

Update to the VSBPE: Paraeducator Standards Working Group

Brenda Schramm, ECE Workforce Development Director VTAEYC
Diane M Hermann-Artim, Associate Academic Dean CCV
Gina Rocque, Director of Support Services at WCSU
Hannah Miller, Assistant Professor, Chair, Advisor, NVU-Johnson
Jason Gingold, Director of Burlington Technical Center
Mikaela Simms, co-director Spark Teacher Education and Diversity Coordinator, BUHS
Mike Leonard, Special Educator BSD
Natalie Searle, Director of Secondary Education Initiatives at CCV
Ana Kolbach, AOE Inclusion and Accessibility Coordinator
Andrew Prowten, AOE Pre-Service education Coordinator
Ruth Durkee, AOE State Director of Career Technical Education
Ryan McCormick, AOE Peer Review Coordinator
Ryan Parkman, AOE Math Content Specialist PB Learning Team

The participants above reviewed the Vermont Core Teaching Standards and 5 sets of Paraeducator standards from other states or professional organizations (see chart below). Participants provided feedback through a combination of synchronous and asynchronous activities focused both on the specific standards frameworks, and larger essential questions of this project.

The participants were initially presented a draft framework of seven standards to use in Vermont, which has been focused down into five. The framework below shows draft language for the 5 standard areas, and the team will continue to draft specific sub-standards.

Additionally, the team responded to several essential questions through writing and discussions. Key takeaways from those conversations are included below as well.

Paraeducator Standards of Other States and National Organizations

Vermont Core Teaching and Leadership Standards	NEA ESP	NH Para 2 (use ctrl+F “Certification as a Paraeducator II”, or scroll to standard Ed 504.06)	WA Para	Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) Paraeducator Guidelines	WI Paraprofessional Standards
1 Learner Development	P1 Communication Standard	1 Professionalism	1 Supporting instructional opportunities;	Preparation Standard 1: Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences	Standard I: Support Instructional Strategies in Content Areas
2 Learning Differences	P.2. Cultural Competence Standard	2 Literacy (KS and PS)	2 Demonstrating professionalism and ethical practices;	Preparation Standard 2: Learning Environments	Standard II: Support Positive Learning Environment
3 Learning Environments	P.3. Organization Standard	3 Mathematics (KS and PS)	3 Supporting a positive and safe learning environment;	Preparation Standard 3: Curricular Content Knowledge	Standard III: Demonstrate Effective Communication and Collaborative Relationships
4 Content Knowledge	P.4. Reporting Standard	4 Child Development	4 Communicating effectively and participating in the team process;	Preparation Standard 4: Assessment	Standard IV: Demonstrate Understanding of How Children and Youth Learn
5 Appl of content	P.5. Ethics Standard	5 Individualized instructional strategies	5 Demonstrating cultural competency.	Preparation Standard 5: Instructional Planning and Strategies	Standard V: Demonstrate Professional Responsibilities and Growth
6 Assessment	P.6. Health & Safety Standard			Preparation Standard 6: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice	
7 Planning for Instruction	P.7. Technology Standard			Preparation Standard 7: Collaboration	
8 Instructional Strategies	P.8. Professionalism Standard				
9 Prof Learning and Ethical Pract					
10 Leadership and Collab					

Draft Vermont Paraeducator Framework

Standard One: Learner Development (adapted from VTCS)

The Paraeducator understands how learners grow and develop, recognizing that patterns of learning and development vary individually within and across the cognitive, linguistic, social, emotional, and physical areas, and supports developmentally appropriate and challenging learning experiences.

Standard Two: Learning Differences (adapted from VTCS)

The Paraeducator uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to support inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards.

Standard Three: Learning Environments (adapted from VTCS)

The Paraeducator works with others to create environments that support individual and collaborative learning, and that encourage positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.

Standard Four: Supporting Instructional Strategies in Content Areas (adapted from WI Para Standards)

The Paraeducator has basic knowledge of instructional strategies across various content areas and supports the teacher in providing meaningful learning experiences for students.

Standard Five: Professional and Ethical Practice (adapted from NEA ESP Paraeducator Standards)

The Paraeducator demonstrates an ability to maintain a high level of ethical behavior, confidentiality, and privacy of any information regarding students, staff, and all job-related matters, and presents and conduct oneself in a professional manner in all job settings.

