

Education Assistant Regulatory Body

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Preamble:

As students with disabilities are designated as a vulnerable population, we need to ensure there is a consistent standard of care among education assistants (EAs) who support them. For our purposes, EAs include: SEAs, CEAs, EAs, ABA EAs, etc. At this point, education programs for EAs varies so greatly that skill sets are inconsistent and effectiveness as an EA is reduced dramatically. This, in turn, affects the level of trusted support for the child.

EA support is a cornerstone of a strong, supportive, safe, and inclusive education system. Well trained EAs means better working conditions for EAs, for teachers, administration, and especially better conditions for students. Simply put: working conditions = learning conditions.

Role and Mandate:

The role and mandate of a regulatory body for EAs is to protect vulnerable students through risk management by way of:

- establishing best practices, professional standards, and conduct that help guide EA education and practice;
- creating consistent standard, provincially mandated post-secondary curriculum designed to support best practices, professional standards, and conduct throughout the Province;
- communicating these established standards to the public;
- professional development opportunities to keep current best practices being employed.

Resolutions:

Resolutions have been brought forth by BCCPAC and BCSTA, as well as School Boards. CUPE members in various Districts are working to get their locals to bring a resolution in support of a regulatory body forth to the CUPE convention for debate.

BCSTA Resolution 28 (2018): *“Development of Standards of Practice for Education Assistants by BC Ministry of Education: That BCSTA call on the Ministry of Education to develop standards of practice for education assistants in British Columbia.”* (CARRIED) http://bcsta.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/report-2018-AGM_Report_of_Proceedings.pdf

BCCPAC Resolution 2015.24: *“THAT BCCPAC advocates for provincially mandated standards and practices for Special Education Assistants and similar support staff that include training, conduct and discipline processes.”* (CARRIED AND ACTIVE) <https://bccpac.bc.ca/index.php/resolutions/list-archive/464-standards-for-special-education-assistants>

Greater Victoria School District (January 29, 2018) McNally: *“That the Board request that the BCSTA call on the Provincial Ministry of Education to develop standards of practice for education assistants in BC, in consultation with CUPE BC.”* (CARRIED) https://lined-paper.com/2018/02/04/feb-5-18-education-policydirections-classroom-pets-left-behind-in-earthquake-and-fire-drills/?fbclid=IwAR3wT08D8z-6QzFa8cbjLyyXugXOIbH_dcMwYfDIAUYxZ45ImPxyCt5rk

Opportunity:

The talk of a regulatory body has been ongoing for a number of years. The previous government ignored this opportunity, and with the current push for more accountability and inclusive classrooms, the timing couldn't be better for the profession.

The prevalence of need for the role of an education assistant is growing, and this is BC's opportunity to lead the country in best practices and standardization. Ontario is currently the only Province that regulates the EA profession through an apprenticeship program. In Ontario, the Educational Assistant is a trade regulated by the Ontario College of Trades and Apprenticeship Act, 2009.

Reference: https://www.collegeoftrades.ca/wp-content/uploads/TFS_Educatoinal_Assistant_Nov2015.pdf and https://www.collegeoftrades.ca/wp-content/uploads/CTS-EDUCATIONAL_ASSISTANT_620E_EN.pdf

Risks:

The risks associated with not regulating EAs as they work with the vulnerable population of students with disabilities are immense. Currently, due to lack of sufficient and consistent training for EAs, we continue to put children and staff at risk of not only physical harm but also trauma and PTSD. A regulatory body can mitigate these issues as we create effective, robust training opportunities and professional development.

Further, standardization would support the learning environment in that those working with the EA would know the skill set and training that the EA has when supporting the child in the classroom. As a result of consistency, the need for continuity may be reduced in some cases.

Fiscally, with the increase in incidents of aggression and harm within the classrooms, the costs associated are also on the rise. EAs being on leave, finding replacements, costs increasing in benefits payment due to these incidents all increase the stress to the overall education budget. In addition, as parents advocate more and more, the legal costs associated will continue to rise. Human Rights Tribunals are increasing as parents are supported to advocate for their children.

Supporting children with disabilities with well-educated, knowledgeable, passionate education assistants through standardization can only support fiscal responsibility and social responsibility as a whole, while reducing harm and trauma.

It's also important to note the requirements from Worksafe BC. Worksafe BC continues to request better communication from districts and staff. This note is of particular concern: *"While educators and support staff regularly document student histories to facilitate educational objectives, they often don't share student information relating to known violence risks or triggers of violent behaviour. This is partly the result of confusion about privacy law, professional practice guidelines, and school district policy – confusion that puts educators and support staff at risk of injury."*

Reference: <https://www.worksafebc.com/en/resources/health-safety/hazard-alerts/communicate-student-information-prevent-violence-related-injuries-to-workers-in-the-education-sector?lang=en&origin=s&returnurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.worksafebc.com%2Fen%2Fsearch%23q%3D%2522education%2520assistant%2522%26sort%3Drelevancy%26f%3Alanguage-facet%3D%5BEnglish%5D>

Duty to Vulnerable Populations:

There's an urgent need for more EAs across the Province. As we work to rectify the cuts to education made by the previous government, standards of care need to both be established and protected for our most vulnerable students. The teacher shortage does not change qualifications and licensing required for teachers. Credible, qualified, and educated professionals cannot be replaced. In some northern communities they have had to temporarily hire unqualified teachers since the MoA, and this is worrying for everyone concerned and something they are working as swiftly as possible to rectify. By contrast, a district recently added a new position to perform some of the work that is traditionally that of an EA, while requiring fewer qualifications and a lower rate of pay.

When there are not enough educational assistants, and when those working have inconsistent training and qualifications, this creates more work for administrators and teachers, as well as the EAs who must train the new employees, making it less possible for them to do their own work effectively, and taking important education and support time away from other students. EAs do specific and different work. We need our EAs to come out of their programs ready to provide consistent, adequate, and appropriate support to students.

