PARAEDUCATOR

Guidance Document

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ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR ALL

INTRODUCTION

The objective of this guidance document is to provide essential information to anyone working alongside paraeducators, supervising paraeducators, and paraeducators across the state of Nebraska. The role of paraeducators has changed over the years, and thanks to the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA 2004), school districts have been able to provide improved support for children with disabilities through the utilization of paraeducators. IDEA brought about the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom settings, thus driving the need for more paraeducators across the state.

According to the Area Special Education Cooperative (2006):

> Research supports that children with disabilities benefit from inclusive instruction within the regular classroom environment. For children with moderate to severe handicaps, inclusion can increase social interaction between disabled and non-disabled children. Inclusion can increase social acceptance by peers and provide disabled students with appropriate behavior models.

> It is important to note however, that the mere physical placement of children with disabilities in regular classrooms does not necessarily result in positive results. Often these children require direct intervention and support in order to be successful. Paraeducators play an important role in providing that intervention and support as they are often utilized to implement and reinforce teacher designed programs to increase the students' success in the classroom setting.

> Paraeducators have a difficult but rewarding position within education. They influence positive changes in academic achievement and behavior. Their interest in students and assistance to teachers is invaluable (p. 5).

Each school district has its own policies and procedures regarding roles and responsibilities, evaluations, communication, etc. in regards to special education paraeducators. It's imperative to have a good understanding of the district's roles, responsibilities, and expectations and how those differ amongst the different roles within the district with hopes of meeting or even exceeding expectations of the district when working with students, including those students with disabilities.

ACRONYMS & TERMS

Below is an important list of acronyms and terms in special education. It is important for any staff member to be able to identify and have a basic understanding of these terms in order to best serve students with disabilities. Throughout this document, you will find the use of these acronyms and terms with more in-depth information.

Accommodation – Accommodations refer to the supports that allow students to access their grade-level curriculum and demonstrate learning and mastery of grade-level content. IEP teams determine both accommodations and modifications based on individual needs. Some of the most common accommodations include calculators, multiplication charts, and manipulatives.

ADHD – Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder is a chronic condition including attention difficulty, hyperactivity, and impulsiveness

ASL – American Sign Language is a natural language that serves as the predominant language of Deaf communities in the United States of America. ASL is a complete and organized visual language.

BIP – Behavior Intervention Plan is a formal action plan which defines how an educational setting/strategy will be changed to improve the behavioral success of the student.

FAPE – Free Appropriate Public Education

FBA – Functional Behavior Analysis is an evaluation process that searches for a reason for a child's behavior. It is a systematic approach that involves gathering information and data collection to help analyze the relationships between antecedents, behaviors, and consequences to determine when a behavior is more likely to occur.

IEP – Individualized Education Program is a written plan for a child with a disability that is developed, reviewed, and revised in an annual meeting. The requirements for the contents of the IEP are outlined in federal law and state regulations.

LRE – Least Restrictive Environment is a law which states that a student with a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with non-disabled peers to the greatest extent possible. Students in special education should have access to the general education curriculum and provided accommodations and other supplemental aids to be successful in the general education classroom.

LEA – Local Education Agency

Manifestation – The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Nebraska statutes and regulations provide disciplinary protections for children with disabilities. These protections prevent district staff from disciplining children with disabilities for behavior that is a manifestation of the child's disability. In a manifestation meeting, reviews all relevant information compiled by a team and the child's parents to determine if the disciplinary issue was (a) caused by, or had a direct and substantial relationship to the child's behavior or (b) the direct result of the district's failure to implement the child's individualized education program.

MDT – Stands for Multidisciplinary Team. When a child is suspected of having a disability, a parent, educator, or school district refers the child for an evaluation. It is up to the team to evaluate the needs and strengths of the student to develop a comprehensive plan to support the child. The MDT determines whether the child qualifies for special education services.

Modification – A modification is a change in the course of study, standards, test preparation, location, timing, scheduling, expectations, student response and/or other attributes, which provide access for a student with a disability to participate in a course, standard, or test. It does fundamentally alter or lower the standard or expectation of the course, standard, or test.

MTSS – Multi-Tiered System of Supports

MDT – Multi-Disciplinary Team

OT – Occupational Therapy

PT – Physical Therapy

The following is a list of the 13 categories a child can qualify for in Special Education services in Nebraska. You can find in-depth information on each category in the Essential Information for Paraeducators portion of this document under the Special Education Eligibility Categories in Nebraska section.

ASD – Autism Spectrum Disorder
DB – Deaf-Blindness
DD – Developmental Delay
DHH – Deaf or Hard of Hearing
ED – Emotional Disturbance
ID – Intellectual Disability
MD – Multiple Disabilities
OHI – Other Health Impairment
OI – Orthopedic Impairment
SLD – Specific Learning Disability
SLI – Speech Language Impairment
TBI – Traumatic Brain Injury
VI – Visual Impairment

More information about each of these categories can be found at
https://www.education.ne.gov/sped/eligibility-guidelines/.

PARAEDUCATORS: WHO ARE THEY?

A paraeducator is a school employee who works under the supervision of a licensed staff member to assist in providing instruction and other services to children, youth, and their families (Adapted from A.L. Pickett, Director for the National Resource Center for Paraeducators, City University of New York, 1997). The prefix "para" means "alongside of." Therefore, it is correct to assume that a paraeducator works alongside an educator (teachers, related service providers, etc.). In the early 1960's, there were approximately 10,000 paraeducators working in schools, primarily in noninstructional areas. Currently, due to the increase in student population and diversity, the estimated number of paraeducators is between 500,000 and 700,000 nationwide, performing a variety of instructional and non-instructional roles, from helping students in classrooms, supervising playgrounds, to performing as health assistants. These paraeducators work in several learning environments from infant care and family respite to adult vocational sites.

The provisions of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1997 (IDEA), which required schools to serve students with disabilities in the least restrictive environment, also contributed to the rising use of paraeducators in schools today. Paraeducators are often utilized in educational settings to provide direct and indirect services to students with disabilities. The increasing use of instructional support staff and other paraeducators and the corresponding expansion of their duties and responsibilities have created the need for increased professional development of these critically important members of the school community. Recognizing that the majority of paraeducators possess intimate knowledge of school and community but often lack formal training, state and federal legislation, such as IDEA (2004) and the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015 (ESSA), have affirmed the need for high-quality professional development and training.

Additionally, these federal laws emphasize the need for adequate supervision of paraeducators, which in the past has been a gray area for school personnel many of whom are unsure of who supervises the paraeducator - the special educator, the related service provider, the general education teacher, or the building principal.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Paraeducators Within Classrooms

When there is more than one adult present in a classroom, it is essential that roles and responsibilities be clearly delineated and followed. While this document provides general information, one non-negotiable is that the classroom teacher (or co-teaching team) must always have the role of primary teacher(s) for all students in the classroom.

All students should be involved in all parts of the classroom, including instruction and routines of the classroom. When students with disabilities are hosted, rather than fully included, in a classroom setting, it can inadvertently send a message to the rest of the class "that some students are more or less worthy of teacher time than are others" (Broer, S.M.; Doyle, M.B; & Giangreco, M.F. (2007) p. 427).

The tasks the paraeducator performs should supplement, not supplant, the classroom teacher(s)' duties. While paraeducators can serve in many different capacities in a classroom, Causton-Theoharis, Giangreco, Doyle & Vadasy point out that "[t]he paraeducator's role is not to plan or design classroom instruction, but rather to make important contributions to classroom instruction by effectively implementing important delegated tasks for which they are specially trained" (p. 56).

Be aware of the role your paraeducator is intended to play in the classroom. It is important to distinguish the roles and responsibilities of a paraeducator who is assigned to a classroom for support of multiple or even all students from those of a paraeducator who is assigned to an individual student within the classroom, as required by that student's IEP. While a classroom paraeducator can assist with general classroom routines and assist all students within a classroom, a paraeducator who is required to provide 1:1 support for a specific student, as mandated by the student's IEP, should not have responsibilities outside of working with that individual student.

Support student independence, autonomy, and peer relationships. However, it is important that the student with a 1:1 aide not be isolated physically or socially from the rest of the classroom, as studies have repeatedly shown that in many instances a 1:1 paraeducator hindered a student's participation in a general education classroom, and the paraeducator, rather than peers, became the student's primary social contact during their school years. Instead of the 1:1 paraeducator being the student's primary social contact, the paraeducator can work to facilitate academic and social interaction between the student with a disability and his/her peers.

Include students in the decisions that affect the supports they need from a paraeducator. A study of students with physical disabilities who were assigned a paraeducator to support them in the general education setting found that the students were often excluded from decision making as to what types of supports they needed from a paraeducator; the students who were interviewed reported that this exclusion sometimes resulted in them receiving supports they felt they did not need and not receiving supports in areas in which they felt they needed them.

Fade supports appropriately. Additionally, regardless of whether the individual is a classroom paraeducator or a student-specific paraeducator, it is always important to look at the fading of supports and ensure that students' independence is maximized. One study of students with intellectual disabilities who were assigned a paraeducator during their school years found that, "[W]hen fading of supports was successfully achieved, respondents [students with intellectual disabilities] spoke about the experience with excitement and pride in their voices…" (Broer, S.M.; Doyle, M.B; & Giangreco, M.F. (2007) p. 425).

A study of how paraeducators spent their time in the classroom found that:

- Nearly 37% [of the paraeducators who participated in the study] were concerned that students with disabilities they worked with were unnecessarily dependent on paraeducators…
- Over 46% of paraeducators reported that some of their students with disabilities communicated, via their language or behavior, that they found paraeducator supports unwanted…
- More than 36% reported that students with disabilities spent more than half of their social time at school (e.g., lunch, playground, free time) with paraeducators" (Giangreco & Broer, 2005, p. 15-17).[4]

It is important to heed the caution that "[t]here is…a fine line between support that facilitates participation and support that restrains child interaction and the development of autonomy. Too much assistance can result in limited use of the children's skills and potential, and possibly create unnecessary or unhealthy dependencies and helplessness" (Egilson, S.T., & Traustadottir, 2009, p. 28).

Non-Negotiables

Paraeducators *may not*:
- Develop lesson plans
- Introduce new material/content
- Provide the direct teach portion of the lesson
- Select materials for implementation of the lesson
- Assign final grades
- Be responsible for any IEP related responsibilities without supervision of a certified special educator
- Develop IEP goals/objectives
- Design the classroom management system
- Be responsible for determining or reporting student progress (general class or IEP-goal progress)

When a paraeducator is providing services required by a student's IEP, he/she must do so under the supervision of a certified special education teacher.

GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATION SETTINGS

The following tables within the next few sections represent a comparison of examples of activities that are appropriate for individuals in designated roles to participate in. It is imperative that everyone understands that the roles and responsibilities of the paraeducator will be very fluid and will vary across situations. This is not meant to be an exhaustive list, nor is it meant to represent what must be a part of a job description. It is meant to spark conversation within an LEA and/or building as to how to utilize paraeducators most effectively within a classroom or non-traditional setting in assisting students with disabilities in accessing and progressing in the general curriculum. It is recommended that each LEA or school building create its own specific list of duties for a paraeducator; this list should link to the classroom schedule and provide the paraeducator guidance on what to be doing during particular points in a lesson.

General Education Setting

Sample Instructional Duties

In the general education setting, it is important to delineate the role not just of the certified general education teacher and the paraeducator, but also to include the role of the special educator, if there is one assigned to the classroom for all or some of the class time. The following tables of sample instructional duties outline possible roles/responsibilities for both instructional and administrative tasks for the general educator, the special educator, and the paraeducator. LEAs will need to make final determinations regarding roles and responsibilities using students' IEPs to guide these decisions.

Paraeducators should be provided a schedule that links to the classroom schedule, providing them with explicit information regarding what task(s) they should implement during specific points in the lesson. For example, while the teacher provides direct whole-class instruction, the paraeducator may prepare materials or the teacher may direct the paraeducator to listen to the instruction so that he/she can provide teacher-directed student assistance after the instruction.

Paraeducators should spend the majority of the time on instructional duties, not on administrative duties

IEP Development

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Provide information regarding student's abilities, including strengths and weaknesses, for the IEP team to use in development of PLAFFP (Present Levels of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance) and IEP goals/objectives. • Provide information regarding content standards for his/her assigned course/class for the MDT to use in development of PLAFFP and IEP goals/objectives. • Attend ARD meeting, when invited. • Give input into development of IEP.	• Provide current information regarding student's abilities, including strengths and weaknesses, for the IEP team to use in development of PLAFFP and IEP goals/objectives. • Provide information regarding specially designed instruction for the MDT to use in development of PLAFFP and IEP goals/objectives. • Attend ARD meeting when invited. • Give input into development of IEP.	• Provide any information requested by teacher(s)/administrator(s) for development of the IEP.

Lesson Planning

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Design lesson plans. • Include any required accommodations/modifications.	• Assist as needed/required in designing lesson plans. • Ensure general educator is aware of any Individual student IEP-directed accommodations and/or modifications, including goals/objectives related to the content/course. • Assist in developing IEP-required accommodations and/or modifications into lesson plan.	• Assist in preparation of teacher designed materials that are designated as needed in the lesson plan (i.e. prepare centers for the classroom, etc.)

Lesson Implementation

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Provide direct teach portion of lesson to entire class. • Direct classroom paraeducator in his/her role during the direct teach portion of the lesson. • Design necessary re-teach pieces. • Assist students as needed with individual work.	• May assist with direct teach portion of lesson. • May co-teach portion(s) of lesson. • Oversee/supervise implementation of IEP goals/objectives by a paraeducator, including specially designed instruction required by IEP. • May re-teach small groups. • May assist students as needed with individual work. • Pull individual students out of general education classroom (only if required by IEP).	• Implement supports directed by teacher(s) during the direct teach portion of the lesson. • Work with small groups for re-teach, as directed by teacher(s). • Assist individual students as directed by teacher(s). • Pull individual students out of general education classroom (only if required by IEP).

Evaluation of Student Learning

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Responsible for final grade determination for both assignments and overall course/class. • Partner with special educator to determine mastery for students who receive special education services, as directed by IEP. • Report on all students' progress/ grades in class periodically, as directed by local policy. • Responsible for asking for a review of IEP if concerns/questions exist regarding student's IEP and/or any lack of expected progress • Responsible for data collection on student mastery of IEP goals/ objectives	• May assist in final grade determination for both assignments and overall course/class, as determined by student's IEPs. • Design process/forms for collection of data on student progress on IEP goals/objectives. • Responsible for asking for a review of IEP if concerns regarding the lack of the expected progress toward the annual goals/objectives. • Responsible for data collection on student mastery of IEP goals/ objectives	• May assist in grading objective assignments/tests (i.e. multiple choice, fill in the blank, etc.) • May assist in clerical recording of grades (Note: Some LEAs allow only the classroom teacher to enter grades in a grade book/ online grading system.) • May assist in collection of data on student mastery of material using criteria/ checklist developed by special educator.

