

Parent Guide to Paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals, whether they are working with a single student or in a general education setting, have become a vital link to enable school districts to expand their programs and adapt to the special needs of students in the form of smaller and more varied classrooms and instructional settings.

Paraprofessionals increase the amount of quality instructional time, enabling individual student needs to be met in a timely and efficient manner. Effectively utilized, paraprofessionals create positive role models that expand student-learning opportunities through individualized attention, instruction, and behavior management. Further, they ensure that students receive consistent and safe instruction in the general school environments.

Finally, and perhaps just as important as providing direct support to students, paraprofessionals enable teachers to have time to develop their instructional programs for all students with greater consistency in planning, teaching, and evaluating their special education program.

Role of the Teacher vs. the Role of the Paraprofessional

The following highlights the differences in role of the teacher and paraprofessional in various aspects of an educational program:

Classroom Teacher/ LBS/Team	Paraprofessional
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Diagnoses educational needs. ○ Plans instructional programs. ○ Grades student performance. ○ Takes complete responsibility for new concepts, skills, and classroom activities. ○ Revises instructional programs. ○ Designs instructional material. ○ Designs and implements behavior and intervention plans. ○ Communicates child progress or concerns with parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Scores and compiles data associated with informal assessment. ○ Assists with the planning process, copies, transcribes, types, files, etc. ○ Checks and scores work. ○ Reinforces and reviews concepts and skills. Assists students in performing activities initiated by the classroom teacher/LBS. ○ Monitors student progress in instructional programs and relates findings to LBS. ○ Constructs materials designed by classroom teacher/LBS. ○ Monitors and reinforces student performance during behavioral interventions through observation; performs data collection, compilation and other record keeping duties.

Communication with Paraprofessionals

The parent or guardian is involved in each step of the educational process. You and your student's IEP team discuss the types of activities and supports that best suit your student's educational experience. The LBS/case worker and general education teacher translate this information into a job description for the paraprofessional. The LBS/case manager will define the paraprofessional's role in relation to the parent. For younger children, the paraprofessional may be responsible to keep a daily notebook with the parent. This notebook might include a daily activity update, a log of home-work assignments, general comments regarding the day, or comments about the student's behavior. The teacher or LBS communicates with the paraprofessional about what and how to exchange information in a manner that is appropriate for each student's personal development.

Parents are encouraged to work out a communication arrangement at the start of the school year with your student's LBS/Case Manager. This communication arrangement should include how communications with the paraprofessional will be conducted: written, email, telephone, or always through the case worker. Please don't put the paraprofessional in a difficult position by trying to communicate outside of the agreed-upon arrangement.

The Role of the Paraprofessional

The primary role of the paraprofessional is to assist the teacher in helping your child have a successful educational experience. The specific way in which the paraprofessional supports your child depends on his/her individual needs.

Various factors influence the specific responsibilities assigned to the paraprofessionals including: characteristics and personalities of teachers, paraprofessionals and students; interpersonal skills of both teachers and paraprofessionals, the skill level of the paraprofessionals, and the physical environment of the classroom. Individual teachers may vary the responsibilities of the paraprofessionals to enhance the program of instruction. The following illustrates instructional and administrative duties that might be assigned to a paraprofessional:

- Assist individual students in performing activities initiated by the LBS/general education teachers.
- Supervise children in the hallway, lunchroom, and playground.
- Supervise the classroom when the supervising teacher is called away.
- Assist in monitoring supplementary work and independent study.
- Reinforce learning in small groups or with individuals while the LBS/general education teachers works with other students.
- Provide assistance with individualized programmed materials.
- Assist the LBS/general education teachers in observing, recording, and charting behavior.
- Assist the teacher with crisis problems and behavior management.
- Assist in preparation/production of instructional materials.
- Carry out instructional programs designed by the LBS/general education teachers.
- Work with the LBS/general education teachers to develop classroom schedules.
- Administer tests.
- Participate in student meetings.

If You Have a Concern

If you have general or specific concerns about your child's progress, you should contact your child's case manager to discuss your concerns. If you feel your child's case manager is not appropriately addressing your concerns, you should contact your Principal or Special Education Coordinator for your child's school.

Concerns should not be discussed privately with your child's paraprofessional; this only puts the paraprofessional in an awkward position because the paraprofessional takes direction from your child's Case Manager and/or General Education Teacher.

How Parents Can Support Paraprofessionals

1. **Share information about your child with all staff members at the beginning of the year.**

Before the beginning of the school year, take time to write down information about your child you think would be helpful, such as:

- *Child's strengths, interests, likes, dislikes*
- *Things that trigger a negative reaction (e.g. fire alarms)*
- *Social difficulties*
- *Strategies to bring out the best in your child*
- *Strategies to address behavioral issues (e.g. cool-down strategies)*
- *Academic Strategies*
- *Private therapies*
- *Your hopes and dreams for your child (for the school year and beyond)*

2. **Communicate to all staff members throughout the year:**

- *Feedback on whether your student's school strategies transfer successfully to related home activities such as homework, self advocacy, behavior programs, etc.*
- *Techniques and settings that motivate student success at home.*
- *New things your child has done.*
- *Specific health information on sleeping and eating changes and stressful family situations.*

3. **Acknowledge the work of the paraprofessional.**

The work of a paraprofessional is so important and can be very challenging. Take every opportunity to acknowledge and thank the paraprofessionals for the work they are doing.