

It's Not Just Teachers Who Are Leaving: Paraeducator Turnover is Rising Too

Research One-Pager
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What do paraeducators do? Why do they matter?

- Paraeducators fill many roles supporting students with disabilities in schools. They can lead small instructional groups, provide behavior management, and help students access the curriculum, especially in inclusive settings (Mason et al., 2021).
- Paraeducators can have positive impacts on student learning, especially in districts serving many students from low-income households (Hemelt et al., 2021).
- Paraeducators can also contribute to staff diversity, as the paraeducator workforce is more racially diverse than the teacher workforce (Bisht et al., 2021).

Paraeducator attrition in Washington is at a 25-year high.

CALDER and Boston University researchers recently conducted the first large-scale longitudinal study on paraeducators using over 25 years of administrative data in Washington state.

The results show that paraeducator attrition has always been substantially higher than special education teacher attrition – and it is at an all-time high in the state. One in five paraeducators left the education workforce in the 2021-22 school year, double the rates in the late 1990s and early 2010s.

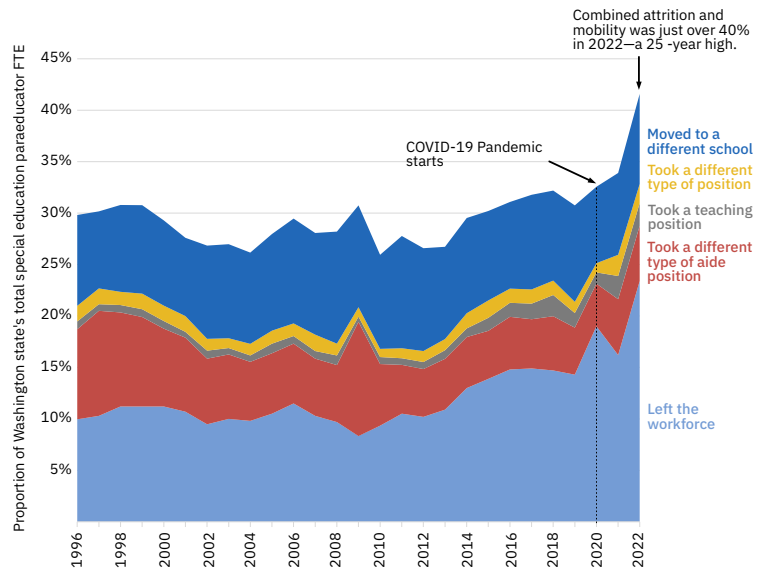
What might districts do to stabilize their paraprofessional workforce?

We do not know precisely why attrition rates for paraprofessionals are increasing. It might be related to their lower salaries, tough working conditions, a tight labor market, or the rising cost of living. Regardless of the cause, potential solutions school districts might consider include:

- **Clarifying the need.** Districts should begin by analyzing their workforce data to identify their paraprofessional staffing needs and challenges.
- **Clarifying the role and providing support.** Districts might make the job more manageable by clarifying the role and providing formal on-boarding and ongoing training for paraeducators; at the same time, teachers may need additional support understanding how to best work with paraeducators in the classroom (Biggs et al., 2019; Douglas et al., 2019; Giangreco et al., 2010).

PARAEDUCATOR TURNOVER IS INCREASING OVER TIME

Attrition and Mobility Rates for Paraeducators in Washington state, 1996-2022



Source: Theobald et al., 2023.

- **Rewarding the role.** Districts should consider raising paraeducator salaries and finding other ways to honor and recognize their work. Leaders can also work to build school cultures that help paraeducators feel valued and connected.
- **Offering pathways to teaching.** Finally, districts can make the role more attractive by investing in the career development of paraeducators, including Grow-Your-Own programs that provide opportunities for paraeducators to transition into teaching roles (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019; Bianco & Goings, 2022; Gist et al., 2019).

The Bottom Line

High turnover among paraeducators comes with a cost. Students don't have the consistent access to extra help in the classroom. Classroom teachers can be burdened with more work. And districts must bear the cost of hiring and training new personnel.

School districts need to pay attention to the problem where it exists and look for ways to reinforce and stabilize this often-overlooked part of their school communities.

Go Deeper at <https://caldercenter.org/>

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