Behavior Management

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Design classroom management system for all students in the class/ course. • Implement classroom management system for all students in the class/ course. • Implement individual student's Behavior Improvement Plans (BIP), as required by IEP. • Responsible for data collection on student mastery of behavior related IEP goals/objectives. • Responsible for asking for a review of IEP if student is not making adequate progress on behavior-related IEP goals/objectives and/or if BIP is not effective.	• May assist in design of classroom management system for all students in the class/course. • May assist in implementation of classroom management system for all students in the class/course. • Ensure general educator is aware of any individual student IEP goals/ objectives related to behavior and/ or individual student's BIP. • Provide and/or supervise any specially designed instruction related to behavior. • Responsible for data collection on student mastery of behavior-related IEP goals/objectives. • Responsible for asking for a review of IEP if student is not making adequate progress on behavior-related IEP goals/objectives and/or if BIP is not effective. • Reports on student mastery of behavior-related IEP goals/ objectives periodically, as required by IEP	• Assist teacher(s) in implementation of the classroom management system, including established classroom routines, as directed by teacher(s). • Assist in the implementation of the BIP. • May assist in collection of data on student mastery of behavior goals/ objectives using criteria/ checklist developed by special educator.

Fading of Supports

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Fade supports to individual students, as appropriate. • Assist paraeducators with understanding how/when to fade supports to students, as appropriate. • Document fading of supports per student's IEP.	• Fade supports to individual students, as appropriate. • Assist paraeducators with understanding how/when to fade supports to students, as appropriate. • Document fading of supports per student's IEP.	• Fade supports to individual students, as appropriate. • Document fading of supports per student's IEP, as directed by teacher(s).

Administrative Duties

Paraeducators should spend the majority of the time on instructional duties, not on administrative duties

Classroom Duties

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Responsible for reporting accurate attendance information. • Responsible for ensuring accurate reporting of grades. • Reports on individual student mastery of IEP goals/objectives periodically, as required by IEP.	• May assist with reporting attendance information. • May assist with reporting of grades. • Reports on individual student mastery of IEP goals/objectives periodically, as required by IEP	• May assist in collecting and recording attendance information. • May assist in clerical recording of grades (Note: Some LEAs allow only the classroom teacher to enter grades in a grade book/ online grading system.) • May assist with other clerical duties in classroom (i.e. organization of materials, making copies, etc.) as directed by teacher(s).

Duties Outside of Classroom

General Educator	Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Supervise hallways, play areas, etc. as directed by administration.	• Supervise hallways, play areas, etc. as directed by administration.	• Supervise hallways, play areas, etc. as directed by administration.

Special Education Setting

Sample Instructional Duties

The following tables represent possible instructional and administrative tasks/roles/responsibilities of the special education teacher and the paraeducators(s) within a "traditional" special education setting. This might be a resource setting, a content mastery setting, a self-contained setting, or any other special education "classroom" setting.

IEP Development

Special Educator	Paraeducator

• Provide student-specific information for development of IEP, including:
  » Current abilities (strengths and weaknesses);
  » Modifications and/or accommodations (including use and effectiveness); and
  » Specially designed instruction.
	• Provide any information requested by teacher(s)/ administrator(s) for development of the IEP.

Lesson Planning

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Design lesson plans. • Integrate IEP-required accommodations and/or modifications into lesson plan.	• Assist in preparation of teacher designed materials that are designated as needed in the lesson plan (i.e. prepare centers, etc.)

Lesson Implementation

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Provide direct teaching portion of lesson to entire class. • Direct classroom paraeducator and/or student specific paraeducator in his/her role during the direct teaching portion of the lesson. • Implement and/or oversee implementation of IEP goals/objectives, including specially designed instruction required by IEP. • Design necessary re-teach pieces. • Re-teach as necessary and/ or provide direction to classroom paraeducator on who/what/how to re-teach. • Assist students as needed with individual work.	• Work with small group for re-teaching, as directed by teacher(s). • Implement supports directed by teacher(s) during the direct teaching portion of the lesson. • Assist individual student(s), as directed by teacher(s).

Evaluation of Student Learning

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Responsible for final grade determination for both assignments and overall course/class. • Report on all students' progress/ grades periodically, as directed by local policy. • Design process/forms for collection of data on student progress on IEP goals/objectives. • Responsible for data collection on student mastery of IEP goals/ objectives. • Responsible for asking for a review of IEP if concerns/ questions exist regarding student's IEP and/ or any lack of expected progress toward the annual goals and in the general education curriculum, where appropriate.	• May assist in grading objective assignments/tests (i.e. multiple choice, fill in the blank, etc.) • May assist in clerical recording of grades (Note: Some LEAs allow only the classroom teacher to enter grades in a grade book/online grading system.) • May assist in collection of data on student mastery of material using criteria/checklist developed by special educator.

Behavior Management

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Collaborate with General Education Teacher(s) to design classroom management system for all students in the class/ course. • Implement classroom management system for all students in the class/ course. • Implement individual student's BIP, as required by IEP. • Provide and/or supervise any specially designed instruction related to behavior. • Responsible for data collection and reporting on student mastery of behavior-related IEP goals/objectives. • Special Education teachers in self-contained environments are responsible for managing and the organization of the above.	• Assist teacher(s) in implementation of the classroom management system, including established classroom routines, as directed by teacher(s). • May assist in collection of data on student mastery of behavior goals/ objectives using criteria/checklist/anecdotal notes developed by special educator.

Fading of Supports

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Fade supports to individual students, as appropriate. • Assist paraeducators with understanding how/when to fade supports to students, as appropriate. • Document fading of supports per student's IEP	• Fade supports to individual students, as directed by teacher(s). • Document fading of supports per student's IEP, as directed by teacher(s).

Paraeducators should spend the majority of the time on instructional duties, not on administrative duties

Classroom Duties

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Responsible for reporting accurate attendance information. • Responsible for ensuring accurate reporting of course/assignment grades. • Report on individual student mastery of IEP goals/objectives periodically, as required by IEP	• May assist in collecting and recording attendance information. • May assist in clerical recording of grades. • May assist with other clerical duties in classroom (i.e. organization of materials, making copies, etc.) as directed by teacher(s).

Duties Outside of Classroom

Special Educator	Paraeducator
• Supervise hallways, play areas, etc. as directed by administration.	• Supervise hallways, play areas, etc. as directed by administration.

Additional Considerations for Paraeducators Supporting Students with Disabilities

There are many things to take into consideration when supporting teachers and paraeducators who are instructing students with disabilities. Parker (n.d.) includes the following ideas as systems that support paraeducators:

Data Collection Systems: One specific form of communication that is critical for paraeducators to have systems in place is in the area of data collection. Technology has provided many low-cost and efficient methods for data collection, including online forms or apps that collect and store data in a central location. When possible, time in paraeducator schedules should be provided daily or at least weekly to input academic and functional data for the skills and goals that are being addressed, so that this information can be reviewed by the student's teacher and incorporated into regular reports of student progress.

Scheduling Time with Students Equitably based on Student Needs: Often, paraeducators are assigned to support individual students with the greatest needs throughout the day. Other times, paraeducators are assigned to support key areas of instruction where specific groups of students require additional support. Analyzing and scheduling when individual or groups of students may need more or less support during the school day not only maximizes staff resources but also ensures students are not being supported at times when they are able to be independent or successful without direct one on one or small group support. One strategy to address schedules is to write down the daily schedules of students that require paraeducator support to identify each part of the day when individual students are independent with little support, may require some additional support from the classroom teacher (e.g., starting an activity), may benefit from peer support, or may need adult support throughout an activity. Analyzing schedules may also identify times and locations in a school day when a group of students have similar academic or social and emotional skill needs that a paraeducator could assist in supporting.

Active Listening Training: An important skill for paraeducators is to listen and observe what is happening with and around students in the educational environment. Active listening is a skill that can be learned and utilized to not only understand academic instruction but to support students in crisis, who require more substantial social and emotional supports. One of the most difficult skills for any educator to perform is staying calm in stressful situations or when a student displays explosive behaviors or has not learned skills to communicate concerns effectively or self-reflect and problem

solve. To build strong relationships with students, educators must be able to listen before responding to students who express needs throughout the day and utilize active listening strategies to assist students in problem solving, so they are better able to examine their own behaviors to find their own solutions moving forward.

Training in Family Engagement: Students with IEPs that require direct one-on-one support throughout parts of a school day often require a special understanding and empathy when working with families. Paraeducators must be supported by teachers and administrators in how communication channels and systems of communication are set up with families. Not only should paraeducators have clear "how" and "what" communication channels established, but schools should also establish protocols in communicating with families to clearly outline the roles of the teachers compared to the roles of paraeducators. In addition, they may benefit from additional training to better understand and build empathy for families of students with more significant needs so that they are able to understand and support individual family hopes, dreams, fears, and concerns.

Implementing Supports with Fidelity: When an accommodation, modification, or support is designed for a student and multiple paraeducators are responsible for implementing or providing access to the support, it is critical to ensure that the paraeducators have a system in place for ensuring those supports are provided consistently. Examples of providing consistency may be:
- Clearly defining what and when supports are provided
- Asking paraeducators to take date on the use of supports
- Training staff to use the same language and protocols when responding to student behaviors

There are many tools such as scripts, video modeling, classroom observations, implementation checklists, and written protocols to assist in implementing supports with fidelity. A unique way a school addressed fidelity was to modify "The Incredible Five Point Scale" that is often used to support understanding of student behaviors. The Five Point Scale was modified to outline specific student behaviors and corresponding staff response to help staff understand how to respond to specific students in a given situation (para. 25-29).

COMMUNICATION

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In addition to clearly defining and distinguishing the roles and responsibilities for teachers and paraeducators, it is imperative that everyone on the teaching team is clear about what is communicated to whom regarding how the teaching team will work together. Likewise, it is helpful to define specific responsibilities related to communication. The certified teacher should always be the primary communicator to parents regarding a student's academic and behavioral progress. Additionally, anytime student-specific information is communicated, whether verbally or in writing, confidentiality must be maintained.

> **THE CERTIFIED TEACHER SHOULD ALWAYS BE THE PRIMARY COMMUNICATOR TO THE PARENT REGARDING A STUDENT'S ACADEMIC AND BEHAVIORAL PROGRESS.**

It is imperative that the paraeducator have both general information about his/her duties and specific information about the student(s) with whom he/she will be working. If he/she is to work with any portion of the child's IEP, not only must he/she be directly supervised by a certified special educator, he/she must also have or have access to the portion of the IEP he/she is responsible for following. While the ultimate responsibility for implementation of the IEP will rest with the certified educator, the paraeducator should be included and have access to student- specific information if he/she is responsible for following it.

The teacher will need to explain what the IEP means and what the paraeducator's role is in assisting with its implementation.

All adults in the classroom must be "on the same page" in order for students to receive a consistent message. Expectations must not vary from person to person. This needs to be clear in communication to both the students and to parents. Students are able to easily tell when there is a lack of communication between two (or more) adults in the classroom. Recognizing the limited time that exists within the school day for structured communication, LEAs or school buildings may consider alternate strategies for allowing for communication between the teacher(s) and paraeducators), especially when a new student is introduced, IEPs are updated, and/or roles/responsibilities change for any other reason.

As with all communication, whether verbal or written, confidentiality of student information must always be maintained.

Teacher Communication to Paraeducator

(In all educational settings)

Roles	Grades/Progress
• Clearly define roles and responsibilities of paraeducator (see pages 6-20). The local education agency determines roles and responsibilities of paraeducators as long as the assigned duties fall within scope of their certification level. • The paraeducator needs to know when and how his/her responsibilities will be communicated to him/her and by whom.	• Teachers have ultimate responsibility for communicating progress and/or concerns. • Paraeducators should discuss the student's grades, relationships to other students, and/or discipline with the appropriate teacher(s). • Paraeducators should direct all questions to the general/special education teacher(s). • The teacher will be the one to share specific results of student's academic/behavioral progress, where the paraeducators may impart more general information and refer parents to the teacher for specifics. • Information about the student's performance should be objective, not personal opinions.

Communication	Classroom Management
• Describe and clarify all areas/implications of confidentiality. (Paraeducator may not discuss other students with parents.) • The teacher will be the primary communicator with the parent regarding student progress, behavior, etc. • Explain to the paraeducator how to redirect a parent to contact the teacher – by e-mail, phone, parent meeting, etc.	• Clarify how the paraeducator will assist with general classroom management as determined by the classroom teacher. • Describe and explain the paraeducator's role with the expectations of the students. Both the paraeducator and teacher share the same expectations of students, as well as the same consequences, whether positive or negative.

Rapport	Academic Assistance
• Describe how the paraeducator is there as a support in the classroom but should receive the same respect as the teacher. • Describe how the paraeducator is an important part of the learning community and is here to help with student success. • Identify where materials or supplies are located that he/she may need for instructional purposes.	• Explain that the paraeducator is in the classroom to assist the student's completion of work independently. • Explain that the paraeducator is there primarily to support the student receiving special education services. However, he/she may assist general education students (i.e. inclusive classrooms where both special education and general education students are present).

IEPs	Training
• Explain the legal obligations of the IEP as they relate to the paraeducator's role with the student, including confidentiality, necessary accommodations and modifications, time (frequency/duration/location of IEP-required services), data collection, and documentation requirements.	• Describe what training is available (both in district/on campus and externally) and how to request training to the paraeducator.

Planning
• Describe how the paraeducator will be included in the planning process.

Teacher Communication to Student about Paraeducator

(In all educational settings)

Roles	IEPs
• Clearly define the role of the paraeducator to the students.	• Explain age-appropriate information regarding his/her IEP and describe the necessary supports the paraeducator will provide as outlined in his/her IEP. • The student should provide feedback as to the efficacy of current supports and the recommendation of the addition or elimination of supports provided by the paraeducator.

Communication	Classroom Management
• Explain that paraeducators cannot discuss other students. • Describe to student how the teacher and paraeducator will work together to communicate with their parents.	• Explain that the paraeducator will assist with general classroom management. • Describe how the paraeducator's role regarding expectations and consequences will mirror those of the classroom teacher.

Rapport	Academic Assistance
• Explain that the paraeducator is there as a support and needs to be respected as a teacher. • Explain that the paraeducator is an important part of the learning community and describe how he/she is here to help the student be successful.	• Explain that the paraeducator is there to assist with work completion, but the student should strive to do so as independently as possible.

Training
• Describe the training the paraeducator may receive in order to assist the student in the classroom.

