Instructional Assistant Certification Pathways

Achieving Highly Qualified Status by Fall 2027.

Title I mandates all paraprofessionals meet specific "highly qualified" educational benchmarks.

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Under Title I, Part A of the ESEA, all paraprofessionals providing instructional support must achieve a "highly qualified" standard. Requirements include holding a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent, plus one of three options:

OPTION 1

Higher Education Study

Completing two years of study at an institution of higher education (minimum 60 credit hours).

OPTION 2

Associate's Degree

Obtaining an associate's degree or higher.

OPTION 3

Academic Assessment

Passing a rigorous formal state or local academic assessment to demonstrate knowledge in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics.

Fall 2027: A Timeline to Compliance

Key Implementation Milestones & Deadlines

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An planned approach designed to accommodate the varied needs of our staff through intentional planning and individualized support.

1

PHASE 1

Fall 2026

Program Development

Collaboration with Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) for paraprofessional course development and curriculum alignment.

2

PHASE 2

November 2026

Staff Notification

Official notification distributed to identified instructional assistants regarding new Title I highly qualified requirements.

3

PHASE 3

December 2026

Preferences Survey

Survey identified employees to assess individual training preferences and select preferred division-sponsored certification pathways.

4

PHASE 4

January 2027

Action Planning

Complete individualized certification and training planning with HR support for each identified Instructional Assistant.

5

PHASE 5

April 1, 2027

Completion Due Date

Final deadline for certification completion or confirmed enrollment in summer program to secure 2027–2028 appointment letters.

Meeting the Highly Qualified Designation

MANDATORY REQUIREMENT

Strict condition of employment for the 2027-2028 school year.

Applicable to all current staff, new hires, and returning employees.

Certification & Compliance

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Achieving this certification is mandatory for continued employment in the 2027-2028 school year. Current Charlottesville City Schools employees must complete the qualification process by April 1, 2026, to be eligible to receive an appointment letter for the upcoming 2027-2028 academic year. All new hires and employees who do not meet this initial deadline must secure the highly qualified designation before August 1, 2027, to remain eligible for employment.

Key Implementation Timeline

April 1, 2026
Current Staff

Complete qualification process to be eligible to receive an appointment letter for 2027-2028.

August 1, 2027
Final Deadline

All new hires & remaining staff must secure designation to remain eligible for employment.

2027–2028 Year
Full Enforcement

Highly qualified designation becomes a mandatory active condition of employment.

Market Competitiveness & Training Incentive

Regional Labor Dynamics & The "Grow Your Own" HQ Strategy

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Competitive Labor Market & Bottleneck

Regional Shortages & Cross-Sector Competition

- **Tight Local Economy:** Charlottesville unemployment hovers at 2.5–3.0%. Retail & private childcare offer comparable wages ($17–$20/hr) without credential barriers.
- **HQ Bottleneck:** Strict Title I rules disqualify willing applicants lacking immediate college credits or test scores, narrowing the candidate pool.
- **"Grow Your Own" Program:** Successful licensure pipelines systematically elevate top IAs to teachers, creating continuous backfill needs.

Strategy: Build HQ Capacity Locally

Overcoming External Hiring Barriers

- **Internal Talent Cultivation:** Rather than competing endlessly in a shallow market, CCS equips existing IAs to earn Highly Qualified status in-house.
- **Flexible Pathways:** Division-sponsored local assessments and ParaPathways prep ensure staff reach compliance securely.
- **System Stability:** Retaining experienced assistants stabilizes classroom environments and reduces costly operational turnover.

Regional Paraprofessional Wage Metrics

2026–2027 Compensation Benchmarks

Charlottesville City Schools (CCS) Hourly Range

$20.24 – $32.95 / hr

Varies by experience, Special Ed, Pre-K, and CATEC demands.

Albemarle County Public Schools Range

$17.89 – $23.45 / hr

High regional churn creates ongoing competition for certified staff.

$500 Professional Learning Stipend

Pending Approval for Title II, Part A Funds Usage

Recognizes and compensates the extensive rigor and personal time required for IAs to complete professional learning and attain credentials.

Implementation Note: One-time participation stipend awarded in Fall 2027 following credential completion via ParaPathways tracks.

Instructional Assistant Retention Strategy

Proactive Professional Development & Highly Qualified Designation

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43 of 120

Instructional Assistants Needing Certification

Charlottesville City Schools currently employs 120 Instructional Assistants, with 43 targeted for the new highly qualified designation pathway.

Staff Retention Strategy

Charlottesville City Schools currently employs 120 Instructional Assistants, 43 of whom need to meet designation standards. This certification initiative serves directly as a primary strategy to retain experienced staff.

Flexible Pathways & System Stability

By investing proactively in professional development and offering flexible pathways, the division equips staff to meet the mandate, ensuring continued employment and stabilizing classroom support systems.

SUPPORTIVE DIVISIONAL MANDATE

A supportive approach ensures continued employment for our valued assistants while stabilizing classroom support systems across the division.

Division-Sponsored Certification Pathways

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Charlottesville City Schools provides three flexible, division-sponsored pathways to help staff achieve the highly qualified certification and maintain their employment status:

1. Locally-Awarded Certification

Local division assessment pathway for staff certification.

2. ParaPathways Assessment

Self-Paced Online Study

3. ParaPathways Assessment

PVCC In-Person Course

Instructional Assistant Certification Pathways

Pathway Comparison & Implementation Overview

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Criteria	Locally-Awarded Certification	ParaPathways Assessment (Self-Paced Online)	ParaPathways Assessment (PVCC In-Person Course)
Time Commitment	Independent practice and up to 2 hours for the test session.	Variable; self-paced digital learning via Study.com.	8 hours a week (6 hours in-class, 2 hours out-of-class).
Exam / Certification	Local assessment demonstrating qualifications in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics.	ParaPathways Assessment (Test Code 5757).	ParaPathways Assessment (Test Code 5757).
Costs Paid by CCS	Staff are compensated at their regular hourly rate for up to 2 hours for the test session.	CCS covers all exam fees and test prep materials.	CCS covers PVCC tuition, fees, course materials, and exam fees.
Participation Stipend	None	One-time $500 participation stipend awarded in Fall 2027.	One-time $500 participation stipend awarded in Fall 2027.
Eligibility for Fall 2027 Employment	Must be completed by April 1, 2027.	Must be completed by April 1, 2027.	Must be completed or enrolled in PVCC summer program by April 1, 2027.

Local Certification Assessment for Instructional Assistants

Standards Alignment & School Board Approval

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Title I Authority

Federal Qualification Framework

Federal guidelines allow paraprofessionals to demonstrate qualifications through a "formal state or local assessment [measuring] knowledge of and ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics."

Development & Alignment

Rigorous Standards Cross-Mapping

Created by cross-aligning Virginia Standards of Learning (SOLs) with the official ParaPathways 5757 competencies to ensure a rigorous, evidence-based evaluation.

Note: ***CCS engaged with multiple VA school divisions to review their locally-approved assessments and processes to ensure commensurate quality.***

What it Assesses

Academic & Pedagogical Domains

Evaluates both foundational academic proficiency (Reading, Writing, Mathematics) and practical pedagogical application (Instruction and Classroom Management).

School Board Approval

Governance & Local Authority

Under Title I federal guidelines, local assessments require formal School Board approval to establish official qualification status for instructional assistants across the division.

Action: ***Board adoption authorizes division-level administration and establishes the credential as a recognized condition of employment.***