



Case Study Findings

Conditions Contributing to Successful Teacher-Paraprofessional Partnerships

Case studies of four teacher-paraprofessional partnerships in Ohio school districts suggest many factors that are likely to contribute to the successful engagement of paraprofessionals on instructional teams. These factors fall into four main categories:

- professional preparation of paraprofessionals,
- continuity and quality of the teacher-paraprofessional partnership,
- effective communication, and
- establishment of a climate that professionalizes the role of paraprofessionals.

Professional Preparation of Paraprofessionals

The case studies suggest that paraprofessionals who have professional training and prior experience effectively support student learning, collaborate productively with teachers, and are accorded respect within the school community. Paraprofessionals' professional training includes coursework in the field of education; participation in paraprofessional certification programs; professional development provided by schools and districts, the OPEPP process, and independent study; and training from teachers with whom the paraprofessionals work.

Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Paraprofessional Partnership

The case studies reveal that the quality of the relationship between a teacher and a paraprofessional often contributes to the longevity of their partnership. Similarly, they show that partnerships between a teacher and a paraprofessional often improve in quality over time. Continuity in

teacher-parapro relationships is dependent upon school district policies that facilitate teacher-parapro partners working together across multiple years. Long-term partnerships enable parapro to understand the strategies, procedures, and expectations of the teachers with whom they work; and they allow teachers and parapro to develop mutual trust and effective systems for communicating, collaborating, evaluating performance, and resolving conflict.

Effective Communication

The case studies indicate that effective communication between teachers and parapro is likely a key contributor to parapro's ability to provide instruction and support to students. Teacher-parapro communication involves, for example, discussing student needs, giving or receiving directions, reviewing performance, asking for help, planning mid-course corrections, resolving conflicts, ensuring confidentiality, and balancing cordiality and professionalism. Including parapro in instructional conversations, professional learning communities, and professional development opportunities enhances teacher-parapro communication.

Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Parapro

The case studies reveal an association between environments that professionalize the role of the parapro and the effectiveness of parapro's performance of instructionally relevant tasks under the supervision of a teacher, such as tutoring a student, guiding small-group learning, and administering assessments. Districts and schools can implement policies, establish structures, and use procedures that help cultivate a climate that professionalizes the role of parapro. Factors beyond the purview of school districts, however, might impact the scope of the changes that can be implemented. Examples of such factors include governmental regulations, labor contracts, legal and financial considerations, and availability of resources. Challenges notwithstanding,

many districts appear to be effecting notable changes, often drawing on support and resources from the Ohio Department of Education and other state agencies and programs.

Teachers play a significant part in establishing a climate that professionalizes the role of paraprofessionals by demonstrating respect for paraprofessionals and trust in their work, by including paraprofessionals in planning and delivering instruction, by ensuring that others (e.g., teachers and administrators, students’ families) recognize the professional contributions of paraprofessionals, and by including paraprofessionals in instructional conversations and teacher events and meetings. Paraprofessionals themselves contribute to the development of a climate in which their role is professionalized by effectively supporting student learning, demonstrating initiative and professional judgment, and continually working to improve their knowledge and performance.

The following sections identify for each category specific factors that district and school leaders, teachers, and paraprofessionals might consider as they work together to create learning communities in which paraprofessionals play a key role in the educational mission. Examples from the case studies are included for each consideration.

Considerations for District and School Leaders

Table 1: Professional Preparation of Paraprofessionals

Consideration	Examples
Districts and schools might consider implementing employment and job placement practices that give preference to paraprofessional candidates with professional training and/or prior experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Post-secondary coursework/degree in education, child development, paraprofessional certification, etc. ● Previous experience working as paraprofessional ● Previous experience working with children ● Relevant prior employment ● Familiarity with schools
Many school districts in Ohio employ paraprofessionals through partnerships with other agencies. Districts might provide guidelines to these agencies specifying their preference for paraprofessionals with	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Educational Service Center (ESC) ● Employment agency ● Multiple sources for paraprofessionals, depending on paraprofessionals’ job functions

professional training and prior experience.	
Districts/schools might offer professional development to paraprofessionals to enhance their knowledge, skills, effectiveness, and job satisfaction.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● School’s mission, organization, culture, code of conduct ● Tasks and expectations ● Effective communication ● Same topics as for teachers, e.g., instruction, assessment, behavioral strategies, confidentiality, use of technology ● OPEPP process

