

Excellent Schools Act

Review of Teacher Assistants Education
Programs and Standards

Review of Teacher Assistants Education Programs and Standards

Background

Senate Bill 352, the Appropriations Act of 1997, requires the State Board of Education, in cooperation with the State Board of Community Colleges and the Board of Governors of The University of North Carolina to

(1) review existing teacher assistant education programs, including the program offered by the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants; and

(2) recommend whether there should be educational standards, goals, competencies, and certification for teacher assistants, and if so, what they should be, how those should be developed, and the cost of implementation.

The State Board of education is required to report on the results of these studies to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee prior to March 15, 1998.

This same legislation requires the State Board to

(1) collect data on teacher assistants' years of experience in the public schools and in State and local government and the degrees that they hold; and

(2) collect data on locally adopted salary schedules for teacher assistants and the distribution of teacher assistants on the locally adopted schedules.

This second phase of the required reports on teacher assistants must be reported to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee prior to December 15, 1998. Data is currently being collected to comply with this request and will be presented to the State Board at a later meeting for information and approval.

Report of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards

The Department of Public Instruction contracted with the Research Triangle Institute to complete the first phase of the study of teacher assistants' experience, credentials, placement on salary schedules, and education programs and standards. The phase one report, which addresses education programs and standards only, is attached. The agency worked closely with RTI during this study and endorses the recommendations for professional development, a program approval process, and development of new salary schedules designed to encourage and reward the acquisition of enhanced skills by teacher assistants.

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Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards

Policy Paper

Submitted to:

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Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards

Policy Paper

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Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards

Executive Summary

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE	Senate Bill 352, Section 8.12b, requires the State Board of Education to review teacher assistant education programs and to recommend whether there should be educational standards, goals, and certification for teacher assistants. The Department of Public Instruction contracted with Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to conduct the study, and this report documents the study findings and recommendations.
STUDY METHODOLOGY	The first step in the study of teacher assistant programs and standards was a review of published materials and other information on teacher assistant programs in North Carolina and other states. RTI then completed personal or telephone interviews with personnel from public school districts and community colleges in the state. Staff also interviewed representatives of the Department of Public Instruction and the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants. Finally, a brief survey of public school districts was completed to assess assistant utilization in the state.
MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY	<ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ The duties of teacher assistants in North Carolina are widely diverse, ranging from high-level instructional support to very low-level clerical activities. In some systems, assistants are expected to perform many of the same duties as classroom teachers; however, these expectations are at odds with the minimum requirements generally in place for the job (a high school diploma).➤ Under current conditions and minimum qualifications for teacher assistants, there is no unmet demand for teacher assistants in North Carolina.➤ Two teacher assistant education programs currently offer certification systems in North Carolina. One program is offered by the state's community colleges and leads to a certificate and associate's degree. The other program is a professional development plan administered by the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants (NCATA) which leads to a teacher assistant certificate. Both programs require the completion of relevant course work at institutions of higher education.➤ Pay for teacher assistants in North Carolina is low for the high-level instructional support that many provide. Moreover, the pay is less than comparable services provided by other classified staff.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- The salary schedules in place in most school districts do not reward advanced professional training and improvement for teacher assistants.
- Salary schedules for teacher assistants should be redesigned to encourage professional development. Salary schedules that reward additional professional training and certification will, over time, encourage improvements in classroom instruction and support.
- Current educational offerings in the teacher associate and special education concentrations in the North Carolina Community College System's Early Childhood Associate Program should be expanded to more sites in the state. Additionally, we encourage individual districts to work more closely with local community colleges to ensure that their requirements and needs for teacher assistants are understood.
- Given the administrative requirements necessary to design and implement a teacher assistant certification program in the state, we do not advocate a state-administered certification program for teacher assistants at this time. However, we encourage the Board to adopt a program review and approval process for the state's existing teacher assistant certification programs. We believe these programs, with state oversight, will provide a strong teacher assistant certification system, especially if linked to new salary schedules designed to encourage professional development.
- A number of important issues and recommendations have been presented in this report. The implications of these elements in North Carolina are far-reaching and, we believe, should receive additional and high visibility consideration at the state level. We recommend that the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission consider additional specifications of the instructional support activities expected of teacher assistants; the long-term impact of revised salary schedules that encourage professional development; and the implications of increased pay for increased teacher assistant expectations, requirements, and credentials.

Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards

Teacher Assistant Programs/Standards

requires that the North Carolina Board of Education:

- (1) Collect information and review current teacher assistant education programs in the state, and
- (2) Recommend whether there should be educational standards, goals, competencies, and certification for teacher assistants.

The North Carolina Department of Public Instruction contracted with the Research Triangle Institute in December 1997 to carry out these activities. This report summarizes our findings.

We are especially grateful to the many educators and administrators who willingly participated in this important study. It would not have been possible without the generous assistance from these committed individuals. Table 1 is a list of these participants and their affiliations.