What we're hearing

These quotes have been provided by current EAs, retired EAs, teachers, Principals and VPs, and parents. This is just a handful of impactful statements to show why a regulatory body and standards of practice are vital to the success of the student and the profession.

“Currently, the BC education system tries to create space for our kids with disabilities in a system that was not designed for them. As a parent, I feel like a caring and well-trained EA is worth their weight in gold in helping my kids to feel welcome in the current system, while we work towards creating a more inclusive one.”

“A code of ethics would give us a baseline trust in their certification process. As a parent, there is security in knowing that there will be consistency in the skills of the EAs.”

“Many EAs are undertrained for the work they are doing, thus putting them at risk of violence.”

“A regulatory body is the only way we'll ever be respected and appreciated.”

“Not only are there no provincial standards, some of the programs do not do a very good job at preparing EAs for what they will actually encounter in the classroom. I was an EA for 8 years. I did my ECE and my SETA at Ridge Meadows College. If I had not done my ECE, I would have been lost.”

“I took a full-time course that was 9 months long and felt I could have learned so much more. I was lucky enough to have an elementary practicum and high school practicum. Both were towards the end of the diploma program with a week to debrief between practicums. They were 3 weeks each. I feel this should be the minimum requirement for EA standards. Since becoming an EA 13 years ago the field has drastically changed (and not for the better). I do take initiative and seek out additional training each and every year. Currently I am doing ASL level 1 ... 120 hours of night school. There is always so much to learn and keep updating (food safe, CPI, first aid, BI, ABA, medical needs, AAC strategies (hardware, software) and little training for some of these listed.”

“Surely there are many Worksafe incidents under review and risk assessment right now. What steps are school districts doing to prevent violence in the workplace? Other than exclusion... because that is not an acceptable answer. Under WorkSafeBC there are many ways to reduce risks, when eliminating the risk is not an option (e.g. ensure everyone has appropriate training and support).”

“Having a regulatory body would help to legitimize and professionalize the complex and important work we do.”

“We are under pressure from our District not to report incidences that do not directly fall under incident reporting for Worksafe. As a result, data is not captured and patterns are not established which could have a direct benefit on supporting a child better and receiving more supports. The District just doesn't want the info because they don't want to spend the money on supporting the students.”

“Interesting fact! Nail technicians need 400 hours of training and must pass a board exam, and our vulnerable students have no set worker standards, it is willy-nilly and up to each district to determine. We have asked MOE to correct for years, yet, ignored.”

“In FSJ we are required to get certified as a Special Education Assistant. This is 15 different courses. Other people, who are certified in their own cities, move up here and have to fight to be paid the certified wage as our town won’t recognize it as equal.”

“My daughter is taking the Education Assistant program through Surrey College as part of the career training offered by the District. Her program is Monday-Friday 9:00-2:15 daily. The length of the program is only 5 months, with two 4 week practicums, and one week off for Spring Break. Twelve weeks of in-class instruction at 22.5 hours a week. If I’m generous, that’s 300 hours of instruction total. She has commented many times that they are “rushing” through the material, often skipping over slides in PowerPoint presentations. We spend time reviewing her day every afternoon on our drive home, and often into dinner as she asks questions they didn’t get to in class.

I realize that we are chronically short EAs. But this shortened program worries me. I see firsthand what is being skipped over. She is fortunate to have the option to have Mom to help and provide more information and clarification and sometimes real-world scenarios and examples. Surrey is following the example set by Burnaby with a condensed program and we will see the consequences soon enough.

The kids we work with and support deserve the best. Parents entrust their children into our care for 6 hours a day and we need to be as prepared as we can to set them up for success.”

“My daughter has FASD as her primary diagnosis. If there was a regulatory body that I knew made sure that all school support workers were a part of, that ensured that their members were trained appropriately with up-to-date information about strategies that work for children with FASD, I would feel better when her regular workers were unavailable. We’ve had some awful experiences...”

“I work as an EA in Peace River North (SD60) Fort St John. I am certified and received my certification through Northern Lights College. I had to do 15 courses of which about half relate to the field. I found the courses are not set up well or conducive to learning. I have since learned that if I choose to move my certification may not be accepted in other districts. I feel that it should be province wide certified. Our district is consistently short on EAs therefore no training is required in order to get a position. This is also concerning.”

Attachments:

Chart from BCEdAccess Interim Report on Exclusion Tracker:

This chart exemplifies how, in many cases, our EAs are sufficiently trained to support a child with disabilities. Of the incidences of exclusion, 54.7% were not because of absences; they were a direct result of insufficient training to meet the need of the student they support.

Program Hours/Length/Admission Requirements Table:

A few notes regarding the attached program information. This is not all the programs within the Province but is a large sample of offerings. You will note that there seems to be no consistency as to what constitutes a diploma or certificate, hours of instruction vary greatly, as does practicum hours. Further, entrance requirements are inconsistent, and many do not require any experience working with children; this speaks to suitability for the career path. In addition, assessment requirements are inconsistent throughout the programs.