Teacher Communication to Parents about Paraeducator

(In all educational settings)

Roles	IEPs
• Clearly define the role of the paraeducator to the parents.	• Explain the legal obligations of the IEP and all the components of the IEP and subsequent documentation.

Communication	Classroom Management
• Explain that paraeducators cannot discuss any student's progress, behavior, etc. • The teacher must explain to the parent that all communication must come from the teacher. If the parent has questions, those are directed to the teacher. • Explain to the parent how to contact the teacher by e-mail, phone call, or parent meeting.	• Explain that the paraeducator will be in classroom (and other areas per the student's IEP) to assist students and, if appropriate, can implement classroom management strategies, etc. • Explain the paraeducator's role regarding student expectations and consequences will mirror those of the classroom teacher.

Rapport	Academic Assistance
• Explain that the paraeducator is there to support students in the classroom and should be respected. • Explain that the paraeducator is an important part of the learning community and describe how he/she is here to help with student success	• Clarify that the paraeducator is there primarily to support the student receiving special education services. In addition, if his/her role permits, the paraeducator may assist all students in the classroom.

Training
• Clarify to parents that the paraeducators may receive training to assist the students in the classroom.

Active Listening

As in any collaborative relationship, on-going communication between the educator and the paraeducator is essential to effective team functioning. Open communication, providing fair leadership, and sensitive feedback within the guidelines of a coaching model builds trust in teams. Successful communication results in mutual understanding of what was sent and what was heard. As a supervisor, the educator needs to use active listening skills to facilitate open communication among team members. Active listening involves eye contact, paraphrasing, clarifying, and summarizing.

Active listening involves the listener attending to the speaker in a way that will allow direct and clear communication. The result of active listening is an accurate understanding of what is being said. The supervisor needs to model active listening by:

- Making direct eye contact with the speaker. To be comfortable, one may have some moments where eye contact is broken by blinking or looking at an object and then returning attention to the speaker.
- Attending to the message without drifting to personal thoughts. This includes not interrupting when the paraeducator is speaking.
- Asking clarifying questions to be sure that the message is understood. Examples of clarifying questions are, "What did you mean when you said...?", "Is this an example of what you observed?", and "Is this what you mean to do...?"
- Paraphrasing or summarizing the message to be sure everyone is in agreement. When paraphrasing, it is important to remember that both the emotion and the words need to be matched to the speaker's message. If the emotional content is not conveyed correctly, the speaker will feel that he or she has not been heard well enough to understand the full impact of what was being said.

Developing Communication Channels

Teams should set aside at least a few minutes at the beginning and end of each day to clarify plans, ask and answer questions, and address any immediate concerns that arise. However, the fast pace of schedules within any program often means that there is limited time to meet and communicate on a daily basis. That is why a variety of communication methods need to be developed that allow the teacher or related service professional to keep up with the instructional tasks, and the progress the paraeducator is making toward reaching the program goals. Written lesson plans should be provided for the paraeducator as part of the educator's responsibilities. Information on the implementation of the plans may be written or whenever possible communicated face-to face, however, when this is not possible other techniques will be useful. Sample communication channels include:

- Communication logs in which the paraeducator and the teacher write notes about the day's activities and progress can be kept in a three-ring binder in a convenient place.
- Progress and data sheets that are routinely used will provide information for the teacher and the paraeducator on the effectiveness of the instruction or management plan.
- Communication notes that are jotted down and dated on post-it paper can be organized in a spiral notebook and reviewed for a more thorough analysis.

Delegating Tasks

As part of the ongoing communication process, teachers need to be skilled at delegating appropriate tasks to other members of the team. Delegating tasks require the teacher to be willing to surrender a certain degree of control over how a task may be completed. The paraeducator needs to know exactly how much authority she or he has in carrying out assigned tasks and what to do when unexpected circumstances arise. Again, the importance of keeping the lines of communication open among team members cannot be overemphasized. The longer a problem is allowed to go unresolved, the more complicated it becomes and the more difficult it is to solve. Daily communication, as well as regular

team meetings, can help to maintain a healthy level of communication and collaboration.

Delegating tasks to a paraeducator is often hard for teachers to manage. Whether it is because they feel a loss of control, believe that the paraeducator is not skilled enough, or feel that they are totally responsible for the child's program, teachers are not always prepared to subdivide their responsibilities. Trust in the other team member's ability to do the task is absolutely necessary. Task analysis of the program needs and of the steps for carrying out planned instruction will allow the teacher to feel more comfortable about delegating responsibilities.

To successfully delegate tasks, a teacher must accept the differentiation between the teacher's roles and paraeducator's roles. Next, the teacher should analyze what needs to be done to accomplish the goals that have been established. Consider whether the task can be achieved reasonably well by a student peer, an adult volunteer, or the general educator. If the answer is yes, those individuals should be asked to complete the tasks. If the answer is no, analyze the level of professional skill that is needed to perform the task and determine if the paraeducator can accomplish the job, or if the teacher needs to perform the task.

NEBRASKA'S JOURNEY TO INCLUSION

All students deserve a high-quality education that prepares them for future success. To realize this vision, all students with disabilities must have equitable access to the full rigor of grade-level instruction. However, districts, schools, classrooms, and families often encounter significant challenges in enacting the systems, structures, support and development needed to ensure equitable access for all learners. With best intentions, these groups often unintentionally exacerbate persistent inequities. Inclusive education provides a model for providing high-quality equitable educational programming that improves access and opportunities for all learners. You can read more about what inclusive education is, why it's important, and how to implement an inclusive education. Further information around funding, scheduling, staffing and much more can be found within the document from the Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education titled, Equity for all Learners: Inclusion at Every Level.

Check out the Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education's Journey to Inclusion tab here for even more information about inclusive education and the efforts being made across the state of Nebraska.

IDEA, RULE 51, AND LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT

About IDEA (2022) defines IDEA as:

> The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is a law that makes available a free appropriate public education to eligible children with disabilities throughout the nation and ensures special education and related services to those children." (para. 1).

All children from birth through age 21 (including students who have been suspended, expelled, and/ or residing in a detention facility, jail, or prison) are entitled to FAPE (free appropriate public education). FAPE encompasses special education and related services to meet individual students' needs. Nebraska Department of Education Rule 51 section 004 and Nebraska Department of Education Rule 52 section 004 explains the responsibilities and protocols in regards to providing free appropriate public Education further.

The education of students with special needs is more effective with maintaining high expectations, inclusivity with their peers, and fair access to their grade level curriculum, according to comprehensive and lengthy research provided by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004).

Rule 51 (Regulations and Standards for Special Education Programs) explains Least Restrictive Environment (LRE): Nebraska Department of Education Rule 51 see page 44 for least restrictive environment. Another helpful resource is the Least Restrictive Environment Guidance Document from the Nebraska Department of Education, Office of Special Education, found here: https://www.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Least-Restrictive-Environment-LRE-Guidance-Document-Aug-2018.pdf.

About IDEA (2022) notes that Congress states in the law:

> Disability is a natural part of the human experience and in no way diminishes the right of individuals to participate in or contribute to society. Improving educational results for children with disabilities is an essential element of our national policy of ensuring equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living, and economic self-sufficiency for individuals with disabilities. (para. 6).

CONFIDENTIALITY

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All LEA staff should complete confidentiality training and understand laws regarding how to protect confidential student information. It is important that paraeducators have an understanding that communication norms exist in order to ensure that confidentiality of student information is protected and that any communication outside of the LEA-established norms could violate student confidentiality laws.

The following are tips on confidentiality, from Giangreco and Doyle (2004, p. 192):
- Tip 1. Never discuss a student's educational plans in public places (e.g., faculty room, playground, hallway, community park, grocery store)
- Tip 2. When meeting to discuss a student's educational plan, only discuss information that is directly relevant to the issues at hand.
- Tip 3. If someone approaches you and begins to breech the confidentiality of a student, provide a kind but clear response. For example, "I'm not on that student's educational team, so I don't think it is appropriate for me to be involved in discussing his educational program."
- Tip 4. When you or the paraeducator are no longer on the student's team, you must continue to maintain confidentiality about any information that you have learned about the student and/or family.
- Tip 5. When in doubt, put yourself in the shoes of the parent or student and ask yourself: "Would it be okay for people to be talking about me or my family in this manner, in this same location, and for the same purpose?"

*Please see Figure 2.1 under the subheading Orienting the Paraeducator within the Essential Information for Supervising Paraeducators section of this guidance document for further information about Paraeducator's ethics.

MANDATORY REPORTING

Nebraska State Statute states, "When any physician, any medical institution, any nurse, any school employee, any social worker, the Inspector General appointed under section 43-4317, or any other person has reasonable cause to believe that a child has been subjected to child abuse or neglect or observes such child being subjected to conditions or circumstances which reasonably would result in child abuse or neglect, he or she shall report such incident or cause a report of child abuse or neglect to be made to the proper law enforcement agency or to the department on the toll-free number..." (NE Code § 28-117, 2019).

Everyone has a responsibility to report child abuse or neglect.
1-800-652-1999 is the Child Abuse and Neglect Hotline that should be called if it is suspected that a child under the age of 18 is being abused or neglected. Contact information given to the hotline is confidential. You may receive follow-up from the Child and Family Services Specialist during an investigation, but you may request to remain anonymous.

If you have the suspicion that a child is in immediate danger please call 911.

Visit the Department of Health and Human Services website for further information regarding child abuse and neglect.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Nebraska State Statute states, "When any physician, any medical institution, any nurse, any school While teachers may not have the authority to send a paraeducator to professional development, if a teacher has the capacity, he/she could make suggestions or help the paraeducator find appropriate training opportunities so that the paraeducator can develop skills specific to the responsibilities he/she is responsible for implementing. Additionally, the certified educator is responsible for ensuring the paraeducator has working knowledge of the student(s) with whom he/she is assigned to work. Specifically, the teacher must ensure that the paraeducator knows what he/she is responsible for implementing with the assigned student(s) and what documentation must be kept of this implementation. When specific special education duties are assigned, those portions must be supervised by a certified special educator.

Administrator

Provide professional development to supervising teachers on how to effectively supervise paraeducator, including:
- Regularly scheduled planning time and communication with paraeducator;
- Managing paraeducators' schedules;
- Delegating tasks and responsibilities;
- Orientation of a new paraeducator;
- Informing the paraeducator of professional development opportunities;
- Modeling academic and functional activities, instructional supports, skill sets, and fading supports;
- Evaluating paraeducators' job performance;
- Managing the work environment;
- Maintaining student confidentiality; and
- Providing constructive and corrective feedback based on objective rather than subjective evidence of instructional and non-instructional activities.
- Schedule continuous professional development opportunities that align to the paraeducators' job descriptions and tasks they will perform in the educational setting, (i.e., webinars, trainings, etc.)
- Ensure all staff receive training in maintaining confidentiality.

General and Special Educators

- Provide ongoing on-the-job training, such as:
- Orient a new paraeducator to a new LEA, educational setting, or situation such as one-on-one assistance;
- Refreshers/continuous professional development on providing supports in academic and functional settings, confidentiality, skill sets, and fading supports; and
- Implement students' IEP goals and, where appropriate, objectives/benchmarks.
- Train, coach, and model academic and functional activities, instructional supports, skill sets, and fading supports.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Paraeducator

- Request professional development, coaching, or modeling of academic and functional activities, instructional supports, skill sets, and fading supports.
- Maintain confidentiality.

Professional Development Opportunities

- Project PARA offers a web-based self-study program for paraeducators and a web-based training for supervising paraeducators. https://para.unl.edu/index.lasso
- National Resource Center for Paraeducators (NRCP) has many resources, including trainings found here: https://nrcpara.org/

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR ALL SUMMARY

The certified teacher is always responsible for effective, meaningful instruction for all students in his/her class, whether or not they are students with disabilities and regardless of the paraeducator supports provided for them. It is the teacher's responsibility to remain actively involved with the paraeducator; in delegating/assigning tasks to him/her, monitoring his/ her implementation of those tasks, and providing timely feedback on their implementation of those tasks. It is critical that the certified teacher ensures that the paraeducator's roles and responsibilities, including those related to communication, are clearly delineated and that the paraeducator has an understanding of how to implement the tasks assigned to him/her. McGrath and Johns offer an acronym for helping teachers remember their responsibilities when it comes to paraeducators (2010, p. 6):

PREPARE THE PARAEDUCATOR FROM THE BEGINNING ON HIS OR HER ROLE

ASSERT YOUR EXPECTATIONS IN A HELPFUL MANNER

REVIEW FREQUENTLY HOW THINGS ARE GOING

AGREE TO WORK OUT ANY PROBLEMS AND SUPPORT EACH OTHER

PLAN CAREFULLY THE ACTIVITIES YOU WISH THE PARAEDUCATOR TO CONDUCT

REINFORCE THE PARAEDUCATOR FOR HIS OR HER CONTRIBUTIONS AND SUCCESSES

OBSERVE THE PARAEDUCATOR FREQUENTLY TO ENSURE ALL IS GOING WELL AND THAT YOUR PLANS ARE BEING IMPLEMENTED AND GIVE CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK BASED ON YOUR OBSERVATION

Giangreco and Doyle state, "It is the responsibility of the teacher and special educator to assess students' educational needs and progress; make decisions about curriculum; develop lesson plans that reflect individually determined adaptations, instructional methods, and data collection systems; and to be the primary liaison with the family. These are responsibilities that many paraeducators are not trained in or qualified to undertake. In cases where they are qualified (e.g., a certified teacher hired in a paraeducator role), they are not compensated to do teacher-level work and as a paraeducator are not accountable for the educational program in the same way as you are as an educator" (2004, p. 195).

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR PARAEDUCATORS

SPECIAL EDUCATION ELIGIBILITY CATEGORIES IN NEBRASKA

The certified teacher is always responsible for effective, meaningful instruction for all students in his/her class, whether or not they are students with disabilities and regardless of the paraeducator supports provided for them. It is the teacher's responsibility to remain actively involved with the paraeducator; in delegating/assigning tasks to him/her, monitoring his/ her implementation of those tasks, and providing timely feedback on their implementation of those tasks. It is critical that the certified teacher ensures that the paraeducator's roles and responsibilities, including those related to communication, are clearly delineated and that the paraeducator has an understanding of how to implement the tasks assigned to him/her. McGrath and Johns offer an acronym for helping teachers remember their responsibilities when it comes to paraeducators (2010, p. 6):

The following information has been taken directly from the NDE's Special Education website. In-depth information about each category can be found on the Nebraska Department of Education's website by following this link: https://www.education.ne.gov/sped/eligibility-guidelines/

1. **Autism – also known as Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**
   - Autism is a behaviorally defined neurodevelopmental disability. Characteristics include qualitative impairments of social reciprocity, nonverbal and verbal communication and flexibility in thoughts and actions.
   - The word "spectrum" in "autism spectrum disorder" determines that autism does not look the same for every individual. Autism is a continuum, meaning certain characteristics of the diagnosis can range from mild to severe. Learning, responding, and thinking differences can result in confusion, frustration, and anxiety expressed in withdrawal, repetitive behaviors, and, sometimes, in aggression or self-injury. Autism can co-occur with other disabilities.
   - Autism Spectrum Disorder is a term used by Psychologists, Psychiatrists, and Physicians when giving a clinical or medical diagnosis The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th Edition (DSM5) determines how a child may qualify for a diagnosis.
   - A medical diagnosis is not required to receive an educational identification, but medical records should be considered by the MDT.
   - Procedures to determine an adverse effect on developmental/educational performance typically include evaluation/questions pertaining to impairments in social competence, lack of communicative competence, and restricted, repetitive patterns of behavior, interests, or activities
   - See "Section 2: Educational Identification Guidelines" in the Special Education Autism Eligibility Guidelines document (linked above) for more information about the characteristics of autism.