Table 1: Respondents for the Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards

Respondent	Title/Position	Agency
Teressa Banks	Nursing/Early Childhood Coordinator	NC Community College System
Jennifer Beal	Director of Membership Services	NC Association of Teacher Assistants
Winnie Bennett	Human Services	Anson Community College
Mary Bergen	Director of Development	Isothermal Community College
Steve Clodfelter	Classified Personnel Manager	Winston-Salem/Forsyth Schools
Kerry Crutchfield	Director, Financial Services	Winston-Salem/Forsyth Schools
Rhonda Culbreth	Instructor, Early Childhood/Teacher Associate Program	McDowell Community College
Essie Davis	Chair, Early Childhood and Special Education Department	Roanoke-Chowan Community College
David A. Davies	Associate Superintendent	Clay County Schools
Georgia Enright	Director, Early Childhood/Teacher Associate Program	Rockingham Community College

Teacher Assistant Programs/Standards

Steve Foster	Personnel Services	Guilford County Schools
Tom Halliman	Dean of Instruction	Anson Community College
Evelyn Heflin	Instructor	Isothermal Community College
Debbie Hill	Executive Director, Personnel Development	Alamance-Burlington Schools
Table 1: Respondents for the Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards continued		
Respondent	Title/Position	Agency
Frederick Hill	Counselor/Technical Preparation	Carteret Community College
Linda Johnson	Scholarship Coordinators, Teacher Education	NC Department of Public Instruction
Robin Johnson	Legislative Staff	North Carolina General Assembly
Wayne Lassiter	Superintendent	Anson County Schools
Katie McGee	Director, Innovative Programs	Nash-Rocky Mount Schools
Wil McLean	Executive Director, Personnel Services	Vance County Schools
Margaret Meany	Chief, Policy Monitoring and Audit Section, Exceptional Children Division	NC Department of Public Instruction
Diana Mills	Professional Development Plan Administrator	NC Association of Teacher Assistants
Gordon Millspaugh	Executive Director, Personnel Management	Alamance-Burlington Schools
Jane Norwood	Career Counselor	Rockingham Community College
Sandra Novick	Head, Early Childhood Program	Rowan-Cabarrus Community College
Philip Price	Assistant Director, School Business	Department of Public Instruction
Janis Ramquist	Governmental Affairs Consultant	NC Association of Teacher Assistants
George Reynolds	Director, Recruitment/Classified Personnel	Rockingham County Schools
Wayne Silver	Assistant Superintendent	McDowell County Schools
Katherine Wilder	Director, Early Childhood/Teacher Associate Program	Nash Community College

LEGISLATIVE MANDATE

Senate Bill 352, the Current Operations and Capital Budget Act of 1997, was ratified by the General Assembly and signed by Governor James Hunt on August 28, 1997, and was ultimately codified as S.L. 97-0443. Although primarily an appropriations bill for operations and capital improvements for state departments, institutions, and agencies, the legislation also included several sections that specified initiatives and special studies for the state's administrative departments and agencies, including the Department of Public Instruction.

Section 8.12, entitled *Data on Teacher Assistants . Years of Experience, Credentials, and Placement on Locally Adopted Salary Schedule/Review of Teacher Assistant Education Programs and Standards*, requires the State Board of Education to collect information on the state's teacher assistants and to make recommendations to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee. Section 8.12(b), which provides the authority for this project, requires that the Board cooperate with the State Board of Community Colleges and the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina to:

- ⌘(1) Review existing teacher assistant education programs, including the program offered by the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants; and
- (2) Recommend whether there should be educational standards, goals, competencies, and certification for teacher assistants, and if so, what they should be, how those should be developed, and the cost of implementation. (Current Operations & Capital Budget Act, S.B. 352 §8.12(b)).

The legislation further specifies that the findings of the review be presented to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee prior to March 15, 1998.

STUDY METHODOLOGY

In December 1997, the Department of Public Instruction contracted with the Research Triangle Institute (RTI) to conduct the study of teacher assistant education programs and standards in North Carolina. RTI, an independent, nonprofit research institute affiliated with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, North Carolina State University, and Duke University, initiated the study with reviews of published research materials and available information on teacher assistant programs in North Carolina and other states. This review formed the basis for the following discussion of the background of teacher assistant programs. RTI then developed data collection protocols for personal and telephone

interviews with knowledgeable administrators and educators in the state's public school districts and community college system. Staff also interviewed representatives of the professional association that represents teacher assistants in the state, the North Carolina Association of Teacher Assistants (NCATA), and representatives in the Department of Public Instruction. (Table 1 in this report's foreword includes a list of respondents.)

The purpose of these structured interviews was to obtain detailed information on teacher assistant staffing and utilization in North Carolina public schools, the characteristics of these instructional personnel, the training they currently receive, and existing education or personal standards that apply to them. We also asked the respondents to identify other issues that should be considered.