2012 White Paper: Call for Standards of Practice for Education Assistants in BC:

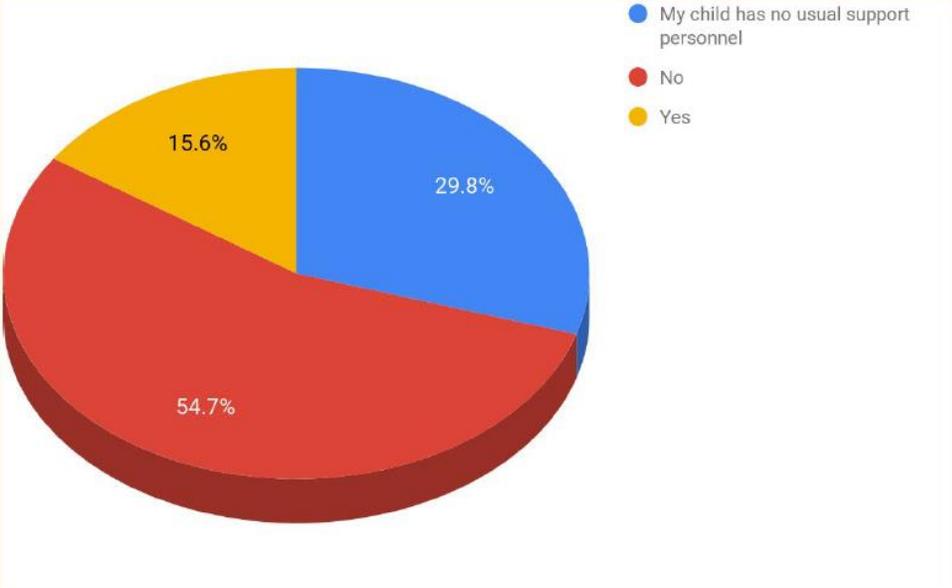
While the document is from 2012, and went nowhere with the previous government, this white paper highlights research that is still valid today.

2015 EA Standards of Practice Working Paper:

While political will was not there, this working group clearly organized to respond and move forward the above White Paper with the same goal of a creating a regulatory body for education assistants. Please note the members of the working group comprises of CUPE representatives and presidents, post-secondary department chair, education consultants, facilitators, education assistants, district principals, and coordinator of programs. This is a foundational document to work from but will need input from additional stakeholders on how a regulatory body be formed.

Chart from BCEdAccess Interim Report on Exclusion Tracker:

Was the usual support person absent?



Institution	Length	Hours	Practicum Hours	Entrance Requirements	Grading Methods	Credential
Sprott-Shaw	43 weeks	720	+180	Grade 12/GED/Mature/Interview /Assessment/English level assessment for International	70% average upon completion of all courses	Diploma
Surrey Community College	20 weeks	285	+180	English 12 with a final grade of C+ (67%) or Communications 12 with a minimum A (86%) or a post-secondary English course with a minimum of C- (55%) from a recognized post-secondary institution where English is the primary language of instruction in the past 5 years. An English assessment may be required/2 reference letters/letter of introduction/interview	70% in all courses	Diploma
Discovery Community	18 weeks	300	+75	Grade 12/GED/Mature/Interview/ non-native English must provide proof IELTS 6.0	70% of all courses	Diploma
Camosun College	40 weeks	472	+312	Min 40 hours volunteer experience or life experience within last 5 years/C+ English 12 or equiv./Info session	60% in all courses	Certificate with transfer credit option to future learning
College of the Rockies	40 weeks	510	+300	Grade 12 with min 65% in English	60% in all courses	Certificate
Vancouver & Burnaby School Districts	20 weeks			Grade 12 or equivalent in any country; submit proof of highest education level achieved/ Applicants must have experience working or volunteering with school-aged students	70% final mark	Diploma
Vancouver Career College	45 weeks	967	+216	High school from an English language institution or mature and pass college admission test/3 references/interview		Diploma
CDI College	45 weeks	967	+216	high school or mature/pass entrance exam		Diploma
Delta School District	40 weeks	311	+180	Transcript or proof of Grade 12 or equivalent; or transcript of post-secondary program		Certificate
Coastal College	36 weeks	800	+180	High school graduates OR 19 years or older/ English is IELTS 5		Diploma
Stenberg College	41 weeks	986	+240	Cdn Grade 12 or equiv./ English 12 with C or higher or Comm 12 with B or higher or alternate acceptable English assessment/entrance exam/entrance interview/written essay/CAAT Level C math – 70%/50 hours of volunteer or paid experience working with children/reference letter	70% in each course	Diploma

Vancouver Island University (Education Assistant and Community Support)	32 weeks	294	+105 school based +105 community based	graduation from a B.C. secondary school, or equivalent, with a minimum "C" grade in either English 12 or English 12 First Peoples/mature/interview/2 references/	C in all courses	Certificate
Westshore Centre Continuing Education	36 weeks	300	+123	grade 12 or equiv. or mature with extensive experience/50 paid or volunteer experience/interview/2 references/evidence of computer literacy	pass/fail	Certificate
Okanagan College	4.5-5 months (or 18-20 weeks)	327	+120	grade 12 or equiv. or 19 years and out of school for 1 year/60% in computer fundamentals/60% in Eng 12	60% in each course	Certificate
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	course by course	420	+224	100 hours of successful experience volunteering or working with children or youth, preferably in the schools/Gr 12 or equiv./English 12 with C+ or Communications 12 with A/info session		Certificate. ladders into BA programs at KPU
Western Community College		700	+120	High School Diploma or equivalent and Mature Student Status (19 years of age) and proof of English Language Proficiency.		Diploma
North Island College (Human Services Certificate – Education Assistant/Community Support)	12 months		+180	C+ in one of Provincial English 12, English Studies 12, English First Peoples 12, NIC ENG-060, ENG-096, ENG-098, ESL-090 or equivalent; or English assessment. Completed 20 hours volunteer work/300 word letter of intent		Certificate
Northern Lights College	16 - 24 months or 12 months	810 or 585	+260 or +260	Comprehensive letter/ Two letters of reference/ high school completion or equiv./mature/Eng 12 or equiv. with C/ NLC Writing Assessment		Diploma Certificate

June | 2012

White Paper: Call for Standards of Practice for Education Assistants in B.C.

