the various qualitative variables noted. These metrics include:

- State of New Hampshire Special Education Paraeducator to Student (on IEP) Ratio
- Regional School Districts’ Special Education Paraeducator to Student (on IEP) Ratio
- Merrimack School District’s 10-Year Trend of Special Education Paraeducator to Student Ratio

## New Hampshire Data for Ages 6-21

### Ages 6-21: Paraprofessional to Student Ratio

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Paraprofessionals	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4	1:4

### Ages 6-21: Teacher to Student Ratio

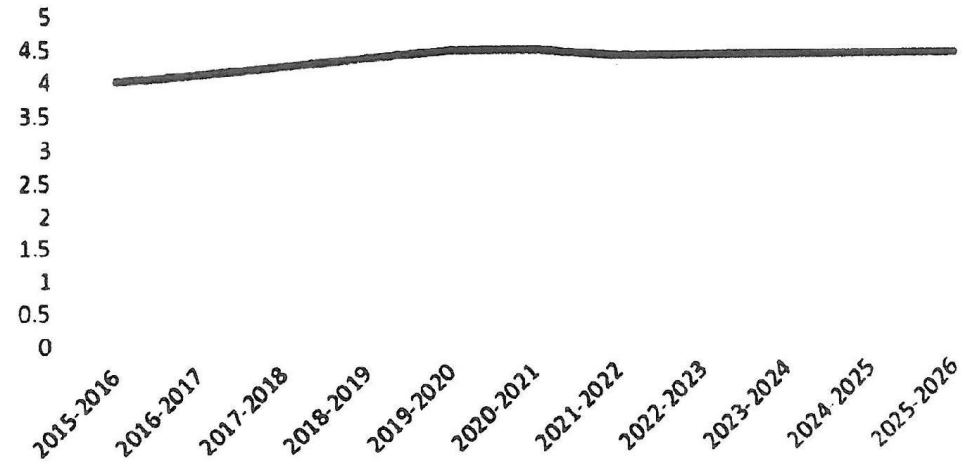
	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
Teachers	1:12	1:12	1:12	1:12	1:13

Reported from the New Hampshire Personnel Survey and Child Count

## Students with an IEP per Paraeducator

District	Number of Students in District 10/1/2025	Total # of Students w/IEPs	Total # of Paraeducators	Average
Salem	3,502	649	155	4.2
Pelham	1,556	337	64	5.3
Windham	2,848	545	93	5.9
Timberlane	3,193	722	149	4.8
<b>Merrimack</b>	<b>3,375</b>	<b>753</b>	<b>180</b>	<b>4.2</b>
Milford	1,904	411	70	5.9
Goffstown	2,764	564	117	4.8
Londonderry	3,847	770	97	7.9
Hudson	2,875	506	100	5.0
Litchfield	1,085	190	42	4.5
Average Number of Students per Paraeducator				5.3

**MERRIMACK SCHOOL DISTRICT**  
**Students with an IEP per Paraeducator**



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# Summary Findings and Staffing Outlook

Minimum Number of Special Education Paraeducators Needed at the Time of the Study via Boothby Analysis	139
Number of Additional Special Education Paraeducators Required to Address Qualitative (school operational) Variables	25
Total Needed at Time of Study	164
Number of Special Education Paraeducators Expected to be Needed in 2026-2027	165-175
Number of Staff Budgeted for 2026-2027	180
<u>Possible</u> Reduction of Paraeducators Over the Next Two Years	5-10

## Key Takeaway

The special education paraeducator “right-sizing” analysis found that there is no one quantitative or qualitative variable that can precisely identify the right number paraeducators that are needed to provide FAPE to students with IEP’s during the course of an entire school year.