The school district personnel administrators were selected to represent various regions, district sizes, and urbanicity types in the state. Community college personnel included administrators and instructors in the Early Childhood Associate Program. Overall, RTI professional staff interviewed representatives of nine school districts and seven community colleges. Finally, RTI staff conducted a brief survey of the 117 school districts using facsimile and electronic mail to determine teacher assistant utilization patterns in the districts.

BACKGROUND ON TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Any discussion of the history and character of teacher assistants in North Carolina must begin with a careful discussion of terminology. School districts nationwide use different titles to describe the school employees who provide instructional and other direct services to children, youth, and their parents . . . and are supervised by certificated, licensed professionals who are responsible for diagnosing student needs, planning and evaluating programs designed to meet these needs, and assessing student performance and progress (Pickett, 1997, p. 4).

While the range of titles in North Carolina is not as great as in other states, the teaching assistant positions at the district level can include a number of different titles, including:

- ☞ Instructional assistant,
- ☞ Technology assistant,
- ☞ Special education assistant,
- ☞ Exceptional children's aide, and

☞ Student health assistant.

Some districts also use an older term, teacher's aide; however, from our discussions with school district personnel officers, there was little differentiation of duties between aides and assistants. Indeed, Session Laws 1989 (Chapter 585), which replaced "teacher aide" with "teacher assistant" in North Carolina's Public Schools Laws, noted that the action should not "alter the rights, duties or responsibilities conferred upon persons referred to as teacher aides in any other provision of law."

DEFINITION OF TEACHER ASSISTANTS

In general, teacher assistants aide and support classroom teachers to enhance the learning process. Legislation carefully defines the duties of classroom teachers in the state (North Carolina General Statutes 115C-307) to include:

- ☞ Maintaining good order and discipline in their schools;
- ☞ Encouraging temperance, morality, industry, and neatness;
- ☞ Promoting the health of all pupils, and especially children in the first three grades, by providing frequent periods of recreation;
- ☞ Supervising play activities during recess and encouraging wholesome exercises for all children;
- ☞ Administering any medication prescribed by a doctor upon written request of the parents, giving emergency health care, and performing any other first aid or lifesaving techniques in which the employee has been trained;
- ☞ Teaching as thoroughly as possible the areas they are required to teach; and
- ☞ Entering actively into the plans of the superintendent for professional growth.

The legislation also specifies the same duties for teacher assistants, with one important condition: The school principal and supervising teacher retain authority for all tasks until they are delegated to the teacher assistant. Consequently there is a wide range of possible duties for teacher assistants.

Although teacher assistants are often characterized by their individualized work with children, these persons can also provide clerical assistance,

help supervise children, assist with basic duties, file and catalog materials, check objective tests under the supervision of teachers, correct materials, and prepare instructional materials for the teacher (Connell, 1968).

Specialized teacher assistants work with Title I, special needs, and other students, either in the classroom or in separate locations.

EFFECTIVENESS STUDIES

Perhaps the nation's first major program utilizing teacher assistants in public school classrooms began in 1953 in Washington, DC. Findings from this program were widely cited and indicated that teacher assistants were effective in freeing classroom teachers from some distracting and time-consuming tasks (District of Columbia Public Schools, 1984, p.1). Teacher assistants have since become a viable and integral part of educational programs, and several studies and program reviews have demonstrated the usefulness of teacher assistants in the classroom:

- One assessment of services provided by teacher assistants in the District of Columbia found that these individuals were both effective and extremely valuable. In addition, both teachers and principals were heavily in favor of continuing support services over other options for substituting materials, equipment, and other services. Principals even stated that the teacher assistants brought a "personal" dimension to learning.
- In the Instructional Assistant Program conducted by the Ohio Disadvantaged Pupil Program Fund (1994), teacher assistants were trained to administer instructional activities that would improve oral and written language skills of kindergarten students. Resulting test scores demonstrated significant improvements in student oral and reading performance. Evaluations completed by the classroom teachers confirmed these findings.
- Concerns are often raised by teachers related to the lack of assistants in their classrooms. Many feel they need an "extra set of hands" to handle paperwork and to be available to assist with restroom breaks and emergencies (Egelson, Harman, & Achilles, 1996, p. 25). Other outcomes to which assistants contributed include increased test scores and reduced student retention rates.

EMPLOYMENT

Minimum requirements vary according to classification, duties, and training. Most teacher assistants are required to have a high school diploma or equivalent, although the trend is now for some college or an associate's degree (e.g., the California Department of Education requires two years of postsecondary education for teacher assistants). Salaries for

teacher assistants are very low and, therefore, may fail to attract a strong applicant pool.

