

PRESS RELEASES

News Brief - 8/28/02

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Western Governors University Prepared to Deliver Online Education to Meet HR 1 Requirements

SALT LAKE CITY - As the various elements of H.R. 1, The No Child Left Behind Act are implemented, they could significantly improve the quality of education in America...or result in classrooms without adequate professional staffing. With a goal of promoting teacher quality through training and recruitment, the Act requires paraprofessionals, such as teachers aides, to complete at least two years of college, earn an associate's degree or pass an assessment of math, reading and writing.

U.S. Secretary of Education Rodney Paige says the new law will give states more flexibility on how they spend their education dollars. "In return, it requires them to set standards for student achievement, and hold students, teachers and other educators accountable for results," he said.

While the goals of H.R. 1 promise improvement, the Act creates an enormous challenge for paraprofessionals who cannot attend a regular class schedule while working full time and supporting their families. As school districts around the country look for ways to assist their staffs to meet the new requirements and accountability standards, Western Governors University (WGU) has a program in place that exactly matches the new requirement.

According to WGU President Robert Mendenhall, the WGU associate of arts degree, which is delivered online, meets the needs of many paraprofessionals. "It specifically addresses the areas of math, reading and writing and recognizes the competencies the paraprofessionals already have as a result of their work in the classrooms," he said. Because it is already available online, this is a program which can be completed within the time period designated by HR 1, no matter where the student lives.

Mendenhall said, "WGU's online, competency-based associate of arts degree is perfect for many paraprofessionals because it allows them to work on their own time at their own place. Plus, they may be able to apply knowledge and competencies already gained to accelerate their time to a degree.

"Further," he said, "for individuals interested in a pathway to teaching, the associate's degree will lead into WGU's bachelor's degree with elementary teacher certification, which will be available from WGU in early 2003 -- all delivered online in a competency-based program."

An important benefit of the No Child Left Behind Act is that funding may be available from school districts or states to enable paraprofessionals to pursue a degree. If additional assistance is required, WGU may be able to help. WGU was one of the first online universities in the country allowed by the U.S Department of Education to provide federal financial aid to students through Pell grants and federal Direct Student Loans. New students may enroll anytime and begin their programs on the first day of each month.

For detailed information about provisions of the act and application, visit Western Governors University's H.R. 1 Web site: <http://www.wgu.edu/parapro/>.

SPECIFIC PROVISIONS OF H. R. 1

Existing Paraprofessionals

(Hired Prior To January 8, 2002)

All paraprofessionals hired before the date of enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (January 8, 2002), and working in a program supported with Title I funds must meet one of the following three requirements no later than four years after the date of enactment (by January 8, 2006):

- Complete two years of study at an institution of higher education, OR
- Obtain an associate's (or higher) degree, OR
- Meet a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics; or reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness.

New Paraprofessionals

(Hired After January 8, 2002)

All paraprofessionals hired after January 8, 2002 and working in a program supported with Title I funds must meet one of the following three requirements at the time of employment:

- Complete at least two years of study at an institution of higher education, OR
- Obtain an associate's (or higher) degree, OR
- Meet a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics; or reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness.