



KANSAS STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SCHOOLS



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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to support Kansas school districts in the effective use of paraprofessionals in school-based settings. There is an emphasis on understanding effective practices, encouraging data-based decision-making, and managing the effective use of paraprofessionals.

Effective practices for paraprofessionals are critical to achieving outcomes for students in Kansas. Paraprofessionals contribute in many ways to the social, emotional, functional and academic growth of children in schools and are a large portion of the employees for elementary and secondary education. In Kansas, for special education alone, about 14,000 paraprofessionals work in schools and other educational settings. About 20,000 instructional assistants work in schools statewide, according to the May 2017 Bureau of Labor Statistics report. Nationally, the number of instructional assistants in public elementary and secondary schools is more than 1 million and assistants make up about 12 percent of the industry employment, according to the U.S. Department of Labor.

There are many other position titles that are used to describe paraprofessionals in educational settings: paraeducator, teacher aide, instructional assistant, bilingual aide and more. In Kansas, based on the Kansas State Department of Education (KSDE) Special Education Categorical Aid Reimbursement Guide and practice in the field, paraprofessionals supporting special education needs of students with exceptionalities are referred to as paraeducators. Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), on the other hand, such support staff are referred to as paraprofessionals. Regardless of the specific term used or program application, the primary function and role of the para is the same – working alongside the professional educator to meet individual student and program objectives.

It is important to note that this document is applicable not only to the use of paraprofessionals in the context of serving children and youth with disabilities, but also other federal program and general instructional roles in PK-12 school-based educational settings. This resource was developed with the following guiding principles in mind:

- Paraprofessionals are valuable members of the educational community and a necessary resource for students.
- Paraprofessionals are not surrogate teachers; proper supervision and guidance from the professionals working with the student is required.

- The intent of paraprofessional support services is to foster independence, not dependence.
- Paraprofessional support decisions shall be based on student and classroom need, as determined by educational teams and in accordance with any applicable law and policy.

This document is not a policy brief or a compliance tool. Administrators are encouraged to use this resource as a base for developing or enhancing local practices, procedures and professional development and are expected to customize this tool to align with local policy and needs.

Thanks are extended to the Kansas Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC) and Kansas Association of Special Education Administrators, and particularly Kathy Kersenbrock-Ostmeyer, special education director for the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center in Oakley; Deborah Howser, special education director for Manhattan-Ogden Unified School District (USD) 383; and Rebekah Helget, special education director for Geary County Schools USD 475 in Junction City.

PARAPROFESSIONALS IN THE LAW: A BRIEF DISCUSSION

There are several instances in which paraprofessionals are addressed in education laws. A quick review of the two most extensive federal education program laws demonstrates how embedded paraprofessionals have become within our current education system.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 specifically references to paraprofessionals in Title I, Part A; Title II, Parts A and B; Title III; Title IV 21st Century Learning Grants; Title VI Opportunities for Indian and Children and Youth; and Title VIII Definitions, including the definition of a “*paraprofessional*” as: “(37) PARAPROFESSIONAL. – The term ‘paraprofessional,’ also known as a ‘paraeducator,’ includes an education assistant and instructional assistant.” The key characteristic of the role is one of supporting or assisting in the education of a student. Further, some of these references outline training or qualification requirements for paraprofessionals supporting the federal program, such as Title I, Part A, State Educational Agency (SEA), assurances by both the SEA and LEA that the agencies will meet applicable state certification and licensure requirements for paraprofessionals.

One of the most common uses of paraprofessionals in K-12 public education is assisting in the education or instruction of a student with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004). Paraprofessionals were formally identified in federal legislation with the 1997 Amendments to the IDEA (P.L. 105-17). The term paraprofessionals continued in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. Federal regulations at 34 C.F.R. § 300.156(b)(2)(iii) allows paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with state law, regulation or written policy, in meeting the requirements of this part to be used to assist

in the provision of special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities. Further 34 C.F.R. § 300.156(a) requires each state to establish and maintain qualifications to ensure paraprofessionals are appropriately and adequately trained.

This is not a review of potential legal requirements applicable to paraprofessionals. Specific legal questions about paraprofessionals in schools should be directed to the agency's school attorney or the KSDE Special Education and Title Services (SETS) team.

EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

This section outlines the overarching effective practices in the use of paraprofessionals to support students in school-based settings - from the inclusive practice requirements set forth in the IDEA, the recognition of detrimental effects of the overuse or misuse of paraprofessionals, to the implementation of strategies for fostering independence and more.

The Role of the Paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals play an important role in schools when working under the supervision or direction of a certified or licensed professional to provide educational services to students. Paraprofessionals are valuable members of education teams and support a variety of students – from students with disabilities to those students with health needs or who are limited in English proficiency. Paraprofessionals

work in a wide range of educational settings including classrooms, lunchrooms, playgrounds, school buses, vocational work sites, computer labs and school media centers. They provide instructional support to children in early childhood, elementary and secondary school programs in residential educational facilities, community services and work-study instruction.¹

Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

Although the use of and effective practices for paraprofessionals in school-based settings are not exclusive to special education, it is important to point out that for paraprofessionals providing supports or instruction to children with disabilities, the overarching goal for all children with disabilities under IDEA is to meet the needs that result from each child's disability and to enable the child to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum. IDEA regulations 34 C.F.R. § 300.114 through 300.120 specifically outline the least restrictive environment (LRE) requirements.

Under 34 C.F.R. § 300.114, personnel supports, supplementary aids and services or modifications, including supports for the teacher, must be provided when necessary for the child to benefit from his/her educational program. Removal from the regular education environment may occur only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in the regular class with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily. Paraprofessional support is one example of supplementary aids and services that may be necessary to ensure a child with a disability has access to participation and progress in the general curriculum. Paraprofessionals are also utilized in the delivery of specially designed instruction under the supervision and direction of a special education teacher or related services provider in both general and special education classrooms.

Further, under 34 C.F.R. § 300.320(a) the present levels, annual goals and special education services components of the Individualized Education Program (IEP) for children with disabilities requires IEP teams to ensure students with disabilities not only have access to but involvement and progress in the general education curriculum. Children with disabilities also need to be offered the opportunity to participate in extracurricular and nonacademic activities and to be educated with disabled and nondisabled peers.

When considering the LRE for children with disabilities, keep in mind that just because a child with a cognitive disability may have limited potential for academic achievement in the general education classroom does not mean the child cannot receive an educational benefit in that environment. In addition to academic progress, nonacademic considerations, such as interaction with nondisabled peers, social development and self-care, are equally important aspects of special education for some students, and they are critical factors in the LRE test commonly used in the courts. A special education placement cannot be justified on the grounds that a child might make greater academic progress away from the general education environment.²

¹ Information about the requirements related to paraprofessionals in Kansas schools can be found here: <https://www.ksde.org/Agency/Division-of-Learning-Services/Early-Childhood-Special-Education-and-Title-Services/Title-Services/Federal-Programs/Title-I-Part-A/Paraprofessional>.

² *Oberti v. Board of Education of the Borough of Clementon School Dist.*, 19 IDELR 908 (3d Cir. 1993).