Alabama State University developed an innovative scholarship program for recruiting and retaining teacher assistants (Martin, Wright, & Maertens, 1996). The program was coordinated by both public school and university officials, thereby providing communication of training needs, and its intention was to follow recruited students through their college tenure and document their experiences. During the program, enhancement of peer relationships, techniques for group problem solving, and multicultural issues were emphasized. The information obtained from students was used to develop successful methods for increasing proficiency in teaching urban children. The authors found that having experience working in an urban setting during the program facilitated later effectiveness in teaching urban children.

SPECIAL EDUCATION
TEACHER ASSISTANTS

One key need for teacher assistants is behavioral training; they need structured training in how to manage behavior problems, especially in special education classrooms. Martella, Marchand-Martella, Miller, Young, and MacFarlane (1995) found that instructional assistants often reacted inappropriately to behavior problems and to non-compliance in the classroom. To decrease the frequency of problem student behaviors, the authors developed a training program for special education instructional assistants, consisting of seven steps introducing appropriate ways to provide instructions, reinforce adaptive behaviors, and effectively correct student mistakes without negative remarks. With this type of training, possible outcomes included increases in student motivation and decreases in student frustration and disruptive behavior.

Additional research reveals that teacher assistants may not receive training appropriate for working with special student populations (Pickett & Humm, 1980), and are often expected to engage in tasks not commensurate with their skills (Lindsey, 1983). In a study conducted by McKenzie and Houk (1986), teacher beliefs regarding the use of teacher assistants in classrooms with mildly handicapped students were examined. Teachers argued that assistants should better integrate skills required for teaching handicapped children. Based on the findings, the authors concluded that there should be a greater fit between the skills of the assistants and the individual needs of the teacher. Further, assistants should receive more precise training in assessment/observational skills and behavior management.

In North Carolina, the beginnings of the current teacher assistant program can be attributed to the Primary Reading Program, which began as a

**CHARACTERISTICS
OF TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN
NORTH CAROLINA**

pilot project for grades K-3 in 40 school districts in 1975. The initial funding for the project (\$750,000) was soon increased, and by 1977 the appropriation was \$2 million. During Governor James Hunt's first administration, the program began moving toward statewide implementation, reaching \$30 million in 1979 and \$79 million in 1980. By 1985, a line item for instructional aides was added to the Basic Education Plan.

HISTORY

Not all school districts in the state, however, sought to implement teacher assistant programs. For example, Chapter 802 (§31.5) of the North Carolina General Statutes authorized pilot programs in three districts, including the Winston-Salem/Forsyth Schools, to hire classroom teachers in lieu of teacher assistants. Similar authorizations were also included in Senate Bill 1216, which authorized a similar program in the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools (the Worldclass Pilot School Project) and House Bill 80 (§35), which reaffirmed Winston-Salem/Forsyth's program. By 1995, House Bill 6 extended the authority to convert vacant teacher assistant positions to classroom teachers to all school districts.

Teacher assistants have typically been paid according to the state salary schedules, based almost exclusively on longevity and without consideration to inflation-adjusted cost-of-living increases. However, this practice changed in 1995, when the NCGS 115C-12b specified that the average salary paid to teacher assistants must be at least 98 percent of the state-allotted amount for the category.

**USE OF TEACHER
ASSISTANTS IN
NORTH CAROLINA**

A total of 23,400 teacher assistants were employed by public schools in North Carolina during the 1996-97 school year (NC DPI, 1997), a dramatic increase in the number of staff since the program's onset in 1975. Most of the positions (83 percent) were funded by state allotment. Local funding supported 10 percent of the teacher assistant positions; seven percent were based on Federal support (e.g., Title I for compensatory education or Title IX for Indian education). Roughly 5,200 teacher assistants worked with special education students. Teacher assistants were overwhelmingly female (95 percent). Two-thirds of the state's teacher assistants were white; 20 percent were black.

Public school districts in North Carolina have considerable latitude in how (and whether) they utilize teacher assistants. For example, some districts regularly exchange the state allotted teacher assistant positions for classroom teachers, thus reducing class size (e.g., Winston-Salem/Forsyth uses assistant positions only for special education support and pre-kindergarten). Figure 1 compares the ratio of teacher assistants to overall district instructional personnel for the 1995-96 school year. The

overall proportion is 0.217, or about 1 teacher assistant to 5 instructional personnel. The range, though, is rather large, from about 1:10 for Winston-Salem/Forsyth to 1:3 for Cherokee County.

Figure 1. Ratio of Teacher Assistants to Overall District Instructional Staff

RTI submitted a brief survey (Appendix) to 117 district personnel officers

Table 4. Districts Reporting Teacher Assistant Positions in Public Schools

Trade-ins

of teacher assistants, and Tables 2 through 4 are a summary of the data. Table 2, all responding districts from instruction, as expected, require a high school diploma or equivalent as a minimum requirement. Table 3 displays the minimum requirements for teacher assistants as applied by these public school districts in the state; Table 4 reports that a minority of these districts traded in teacher assistant positions for other assistants or for certified teachers.