2. **Deaf-Blindness**
   - A child who is both deaf /hard of hearing and blind/visually impaired should meet the criteria for both impairments, the combination of which causes: severe communication needs; and other developmental and educational needs. The severity of these needs is such that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
   - An analysis and documentation must show that there is an adverse effect on the child's educational performance in at least one category: effective communication, expressive or receptive language development, speech reception or production, cognitive ability, academic or vocational performance, social or emotional competence, and/or adaptive behavior skills, or result in a social/behavioral disability

3. **Deaf or Hard of Hearing**
   - To qualify for special education as deaf or hard of hearing, a child must have an impairment in hearing which is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing with or without amplification, or is permanent or fluctuating, and adversely affects the child's development or educational performance.
   - Any child with a hearing loss, regardless of type, degree, configuration, etiology, or permanency of the loss may be eligible for special education services.
   - An analysis and documentation of the adverse effect the impairment has or can be expected to have on the child's educational performance should include at least one of the following:

effective communication, expressive or receptive language development, speech reception or production, academic or vocational performance, cognitive ability, social or emotional competence, adaptive behavior skills, or result in a social/behavioral disability.
- Questions around effective signed, spoken, or written communication are also a part of the assessment process.

4. **Developmental Delay**
   - To qualify in this category, a child has a significant delay as measured by appropriate diagnostic instruments in one or more of the following areas: cognitive development, physical development, communication development, social or emotional development, adaptive behavior or skills development, or a diagnosed physical or mental condition
   - Developmental delay can only be used through age of eight years before the IEP/MDT team must determine whether the child qualifies under another category or is no longer considered a child with a disability.

5. **Emotional Disturbance**
   - To qualify in this category, a child must have a condition of one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a degree that adversely effects the child's educational performance: an inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, a general pervasive mood or unhappiness or depression , a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems
   - A child with an emotional disturbance exhibits responses which are not age appropriate to stressful events in the environment, and/or demonstrates patterns of situational inappropriate behavior which deviates from the behavior of his/her/their same age or peer group.
   - When evaluating a child who may have an emotional disturbance, specific questions are discussed with the IEP and MDT teams to guide decision-making. The questions cover topics pertaining to the child's inability to learn which cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors, inability to build or maintain interpersonal relationships, inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances, general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression, a tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems, and other relevant conditions pertaining to the child's life.

6. **Intellectual Disability**
   - Intellectual disability is a disability characterized by significant limitations both in intellectual functioning (reasoning, learning, problem solving) and in adaptive behavior, which covers a range of everyday social and practical skills. This disability originates before the age of 18.
   - Often people will hear the terms "developmental disability" and "intellectual disability" intermix with one another. Developmental disability typically refers to physical issues, such as cerebral palsy or epilepsy. Intellectual disability broadly covers the thought processes of a disability. A person can have a physical and intellectual disability.
   - For a child to be eligible in this category, the child must demonstrate significantly subaverage general intellectual functioning existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period that adversely affects a child's educational and/or developmental performance.
   - A child cannot have a higher IQ than 70 to qualify for an intellectual disability, but an IQ score alone is not sufficient to qualify a child for an intellectual disability. Other factors must still be when determining if a child can be verified with an intellectual disability.

7. **Multiple Disabilities**
   - Having multiple disabilities is defined as the child having concomitant impairments (such as intellectual disability-visual impairment, intellectual disability-orthopedic impairment).
   - To qualify a child in special education as having multiple disabilities, one of those disabilities must be an intellectual disability. The child must meet both guidelines for intellectual disability and the other category for which he/she/they are being assessed.
   - Guidelines in starting the eligibility process would include assessing the child's adaptive behavior across settings (school, home, community), significantly below average functioning in academic

achievement and intelligence test, and other areas of functioning that affect behavioral characteristics.

8. **Orthopedic Impairment**
   - This category includes impairments caused by a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease (poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis), and impairments from other causes (cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).
   - For a child to be eligible for an orthopedic impairment, a signed written report from a physician must be provided. The report should include the severity of the child's motor impairment and any medical implications. This helps determine how the child's educational performance is affected.

9. **Other Health Impairment**
   - To qualify for special education services in this category, the child must have: limited strength, vitality or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that is due to chronic or acute health problems which adversely affects the child's educational (developmental performance when the child is 5 years or younger) performance.
   - Conditions that typically fall under other health impairment include asthma, attention deficit disorder (ADD), attention hyperactive deficit disorder (ADHD), diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, sickle cell anemia, and Tourette syndrome.
   - In order to determine if a child's health condition has an adverse effect on his/her/their educational performance, questions around the child's vocabulary, functional language, academic language, speech reception/production, academic performance, social/emotional competence, motor development adaptive skills, and attention and focus skills are all considered when deciding if the child qualifies for special education.

10. **Specific Learning Disability**
    - There are six criteria the special education team must evaluate to determine whether a child qualifies for special education with a specific learning disability.
    - Criterion one evaluates the child's grade-level performance standards. To be considered eligible for an SLD verification, the child must show a deficit in learning in at least one of the following categories: oral expression, listening comprehension, written expression, basic reading skills, reading fluency skills, reading comprehension, mathematics calculation, mathematics problem solving.
    - Criterion two refers to the lack of progress in response to scientific, research-based interventions. If a student receives several interventions and is unable to make sufficient progress in general education curriculum, then the student's educational team may consider testing the student for a learning disability after having a conversation with parents, guardians, and necessary team members.
    - Criterion three states that the MDT determines that its finding under 92 NAC 51 is not primarily the result of – a visual, hearing, or motor disability, intellectual disability, emotional disturbance, cultural factors, environmental or economic disadvantage, or limited English proficiency. This means these factors must be ruled out in order to determine that the child's lack of academic achievement is not also the result of other underlying factors.
    - Criterion four refers to making sure that underachievement is not the result of poor instruction in reading, writing, and math. It is important to support the general education teacher to make sure he/she/they are delivering instruction using evidence-based practices and with fidelity. It is important to review this when deciding whether a child may qualify with a learning disability.
    - Criterions 5 and 6 include observation of the student in the classroom and documentation of why the child may have a learning disability.

11. **Speech-Language Impairment**
    - For a student to qualify for services in this category, the child must have: a communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment, or voice impairment. The impairment must adversely affect the child's educational or developmental performance.
    - An evaluation consists of assessments in each of the following areas: language, articulation, voice, and/or fluency.

12. **Traumatic Brain Injury**
    - A student must have an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that adversely affect the student's educational or developmental performance.
    - This category includes closed or open head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas; cognition, language, memory, attention, reasoning, abstract thinking, judgment, problem solving, sensory, perceptual, or motor abilities, psychological behavior, physical functions, information processing, and speech.
    - Factors that are considered and evaluated during the process include the type of brain injury that occurred and its severity, the cause of the TBI, nature/status of the injury, medical history (including medications), current age, current educational placement, current levels of performance (language, communication, academic, social-emotional), and vocational/postsecondary transition needs.
13. **Visual Impairment**
    - To qualify for special education services with a visual impairment, a student must have an impairment in vision, that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. This includes children who have partial sight or blindness.
    - Many factors should be considered in determining if a visual impairment is causing, or can be expected to produce, significant delays in the child's academic achievement. These factors typically include; current medical information, type and degree of the visual impairment, etiology of the visual impairment, age of onset, age of identification, current medications, current age, history of interventions and response, relevant family/medical history, and current educational placement

CHARACTERISTICS OF LEARNERS
When a student is diagnosed or verified with a disability, parents, educators, and other professionals working with that student can accommodate and support the student with an understanding of how that disability affects learning. The following section describes terminology, characteristics, instructional strategies, and accommodations for different types of disabilities.

Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder/Attention Deficit Disorder
Although ADHD/ADD is not a special education verification itself, it is the most common identification for students who qualify for services with OHI. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2022) from 2016-2019:
- 265,000 (2%) children ages 3-5 were diagnosed with ADHD,
- 2.4 million (10%) children ages 6-11 were diagnosed with ADHD, and
- 3.3 million (13%) children ages 12-17 were diagnosed with ADHD
- According to a 2016 national parent survey, 6 in 10 children with ADHD had at least one other mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder.(para 2).

What is ADHD/ADD?
According to Johns Hopkins University, ADHD, or attention deficit hyperactive disorder, is a neurological condition that impacts a person's ability to focus for effective amounts of time. This impedes both learning and behavior. Symptoms of ADHD/ADD include "difficulty regulating attention, lack of impulse control, and the executive functions, which control cognitive tasks, motor activity, and social interactions." Students diagnosed with ADHD typically qualify for special education services under Other Health Impairment.

Possible Characteristics:
- Inability to focus/stay on task
- Is often distracted
- Reading comprehension is difficult
- Lack of listening and/or keeping up with class lectures/lessons
- Hard time focusing or following directions
- Blurting out

Instructional Strategies
- Supplying appropriate accommodations for students with ADHD/ADD can alleviate a lot of their struggles/frustrations in the classroom. Some common accommodations may include:
    » Copy of lecture notes/guided notes
    » Extended time on assignments, quizzes, or exams
    » Alternate room for testing in small group with minimal distractions
    » Use of a blank card or paper to assist reading
    » Clear oral instructions
    » Instructions or demonstrations presented in multiple ways (Johns Hopkins University, 2021)

Blindness/Low Vision
They also state there are three categories that describe students with vision disabilities:
1. "Totally blind" students learn via Braille or other nonvisual media.
2. "Legally blind" means that a student has less than 20/200 vision.
3. "Low Vision" describes a student who has severe loss in distance and near vision. These students use a combination of vision and other senses to learn that may require adaptations in lighting or print size.

Instructional Strategies
- Allow the student to decide his/her/their ideal seating location in the classroom and other locations in the school.
- Be specific when giving directions, such as "The chair is to your left" or using directions like "left," "right," or "walk straight forward."
- Take time to help the student familiarize the layout of classrooms and show them the exits and locating emergency equipment in a laboratory.
- Ask the student when they will need the most assistance versus little to no assistance on certain tasks.

Accommodations
- Reading materials on an overhead, blackboard, or handout aloud to the student
- Use of black ink on white paper
- Warning of any changes to the physical layout of the classroom
- Use of closed captioning on videos that are played in class
- Allow the student to sit in the front of the class

Brain Injury
Brain injuries can occur in multiple ways. According to Johns Hopkins University, brain injuries are one of the fastest-growing disabilities, especially within the age range of 15-28 years. Causes of brain injury mostly occur from accidents, but other causes tend to be from insufficient oxygen, stroke, poisoning, or infection.

Possible Characteristics:
Not all brain injuries have the same effect on individuals. The brain is a very complex organ, therefore a person's injury is dependent on the location of where the brain has been damaged. Some possible, or most common, characteristics are as follows:
- Difficulty organizing thoughts and remembering information
- Needing extra processing time
- Communication, speech, and balance/coordination can be difficult
- Hard time generalizing skills

Instructional Strategies
- Brain injuries can affect a person physically, cognitively, and/or behaviorally. It is important to recognize the limitations and challenges in order to provide the best instructional strategies.
- A student's memory may be affected in the short term or permanently. Acknowledging this, a student's progress in academic or personal achievements may take more time.
- Using a multi-sensory approach to instruction could help the student master skills or better

understand the lesson at hand
- Know the student's emergency evacuation plan as well as any medical information

Accommodations
Accommodations will be based on the Indvidual's' needs and the impact of the injury. The following is not an exhaustive list, but rather common accommodations that can be implemented into the school day.
- Use of handouts, visuals, and tactile materials
- Extended time for assignments, exams, and quizzes
- Quiet space during work time
- Extra processing time to answer questions aloud in class
- Assistive technology for spell check, text-to-speech (or speech-to-text), and audio reading
- Instructions provided in multiple ways (textual, oral, broken into steps, video modeling)
- Recorded lectures
- Copy of lecture notes or guided notes

Deaf/Hard of Hearing
Accommodating students who are deaf or hard of hearing will be unique to the individual based on the degree of hearing loss, when the hearing loss began, and the type of communication they use (sign language, assistive technology devices, have hearing aids, etc.).

Characteristics
- May be able to read lips well, but is not the best form of communication
- May have difficulty with speech, reading and writing skills
- The deaf/hard of hearing community often has a set of their own beliefs and values

Instructional Strategies
- ASL is its own language with different syntax and grammatical structures
- When talking with the student, be sure you have their full attention, and they are looking at you before you begin communicating with them. When the student has an interpreter, it is important to look at the student while speaking to them and not the interpreter.
- Give extra processing time for answers, questions, and responses

Accommodations
- Allow the student to have a choice of where they sit during class. This space should be big enough for the interpreter to be comfortable as well as clear access to the teacher and board.
- Use of visual aids
- Closed captions on videos played in class
- Repeating questions and comments from peers and teachers
- Provide the student with his/her/their own visual aid for emergency building exits/plans
- Check in with the student frequently

Learning Disabilities
A learning disability originates in the neurological pathways in the brain. Types of learning disabilities can include difficulty in listening, speaking, reading, mathematics, reasoning, and/or writing skills. The inability to process information correctly is what can cause a discrepancy between intellectual potential and academic achievement. In Nebraska, a child verified in special education with SLD may have a learning deficit in one or more areas.

Possible Characteristics:
- Need more time processing questions, equations, and multi-step problems
- Difficulty listening to lectures which can result in poor note-taking
- Help organizing tasks and academic priorities and time management skills
- May have short-term memory
- Struggles in problem-solving real-world situations

Instructional Strategies
Classroom teachers and support staff who use a multi-sensory approach in their classroom will help increase a student's capacity to succeed in the classroom. Using learning tools such as math manipulatives, color coding, visuals, hands-on learning, and any other strategies that are helpful to the student will create a positive learning environment for all students. Ensuring the importance of implementing accommodations is also needed in order for the child to see progress.