Table 2: Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Paraprofessional Partnership

Consideration	Examples
Certain district/school policies, structures, and procedures likely contribute to the development of high quality teacher-paraprofessional partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Hiring paraprofessionals with (or instructing them in) professional skills (e.g., helping with instruction, scaffolding, communicating, collaborating, fading supports) ● Training teachers how to work effectively with paraprofessionals, e.g., ways paraprofessionals can support instruction, effective communication, conflict resolution ● Participation in the OPEPP process/use of OPEPP tools and resources ● Provide a paraprofessional mentor for newly employed paraprofessionals ● Providing opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to plan together, review performance and needs, collaborate ● Scheduling paraprofessionals to work with a limited number of supervising teachers ● Enabling paraprofessionals to attend IEPs, TBTs, conferences ● Maximizing paraprofessionals’ time in the classroom; minimizing pull-out for other non-teaching purposes, e.g., office coverage, cafeteria duty
Certain district/school structures appear to contribute to the continuity of teacher-paraprofessional partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Job assignments that allow effective teacher-paraprofessional teams to stay together ● Job assignments based on students’ needs ● Job assignments based on paraprofessionals’ strengths ● Employment policies and conditions that reduce employee turnover ● Job descriptions and performance evaluations ● Paraprofessionals employed by the school district rather than by an outside agency

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Rewards for experience and effective job performance, e.g., pay increase, seniority, increased responsibilities, professional training opportunities
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Table 3: Effective Communication

Consideration	Examples
Districts and schools might foster effective teacher-parapro communication by providing professional development and training/coaching to teachers and parapro.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● How teachers can communicate effectively with parapro ● Conflict resolution ● Confidentiality in schools ● Body language ● Inclusive (e.g., person-first) language
Districts/schools can facilitate effective communication by providing (especially new) teachers and parapro with organizational information.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Job descriptions: Responsibilities of the administrators, teachers, and parapro ● District/school employee flow charts
Districts and schools can provide opportunities for parapro to communicate and collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents, and other parapro.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Daily planning and collaboration time ● IEPs, parent conferences ● TBTs, instructional planning meetings ● PD events, OPEPP activities, professional conferences ● School events for families/community ● Professional learning communities (PLCs)

Table 4: Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Parapro

Consideration	Examples
Districts can revise employment practices and terms to reflect the professionalized status of parapro.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Employing parapro through the district ● Changing employment terms, e.g., salary, time off, continuing education, seniority ● Implementing job descriptions and performance evaluation systems
Districts can give parapro more autonomy in managing their careers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Options for professional development, OPEPP, continuing education, professional certification, advancement into higher level positions ● Performance evaluations, self-improvement plans ● A voice in job placement and job responsibilities

Consideration	Examples
Districts and schools might provide clarification of the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Creation and dissemination of guidelines as to what paraprofessionals are authorized (and not authorized) to do ● Differentiation among categories of paraprofessionals (e.g., one-on-ones, instructional paraprofessionals, duty/coverage paraprofessionals)
Districts and schools can actively encourage a climate of professional respect for paraprofessionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Acknowledging the work of paraprofessionals and viewing them as part of students' instructional teams ● Inclusion of paraprofessionals in schoolwide opportunities, celebrations, and other activities ● Minimizing the pulling of paraprofessionals from their regular work to perform other duties ● Referring to paraprofessionals by title and last name (i.e., Mrs. Smith instead of Miss Sally), as with teachers ● Involving paraprofessionals in TBTs, instructional planning meetings, IEPs, conferences, school events
Districts and schools can work to elevate paraprofessionals' conception of the work they do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Professional development, participation in OPEPP process, continuing education ● Higher expectations, increased responsibility, greater autonomy

