



The Role of A Paraprofessional

OVERVIEW

Paraprofessionals play a crucial role in providing support to educators and students under their care. They are essential in ensuring access to the general education setting in academic and non-academic components of a student's day. The paraprofessional's responsibilities can vary widely depending on the specific needs of the student, the grade level, and the school and/or district policies. This guide provides an overview of key areas paraprofessionals often provide support and guidance that can be used to improve practices in school communities.

KEY SUPPORT AREAS

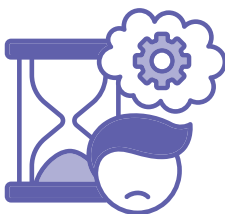
Support provided by paraprofessionals most often falls into the following key areas:



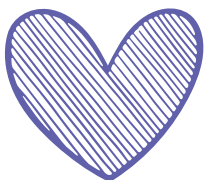
Instructional Support: The paraprofessional assists with educational services, instructional methods, or school resources provided to students in their care to help the student accelerate their learning progress, catch up with their peers, or generally succeed in school. This support may be provided to individual students, specific student populations, or all students in the class.



Language Support: The paraprofessional assists with the execution of communication strategies and provides assistance to students in multiple settings to support language acquisition.



Executive Functioning Support: The paraprofessional assists students with adaptive skills including but not limited to planning ahead and meeting goals, displaying self-control, following multiple-step directions even when interrupted, and staying focused despite distractions.



Social Emotional Support: The paraprofessional assists students with communication and interpersonal skills needed to achieve individual goals. These can be outlined in a Behavior Intervention Plan, 504 Plan or in an IEP.



Medical & Physical Support: The paraprofessional collaborates with the nurse to support students with medical and toileting needs.

GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT IMPLEMENTATION

The guidance below outlines how paraprofessionals can provide support to the students in their care. It is important to note that support provided by paraprofessionals is not something that is defined in IDEA. Communities should refer to their specific policies, guidelines, or rubrics that further outline their role and responsibilities.

Support Strategies

- Assist students by sitting with them and reading or restating questions or sentences aloud.
- Work 1:1 or in a small group to review concepts taught or support completion of the guided practice as designed by a teacher.
- Work alongside a teacher to determine which students need an additional review and determine how and when to provide those support.

Instructional

Questions to Guide Planning

- Can we schedule time to review learning targets for students being supported?
- How can we track students' interest to learn more about how they learn and how they show their learning?
- What are the responsibilities for gathering and sharing data on student progress?
- Can we review resources with to support understanding of concepts from the curriculum?

Language

- Support students with access to academic content.
- Monitor assistive technology or use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices.
- Bilingual paraprofessionals provide language support to English language Learners (ELLs).

- What questions do we have about any of the technology or other devices the student we support utilize?
- Do students in our care have an Individualized Accommodation Plan (IAP) or communication goals we can review together?

Paraprofessionals play a critical role in ensuring all students receive equal educational opportunities and access to academic success regardless of ability level.



Support Strategies

- Support students in keeping track of deadlines, materials, and/or project components.
- Review and track IEP goals.
- Support students in identifying challenges they are facing and how to communicate these to the teachers they work with.
- Share insights on student strengths and needs with teachers and other staff.

Questions to Guide Planning

- How can we best support students in achieving their goals?
- What visual aids or guides can we create to support student progress?
- What class-wide systems can we put in place to support students with organization?
- Is there a place in the classroom where we can keep a set of spare materials/handouts/notes?

**Executive
Functioning**

- Serve as a guide in instructing students on expectations for classroom behavior
- Support students and teachers in and after moments of crisis
- Review and track individual goals aligned to a behavior plan
- Offer positive reinforcements, support in creating a conducive environment, and ensure that individual sensory requirements are met effectively in accordance to the student's behavior plan

- When can we review the Behavior Intervention Plan and discuss the impact of the exceptionality on the student's behavior?
- How will we support tracking the student's behavior?
- How will we support in communicating a behavior report with guardians?
- What sensory objects are available and appropriate for the student to use?

**Social
Emotional**

- Receive medical training to support individual student needs
- Review and track individual goals aligned to the student's needs
- Support student with toileting and/or mobility, if applicable
- Provide and support students in accessing and using fine and gross motor accommodations

- How do the student's health needs impact their ability to participate in the classroom?
- What is our role in supporting the students in an academic setting?
- What other tools and supports do students with medical and/or physical needs require in order to be successful while at school?

**Medical &
Physical**

Paraprofessionals are essential to the success of students.

To enhance the everyday experience of learners in our communities, schools must prioritize the support and development of paraprofessionals. This can take the form of cycles of ongoing learning on topics such as those highlighted below.



Exploration of the Foundations of Inclusive Education



Understanding of IEPs and How to Use Them to Implement Daily Support



Application of Collaborative Mindsets to Enhance Inclusion



Opportunities to Plan and Apply Learnings in their Role



Introduction to and Understanding of How to Support Learner Variance

SPED Strategies offers a training series proven to shift the practices of paraprofessionals in the above areas. Scan the QR code to connect with us and sign up or email support@spedstrategies.com.



REFERENCES

- Best Practices for Paraprofessionals*. (2019, August 9). Florida Inclusion Network. <https://www.floridainclusionnetwork.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/CueCard-FINAL-Paraprofessional-08.09.19.pdf>
- Doering, K. (2005). *Paraprofessional Gen. Ed Goals and Outcomes*. California Research Institute. https://education.rowan.edu/_docs/general-education-goals-and-outcomes.pdf
- Juravich, N. (2019, September 3). *Making a “paraprofessional movement” in New York City*. The Gotham Center for New York City History. <https://www.gothamcenter.org/blog/making-a-paraprofessional-movement-in-new-york-city>
- Lightner, L. (2023, August 10). *How to get a 1:1 aide/para added to an IEP*. A Day in our Shoes. <https://adayinourshoes.com/one-on-one-aide-paraprofessional-iep-special-education/>
- Vierstra, G. (2023, November 27). *Paraprofessionals: What you need to know*. Understood. <https://www.understood.org/articles/paraprofessionals-what-you-need-to-know>