



RI Department of Education Teacher Assistants' Policy and Professional Development Infrastructure 2008-09

The RI Department of Education (RIDE) has established a policy and professional development infrastructure related to teacher assistants (TAs). This infrastructure is built on a philosophy recognizing the important role of TAs working with teachers to help students succeed in educational settings and achieve at high levels. This report presents information on RIDE's TA infrastructure including:

- Background and National Recognition
- Data/Accountability
- Legal Requirements
- ParaPro Assessment
- Training Opportunities
- Resources
- Networking

Background and National Recognition - Beginning in the mid-1990's, RIDE began a multi-faceted approach to raising TA quality. RIDE's approach has focused on these goals:

- Ensuring that TAs are effective partners on the instructional team and are recognized as valued professional colleagues as RI strives to ensure high levels of learning and performance for ALL students.
- Forging partnerships with TAs, unions, administrators, higher education, teachers, TA training programs, families and other key stakeholders.
- Establishing a TA policy and professional development infrastructure perceived as effective and attainable.

RIDE has supported the development of this infrastructure with IDEA, State, Title I and Title II funds through a collaboration of the Office for Diverse Learners and the Office of Educator Quality and Certification. The infrastructure includes multiple components. Support materials for these components are identified in this report and are located on the TA website at www.ritap.org/ta.

RI is nationally recognized for its TA initiative. The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals cites RI as a leader in TA policy and practice in its studies. In 2005, the Education Commission of the States (ECS) published national research findings on each state's response to No Child Left Behind (NCLB) requirements and paraprofessional/TA policies. ECS research recognized RI's TA initiative as a leader among states:

- 1 of 5 states that has the same qualifications for ALL instructional TAs serving students with and without special needs
- 1 of 11 states with state level TA PD programs
- 1 of 12 states with TA requirements that exceed basic federal minimums

Data/Accountability – Since 2003, RIDE has collected TA-related data annually from educational agencies that now include School Districts, Educational Collaboratives, State Operated Programs, Charter Schools and Non-Public Schools for Students with Special Needs. Initially, these data were collected manually but are now collected electronically.

Data on TA Assignments and Qualifications - In 2006-07, RIDE enhanced its TA data collection system with RICERT TA, a computer-based system to track the qualifications, assignments and professional development of TAs.

- Approximately 3000 TAs and other paraprofessionals are employed in RI, approximately 20% of RI's instructional work force.
- Of these, nearly 90% are instructional TAs over 75% of whom serve students with disabilities and the rest in general education, Title I or other roles.

- Approximately 10% are non-instructional TAs or other paraprofessionals such as therapy assistants.
- Nearly half of instructional TAs have an associates degree or 2 years of college or higher. Most of the remaining TAs have, as a minimum as required by RI law, a high school diploma/GED, good moral character, completion of a RIDE approved pre-employment TA Training Program and passage of the ParaPro Assessment.
- Local Policy and Practice Supports for TAs and the Instructional Teams with Which TAs Work - In 2006-07, RIDE enhanced its TA data collection system related to TA policy and practice through the use of eRIDE. The following provides summary data across broad TA policy and practice categories in the annual TA survey. If the respondent identified at least one policy or practice in each category (from multiple options), they were “credited” with having some type of policy and practice in place in that category. Over the years, data show maintenance or growth of TA policy and practice supports in all but one category (with that area of decline small and a result of Non-Public Schools for Students with Special Needs reporting for the first time with all other respondents maintaining or increasing in all categories). The full report appearing on the About Us webpage at www.ritap.org/ta includes comprehensive findings on all policies and practice items under each broad category. NOTE: In 2005-06, categories added for the first time were: TA Recruitment, TA Retention and TA Substitute Use. 2007-08 was the first year that Non-Public Schools for Students with Special Needs were surveyed. In 2008-09, the following category was added for the first time: RICERT TA - RIDE computer-based system to track the qualifications, assignments & professional development (PD) of district/educational program personnel, including TAs. For a complete copy of the 2008-09 statewide report, go to the TA website at www.ritap.org/ta, About Us webpage.