Prepared by Nancy Hoyano, Education Assistant Program, Langara College with the assistance of Sylvia Woodyard, Kwantlen Polytechnic University and Diane Koch, Capilano University on behalf of the Community and School Support Sub-committee of the Post-Secondary Human Services Articulation Committee.

White Paper: Call for Standards of Practice for Education Assistants in B.C.

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Education Assistants (EAs) play a critical role in the education and support of a wide range of students presenting with various abilities in the school system. It is critical that this group of paraeducators* be well prepared with thorough and high quality education and training.

A professional set of standards of practice for EAs must be established so that students who possess the most complex needs in our school system receive the best possible education by the EAs who support them. While EAs work under the general direction of teachers in schools, more and more EAs play a key role in the instructional aspects of the education of students with special needs. As Giangreco et al. (2002) point out, it seems questionable, if not a double standard, when general education students receive instruction from professionally certified teachers while, at the same time, many students presenting with a wide range of abilities also receive much of their instruction from paraprofessionals (Breton, 2010), over half with little or no related training or education (Malcolmson, 2009). Malcolmson (2009) points out that students served by EAs could benefit from staff empowered with appropriate knowledge, skills and credentials and that “the responsibilities we place on the shoulders of EAs working with the most vulnerable students in our school system suggest we should never be content to settle for less” (p. 17).

With this review of research literature, history and developments of the EA role in British Columbia, it is hoped that renewed discussion of the need for standards of practice for education assistants in B.C. will be seen as a priority.

What the research says

In 2001, Giangreco, Edelman, Broer and Doyle conducted a comprehensive review of research pertaining to paraeducators and found that there was a substantial increase in the utilization of paraeducators to support students with and without disabilities in general education classes and that the role expectations had become increasingly instructional in nature. Breton echoes this increased demand more recently in a study of preservice and inservice training needs in 2010.

Increasingly, EAs are providing a range of supports to students including but not limited to instruction in academic, social, communication and life skills, behaviour support, and delivery of personal care (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, Doyle, 2001; Robertson, 2000). This is carried out in the context of school teams, which requires that they have strong communication skills (Pora,

* For the purpose of this paper, the main term, education assistant (EA), will be used to describe the job of a paraprofessional supporting students with special needs in the public school system. The secondary terms, paraprofessional or paraeducator, will be used in the context of discussing literature that has used paraprofessional or paraeducator as a definitive term. Typically, these secondary terms are used in the literature from the United States.

2009) and are clear about their role and the roles of other team members (Giangreco, 2001; Hoyano, 2000).

In their review of a decade of literature about paraeducator support Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, Doyle (2001) suggest that students with the most complex challenges to learning “are in dire need of continuous exposure to the most ingenious, creative, powerful, competent, interpersonally effective, and informed professionals” (p. 252). At the time they also found that preservice training for paraeducators in the United States was virtually nonexistent and inservice training to be insufficient. Breton (2010) concluded “often the least qualified personnel are in a position of providing the majority of instruction and related services to students presenting the most complex learning challenges” (p. 35). He also points out that as a result of this situation many legal issues and ethical concerns have emerged concerning the adequacy of paraeducators’ supervision and training (in Etscheidt, 2005).

Teachers report that they “couldn’t do it on their own anymore” and have come to rely on EA support in order to accommodate the diverse abilities that exist in the classroom (Giangreco, Broer, and Edelman, 2002, p. 58). Overtime this support role has evolved to become more instructional in nature. Giangreco, Broer and Edelman (2002) found that there were concerns about training, and that EAs were being asked to take on this instructional role with virtually no preparation: “respondents often judged training of paraprofessionals to be insufficient to do the tasks they were assigned such as skills in teaching reading, language arts, math, communication, social behavior, and daily living”(p. 59). It was also identified as problematic when paraeducators’ command and modeling of written and oral language was deemed less than acceptable (e.g. errors in spelling and grammar), but it was particularly noted, “a paraprofessional’s level of academic skillfulness was of increasing concern at the middle and high school”. Similarly, problems were noted when paraeducators “were asked to support students in subject areas that were unfamiliar to them or where some of them struggled when they were students” (p. 61). French and Chopra (1999) found similar concerns by parents with regard to EAs supporting their children.

The issue of lack of educational preparation for the EA roles is reflected in Malcolmson’s BC research report published in 2009 by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE BC) following a provincial survey of 4,000 of its members, titled “Recognition and Respect: Education assistants in British Columbia: An Educational Profile and Agenda”. This study indicates that only 48% of those people employed have specific training and education for the role of EA and goes on to point out that there is variability in depth and breadth among these programs and credentials available in the province. With the responsibilities that are placed upon EAs and the work demanded of them in supporting the most vulnerable students in our school system, the author suggests further research be done and calls for an educational enhancement agenda. He states that there are EAs who believe that it is time to move towards a more uniform system of EA certification in core skill areas.

Malcolmson (2009) points out that many more EAs have training in the areas of first aid and non-violent crisis prevention (70 – 80%), and that both these skill sets relate primarily to anticipating and dealing with emergency or crisis situations involving students. “At the same time, however, survey findings show lesser success ensuring EAs have the skills to deal with students’ specific educational needs. Dealing with the issue of violent behaviour from the vantage point of crisis management likely means less training or attention focused on skills related to Positive Behaviour

Support (PBS), which is better suited to enhancing opportunities for student learning” (p. 17). Certainly current research supports PBS and Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) as the primary tools for dealing with challenging behavior and therefore ensuring that there are uniform training requirements required for proactive behavior support. Teaching EAs to focus on crisis prevention approaches rather than adjusting the environment is now found to be largely counterproductive to longterm change (Carr, 2007). PBS “reflects a more general trend in the social sciences and education away from pathology-based models to a new positive model that stresses personal competence and environmental integrity” (Carr, et. al, n.d., p. 2).