PAY SCALE

Teacher assistants were among state employees recently slated to receive a 4 percent salary increase. They are classified at pay grade 56; however, until legislation provides funding to pay at that salary level, they must be paid at least at salary grade 54. Thus, they are paid at least \$1,252 per month. Under the ABC accountability program, teacher assistants are eligible for a bonus of \$375 for those whose schools meet their goals, or \$500 for those whose schools exceed goals. In total, the state has set aside over \$305 million for teacher assistants for the 1997-1998 school year, or \$733 per K-3 student.

Most school systems have met the minimum salary requirement, and the situation has improved over the last three years. In 1994-95, 47 of 119 school districts had an average salary that was less than 98 percent of allotment, while eight had average salaries more than five percent over the allotment. In 1995-96, 40 districts had an average salary that was less than 98 percent of allotment. In 1996-97, 23 of 117 systems had an average salary that was less than 98 percent of allotment, and 12 had salaries more than five percent over allotment. Ten of this 23 have been on the list that did not meet the 98 percent standard all three years.

HIRING

In addition to the funds set aside specifically for teacher assistants, there are other line items through which they may be hired. For instance, in 1996-1997, \$35 million from the Children with Special Needs line item and \$5 million from the At-Risk Student line item were used to pay teacher assistants.

Across the state, 21 districts add local funds to state funds to hire additional teacher assistants. Districts are also able to trade teacher assistant funds for certified teacher positions. In 1996-1997, a total of 512.2 teacher assistant positions were converted into 278.2 teacher positions. Also, 10 districts failed to use all state funds available to pay for teacher assistants.

**MINIMUM
REQUIREMENTS**

Most public school districts in North Carolina currently require high school equivalency and a criminal background check for employment as a teacher assistant. A small number of districts require other types of specialized training. For example, Rockingham County requires a Teacher Associate certificate, and several require Effective Teacher training. Cumberland County requires a high school diploma or GED, but also a minimum score on one of two nationally standardized tests or additional teacher assistant training or experience. Greene County requires assistants to work toward either community college certification or county certification. The Clinton City School District has its own Teacher Assistant Training program. A few counties require teacher assistants to serve as bus drivers.

District personnel officers overwhelmingly identified the need for more and better-trained teacher assistants, and noted that better trained assistants would lead to better classroom instruction.

**TEACHER
ASSISTANT
EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

There is a growing awareness of the need for teacher assistant certification systems or other regulatory systems designed to ensure that these individuals are prepared for the requirements of their roles. For example, as of 1996, approximately half of the nation's state education agencies had developed at least some rudimentary standards and guidelines for the preparation, employment, and supervision of teacher assistants (Pickett, 1996).

The need for credentialing mechanisms, as Pickett (1997, p. 16) has noted, is much more controversial. Indeed, only 12 state education agencies have developed credentialing mechanisms. These mechanisms range from multilevel certificate programs with carefully defined roles, training, and career advancement ladders (similar to current teacher certificate programs) to systems without specified roles, duties, or training requirements.

Several important reasons for developing certification systems for teacher assistants can be identified.

By setting standards for knowledge, training, and performance,

the Department of Public Instruction could ensure that teacher assistants have the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully perform their assigned duties.

- An effective certification system would provide opportunities for meaningful professional advancement on a teacher assistant career ladder. In turn, the desire for advancement would encourage assistants to seek additional training.
- Certification would clearly differentiate among the duties and responsibilities of teacher assistants with different levels of education and experience. It would give principals and supervising teachers the tools to more easily relate assistant responsibilities with their training and competence.
- Certification of teaching assistants would provide a mechanism for formally recognizing the contributions of teacher assistants to the educational process.

Two formal teacher assistant education training programs currently operate in North Carolina. These programs, one offered by selected institutions in the North Carolina Community College System, and the other administered by the NCATA, may lead to associate's degrees or instructional certificates. We discuss these two education programs in the following section. We also briefly discuss another important training component for the state's teacher assistants, the decentralized and ongoing school district and association orientation and inservice training.

**COMMUNITY COLLEGE
PROGRAMS**

The North Carolina Community College System offers a series of Public Service Technology programs designed to train individuals for employment in the public and private sector in service-related careers. The Early Childhood Associate Program, offered at 47 community colleges, is designed to prepare participants for employment in diverse learning environments, including regular and special education classrooms, child development programs, preschools, and Head Start programs. The program encourages students to combine theory with practice in actual settings with young children under the supervision of qualified teachers.

Course work includes child growth and development, physical and nutritional needs of children, care and guidance of children, and communication skills. Students foster the cognitive, language, physical, social, and emotional development of young children.