TA Policy and Practice Categories	2004-05 51 Total	2005-06 52 Total	2006-07 52 Total	2007-08 66 Total	2008-09 74 Total
<u>Guidelines For TA Assignment:</u> Have local guidelines for deciding when a TA is needed for a child or class	44 or 86% of total	51 or 98% of total	51 or 98% of total	65 or 98% of total	74 or 100% of total
<u>Job Descriptions:</u> Have TA job descriptions of some type	30 - 59%	51 - 98%	52 - 100%	66 - 100%	74 - 100%
<u>TA Orientation:</u> Use some type of process for orientating TAs in new assignments	28 - 55%	50 - 96%	51 - 98%	65 - 98%	74 - 100%
<u>Training Teachers On Effective TA Use:</u> Have training/other strategies to help teachers know how to work effectively with TAs including teachers' providing adequate supervision and support to TAs in implementing instruction under their direction.	22 - 43%	28 - 53%	52 - 100%	66 - 100%	74 - 100%
<u>Instructional Team Supports:</u> Have strategies to support teachers and TAs in working as instructional teams (including provisions for planning time and ongoing communication)	31 - 61%	49 - 94%	51 - 98%	63 - 95%	71 - 96%
<u>TA Performance Evaluation:</u> Have some type of process to evaluate TAs in a way that supports their professional growth	30 - 59%	42 - 81%	43 - 83%	60 - 90%	69 - 93%
<u>Professional Development:</u> Have some type of PD supports available for TAs	37 - 73%	52 - 100%	52 - 100%	66 - 100%	74 - 100%
<u>Career Ladder:</u> Have some type of career ladder or related supports for TAs	18 - 35%	41 - 79%	41 - 79%	58 - 88%	69 - 93%
<u>TA Recruitment:</u> Have effective strategies for recruiting qualified TAs.	NA	22 - 42%	51 - 98%	65 - 98%	72 - 97%
<u>TA Retention:</u> Have effective strategies for retaining qualified TAs.	NA	18 - 35%	52 - 100%	66 - 100%	74 - 100%
<u>TA Substitute Use:</u> Have effective strategies for finding qualified substitute TAs. (RIGL 16-11.2-6 requires that TAs who substitute for more than 20 days during a school year meet all pre-employment TA qualifications.)	NA	7 - 14%	45 - 87%	58 - 88%	66 - 89%
<u>RICERT TA:</u> Describe how your district is using the RICERT TA system.	NA	NA	NA	NA	52 - 70%

Legal Requirements – Since the 1990's, RI has put in place state law and standards for the employment, training and use of TAs. In 2003, RI amended state law to comply with NCLB and establish a uniform state standard for the qualifications of all instructional TAs regardless of position title or funding source. Districts must ensure that TAs meet these qualifications and report such to RIDE annually through the RICERT TA system.

RIDE state standards identify entry-level TA competencies in 4 areas that must be taught in RIDE approved pre-employment TA Training Programs:

- Professionalism in communication and collaboration among members of the school community, including colleagues, families, and related agencies
- Instructional opportunities
- Learning environment that encourages appropriate standards of behavior, positive social interaction, active engagement in learning and self-motivation
- Health, safety, and emergency procedures

RIDE has also developed state guidelines for competencies needed by TAs serving the following types of students (to guide professional development):

- Teacher Assistants Working with Students Who have English as a Second Language
 - Teacher Assistants Working under the Supervision of a Classroom Teacher with Students with Speech/Language Impairments
 - Teacher Assistants Who Support Students with Behaviors that Interfere with Learning and/or Relationships
 - Teacher Assistants Assisting with Community-Based Instruction
 - Teacher Assistants Supporting Students with Diverse Academic Needs
- + Guidelines for Instructional Teams, Supervision and Performance Evaluation related to TAs (federal and state law mandate that TAs must work under the direction and supervision of teachers or other appropriately certified personnel)

Under state law, TAs must engage in ongoing job-related PD annually as a condition of employment. Districts are to ensure that TAs engage in such PD and maintain records in this regard (which they do through the use of the RICERT TA system). School districts must also include TAs in a meaningful way in district plans related to the RI's Comprehensive Education Strategy, including school improvement plans and professional development plans.