Effects of the Misuse of Paraprofessionals

The misuse of paraprofessionals, particularly overreliance on one-on-one paraprofessionals, can result in, among other things, students becoming overly dependent upon adult support; students being segregated or isolated from their peer group; and students receiving limited interaction with the general education teacher.^{3, 4, 5}

Research shows that excessive assistant use and proximity can cause unintended detrimental effects on the student, including: separation from classmates; unnecessary dependence; interference with peer interactions; insular relationships with paraprofessionals; stigmatization; limited access to instruction from the highly qualified teacher; interference with teacher engagement; loss of personal control; provocation of behavior problems; and risk of being bullied.⁶

Dr. Michael F. Giangreco, a professor at the University of Vermont, along with colleagues Susan Yuan, Barbara McKenzie, Patricia Cameron and Janice Fialka, wrote an article for the May/June 2005

issue of “Teaching Exceptional Children,”⁷ which cited five reasons that “professionals and parents alike should be concerned about the assignment of individual paraprofessionals.”⁸ They are:

- Reason 1: The least qualified staff members are teaching students with the most complex learning characteristics.
- Reason 2: Paraprofessional supports are linked with inadvertent detrimental effects.
- Reason 3: Individual paraprofessional supports are linked with lower levels of teacher involvement.
- Reason 4: Teachers, parents, and students may not be getting what they deserve or expect.
- Reason 5: Providing paraprofessional supports may delay attention to needed changes in schools.⁹

Alternatives to Paraprofessionals

Given the research on the possible detrimental effects of the use of paraprofessionals on students, it is critical that family members and other team members planning for how to meet the needs of the student and the needs of the classroom program be familiar with and *first* explore other possible resources and supports available. The use of paraprofessional services may or may not be the most appropriate option.

Peer intervention, for example, is an excellent alternative to adult support. Peer support strategies are well-supported by literature reviews, and although not specifically for the purpose of avoiding overreliance on paraprofessionals, such a strategy could support such a purpose. With this alternative to paraprofessional support, administrators identify roles and responsibilities carried out by paraprofessionals that could be appropriately done by peers, then shift those to actual student peers. However, the same dependency risk is there whether a student or an adult is supporting the learner, so plans must ensure quality natural supports are provided. A couple of examples include a learning lab model and a peer-to-peer support system. Regardless of the model, this strategy requires proper training and orientation of the peers. The benefits of peer support systems to both the student and the peer student are many - expanded opportunities for communication and socialization, empathy, leadership

and increased teacher involvement are just a few.¹⁰ Education teams may also want to consider other peer intervention models, like the one found at Autism Internet Modules, available for download at www.autisminternetmodules.org.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is another alternative with great potential for students. Additional alternatives to assigning a paraprofessional include:

- Using cooperative learning practices with structured supports.
- Visual schedules and supports.
- Task analysis support.
- Teaching self-management strategies.
- Increasing training to existing staff in making accommodations.
- Using assistive technology to assist the student.
- Utilizing co-teaching with two licensed teachers.

To avoid potentially negative consequences, such as social isolation, the failure to develop self-regulation behaviors, and/or overdependence on adults, the support of a paraprofessional should be considered temporary and be regularly assessed to determine if fading or discontinuing the paraprofessional supports is appropriate.¹¹

3 Marks, S. U., Schrader, C. and Levine, M. (1999) Paraeducator Experiences in Inclusive Settings: Helping, Hovering or Holding Their Own? *Exceptional Children*, 65, 315-328. doi: 10.1177/001440299906500303

4 Giangreco, M.F., Edelman, S., Luisella, T. and MacFarland, S. (1997). Helping or Hovering? Effects of Instructional Assistant Proximity on Students With Disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 64(1), 7-18.

5 Mueller, P. H. and Murphy, F. V. (2001). Determining When a Student Requires Paraprofessional Support. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33, 22-27. Retrieved from http://www.lease-sped.org/files/Paraprofessionals/Paras/Section_5_-_Additional_Information.pdf

6 Giangreco, M. F. (2017). *Reimagining Inclusive Special Education Service Delivery*. Presented at the Council for Exceptional Children Annual Convention and Expo. Boston, MA..

7 Giangreco, M. F., Yuan, S., McKenzie, B., Cameron, P. and Fialka, J. (2005). “Be Careful What You Wish For ...”: Five Reasons To Be Concerned About The Assignment of Individual Paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37, 128-34.

8 Giangreco, et al., p. 29.

9 Giangreco, et al., p. 29-32.

10 Giangreco, M. F., Halvorsen, A. T., Doyle, M. B. and Broer, S. M. (2004). Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 17, 82-90.

11 Giangreco, M. F. (2010). Utilization of Teacher Assistants in Inclusive Schools: Is It the Kind of Help That Helping Is All About?. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, 25, 341-345.

Fading or Discontinuing Paraprofessional Supports

Fading assistance means systematically reducing the type and level of support given to a student. Fading support can reduce the negative impact of adult support and allow for more natural supports to occur.

The research in fading support is clear. Invasive adult support has had inadvertent detrimental effects on students, and paraprofessional services should be faded as or discontinued when the student has accomplished specific skills; when the student achieves a determined level of independence; or when specific conditions identified by the

educational team are met. Giangreco, et al.,¹² found that in most cases, procedures to fade the need of the paraprofessional, or decrease the dependence of students on the paraprofessional, were not evident. All team members, including parents, school staff members and the student, should have input into the creation of a fading plan.¹³ In addition to strategies for promoting independence noted in the previous section, a Prompt Hierarchy (see example below) is an example of an essential component for developing a plan for fading supports (see *Example Plan for Fading Adult Supports on page 9*).

Prompt Hierarchy¹⁴

LEAST TO MOST PROMPTING (Least intrusive, for previously exhibited skills).	MOST TO LEAST PROMPTING (Most intrusive, for new skills only).	Full Physical	The teacher uses hand over hand guidance to make sure the student demonstrates the correct response.	Example: Hand over hand washing hands
		Partial Physical	The teacher uses only partial physical assistance so that the student demonstrates the correct response.	Example: Tapping elbow to raise hand.
		Full Model	The teacher fully demonstrates the correct response.	Example: Showing where to get the towels.
		Partial Model	The teacher only demonstrates part of the correct response.	Example: Walking in the direction of where to find the door.
		Full Verbal Model	The teacher clearly communicates what the desired response is step by step.	Example: Explaining how to use the locker.
		Partial Verbal Model	The teacher communicates only part of the desired response.	Example: Touching on key details of directions to the office.
		Gesture	The teacher makes some kind of gesture to prompt the desired response.	Example: Nodding head toward the pencil sharpener.
		Positional	The teacher places an item/object in a specific position/place that prompts the correct response.	Example: Putting the correct choice of two closer to the student.
		Visual	An arrangement of the physical environment that prompts the correct response.	Example: A visual reminder to raise a hand to ask questions.

From *Promoting Independence!* By P. Mulick, 2015. Copyright 2015 by Patrick Mulick. <http://patrickmulick.com/tag/prompt-hierarchy>. Reprinted with permission.

¹² See page 7, footnote 4.

¹³ See page 7, footnote 10.