Table 5: North Carolina Community Colleges Offering Specialized Concentrations in the Early Childhood

program also offers concentrations: Special Education. This concentration curriculum is intended to address children from infancy through the early childhood years. The Teacher Associate concentration prepares individuals to work primarily with K-3 children in public and private schools and school-age programs. Table 5 shows the community colleges at which these concentrations are offered. During the 1996-97 school year, 354 full- and part-time students were enrolled in the Teacher Associate concentration; approximately 15 were enrolled in Special Education.

The North Carolina State Board of Community Colleges has established curriculum requirements for associate's degrees and other programs:

- Degree programs must contain a minimum of 15 semester hours, including at least one course from each of the humanities/fine arts, social/behavioral sciences, and natural sciences/mathematics.
- Diploma programs must contain a minimum of six semester hours of general education.
- Degree programs must contain a minimum of six semester hours of communications; diploma programs, three.
- Degree, diploma, and certificate programs must include major courses which offer specific job knowledge and skills. Work experience (including cooperative education, practica, and internships) may be included in a degree or diploma program up to a maximum of eight semester hours and in a certificate program up to a maximum of two semester hours.
- A college may require other subjects or courses to complete graduation requirements.

The major semester hour requirement encompasses core, concentration and other semester hours. Core requirements are specific courses and/or subject areas which are required for each curriculum program. A concentration of study, if applicable, represents additional courses to the core requirements.

The Early Childhood Associate Program/Special Education and Early Childhood Associate Program/Teacher Associate curricula share the

Table 6: Core Courses and Subject Areas Required in Early Childhood Associate Curriculum

Early Childhood Associate
 12 semester hours of credit,
 The core courses are presented in
 of the concentrations appear in

NORTH CAROLINA
 ASSOCIATION OF
 ASSISTANTS PRO

Table 7: Specialized Courses Required for Associate Special Education Concentration Semester C

and education-based
 bers. The program includes
 teacher assistants without
 es are available for individuals
 degrees, and bachelor's
 degrees from accredited community colleges and other postsecondary
 institutions (see Table 8). NCATA certificates require continuous
 association membership, and, in some cases, the completion of specified
 NCATA duties (e.g., attending the annual conference, serving on
 committees, and standing as officer/committee chair).

Table 8. Certificates available from the NCATA's Professional Development Plan

Certificates

renewal requirements include an
 ction, continuous employment
 ublic schools, continuous
 of selected activities as an
 NCATA member. The initial application
 for an NCATA certificate costs
 \$25, certificate upgrades are \$20, and certificate renewals are \$15.
 Certification procedures require official transcripts from regionally
 accredited colleges or universities to verify semester hour and quarter-
 hour courses. Attendance at, and successful completion of, a continuing
 education course, inservice training, and staff development workshops
 require supporting certificates or letters from administering agencies or
 instructors that specify course name, dates, hours of instruction,
 instructor, and sponsoring agency. These materials are then reviewed by
 the NCATA's Professional Development Program administrator and
 certificates are provided.

Teacher assistants can earn educational credit for the certificate program
 through college courses, continuing education units (c.e.u.) from colleges,
 inservice and staff development workshops, and preapproved
 correspondence and study courses from accredited sources. All applicants
 are encouraged to complete child development courses. Courses with the
 emphases in the following areas, taken at an accredited postsecondary

institution, sponsored by a school district, or the NCATA will be approved for credit.

- a. Art appreciation/applied arts
- b. Bus driver training
- c. Cardiopulmonary resuscitation/first aid
- d. Child health, nutrition, and safety
- e. Communications/public speaking/sign language
- f. Computer literacy/computer applications/keyboard
- g. Educational audio/visual
- h. English grammar/composition
- i. Exceptional children
- j. Foreign language
- k. World history/American history
- l. Human relations
- m. Language arts/language arts techniques
- n. Legal issues in education/family law
- o. Library science
- p. Literature/children's literature/drama
- q. Mathematics
- r. Music appreciation/music techniques
- s. Philosophy
- t. Physical education/introduction to recreation
- u. Psychology
- v. Sciences●basic/developmental
- w. Sociology
- x. Stress management
- y. Teaching, management, discipline techniques
- z. Wellness (instruction only, maximum 10 hours)

All certificate levels have a one-time requirement of 30 hours of Effective Teacher Training. Applicants typically complete this training through their local school district or community college; however, 10 clock hours of instruction each in classroom management, child development, and instructional techniques from other sources are acceptable.

**ORIENTATION/INSERVICE
TRAINING PROGRAMS**

Teacher assistant training can take place during orientation immediately after hire as well as throughout the school year. All of the North Carolina school districts we contacted provide orientation, often given at the central school district offices to teacher assistants and all other new employees, who are provided information on benefits and district policies. However, school districts vary in the extended in-service training provided to teacher assistants, usually leaving training decisions to the local schools.