Causton-Theoharis et al. (2007) point to a number of studies that have documented the unintended detrimental effects that untrained paraprofessionals can have on students' learning and on teachers' academic expectations of students that EAs support. At the same time there are a significant number of studies supporting the view that EAs have a positive effect on the learning and participation outcomes of students with special learning needs (Pora, 2007) and that when properly trained and supervised, EAs could provide an efficient and cost effective way for supporting students with disabilities (Breton, 2010).

There is documentation that shows very specifically that EAs impact student learning. Causton-Theoharis et al (2007) references a small, but growing body of literature that specifically addresses the use of paraprofessionals for literacy instruction. They found that when they are trained appropriately in research based approaches and used effectively in the classroom under the direction of a teacher, “paraprofessionals can not only expand a school’s literacy learning opportunities for struggling students, but can also make the ‘main course’ of literacy learning more appetizing and more nourishing” (p. 61). Martella (1993) demonstrated that systematic training of paraprofessionals in effective instructional procedures with a student with severe developmental disability and challenging behaviour resulted in improved skills and attitude and decreased behaviors and increased compliance by the student. Clancy and Walker (2011) found that the integration of the paraprofessional into the support team conducting positive behavioral approaches contributed to greater teacher retention, less expulsions, and stronger student academic and behavioral performance, and better classroom climates.

Paraprofessionals themselves show a keen interest in acquiring the knowledge and skills to do their jobs. Many of those who have completed a post-secondary program report having had transformational experiences that positively impacted their ability to process all the tasks and demands of their role. Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, Doyle (2001) reported satisfaction from learning and using new skills and that corresponding data indicated positive student outcomes (e.g., social skills, independent task engagement) when those skills were applied. Malcolmson’s (2009) data shows that “education assistants give the highest priority for additional training to a range of specific skills or areas of need” (p. 14). Anecdotal comments from recent graduates of the Langara Education Assistant Program state that their education was “transformational”, that the tools they have acquired have prepared them for the work and that they “couldn’t do it without this” (P. Logan, personal communication, April 2011) and another reported that while she had worked in the field of child and youth care and had some skills upon entering the program, she learned more specific skills related to behaviour, autism, medical and personal care procedures, learning styles, and visual supports, to name a few (A. Dragomir, personal communication, April 2011; P. DeLeon-McRae, personal communication, May 2011). In a recent survey, Kwantlen Special Education Assistant (SETA) Program graduates report being “provided with the skills

and/or information that provided ...a strong foundation on which to build my career” (Woodyard, Cowell, Williams and Robertson, 2011, p. 10). Strong programs made consistent among each other by larger bodies such as the BC Human Service articulation committee correlate meta-cognitive skills necessary for the flexibility and reflective thinking critical to all the roles of the EA. SETA’s program review surveys further demonstrated that an average of 90% field respondents (*ie.* school district personnel), graduates, students and faculty alike place a high value on learning problem solving, interpersonal and critical thinking skills and are to the same degree satisfied with the training provided at Kwantlen (Woodyard et. al., 2011).

The landscape in British Columbia today

In British Columbia the number of Resource Teachers and specialist teachers has diminished, while at the same time the number of EAs continues to rise; today there are over 10,000 Education Assistants (Fewster, 2008; Malcolmson, 2009). This trend is also observed in the United States (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, Doyle, 2001; Giangreco, Broer, Edelman, 2002; Breton, 2010).

The Ministry of Education in the School Act recognizes the role of Education Assistants. Section 18 states “A board may employ persons other than teachers to assist teachers in carrying out their responsibilities and duties under this Act and the regulations” and further that “Persons employed under subsection (1) shall work under the direction of a teacher and the general supervision of a teacher or school principal”. It continues to say that while Teachers are expected to design programs for students with special needs, Education Assistants play a key role in many programs for students with special needs, performing functions that range from personal care to assisting the teacher with instructional programs. Under the direction of a teacher EAs may play a key role in implementing the program. Clearly EAs have an important and direct role in educating children yet there is no provincial requirement they have any specific educational background.

In the spring of 1995, British Columbia Teachers Federation (BCTF) and CUPE BC convened a small joint committee to address special education issues. Discussions were stalled and it wasn’t until April 2001 that BCTF and CUPE BC resumed meetings and the “Roles and Responsibilities of Teachers and Teacher Assistants” position paper was completed and endorsed by both union executives. More recently, in 2009, both union executives endorsed an up-dated document. This document also recognizes that both teachers and Education Assistants play a key role in the educational programs for students with special needs to ensure their success.

Evolution of the EA Role, and their Training and Education in BC

In the BC education system, the EA role has existed in various forms for many years. For example, the Education Assistant program at Langara College is over 40 years old, one of the oldest in the province. In its early days the program had very different content, preparing students to do library cataloguing and to support students with learning disabilities. At that time students with more significant disabilities were not participants in general education but mostly in segregated schools. About 25 years ago, with the movement toward the inclusion of all children with special needs in the general education system, post secondary programs evolved to recognize the need for education and training to support these students in schools and classroom environments.

A study of Kwantlen's SETA program yielded interesting findings with regard to the current situation. To a large extent employers from across several Lower Mainland and Fraser Valley districts were highly satisfied that graduates were prepared to do the work of an EA upon graduating. However, comments were made about the increasing complexity of the role relevant to the need for greater skill level, given the needs of elementary and secondary students, in such areas as literacy, numeracy, classroom management and behavioural support (Woodyard et. al., 2011). This evolution of the role to that of a more sophisticated (para)-educator is significant to the current discussion, since commonality in skill level is critical.