¹⁴ Mulick, P. (2015). *Promoting Independence: 10 Mantras of the Special Educator!* Retrieved from <http://patrickmulick.com/tag/prompt-hierarchy/>

Example Plan for Fading Adult Supports.¹⁵

Student:	Date:
----------	-------

BARRIER/NEED	ADULT ROLE	
Student loses attention during extended (5 or more minutes) activity.	Current Condition:	Student is adult-prompt dependent to stay on task
	Fading to:	Prompt; back away.
	Fading to:	Utilize prompt hierarchy to fade prompts.
	Fading to:	Wait, prompt with least intrusive prompt.
	Fading to:	No prompt.
Student struggles with peer socialization	Current Condition:	Student relies on adult to initiate interaction with peers.
	Fading to:	Set up opportunities for student to interact with peers in advance.
	Fading to:	Facilitate interaction with peers.
	Fading to:	Prompt student to interact with peers. <i>(Use at least intrusive prompt and prompt hierarchy.)</i>
	Fading to:	Watchfully ignore student interacting with peers and prompt only when student is "stuck."
	Current Condition:	
	Fading to:	
	Current Condition:	
	Fading to:	

¹⁵ Kansas State Department of Education. *Plan for Fading Adult Supports*. Retrieved from www.ksde.org/Portals/0/ECSETS/Para/PromptFading.docx

Fading supports is not only about pulling away, but also about changing how the support is provided. Instructional needs to build skills or knowledge necessary for the student to become more independent should also be considered and could be added to the plan for fading supports. Generally to appropriately fade or discontinue supports of a paraprofessional, the educational team should also determine, document and monitor the following:

- The level of independence or skill acquisition that will indicate the need to revise the level of support and the type of modification and services needed, such as:
 - The skills that need to be acquired to enable the student to be successful without the supports of the paraprofessional.
 - The level of independence to be achieved to enable the

student to be successful with reduced or eliminated paraprofessional support.

- How the team will know when the student has attained mastery of these skills or levels of independence.
- The position of the person responsible for monitoring and following progress on the skills or independence levels the paraprofessional services support.
- The frequency with which the supports will be monitored and evaluated.¹⁶

Another effective practice that can have a direct impact on a child's readiness for faded supports is the implementation of strategies to foster independence.

Fostering Independence

Research on the paraprofessional role in inclusion has shown that paraprofessionals often assume too much responsibility for the student; bond with students to the point of becoming overprotective; inadvertently interfere with the student's social interaction goals; and are viewed by parents and educators as the student's primary teacher.^{17, 18}

Giangreco and colleagues noted that one of the effects of close proximity of paraprofessionals was a dependence on adults. This dependency on adults may lead to learned helplessness. Learned helplessness is a cognitive process where students perceive events which are controllable to be out of their control, and perhaps at times, will see uncontrollable events as controllable.¹⁹ It is likely that students with learned helplessness will continue dependency on adults because of the negative outlook on independent abilities. Learned helplessness, among other detrimental effects, can be limited by developing the independence of students.

When an IEP team or other educational team determines that a paraprofessional is needed to assist a student in fulfilling an educational goal(s), (e.g., *behavioral, self-help, mobility, communication*) the goal(s) for which the paraprofessional will provide support should reflect as much independence and self-advocacy as appropriate for the student. When a paraprofessional is assigned to assist a student, short-term objectives or benchmarks should be written to promote increased independence.

Strategies for fostering independence include:

- Watch before assisting. Can the student ask for help from teacher or peer?
- Can the student problem-solve on his/her own?
- Have high expectations for what the student understands or can do independently.

- Provide a consistent classroom schedule (*posted, visual, at desk if needed, reinforcement periods included*). Teach the student how to use it.
- Start with the least intrusive prompts to get a student to respond.
- Prompt, then back away to allow independent time.
- Use strengths and weaknesses, like and dislikes.
- Model: Guide (*watch and assist*). Check (*leave and check back*).
- Teach independence skills (*raising hand, asking for help, modeling other students*).
- Encourage age-appropriate work habits. See what other students are doing.
- Be aware of proximity. Sit with the student only when necessary.
- Encourage peer assistance and partnering. Teach peers how to help, but not enable.
- Utilize self-monitoring checklists for students.
- Color code materials to assist with organization.
- Use transition objects to help student anticipate/complete transition (*i.e., head phones for listening center*).
- Break big tasks into steps.
- Use backward chaining (*i.e., leave the last portion of a cutting task for the student, then gradually lengthen the task*).
- Assist in encouraging a means for independent communication (*i.e., PECS*).
- Provide positive feedback (*be specific to the situation*).
- Ask facilitative questions (*"What comes next?" "What are other students doing?" "What does the schedule say?" "What did the teacher say?"*).
- Give choices.

¹⁶ Iowa Department of Education. (2007). *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices* (2nd ed.). Student and Family Support Services. Retrieved from https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/0708_sped_paraed_practices_guide.pdf

¹⁷ French, N. and Ritu, V.C. (1999). Parent Perspectives on the Roles of Paraprofessionals. *The Journal of the Association for Persons With Severe Handicaps*, 24, 259-272.

¹⁸ Downing, J. E., Ryndak, D. L. and Clark, D. (2001). Paraeducators in Inclusive Classrooms: Their Own Perceptions. *Remedial and Special Education*, 21, 171-181. doi: 10.1177/074193250002100308

¹⁹ Peterson, C., Maier, S. F. and Seligman, M. E. P. (1993). *Learned Helplessness: A Theory for the Age of Personal Control*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, UK.

Family Considerations

The following section is adapted from the *Guide to Effective Paraprofessional Practices, Edition II*.²⁰

Only a few studies have addressed topics that relate to both paraprofessionals and parents (e.g., *paraprofessional communication; paraprofessional role in inclusion; paraprofessional as bridges between educator, parents and community*). Most of these studies involve parents of students with disabilities and the paraprofessionals who support them. Some research focuses on parents from diverse cultures who may share linguistic and cultural similarities with paraprofessionals more often than with teachers. The research notes that dynamics of these types of relationships can be significant in shaping roles of family members, teachers and paraprofessionals. Additional relevant findings of parent and paraprofessional research are summarized below:

- Most parents of students with disabilities regard paraprofessionals positively and think that successful inclusion is not possible without paraprofessionals.
- Parents consider paraprofessionals as liaisons or connectors between school and themselves, community and their children, and other students.
- Parents want paraprofessionals to be accepted as part of the school community as a respected and valued contributor to the child's educational team.

- Paraprofessionals and parents often communicate on a daily basis - sometimes extensively - a practice which many times leads to close relationships. However, close relationships between parents and paraprofessionals do not necessarily help, and may sometimes negatively affect the education of the child, particularly when the supervising teacher is not in the loop of the parent-paraprofessional communication.
- Parents tend to be critical of paraprofessionals who fail to foster independence, those who develop a sense of helplessness and overdependence, and those who interfere or create barriers to interactions with others.
- Parents of students with disabilities recommend that paraprofessionals be well trained. Parents recommend providing paraprofessionals with information on the child's disability; techniques for positive behavior intervention; health issues; communication strategies for interacting with the child; and approaches that encourage independence for the child.

For more information on these research findings or additional research, go to <https://paracenter.org/parents/>.

²⁰ See page 10, footnote 15.

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DETERMINING NEED: APPROPRIATE DECISIONS ABOUT PARAPROFESSIONALS

This section is intended to be used as a resource for LEA administrators to ensure appropriate supports and guidance are provided to help educational teams make important decisions about student supports, particularly paraprofessionals. The decision-making section outlines a process to help teams determine when the services of a paraprofessional are needed to assist children. Tools referenced or included in this guide are intended to be used as a basic template, which can be customized to include district-specific policies, forms, tools, etc., as appropriate. It is recommended that any such tools, forms or considerations adopted are implemented systemwide and that education team members and families will be collaborative partners in such adoption and implementation.