The Legal Requirements webpage of the TA website includes:

- Checklists for Reviewing TA Qualifications (Provides complete information on state requirements for TA qualifications.)
- RIDE Program Standards for All TAs and Guidelines for TAs in Specific Assignments and Guidelines for Instructional Teams, Supervision and Performance Evaluation
- Q & A Related to State and Federal Requirements for TA Qualifications and Use, RI Department of Education
- Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) 2004 Regulations & Comments Related to Paraprofessionals/TAs
- A Q & A developed by the U.S. Department of Education, *Title I Paraprofessionals: Non-Regulatory Guidance, March 1, 2004*
- Linkage to the federal regulations for Title I (No Child Left Behind – NCLB)
- Qualifications for Paraprofessionals Other Than Instructional and Non-Instructional TAs

ParaPro Assessment – In compliance with NCLB, one option for meeting state qualifications for instructional TAs is demonstrating, through a formal state or local academic assessment: knowledge and ability to assist in instruction, reading, writing, and mathematics; OR reading, writing, and mathematics readiness. RIDE recognizes a passing score of 461 on the ParaPro Assessment developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as the state academic assessment. The TA website provides:

- ParaPro Assessment Fact Sheet
- Handout - ParaPro Assessment and Training Availability Through RI School Districts and Related Agencies
- Linkage to the ETS/ParaPro website
- ParaPro Knowledge & Skill Areas, a handout that lists knowledge & skills tested on the ParaPro Assessment.
- ParaPro Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities or Whose Primary Language is Not English

Training Opportunities – RIDE provides the following professional development supports.

Career Advancement – Through a federal grant (2007-2010), RIDE’s Project RECRUIT that is supporting the development of district-based programs in Providence and Pawtucket to support TAs in becoming teachers. These programs are individualized for each district and provide TAs with college coursework and other supports that increase their effectiveness in their current positions and help them attain their goals of becoming certified teachers in areas of high need in the district. Each district program is a collaboration among RIDE, the districts, institutions of higher education and unions.

In addition, the TA website provides information on:

- Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI) Supports for TAs Pursuing Associate Degrees
- TA Career Advancement Opportunities in Special Education –*The Paul V. Sherlock Center on Disabilities* at RI College helps TAs and others interested in becoming special education teachers.

Pre-Employment TA Training Programs - RI has approximately 20 pre-employment RIDE Approved TA Training Programs that provide training consistent with state standards for persons interested in being employed as TAs. Programs are provided by various entities: community college, school districts, educational collaboratives, career/technical programs, adult education, high schools, private schools and agencies. Some programs are exclusively for “in-house” staff or for high school students. However, most are post-secondary programs available to any qualified applicant. A “typical” training program is 30-40 hours over multiple weeks, most involving classes, practica/field placement and portfolios. The average cost is generally in the \$150-\$300 range.

TA Networks – Since 1999, RIDE has trained approximately 4000 TAs via regional networks that meet 3 times each school year (fall, winter and spring) reaching up to 250 TAs each “season” in locations throughout RI co-sponsored by the Educational Collaboratives. Training topics are based on annual needs assessment. Sessions are 4:00-6:00 with light refreshments.

Training For Teachers on Effective TA Use – Beginning in 1999-2000, RIDE funded, through a small grant, a presenter:

- To train teachers and/or teacher/TA teams on the Effective Use of TAs in both regular and special education classrooms. The presenter was available to districts at no cost and was able to tailor the training to meet specific district needs. RIDE Professional Development Credits (PDCs) were available.
- To support teacher education programs in training perspective teachers on how to work with TAs in both regular and special education classrooms. Support consisted of a presentation to the class, leaving materials for the instructor for follow-up or for use with other classes. The presenter addressed college courses for a wide audience: early childhood educators, elementary and secondary teachers, special educators and administrators. Due to funding cuts, these supports ended in 2008-09.

Professional Development for TAs Addressing the Competencies Identified in State Guidelines – Over the years, RIDE has funded statewide professional development related to some of the RIDE TA Guidelines: Behavior, ESL and Speech Language. Funding is no longer available to support this training.

The TA website provides:

- Professional Development (PD) for TAs – Summary of RI PD requirements and resources for TAs.
- Presenters for TA PD – Individuals and organizations with which districts/programs may choose to make arrangements for local TA PD.
- Training for TAs Assisting with Community-Based Instruction – Provides information to link to training resources and materials on this topic.
- National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals – Linkage to their website.
- Free and Low Cost Training Opportunities for TAs in RI – PD that TAs or districts can access on their own. Most PD is not specifically geared for TAs but is often suitable for them.
- Online PD for TAs - Links to a variety of online PD appropriate for TAs and those who work with them – some at no or low cost.