Post secondary Education Assistant and related Classroom and Community Support programs prepare students broadly: to see children and youth as learners from a strength based perspective, to support them with their learning, to understand the purpose of their behaviour and support positive behaviour, to communicate as a team member and to see the benefits of the synergy of teamwork among many other skills. EA graduates report that they couldn't imagine entering the field without specific education, that it leaves them feeling so much more confident. They appreciate that their education has fostered their ability to be reflective practitioners, and to be aware of their values and related insights this brings to their practice (V. Reynolds, personal communication, April 2011; Woodyard et. al. 2011).

Recently, Malcolmson's (2008) survey findings pointed out that EAs in BC have a keen interest in pursuing courses, workshops and other upgrading opportunities to better address the issues and challenges they encounter on a daily basis with the students they serve. In the 2009/10 school year, the Support Staff Education and Adjustment Committee (SSEAC), a joint initiative of BC Public School Employers' Association (BCPSEA) and unions such as CUPE, representing support staff in the K-12 public education sector decided to allocate \$3,000,000 of the Workforce Adjustment Fund to further support Skills Enhancement and Retraining initiatives, this was in addition to an earlier one-time payment of \$3,000,000 from an initial Framework Letter of Understanding which established SSEAC. These funds have been used to support training of CUPE members who are currently employees of a school district in a number of areas including education assistant upgrading. Nine learning options were developed from which school districts could select. These options covered a range of specific knowledge and skills from Foundations of Inclusion to FASD, ABA, and Sign Language and ranged in length from 9 to 30 hours.

While professional upgrading is important to any profession there is a universal requirement that professionals enter the field with a recognized minimum standard of knowledge and skill in the field.

Provincial Post-Secondary Articulation

In the mid seventies the Ministry of Advanced Education instituted the process of articulation between post secondary institutions to facilitate student transfer between colleges and universities.

In 2006, fourteen public post-secondary programs that comprise both community and school support programs (CASS), a subcommittee of the provincial Human Service Articulation Committee, acknowledged the desire of students to have their education recognized provincially so that they could continue their learning anywhere in the province. See appendix 1 for a list of the programs and educational services they provide. This required course transfer and laddering from

one-year certificates to two-year diplomas and into degrees. The CASS subcommittee responded to this need with the development of the “Community & School Support (CASS) Articulation Guide for Instructors & Institutions” which set out the initial map for course transfer. It is updated annually and can be found on the BC Transfer Guide website at <http://bctransferguide.ca/program/cass/transfer/>.

In the late 1990’s the Ministry of Advanced Education established a multi-lateral task force, which oversaw the development of competencies for Community Living and at the same time a draft competency document was developed for education assistants. While the former was endorsed, the competencies for EA’s were never finalized and eventually shelved. As a result there are still no competencies or standards of practice to date for education assistants working in a paraprofessional capacity supporting children presenting with various abilities.

Finally

There was a time when teachers had little more than a high school certificate to be certified to teach. Normal schools were established in BC in 1901. Initially, the Normal School offered a four-month program for students who had completed Grade 11 to train for teaching. Later the program was expanded to two years and was designed for students who had earned their Senior Matriculation (Grade 12). Beginning in September 1956, all teacher education (elementary and secondary) was transferred from Provincial Normal Schools to a new College of Education. It operated as a faculty within the University of British Columbia in Vancouver and as a department of Victoria College in Victoria, B.C. It soon became evident that teachers needed further education. Today in BC teachers require an undergraduate degree and a professional teaching year to meet minimum teacher qualifications.

Having EAs who are well educated will improve the likelihood that students with disabilities get the best educational support.

The time has come for establishing standards of practice for Education Assistants and minimum educational requirements that prepare them for their role in supporting students presenting with various abilities, including those with the highest needs in the school system.

A Plan of Action: Getting From Here to There, a first step

- Stakeholders need to come together to discuss standards for practice (Ministry of Education, Ministry of Advanced Education, Post Secondary Deans and Directors, Post Secondary EA programs, School District Superintendents, Principals, Directors of Special Education (BC CASE), School District Human Resource Managers, BCTF, CUPE, Families and most importantly EAs).
- Stakeholders need to develop a plan for developing and implementing minimum standards of practice for EAs.

