ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING  
March 19-20, 2003

TO: Illinois State Board of Education

FROM: Robert E. Schiller, Superintendent  
Christopher Koch, Director

Agenda Topic: Action Item: Routes to Paraprofessional Qualification

Materials: Executive Summary - ACT WorkKeys Standard Setting  
Abstract – ETS ParaPro Assessment Standard Setting

Staff Contact(s): Lee Patton

Purpose of Agenda Item

• To provide Board members with a report on progress toward implementation of the paraprofessional tests endorsed by the Board in January;  
• To secure Board action on passing scores for the paraprofessional tests endorsed by the Board in January; and  
• To provide Board members with a report on progress toward implementing the AAS program for paraprofessionals, as discussed with the Board in January.

Expected Outcome(s) of Agenda Item

• Board approval of the passing scores for the ParaPro (ETS) and the ACT WorkKeys tests for paraprofessionals; and  
• Board authorization for continued implementation of the Illinois routes to paraprofessional qualification.

Background Information

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires paraprofessionals who serve in instructional assistance roles in programs supported by Title I funds to demonstrate their qualifications through one of three options:

• Complete at least two years of postsecondary study at an institution of higher education; or  
• Obtain an associate’s (or higher) degree; or  
• Meet a rigorous standard of quality and demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, the knowledge of and ability to assist in the
instruction of reading, writing and mathematics or reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness.

Paraprofessionals who were employed after the effective date of the law (January 8, 2002) to work in a program supported by Title I funds are already required to meet these criteria. All paraprofessionals employed before January 8, 2002 and working in programs supported by Title I funds will be required to do so by January 2006.

In January, the State Board adopted recommendations designed to help school districts and individuals interested in serving as paraprofessionals to meet these requirements.

For the short term, the Board endorsed the use of three options to meet the requirements.

1. The “ParaPro” assessment developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS), using standards or cut-scores to be established for Illinois within the next two months;
2. Three ACT “WorkKeys” tests corresponding to the NCLB-required areas (reading, writing and math) plus an assessment of the candidate’s “ability to assist in instruction” (pending State Board verification of its appropriateness); and
3. Local assessments that meet the guidelines established by the U.S. Department of Education and adopted by the State Board of Education.

The longer-range option will allow paraprofessionals to meet the NCLB requirements by participating in a new training program based on paraprofessional standards developed by the American Federation of Teachers. Completion of this program, which is expected to be available in community colleges across the state later this year, will result in an Associate’s of Applied Science (AAS) degree and recognition as a Paraprofessional Educator.

Following this Board action, the guidelines for local assessment were disseminated to local districts and made available on the State Board website.

On February 20, a group of advisers, all current paraprofessionals, worked with State Board staff and an ACT representative to develop a job profile for the paraprofessional role and identify the skill levels required for that position. An executive summary describing that process is provided with this report.

On February 25, another group of paraprofessionals and teachers who supervise paraprofessionals worked with State Board staff and ETS representatives to develop recommended cut scores for the ParaPro Assessment. An abstract describing that process is provided with this report.

Representatives from ACT and ETS will be present at the State Board meeting to discuss the respective developmental processes and to present recommendations for State Board action.
State Board staff members have also met with staff from the Illinois Community College Board to discuss development of the AAS program and plans for providing test preparation opportunities for paraprofessional candidates throughout Illinois. Information about the status of this initiative will be provided during the Board meeting.

**Recommendations**

**ParaPro**

The ETS ParaPro Assessment was designed to reflect the knowledge needed by a paraprofessional educator and to evaluate the candidate’s ability to assist with instruction as required by NCLB.

The process used for establishing standards (cut scores) for the ParaPro assessment was the Tucker-Angoff standard-setting model, which has been used by the State Board for setting cut scores for ISAT, PSAE and other assessments.

The average question-level judgment across all of the 75 operational ParaPro questions was computed after the panel had been trained in the process. The average was 50.56, a number which represents the panel’s collective judgment of the number of questions for which a sufficiently knowledgeable beginning paraprofessional would know the correct answer.

This unadjusted recommended passing score value was then modified to account for candidates who might get the answer correct simply by guessing. Based on this calculation, the adjusted recommended passing score was 56.67. This translates to 76% of the questions answered correctly.

This was then translated into a scaled score for reporting purposes; for the ParaPro Assessment, the scale score ranges from a low of 420 to a high of 480. The recommended scaled passing score for NCLB qualification is 467, which also represents 76% of the maximum possible score.

The full report from ETS (provided to the State Board under separate cover) indicates that the State Board has the option of using this score, or scores that represent minus one and minus two standard errors of measurement. The latter scores would be 464 for one standard error of measurement and 460 for two standard errors of measurement.