In the Alamance-Burlington Schools, in addition to training at the local school, the district provides staff development, three days during the year

Table 9: [Redacted]
Table 10: Sample Training Courses
Annual
Meeting, 1997
Scholarship

...ction for teacher assistants. In
...e scheduled on the school
...h staff development and
...Schools, staff meet four times

Anson Schools provide no district-wide training, but will pay for a community college course if a principal recommends an assistant for the course. Rockingham has set up a pool of local funds for all school employees for career development. In addition, Rockingham offers the incentive of \$36 per month additional pay for teacher assistants with a Teacher Associate's degree.

The state offers the Teacher Assistant Scholarship Loan Program for individuals currently working as teacher assistants in public schools. Scholarships of up to \$1,200 annually are given to assistants to help in undergraduate study either for two years in a North Carolina community college leading to an associate's degree, or for four years in an approved teacher education program leading to licensing as a teacher.

Table 9 shows the number of awards made since the inception of the loan program. Loans have been made in the past year to individuals representing all of North Carolina's 12 Congressional districts. Employees in Rockingham and Anson, in particular, are encouraged by the districts to take advantage of these scholarships.

The NCATA offers development courses as well. For example, NCATA figures indicate that approximately 1,900 individuals attended the Association's 1997 annual meeting, which offered single- and multiple-day courses. The courses are generally approved for continuing education unit credit. (A sample of the course titles is presented in Table 10.) In addition, districts and local chapters offer mini-conferences throughout the year. Assistants submit their accumulated c.e.u. count for certification from the NCATA for achievement in education, experience and membership participation.

FINDINGS

In this section of the report we discuss the findings of the study. We partition the findings into five separate policy areas.

DUTIES OF TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN NORTH CAROLINA ARE WIDELY DIVERSE

The majority of teacher assistants in the state, whether classified as technology, media, or exceptional children assistants, spend most of their time providing direct instructional and other support services to students. Indeed, by statute, teacher assistants in North Carolina can do, and in many districts are expected to do, much the same job as teachers. With the exceptions of student evaluation, reporting, and planning, teacher assistants are expected to maintain order and discipline; encourage temperance, morality, industry, and neatness; promote health and exercise; give emergency health care and first aid; teach in the areas they are assigned to teach; and undergo staff development for professional growth.

These expectations are at odds, however, with the minimum requirements in place for the job (a high school diploma or equivalent in most districts) and with the lack of value (based on pay) placed on continuing education.

Consequently, the range of duties for these instructional staff varies dramatically. For example, some assistants are capable of high-level instructional support with little direct supervision (e.g., providing content-specific, individualized instruction to students). Other assistants have little educational training or other experiences, and are capable of providing little direct instructional support. District personnel note that these individuals typically correct papers that teachers have been waiting to grade for several days, monitor class trips to the cafeteria, and provide discipline during recess.

UNDER CURRENT CONDITIONS, THERE IS NO UNMET DEMAND FOR TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN NORTH CAROLINA

Given North Carolina's current minimum requirements for teacher assistants, the supply of teacher assistants exceeds, and in some cases far exceeds, the demand for qualified teacher assistant candidates. Openings for teacher assistant positions in many districts are created only through retirement, illness, or death; assistants routinely work for 20+ years in the same district.

Moreover, many districts maintain long waiting lists (e.g., in Clay County the waiting list currently includes 50 qualified candidates) for these positions, many of whom are certified teachers who believe employment as an assistant provides an entry into classroom teacher positions. Some less wealthy or otherwise less desirable counties have shorter lists and fewer advanced candidates, but there is little indication that meeting teacher assistant demand is problematic with current teacher assistant

qualifications and standards.

That stated, we note that the implications of an increase in the requirements for teacher assistants likely would create a demand for teacher assistants where none currently exists. Wealthy districts and units in desirable locations would likely have little difficulty filling assistant slots with individuals with more training and experience; in contrast, other districts would be unable to find ~~upgraded~~ personnel to fill teacher assistant slots.

TWO PROGRAMS IN NORTH CAROLINA PREPARE TEACHER ASSISTANTS

Two formal programs currently operate in North Carolina to prepare teacher assistants for their roles in the classroom. Both programs (the North Carolina Community College system's Early Childhood Associate Program and the North Carolina Association for Teacher Assistant's Professional Development Program) are based on classroom instruction in important areas (e.g., health, development, substantive content). We believe that graduates of the programs are well-qualified for work as teacher assistants in the public schools.

PAY FOR TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN NORTH CAROLINA IS LOW FOR HIGH-LEVEL INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT

The level of financial support for teacher assistants has been, and continues to be, a highly contentious issue in North Carolina. Legislation since 1989 has authorized salary increases from pay grade 51 to pay grade 54 for teaching assistants (pay grade 56 is currently authorized but unfunded by the General Assembly); payment comparable to that for licensed teachers who substitute in classrooms; and, starting in 1997-98, participation in the state's ABC incentive bonus plan for high-performing schools.