Considerations for Teachers

Table 5: Professional Preparation of Paraprofessionals

Consideration	Examples
Teachers might consider providing on-the-job training even to paraprofessionals who have had professional preparation and prior experience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explaining, demonstrating, reviewing outcomes, making suggestions, introducing curricula ● Providing materials and resources ● Co-teaching, teaching with paraprofessionals ● Including paraprofessionals whenever possible in PD and OPEPP sessions, IEPs, and instructional planning ● Clearly communicating school norms and rules, expectations, responsibilities
Supervising teachers' actions contribute to paraprofessionals' continuing education/professional development.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing opportunities for paraprofessionals to use what they have learned ● Including paraprofessionals in TBTs and professional learning communities (PLCs) whenever possible.

Table 6: Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Paraprofessional Partnership

Consideration	Examples
Teachers' actions play a major role in the development of effective teacher-parapro partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing training, instructions, materials, and performance feedback ● Planning, collaborating, working out systems together ● Using parapro in the ways specified in their job descriptions ● Using parapro to provide instructional support to students, not just classroom management, administrative, or personal care tasks. ● Giving parapro independent tasks and responsibilities; promoting parapro's ownership of their tasks ● Developing effective means of communicating; inviting discussion, questions, and suggestions ● Propagating respect for parapro and their work
Certain teacher understandings appear to be associated with successful teacher-parapro partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parapro are part of the community of educators. ● A parapro is a very important tool for a teacher. ● The more teachers invest in training and building relationships with their parapro, the more effective the parapro will be in supporting student learning. ● Respect and have trust in your parapro.
Certain characteristics tend to be associated with high quality, successful teacher-parapro partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher-parapro partners working together over multiple school years ● Teacher-parapro partners communicating and collaborating frequently and well ● Effective systems for conflict resolution ● Mutual trust and respect ● Parapro who have professional knowledge and experience working with children ● Parapro who demonstrate initiative, are receptive to learning, and can work independently
Effective teacher-parapro partnerships tend to be long lasting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using performance evaluations to support parapro's professional growth ● Requesting to continue to work with the same parapro(s) ● School policies that enable teacher-parapro partnerships to stay together over multiple school years

Table 7: Effective Communication

Consideration	Examples
Effective communication appears to be a critical component of high quality teacher-parapro partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing instruction, giving feedback, inviting questions and suggestions ● Resolving conflicts ● Maintaining confidentiality ● Using inclusive language

Involving paraprofessionals in educational conversations contributes to effective teacher-paraprofessional communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussing student needs and performance ● Providing background information so paraprofessionals develop holistic understanding of students ● Including paraprofessionals in team meetings (e.g., Teacher-based Teams and IEP teams), instructional planning, professional learning communities, professional development whenever possible
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Table 8: Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Paraprofessionals

Consideration	Examples
Training provided by teachers and by school professional development programs professionalizes the work that paraprofessionals can do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Providing training and experience in instructional tasks, e.g., planning, scaffolding, assessing ● Including paraprofessionals in TBTs, IEPs, professional development, professional learning communities, OPEPP program ● Familiarizing paraprofessionals with school laws, norms, procedures, codes of conduct ● Giving paraprofessionals information about students, enabling paraprofessionals to take initiative in supporting student learning
Teachers' actions contribute to a climate of professional respect for the work of paraprofessionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Considering paraprofessionals as members of students' instructional teams ● Giving paraprofessionals independent tasks, a voice in choosing job responsibilities, and input into planning instructional activities and materials ● Involving paraprofessionals in TBTs, IEPs, conferences, school events, professional learning communities ● Promoting respect for the work of paraprofessionals among teachers, students, and families
Effective teacher-paraprofessional communication is associated with professionalizing the role of paraprofessionals.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Clarifying responsibilities, providing feedback, inviting questions and suggestions ● Treating paraprofessionals as professional colleagues and addressing them with the same level of formality as with teachers (e.g., Mrs. Smith instead of Miss Sally) ● Demonstrating trust and respect

