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# Teacher Assistant and Aide Careers, Jobs, and Training Information

## Career and Job Highlights for Teacher Assitants and Aides

- Roughly four in every ten teacher assistants are part time employees.
- Scholastic requirements vary from a high school diploma to some college training
- Particularly in demand will be those who are bilingual or have experience in special education

## Teaching Assitant and Aide Career Overview

Teacher assistants help classroom teachers complete instructional and secretarial tasks, which allow teachers to spend more time preparing lessons and teaching. Using the teacher's lesson plans, teacher assistants help students learn material by tutoring and assisting them one-on-one. Additional classroom duties teacher assistants have are to help prepare supplies for lessons, set up equipment, and record grades. Outside of the classroom teacher assistants may be responsible for supervising students on field trips, in the hallways, as they load busses to and from school, or in the cafeteria. Commonly called teacher aides or instructional aids, some teacher assistants refer to themselves as paraeducators or paraprofessionals.

Some teacher assistants, such as playground and lunchroom attendants, carry out only non-instructional or clerical duties. However, it is more common for teacher assistants to perform a mixture of both clerical and instructional tasks. With the guidance and direction of teachers, these assistants usually offer academic support to students. They may work with children in small groups or individually, helping students learn through such activities as studying or clarifying class notes, listening to them read, or assisting them to locate information for reports. Teacher assistants often specialize in a certain subject area, for example Spanish or science, at the secondary level. Frequently teacher assistants oversee special projects and arrange exhibits or equipment, such as for a science demonstration. Computer laboratories are often run by teacher assistants who help students using computers and education software programs.

Teacher assistants have several other duties in addition to supervising, assisting, and instructing students. They also perform clerical tasks such as duplicate materials, do typing and filing, keep health and attendance records, and stock supplies. Other classroom related responsibilities they

may have are checking homework, grading tests and assignments, operating technological equipment, and keeping the classroom equipment in order.

As schools strive to become more inclusive by placing special education and general education students in the same classrooms, more and more teacher assistants will work almost exclusively with special education students. These assistants may work with special education students in general education or special education classrooms. The disabled students' physical needs are attended to by the teacher assistant, these may include helping students ride the school bus, teaching proper grooming habits, or feeding the students. Students with other special needs—for example, those from underprivileged families—who require remedial education or who are learning English as a second language may also warrant attention from teacher assistants. By observing a student's performance and noting pertinent information, teacher assistants can help monitor a student's growth.

Infants and toddlers who have developmental handicaps or other disabilities may work with a teacher assistant. They may play games or do exercises that develop the physical and behavioral skills of the child under the guidance of an instructor or therapist. A number of teacher assistants help young adults apply for community services for the disabled or find a job.

### **Teacher Assistant and Aide Career Training and Job Qualifications**

To become a teacher assistant, most applicants must have a high school diploma and possibly some college training. These standards vary by State and school district. It is becoming more common for employers to favor applicants with some college education. Typically more schooling is required for teacher assistants who have teaching duties than those who perform only non-instructional tasks. Furthermore, the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 has had a significant impact on the educational requirements of teacher assistants who work in Title 1 schools—schools where students from low-income households make up a large percentage of the student body. These teacher assistants will be required to either pass a thorough state and local examination, attend a minimum of 2 years of college, or hold a degree from a 2-year program or higher level. There are additional requirements besides these at many schools, which may include passing a background check, having a current driver's license, or previously working with children.

Individuals who wish to work as teacher assistants can complete associate degree programs offered at many community and 2-year colleges that prepare students for this career path. Nevertheless, on-the-job training is offered to a majority of teacher assistants. It is important for teacher assistants to be able to prepare instructional supplies, keep records, run audiovisual equipment, and have sufficient computer skills. Teacher assistants who have instructional duties, such as reviewing class notes and tutoring students, must have sufficient knowledge about class materials and teaching techniques, and must be familiar with the school's organization and procedures.

As teacher assistants constantly interact with students and teachers, they must have good writing and communication skills. They must have the ability to act with fairness and patience in every classroom situation. Teacher assistants should like to work with students from many different

cultural backgrounds. Students and parents who speak a language other than English as their primary language are becoming more and more common. This is creating a demand for bilingual teacher assistants, especially those who speak Spanish.

Teacher assistants advance, typically in the form of increased salaries or more responsibility, by gaining more education or experience. A number of school districts offer tuition compensation or time away from the job to support teacher assistants who want to further their education by earning teaching licenses or bachelor's degrees. Assistants often must agree to teach for a specific length of time for the school district if they participate in tuition reimbursement programs.

### **Job and Employment Opportunities**

Compared to projected employment growth through 2002 for all occupations, employment is anticipated to increase somewhat faster for teacher assistants. This is due to the increasing number of students who will need to work with teacher assistants, such as special education students and students who speak English as their second language, compared to the general school-age population. Non-native English speakers and students with disabilities are required by legislation to receive an education comparable to that of general education students. Teacher assistants will be needed to help meet these students' special needs. Special education and general education teachers depend on teacher assistants to give the individual attention that children with special needs require. These factors will create many job openings for teacher assistants despite only stable or slightly increasing student enrollments.

The No Child Left Behind Act, which places emphasis on educational quality and accountability, is likely to lead to a growing demand for teacher assistants. Teachers will need the help of increasingly more assistants to prepare students for standardized testing especially those students who do poorly on standardized tests. After-school and summer programs will create new employment opportunities for teacher assistants. As teacher assistants leave the field to take on family responsibilities, shift career paths to other types of employment, or for other reasons attributed to employment that involves little formal education and offers somewhat low pay, even more openings will be created in addition to those produced by growth.

Teacher assistant employment opportunities are predicted to be best for high school graduates who have at least 2 years of formal education. School districts with high percentages of students whose families do not speak English at home will seek bilingual applicants. Demand will likely differ depending on geographic region. Areas such as the South and West, where school enrollment and general population are growing quickly, should have increased demand for teacher assistants.