

SHATARUPA PODDER: Hello. Welcome to the second session of the training considerations for administrators. I am Shatarupa Podder, an advisor in the Bureau of Special Education. In this section, which is called Laws, Revelations, and Standards Related to Paraprofessionals, I will discuss federal and state laws, regulations, and standards that impact the employment and use of special education paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania.

On this slide, you will see that I have listed some names that I used for paraprofessionals. Over years, paraprofessionals have been called aides, teacher's assistant, job coach, para-educator, instructional assistant, and many, many more labels have been given to them. In Pennsylvania, if you look at the numbers on the slide, you will see in 2003-2004 school year, we had about 21,000 special education teachers and about 14,000 paraprofessionals, whereas in 2009-2010, we had about 22,000 special education teachers, an increase of just about 4%, but over 21,000 paraprofessionals, which is an increase of over 50%.

This can be attributed to various factors, such as the increase in the number of students with disabilities who are included in regular education environments, the increased emphasis on providing standards-aligned instruction and gender education curriculum to these children, and such other factors as the increased use of one-on-one special education paraprofessionals. As a result, why are these numbers important to you? As an administrator, you need to be able to use your resources efficiently, so it becomes imperative than when LEAs hire paraprofessionals, they're able to train and retain them, especially the ones who are skilled in the jobs they're assigned to.

In this section, I will provide an overview of the federal and state regulations that impact paraprofessionals. Depending on the students they work with, special education paraprofessionals may need to comply with federal IDEA, Title I, and Pennsylvania State Chapter 14 regulations. Title I and IDEA requirements have been in place since 2004 and 2006, and state regulations under Chapter 14 have been effective since July 1, 2008. However, certain pieces of Chapter 14 requirements in terms of paraprofessionals being qualified came into effect July 1, 2010, when we had given -- the states had provided an opportunity for existing paraprofessionals to become qualified in that period of two years.

On this slide, you see IDEA regulations that were issued in 2004. This addresses special education regulations that came down from the federal Department of Education. IDEA 2004 and the ensuing regulations of 2006 said that a state must establish qualifications for

paraprofessionals and ensure that they are adequately prepared and trained. In Pennsylvania at that time, the requirements for non-Title I paraprofessionals was that they just had to have a high school diploma. As you may know, this had resulted in a wide range of skill levels for paraprofessionals who were working with students with disabilities. However, since 2003, Pennsylvania had provided an opportunity to obtain a voluntary credential through a credentialing system that has been used by some LEAs and paraprofessionals across the state. This credential system would give them a basic level of skills. But since this was voluntary, there was no uniform standard of knowledge and skill for paraprofessionals that was being applied on a consistent basis across the state.

Chapter 14.105 was promulgated in 2008, and it defined two types of special education paraprofessionals, the instructional special education paraprofessional and the personal care assistant. And this required the instructional paraprofessional to meet qualifications and obtain 20 hours of professional development annually. I will talk about being qualified a little bit later. The personal care assistant needed 20 hours of professional development each year also.

On this slide, you see a comparison of the requirements under NCLB Section 119C, which is Title I, and Chapter 14. If you look at the first two bullets between Title I and Chapter 14, you will see that they are very similar. The first bullet in Chapter 14 talks about having completed at least two years of post-secondary study, which is about -- deemed in Pennsylvania to be about 48 credits. And Title I talks about having completed two years of study at an institution of higher education. In the second bullet, they both talk about having an associate's degree or higher to be qualified. The regulations differ slightly in the third bullet, in that NCLB focuses on academic assessment only, whereas Chapter 14 mentions an assessment which would include both academic and non-academic knowledge and skills for paraprofessionals who work with students with disabilities.

In the EI world, how the paraprofessional is employed determines the qualifications required, and the requirements may vary slightly based on who employs the paraprofessional. If a school district, a charter school, or a pre-school/early intervention program employs the paraprofessional, then all paraprofessionals need the same requirements. However, if childcare or a Head Start program employs the paraprofessional, they have their own qualification requirements. That might be the PA quality assurance system or the requirement under Keystone Start, which gives each preschool program a one to four star rating. Under the PA quality assurance system, they also accept Act 48 credits, so if a paraprofessional who is working

with childcare or a Head Start program gets Act 48 credits, they may be able to apply those to their training requirements under early intervention.

Now I'm going to talk about the instructional paraprofessional. When IDEA 04 came out -- and it contained many revisions to bring special education mandates into line with the regular education mandates of No Child Left Behind. One area where this was evident is the requirement that all personnel who work with students with disabilities must be qualified, including our paraprofessionals. Chapter 14 went a step further and clarified this requirement of the qualified status of paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania. As I had said before, it described two types of paraprofessionals, the personal care assistant and the instructional paraprofessional. This slide contains the Chapter 14 definition of an instructional paraprofessional, and this section clearly states that an instructional paraprofessional works under the direction of a certified staff member to support and assist in providing instructional programs and services. Chapter 14 focuses on the job description of a paraprofessional rather than the title used by the LEA. As we have mentioned previously, paraprofessionals are addressed by several job titles, and it is irrelevant what the job title is. The focus is on the job description, and that determines what kind of qualifications and what kind of training the paraprofessional receives.