Decision-making Tools

Making decisions about when a paraprofessional service is needed for a child is a critical responsibility of the child’s educational team. To ensure appropriate data-based decision-making, it is suggested that the LEA adopt a comprehensive decision-making model to support consistent, quality student needs centered decisions about the use of paraprofessional supports and services. Generally, the use of such a model promotes the analysis and discussion in this context and should be about the supports needed, not the personnel needed.²¹

Whatever decision-making model and tools ultimately chosen, the following components should be considered (see *Intensive Needs Checklist* below):

- Analysis of any intensive needs of the child (see examples of the *Area of Need Rubric* on page 15 and the *Intensive Needs Paraprofessional Support Summary Sheet* on page 17). The intensive need analysis component is designed to develop an overview of the student’s needs in relation to the classroom environment and focus discussion on critical issues when present.
- Analysis of both the child’s abilities and assistance needs (see example *Abilities and Assistance Needs Matrix* on page 18). The objective of this component is to systematically review the student’s strengths, needs and options for support in the student’s entire day.
- Checklist of Existing Environmental Supports (see example on page 19). Other areas of existing supports could be added as an additional checklist.

Intensive Needs Checklist ²²

Intensive Needs Checklist		
1.	Is there a safety concern for self or others? Please describe.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
2.	Does the student require continual teacher prompts: during instruction and/or after instruction (e.g., during independent work)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
3.	Does the student require assistance with basic functional skills? Toileting Mobility Feeding Dressing Following basic safety rules	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
4.	Is the student’s performance consistent with his or her aptitude?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
5.	Do his or her peers include the student in classroom activities? Is the student receptive to peer tutoring and support?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
6.	Is the student currently receiving specialized small or individualized group instruction in specific academic areas? Please describe.	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
7.	Please note what interventions or program changes you have tried and describe their rate of success (e.g., cooperative learning, behavior management plan, re-grouping within the classroom, pairing with other students). If these interventions are not an option, please explain why.	
8.	Has an administrator observed the student?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
9.	Does the team recommend that this position be job-shared? If yes, why?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Date of Review: _____		Date Amended: _____
Team Members: _____		

²¹ Mueller, P. H. and Murphy, F. V. (2001). Determining When a Student Requires Paraprofessional Support. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33, 22-27. Retrieved from http://www.lease-sped.org/files/Paraprofessionals/Paras/Section_5_-_Additional_Information.pdf

²² Kansas State Department of Education. *Intensive Needs Checklist*. Retrieved from www.ksde.org/Portals/0/ECSETS/Para/IntensiveNeedsChecklist.docx

Area of Need Rubric²³

Instructional Assistant / Support Staff Needs Assessment

Student: _____

Age: _____

Grade: _____

Completed by: _____

Date: _____

For each of the areas listed below, please indicate if your observations of this student suggest that they are completely independent in that area, need supervision while performing tasks in that area, need some type of partial assistance in that area, or if they need complete assistance in that area. For each area, circle the level that best describes the student's needs. If you have not observed the student in an area, please write "n/a" in that area.

	INDEPENDENT	SUPERVISION	MINIMAL/MODERATE ASSISTANCE	SIGNIFICANT ASSISTANCE	COMPLETE ASSISTANCE
MOBILITY	Moves self and materials throughout environment without special equipment or assistance.	Requires adult supervision to ensure safety in mobility (e.g., prompts to use leg braces safely, reminders to wait until the hallway is not crowded before entering, etc.).	Requires some adult supervision, but not direct assistance, when transferring in and out of special equipment and is able to move self throughout the environment.	Requires adult assistance to get in and out of special equipment (e.g., wheelchair, stander) and to ensure securely fastened, but is able to move self throughout the classroom. May require adult assistance to move throughout the building.	Cannot move self throughout the environment (e.g., walk, crawl, scoot), even when provided special equipment (e.g., cannot propel wheelchair). Requires adult to move through classroom and building.
TOILETING	Finds familiar restroom, enters restroom, closes door, and uses restroom independently (no toileting accidents).	May require adult reminder to go to bathroom. Requires adult supervision to ensure bathroom routine followed (e.g., pulling down pants, using restroom, washing hands, etc.).	Has occasional toileting accidents (no more than once per week). Requires adult assistance with wiping at times, but can independently remove pull-up and put on a new one when prompted.	Student has frequent or daily accidents. May recognize when wet/soiled, but requires adult assistance, to change pull-up. If catheter, student can initiate and assist with this.	Cannot recognize the urge to use the bathroom, does not recognize when wet/soiled, cannot assist with changing or catheter (if applicable).
FEEDING	Opens packages/cartons, feeds self independently (fingers or utensils), disposes food/trash as expected for age.	Requires more prompting than peers to follow cafeteria routine (e.g., pick up utensils, dispose of food/trash).	Requires an adult to take tray to table, open cartons, and dispose of food/trash, but is able to feed self independently.	Requires an adult to take tray to table, open cartons, and dispose of food/trash. Able to chew and swallow foods, but requires an adult to feed each bite.	Unable to swallow liquids or soft foods; requires tube feeding.
SAFETY	Follows school safety procedures for fire and weather drills, follows safety rules during recess, remains with class on field trips.	Requires more prompting than peers to follow school safety procedures (e.g., requires adult reminder of where to go for tornado drill, position to take, etc.).	Requires some direct assistance from adult to follow safety procedures (e.g., leading by hand during fire or tornado drill).	Requires continuous direct assistance from adult to follow safety procedures. Is unable to move safely to the designated areas for drills or may run from the group if not given direct assistance.	Requires safe physical management (one-on-one) during most safety drills to ensure student does not run from group or put self in dangerous situation.
BEHAVIOR	Maintains age-appropriate on-task behaviors, follows class rules.	Requires more prompting than peers to maintain age-appropriate on-task behaviors and to follow class rules.	Requires frequent prompting and re-teaching to maintain age-appropriate on-task behaviors and to follow class rules.	Requires daily individual instruction regarding appropriate behaviors, requires significant adult supervision throughout all school settings.	Demonstrates aggressive or explosive behavior requiring frequent safe-crises management or other complete assistance to gain control of behaviors.
ACADEMIC	Completes age-appropriate academic work independently.	Requires more prompting than peers to complete age-appropriate academic work. May require close proximity of an adult.	Requires direct assistance (individual or small group) to complete age-appropriate work, or requires significant modifications to classwork to reach an instructional level.	Requires continuous direct assistance to complete any class work, even when modified to an appropriate instructional skill level.	Requires complete adult assistance (one-to-one) to complete academic work (e.g., hand-over-hand assistance).