The ParaPro test fee is $40, with a number of additional costs for special circumstances (e.g., late fee) and a $35 fee for score verification.
The WorkKeys tests are criterion-referenced to specific workplace skills. Their application to NCLB requirements is dependent on the alignment of skill levels on the three relevant exams with a job profile for a paraprofessional, PLUS an evaluation of the candidate’s ability to assist in instruction.

The process for defining recommended skill levels on the WorkKeys tests began with the development of an Illinois Para Educator job profile (i.e., the responsibilities of this position as described by individuals who have held or supervised this position). This was followed by an analysis of the on-the-job behaviors associated with the job profile and a group decision about the skill levels required for those behaviors. Those were then translated into recommended scores for Illinois paraprofessionals at both the “entry” and “effective” levels. The entry level scores are considered “adequate to do the job” and would represent the minimum passing score for meeting the NBPTS paraprofessional qualification requirement. The “effective” level scores are considered desirable with experience and training.

The recommended scores for each test are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Test</th>
<th>Entry</th>
<th>Effective</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Applied Mathematics</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading for Information</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In accordance with NCLB requirements for Title I paraprofessionals who were hired after January 8, 2002, ACT has reviewed their WorkKeys tested population database and has determined that the “entry” scores listed above are those most typically achieved by test takers at the second year of post-secondary education.

The second component of the WorkKeys assessment for paraprofessionals is an observation of the paraprofessional’s performance in a work environment. The ACT Instructional Support Inventory will be ready in late April and if it is used by a district along with the WorkKeys tests, ACT will provide a “certificate” indicating that the paraprofessional has met the minimum passing scores on each assessment and has achieved an acceptable level of competence in accordance with NCLB requirements. The score range for the Instructional Support Inventory (classroom assessment) is expected to be 1-5, with 3 representing an acceptable level of performance.

A school district could use the WorkKeys tests and then administer its own classroom observation instrument (consistent with the State Board’s guidelines for local tests) to determine the paraprofessional’s ability to support instruction. However, the results of the district’s performance assessment would be valid for NCLB only in Illinois.
The three WorkKey tests, administered together, will cost $18.90 for each candidate. If the tests are administered as a part of the Paraprofessional Certificate Package (includes the Instructional Support Inventory and the Certificate), the cost per paraprofessional candidate will be $25.

**Analysis and Implications for Policy, Budget, Legislative Action and Communications**

The Board’s decisions regarding the proposed passing scores for the ACT WorkKeys and ETS ParaPro tests will establish the minimum standards for meeting the NCLB qualifications for beginning paraprofessionals in Illinois. As such, they will have significant impact on the individuals who are now, or who wish to serve as instructional paraprofessionals in programs supported by Title I funds.

The recommended scaled passing score of 467 for the ParaPro Assessment establishes a very high standard (76% of questions answered accurately) and, on the basis of the ETS pilot test and the performance of examinees who took the test in January, can be expected to have a high failure rate. Use of the standard error of measurement options would be statistically acceptable, provide a more reasonable goal at the onset of the new requirement, and put the passing score for Illinois in closer proximity to the passing scores set by other states that are using the ParaPro Assessment. The states for whom that information is available have set the following passing scores:

- Idaho 460
- Delaware 459
- Arizona 459
- Connecticut 457
- Georgia 456

At this time, the major fiscal challenge for the state and other entities such as local districts will be to assure that test preparation opportunities are available for paraprofessional candidates and that those candidates who fail the test are able to engage in appropriate remedial work.

Information about various routes to paraprofessional qualification must be quickly and widely disseminated. That will be accomplished through the Superintendent’s Message to districts and other entities, the State Board website and other strategies.
Pros and Cons of Various Actions

Board action on the recommended passing scores is needed so that individuals can take the tests and determine whether they meet the NCLB qualification. This will facilitate district employment decisions.

Since the AAS degree is not yet in place, delay in making a decision on passing scores for the two paraprofessional tests will limit (at least temporarily) the options available to paraprofessional candidates to those in the law.

Superintendent’s Recommendation

The State Board should approve the use of the WorkKeys tests for assessment of paraprofessional educators, with the expectation that, to establish NCLB qualifications, it will be used in conjunction with either the ACT Instructional Support Inventory (pending Board review of that classroom observation instrument) or a locally-developed observation instrument that meets the State Board guidelines for local assessments.

The State Board should approve the following minimum score levels for the ACT WorkKeys tests for paraprofessional educators in Illinois:

- Applied Mathematics 4
- Reading for Information 4
- Writing 3

The State Board should approve a minimum scaled score of 460 for the ETS ParaPro Assessment. This represents two standard errors of measurement from the minimum scaled score of 467 that was developed by the advisory panel.