In the definition in Chapter 14, you will also see that there are examples given of the kinds of supportive assistance that instructional paraprofessionals might offer, such as they include one-to-one services, group review of material that was taught by the teacher, classroom management, and the implementation of positive behavior support plans. The various settings where instructional services can be provided, such as a special education class, a regular education class, or other instructional settings based on where the child is within the continuum of services is also discussed in the second bullet on this slide.

As I said earlier, from July 1, 2010, instructional paraprofessionals need to meet certain requirements to be qualified. These requirements, again, are only for instructional paraprofessionals and not personal care assistants. And please note that of the three requirements listed on this slide, the instructional paraprofessionals needs to meet only one requirement: either they have completed two years of post-secondary study which is deemed to be 48 credits, or they possess an associate's degree or higher, or they meet a rigorous standard of quality as demonstrated through a state or local assessment. Paraprofessionals must meet this requirement as of July 1 of 2010. Individuals who have been hired after July 1, 2010 may receive a reasonable grace period if the LEA has a procedure or policy to grant such a grace

period. This is at the discretion of the LEA. The Bureau of Special Education does not have jurisdiction over that.

When you look at bullet three and it talks about the state or local assessment, the current Pennsylvania credential of competency satisfies the requirement for the rigorous assessment. However, school districts and other LEAs may also elect a different assessment as long as it addresses the same ten standards of the credential of competency, and this is explained in the district special education plan. Guidance is available from the Pennsylvania Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education via the [inaudible] link that was provided when the requirements became effective. There are FAQs listed on the PaTTAN website and also listed as resources in this section, and you may also contact me at the Department of Education. My email address will be provided at the end of this presentation.

Beginning with the '08-'09 school year, each school year paraprofessionals must provide evidence of 20 hours of staff development activities that are related to their specific job assignment. However, please note that if you have a collective bargaining agreement that was in place on July 1, 2008 and continues to remain in place today, these requirements do not override that bargaining agreement. This 20-hour requirement for paraprofessionals, whether they're instructional paraprofessionals or personal care assistants, must be met between July 1 and June 30th each school year. And each school entity is responsible for developing and maintaining a system that attracts the paraprofessionals' development each school year. The paraprofessional will be responsible for showing documentation of the 20 hours of training to the employing public entity annually.

In the case of personal care assistants, this slide talks about the job description of a personal care assistant. It defines a personal care assistant as someone that works with only one student at a time, providing assistance in the use of medical equipment, monitoring student health or monitoring behavior, assisting with communication devices. A personal care assistant provides review of instructional material on a limited basis only. And just like the paraprofessional who's providing instructional services, a personal care assistant also must have 20 hours of staff development every year. They do not require -- they are not required to be qualified. The 20 hours of training that a personal care assistant receives may include training required by the school-based ACCESS program. This could include requirements for CPR and first aid, but not training related to paperwork requirements for ACCESS. This situation or this issue is addressed in detail within the Chapter 14 Q&As in volumes one through three. Those links will

be available as a resource on this site, as well as they're available on the PaTTAN website. The LEA has the same responsibility for maintaining professional development records for personal care assistants as for instructional paraprofessionals.

In this next section, I will discuss the credential of competency that is available through the Pennsylvania Department of Education, which is one way for LEAs and paraprofessionals to prove that they have met the qualified requirements. The credential of competency for special education para-educators in Pennsylvania is recommended as the state assessment if LEAs choose to use it. The credential of competency was promulgated on performance-based standards for special education paraprofessionals in 2000 by the Counsel for Exceptional Children, and it's a list of basic knowledge and skills needed to work successfully in educational environments. The Bureau of Special Education endorsed the use of these CEC standards for the initial preparation and practice of special education para-educators. The checklist that we use has the format that was adapted from Twin Falls School District Number 411 in Idaho. CEC has released and updated expanded set of standards in the last couple of months. The Bureau of Special Education is in the process of reviewing those and looking to see if we need to update our credential of competency. At this point in time, the credential of competency remains as it has in the past. The para-educator standards for practice within the competency -- within the credential of competency are based on the performance-based standards for special education para-educators. These define the basic content for initial preparation and practice of special education paraprofessionals only.

This slide lists the ten standards that are included in the checklist. It is used to document achievement of the knowledge and the skill competencies required to receive the paraprofessional credential. The supervisor must verify the achievement of each item on the checklist before the application for a credential can be submitted. Once the entire application is completed, it can be mailed to the address on the first page of the checklist. The checklist is also listed as a resource on the website.

This slide provides an overview or a sample of what the checklist looks like. The checklist, as I said before, can be downloaded from the para-educator webpage on the PaTTAN website, which is www.pattan.net. If you look at this slide, you see that there are a list of competencies, which may be either knowledge or skill levels, listed in the left column. And then there is documentation of the achievement level, the date that achievement level was demonstrated, and then in what category it was demonstrated; that is, whether the supervisor

or other designee saw that achievement level demonstrated, or the competence was received through an interview, or the portfolio was created, or the individual para-educator took a class to achieve that level.