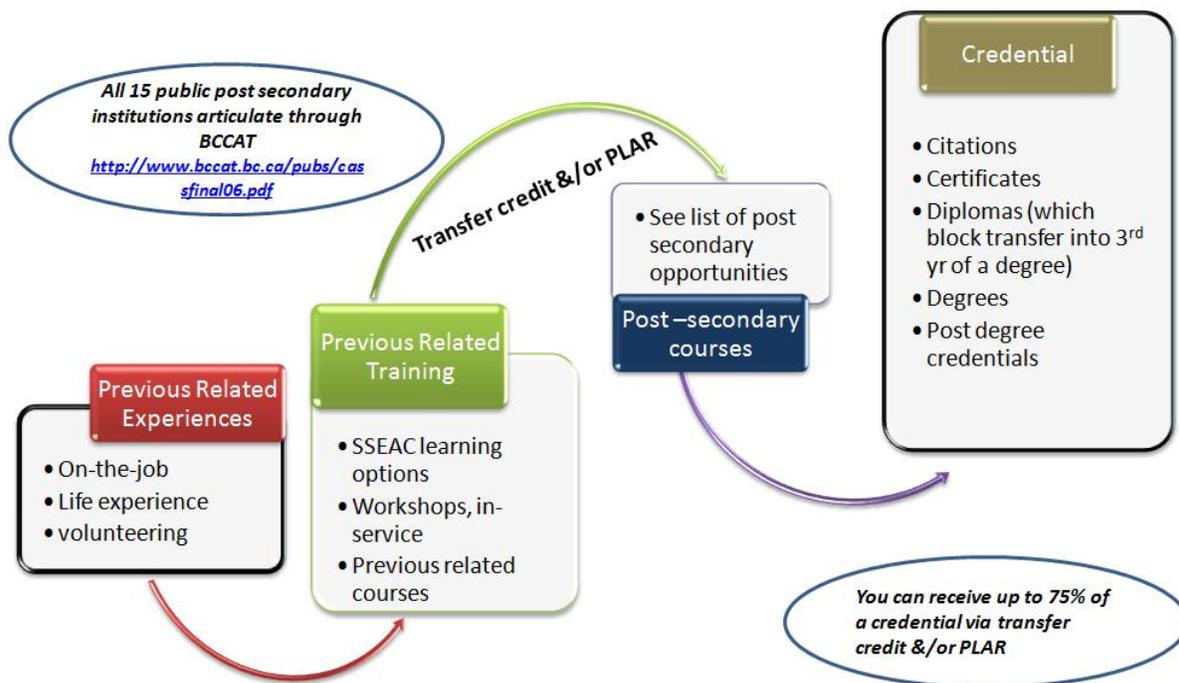
Appendix 1

Pathways to Post Secondary Programs

Revised: May 2012

Welcome! The 15 public post secondary Community and School Support (CASS) programs across British Columbia and Yukon invite you to explore further learning opportunities. Education Assistant (EA) work is complex and requires specialized knowledge and skill in order to provide quality support to students. As the official EA-type programs, CASS programs across the province invite EAs to build upon what they already know to further personal and career opportunities. Education Assistants may qualify for transfer credit and prior learning assessment recognition. Flexible offerings may include part-time, full-time, evening, face-to-face, on-line, distance and self-directed learning. Curious? To find out more, individuals and school districts are encouraged to contact us (see the list of post-secondary institutions below).

Educational Pathways



Education Assistants are encouraged to keep all their certificates, documents, course materials and assignments for future considerations and prior learning assessment and recognition (PLAR) opportunities.

Public Post Secondary Institutions offering official Education Assistant curriculum

Institution	Name of Program	Contact name	website	Additional info
Camosun College	Community support and Educational Assistant Certificate	Anita Ferriss Ferriss@camosun.bc.ca	www.camosun.bc.ca	FT, PT, face-to-face
Capilano University	Special Education Assistant Certificate	Diane Koch dkoch@capilano.ca	www.capilano.ca	PT evening/weekend Face-to-face
College of New Caledonia	Community & School Support Program Certificate	Val Waughtal waughtal@cnc.bc.ca Bev Currie currieb@cnc.bc.ca	http://www.cnc.bc.ca/	PT, distance, On-line
College of the Rockies	Education Assistant Certificate & Diploma	Ildi Walkley walkley@cotr.bc.ca	http://www.cotr.bc.ca	Face to face and online
Douglas College	Behaviour, Intervention Certificate, Classroom & Community Support Cert & Dip, Disability & ABA Advanced Certificate, Employment Support Specialist Advanced Certificate	Lori Woods woodsl@douglascollege.ca Wendy Parry parryw@douglascollege.ca	www.douglascollege.ca	FT, PT, Face-to-face, online, PLAR
Kwantlen Polytechnic University	Certificate in Special Education Teacher Assistant	Sylvia Woodyard Sylvia.Woodyard@kwantlen.ca	www.kwantlen.ca	FT, PT, face to face
Langara College	Education Assistant	Nancy Hoyano nhoyano@langara.bc.ca Ken Pawlak kpawlak@langara.bc.ca	www.langara.bc.ca	FT, PT, face to face, mixed mode
North Island College	Cert in Educational assistant/Community support worker	Mary Pat Thompson mthompson@nic.bc.ca	www.nic.bc.ca	FT, PT, PLAR, indigenous focus
Northern Lights College	Educational assistant program	Shari Harrison sharriso@nlc.bc.ca	http://nlc.bc.ca/	On line FT, PT, PLAR
Okanagan College	Human Service Work Diploma Program	Michael Douglas mdouglas@okanagan.bc.ca	www.okanagan.bc.ca	Face-to-face
Selkirk College	Classroom & Community Support Worker	Jane Green jgreen@selkirk.ca	www.selkirk.ca	PT, face-to face, online, PLAR
Thompson Rivers University	Community & School Support Program	Sue McKay smckay@tru.ca	www.tru.ca	Face-to-face, FT
University of the Fraser Valley	Community Support Worker	Alyson Seale Alyson.Seale@ufv.ca	www.ufv.ca	Face to face
Vancouver Island University	School & Community Support	Leif Rasmussen Leif.rasmussen@viu.ca	www.viu.ca	PT, face to face, online, PLAR
Yukon College	Education Assistant Certificate	Lori Eastmure leastmure@yukoncollege.yk.ca	www.yukoncollege.yk.ca	PT, distance, face-to-face

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Standards of Practice for Education Assistants in British Columbia

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EA Standards of Practice Working Group

April 2014

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Preamble

Standards of Practice for Education Assistants in British Columbia

Provincial standards for Education Assistants (EAs) guide professional learning and best practice, and contribute positively to the public standing of the profession. Standards of Practice articulate the necessary knowledge and skills for EAs in the K-12 education system in British Columbia.

The Role of The Education Assistant

The role of the EA is multi-faceted and becoming increasingly complex (*Maggin, Wehby, Moore-Partin, Robertson & Oliver, 2009*). Under the direction of the teacher, EAs work with a broad range of students in a wide variety of educational settings (BCTF/CUPE 2009). EAs are required to have knowledge about specific disabilities, instructional strategies, implementing technology, communication and/or personal care protocols, as well as understanding how to support positive behaviour and prevent or de-escalate challenging/severe behaviour (*Malcolmson, 2008 & 2009; Maggin et al., 2009*). Another critical role of the EA is to facilitate inclusion and independence for students with special needs without the student becoming too dependent on adult support (*Giangreco, 2010*). Often, these job demands occur in several environments while working with many different professionals and students during the course of a day. In order to fulfill the demands of an EA position, Education Assistants need specialized knowledge and ongoing training.

