

Roles and Qualifications to Conduct Special Education Evaluations

Purpose

The Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) and the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) work jointly to ensure that Washington's PK-12 students are supported by qualified education professionals, including teachers, education staff associates (ESAs), paraeducators, and administrators.

The content within this guidance is intended to replace previously published guidance regarding the role of school psychologists in evaluating students for special education services.¹ Co-developed by PESB and OSPI, this guidance applies to all educators who evaluate students for special education services.

Summary

State and federal regulations² on evaluation, eligibility, and staff qualifications provide guidelines for assessment procedures for determining a student's initial or continuing eligibility for special education and related services.



Each school district must ensure that special education assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a student:

- Are administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel; and
- Are administered in accordance with any instructions provided by the producer of the assessments.

Educator roles and certification requirements may vary based on the testing protocols for the assessments being implemented. Special education evaluations are an individualized, student-specific decision made by the student's evaluation team.

The guidance within this document will:

- Detail the requirements of trained and knowledgeable personnel and special education evaluations; and
- Provide answers to frequently asked questions.

¹ May 2024, PESB issued [initial guidance](#) regarding the scope of practice for school psychologists. February 2025, PESB issued [Updated Guidance for School Psychologist Scope of Practice](#) revising the May 2024 bulletin.

² 34 CFR § 300.304; WAC 392-172A-03020(3)(a)

Trained and Knowledgeable Personnel

PESB and OSPI both have authority to establish rules for the training and qualifications (knowledge and skills) of school personnel. See the [FAQ](#) for more information related to agency roles.

Educator Roles and Qualifications

PESB sets standards for, approves, and regulates all educator preparation programs leading to educator certificates in Washington state. Educator preparation programs must ensure these standards are upheld through program structures.

Per [WAC 181-78A-005](#), these rules “establish a performance-based preparation system for educators that supports the Improvement of Student Achievement Act of 1993 (ESHB 1209), which will enable educators to implement the Washington state student learning standards and requirements.” No institution may offer, or claim to offer, a Washington state educator certificate or special education endorsement unless formally approved by PESB through the process described in [WAC 181-78A-105](#).

School districts determine the roles and responsibilities of certificated employees. Districts must ensure they adhere to PESB’s guidance regarding educator certificates and ensure that each educator is placed in a position that aligns with the specific educator certificate that they hold.³ While districts are allowed flexibility under state assignment policy to meet workforce needs, it is important to prioritize student access to appropriately credentialed educators.

Paraeducator Roles and Qualifications

The Paraeducator Board has the powers and duties to adopt paraeducator standards of practice.⁴ The general paraeducator certificate is the minimum credential a paraeducator may earn to obtain the knowledge and skills needed to support and assist teachers with their programs and administrative duties.⁵ In addition to the general paraeducator certificate, paraeducators may earn an English language learner subject matter certificate,⁶ a special education subject matter certificate,⁷ and/or an advanced paraeducator certificate.⁸ The special education subject matter certificate provides increased training to paraeducators to meet the demands of special education instructional support.⁹

Teacher Roles and Qualifications

An endorsement is the specific subject matter or content area listed on a teaching certificate in Washington state. Educators earn endorsements on a teaching certificate by demonstrating specific skills and knowledge in the endorsement area by passing the aligned content area assessment. Additionally, some endorsements also require the recommendation of an educator preparation program¹⁰. The special education endorsements are: special education, early childhood special education, teacher of the visually impaired, deaf education, and deaf education with American Sign

³ WAC 181-79A-003

⁴ RCW 28A.413.030

⁵ WAC 179-11-010(2)

⁶ WAC 179-13

⁷ WAC 179-15

⁸ WAC 179-17

⁹ WAC 179-15-010(2)

¹⁰ <https://www.pesb.wa.gov/current-educators/assignment/endorsements/>

Language (ASL) proficiency. Additionally, there is a specialty endorsement available for adapted physical education (APE).¹¹

ESA Roles and Qualifications

The educational staff associate (ESA) certificate authorizes service in the following roles: school behavior analyst, school counselor, school nurse, school occupational therapist, school orientation and mobility specialist, school physical therapist, school psychologist, school social worker, school speech language pathologist, or audiologist.¹² ESA certificates are required for individuals practicing in these roles in school districts.