Accommodations
- Guided notes or copy of lecture notes/slides
- Taking assessments or quizzes in a quiet space
- Giving extra time for homework and assessments
- Reading directions out loud and checking for understanding
- Visual aids and graphic organizers
- Use of manipulatives
- Use of assistive technology for spell check or voice output
- Preferential seating next to the teacher or whiteboard (Johns Hopkins University, 2021)

Orthopedic Disabilities
This category with information from Johns Hopkins University (2021), includes impairments from a congenital anomaly, impairments caused by disease, and impairments from other causes (cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).

Possible Characteristics
Because many different types of conditions fall under this category, characteristics are highly individual and pose different strengths and needs for each student.

Instructional Strategies
- If a student uses a wheelchair, be sure to communicate with them at eye level by sitting in a chair or kneeling next to them.
- Create an accessible classroom for students in chairs to navigate safely and as independently as possible.
- When conversing with a student who has a communication impairment, repeat what you understand and be open and polite about what you don't understand. It is OK to ask them to repeat what they said.
- For students that use a communication device, begin to familiarize yourself with the layout of the device, how it operates, as well as asking the speech-language pathologist for guidance or training.
- Ask before giving assistance

Accommodations
- Adaptive seating in classrooms
- Seat student closer to exits and give extra space
- Peer aide or para support
- Assistive technology for typing, speech-to-text, spell check, and audible reading
- Flexibility on homework and test deadlines
- Extra processing time for answering questions
- Provide transportation support for field trips
- Adjustable height desk options

Emotional Disturbance
They also state that emotional, or psychiatric, disabilities are categorized under a wide range of behavioral or psychological problems. A verification of ED impedes the way a student processes emotions, decisions, and challenges which often has a major educational impact. Depression, anxiety, trauma, and mood swings can be common characteristics in a student with ED.

Instructional Strategies
- Students with ED may not be fully comfortable talking about his/her disability. However, some students may be extremely comfortable talking about it. It is important to allow the student to control what they want to share with you and to respect their decision.
- When/if a student becomes escalated, it is best to stay calm, use positive statements, give choices, and offer space in an alternate room that is safe for the student for them to calm down.
- Fatigue, lack of memory, or drowsiness may be a side-effect of a medication
- Breaking down tasks into smaller steps can ease frustration or anxiety
- Check in with the student before class begins to get an idea of how they're feeling for the day. Ask if they need anything that would be helpful to them for the day.

Accommodations
- Chunking assignments into smaller steps
- Guided notes
- Graphic organizers, graph paper
- Quiet testing area
- Allow student to choose where to sit in class
- Extensions on homework or other assignments
- Breaks in an alternate, quiet room

Speech and Language Disability
They have also found that Speech and language disabilities can form from several conditions, events, or learning disabilities. Difficulties may fall within articulation, voice strength, or complete absence of voice. Students with speech or language disabilities may have a hard time articulating words or sounds and may also struggle with stuttering.

Instructional Strategies
- Always allow the student to decline speaking in class (during whole group reading, answering questions during a lecture, presenting) and have them come up with a signal to you when they are comfortable to participate orally.
- It is OK to ask the student to repeat something they said.
- Give extra processing time for them to think about the question or statement so that they can think about what they want to say back.
- Allow presentations to be in a small group or only in front of the teacher
- If a student chooses to present to an entire class, give them extra time to practice
- Do not ask them to memorize speeches or other content that is presented

Accommodations
- One-to-one presentations
- Alternate format for oral presentations

Just as every student's disability, strengths, and needs are unique to them, it is critical to acknowledge that some accommodations are better suited for some students and not others. It is pertinent to know a student's accommodations to ensure that they are receiving them in all necessary capacities during the school year (Johns Hopkins University, 2021).

PARAEDUCATOR TOOLKIT
According to Parker (n.d.), "Research has shown that some students that receive direct one-on-one support from a paraeducator have fewer social relationships with peers and less independence than students who do not receive one-on-one support. Ensuring paraeducator "skills" focus on improving the independence of students in social and academic settings is a critical component to an effective system of support." (para. 8).

There are several skills and strategies that can be helpful when supporting students with disabilities, which will support all students as well. Parker (n.d.) describes the following skills and supports:

Modeling: Modeling is an excellent strategy for paraeducators to support any area of skill development and can be done in any setting (e.g., classrooms, hallways, playground, and in the community). Common skills for paraeducators to model may include step by step problem solving, reading comprehension strategies, self-talk, or using sensory or self-regulation techniques. Paraeducators can also help individual or small groups of students by modeling good note-taking skills as students and peers learn those skills to be more independent over time.

Supporting Communication: Students with IEPs may require communication related support ranging from using scripts or sentence starters to supporting the use of augmentative and alternative communication devices. Paraeducators can assist students to ensure students have access to their communication tools, systems, or devices throughout the school day. They can also assist in ensuring the communication system or device has available the specific communications (symbols, words, or sentences) needed to engage in specific activities. Modeling and supporting the use of communication systems with different teachers and peers promotes generalization of communication skills and expands the ability of students to communicate with different people and in different places.

Providing Multiple Means of Representation: One of the three Principles for Universal Design for Learning is providing multiple means of representation. Paraeducators can assist with different options for receiving information, such as paraphrasing directions or academic content, re-directing students to written or visual prompts or directions, accessing prior knowledge by relating content to past experiences, and previewing content with students prior to instruction.

Providing Reinforcement and Social and Emotional Support: It is often difficult for teachers working with multiple students to provide the frequency and rate of positive reinforcement and reassurance that some students require to use new skills and manage their emotions throughout the day. For example, depending on the demands and setting, some students may require some type of reinforcement at very high intervals (e.g. once every ten seconds) to engage and complete a skill or activity successfully. Once implemented by a teacher, paraeducators can support token or other reinforcement systems that require high rates of feedback as well as ensure that students immediately receive the reinforcement that is unique to their preferences. In addition to external reinforcement, some students may require social and emotional supports and reassurance throughout the school day. I've found more than once that well-planned and scheduled "touch base" supportive conversations or short playful activities between a paraeducator and a student throughout a school day can provide the support and sense of safety to ensure the student does not require a removal in the middle of instruction. In addition, paraeducators can support the use of sensory diets, movement breaks, self-regulation plans, and other supports designed to support the movement and social and emotional needs of students.

Supporting Physical Needs: Paraeducators can be additional eyes and ears in the classroom to inquire and attend to daily needs of students in relation to hunger, sleep, physical supports, and emotional distress. Some schools customize "The Incredible Five Point Scale" or have other methods of "checking in" to ensure students have what they need at the start of each school day. For students with IEPs with unique needs for diets or physical supports, especially when supports may be shared between home and school, paraeducators can assist to ensure students have what they need at the beginning, middle, and end of the school day and take data in relation to physical needs that can assist families in coordinating with out of school supports.

Supporting Peer Prompting: To ensure students with IEPs know how to look for and respond to cues in the natural learning environment (e.g. learning from other students) at times when they may not have direct adult supports, peer prompting is a strategy that supports student engagement while reducing dependence on adult support. The concept behind peer prompting is simple, anything that a paraeducator might say, point to, or remind a student to do is provided by a peer instead of the paraeducator. However, implementing peer prompting systemically requires support and practice. As peers learn when and how to support students to stay engaged, paraeducators can provide reminders to peers and assist them in using systems for peer prompting. Examples of peer prompting systems include check lists at table groups, social scripts for conversations, and comprehension cards during peer reading activities. Common prompts to encourage paraeducators to transfer to peers

include getting out materials for specific activities, transition buddies across the classroom and school, engaging peers in conversations during social or academic turn and talk times, and providing peer models and prompts to engage in activities during recess, center, and play groups.

Documentation and Data Collection: There are many ways paraeducators can document the use of skills and supports outlined in a student's IEP. With advances in technology, many schools are using web-based forms as well as apps on devices or phones that allow for immediate and efficient data collection. Other schools or teachers prefer to develop paper data collection forms that paraeducators use to track specific data points throughout the day. When using a paper or non-electronic system for data collection, it is important to allow time for paraeducators and teachers to summarize and chart the data on a regular basis to ensure the information is informing the teacher on future instructional decisions. Paraeducators can also assist students to self-monitor and collect data on their own behaviors, such as using a graphic organizer or tracking the use of a skillful and positive behavior, such as a self-regulation technique. Because student self-monitoring systems often require intensive upfront support and monitoring, paraeducators can assist students in accurately self-monitoring across environments and assist with linking the self-monitoring to reinforcement, encouragement, and communication of success among educators and families.

Supporting Social Interactions: As mentioned previously, paraeducators can either increase or decrease the level of independence and social interactions students' experience. It is critical for paraeducators to engage in conversations with teachers and families about when and how to support student engagement and when to back away to allow for independent and natural social interactions to occur. There are many ways for paraeducators to support interactions with class and school peers that do not require the paraeducator to be the "gateway" to interacting with a student. Having these skills is especially important for a paraeducator supporting a student with significant differences in their communication and physical abilities. Today there are many evidence- based practices that support students in understanding and navigating social settings, including social scripts, social narratives, social autopsies, and facilitating peer-mediated interventions and supports.

Providing Choices: Providing choices is one of the easiest ways to improve student engagement as well as assist students in understanding, identifying, and building self-determination around supports that benefit them throughout the day. It is important for teachers and families to guide paraeducators to know what choices are appropriate during different activities and how many choices should be available based on the needs and abilities of individual students. Once teachers map out the student's school day and brainstorm choices with a student, paraeducators can ensure that students have access to those choices and support students in building self-determination by prompting them to request those choices across other educators and peers. Choices might include choices of instructional materials (pens, paper, books), reinforcement for completing tasks, and choices in scheduling when appropriate.

Using Visual Schedules and Organizers: Independent development and use of a schedule is a life-long skill for everyone and something that many students with IEPs may require years of successful practice to learn to do independently. Schedules help students know how to predict what is expected, understand the sequence that may be required to finish an activity or lesson, and know when something is considered completed, and know what is coming next. Using schedules can also have a tremendous impact on reducing anxiety. Paraeducators can help students follow different types of schedules, including written, visual, or schedules that use pictures or icons depending on the abilities and needs of students. Helping students use organizers also supports students moving from adult support to tools that they can use across subject areas (para 10-19).

PARAEDUCATORS IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS

Paraeducators in Early Childhood Settings
Paraeducator's roles and responsibilities differ within early childhood settings. The main responsibilities revolve around supporting the instruction and healthy interactions amongst students. This student population learns a lot through movement, play, and hands-on experiences. Paraeducators may be

asked to assist in cleaning classroom materials, lead small groups of students as they engage in centers, supervise during snacks and lunch/ recess.

Other responsibilities that are more unique to early childhood is potentially assisting students in the restroom and communicating with the teacher and potentially parents about student's development and needs. Please review the section titled "Confidentiality" within the Essential Information for All section of this document.

Paraeducators in Elementary Settings

Paraeducators support students and teachers in many ways from each building, within each district across the state of Nebraska. From supporting students with disabilities, to working with students in small group settings, to supervising recess and/or lunch- they play a huge role in student's and teacher's success.

Roles and Responsibilities

Paraeducator roles can differ across all educational settings, this includes the elementary setting as well. Paraeducators' roles supporting in the elementary setting can include instructional support, language support, behavioral support, physical and medical support.

Paraeducators may provide instructional support by working with students in a small group, reinforcing learning, or in a one-one-one setting. Paraeducators should have guidance and materials (if needed) provided by the supervising teacher. Some paraeducators assist teachers during plan time with preparing materials for lessons and/or collaborate on upcoming lessons and plans.

Language support may be provided to English Language Learners (ELL) from bilingual paraeducators. Paraeducators may also support those students in the beginning stages of learning English, as well as support ELLs' understanding of academic content and vocabulary by speaking to students in their home language. Paraeducators may even collaborate with the teacher to create materials in another language.

Many paraeducators support students who struggle with classroom behavior expectations. Paraeducators may play a role in a student's Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) by giving input about the student and/or by helping to implement the plan. Paraeducators who provide behavioral support should be provided training such as PBIS, de-escalation strategies, giving praise for appropriate behaviors, NeMTSS, etc. Students' behavior is a way of communicating. Building a positive rapport with students helps to respond with empathy to challenging behaviors.

Some paraeducators support students with physical disabilities or those students with severe intellectual disabilities. They may assist students throughout the school day with adaptive skills such as self-care, communication, hygiene, etc. Paraeducators who support students with these types of needs often will collaborate with the school nurse about students' medical needs.

Paraeducators Supporting Transition-Aged Students

Whether a paraeducator works with a transition-aged student in a vocational program or stays in a school all day, his/her/their role is to enhance independence, advocacy skills, and learning opportunities for students. Paraeducators for students who are in the stage of transition to post-secondary education still follow the lead of a special education teacher to implement best practices for the individual they are working with. Some differences in this area may be the shift in focus for what the child is to be learning. For example, an emphasis on problem-solving skills, independence, self-determination skills, and job training may be things the child is working toward. The following sections provide guidance on how paraeducators can be most effective with this age group.

Working In Vocational Programs

A vocational program, sometimes referred to as transition-to-work programs, focuses on skills required for a certain job or trade. In these programs, students learn the skills needed to acquire a job (or trade) by earning on-site training in a career of interest. Businesses within the community offer transition-aged students to come work with them to gain real-world experience to prepare them for the future.

Within the program, students may also learn financial literacy such as paying bills, saving money, or understanding how to read a paycheck. Living skills like cooking, cleaning, and hygiene, recreational and leisure activities to promote exercise, and other skills related to independence may also be included in the program (Krawetz et al., 1995).

Paraeducators working in a vocational program play a significant role in the student's learning experience. Most students in this setting qualify to be in the program based off their disability and IEP.

Roles and Responsibilities

At the transition level, a paraeducator uses the fading of supports to allow the student to be independent and avoid relying on prompting or the help of someone else. In the beginning of a transition program, students will be exposed to skills they already know and skills they have not yet been learned. It is important for support staff to recognize which skills the students can do completely independently, partially independently, and not at all independently.

Being able to distinguish this will increase independence over time and decrease prompt dependency. Below is a visual of the "prompting hierarchy." The bottom of the hierarchy is where the most intrusive prompting is occurring, and at the top is little to no prompting. Moving up the hierarchy indicates that a student has now learned the skill independently and no longer needs prompting or assistance.

