Bridging Policy & Practice:
Paraeducator Pathway Pilot

Background & context:

For 25 years, the Washington Student Achievement Council (WSAC) and the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) have partnered to strengthen state educator pathways and address workforce needs. To eliminate adult learning repetition, the initiative modernizes teacher preparation by ensuring that verified classroom experience and professional certificates translate into transferable college credit.

Through a public- and private-funded Credit for Prior Learning (CPL) pilot, WSAC and PESB are leading a deep-dive initiative specifically designed to dismantle systemic barriers to CPL. To close the affordability gap, WSAC and PESB have partnered to braid state funding and secure private funding, creating a sustainable financial framework that reduces financial barriers for students while supporting institutional costs for higher education partners.

The Problem: Teacher Workforce Shortages & Underutilized State Aid

Skilled & Experienced Workforce
Washington employs thousands of paraeducators who already work directly with students, teachers, and families.

High Barriers to Certification
The path to becoming a credentialed teacher is often to expensive, overly confusing and unnecessarily long.

Unrecognized Prior Learning
State-required training and years of classroom experience do not consistently count toward a college degree.

Systemic Friction
Candidates are repeating known content and competencies, pay extra tuition, and navigate disconnected college, scholarship, a certification systems independently.

The Solution: Coordinated Advancement System

The WSAC and the PESB are leading a multi-year, multi-agency pilot to bridge policy and practice by operationalizing CPL.

Experience-to-Credit: Converts state-required paraeducator training and verified classroom experience directly into college credit, accelerating degree completion.

Three-Pillar Support Architecture:

- Higher Ed Capacity: Funding faculty review time, competency crosswalks, shared portfolios, and transparent CPL transcripting policies.
- ESD Infrastructure: Utilizing Education Service Districts (ESDs) for dedicated regional advising teams, cohort organizing, and district-higher education coordination.
- Direct Student Supports: Financial aid navigation, CPL fee coverage, portfolio assistance, and ongoing cohort peer groups.

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Pilot Timeline

Co-Design
Year 0: Nov 2026 – June 2027

Landscape analysis, competency crosswalks, CPL process design, and formal partner agreements.

Implementation
Year 1: July 2027 – June 2028

Cohort enrollment, regional advising, participant data tracking, and focus groups.

Closeout & Evaluation
Year 2: July 2028 – June 2029:

Data matching, policy brief synthesis, and institutional scaling recommendations.

Theory of Change & Desired Outcomes

Short/Intermediate Outcomes:

Reduced financial/tuition barriers, lower student debt, institutionalized CPL policies, and stronger regional support networks.

Long-Term Impact:

Greater career advancement and retention for educators, increased regional workforce stability, and a scalable policy model applicable to other adult learner pathways.

Early Takeaways

Crosswalk:

Audit existing state-mandated training hours for paraeducators against entry-level college course outcomes.

Engage Regional Intermediaries:

Identify local regional service agencies (like ESDs) to act as trust-builders and logistical hubs.

De-silo Funding:

Explore braiding state workforce development funds with institutional financial aid to cover CPL assessment and transcription fees.

Contact

Inez Olive

inezo@wsac.wa.gov

wsac.wa.gov/assessments-prior-learning