Resources - RIDE provides the following resources through its TA website.

TA Newsletter – RIDE publishes a quarterly newsletter to provide up-to-date information on policy, practice and PD. It is available on the TA website and emailed to: School District Superintendents, Principals, Human Resources Directors, Special Education Directors, Title I Directors, and Staff identified as Teacher Assistant Contacts; State and Local Union Representatives; Teacher Preparation Programs; Approved TA Training Programs; Education Collaboratives; and Others Who Request to Be on the TA Mailing List (This list numbers approximately 2000, the majority of whom are TAs).

RICERT TA – RICERT TA is a computer-based system established by RIDE to track the qualifications, assignments and PD of TAs. Resources on the TA website include: (1) RICERT TA Fact Sheet; (2) RICERT TA Manual that includes many resources for using RICERT TA; (3) Quick References for RICERT TA; (4) Worksheet for PD Activity Documentation on RICERT TA; and (5) Other resources to support using RICERT TA.

Research on the Effective Use of TAs –A summary of research on (1) TA Use Linked to Student Achievement; (2) What Teachers Need to Know About the Effective Use of TAs; (3) TA Assignment Considerations; (4) TA PD; and (5) National Trends and State Practices re: TAs.

Annotated Bibliography of TA Resources – Listing of books, training modules, on-line training and related resources intended to support districts and other entities in developing effective policy and practice and in providing PD for TAs and persons working with them. RIDE has purchased many of the resources listed in this bibliography and makes them available on loan for through 6 locations throughout the state.

Worksheets Teachers and TAs Can Use to Improve Teamwork –Includes worksheets to support the implementation of State Guidelines related to Instructional Teams, Supervision and Performance Evaluation related to TAs. Worksheets include:

- Professional/Program/Student Needs Inventory
- Personalized Job Description for Paraeducators/TAs
- Paraeducator/TA Skills/Confidence Inventory
- Paraeducator/TA Growth and Development Plan
- Paraeducator/TA Performance Rating
- Paraeducator/TA's Work Style
- Professional's Work Style
- Work Style Score Sheet

Training Module for TAs Who Work with Students Who Have English As a Second Language – Districts can use or adapt this module to address local needs. Module content complies with RIDE ELL regulations & WIDA English Language Proficiency Standards. It trains TAs in competencies specified in RIDE State Guidelines for TAs Working Students who Have English as a Second Language. The module has easy-to-follow scripts for the trainer with lecture notes & step-by-step activity instructions, handouts & transparency masters that can be converted to PowerPoints. The module is divided into 7 parts, all in PDF for downloading. *Adaptations/applications:* (1) Module content on ESL/ELL is appropriate for various educational personnel – not just TAs – &, thus, can be used to train ESL/ELL teams of teachers, TA & others. (2) Some parts can be modified for use with any type of TA, not just TAs working with students who have English as a second language.

Substitute Folder for Teachers and TAs – This portfolio provides resources that school personnel can adapt to their individual situations to facilitate: communication and teamwork among teachers and TAs and continuity of instruction when teachers or TAs are absent. Resources include: Helpful Forms, School Specific Information, Special Education Resources, Professional Information and RIDE and District Information.

Effective Use of Teacher Assistants – A Module for Policy and Practice Development – This module is targeted for persons in a leadership capacity related to TAs. It includes: Module document, PowerPoint presentation, Web-based component, and a Checklist for Policies & Practices on Effective TA Use that

districts can use as a self-assessment & basis for making improvements. The module can be used as an auto-instructional resource by individuals or groups wishing to do research, program self-assessment & program improvement related to TA legal requirements, policy & practice. It can also be used as a training tool. Module sections include:

- How to Use this Module
- Research Related To TAs
- Legal Requirements Related To TAs And Other Paraprofessionals
- Instructional Team Model
- Job Descriptions For TAs
- Considerations For Assigning TAs
- Orientation Of TAs
- Professional Development For Instructional Team Members
- Supervision Of TAs
- Performance Evaluation Of TAs
- Orientation Exercise for Effective Use of TAs Module
- Guided Discussion
- Bibliography

TA Job Descriptions - Access a variety of materials designed to assist districts & related programs in developing effective job descriptions for TAs including information on TA job description requirements and state guidelines, examples of TA job descriptions in RI districts & related agencies, a job description format and supports for job description development.