The use of the prompting hierarchy allows students to first get the prompting they need to be successful in completing a task, skill, or direction. Then as the student becomes more and more exposed to the skill, slowly release the intrusiveness of prompting by "fading" our support. For example, a student learning to cut with scissors may need hand over hand (full physical prompt) the first ten times he/she/they practice cutting. Over time, the student becomes more familiar with using scissors and then may only need a modeling prompt, and then a gestural prompt, and eventually no prompt at all to independently use scissors. It is important to know that some prompts are not appropriate for certain skills. If a student is learning how to ask for something they need (advocacy), it would not be possible to use a physical prompt.
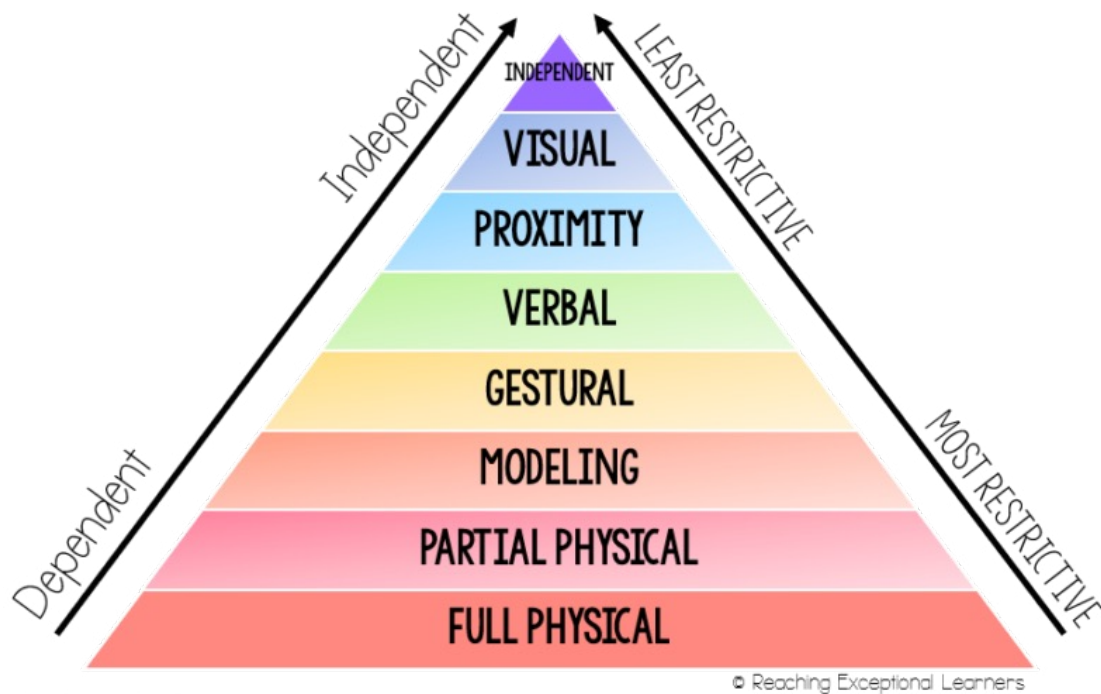

Image from: https://reachingexceptionallearners.com/prompting-hierarchy-in-special-education/

Independent	Learner no longer needs assistance with the task.
Visual	There are many examples of the use of visuals everywhere we go. From street signs to
Proximity	Also known as positioning yourself in a way that benefits or cues the learner to do something. You may also use proximity with objects (positioning materials closer to the student so they realize it's time to use them).
Verbal	Using your words to state instructions or remind the student of something. Sometimes we may use "indirect prompts" like questions so we make the learner think about what they need to do without directly telling them. For example, if a student is learning to put items away, support staff might ask "What do we do with the toys when the timer goes off?" the student might answer by saying "Put them back in the bin where I found them." When it is time for the student to do this, they should be able to complete the task without any other reminders. *Some people suggest that verbal prompting is more intrusive than gestural or modeling because the learner is relying on someone else's voice. Depending on the learner and the task, you may want to use verbal prompting with caution.
Gestural	Also known as reaching out or pointing to cue the learner to look at something, pick up an item, direct them to what their focus should be on, etc. Gesturing can give hints or reminders to a student without having to explicitly say or do anything which can lead to independence.
Modeling	Modeling is a great way to assist in learner without inadvertently causing prompt dependency. Simply showing someone how to do something can be very effective. If you believe the learner would respond well from modeling the skill or task this is a good place to start. If the task requires a lot of steps, you can model piece by piece and perform a check for understanding prior to moving to the next step. If the student needs further explanation or physical prompting, it would be appropriate to assist them so they feel successful in the task.
Partial Physical	Like full physical prompting, support staff physically helps the learner through the steps, but with slightly less intrusiveness. Rather than direct hand-over-hand placement, prompting is at the elbows of the learner to correct any movements that may cause error.
Full Physical	Also known as hand-over-hand support. Using a full physical prompt allows the learner to get every step correct with the guidance of another person.

Supporting Students in Transition Programs:
- Provide supervision and support for students participating in job skills training
- Implementing and explaining safety protocols in new work environments for students
- Support students in learning new skills during training
- Provide positive reinforcement and feedback
- Adhere to the special education teacher's guidance
- Communicate and update the special education teacher on student progress and concerns
- Collect accurate data on student performance
- Encourage students to advocate for themselves by modeling effective communication
- Create tasks analyses and checklists for students to use on the job (ex. step-by-step process of a more complicated task or checklist for items to remember before leaving for work)

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR PARAEDUCATOR SUPERVISORS

INTRODUCTION

The increased use of paraeducators in a variety of educational settings has resulted in the need for teachers and other educational professionals (nurses, speech-language pathologists, occupational/ physical therapists) to assume the tasks of supervising these individuals. Being a qualified educational professional, however, does not automatically translate into being equally prepared to supervise another adult. In too many cases, this new role is undertaken with little or no training or previous knowledge of supervisory skills. This section of this guidance document provides information on the principles of supervision and establishing an effective supervisory relationship whose ultimate goal is success of the child in the school setting.

SUPERVISION

If asked, most adults would say that they do not like to be supervised. Understanding that supervision is a required part of the position may not change feelings, but explaining up front that the intent is for skill development may help the paraeducator to accept the supervisory relationship. Supervision should be an on-going interpersonal process, such as coaching, that focuses on the paraeducator's actual performance of the job requirements. This focus involves detailing and improving the paraeducator's skills through formative and summative measures. The outcome of supervision is improved job performance, which is defined in terms of increasing student achievement.

Supervision is one of those words that by definition and common use is assumed to be consistent and constant. Yet when actually put into practice, supervision strategies differ greatly from one program to another. Most classroom teachers have experienced supervision in the form of an administrator sitting through a pre-arranged observation, providing written and verbal feedback, and then returning at a later date to repeat the process. Many other educational professionals have experienced supervisory practices that have included coaching, instructional dialogues, and even instructional modeling. The educators who mentor or supervise paraeducators share invaluable knowledge and skills and build an effective partnership with shared power, clear mutual expectations, and open communication.

To clarify the basis for selecting material for this document, it is important to share some thoughts and general assumptions about supervision. The first element of effective supervision is to be aware of personal beliefs, philosophy, and attitudes about supervision and share them with the paraeducators supervised.

1. Not everyone wants, or needs, to be supervised in the same way. There is no single right way to supervise. Your supervision practices should be flexible enough to match your paraeducator's need for oversight and guidance.
2. Supervision is an on-going process, not a product. This means that supervision is proactive rather than reactive. Reactive supervision works to neutralize or repair a problem. In proactive supervision, interactions are based on goal setting, understanding the uniqueness of each person's roles and responsibilities, and an analysis of each individual's effectiveness, competencies, and style.
3. Supervision, when effective, results in change. As the process evolves, changes will occur in the development of additional skills and competencies for both the paraeducator and the educator-supervisor. Be prepared to accept the dynamic nature of supervision by expecting and preparing for new responsibilities to shift from the educator to the paraeducator. It is important to acknowledge the personal growth experienced by the educator-supervisor and paraeducator.
4. Supervision is a relationship-centered process. Effective supervision and constructive feedback require frequent interactions over an extended period of time. As all teachers know, 180 days can either seem to go by quickly or last forever depending on how each day flows. Expanded duties, coupled with less direct instructional time, make it pertinent that the educational professional and paraeducator trust and respect each other and the job that each one is doing.

Expectations of the Teacher – Supervisor
As an educator-supervisor of a paraeducator you will be expected to:
• Orient the paraeducator to the school; • Train the paraeducator to use instructional and management approaches; • Schedule and plan the assignments for the paraeducator's day; • Communicate regularly with the paraeducator; • Delegate tasks and direct their implementation; • Provide skill development opportunities, and • Provide feedback of the paraeducator's job performance.

Overview of a Supervision Plan

The National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities (1998) recommended the following as a minimal set of guidelines for direct supervision of paraeducators:

- The first 10 hours in which the paraeducator has direct contact with a student should be observed and supervised by the teacher.
- After that initial period, at least 10 percent of the supportive instructional sessions conducted by the paraeducator should be supervised to ensure continuity of instruction and program. Using these guidelines the teacher is also able to guarantee contact with the child involved as well as direct interaction with the paraeducator.
- There must be on-going communication on at least a weekly basis between the teacher and the paraeducator during which data pertaining to the student's progress are reviewed.

Barriers to Effective Supervision

1. Inadequate feedback is provided to the paraeducator. Feedback which is subjective rather than objective or which is provided infrequently can be considered inadequate.
2. The paraeducator's lack of commitment. Lack of commitment to the program or to the educator will undermine the program and increase frustration in carrying out one's role as educator-supervisor.
3. The educator's or paraeducator's attitudes about supervision are negative. For instance, if one or the other believes that supervision is solely for the purpose of evaluation, the relationship will become more reactive than proactive.
4. Inter-role conflict can occur when there is a belief that each individual's role, although different, is equal. Such a belief demonstrates that there is a poor understanding of roles and responsibilities. In addition, conflict will arise when one individual has a strong interest in maintaining the status quo and rejects a process that will lead to change in the form of growth and improvement. An individual who views change as a personal loss may view supervision as a threat.
5. The organizational structure of the school may not support effective supervision. In schools where the climate does not encourage change, there will be little or no time set aside for team planning and feedback. Rather than rewarding the efforts of the team to work as a unit toward change, the organization may present barriers in the form of time constraints, negative feedback, or increasingly burdensome student loads.

SELECTING PARAEDUCATORS

Interviewing Applicants

The paraeducator applicant may never have had school-related work experience. A prospective paraeducator may have a resume that reflects diverse experiences and educational backgrounds but provides few clues as to how successful the person will be in this particular role. As a result, the interview's importance is heightened. The interview itself can be divided into three components: (1) preparation, (2) the actual interview, and (3) follow-up (Russell, 1997).

Prepare for the interview by developing the job description. This will help determine the necessary baseline skills one must have coming into the position as stipulated by state and federal legislation. Also, consider what elements of the instructional program, supervision, and personal style will affect the appropriateness of the match. Finally, plan how to conduct the interview, what topics will be covered,

who will be present, and when and what type of feedback will be given to the applicant.

The interview is a combination of a social situation and a business function that should help in selecting the best applicant for the position. At the beginning, establish a welcoming atmosphere and a good rapport with the individual applying for the position. Introductions should include full names and titles and preferred personal names. Casual conversation will help to ease the transition into the more formal parts of the interview relating to the description of the position and job qualifications. The interview should allow you to learn about the applicant's skills, personal style, and ability to relate to children and adults.

Questioning skills are an essential component of every teacher's repertoire, but teachers who ask questions to students may have difficulty transferring this skill to the interview process. It is important to remember that questions pertaining to personal information (e.g., age, race, marital status, religion or national origin) which are not job related may be considered discriminatory in nature and should not be asked. Concerns about an applicant's physical or mental condition may be questioned only if the condition is related to on-the-job performance. *

*Review questions with the human resource office to assure inquiries are appropriate.

Areas to explore in the interview are:
- Past experiences with children or with adults working cooperatively in a team,
- Knowledge of schools, education, and special programs such as special education
- Expectations about the job
- Examples of initiative and independence in past employment
- Ability to take directions and willingness to do noninstructional tasks such as copying, clean up, making materials, etc.
- Special talents that the program may draw upon such as art, music, etc.

During the interview you should note whether the applicant uses appropriate nonverbal communication, displays a genuine interest in the position, and appears competent in personal management.

Follow-up to the interview includes reviewing notes, checking with others who may have met with the applicant, and writing a brief statement concerning the final decision as a record of the interview process. As soon as possible, contact the applicant selected for the position and clarify any concerns that exist and establish the procedure to complete the employment process.

Setting Expectations
From the beginning, the educator-supervisor must envision how the school team will operate, how decisions will be made, and who will perform what tasks. Several sources of information may help in this process:
- the local educational agency's official job description for paraeducators;
- lists of strengths, weaknesses, and preferences of the team members;
- the teacher's own expectations for instruction and classroom management.

By integrating information from these three sources, the teacher may develop a list of preferences that clearly define roles, duties, and expectations for the paraeducator.

Establishing Roles
The following (figure 2.4) is an exercise that could be helpful to the educator and the paraeducator to develop an understanding of each other's responsibilities. This form could also be a starting point for discussions and team-building exercises.

Figure 2.6
Sample of Team Schedule

Instructions: Discuss the following tasks with members of the team. Establish the duties that should be performed exclusively by the teacher or paraprofessional and those that can be shared. Discuss the details of how each shared task will be performed. Policies and procedures vary within local educational agencies, therefore; be certain to verify responsibilities with you local administration.

Task	Teacher	Paraprofessional	Share
Participates in planning academic lessons			
Participates in planning academic activities			
Creates classroom displays			
Takes attendance			
Contacts parents			
Collects homeworks			
Assists in supervision in the classroom			
Makes copies, prepares materials			
Records and charts data			
Implements behavior management procedures			
Implements classroom management procedures			
Tidies classroom at end of day			
Escorts children to other classes			
Assists students with hygiene tasks			
Inventories and orders supplies			
Grades papers and records grades			
Takes phone calls from parents			
Participates in team meetings			
Participates in an eligibility meeting			
Participates in an IEP meeting			
Maintains prostheses or medical devices			

Note: There are many tasks that members of the team are responsible for an which should be discussed to clarify who will take the lead in performing them. On a separate paper, list any additional tasks, prior to performing this activity.

(Adapted from Pickett, A.L. (1997). A training program to prepare teachers to supervise and work effectively with paraeducator personnel. New York: National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services.)

Work Style Preferences

The next step is for the educator to become familiar with the strengths, abilities, weaknesses, needs, and preferences of the paraeducator. Not only will this information help to define the paraeducator's role in the classroom and school, but it will also indicate potential training needs for which the teacher can begin planning. Obviously, a great deal of information will only be learned over time and after observing and working with each other on a daily basis; however, some immediate information can be gained from the interview, or by using a checklist of preferences. Educators can facilitate the process and avoid potential problems by taking the time up front to learn more about the particular characteristics of each team member.