Additionally, each ESA role must uphold all of the requirements of their licensing. Nothing within [chapter 181-79A WAC](#) authorizes professional practice by an educational staff associate which is otherwise prohibited or restricted by any other law, including licensure statutes and rules and regulations adopted by the appropriate licensure board or agency.¹³

All providers are required to know and uphold the requirements that apply to them, including requirements from their licensing and certification. Neither OSPI nor PESB can provide guidance related to the requirements of the licensure from the Department of Health (DOH). For more on DOH requirements, please review the [DOH webpage](#) or contact DOH.

Special Education Evaluations

Each student must be assessed in all areas related to their suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities.¹⁴ Additionally, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA) requires that school districts “use a variety of assessment tools and strategies to gather relevant functional, developmental, and academic information, including information provided by the parent”¹⁵ as part of the comprehensive evaluation process.¹⁶

Special Education Evaluator Qualifications

Evaluations must be conducted by a *group of qualified professionals* selected by the school district and are completed using a variety of assessment tools and strategies to determine the individual student’s eligibility and unique needs.¹⁷

¹¹ WAC 181-82A-202; WAC 181-82A-208

¹² WAC 181-79A-140

¹³ WAC 181-79A-140(5)(b)

¹⁴ 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(4); WAC 392-172A-03020(3)(e)

¹⁵ Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, 20 U.S.C. § 1414 (2004); Assistance to States for the Education of Children With Disabilities and Preschool Grants for Children with Disabilities

¹⁶ WAC 392-172A-03020; [TAP #5 – Evaluation Procedures Under Part B](#)

¹⁷ 34 CFR § 300.304; WAC 392-172A-03020

Educator roles and certification requirements may vary based on the testing protocols for the assessments being implemented.

Following the evaluation, the group of qualified professionals and the student's parent (and/or guardian) determine if the student is eligible for special education services.¹⁸

The district is ultimately responsible for ensuring assessments and other evaluation materials used to assess a student are properly selected and administered by trained and knowledgeable personnel in accordance with the assessment protocols.¹⁹ Additionally, responsibility lies with the staff administering and interpreting the assessment and evaluation materials, as they are responsible for adhering to all guidance and regulations that apply to them, which can include, but are not limited to: Department of Health licensing, ESA credentialing, and other required credentials.

For more information about the Evaluation Procedures Under IDEA Part B, refer to [Technical Assistance Paper No. 5 \(TAP 5\)](#).

Special Education Evaluation Procedures

Assessment instruments must be administered following test instructions and protocols, including any instructions about qualifications needed to administer the assessment. Some assessments must be administered by a certificated ESA, such as a school psychologist, but others may be administered by a special education endorsed teacher or trained administrator of the evaluation tool. Refer to the test manual of the specific assessment tool for information on the required qualifications of the individual administering, scoring, and analyzing the results of that particular tool.



As an example, [Pearson](#) classifies assessments as Level A, Level B, or Level C and utilizes a qualifications policy for assessment sale and use. The "Qualified User" is the individual who assumes responsibility for all aspects of appropriate test use, including administration, scoring, interpretation, and application of results. There are no special qualifications to purchase Level A products. Level C products require the highest level of expertise in test interpretation and may be purchased by individuals with "licensure or certification to practice in your state in a field related to the purchase."²⁰

¹⁸ 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(4); WAC 392-172A-03020(3)(e)

¹⁹ WAC 392-172A-03020

²⁰ <https://www.pearsonassessments.com/professional-assessments/ordering/how-to-order/qualifications/qualifications-policy.html>

Frequently Asked Questions

Q1: How do I know that a person is "trained and knowledgeable" to administer a special education assessment?

The test manual will provide details on administration, scoring, and/or interpretation requirements and options for the particular assessment. For details on the qualifications for specific roles, please see the section above titled Trained and Knowledgeable Personnel.

Q2: Who is appropriately qualified to be on a special education evaluation team?