23 Bisotti, T. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.bigeastcoop.org/Big%20East%20Directors%20Meeting/Document%20Library/20131227/Areas%20of%20Need%20Rubric.docx>

	INDEPENDENT	SUPERVISION	MINIMAL/MODERATE ASSISTANCE	SIGNIFICANT ASSISTANCE	COMPLETE ASSISTANCE
SOCIAL	Demonstrates age-appropriate interaction with peers and adults.	Requires more prompting than peers to initiate and respond to interactions with peers and adults.	Requires direct prompting to interact with peers or adults. Requires direct assistance to ensure social interactions are appropriate.	Requires daily small group or individual instruction to interact with peers or adults and maintain appropriate interactions.	Requires continuous direct assistance from adult (<i>one-on-one</i>) to initiate interaction with peers (e.g., <i>eye contact, say "hello," etc.</i>) and to respond to adults.
COMMUNICATION	Communicates needs and wants, engages in conversations, and participates in class discussions.	Requires more prompting than peers to communicate needs and wants, engage in conversation, and participate in class discussions.	May require direct prompting and yes/no questions to determine needs and wants. If assistive communication device/system is in place, student is independent with using the system.	Requires assistive communication device or picture communication system to communicate with others. Requires adult assistance using the device/system.	Cannot communicate needs and wants verbally (<i>other than crying</i>) or nonverbally. Is unable to point/gesture to indicate desired object.
FOLLOWING DIRECTIONS	Listens to and follows teacher directions, follows through on instructions.	Requires more prompting than peers to follow through on instructions.	Requires some direct assistance (<i>individual or small group</i>) to follow directions.	Requires continuous direct assistance to follow any directions.	Requires complete adult assistance (<i>one-on-one</i>) to follow any directions (e.g., <i>hand-over-hand assistance</i>).
ORGANIZATION	Maintains materials appropriately for age, manages folders and assignments, demonstrates appropriate planning skills for assignments.	Requires more prompting than peers to follow established organization system (e.g., <i>put items in proper places and organize materials</i>).	Requires some direct assistance to follow established organization system (e.g., <i>staff member goes through materials with student weekly to maintain organization</i>).	Requires daily direct assistance to follow established organization system (e.g., <i>staff member goes through materials with student daily to maintain organization</i>).	Requires complete adult assistance (<i>one-on one</i>) to manage all materials (e.g., <i>adult puts the items away, maintains folders, maintains established organization system</i>).
ATTENTION	Attends to age-appropriate tasks for a reasonable amount of time (e.g., <i>looking at speaker, attending to assignments at independent level</i>).	Requires more prompting than peers to maintain attention for a reasonable amount of time (e.g., <i>looking at speaker, attending to assignments at independent level</i>).	Requires some direct assistance (<i>individual or small group</i>) to maintain attention for a reasonable amount of time (<i>visual attention and attention to assignments at independent level</i>).	Requires continuous direct assistance (<i>individual or small group</i>) to maintain attention for even a small amount of time (<i>visual attention and attention to assignments at independent level</i>).	Is unable to maintain visual attention for more than a few seconds. Requires complete (<i>one-on-one</i>) adult assistance to maintain attention to task.

Intensive Needs Paraprofessional Support Summary Sheet ²⁴

Student: _____ DOB: _____ Date: _____

Eligibility: _____ Teacher: _____ Program/School: _____

Completed by: _____ Title: _____

Check areas of intensive need that might require additional paraprofessional support:

Health/Personal Care

- G-tube feeding*
- Medication*
- Suctioning*
- Food preparation
- Diaper changing
- Feeding-full support
- Seizures*
- Lifting/Transfers
- Other: _____

Behavior

- Behavior plan implementation or documentation
- Physically aggressive
- Noncompliant on campus
- Runs away
- Self-injurious
- Other: _____

* *Specialized physical health care plan or emergency plan.*

Area of Need	Is further independence possible?	How will independence be encouraged?	How will level of independence be monitored?	Are there alternative supplementary aids or services to support this need?
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				

24 Kansas State Department of Education. *Paraprofessional Support Summary Sheet*. Retrieved from www.ksde.org/Portals/0/ECSETS/Para/IntensiveNeedsParaprofessionalSupportSummarySheet.docx

Abilities and Assistance Needs Matrix ²⁵

Student's Name: _____	What the student can do without assistance.	What the student cannot do and needs <i>accommodation</i> to do.	What the student cannot do (<i>and needs assistance with</i>).	Areas to promote social acceptance and utilize peers.	Areas targeted for independence.	Options for alternative or natural supports.
Activity: _____						
Activity: _____						
Arrival and/or Depature Time: _____						
Arrival and/or Depature Time: _____						
Class/Time: _____						
Class/Time: _____						
Class/Time: _____						

²⁵ Kansas State Department of Education. *Abilities and Assistance Needs Matrix*. Retrieved from <https://www.ksde.org/Portals/0/ECSETS/Para/AbilitiesAndAssistanceNeedsMatrix.docx>

Checklist of Existing Environmental Supports ²⁶

Student: _____ DOB: _____ Date: _____

Eligibility: _____ Teacher: _____ Program/School: _____

Completed by: _____ Title: _____

A. Classroom schedule:

Is there a posted classroom schedule? Yes (*If "Yes," please answer questions below*) No

1. The following elements are included in the classroom schedule:

Times Students Activities Staff names Locations

2. The schedule is: Daily Weekly Other

B. Schedule for individual student:

Is there an individual student schedule? Yes (*If "Yes," please answer questions below*) No

1. Student uses the following format for individualized schedule:

Object Icon Photograph Word Picture

2. Student ability to follow the schedule:

Independent With indirect verbal or gestural prompts With physical prompts

Inconsistent With direct verbal prompts

3. Student use of the schedule:

Student carries schedule Student uses transition cards Student goes to schedule board

Inconsistent Teacher carried and shows the schedule

4. Room is arranged with structure to correlate with tasks on schedule: (*Check all that apply*)

Area for one-on-one work Area for independent work Area for group work

Area for leisure Not applicable

C. Curriculum and Instruction:

1. Are the materials and activities differentiated for the students?:

- Chronological age (describe): _____
- Ability level (describe): _____
- Interest level (describe): _____

2. Check the curricular domains included in the student's program:

Communications Pre-vocational Domestic skills Recreation/leisure

Self-care Motor skills/Mobility Academics Social skills Other: _____

26 Kansas State Department of Education. *Checklist of Environmental Supports*. Retrieved from www.ksde.org/Portals/0/ECSETS/Para/ChecklistOfExistingEnvironmentalSupports.docx

3. List equipment or devices used/available that may relate to the need for assistance. (*May be low incidence equipment or assistive technology device.*):

4. Describe an activity which is challenging for the student: If appropriate, attach a sample task analysis form used for a challenging activity with the student (*see Task Analysis Data*):

D. Behavior Support:

Are there problem behavior(s) interfering with learning of self or others?

Yes (*If "Yes," please answer questions below*) No

- Brief description of problem behavior(s): _____
- Where behavior(s) typically occur: _____
- When behavior(s) typically occur: _____

1. Student has a Positive Behavior Support Plan (*PBSP*)/Behavior Intervention Plan (*BIP*): Yes (*If "Yes," please answer questions below*) No

2. Behavior plan is based on a Functional Behavioral Analysis (*FBA*):

Yes No In the process Need to initiate

3. How effective is the plan in addressing the student's needs:

Very Moderately Mildly Not at all

4. Describe anticipated level of support to implement plan. (*i.e., frequency of reinforcement, prompting, redirection*):

5. What supports exist for implementing the plan; i.e., self-monitoring, other adult:

***(Please attach Behavior Support Plan/Behavior Intervention Plan):**

E. Current data systems and collection of data:

Are there current data on each IEP objective and/or behavior plan?

