

# Mesa Special Education Alliance

## Fact Sheet

### Instructional Assistant Pay Inequities

#### OUR GROUP

Mesa Special Education Alliance is a community-led, grassroots group of parents, educators and service providers committed to working collaboratively to effectively improve and enhance the educational experiences for students, families, teachers, and providers.

#### BUILDING COMMUNITY

Paraprofessionals' work "...enhances performance among students and helps to build a school community in which students feel connected."<sup>1</sup> An MIID Teacher shared the key role IAs play in promoting an inclusive school community: "IAs go into the general education setting with our students to help them practice the skills they need in order to become independent. We can't teach the skills in the self-contained setting and expect students to generalize the skills elsewhere. Our IAs are essential for providing the support and reinforcement necessary until the skills and expected behaviors become routine, at which point the support can be faded. Without adequate staffing, this can't be achieved."

#### COMPARE POSTINGS

[MPS IA 1](#)

[MPS IA 2](#)

[Chick-Fil-A](#)

[Daycare Provider](#)



#### Contact Us

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#### Introduction

Instructional Assistant 1s (IA 1s) serve a complex and influential role in our education system, yet their vital role is often overlooked and undervalued.

#### Background

Despite Mild Intellectual Disability (MIID) self-contained classrooms serving students with complex needs such as those with an Autism Spectrum Disorder, genetic disorders, behavioral dysregulation, sensory processing disorders, and physical care needs, MIID IAs are the only IAs in **all self-contained programs** to be paid the lowest pay grade in the District: \$12.80,<sup>2</sup> equal to the pay grade of crossing guards. While IA 1s perform the same duties as IA 2s, they receive \$4.41 an hour less than their counterparts, resulting in a disruptive revolving door of staff turnover.

#### Results of An Uncompetitive Wage

An MPS IA 1 shared her experiences, "I implement lesson plans, provide behavior support, take data, assist with testing, and run reading, math and science groups. I usually work one or two more jobs in order to pay bills. I applied for AHCCS to manage my physical and mental health, and was approved for food stamps in order to provide for my family because my income is so low."

Another MPS IA 1 shared her struggle over leaving, "I am part of a great team and I absolutely adore the students I teach. I can't survive on minimum wage and nearby Districts pay at least \$2-\$5 more. This is a hard decision to leave because I know change in routine and familiar faces are upsetting to our students, and it causes significant disruption in students' education and ability to function at their highest level. I wish MPS valued us more."

#### The Impact to Educators and Students

The significant pay inequity and resulting staffing shortages cause educational disruptions for students, and contribute to teacher burn-out and strained resources at the site level.

An MIID Teacher commented on her experiences: "My IAs are an integral part of my program and I could not do my job without them. We have to be on the same page as far as how we approach behaviors; we have to be able to read each other and respond to challenging situations at a second's notice. It takes a long time to build that kind of working relationship. It's not possible to build an effective team with constant turnover and inadequate staffing."

#### Recommendation

A pay increase for IA 1s commensurate to IA 2s will improve MPS' recruitment and retention efforts, enhance educators' ability to support student well-being and achievement, and enhance the efficiency and effective functioning of site level teams.

#### Sources:

1. Jung, Lee Ann, et al. *Your Students, My Students, Our Students*. ACSO, 2019
2. MPS Governing Board Policy IHB-R