Next Steps

The next steps will include, but not be limited to:

- Communication to the field;
- Provision of test preparation opportunities;
- Implementation of testing, test preparation, and the AAS program; and
- Board review of the ACT Instructional Support Inventory.
ILLINOIS PARA EDUCATOR’S OCCUPATIONAL PROFILE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The first step in conducting this occupational profile was to perform an analysis to develop a Final Task List showing the critical tasks of the Illinois Para Educator’s occupation. To begin the task analysis for this occupation, the analyst first developed an Initial Task List using the Dictionary of Occupational Titles, other Para Educator’s (SMEs) occupation descriptions, and information gathered from the Illinois Board of Education. The analyst then met with the SME group to tailor this Initial Task List to make sure that the resulting Final Task List would accurately and completely describe their occupation.

A skill analysis was conducted to identify the on-the-job behaviors associated with each WorkKeys skill. The analyst gave each SME a copy of the skill definitions, read the definitions aloud, and then answered any questions the SMEs had regarding the skills. Once the SMEs understood the definition of a WorkKeys skill and had determined its relevance to the occupation, they independently identified the tasks on the Final Task List that require that skill. Using their list of tasks that require the skill, the SMEs identified the work behaviors that specifically use that skill.

The analyst then presented detailed descriptions of the WorkKeys skill levels to the SMEs. These descriptions include examples of problems or situations employees deal with at each level. The occupation profiler sought to bring the group to a consensus regarding the skill levels required at occupation entry and for effective performance. Following the Uniform Guidelines on Employee Selection Procedures (1978), WorkKeys defines occupation entry as an employee’s first day on the occupation. Entry-level skill requirements are reported here as recommended cutoff scores on the WorkKeys assessments. Effective performance is when an employee can perform competently without continuous supervision and usually this level is reached after some job experience and training.
Next the analyst presented the definition of skill profiled along with specific examples of each level contained in the three skills profiled. After reviewing the examples and discussing them in relation to the Final Task List and specific skills required by Illinois Para Educators tasks, the SMEs came to a consensus on the skills levels required to perform their job.

**WorkKeys Skill Levels Needed for the Illinois Para Educator**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Applied Mathematics</th>
<th>Reading for Information</th>
<th>Writing</th>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Entry</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Adequate to Do the job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Effective</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Desirable With Experience &amp; Training</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The final step in the process was to have the Para Educators rank these skills in importance. Reading was ranked number one, Math number two and Writing number three.
Abstract

This report describes the results of the study conducted by Educational Testing Service (ETS), in conjunction with the Illinois State Board of Education to set standards for The Praxis Series™ ParaPro Assessment. The goal of the study was to recommend a minimum passing score (i.e. study value) for the assessment.

For the ParaPro Assessment, panel members received appropriate training on the Tucker-Angoff standard-setting method. This method necessitates that each panelist review each test question and judge the percentage of a hypothetical group of 100 sufficiently knowledgeable beginning paraprofessionals who would know the correct answer to the question. This hypothetical group, overall, has a sufficient foundation of reading, writing, and mathematics knowledge to support instruction in those areas. The working definition was established through whole-panel discussion, which was facilitated by the standard-setting panel leader.

Once the working definition was established, the panel leader instructed the panelists on how to make and record their standard-setting judgments. As part of the training process, panelists practiced making judgments on sample ParaPro Assessment questions. Each panelist was asked to review the first sample question and to record for each the percentage of 100 sufficiently knowledgeable beginning paraprofessionals who would know the correct answer to the question. The panel leader also presented to the panelists certain features of test questions, not necessarily related to content understanding, which may impact question difficulty, such as the phrasing of the question and the similarity of available response options. After the panelists made their judgments, the panel leader facilitated a discussion encouraging the panelists to share their rationales for their judgments. Panelists were then presented with the actual percentage of paraprofessionals who correctly answered that question from a pilot administration. This process was repeated for five other sample questions as well as six questions from the actual edition of the test they were reviewing.

At the conclusion of the training and practice session, panelists were asked to complete and sign an evaluation form acknowledging that they received sufficient training and felt prepared to continue. Panelists made their operational knowledge estimation judgments for each question on the ParaPro Assessment by recording the percentage of 100 sufficiently knowledgeable beginning paraprofessionals who would know the correct answer.

The average question-level judgment across all panelists was computed for the 75 operational ParaPro Assessment questions. This value was then adjusted to account for candidates who might not know the correct answer, but may get the question right by guessing. The scaled score that a candidate can receive on the ParaPro Assessment ranges from a low of 420 points to a high of 480 points. The recommended passing score based on the panelists' judgments for the ParaPro Assessment is 467.