Yes (*If "Yes," please answer questions below*) No

1. Data records include: Date Level of independence (*prompting needed*) Task Level of progress

2. Data is collected: Daily Weekly Monthly Other: _____

3. Data are summarized: Graphed Written narrative Other: _____

***Attach sample data collection sheet: See IEP goals and objectives form**

Benefits of a Comprehensive Decision-making Process

This document has already cited many of the potential detrimental effects to children when schools rely too heavily on paraprofessionals. Further, the size of the paraprofessional workforce has grown steadily as budgets have inflated and paraprofessionals were hired because people think that the only way a student could successfully be included in a general education classroom was to have adult support.²⁷ That is not to suggest that decisions regarding paraprofessional supports should be based on budgets. Rather, one of the most important benefits of adopting a decision-making model is that the process is clearly student-centered and implementation of a decision-making model were shown to eliminate parent or classroom teacher notions that administrators were making decisions based on money.²⁸

Use of such a model not only moves once-contentious conversations about the nature and amount of support a child should receive to an organized and student-centered planning discussion. It also reduces paraprofessional turnover because of burnout from an overreliance on the paraprofessional as the sole resource for implementing complex student programs. The decision-making model promotes the effective practices noted in the first section of this document as well as:

- Improved documentation of the specific supports needed;
- Consideration of alternative or natural means of providing those supports to ensure quality peer interactions, sense of belonging, and enhanced student learning;
- Increased paraprofessional understanding of their role in helping or hindering student independence and social growth; and,
- Responsible inclusion for children with disabilities.

27 Giangreco, M. F., Broer S. M. and Edelman, S. W. (2011). Teacher Engagement With Students With Disabilities: Differences Between Paraprofessional Service Delivery Models. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 26, 75-86. Retrieved from <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.2511/rpsd.26.2.75#articleCitationDownloadContainer>

28 Mueller, P. H. and Murphy, F. V. (2001). Determining When a Student Requires Paraprofessional Support. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 33, 22-27. Retrieved from http://www.lease-sped.org/files/Paraprofessionals/Paras/Section_5_-_Additional_Information.pdf

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MANAGING THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS: ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORTS

The role of the administrator is complex when it comes to the effective utilization of paraprofessionals in school-based settings. In addition to the many concerns and considerations already discussed in this document, administrators are expected to simultaneously:

- Recognize the value of paraprofessionals as respected members of educational teams.
- Use existing paraprofessional resources effectively.
- Make sure future decisions about the use of paraprofessionals are appropriate and judicious.
- Build capacity for alternatives to paraprofessionals for supporting the educational needs of students with special needs in general education classes.²⁹

²⁹ Giangreco, M. F., Halvorsen, A. T., Doyle, M. B. and Broer, S. M. (2004). Alternatives to Overreliance on Paraprofessionals in Inclusive Schools. *Journal of Special Education Leadership*, 17, 82-90.

With this daunting combination of leadership tasks at hand, it is a challenge for administrators to develop an effective plan for moving forward. Unfortunately, the often-used practice of employing paraprofessionals to temporarily relieve pressures in our general and special education systems obscures needed changes in schools. Changes like improving:

- General education classroom teacher ownership of ALL students, especially students most in need of intensive instruction or instructional supports.
- Working conditions for special and general education teachers (e.g., caseloads, paperwork, professional learning and planning time); and
- Building capacity of general education systems to effectively design curriculum and instruction for varying abilities.³⁰

Additional Alternatives to Paraprofessionals – Resource Reallocation Strategies for Administrators

The following are a few of the alternatives to paraprofessionals through resource reallocation strategies adapted from and detailed in full in Giangreco, M. F., Halvorsen, A. T., Doyle, M. B. and Broer, S. M. Alternatives to overreliance on paraprofessionals in inclusive schools.³¹

- **Resource reallocation:** This strategy involves a cost-neutral shifting of existing resources spent on paraprofessionals to special education teachers. The number of paraprofessional positions required to shift to one special education teacher will vary depending upon local pay, benefits and schedule factors. This strategy is appealing because it is cost-neutral and has shown success in improving working conditions for special education teachers. However, there are challenges, such as teacher shortages and paraprofessional staff anxiety (though this can be mitigated by keeping the transition from paraprofessionals to special education teachers at a rate comparable to a projected turnover rate). Furthermore, investment in alternatives to paraeducators and transitioning schedules and staff expectations can be a challenge as well.
- **Increasing ownership of general educators and building their capacity:** The substantive, direct involvement of the general education teacher is critical in order for students with special learning needs to be successful in the general education classroom. This strategy involves eliminating the notion of the teacher merely being a host and the paraprofessional the primary teacher for students with special needs. This can be done through capacity-building of general education teachers and collaborative partnerships. It starts at hiring - how does the candidate general education teacher view his or her role in teaching students with special needs in the general education classroom?

One recommended model for administrators to ensure the effective utilization of paraprofessionals is the three-component administrative model. In this model, administrators attend to three foundational and interrelated components of leadership for effective use of paraprofessionals: alternatives, decision-making and supports. The first two components have been addressed in the effective practices and decision-making sections of this resource. However, additional alternatives to paraprofessionals specific to administrative considerations are outlined in this section for consideration. The third component, supports, refers to clarifying and strengthening the work of paraprofessionals and includes, for example, hiring practices, role clarification, orientation, training and supervision and is addressed briefly in this section as well.

- **Transitional paraprofessional pool:** How do administrators address unanticipated or short-term support needs? One strategy is a transitional paraprofessional pool recruited, hired and trained under the direction of a certified or licensed professional for a limited amount of time (i.e., transition to a new school, introduction of a new augmentative communication system or initial implementation of a positive behavioral support plan) and could also serve as a paraprofessional substitute pool. System size and needs dictate the best options and establishing practices and procedures is critical to successful rollout. An added bonus during downtimes of the pool is using the pooled staff to cover for other paraprofessionals to support training or special program projects.
- **Clerical/paperwork paraprofessional:** Consider reconceptualizing an existing paraprofessional position, or part of a position, to support certified/licensed educators with logistical and clerical tasks, including notifications, scheduling, student data entry, reports, organization of student files, deadline tracking and general clerical work. This strategy can be leveraged to support alternative No. 2 – a shift toward the certified teacher primary role as a direct instructor of the students. It can also assist in improved working conditions and efficiency through centralization of certain administrative and clerical tasks. Note: There may be role expectations or limitations tied to the funding source for paraprofessionals to consider related to this alternative strategy.

³⁰ Giangreco, et al., 2004, p. 83.

³¹ Giangreco, et al., 2004, p. 82-90.

Documenting Paraprofessional Supports

After consideration of effective practices and a determination of need, paraprofessional supports should be documented, whether in a program schedule or an individual student support plan. The decision-making tools outlined in the previous section provide the foundational information and data for decisions. Then, documenting those decisions is essential to proper staffing, implementation and achieving desired outcomes.

A sample Plan for Paraprofessional Assistance* is provided below as an example of one way a team may document paraprofessional supports. The format is not the critical point — clarity of roles, communication of expectations and ensuring attention to fostering independence and fading supports is. There are specific considerations for documentation of paraprofessional supports in an IEP (see *Kansas Special Education Process Handbook*³²). However, the underlying benefits of analyzing and documenting the nature and intensity of the support provided by a paraprofessional can be applied to other programs and support situations as well.

Plan for Paraprofessional Assistance ³³

Specified class/ activity	Identified need for paraprofessional support	Identified areas to increase socialization (<i>natural supports, peers</i>)	Identified strategies for how independence will be encouraged	Total time needed for paraprofessional support	Total anticipated time reduction of paraprofessional support by annual/ quarterly plan review

* This component is used to specifically identify when, how and where the paraprofessional will assist and how the team will encourage independence. Factors to address fading supports should be included here or addressed in a separate plan for fading supports.