Despite these advances, however, the level of financial support for teacher assistants is relatively low, especially considering the level of instructional services some teacher assistants provide in the classroom. Comparable assistant services are provided in many cases by technology assistants (pay grade 61) and occupational and physical therapist assistants (pay grade 64), whose monthly salaries range from approximately \$400 to \$1,000 more per month. (The salary schedule for pay grade 54 ranges from \$1,252.25 to \$2,005.38 per month.)

SALARY SCHEDULES FOR TEACHER ASSISTANTS IN NORTH CAROLINA DO NOT REWARD ADVANCED TRAINING

Salary schedules for teacher assistants in North Carolina are almost universally based on longevity. Most districts provide little consideration for additional educational attainment, community college or association certification, or comparable work performed in other districts or states.

Teacher assistants have regularly raised the issue of salary schedules (NCATA, 1997), and recent legislation addressed equity issues between experienced and newly hired assistants (NCGS 115C-12b). Still,

relatively few districts employ modified salary schedules with salary steps for educational attainment and experience (among the exceptions are Rockingham County, Orange County, and Nash-Rocky Mount Schools).

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this section we present our recommendations. We discuss certification, salary structure, and additional considerations by a professional standards committee.

OVERSIGHT OF EXISTING
TEACHER ASSISTANT
CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Given current DPI staffing levels and the workload required to administer a teacher assistant certification program, we do not advocate a state-administered certification program at this time. However, we believe there is wisdom in a system that will encourage and reward teacher assistants who seek further training, thus, striving to improve the instructional support in North Carolina's classrooms. Two strong training programs currently exist in the state, and we recommend that DPI initiate a program approval process for institutions and associations that currently offer teacher assistant certification and education programs.

SEPARATE SALARY
SCHEDULES BASED ON
EXPERIENCE AND
EDUCATION

DPI is currently collecting data on teacher assistant experience, credentials, and placement on local salary schedules. Conditional on the findings of this study, we recommend that the State Board of Education adopt salary schedules for teacher assistants that both reward and encourage continuing education and certification. We believe that such a payment structure will encourage professional growth and will, over time, encourage improvements in classroom instruction and support.

EXPAND THE COMMUNITY
COLLEGE TRAINING
PROGRAM AND INTEGRATION
WITH DISTRICTS

The Early Childhood Associate Program's Teacher Associate and Special Education Concentrations offered by North Carolina community colleges should be expanded into additional sites around the state. Moreover, we encourage the state's public school districts to work more closely with local community colleges to ensure that district's requirements and wishes for teacher assistant training can be addressed.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATION
BY THE NORTH CAROLINA
PROFESSIONAL TEACHER
STANDARDS COMMISSION

In the previous sections, we described several important issues and recommendations that impact (or may impact) the state's current teacher assistant policies and practices. Some of these will doubtlessly require additional and high-visibility consideration at the state level, including:

- Additional specification of the instructional practices and support activities that are *expected* of teacher assistants in North Carolina,

Long-term impact of revised salary schedules that consider educational

training as well as longevity, and the implications of pay increases for increased expectations from teacher assistants for instruction and other support, especially when offered in conjunction with increased minimum requirements and credentialing.

Work might be undertaken by the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission, whose responsibilities include recommending how to set high standards for the teaching profession (740 N.C. Regular Session Laws §2). We realize that this group's mandate was not initially conceived to include paraprofessionals such as teaching assistants, but given our review of legislated duties of teacher assistants (NCGS 115C-295.1) and the high-level utilization of these positions in some districts, we believe this recommendation is appropriate.

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APPENDIX
SURVEY FOR DISTRICT PERSONNEL OFFICERS

Senate Bill 352 instructs the State Board of Education to review the North Carolina's teacher assistant education program and standards. You can help us to accomplish this by responding quickly to the following questions.

1. Please indicate below whether your district uses teacher assistants (regardless of state/local funding source) and in what capacity they serve. (Mark all that apply.)

- No assistants used in the district
- Assistants used primarily for instructional purposes in classroom
- Technology assistants
- Media/library assistants
- Special education assistants
- Discipline/Security assistants
- Clerical/Office support assistants (not SIMS funded)
- Other (Please specify) _____

2. What are your district.s minimum requirements for teacher assistants? (Please mark all that apply.)

- High school diploma or equivalent (e.g., GED)
- High school diploma
- Some post-secondary course work
- Associate's degree
- Bachelor's degree
- Other requirements (Please specify) _____

3. During the current school year, did your district .trade in. any teacher assistant positions for other purposes? (Please mark all that apply.)

- No
- Yes Traded for additional teachers
- Yes Traded for other assistants (e.g., technology asst. on different salary schedule)
- Yes Traded for 8/technology or curricular materials