Key Takeaways from Collaboration Times:

- Participants appreciated how WI, WA and CEC standards clearly define the role of paraeducators as part of a team.
- Standards need to be simple. Current VLP is complex and abstract. Para standards need to be focused on the job itself, action oriented, and include scenarios ([AEL standards](#) “Sample illustrations”).
- There is a perennial conflict between the expectations of Paraeducator’s knowledge and qualifications, and their job responsibilities. In other words, Paraeducators often find themselves in a position where they are expected to provide instruction to students, but explicitly are not supposed to. These standards need to help define the role and must be careful to alleviate, and not exacerbate this issue. This is especially true for any standards around content area knowledge like math and literacy.
- “Paraeducator” is often the default term used and is often preferred by many in the role. Perhaps this is due to inertia, so we should continue to explore a title that will help elevate the profession. Several indicated that having the word “teacher/teaching” included would be beneficial to promote the idea of continuing towards licensure (co-teacher, teaching assistant, etc.)
- There is merit in having the final credential to be issued by AOE, but we need to be careful of creating additional barriers. Department of Labor’s early childhood credential is a good model to examine further.
- There is also merit in having a “renewal” requirement for the credential. Perhaps a longer timeline so those who pursue licensure can focus on that, while those who want to remain in the role will still be required to demonstrate growth and PD. Having a 10-year lifetime for the credential would give a good balance between flexibility, while incentivizing the pursuit of a teaching license.
- In terms of existing infrastructure:
 - Adult education through district Tech centers has a lot in place that can be utilized and reinforced.
 - 11 CTE Centers have recently partnered with [Ed Rising](#)
 - VTAEYC’s various initiatives in ECE are a great model to examine further. They have recently focused a lot of effort on supporting mentors of teacher candidates and have had great results. They also require partner ECE centers to allow for paid release time
- In terms of needed infrastructure:
 - AOE guidance for EPPs on a “genuine field experience” for working educators contrast to meet the requirements of a traditional 13-week student teaching experience.
 - Expansion of PD for paraeducators beyond current job responsibilities, and to facilitate PD that helps individuals have career growth.
 - Paraeducators are often only paid for “student days.” Paid PD days would be extremely beneficial, especially paired with a focus on career growth)
- For Community college, dual enrollment, and/or early college:

- CCV used to have a pre-education and paraeducator credential program that was discontinued. There were other avenues to meet Title II federal requirements for those who would otherwise seek the credential (presumably ParaPro). Additionally, CCV could not get buy-in from EPPs to accept transfer credits other than Gen Eds.
- Federal Pell grants required a minimum of 24 credits for a credential. If the paraeducator credential required fewer credits, state funds would be required for scholarships and grants.
- We also talked extensively around how this could fit into CCV's Early College Plus program. It would fit well with the work already being completed, and this certificate would be a great incentive. Taking a tiered approach, we could explore how to allow individuals to earn this credential prior to completing a full Associate's as well. Completing the first few courses would allow folks to apply through AOE for the credential while continuing their program. We would need buy in from BA programs/EPPs. NVU/Castleton are a natural fit, but lots of uncertainty around merger.
- Early college does create awkwardness for districts determining where in "the books" a student is. Perhaps a practicum requirement could help keep students as part of the community.
- There are lots of stipend and grant opportunities through VSAC, including an increase in grants for non-degree programs.
- As for the roles and responsibilities of individual districts or school buildings, we discussed how Para's would need more paid PD time. There should also be a pathway for the credential designed to honor the years of experience for current paraeducators. Rather than taking new PD/coursework there should be a form/portfolio process. WA and WI models are good for this but would be asking a lot of districts. Perhaps a partnership with districts EPPs like Spark.
- In terms of recruiting HS students- many students don't want to come back to their school once they leave. Schools would need to create a really positive experience, or partner with neighboring schools to create a new space for candidates (if there is one close enough). Kids do seem to have more positive memories of Elementary classrooms because it is so scaffolded and supported. Practicums in this setting could be beneficial and support recruitment.
- We also discussed how this credential could be used for Paras who have left the field, those who are working in alternative positions (planning room, restorative justice coordinator, afterschool coordinators), and individuals who work outside of schools to earn enough to support their families but want to transition into schools.
- Finally, a sobering reminder that fair compensation and livable wages are essential to sustain a paraeducator workforce. More data from other states with Para credentials is needed to see if there have been increases in compensation after their new credential requires were rolled out.