WORKING WITH A PARAEDUCATOR

How an educator-supervisor proceeds to build a relationship with the paraeducator will depend on whether the team is working with a new paraeducator or a person in a pre-existing position. In the latter case, the orientation takes the form of building rapport with the individual and explaining any differences that exist in the program and teaching style.

Orienting the Paraeducator

The task of orienting the new paraeducator, which often rests with the teacher-supervisor, requires a fresh view of the school, the classroom, and the policies and procedures that may have become so familiar that they are taken for granted. The new paraeducator often feels like an outsider, with unclear expectations of what to do and when to do it. To ensure a successful transition, expectations, directions, and communications should be stated as clearly as possible. One way to think of the orientation is as a new unit including an advanced organizer, providing new concepts, and establishing a context for retention of the material. The orientation should always be based on the local educational agency's policies and procedures as stated in the local educational agency's manual. Knowledge of law, rules, and regulations, and local district policies and procedures is a recommended professional competency for paraeducators.

Some general guidelines for explaining these policies and procedures include the following:

- Provide examples of policies and procedures. Simply stating the policy or procedure will not be enough. The more meaningful the material, the better it will be remembered.
- Use clarifying questions to check for understanding. After providing information, be certain that the paraeducator has focused on the important points by asking what should be done in a particular situation or when a policy or procedure should be followed.
- Provide a context for the policy or procedure. New concepts make more sense when given in context. They will also be remembered longer. As duties are performed, the teacher-supervisor should comment on why they are done in a particular way and their relationship to the policies and procedures.

Topics that need to be communicated during the orientation, which may or may not be in the local educational agency's manual, are:

- Ethical issues, especially those related to confidentiality and professionalism should be stressed (see Figure 2.1 below for a listing of ethical issues). Ethical issues also extend to informing parents, other service providers, and, when appropriate, the child of the assistance of a paraeducator in the context of the program. It is important not to misrepresent the role and responsibilities of the paraeducator. In addition, the teacher directly responsible for the paraeducator's performance is also under a professional code of ethics to provide competent supervision.
- Legal issues, such as nondiscriminatory practices, due process, and negligence should be reviewed. Many of these issues are covered in the local educational agency's policy manual, which should be reviewed as part of the paraeducator's training. The supervisor will be responsible for ensuring that the paraeducator has reviewed the policy manual and is familiar with it. Briefly go over the content together emphasizing particular points that are relevant to the position. Ask the paraeducator to review the material and be sure to follow-up the next day by asking if there are any policies that need clarification.

- The school and classroom environments are largely unfamiliar to the new paraeducator and need to be explained. Identify people and their roles that are important to the paraeducator or the student. Think through a typical week and note the people with whom there is routine contact and those people who are important in moments of disruption or crisis. These are the individuals to whom the paraeducator needs to be introduced. Provide a list of these individuals, their jobs, and where they can be contacted.
- What is the day's routine? Share both the schedule for the class and the paraeducator's personal schedule that is to be followed. Explain why certain routines have been established.

Figure 2.1
Ethical Issues for Paraprofessionals

1. Records and information related to students and their families are considered confidential. Children and youth have legal and human rights that must be respected. Local educational agency's policies are to be understood and followed at all times.
2. Respect the roles of others in the schools and demonstrate your understanding of how your position relates to theirs.
3. Positive acknowledgment should be given to cultural diversity and the differences among individual children/You are responsible for following the directions given to you by your supervisor and other administrators.
4. Learn and follow the chain of command for administrative procedures.
5. Professional behavior includes attendance, punctuality, appropriate dress, and being a good team member.
6. As a member of the school team, you should be committed to its programs.

(Adapted from: Pickett, A. L. (1997). A training program to prepare teachers to supervise and work effectively with paraeducator personnel (5th Ed.). The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services.)

Establishing a Working Relationship with a Paraeducator

Whether the paraeducator is new to the school, is changing positions, or staying in a position where the supervisor is new to the team, requires that a new relationship must be formed. The supervisor and the paraeducator may be uncomfortable at first with their assigned roles and responsibilities, especially if there are age, gender, or cultural differences between the two individuals. Keep in mind that these feelings are natural. Take the time to build a rapport with the paraeducator. Some things to remember during this early period of developing a relationship are:

1. Clearly state educational philosophy and expectations for the school, the teacher, and the paraeducator. For instance, what is the key to the relationship with the students? What are the main objectives for the year? What routines are to be followed each day and what is the management style?
2. Get to know the paraeducator as a co-worker.
3. Listen to the paraeducators' understanding of the role and the expectations that the paraeducator has for the teacher as a supervisor.
4. Let the paraeducator know that consideration will be given to any concerns that exist. When there are points of disagreement, explain positions and come to acceptable decisions.
5. Find areas of agreement and highlight them as the basis for the developing relationship.
6. Include the paraeducator in discussions about changes or the establishment of new routines, schedules, or approaches. The paraeducator may offer a unique point of view from experience working with the child. Participation allows the paraeducator to become more of a stakeholder in the process and will result in greater commitment.

COLLABORATION AMONGST TEAM MEMBERS

After reviewing the general job description and obtaining some information about the particular characteristics of each team member, the teacher should decide how best to use each person's strengths and abilities to create an efficient and cooperative classroom team. Several models exist for collaboration, and the teacher must determine which one works best for the particular situation. Some teams use a collaborative model, in which the teacher devises instruction and the paraeducator supports the teacher's instructions and plans. They may teach some lessons, working together, or instruct small groups at the same time. Remember, it is never the paraeducator's responsibility to develop instructional plans or curriculum or provide direct instruction on teaching a new skill. This model works well for a well-established team with a paraeducator who already has a high skill level and extensive experience. Many teams work toward a collaborative model only after having worked together for a period of time. The key to successful implementation of this model is the scheduling of joint planning time.

Other teams use a teacher-assistant model for classroom instruction. In this model, the teacher assumes responsibility for direct instruction of new material, while the paraeducator provides supplementary instruction involving practice and feedback for individuals or small groups. When the teacher is instructing the whole group at one time, the paraeducator under this model may be moving around the classroom, helping students to stay on task, or assisting a student whose IEP indicates an individual accommodation (e.g., a student who needs someone to help him follow along in a book).

A third model assumes a primarily clerical or organizational role in the classroom. Organizational duties, such as taking attendance and lunch count, charting behavior, marking and sorting papers, preparing materials, and creating classroom displays, can be performed by the paraeducator while allowing more time for the teacher to engage in instructional planning and delivery.

Finally, a paraeducator may be assigned to a particular student with responsibilities focused primarily on the student's needs. For some children to be successfully included in the general education classroom, it may be necessary to provide additional support. In such cases, the paraeducator may be responsible for implementing the instructional and management procedures that have been developed by the special education teacher and the general educator (Freschi, 1999). This model works best when the special education teacher and the paraeducator have pre-arranged daily contact since they may be working in separate classrooms throughout the day.

A combination of these models may be used to create the most effective team. It is essential that the teacher and paraeducator clarify from the start what their expectations are concerning the team's functioning. This includes clearly defining each team member's role and contributions to the team. The line of authority needs to be established from the start; although the paraeducator 's ideas and input are needed and valued, the teacher is responsible for making the final decisions that affect the operating classroom and service delivery to students.

Establishing a Team Schedule

Another component in establishing expectations is designing a team schedule. Developed by the educator-supervisor, the schedule should indicate where each team member will be and generally what the member will be doing at all times throughout the day. It may be helpful to post the schedule in the classroom for easy reference. An example of an elementary classroom schedule is provided below in **Figure 2.6**.

Figure 2.6
Sample of Team Schedule

Time	Teacher	Paraeducator
7:45-8:15	Supervise independent seatwork	Take attendance; collect homework
8:15-8:45	Lead morning meeting	Observe and participate
8:45-10:00	Language Arts: teach small groups	Monitor seatwork. Practice sight word flashcards or other specific skill activities with individual students
10:00-10:15	Snack: Set up for the next lesson	Serve snack, supervise students at snack table
10:15-11:00	Math: teach small groups, monitor seatwork	Accompany students to math class (Room 238)
11:00-11:30	Journal writing: explain topic, teach mini-lesson, monitor seatwork	Take dictation from two students for their journal entries
11:30-12:00	Read-aloud to group	Clerical tasks (office, classroom)
12:00-12:30	Lunch	Accompany students to lunch and monitor
12:30-12:50	Recess: monitor students who must stay in classroom	Lunch
12:50-1:30	Science; teach whole-group lesson	Assist with lesson or teach small group practice skills
1:30-2:15	Social Studies: teach whole-group lesson	Accompany student to speech/ language therapy (room 123, Mon. & Wed.) or assist with lesson or teach small group
2:15-2:45	Planning time: develop lessons and provide student assessments	Provide assistance: Mon., Wed., Fri., Phys. Ed. (gym) Tues., Thurs. (Rm. 124)
2:45-3:00	Supervise students for dismissal	Bus duty
3:00-3:25	Planning time: confer with the paraeducator concerning lessons and students' needs	Planning time: confer with the teacher concerning lessons and students' needs

GOAL SETTING AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Goals for the paraeducator can be established in several different areas and may take into consideration ways of improving performance in delivering supportive instruction, managing behavior, organizing and using time wisely, and meeting standards of professionalism. When a team is just beginning to work together, initial goals may be quite broad, becoming more specific as team members become familiar with one another, the students, and the program. Over time, individual goals should reflect personal strengths, weaknesses, and program needs. Goals should be reviewed and revised periodically; perhaps once per grading period.

The paraeducator's performance goals should be clearly stated with a plan for achievement and a method of monitoring progress. Goal setting is also a way of documenting and planning training needs of individual team members, essential for local educational agencies (LEAs) and state educational agencies (SEAs) for compliance with state and federal laws. When conceived of in this manner, established goals may become the professional development plan for the paraeducator. Just as the teacher can hold the paraeducator responsible for delegated tasks, the paraeducator should hold the teacher and the local educational agency responsible for providing the proper training and support needed to carry out those tasks.

Although goals should be updated on a regular schedule, more frequent updates may be necessary for shorter-term goals or when specific difficulties or issues arise. **Figure 2.7** provides an example of a goal-setting plan for a paraeducator. Column one states the professional development goals of the paraeducator, with the remaining columns outlining a structured, timely plan to achieve the determined goal. **Figure 2.8** is a blank form for creating your own plan.

Figure 2.7
Sample Goal Setting Plan

Area	Goal	Early Training Plan	Monitoring Plan	On-Going Training
Instruction	To identify elements and structure of direct instruction of reading to assist the teacher in implementing lesson plans.	Observe teacher implementing lessons. Study teacher's manual. Practice with individual student.	After two weeks, check for understanding and proficiency, then begin daily implementation with one reading group.	Attend one-half day workshop on implementation of direct instruction (10/1).
Behavior Management	To implement time-out procedures consistently under supervision of teacher.	Observe teacher. Read behavior procedures. Write down questions and problems as they arise.	Informal daily discussion (at end of day). Review questions/resolve problems.	Informal training by teacher. Read article on effective use of interventions.
Professional Expectations	To attend weekly team meetings after school.	Stay one-half hour late every Tuesday; leave one-half hour early every Friday.	Attendance at all meetings.	None
Communication with Students	To provide consistent positive and corrective feedback of identified students.	Observe teacher. Record praise statements and resulting consequences.	Measure frequency of positive feedback during observation sessions.	Feedback on observations. Division-wide workshop on communication skills.
Organization/ Efficiency	To update daily attendance, homework, assignment completion and maintain current data records for each student.	Complete daily "progress note" for each student.	Check records for completion every week. Make note of concerns, patterns of behavior. Share with teacher before meeting.	See "progress notes" from previous years.

Paraeducator_____ Date_____

Supervising Educator_____ Review Date_____

Figure 2.8
Goal Setting Plan

Identified Area	Goal	Early Training Plan	Monitoring Plan	On-Going Training

FEEDBACK

Educators learn a great deal from one another and value the opportunity to talk about what is happening in the classrooms. One way to share information and reflection on issues is through creating a feedback loop. Feedback is part of the cycle of on-going coaching and support. Feedback is a means of giving both supportive and corrective information to the paraeducator. A feedback loop consists of (1) establishing effective ways of providing instruction to students and managing the classroom environments; (2) helping paraeducator learn vocabulary of educational terms for teaching techniques they can use and discuss with others; (3) helping paraeducators become aware of increasing skills; and (4) assisting paraeducator in building confidence in their ability to work effectively and make further improvements (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). Feedback supports the continued use of appropriate behaviors, as well as, informing a person about inappropriate behaviors that need to be changed in order to improve performance. Downing, Ryndak and Clark (2000) concluded that most paraeducators "considered both receiving feedback related to their interactions with students and brainstorming future interventions with other team members to be forms of support" (p. 176).

The primary function of feedback is to enable educators to improve their job performance. It is less likely to be threatening when it is a regular component of the feedback conference, and when it focuses on how she or he can improve their performance. The most useful feedback meets four criteria:

1. It is descriptive rather than evaluative. Feedback should be objective with as little personal interpretation as possible.
2. It is specific rather than general. Tell paraeducator what she or he is or is not doing correctly rather than using terms that convey little meaning such as "Nicely done". Such terms should be accompanied by an explanation, such as "The way you paced the lesson was nicely done".
3. It is directed toward behavior that is voluntary and can be controlled. Involuntary behaviors do not respond to feedback.
4. Feedback should always be checked to insure that it is understood.

The Purpose of Feedback

Feedback is carried out throughout the year as the paraeducator completes the assignments given by the supervisor or masters competencies. Feedback can be formative and summative. Detailed feedback is considered formative and occurs as part of a continuing process. Formative feedback informs people about what they have done and enables them to make changes if necessary. For example, after a meeting to discuss the paraeducator s' concerns, the educator/supervisor and paraeducator can create an action plan based on feedback that identifies strengths and needs. The action plan is a type of formative feedback because it addresses on-going job improvement issues. Formative feedback is specific, non-judgmental, and objective. It is based on observed performance and related to indicators that measure consistency and effectiveness. (See **Figure 3.3** below for indicators of effective practice.)

Summative feedback is given to the paraeducator at, or near, the end of the term and is passed on to a program administrator for the purpose of deciding continued employment. "You did a good job" is an example of summative feedback – it sums up what the person has done but does not explain what was good or bad about it (Morgan & Ashbacker, 2001). If the formative process has been appropriately applied, the end-of-the-year feedback, or summative feedback, should reflect the previously gathered information, act as a follow-up review of the past year, and serve as a planning mechanism for professional development for the coming year.

Elements of a Supervision Model

Supervision involves providing performance-based assessments of the paraeducator. This occurs through interaction between the supervisor and the paraeducator during planning sessions, performance observations, and feedback conferences.

