



MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY
Pathways for Parads

The logo of the Missouri State University mascot, a bear, is positioned behind the text. It is a stylized bear head in a reddish-brown color with a white outline.



MISSOURI STATE UNIVERSITY
Pathways for Paraprofessionals

Missouri State

U N I V E R S I T Y

Pathways for Paraprofessionals

Building a Partnership Between Missouri Public Schools and Missouri State University

There is a growing demand for high quality teachers in Missouri schools. Some areas like special education teachers are in exceptionally high demand. There are many high-quality paraprofessionals currently working in schools that are great candidates for future teaching positions, but they are challenged to find a pathway to finish their teaching degree in order to advance into the teaching field. If you're a high-quality paraprofessional that has a desire to pursue their teaching degree while continuing to work in a special education classroom, the Pathways for Paraprofessionals program is for you!

Missouri State University College of Education would like to form a special cohort of current special education paraprofessionals that have a desire to complete their teaching certificate in special education while they are serving as paraprofessionals in special education classrooms. These paraprofessionals will work toward their degree and continue to work as a paraprofessional at the same time.

Why choose Missouri State University BSED: K-12 Special Education Program if you are a Special Education Paraprofessional?

- The Pathways for Paraprofessionals Program offers a teacher certification in K-12 Mild/Moderate Cross-Categorical Special Education that you work on collaboratively with other paraprofessionals from area public school districts.
- Using grants, scholarships, and other sources of funding, completing the program could be at little or no cost to you.
- Paraprofessionals earn college credit for practicum and student teaching on-the-job while earning a salary as a paraprofessional.
- 100% of the Missouri State University Professional Education coursework is offered after school hours (late afternoon or early evening), online, or summers at a site in a regional location or at Missouri State University.
- Depending on your current number of college credits, there is the potential for paraprofessionals to finish the degree in 2-3 years (if they attend full-time in the fall and spring and take courses in the summer).
- While not required, the MSU Special Education Program offers two Accelerated Masters in Education Program options that allow 12 mixed credit hours to count in both the Bachelor's of Science in Education (BSED) and the Master's of Science in Education (MSED) degree program options, thus allowing completion of BSED degree with certification in K-12 Special Education and completion of 12 hours towards a Master's degree upon graduation.

Who qualifies for the program?

- The paraprofessional must work for a school district and currently have a minimum of 60 hours of college credit. The 60 credit hours that paraprofessionals have completed typically

fulfill the general education requirements for the degree and might also fulfill some of the professional education course requirements. (Individual transcript analysis will be conducted to determine requirements needed.) The program requires a strong GPA for cohort considerations and coursework eligible for pre-Admission to the Teacher Education Program.

- Applicants must hold a paraprofessional position within a school district in a K-12 Mild/Moderate Cross-Categorical Special Education classroom during their work in the Pathways to Paraprofessional program.
- Building Principal approval –Building Principal must verify:
 - Recommendation of paraprofessional for Pathways to Paras Program
 - Review of program requirements & approval of field placement competencies in the paraprofessional's position
 - Approval of Lead Teacher as appropriate “cooperating teacher” for supervision and mentoring of paraprofessional seeking teacher certification

What if the paraprofessional has a Bachelor's degree already? Is there a graduate degree option?

- Missouri State University offers an alternative certification option for persons with a non teaching bachelor's degree OR a teaching degree in a field other than special education. The MSED: Special Education Alternative Certification Track (MSED: SPE-SEACT) provides candidates with a Masters degree + Missouri Certification in K-12 Mild/Moderate Cross-Categorical Special Education.
- Candidates who work as paraprofessionals in a K-12 Mild/Moderate Cross-Categorical Special Education program can complete their field placement at their job site.
- MSED: SPE-SEACT students are eligible for Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education (DESE) Provisional Certification in K-12 Mild/Moderate Cross-Categorical Special Education, which allows them to serve as the teacher-of-record while completing certification & degree requirements.
- MSED: SPE-SEACT courses are fully available online via INET or Zoom platforms.

What if the paraprofessional tested into this role and has no or minimal college hours? Is there an option?

- Missouri State University-West Plains offers an Associate Arts in Teaching Degree (<https://wp.missouristate.edu/academics/teaching.htm>) we are working on creating a seamless transition from our West Plains courses into our Pathways for Paras program to ensure that we have a full continuum of supports to help you achieve your dream.

What must the paraprofessional do?

- Paraprofessional must agree to:
 - Engage in full completion of employment responsibilities while completing certification and degree coursework
 - Conduct field experience and course competencies on-the-job while working collaboratively with Lead Teacher in their school district
 - Complete 2 years of coursework in conjunction with employment in an approved K-12 Special Education Paraprofessional position to replace required Student Teaching semester [MO DESE requires verification of 2 years of supervised paraprofessional employment *while* concurrently completing coursework toward certification.] Two

years of employment and coursework must be completed at the same time during the Pathways for Paras program (prior years of service do not count toward the two-year minimum).

How much will this cost the paraprofessional?

- Paraprofessionals without a Bachelors degree, who qualify for the Missouri Fast Track Grant, can complete the program at nearly no cost. Current Fast Track eligibility requirements include:
 - Individuals who are 25 years or older or individuals of any age who have not been enrolled in any school within the last two years can participate.
 - The grant will serve students who have not earned a bachelor's degree and are planning to enroll part time or full time.
 - Individuals must currently make no more than \$80,000 filing jointly, or no more than \$40,000 per year, filing any other tax status.
- Those that do not qualify for the Missouri Fast Track Grant should still apply for participation. Missouri State University is currently working on grant applications that might cover most of your cost of participation in the program. In addition, the MSU financial aid office supports applications for the federal TEACH Grant program, which serves both BSED: K-12 SPE and MSED: SPE-SEACT candidates.

How can my current school district support this process?

- Interested school districts can contact us to think about creating a district or collaborative multi-district cohort. With this model, almost half of the required coursework (Bachelor's or Masters) could be offered by professionals within your district with district priorities and experiences to help you be ready for the demands of your job. This coursework would be on a schedule to ensure it meets your needs and tailored to fit the specific needs and courses of the individuals within your cohort. Cost associated with each course would be minimal (i.e. small assessment fee!) and would be included on your diploma and transcript as a Missouri State University course before your degree completion. Once certified you would be able to teach anywhere within Missouri.

For more information, or to apply for participation, contact-----Dr. Reesha Adamson at radamson@missouristate.edu or 417-836-6284.

For more information on MSED: SPE-SEACT, or to apply for participation, contact -- Dr. Reesha Adamson at radamson@missouristate.edu or 417-836-6284.

For information on the BSED: K-12 SPE Program, contact. Dr. Jessica Nelson at jessicanelson@missouristate.edu or 417-836-8466.