

## Tick, Tick, Tick...

### NCLB Requirements for Paraprofessionals in School Libraries

By Sharon L. Comstock

While the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) is not new, a deadline is looming for many of our support staff in school libraries who are identified as “paraprofessional” in school districts nation-wide. With the 2005-2006 school year, aides and assistants in school media centers will need to have achieved minimum standards of qualification to retain their positions, or be in breach of the NCLB. What this means for library staff in Title 1 schools (and media center faculty or district coordinators who supervise them) is that this spring is a critical time to make sure training and education are on track to achieve the NCLB targets.

Although the deadline for compliance has been extended to December 2005/January 2006, assuring staff are well informed and are given clear paths toward achievement is absolutely necessary before time runs out.

NCLB legislation, as it has come to be known, was written with the intent “...to close the achievement gap with accountability, flexibility, and choice, so that no child is left behind.” It was signed into law on January 8, 2002, amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), to consolidate educational programs funded by the federal government. NCLB was created in response to quantitative data indicating a wide achievement gap on standardized text scores between students in Title 1 schools and other schools. A school is identified as “Title 1” if 50% of its students are eligible for free or supported lunch according to federal guidelines.

Perhaps the most discussed aspect of NCLB is Section 1119, “Qualifications of Teachers and Paraprofessionals” outlining requirements that paraprofessionals must meet in order to work in a Title I school. See [1119](#), C-1 and G-2-E. Paraprofessionals must have:

- At least 48 semester hours (typically 60 hours is required) of college credit OR
- An associates degree OR
- Demonstrate through a formal assessment the ability to assist in instruction and knowledge of reading, writing, and mathematics.

Groups proposing changes to NCLB (and there are many) include the National Conference of State Legislatures and National School Boards Association who both advocate for granting states and districts flexibility to meet NCLB goals; and the [American Association of School Librarians \(AASL\)](#), who are requesting that school media be included in those core subjects required to have “highly qualified” teaching staff. Despite these proposals, the law’s requirements stand as written, and have little impact as yet on paraprofessionals’ need to comply.

### Complexities in Context

An interesting, albeit complex, area is that margin where the idealism of NCLB meets the gritty, real-world decisions that must be faced by administrators who are short-staffed and under-funded. One example of that can be seen in school libraries. AASL passed a resolution at the ALA Midwinter to support and advocate for school librarians to be included as those teachers of core subjects, thereby requiring school library media specialists to be “highly qualified.” At the same time, school libraries nationwide are, in many instances, being managed by paraprofessionals, who (leaving the “qualified” issue aside) should not have the responsibilities of teaching students without the benefit of working under a teacher-librarian. Paraprofessionals in these school districts are providing library instruction, reading enrichment, managing collections and material selection, performing cataloging and system automation maintenance, and managing parent volunteers: all duties for which certified librarians are paid a higher salary and given training. But, faced with leaving the school library empty or even closed, administrators over-utilize their library aides and clerks. NCLB clearly prohibits schools from using aides to replace certified teachers or undertake instruction in *any* subject, core or not. Yet, we are seeing that in some districts, schools are using federally funded paraprofessionals in instructional positions (see

Russo). Anecdotally, we are seeing this particularly in our nation's school libraries, and research has to be done to validate this pattern.

The idea of “highly qualified” must be seen in the context of recent research. Yet another study was released in Feb. 2005, “Powerful Libraries Make Powerful Learners: The Illinois Study,” authored by Keith Curry Lance, Marcia J. Rodney, and Christine Hamilton-Pennell for the Illinois School Library Media Association (ISLMA), demonstrating statistically valid evidence that school libraries staffed with educated, trained library workers boost standardized test scores for children (see: <http://www.islma.org/pdf/ILStudy%20Report.pdf> ).

These complexities are not disappearing in the face of NCLB compliance, nor do they change the very practical needs of fulfilling its requirements; however, they does give us a clearer picture of just what professional training and staff development is required for libraries to have impact within schools, and offer some framework in which to find ways to support library media aides and assistants in these environments.

### Action and next steps

By now, Title 1 school districts should have conducted an audit of skill levels of paraprofessionals within their schools, and identified with their staffs their plans to meet the NCLB requirements. *Paraprofessionals are responsible for demonstrating that they meet those requirements*, either by having their official college transcripts or taken the skills text and had those official scores mailed to the district office. If your district has not mentioned this, do not hesitate taking the responsibility yourself.

1. 1. Contact your district human resources officer to identify what you need to demonstrate compliance based on your job description and position. There are different grades or levels, and this designation will determine your compliance needs.
2. 2. Assess your transcript for college hours. Your transcript(s) will identify the number of cumulative college hours you have. Request that an official transcript be sent to your school directly.
3. 3. If you do not meet the 60-hours required, plan on registering for summer school and/or fall in order to meet the requirements. Typically, paraprofessionals are not provided with financial support for continuing education or cost incurred to comply with NCLB. However, some districts have discretionary funds in which they may allocate. Discuss options with your human resources officer or community college.
4. 4. If you choose, you can take a skill assessment to determine proficiency in reading, writing, and mathematics. You will need to identify which assessment exam is used by your district. Some districts support the cost (typically \$40). Find out if your school has a reimbursement program. Make sure to take the pretest, if available, and schedule your test date. Follow up with your test administrator to verify that your school has received your official score and if there is any other action required on your part.

NOTE: There are exemptions within NCLB. If you are a parent volunteer, you need not adhere to the “highly qualified” clause, and therefore need not undergo compliance requirements.

### Additional Resources

Ambrosio, John. “No Child Left Behind: The Case of Roosevelt High School” *Phi Delta Kappan* 85, no. 9 (May 2004): 709-712.

Dale, J. D. “Redesigning Work and Compensation To Fit NCLB.” *The School Administrator*. 61, Part 9 (2004): 19-23.

ParaPro, Educational Testing Service: <http://ibt.ets.org/parapro/candidate/type.jsp>

Porrazzo, Jean “Budget cuts slam school librarians” *Enterprise*,  
<http://enterprise.southofboston.com/articles/2004/08/26/news/news/news03.txt>

Reese, Susan. “The Highly Qualified Teacher under NCLB” *Techniques* 79, no. 8 (Nov/Dec 2004): 33-35.

Russo, Alexander. “No Child Left Behind School district aides' credentials fall short” *Catalyst*, <http://www.catalyst-chicago.org/05-03/0503credentials.htm>

U.S. Department of Education, NCLB: <http://www.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>