1. Supervision of the paraeducator during planning sessions involves identifying the paraeducator's tasks and strategies that should be in place during the observation and helping the paraeducator identify areas that need improvement. The paraeducator may not be able to identify the areas needing attention, however, the supervisor can assist by asking probing questions such as:
   a. What do you feel you do well most of the time?
   b. How much progress toward the objective have you made?
   c. What seems to be holding the progress back?
   d. When you try _____, what happens?
   e. What do you think are the consequences of using that strategy?

By the end of the planning conference the teacher-supervisor and the paraeducator should have agreed on skills or strategies that the supervisor will observe.

2. The supervisor should do formal and informal observations of the paraeducator. Informal observations are those that occur in the course of the day while the teacher and paraeducator are executing their duties. These observations, although generally unfocused, can provide much information on the paraeducator's ability to carry out the tasks assigned by the teacher and to help children meet instructional and behavioral goals. When a paraeducator is observed informally, the teacher should try to wait to the end of the lesson to make comments about what was observed. Occasionally, there may be a good opportunity for the teacher to demonstrate a strategy or to assist the paraeducator during the on-going lesson. Too many interruptions by the teacher, however, can interfere with the lesson and/or undermine the paraeducator's authority with the children and should be avoided.

   Formal observation of the paraeducator within the supervision model should occur at a scheduled time. The focus of a formal observation should be the agreed-upon areas discussed in the planning conference. During these observations, the teacher may choose to collect data on the interaction occurring between the paraeducator I and student(s), the methods or strategies used, and the consequences of the paraeducator's communication and behavior. This nonstructured approach is useful for gaining an overall impression of the paraeducator's abilities.

   A more objective observation approach is a checklist of instructional, interpersonal, or management behaviors, such as **Figure 3.4**. A frequency count of specific behaviors also may be applicable.

With a frequency count, the educator/supervisor would use a checklist to record the number of instances the paraeducator demonstrated a specific behavior, such as giving clear directions to the student(s).

3. The feedback conference provides another opportunity for enhancing the paraeducator's performance. During the feedback conference, the teacher should solicit the paraeducator's self-assessment of the lesson and encourage the paraeducator to highlight strengths and areas for improvement that occurred during the observation period. The conference provides feedback on past performance, a chance to modify strategies and behavior, and an opportunity to develop new professional goals.

Figure 3.3
Examples of Observable Indicators of Effective Practices by Paraeducators

Directions: Observe the paraeducator and circle the level of practice for each indicator. Develop more specific indicators based on the job description of the individual paraeducator.

Indicator	Level of Practice		
1. The paraeducator is using the lesson plan, teaching strategies, and instructional materials as specified by the teacher.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
2. The paraeducator demonstrates skills to maintain appropriate student behaviors.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
3. The paraeducator demonstrates skills to enhance a supportive, caring, and enjoyable learning environment for students.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
4. The paraeducator follows all school rules and procedures.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
5. The paraeducator adheres to attendance, punctuality and dress codes established by the school.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
6. The paraeducator follows directions given by the teacher.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
7. Decisions made by the paraeducator regarding instruction or management changes are discussed in advance.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER
Specific Indicators:			
8. The paraeducator is consistent in implementing instructional strategies, behavior plan, and classroom routines that were established by the teacher.	CONSISTENTLY	OCCASIONALLY	NEVER

Figure 3.4

Sample Observation Checklist
Rating Scale: 1=Poor, 3=Average, 5=Excellent, NA=Not Applicable (No Opportunity to Observe)

During this observation the paraeducator:						
1. Gave clear directions	1	2	3	4	5	NA
2. Told the student what behavior is expected	1	2	3	4	5	NA
3. Followed the provided lesson plan	1	2	3	4	5	NA
4. Taught skills identified by the teacher	1	2	3	4	5	NA
5. Kept the students on task	1	2	3	4	5	NA
6. Used prompts appropriately to gain responses	1	2	3	4	5	NA
7. Provided appropriate reinforcement	1	2	3	4	5	NA
8. Used correction procedures	1	2	3	4	5	NA
9. Maintained control of the session	1	2	3	4	5	NA
10. Had instructional material ready for lesson	1	2	3	4	5	NA
11. Paced the instructional activities effectively	1	2	3	4	5	NA
12. Collected data to measure student progress	1	2	3	4	5	NA

Comments:

(Adapted from: Pickett, A. L. (1997). A training program to prepare teachers to supervise and work effectively with paraeducator personnel (5th Ed.). The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education and Related Services.)

The Teacher's Role in Performance Evaluation

Although the educator oversees the paraeducator's daily activities, she or he may not have the responsibility to complete the paraeducator's performance evaluation. The local educational agency's management plan, or policies, may place that responsibility with the principal or a central office administrator. As the paraeducator's supervisor, the teacher should clarify who will complete the evaluation and convey that information to the paraeducator. If an administrator is the primary evaluator, the teacher should request a role in the process to provide a fair assessment of the paraeducator's job performance. However, many teachers would prefer to remove themselves from the summative evaluation process so that they can maintain a balanced relationship with the paraeducator with whom they work so closely. A possible solution to this dilemma is to have different people do different parts of the evaluation.

Solving Performance and Interpersonal Problems

In virtually any working relationship, problems will arise and cause tension among individuals. Sometimes problems develop because one or more team members are not meeting the performance expectations of the rest of the team. At other times, problems arise as a result of different interaction

styles or opposing philosophies or ideas. Regardless of the source of the conflict, the team needs to have a strategy for addressing and trying to resolve the issue. The purpose of the "Problem-Solving Strategy" discussed below is to provide such a framework for the classroom team. This is preceded, however, by a discussion of some of the most common issues that frequently contribute to conflicts between teachers (as supervisors) and paraeducators (as supervisees).

POTENTIAL PROBLEMS IN SUPERVISION

Control Factors

The role of the paraeducator has evolved out of necessity because the teacher cannot be everywhere or do everything required for the job. The teacher, therefore, has to feel comfortable delegating tasks to the paraeducator. This involves surrendering some degree of control over how and when things are done. Difficulties may arise when the teacher is not willing to give up control over the tasks she or he delegates. Perhaps the teacher did not delegate an appropriate task that the paraeducator has the knowledge or skills to complete. Perhaps the teacher did not make the expectations clear or provide adequate instructions to the paraeducator. Or perhaps, for some reason, the paraeducator is unable or unwilling to perform well enough to meet the demands of the job. The problem-solving strategy provided in this section can be used to address these situations.

Time Constraints

Obviously, a great deal of time is required for the teacher and the paraeducator to develop a working relationship and to operate efficiently as a team. The teacher needs to find the time to prepare, confer with, and observe the paraeducator at work. This can present quite a problem because most paraeducators are paid on an hourly basis, usually arriving when the students arrive and leaving soon after the students leave. Furthermore, even when the teacher may have a planning period during the day, the paraeducator is often working with students and not available. In many situations, the teacher may need to request shared planning time with the paraeducator. In some schools, coverage can be arranged for the class to allow the teacher and paraeducator time to meet and plan. In other situations, meetings before or after school can be scheduled as part of the agreement that the paraeducator may leave early or arrive late to compensate for the extra time. Any change in work adjustments should be discussed with the school administration. However it may be arranged, time for meeting, planning, and problem solving is essential to developing an effective instructional team.

Communication Differences

Everyone has a personal style of communication, and supervisors interpret events and make decisions differently, to a large extent because of individual style. One common distinction between communication styles is "direct" vs. "indirect." A description of each style, as well as the advantages and disadvantages of each, is given below.

Direct: People who are considered to have a direct, forward communication style engage in behaviors such as dispensing knowledge, giving directions, and offering opinions. The advantages of this style of communication are that expectations are usually very explicit and honest feedback is given frequently. Disadvantages may include unwillingness to accept new ideas and suggestions and insensitivity to others' feelings.

Indirect: People who have a more indirect style of communicating tend to be less reticent in expressing their ideas, feelings, and opinions. The advantages of this style of communication are that expectations are usually very explicit and honest feedback is given frequently. Disadvantages may include unwillingness to accept new ideas and suggestions and insensitivity to others' feelings.

People who are predominantly direct or indirect in their methods of communicating do not make good supervisors. Although there are times when the elements of one style or the other are appropriate, the best approach appears to be a "happy medium" between the two, in other words, an assertive/supportive style of communication. An assertive person stands up for beliefs and opinions, yet does not trample on the beliefs and opinions of others. Being supportive involves giving encouragement and praise as well as making suggestions and setting goals for improvement. Using "I-messages," asking

clarifying questions, respecting and using the ideas of others, expressing empathy, providing guidance without taking over are all examples of assertive/supportive behaviors. Supervisors who model these behaviors are more likely to get the responses they desire from their supervisors.

In addition, teachers need to be aware of both correction and praise strategies. Just like students, adults respond better to positive feedback than to criticism. This is not to say that corrections will not be necessary, but teachers should keep in mind that statements of praise should far outweigh corrections. Whenever possible, teachers should focus their praise and correction statements on student outcomes to avoid making the paraeducator feel under personal attack. For example, a correction statement may be stated as "I noticed that Marcus started raising his hand to speak," rather than, "You need to stop responding to students who call out." A praise statement similarly consists of comments such as "Your preparation of the materials for the class assisted in a smooth transition for the students" rather than, "You helped me today." Specific comments assist the paraeducators in their job performance and self-esteem.

Furthermore, teachers and paraeducators need to pay attention to the nonverbal cues they give to others. Facial expressions and body language contribute a great deal to the content of any interaction. They can also enhance the ability of a team to operate smoothly and efficiently throughout the day, when verbal communication is not possible or may not be desirable. By developing a set of hand signals or nonverbal cues, the teacher and paraeducator can signal to each other that a student is becoming agitated, trying to manipulate them, or may be in need of extra assistance.

Differences in Role Expectations

Sometimes problems arise when individuals are not accustomed to or are not comfortable with the role they are expected to assume. For example, the teacher may not feel comfortable in a supervisory role, especially if the paraeducator is older, more experienced, or culturally different. Similarly, some paraeducators may not be comfortable taking directions from the teacher or, conversely, taking the initiative when specific directions have not been given. Again, open and honest communication is the essential ingredient for creating an effective partnership and clarifying role expectations. Talking about problems early on and employing problem-solving strategies before problems become too difficult are the keys to teamwork.

A Problem-Solving Strategy

Because of the complex and fast-paced nature of classroom life, it is easy for teams to ignore or postpone dealing with minor misunderstandings or disagreements. Unfortunately, this only tends to exacerbate the problem. The team needs to work together to decide on a course of action, but this is not always easy to do. To make matters worse, most classroom teams are left to solve interpersonal problems on their own, without much outside support or assistance.

The following problem-solving strategy has been adapted from Pickett and Gerlach's work (1997) and consists of a series of five steps that the teacher may use to guide the team in resolving conflict and improving their ability to work together. This approach emphasizes the team's effort to reach consensus, but in reality, there are times when the teacher or other school professionals need to make decisions with which everyone on the team may not agree. However, if problems are addressed early and assertive/supportive communication techniques are used, these situations should be kept to a minimum.

Step One: State the problem. The situation must be clearly understood. If concerns and issues cannot be stated clearly, it is impossible to choose a course of action that will lead to a satisfactory conclusion. Everyone involved in a situation or participating in team efforts should describe the problems in their own words and from their own point of view. At this stage, each person needs to be objective in describing the variables involved. Infusing subjective statements will lead to misinterpretation of the problem. Each member of the team should attempt to answer the following questions: What is the problem? Who is involved? Who is affected? How are they affected?

Step Two: Identify the causes of the problem. After defining the problem, the team must try to identify the sources of the problem and the reasons it persists. Some of the reasons for the problem may come

from outside sources, over which the team may have little or no control. Therefore, it is important to focus the solutions on those factors over which the team does have at least partial control. At first, differences may not be apparent and the problem may be attributed to something else. It is important that the team investigates as deeply as necessary the true source of the problem and clearly identifies areas of agreement and disagreement. Utilizing skills such as active listening can help separate surface events from the underlying issues and clarify similarities and differences.

Step Three: Generate possible solutions. The team must decide what the desired outcome looks like. This can be stated in terms of a goal. From there, the group can generate a list of possible pathways to that goal. At this point, it is important that the team accepts all feasible solutions and allows each member to contribute something. It may also be helpful to list resources that may be necessary to implement each proposed solution.

Step Four: Select a course of action. After a list of possible solutions has been developed, the team should spend some time discussing the positive and negative aspects of each idea. Ultimately, the team wants to choose the alternative that is most likely to achieve the desired results and, at the same time, is most agreeable to team members. The chosen solution must be "tested" over a period of time to see if it will work. An intervention should be assessed at least weekly to determine its effectiveness.

Step Five: Evaluate the results. Finally, the team must reconvene to evaluate progress in resolving the issue. Remember, progress toward a desired goal can be meaningful, even if the goal has not been entirely achieved. Sometimes change is occurring, but more time is needed to achieve the desired results. Try to determine what parts of the intervention seem to be working and what parts may need to be changed. If positive changes have not occurred after a two-week period, the team should review the original problem statement and try an alternative intervention.

Figure 4.1 provides an abbreviated description of the problem-solving strategy including an implementation component and an example to help guide you.

Figure 4.1
Interpersonal Problem-Solving Strategy

Step	Implementation Strategy	Example
1. State the problem.	Allow each person to explain her or his point of view.	Several students are entering the classroom in a disruptive manner every morning.
2. Identify the causes.	Determine those over which the group has some amount of control.	Chaotic morning, rowdy bus ride, inclement weather, new student
3. Generate solutions.	Accept all feasible ideas.	Ask students to carry contracts for the bus driver to complete. Create a checklist for students to complete at home to help with organizational issues. Discuss with students changes in classroom routine.
4. Decide on a course of action.	Choose the most acceptable alternative, set a timeline for evaluation.	Alter morning routine: paraeducator will meet students at a designated spot near buses and walk them to class. Students must take one "quiet minute" in hall before being allowed into class. Evaluate after one week.
5. Evaluate the results.	Assess whether or not progress has been made toward goal, make necessary changes in plan.	Progress is being made, but students have trouble settling down because of distractions in hall. Try taking "quiet minute" in library, which is empty in the morning.

Use **Figure 4.2** to guide you through the process of a problem you are currently experiencing or may have experienced.

Figure 4.2
Interpersonal Problem-Solving Strategy

Step	Implementation Strategy	Problem
1. State the problem.	Allow each person to explain her or his point of view.	
2. Identify the causes.	Determine those over which the group has some amount of control.	
3. Generate solutions.	Accept all feasible ideas.	
4. Decide on a course of action.	Choose the most acceptable alternative, set a timeline for evaluation.	
5. Evaluate the results.	Assess whether or not progress has been made toward goal, make necessary changes in plan.	

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