Considerations for Paraprofessionals

Table 9: Professional Preparation of Paraprofessionals

Consideration	Examples
Paraprofessionals might consider broadening their skill-sets and expanding their	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● College-level coursework in a paraprofessional preparation program or other program in the field of education ● Associates or bachelors degree, paraprofessional certification

access to job opportunities by seeking out various types of training.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Training from teachers, observing teachers ● Training from school specialists, such as occupational therapists and speech therapists ● Professional development, participation in OPEPP program ● Experience working with children in school settings ● Experience, and familiarity with, schools and schooling
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Table 10: Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Parapro Partnership

Consideration	Examples
Paraprofessionals' actions play a major role in the development of effective teacher-paraprofessional partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improving skills and knowledge through coursework, professional development, OPEPP programs and resources, and from teachers and colleagues ● Fulfilling the responsibilities in the job description; taking ownership of the job ● Becoming familiar with students' backgrounds and needs, accommodations and scaffolds ● Learning school regulations and routines ● Planning, collaborating, and working out systems together with supervising teachers ● Communicating effectively with teachers and administrators ● Asking questions, being open to suggestions and feedback ● Working well independently and as part of a team ● Taking initiative and being involved as a member of students' instructional teams
Certain paraprofessional understandings appear to be associated with effective teacher-paraprofessional partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Paraprofessionals are part of the community of educators. ● The more paraprofessionals invest in learning and in building strong relationships with their supervising teachers, the more effective they will be in supporting student learning.
Certain characteristics tend to be associated with high quality, effective teacher-paraprofessional partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Teacher-paraprofessional partners working together over multiple school years ● Teacher-paraprofessional partners communicating and collaborating well ● Effective systems for conflict resolution ● Mutual trust and respect ● Paraprofessionals who have professional knowledge and experience working with children ● Paraprofessionals who demonstrate initiative, are receptive to learning, and can work independently
Certain conditions of effective teacher-paraprofessional partnerships seem	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Using job descriptions and performance evaluations to meet teacher and school expectations

Consideration	Examples
to help those partnerships become long-lasting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Requesting to continue to work with the same teacher ● Celebrating successes

Table 11: Effective Communication

Consideration	Examples
Effective communication appears to be a critical component of high-quality teacher-parapro partnerships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Understanding instructions, asking questions, giving feedback, being receptive to criticism and suggestions ● Checking in with teachers frequently about expectations, needs, performance ● Resolving conflicts successfully ● Demonstrating professionalism ● Maintaining confidentiality ● Using respectful, inclusive language
Participating in educational conversations contributes to effective teacher-parapro communication.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Discussing student needs and performance ● Collaborating and planning with teachers ● Participating whenever possible in TBTs, IEPs, instructional planning, professional learning communities, and professional development

Table 12: Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Parapro

Consideration	Examples
Training provided by teachers, school professional development programs, and OPEPP programs professionalizes the work that parapro can do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Getting training and experience in instructional tasks such as planning, teaching, choosing books and materials, scaffolding, using accommodations, giving assessments, managing student behavior ● Participating whenever possible in TBTs, IEPs, instructional planning, professional development, professional learning communities, OPEPP program ● Becoming familiar with school laws, norms, procedures, codes of conduct ● Learning about students and their needs
Parapro's actions contribute to a climate of professional respect for the work of parapro.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Taking initiative in supporting student learning and assisting teachers ● Working independently and as part of instructional teams ● Taking part in TBTs, IEPs, conferences, school events, professional learning communities ● Interacting respectfully and professionally with students, parents, teachers, and administrators ● Being flexible, adjusting quickly to new tasks and conditions

Effective teacher-parapro communication is associated with professionalizing the role of parapro.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Asking for instructions, suggestions, feedback, and assistance● Responding positively to feedback and corrections● Collaborating with teachers to meet student needs
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