When the credential application is complete, the para-educator should just submit the checklist and the cover sheet. Certificates of attendance, portfolios, essays, et cetera, are not needed. Just the ten standards and the cover sheet that goes with it need to be submitted. It takes the Bureau of Special Education about six to eight weeks to process applications. And when we receive applications and we review them, there are some things to keep in mind. Any application that comes in that has only classes listed for all standards will be rejected and sent back for revision, and that is because there are many competencies that cannot be achieved by just taking a class alone. I will give you a couple of examples here. One of the skills listed within the credential talks about using strategies, equipment, materials, and technologies as directed to accomplish instructional objectives. Now that is a competency that talks about using information, so obviously that is kind of hard to get when you just take a class alone. You cannot see the implementation of that. Another skill is use strategies as directed to facilitate effective integration into various settings. Again, that is a skill that is best seen either through demonstration or interview of an individual who has helped that happen.

If you look at the last bullet, it talks about a stack of applications that was received PDE from a school district where all the applicants had completed all the standards in the same manner on the same day at the same achievement level. It is highly unlikely that all para-educators who applied in this scenario had the exact same knowledge and skills that are demonstrated at the same achievement level on the same date. When we get a packet like that, you will probably receive a call from somebody in the department and the entire packet will be sent back for review and revisions.

Now I'm going to talk about the options you as administrators have to develop -- to provide staff development to meet the 20-hour requirements for your paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals must work with their supervisors to ensure that any courses they take are acceptable and they're related to their job assignment. From the department and from PaTTAN, there are a whole series of trainings available that you may access free of cost to provide those 20 hours. PaTTAN provides some after-school CDs of videoconferences, some online courses, and some summer trainings. The online courses are for the ten competency standards that are

available, and they may be used for new paraprofessionals who are coming into the field to gain their credential of competency.

The videoconferences may be downlinked to -- they are downlinked to all the school IUs and may be downlinked to school districts. You could use them as after-school videoconferences as slated, or you can access them at a later date. There are webinars that are available from PaTTAN which can be accessed with any internet connection on any computer. PaTTAN also has on their website downloadable PowerPoints and trainings notes for numerous topic areas that you, as administrators, may be able to use on the days that you provide in-service training to your staff. In addition, community colleges or universities can provide courses. Districts sometimes hold professional development days or book study programs that are available. As long as the courses and the content of the training relates to the paraprofessionals' jobs assignment, it will be considered within the 20 hours of training.

Many IUs have also developed their own courses that they use across their regions to provide professional development. Now you will hear from two IU supervisors who have chosen to design professional development to meet the unique needs of their constituents. First, you'll hear from Cheryl Wise, a special education supervisor at IU 23 who use -- who chose to use the IU's annual needs assessment survey to determine staff development needs at their LEAs, and then tailor their trainings to meet those specific LEA needs. Rebecca Chadwick, a training and consultant staff at IU 14, chose to develop various strands of training that are geared to meet the specific needs across the LEAs.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

CHERYL WISE: One of my roles as a special education supervisor here at the IU is to support professional development throughout the county. Of course, I also supervise our training consultant staff. Through a survey that's issued each spring, we established the needs of every district throughout the county, and that includes information on para-educator training. So we develop very individualized training for each district. Many times, each district, while trainings developed for their elementary para-educators, and then their para-educators that are assigned to secondary.

REBECCA CHADWICK: We wanted to look at what's the next logical step for these paraprofessionals who now have foundation knowledge but need more. And as a -- as the Chapter 14 requires, it's directly related to what they do. So I took a look at it and laid out a

program that specializes paraprofessionals. It's a three-year program where they can decide if they want to specialize in behavior, they can specialize in reading, they can specialize in low-incidence disabilities, and they can specialize in inclusion. So they can choose from those four strands. And I chose those four strands because those seemed to be the ones that we get the most requests from for districts that they want the most training in, that people need the most support in.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SHATARUPA PODDER: To access the training materials from the PaTTAN website that I talked about earlier, you can either get the PowerPoint slides and use them in-house, you can get the PowerPoint slides with notes for trainers, and you can get the activity packets. The way to get them would be to visit the PaTTAN website, click on Resources, and then browse Instructional Materials.

Now we come to the end of this section, and here is a list of resources that are available for you to use with your staff. There's a credential of competency checklist packet, the FAQs related to Chapter 14 regulations. If you look at volumes one to three, all the paraprofessional questions are listed within those three volumes and they're often very helpful for not only the administrators, but also the HR personnel at your district. The CSBG, which is the certification and staffing guidelines, is also available on the resource list. This concludes this section on the laws, regulations, and standards that impact special education paraprofessionals in Pennsylvania. You can choose to stop at this section, stop at the end of this section, or you can choose to listen to --