Background

The landscape in British Columbia today shows that there are over 10,000 Education Assistants (*Fewster, 2008; Malcolmson, 2009*) and currently there is a wide disparity in the level of training among EAs. The issue of lack of educational preparation for the EA role is reflected in Malcolmson's BC research report published in 2009 by the Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE) following a provincial survey of 4,000 of its members, titled "Recognition and Respect: Education assistants in British Columbia: An Educational Profile and Agenda". This study indicates that only 48% of those people employed have specific training and education for the role of EA. With the roles and responsibilities (BCTF/CUPE 2009) that are placed upon EAs and the work demanded of them in supporting the most vulnerable students in our school system, it is clear there is a need to move toward standardizing EA practice and training. Having Education Assistants who are well educated will improve the likelihood that students receive the best educational support.

In 2012, a "White Paper: Call for Standards of Practice for Education Assistants in BC" (*Hoyano, Woodyard & Koch, 2012*) was produced and circulated among key

stakeholders in British Columbia. This paper recognizes the critical role of EAs in the school system and states that it is essential that EAs be well prepared with thorough and high quality education and training, and calls for a professional set of standards of practice for Education Assistants.

Process

In order to address the concerns arising from the Malcolmson report and “The White Paper”, a provincial working group was established, comprised most importantly of Education Assistants themselves, and also school district administrators of special education, post-secondary educators of EAs, consultants and parents. The stated purpose of the Education Assistants Standards Working Group is:

To engage in broad ranging discussion and consultation among interested parties in order to articulate our shared understanding of core standards of practice (knowledge and skills) of Education Assistants in K-12 education in British Columbia.

The working group defines standards of practice as the minimum expected levels of practice for entry-level competency for Education Assistants in British Columbia. Standards of practice are realized through application in pre-service education, the workplace and other educational contexts. The standards will inform both existing or emerging education and training programs. They will also guide school districts and Human Resource personnel responsible for hiring EAs. Professional standards for Education Assistants will help attract, develop, recognize and retain quality Education Assistants.

The Education Assistant Standards Working Group has developed a draft set of standards and related competencies for EAs ready for discussion and feedback. It is our intent that this document serves as the first step toward provincial standards of practice for Education Assistants in British Columbia.

Standards of Practice of Education Assistants in BC

Standard 1: Professionalism

- 1.1 Possess the knowledge and skills to perform the duties of an EA in a manner consistent with acknowledged best practice and in accordance with legal responsibilities
 - Work within the EA role in an educational setting (i.e. school, district, provincial)
 - Demonstrate necessary literacy, numeracy and technology skills
 - Use theory to guide practice
 - Have an awareness of legal responsibilities regarding students at risk of abuse, neglect, self-harm and/or suicide
- 1.2 Act in an ethical and respectful manner
 - Respect the diversity of all individuals
 - Treat students, families and colleagues in a respectful, safe and fair manner with consideration of physical, psychological, social and emotional needs
 - Maintain appropriate boundaries, privacy and confidentiality of student and family information
- 1.3 Be responsible and accountable
 - Demonstrate effective use of time in the workplace
 - Demonstrate appropriate use of technology in the workplace
 - Demonstrate reflective practice within own range of competencies and self-identify gaps in knowledge and skills
 - Participate in ongoing learning activities
- 1.4 Promote the purpose, principles and values of inclusion
 - Appreciate the history of supporting individuals with exceptionalities (institutionalization to inclusion).
 - Foster a climate of belonging and acceptance within the school and community.

Standard 2: Collaboration and Communication

- 2.1 Utilize effective communication and interpersonal skills
- Use clear verbal communication to inform, instruct, problem solve, resolve conflicts, seek information, ask questions (clarify)
 - Use clear written communication to maintain notes and documentation to share with the school team
 - Maintain confidentiality and follow the protocols of communication set out in the school act and board policy
- 2.2 Work within a team to support students in planning and implementing educational goals
- Work respectfully with diverse teams
 - Collaborate in the planning and/or implementation of documents such as individual education plans, behaviour plans, care plans and safety plans
 - Seek the advice of appropriate team members when needed

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Standard 3: Supporting learning and development

- 3.1 Work within a team to support academic and cognitive development
- Employ a range of systematic instructional strategies
 - Be aware of provincial learning outcomes and resources
 - Work with teachers to adapt or modify learning activities and support differentiated instruction
 - Demonstrate an understanding of the role and use of technology, including adapted and assistive technology, and software programs to support student learning
- 3.2 Work within a team to support social and emotional development
- Employ principles of behaviour and emotional support systems
 - Implement strategies to support pro-social behaviour, self-regulation and social skills
 - Employ measures to prevent and de-escalate challenging behaviours
 - Recognize the signs and protection strategies related to abuse, neglect or potential mental health issues
 - Encourage peer interaction and relationships
- 3.3 Work within a team to support students with physical and medical needs
- Support students with personal care needs in a safe, ethical and respectful manner
 - Make accommodations to support the physical and medical needs of students
 - Demonstrate familiarity with the implementation of health care protocols
- 3.4 Work within a team to support and develop student communication
- Support the development of receptive and expressive communication
 - Make accommodations to support students with communication needs
 - Demonstrate an understanding of augmentative and assistive communication systems to support students
- 3.5 Work within a team to support self-determination and independence in school, community and transition into adult life
- Demonstrate an understanding of the purpose and principles of independence, self determination and transition planning
 - Support the development of meaningful and contemporary functional skills in the classroom and community settings that will support a transition to life as an adult in the community
 - Foster individual self determination and self advocacy skills

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