32 Kansas State Department of Education. *Kansas Special Education Process Handbook*. Retrieved from www.ksde.org/Portals/0/SES/PH/PH-complete.pdf?ver=2015-01-30-144654-223

33 Kansas State Department of Education. *Plan for Paraprofessional Assistance*. Retrieved from www.ksde.org/Portals/0/ECSETS/Para/PlanForParaprofessionalAssistance.docx

Using Data to Make Staffing Decisions

Once needs have been determined and educational teams have identified necessary paraprofessional supports for a student, district and building administration is responsible for ensuring those supports are provided. Administrators consider both individual student support needs and program support needs to ensure the right number, assignment and supervision of paraprofessionals within a program, building, district or cooperative structure is in place at any given time throughout the school year and extended school year. The administrator who is responsible for allocating resources within a building or program, typically the building principal or a program/area coordinator, determines student and paraprofessional schedules in consultation with teacher professionals in the building. The building principal or program/area coordinator also needs to collaborate with district administration to ensure the fiscal and human resources to support the program are in place and to analyze the effectiveness of those supports. The data used in these decisions may include:

- Teacher to student caseload and/or classroom ratios.
- Adult to student caseload and/or classroom ratios.
- Minutes of support needed.
- Indicators or thresholds of intensive level of individual student service needs (*e.g., percent of day with support or service needs*).
- Setting of supports (*pullout versus inclusion*).
- Nature of supports (*supplementary aid or specially-designed instruction*).
- Identification percentages, including disaggregated by category.

A recommended practice based on input from the field is to use the comprehensive data, as noted above, to develop an overall picture and understanding of the needs, practices and staffing within a classroom, building or district level. This knowledge should then

be leveraged by initiating regular conversations with building and district staff and administration about what that data means, what patterns are identified, what improvements have been made or what concerns might be identified. When district administrators develop a strong understanding of the indicators of identification and service practices in a classroom, program, building or district, those administrators can apply data-based decision-making to questions about staffing levels occur.

When a general staffing level concern or the inevitable request to add a paraprofessional does occur, the comprehensive data analysis over time, coupled with a real-time student schedule analysis, can be used to make decisions about immediate staffing needs and inform effective practices. When implementing a schedule analysis, a critical step in this process, it is important to keep the focus on student needs and to implement a sufficiently detailed level of analysis - in terms of time segments - so that overstaffing and understaffing situations can be addressed. Administrators may want to keep in mind the following questions when conducting a schedule analysis:

- What other resources are available at that time?
- Have alternatives to paraprofessional supports been considered?
- What impact is the building or individual student schedule having on the overstaffed or understaffed increments in the schedule?
- What level of support is being provided to the student? For special education paraeducator requests, is this a Specially-Designed Instruction (SDI) need or is it supplementary aids and services?

If there are one-to-one adult-to-student ratios present or specified as needed, has that level of intensity been justified through a data-based decision-making process of the appropriate educational team?

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CONSIDERATIONS FOR THE EFFECTIVE USE OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN SCHOOLS

APPENDICES



Appendix A: Teaming for Effective Paraprofessional Supports

These effective teaming checklists are adapted from the Iowa Department of Education's "Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices" (2007).³⁸ For a more complete list of teaming strategies, check out "Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraprofessionals, Teachers and Principals" by Kent Gerlach.³⁹

To foster an effective teaming environment, **paraprofessionals** are encouraged to:

- Know the school rules and policies for school discipline, confidentiality, health and safety. Request the school policies if not provided. Know classroom rules; expectations for the class; daily routines and schedules; instructional procedures, strategies, and tools; and procedures for handling student work, room organization, dismissing the class, bathroom rules, etc.
- Discuss appropriate roles of the administrator, teacher and the paraprofessional. Share expectations of the teacher and seek out the teacher's expectations of the para. Discuss the roles of the substitute teacher and paraprofessional.
- Learn vocabulary/educational jargon regarding student performance, assessment techniques, program planning and educational methods. Ask about nonverbal cues that will enable the team to communicate in the classroom.
- Recognize and respect the knowledge and expertise the teacher brings. Learn the teaching philosophy and teaching style for each teacher worked with throughout the day. This includes:
 - Teacher guides.
 - Student motivation systems.
 - IEPs for students with special needs.
 - Supports/accommodations/modifications for various students.
 - Explanations of paraprofessional roles in instruction (*drill and practice, assessments, adapting lesson plans according to teacher directions and monitoring student performance*).
- Progress monitoring techniques.
- Clarify the paraprofessional role with the families of students. Discuss confidentiality, communications and conferences. Be clear with families that the licensed teacher guides communications regarding student progress, academic content, classroom behaviors and other educational concerns and issues. Provide accurate student information and only to those who need to know (i.e., supervising teacher, related service personnel and other staff).
- Create an open and professional relationship with the teacher. Get to know each other, and areas of interests, experience, strengths, and needed growth or skill building. Discuss ideas or problems with the teacher. Ask for ideas, suggestions, and opinions. Prompt conversations with the teacher to ascertain how the working relationship is developing.
- Conduct self-evaluations of instructional sessions that help establish goals for improvement. Maintain wellness, composure and emotional stability while working with students and staff. Present a positive model for students.

³⁸ See page 10, footnote 15.

³⁹ Gerlach, K. (2014). *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraprofessionals, Teachers and Principals*. Naples, FL: National Professional Resources / Dude Publishing.

To foster an effective teaming environment, **teachers** are encouraged to:

- Create and communicate a shared vision of teamwork. Discuss ideas and problems with the paraprofessional. Ask for ideas, suggestions and opinions. Use terms like “we” and “us” instead of “I” and “you” to reaffirm that both the teacher and paraprofessional have a responsibility for the classroom.
- Acquaint paraprofessionals with school rules, policies for school discipline, confidentiality, health and safety.
- Clarify classroom rules with paraprofessionals: expectations for the class; daily routines and schedules; instructional procedures, strategies, and tools; and procedures for handling student work, room organization, dismissing the class, bathroom rules, etc.
- Clarify the appropriate roles of the teacher and paraprofessional. Share teacher expectations and acknowledge paraprofessional expectations of the teacher. Discuss the roles of the substitute teacher and paraprofessional.
- Share vocabulary/educational jargon regarding student performance, assessment techniques, program planning, and educational methods. Nonverbal cues need to be established that will enable the team to communicate in the classroom.
- Explain the teaching philosophy and teaching style for your classroom or services. This includes sharing:
 - Teacher guides.
 - Student motivation systems.
 - IEPs for students with special needs.
 - Supports/accommodations/modifications for various students.
- Explanations of paraprofessional roles in instruction (*drill and practice assessments, adapting lesson plans according to teacher directions, and monitoring student performance*).
- Progress monitoring techniques.
- Provide regular, constructive feedback on the paraprofessional's job performance. Share what the paraprofessional does well and give suggestions for improvement. Build time in the schedule to plan and communicate with the paraprofessional. Plan a set meeting time, either daily or weekly.
- Clarify with the paraprofessional and families the paraprofessional's role with students. Be clear about confidentiality and the role of the paraprofessional in parent communication and parent conferences.
- Discuss the paraprofessional's comfort level for assisting students with complex subject matter. Students with advanced academic skills (*chemistry, advanced math, etc.*) may need physical assistance from paraprofessionals who understand the subject matter, i.e., where to place answers and computations on assignments.
- Provide paraprofessionals with opportunities for on-the-job professional development. Such opportunities could include coaching in the areas of behavior management, instructional strategies, and individual student needs.
- Be flexible. Paraprofessionals are valuable assets to the team. They can provide needed support to both students and teachers. Be willing to listen, to experiment and to make changes as needed.

