
Teacher Assistants

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Significant Points

- Almost 4 in 10 teacher assistants work part time.
- Educational requirements range from a high school diploma to some college training.
- Favorable job prospects are expected.
- Opportunities should be best for those with at least 2 years of formal postsecondary education, those with experience in helping special education students, or those who can speak a foreign language.

Nature of the Work

Teacher assistants provide instructional and clerical support for classroom teachers, allowing teachers more time for lesson planning and teaching. They support and assist children in learning class material using the teacher's lesson plans, providing students with individualized attention. Teacher assistants also supervise students in the cafeteria, schoolyard, and hallways, or on field trips; they record grades, set up equipment, and help prepare materials for instruction. Teacher assistants also are called teacher aides or instructional aides. Some assistants refer to themselves as paraeducators or paraprofessionals.

Some teacher assistants perform exclusively noninstructional or clerical tasks, such as monitoring nonacademic settings. Playground and lunchroom attendants are examples of such assistants. Most teacher assistants, however, perform a combination of instructional and clerical duties. They generally provide instructional reinforcement to children, under the direction and guidance of teachers. They work with students individually or in small groups—listening while students read, reviewing or reinforcing class lessons, or helping them find information for reports. At the secondary school level, teacher assistants often specialize in a certain subject, such as math or science. Teacher assistants often take charge of special projects and prepare equipment or exhibits, such as for a science demonstration. Some assistants work in computer laboratories, helping students to use computers and educational software programs.

In addition to instructing, assisting, and supervising students, teacher assistants may grade tests and papers, check homework, keep health and attendance records, do typing and filing, and duplicate materials. They also stock supplies, operate audiovisual equipment, and keep classroom equipment in order.

Many teacher assistants work extensively with special education students. As schools become more inclusive and integrate special education students into general education classrooms, teacher assistants in both general education and special education classrooms increasingly assist students with disabilities. They attend to the physical needs of students with disabilities, including feeding, teaching good grooming habits, or assisting students riding the schoolbus. They also provide personal attention to students with other special needs, such as those who speak English as a second language or those who need remedial education. Some work with young adults to help them obtain a job or to apply for community services to support them after

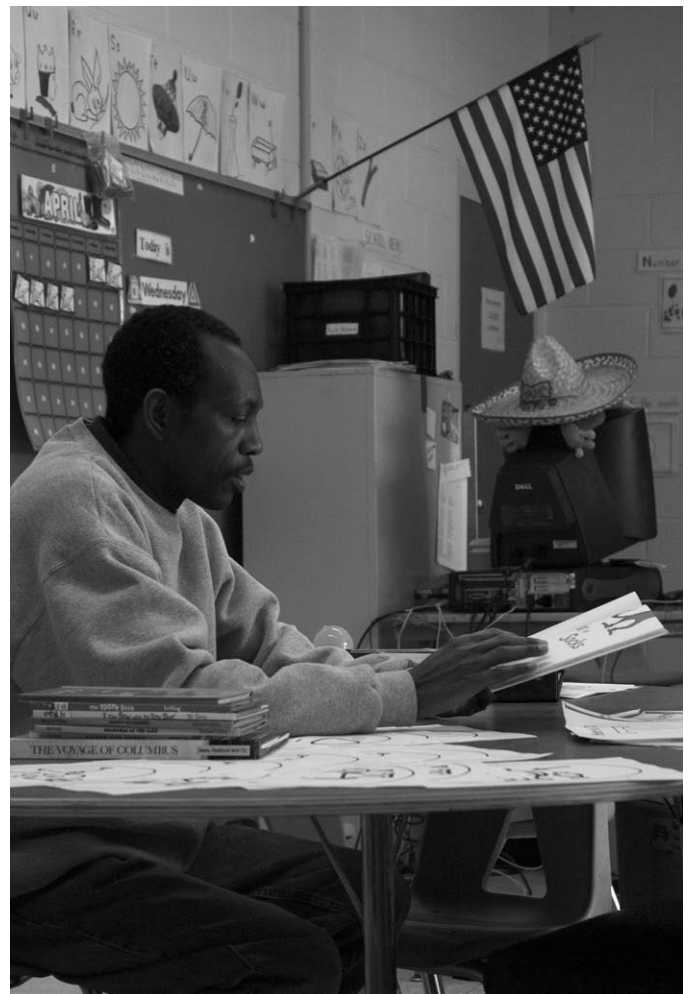
schooling. Teacher assistants help assess a student's progress by observing performance and recording relevant data.

While the majority of teacher assistants work in primary and secondary educational settings, others work in preschools and other child care centers. Often one or two assistants will work with a lead teacher in order to better provide the individual attention that young children require. In addition to assisting in educational instruction, they also supervise the children at play and assist in feeding and other basic care activities.

Teacher assistants also work with infants and toddlers who have developmental delays or other disabilities. Under the guidance of a teacher or therapist, teacher assistants perform exercises or play games to help the child develop physically and behaviorally.

Work environment. Teacher assistants work in a variety of settings—including preschools, child care centers, and religious and community centers, where they work with young adults—but most work in classrooms in elementary, middle, and secondary schools. They also work outdoors supervising recess when weather allows, and they spend much of their time standing, walking, or kneeling.

Approximately 4 in 10 teacher assistants work part time. However, even among full-time workers, about 17 percent work less than 40 hours per week. Most assistants who provide educational instruction work the traditional 9-month to 10-month school year.



Teacher assistants work with small groups of students during reading lessons.

Seeing students develop and gain appreciation of the joy of learning can be very rewarding. However, working closely with students can be both physically and emotionally tiring. Teacher assistants who work with special education students often perform more strenuous tasks, including lifting, as they help students with their daily routine. Those who perform clerical work may tire of administrative duties, such as copying materials or entering data.

Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Training requirements for teacher assistants vary by State or school district and range from a high school diploma to some college training. Increasingly, employers prefer applicants with some related college coursework.

Education and training. Many teacher assistants need only a high school diploma and on-the-job training. A college degree or related coursework in child development improves job opportunities, however. In fact, teacher assistants who work in Title 1 schools—those with a large proportion of students from low-income households—must have college training or proven academic skills. They face new Federal requirements as of 2006: assistants must hold a 2-year or higher degree, have a minimum of 2 years of college, or pass a rigorous State or local assessment.

A number of colleges offer associate degrees or certificate programs that either prepare graduates to work as teacher assistants or provide additional training for current teacher assistants.

All teacher assistants receive some on-the-job training. Teacher assistants need to become familiar with the school system and with the operation and rules of the school. Those who tutor and review lessons with students, must learn and understand the class materials and instructional methods used by the teacher. Teacher assistants also must know how to operate audiovisual equipment, keep records, and prepare instructional materials, as well as have adequate computer skills.

Other qualifications. Many schools require previous experience in working with children and a valid driver's license. Some schools may require the applicant to pass a background check. Teacher assistants should enjoy working with children from a wide range of cultural backgrounds and be able to handle classroom situations with fairness and patience. Teacher assistants also must demonstrate initiative and a willingness to follow a teacher's directions. They must have good writing skills and be able to communicate effectively with students and teachers. Teacher assistants who speak a second language, especially Spanish, are in great demand for communicating with growing numbers of students and parents whose primary language is not English.

Advancement. Advancement for teacher assistants—usually in the form of higher earnings or increased responsibility—comes primarily with experience or additional education.

Some school districts provide time away from the job or tuition reimbursement so that teacher assistants can earn their bachelor's degrees and pursue licensed teaching positions. In return for tuition reimbursement, assistants are often required to teach for a certain length of time in the school district.

Employment

Teacher assistants held 1.3 million jobs in 2006. About 3 out of 4 worked for public and private elementary and secondary schools. Child care centers and religious organizations employed most of the rest.

Job Outlook

Many job openings are expected for teacher assistants due to turnover and average employment growth in this large occupation, resulting in favorable job prospects.

Employment change. Employment of teacher assistants is expected to grow by 10 percent between 2006 and 2016, about as fast as the average for all occupations. A large number of new jobs, 137,000, will arise over the 2006-16 period because of the size of the occupation. School enrollments are projected to increase slowly over the next decade, but faster growth is expected among special education students and students for whom English is a second language, and they will increase as a share of the total school-age population. These students are the ones who most need teacher assistants.

Legislation requires students with disabilities and non-native English speakers to receive an education equal to that of other students, so it will continue to generate jobs for teacher assistants, who help to accommodate these students' special needs. Children with special needs require much personal attention, and teachers rely heavily on teacher assistants to provide much of that attention. An increasing number of after-school programs and summer programs also will create new opportunities for teacher assistants.

The greater focus on school quality and accountability in recent years also is likely to lead to an increased demand for teacher assistants. Growing numbers of teacher assistants may be needed to help teachers prepare students for standardized testing and to provide extra assistance to students who perform poorly on these tests. Job growth of assistants may be moderated, however, if schools are encouraged to hire more full-fledged teachers for instructional purposes.

Job prospects. Favorable job prospects are expected. Opportunities for teacher assistant jobs should be best for those with at least 2 years of formal postsecondary education, those with experience in helping special education students, or those who can speak a foreign language. Demand is expected to vary by region of the country. Regions in which the population and school enrollments are expected to grow faster, such as many communities in the South and West, should have rapid growth in the demand for teacher assistants.

Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2006	Projected employment, 2016	Change, 2006-2016	
				Number	Percent
Teacher assistants.....	25-9041	1,312,000	1,449,000	137,000	10

NOTE: Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

In addition to job openings stemming from employment growth, numerous openings will arise as assistants leave their jobs and must be replaced. Many assistant jobs require limited formal education and offer relatively low pay so many workers transfer to other occupations or leave the labor force to assume family responsibilities, to return to school, or for other reasons.

Earnings

Median annual earnings of teacher assistants in May 2006 were \$20,740. The middle 50 percent earned between \$16,430 and \$26,160. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$13,910, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$31,610.

Full-time workers usually receive health coverage and other benefits. Teacher assistants who work part time ordinarily do not receive benefits. In 2006, about 3 out of 10 teacher assistants belonged to unions—mainly the American Federation of Teachers and the National Education Association—which bargain with school systems over wages, hours, and the terms and conditions of employment.

Related Occupations

Teacher assistants who instruct children have duties similar to those of preschool, kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary school teachers, as well as special education teachers. However, teacher assistants do not have the same level of re-

sponsibility or training. The support activities of teacher assistants and their educational backgrounds are similar to those of childcare workers, library technicians, and library assistants. Teacher assistants who work with children with disabilities perform many of the same functions as occupational therapist assistants and aides.

Sources of Additional Information

For information on teacher assistants, including training and certification, contact:

➤ American Federation of Teachers, Paraprofessional and School Related Personnel Division, 555 New Jersey Ave. NW., Washington, DC 20001.

Internet: <http://www.aft.org/psrp/index.html>

➤ National Education Association, Educational Support Personnel Division, 1201 16th Street, NW., Washington, DC 20036. Internet: <http://www.nea.org/esphome>

➤ National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals, 6526 Old Main Hill, Utah State University, Logan, UT 84322.

Internet: <http://www.nrcpara.org>

Human resource departments of school systems, school administrators, and State departments of education also can provide details about employment opportunities and required qualifications for teacher assistant jobs.