

Documentation of Special Education Paraeducators' Competence in Standards for CLIU Employees

As members of the educational team, you are familiar with the TOPS (Training of Paraeducator Staff) workshops that have been offered through the Intermediate Unit's Educational Consultants. We are aware that most of you as paraeducators have participated in TOPS.

Recent federal legislation (No Child Left Behind) has already mandated certification requirements for Title I Paraprofessional School Employees. In anticipation of the reauthorization of IDEA, Pennsylvania is initiating a credentialing certificate for special education paraeducators.

At this time, A Credential of Competency for Special Education Paraeducators in PA is a completely voluntary program. When a special education paraeducator has completed the Special Education Paraeducator Standards for Practice: Competency Assessment Checklist, a school district or IU will attest to paraeducator competence of these ten standards:

- Foundations of Special Education
- Development and Characteristics of Learners
- Individual Learning Differences
- Instructional Strategies
- Learning Environment & Social Interactions
- Language
- Instructional Planning
- Assessment
- Professional & Ethical Practice
- Collaboration

The IU will then submit documentation for IU Paraeducators to the Bureau of Special Education, who will issue the Credential of Competency. The completed checklist must be sent to:

Application for Special Education Paraeducator Credential
Division of Early Intervention and Support Services
Bureau of Special Education
333 Market Street, 7th Floor
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

This letter is to inform you that the TOPS Academy will satisfy the requirements to meet the ten competency standards. You are eligible to begin the credentialing process if you have attended current TOPS workshops since 1998.

Once you have completed the following TOPS workshops, you are eligible to apply for the Credential of Competency:

- Students with Disabilities
- Role of the Paraprofessional
- Students with Learning Disabilities/F.A.T. City
- Adaptations and Modifications
- Managing Instruction
- Managing Behavior
- Communication and Teaming/Family Issues
- A Close Look at Autism
- Inclusion
- Progress Monitoring
- Assistive Technology
- Paraeducator's Role in Mathematics Instruction
- Working with Concepts in Reading

Enclosed you will find a list of frequently asked questions for your review. If you have questions pertaining to the Paraeducator Credential of Competency, please contact: Terrie Geisel or Karen Newton at CLIU.

Special Education Paraeducator Credential

Frequently Asked Questions:

1. Who can verify and sign off on the Competency Assessment Checklist?

The supervisor of the classroom must verify and sign the Checklist.

2. If I change jobs, can I continue working on completing the Competency Assessment Checklist with the new supervisor on the things I have not yet accomplished, or do I need to start over?

When a paraeducator is ready to resume working on credentials after changing jobs, he/she should meet with their new supervisor to review the competencies that have previously been achieved. An interview should be scheduled with the new supervisor, and should include a discussion of where he/she is in the process, with a brief discussion of the achieved competencies.

3. Should I look up the trainings I have been to in the past to show that I have been trained in the various skill and knowledge areas? If so, how many years back can I go?

Yes, the paraeducator is responsible for verifying attendance at each TOPS course. Courses attended since and including 1998 will be counted towards the credential.

4. Does the paraeducator fill out the form herself/himself?

Yes, the paraeducator is responsible for keeping the necessary documentation on the form, and for securing supervisor signatures on each competency sheet.

5. Why will this help us in the future?

In addition to helping paraeducators develop essential skills to work effectively with students with disabilities, the Special Education Paraeducator Credential documents the efforts that paraeducators have made to better perform their duties.

6. Will the PA Department of Education make the competency credential a requirement for the paraeducator position?

*No. **At this time**, participation in the credentialing program is voluntary on the part of the paraeducator and the local education agency.*

7. Do I need to have all 10 standards complete before I send the document in to the state- or can I send one page at a time?

Please complete the entire document before submitting it to the Department of Education. Make sure your name, home address, social security number and school district information are clearly written on the document. It is in your best interest to keep all portions of the document together- sending it in page by page could result in portions being misplaced or lost.

8. Will classes be presented to fulfill a certain standard (e.g. a class covering #9 Professional and Ethical Practice only)?

Occasionally a class may be held which covers only one competency, but more often a few (or several) competencies will be covered in a class or presentation.

9. Will additional trainings, other than the TOPS courses, received through the IU or PaTTAN count as a class on the credential checklist?

The skills and knowledge addressed in trainings received through the IU or PaTTAN could be counted as a class. CLIU paraeducators are responsible for completing the form for submission of course work other than TOPS workshops. Please submit your request to Terrie Geisel, Educational Consultant at CLIU #21. A committee will review the submission and respond accordingly.

10. Is there a time limit to complete the requirements for the credential?

*There is no time limit **at this time** to achieve the competencies needed for the credential.*

11. Once you achieve the credential, how often is it reviewed (if at all)?

At this time there are no plans for review of the Special Education Paraeducator Credential. It is hoped, however, that paraeducators as well as others working to educate children, will continue professional development throughout their career. The credential does not expire either.