Each evaluation is completed by a *group of qualified professionals* based on the necessary assessments to evaluate a student's needs, determine eligibility, and drive team decisions about IEP content.²¹ When individual diagnostic examinations of students are required, examples of professionals qualified to conduct them include (but are not limited to) school psychologists, speech language pathologists, and remedial reading teachers.²² Eligibility is determined by the group of qualified professionals and the parent (and/or guardian).²³

Evaluation procedures must ensure the student is assessed "in all areas related to the suspected disability, including, if appropriate, health, vision, hearing, social and emotional status, general intelligence, academic performance, communicative status, and motor abilities."²⁴ The evaluation team will be composed of the staff members who have the necessary training and scope of practice to administer and/or interpret the assessments determined to be needed by the evaluation team and in accordance with the test protocols.

Q3: Can paraeducators administer assessment(s) to document a student's initial or continuing eligibility for special education or related services?

It depends on the assessment. Assessments are a student-specific decision made by the student's evaluation team and vary based on the testing protocols for the assessment being implemented. Assessment instruments must be administered following test instructions and protocols, including any instructions about qualifications needed to administer the assessment. Refer to the test manual of the specific assessment tool for information on the required qualifications of the individual administering, scoring, and analyzing the results of that particular tool.

Q4: Is an assessment required to document a student's initial or continuing eligibility for special education or related services?

An evaluation team is not required to complete additional assessments as part of a special education evaluation unless it is determined necessary through a review of existing data. If existing data are

²¹ 34 CFR § 300.304(b) and (c); WAC 392-172A-03020(2) and (3)

²² 34 CFR § 300.308(b); WAC 392-172A-03050(4)

²³ 34 CFR § 300.306(a); WAC 392-172A-03040(1)

²⁴ 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(4); WAC 392-172A-03020(3)(e)

sufficient to document the student's initial eligibility or continuing eligibility (in the case of a reevaluation) for special education, then the team could decide that no additional assessments are needed.²⁵

Q5: What are the roles and responsibilities of the Professional Educators Standards Board (PESB) and the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)?

Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB)

PESB establishes rules determining eligibility for and certification of school personnel.²⁶ PESB determines educator certification requirements and defines the professional scope of certificated roles, including teachers, administrators, and ESAs.²⁷

Additionally, the Paraeducator Board sets minimum employment requirements and defines the professional scope for paraeducators.²⁸

PESB works to ensure that Washington's students have courses and support services from appropriately credentialed educators. One way PESB does this is through assignment policy, by matching certificates with educator roles.²⁹

Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI)

OSPI has the power and duty to issue educator certificates as provided by law.^{30 31}

Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA; 34 CFR § 300) and Washington Administrative Code 392-172A, OSPI is responsible for implementing IDEA requirements for special education in Washington. OSPI also holds the authority to establish state requirements for special education evaluations that conform to the federal regulations, including but not limited to qualifications to conduct assessments,³² comprehensive evaluations,³³ and eligibility determinations.³⁴

The Office of Professional Practices has the statutory authority to investigate individual certificated educators for allegations of unprofessional conduct.³⁵

Q6: Who can I reach out to if I still have questions?

- Questions on certification policy are best directed to PESB) at PESB@k12.wa.us or call 360-725-6275.

²⁵ 34 CFR § 300.305; WAC 392-172A-03025

²⁶ RCW 28A.410.010

²⁷ [Chapter 181-79A WAC](#)

²⁸ [Title 179 WAC](#)

²⁹ WAC 181-82, WAC 179-03, WAC 179-01-020

³⁰ RCW 28A.300.040(9)

³¹ RCW 28A.410.095

³² 34 CFR § 300.304; WAC 392-172A-03020

³³ 34 CFR § 300.304(c)(4); WAC 392-172A-03020(3)(e)

³⁴ 34 CFR § 300.306; WAC 392-172A-03040

³⁵ RCW 28A.410.095

- Questions about certification requirements or applications are best directed to the OSPI Certification Office. You can [submit a question to certification](#) or call 360-725-6400.
- Questions about the special education personnel qualifications for special education services or guidance on IEP development and implementation are best directed to the OSPI Special Education department. You can email your question to speced@k12.wa.us or call 360-725-6075.
- Questions about a specific assessment protocol and qualifications needed to administer an assessment or evaluation tool should be directed to the test publisher.