

SENATE BILL REPORT

SHB 1015

As of March 9, 2023

Title: An act relating to minimum employment requirements for paraeducators.

Brief Description: Concerning minimum employment requirements for paraeducators.

Sponsors: House Committee on Education (originally sponsored by Representatives Santos, Ybarra, Bergquist, Stonier, Leavitt, Rude, Jacobsen, Simmons, Reed, Lekanoff, Goodman, Pollet, Ortiz-Self, Callan, Doglio, Reeves, Tharinger, Wylie, Paul, Thai, Springer and Ormsby; by request of Professional Educator Standards Board).

Brief History: Passed House: 2/2/23, 97-0.

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 3/09/23.

Brief Summary of Bill

- Directs the Paraeducator Board to adopt one or more paraeducator assessments, and set a passing score for each assessment.
- Provides that paraeducators may meet certain minimum employment requirements by receiving a passing score on an assessment approved by the Paraeducator Board.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Staff: Benjamin Omdal (786-7442)

Background: Paraeducators provide instructional services to students while working under the direct supervision of instructional certificated staff. These services can include direct instruction of children in small and large groups, individualized instruction, testing of children, recordkeeping, and preparation of materials. Paraeducators are categorized under Washington law as classified instructional employees.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Federal law generally requires that paraeducators who work in programs supported by certain federal funds have a high school diploma or its equivalent and either:

- have completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education;
- hold an associate's or higher degree; or
- meet a rigorous standard of quality, and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing in reading, writing, and mathematics.

Under state law, paraeducators must be at least 18 years of age and hold a high school diploma or its equivalent. In addition, paraeducators must either:

- have received a passing grade on the Education Testing Service paraeducator assessment;
- hold an associate of arts degree;
- have earned 72 quarter credits or 48 semester credits at an institution of higher education; or
- have completed a registered apprenticeship program.

Education Testing Service Paraeducator Assessment. The private organization, Education Testing Service (ETS), offers a paraeducator assessment called the ETS ParaPro Assessment. According to ETS, the assessment was developed in response to a federal law that allows paraeducators to meet minimum employment requirements by demonstrating knowledge of, and the ability to assist in, the instruction of reading, writing, and mathematics.

The assessment is conducted online at an individual's home or on a computer at certain test centers. Both options are monitored by a human proctor and only available during specified business hours. Test-takers have 2.5 hours to finish 90 multiple-choice questions.

Paraeducator Board. The Paraeducator Board is a statutorily created nine-member board whose duties include establishment of requirements related to the paraeducator standards of practice, mandatory paraeducator certificates, and optional paraeducator certificates.

Summary of Bill: The Paraeducator Board must adopt one or more assessments that meet a rigorous standard of quality and can be used to demonstrate knowledge of, and the ability to assist in, instruction in reading, writing, and mathematics, as well as set a passing score for each assessment adopted. The Paraeducator Board may develop assessments to meet this requirement.

Minimum employment requirements for paraeducators are revised so that a paraeducator must have received a passing score on one of the assessments approved by the Paraeducator Board, rather than have received a passing grade on the Education Testing Service paraeducator assessment.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: The bill creates alternatives to the current assessment. The assessment developed by PESB will meet federal standards. The bill sets up an alternative to the ETS test since ETS is planning on discontinuing its online testing. School districts are struggling to staff paraeducator positions. Financial obstacles for prospective paraeducators will be removed by not using a third-party testing service. Even knowledgeable and skilled educators have difficulty with these exams.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Representative Sharon Tomiko Santos, Prime Sponsor; Jim Kowalkowski, Rural Education Center; Laura Ketcham, Para Educator, remotely; Dr. Erica Hernandez-Scott, Professional Educator Standards Board; Rick Chisa, Public School Employees of WA/SEIU 1948.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.