National Skill Standards - The Education and Training Voluntary Partnership (ETVP) under the Nat'l Skill Standards Board has developed Skill Standards for Frontline Workers in Education & Training: Paraprofessionals, Paraeducators, TAs, Education Assistants, and Child Care Workers Working in General Education, Special Education and Early Childhood Care & Education.

Decision-Making Model for Natural Supports &/or Supplementary Aides or Services – This model and form have been developed by RIDE as a support in determining a student's need for natural supports &/or supplementary aides or services that may or may not include TA assignment.

Student Contract - Research shows that TA use, particularly 1:1 TAs, can sometimes cause a student with special needs to become dependent on the TA. A student contract is one way to support a student in making personal decisions about his/her education and encourage self-determination.

Sharing District-Developed Resources – Provides access to TA-related forms, handbooks, etc. from various RI districts & related programs and instructions for submitting products to share.

Networking

Local TA Contacts – A key part of RI's TA infrastructure is the local TA Contact that RIDE has asked each district, educational collaborative, state operated program, charter school and non-public school for students with special needs to identify. The TA Contact is RIDE's primary communication contact with district personnel, e.g., for policy updates, quarterly TA Newsletter, PD information, etc. The TA Contact is also RIDE's local contact for the operation of the RICERT TA system and the annual eRIDE survey on TA policy and practice. In fact, completion of the annual eRIDE survey serves as an effective vehicle for providing orientation to new TA Contacts on state requirements and resources related to TAs. The staff/position assigned as TA Contact varies. The most common local TA contact positions are Human Resources Personnel; Director/Assistant Director of Pupil Personnel/Student Services/Director of Special Education; Director of Administration/Finance/ Business Manager; and Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent. In

Educational Collaboratives, State Operated Programs, Charter Schools and Non-Public Schools for Students, the TA Contact is usually the agency/program director or another key administrator. A document providing TA contact information is available on the TA website.

Professional Development Networks – In addition to providing information on TA Networks, the TA website provides information on other networks in RI offering PD on various topics, e.g., Autism, IEPs. Each network is open to a variety of personnel, including TAs.

RIDE TA Contacts

- Charlotte Diffendale; Office of Educator Quality and Certification; RI Department of Education; 255 Westminster Street, Room 410; Providence, RI 02903; Phone: 401/222-8808; Fax: 401/222-2048; email: Charlotte.Diffendale@ride.ri.gov
- Peggy Hayden; 34 Sea Breeze Lane; Bristol, RI 02809; Phone: 401/253-3275; email: phayden@fctvplus.net.

Conclusion - This infrastructure has been put in place over time. It continues to grow commiserate with the growth in recognition and respect for the important role TAs play in supporting teaching and learning. The impact of this infrastructure is reflected in the following comments:

- A TA participating in the TA Networks commented that the networks have helped her come to realize “that assistants throughout the state share the same concerns and issues perhaps resulting from transitions taking place in the role as assistants. (This is) one more step in the process of my building background and experience to be as effective in my job as I can. It is satisfying to know that all of these things are recognized by professional educators and that positive steps are being taken” to support TAs, students, teachers and other professionals, and parents with whom assistants work.
- A teacher said after attending training for teachers on the effective use of TAs, “I am not the only teacher that is unsure of how to use TAs. This was made clear by the activity we did with various tasks and who has the primary responsibility. This is all beyond the job description and we need to talk with each other more, to be an effective instructional team!”
- A principal’s comment is, “There is no question that they (TAs) impact student performance by the personalization they provide to students’ areas of academic, developmental and behavioral strengths and needs and being alert to their physical, emotional and social needs.”
- A superintendent’s comment on TA PD is, “PD is an integral part of paraprofessional development. A systemic plan of professional development can have a profound impact on instructional practice.”
- 2 Providence College professors’ research in RI concluded, “TAs should be considered as valuable members of instructional teams. Their direct support of student learning often has significant impact on student success in the classroom. As such they need to be informed as well as have their voices heard regarding student progress. TAs need to have information about effective instructional strategies, curriculum expectations, and ways to communicate with classroom teachers and special educators about specific characteristics of students. TAs’ unique relationships with students can often provide them with specific information about each student’s day-to-day successes and challenges, student preferences and interests and a student’s frustration level. TAs (as well as all professional staff) need to recognize the shared responsibility for student learning. Collaboration leads to success.”