To foster an effective teaming environment, **administrators** are encouraged to:

- Create a school climate in which paraprofessionals have a professional identity as well as respect, recognition and open communication with the other staff members. Include paraprofessionals in newsletters, websites, mailboxes, email addresses, staff meetings (*as appropriate*), school-based committees, school improvement teams and professional learning opportunities.
- Support the teacher/paraprofessional team:
 - Build time into the schedule for teachers and paraprofessionals to plan, communicate, discuss student needs and progress, and receive feedback.
 - Make sure paraprofessionals and teachers understand their respective roles.
 - Ensure that all new teachers understand their work with paraprofessionals.
- Make sure teachers and paraprofessionals have the necessary skills for effective teamwork.
- Provide valuable performance feedback to the paraprofessional and teacher.
- Work with the teachers to develop a vocabulary list of terms or acronyms used throughout the building that may need an explanation including such terms as Title I, IEP, CSIP (*Comprehensive School Improvement Plan*) and others.
- Work with teachers to provide paraprofessionals a desk, mailbox and a place to leave personal property, lesson plans, student work and other items. Many paraprofessionals travel among several classrooms and other settings during the day and may require a station in each setting.

To foster an effective teaming environment, **family members** are encouraged to:

- Be aware of the school's goals and programs and the methods and personnel used to achieve these goals.
- Seek out information about the distinctive roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals versus teachers in the development and implementation of the child's IEP. Ask teachers the following questions to assist family members in effective teaming and communication:
 - What is the difference between what a teacher does with my child and what a paraprofessional does with my child in school?
 - With whom should I communicate if I have questions or concerns? Who should I call to discuss issues related to day-to-day care or ordinary events that arise?
- Who should I call about programming issues (*such as the student's progress, class scheduling, instructional needs or social interaction with peers*)?
- My child is/has special communication needs. Can the paraprofessional understand and communicate with him?
- Who has the responsibility for observing and evaluating whether the paraprofessional is working effectively with my child?
- What skills does the paraprofessional need to work effectively with my child on IEP objectives? Has the paraprofessional had training or staff development that will assist him or her in the classroom?
- Should the paraprofessional participate in IEP meetings?

Appendix B: Effective Practices for Other Special Populations

This information is reprinted from the “Guide to Effective Paraprofessional Practices” (*Edition II, Iowa Department of Education, 2007*).⁴⁰

Section 504

Section 504 is federal civil rights legislation ensuring equal access for individuals with disabilities that substantially limit a major life activity. In educational circumstances that fall under Section 504, students are provided with accommodations and services to ensure equal access to education. The Section 504 services are identified in an evaluation process and outlined in a plan. Depending on unique needs identified in a student’s 504 plan and on the settings in which the student receives services, paraprofessionals can assist with needed supports under the direction of a teacher or, in some cases, teachers and school nurses can delegate certain procedures to the paraprofessionals. Some possible services that can be provided by a paraprofessional include:

- Deliver homebound services for academic tasks.
- Help implement adapted physical education program.
- Take notes in classes.
- Provide supervision during transitions, disruptions, field trips.
- Place assignments, directions on tape for auditory learner.
- Assist with mobility for a student with serious difficulties with fine and gross motor skills.
- Monitor behavior management plans.
- Assist with make-up academic work.
- Assist with curriculum modification.
- Provide special health care procedures after training and with supervision of a health care provider.

English Learners

A growing population of students who are English Learners (EL) has created an increasing need for system supports and personnel. Among those needs are the services of paraprofessionals.

Three widely accepted general principles that foster success for students who are English Learners also provide general guidance about the appropriate role and responsibility for paraprofessionals who serve students who are EL:

1. Increased comprehensibility - Paraprofessionals should assist in producing materials, visuals, adapting reading materials, etc., to provide increased EL student access to the academic content.
2. Increased interaction - Paraprofessionals should assist in EL student interaction with materials, teachers and peers, and provide additional time for EL students to practice the target language in a variety of instructional settings through increased interaction. The point in this work is more student talk, less teacher talk.
3. Increased thinking skills - Paraprofessionals should assist the classroom teacher in providing accommodations to students learning English that do not lower academic content exposure or lessen expectations for grade level appropriate higher order thinking questions and skills.

There tends to be two types of services provided by paraprofessionals who assist students learning English: Traditional supportive services and traditional supportive services with translation. It is important to note that regardless of the type of service provided, paraprofessionals of students who are learning English have a critical role in helping young children progress toward autonomy and should work with the

teacher to implement strategies toward helping each child move from dependence to independence.

Bilingual paraprofessionals fill an important role in the schools. Sometimes the bilingual paraprofessional is the only support in the student’s first language and culture. The bilingual paraprofessional provides a valuable link to language minority family members and communities. As for translation responsibilities, it is important to recognize that translation is a skill that needs to be directly instructed. It should not be assumed that because a paraprofessional has oral proficiency in a native language of a student that the individual paraprofessional can translate formal documents or translate academic content areas for that student or family. Many bilingual paraprofessionals report a lack of content vocabulary in the native language to be able to translate for EL students. An assessment of paraprofessional skill sets is needed prior to translation assignments.

Once the appropriate assessments of a paraprofessional’s knowledge and competencies are completed, job responsibilities can include:

- Assisting EL students to learn academic content and language and to adjust to U.S. schools under the guidance of a licensed teacher.
- Helping provide EL students instruction for English language development, starting with basic survival skills.
- Working with EL students individually, in small groups and during whole class instruction under the guidance of a licensed teacher.
- Preparing EL students to understand and participate in the teacher’s instruction by identifying EL students’ prior knowledge

⁴⁰ See page 10, footnote 15.

and language and by previewing lessons in the students' native language or modified English.

- Supporting EL students' literacy development by using reading and writing strategies appropriate to each student's level of proficiency under the guidance of a licensed teacher.
- Assisting EL students to prepare for assessments by reinforcing thinking and study skills and reviewing material learned.
- Facilitating cooperative work and cross-cultural understanding

between EL students and native English speakers in the classroom.

- Providing feedback to the teacher regarding EL students' progress and challenges in learning academic content and language and in adjusting to U.S. schools.

Both traditional and bilingual paraprofessionals need professional development activities to continuously improve understanding of diverse cultures and ability to work with multiple student needs.

Early Childhood

Paraprofessionals play a special role in supporting the learning, health and physical care needs of young children and families. Paraprofessionals partner with licensed staff in a variety of public and private settings, child care settings, preschools in public schools and private preschools to meet a variety of needs including:

- Health
- Physical development
- Safety
- Language development
- Physical care
- Self-help skills
- Social skills
- School readiness skills
- Ongoing assessment

In early care and education settings, opportunities for informal and formal communication with family members are frequent. Family members routinely interact with staff members when arriving or

departing with their child and often spend time volunteering in early childhood classrooms. Because the communication is frequent and informal, paraprofessionals in these settings need to be especially vigilant regarding ethics, confidentiality and sensitivity to diversity and other differences. As is the case with paraprofessionals in all roles, paraprofessionals need to be aware of agency policies regarding communication practices and refer concerns to the supervising teacher.

Paraprofessionals need training in the specific medical needs of each child and in how to recognize early onset of such needs as allergies and sensitivity to medications. They should employ only those techniques and interventions for which specific training, practice and authorization has been provided. In some cases, paraprofessionals may be called upon to provide input to the Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) team regarding developmental planning and progress for children age birth to age 3. The IFSP is the document used to record the evaluation, assessment, planning, implementation and review information related to the development of infants and toddlers birth to age three, who have special needs.



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