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 parapros on instructional teams. These factors fall into four main categories:

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

Professional Preparation of Parapros

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

Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Parapro Partnership

The case studies reveal that the quality of the relationship between a teacher and a parapro often contributes to the longevity of their partnership. Similarly, they show that partnerships between a teacher and a parapro 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 parapros to understand the strategies, procedures, and expectations of the teachers with whom they work; and they allow teachers and parapros 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 parapros is likely a key contributor to parapros’ 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 parapros in instructional conversations, professional learning communities, and professional development opportunities enhances teacher-parapro communication.

**Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Parapros**

The case studies reveal an association between environments that professionalize the role of the parapro and the effectiveness of parapros’ 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 parapros. 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

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<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Districts and schools might consider implementing employment and job placement practices that give preference to paraprofessional candidates with professional training and/or prior experience. | • 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 | • Educational Service Center (ESC)  
• Employment agency  
• Multiple sources for paraprofessionals, depending on paraprofessional’s job functions |
professional training and prior experience.

Districts/schools might offer professional development to parapros to enhance their knowledge, skills, effectiveness, and job satisfaction.

- 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-Parapro Partnership

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<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
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| Certain district/school policies, structures, and procedures likely contribute to the development of high quality teacher-parapro partnerships. | - Hiring parapros with (or instructing them in) professional skills (e.g., helping with instruction, scaffolding, communicating, collaborating, fading supports)  
  - Training teachers how to work effectively with parapros, e.g., ways parapros can support instruction, effective communication, conflict resolution  
  - Participation in the OPEPP process/use of OPEPP tools and resources  
  - Provide a parapro mentor for newly employed parapros  
  - Providing opportunities for teachers and parapros to plan together, review performance and needs, collaborate  
  - Scheduling parapros to work with a limited number of supervising teachers  
  - Enabling parapros to attend IEPs, TBTs, conferences  
  - Maximizing parapros’ 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-parapro partnerships. | - Job assignments that allow effective teacher-parapro teams to stay together  
  - Job assignments based on students’ needs  
  - Job assignments based on parapros’ strengths  
  - Employment policies and conditions that reduce employee turnover  
  - Job descriptions and performance evaluations  
  - Parapros employed by the school district rather than by an outside agency |
- Rewards for experience and effective job performance, e.g., pay increase, seniority, increased responsibilities, professional training opportunities

### Table 3: Effective Communication

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<tr>
<th>Consideration</th>
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| Districts and schools might foster effective teacher-parapro communication by providing professional development and training/coaching to teachers and parapros. | - How teachers can communicate effectively with parapros  
- 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 parapros with organizational information. | - Job descriptions: Responsibilities of the administrators, teachers, and parapros  
- District/school employee flow charts |
| Districts and schools can provide opportunities for parapros to communicate and collaborate with teachers, administrators, parents, and other parapros. | - 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 Parapros

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<th>Consideration</th>
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| Districts can revise employment practices and terms to reflect the professionalized status of parapros. | - Employing parapros through the district  
- Changing employment terms, e.g., salary, time off, continuing education, seniority  
- Implementing job descriptions and performance evaluation systems |
| Districts can give parapros more autonomy in managing their careers.          | - 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 |
Considerations for Teachers

Table 5: Professional Preparation of Paraprofessionals

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<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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<tr>
<td>Districts and schools might provide clarification of the roles and</td>
<td>● Creation and dissemination of guidelines as to what paraprofessionals are authorized (and not authorized) to do</td>
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<td>responsibilities of paraprofessionals.</td>
<td>● Differentiation among categories of paraprofessionals (e.g., one-on-one, instructional paraprofessionals, duty/coverage paraprofessionals)</td>
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<td>Districts and schools can actively encourage a climate of professional</td>
<td>● Acknowledging the work of paraprofessionals and viewing them as part of students’ instructional teams</td>
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<td>respect for paraprofessionals.</td>
<td>● Inclusion of paraprofessionals in schoolwide opportunities, celebrations, and other activities</td>
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<td>● Minimizing the pulling of paraprofessionals from their regular work to perform other duties</td>
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<td>● Referring to paraprofessionals by title and last name (i.e., Mrs. Smith instead of Miss Sally), as with teachers</td>
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<td>● Involving paraprofessionals in TBTs, instructional planning meetings, IEPs, conferences, school events</td>
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<td>Districts and schools can work to elevate paraprofessionals’ conception of</td>
<td>● Professional development, participation in OPEPP process, continuing education</td>
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<td>the work they do.</td>
<td>● Higher expectations, increased responsibility, greater autonomy</td>
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Table 6: Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Paraprofessional Partnership

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<tbody>
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<td>Teachers might consider providing on-the-job training even to paraprofessionals who have had professional preparation and prior experience.</td>
<td>● Explaining, demonstrating, reviewing outcomes, making suggestions, introducing curricula</td>
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<td>● Providing materials and resources</td>
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<td>● Co-teaching, teaching with paraprofessionans</td>
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<td></td>
<td>● Including paraprofessionals whenever possible in PD and OPEPP sessions, IEPs, and instructional planning</td>
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<td>● Clearly communicating school norms and rules, expectations, responsibilities</td>
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<td>Supervising teachers’ actions contribute to paraprofessionals' continuing education/professional development.</td>
<td>● Providing opportunities for paraprofessionals to use what they have learned</td>
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<td>● Including paraprofessionals in TBTs and professional learning communities (PLCs) whenever possible.</td>
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### Table 7: Effective Communication

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<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Teachers’ actions play a major role in the development of effective teacher-parapro partnerships. | • Providing training, instructions, materials, and performance feedback  
• Planning, collaborating, working out systems together  
• Using parapros in the ways specified in their job descriptions  
• Using parapros to provide instructional support to students, not just classroom management, administrative, or personal care tasks.  
• Giving parapros independent tasks and responsibilities; promoting parapros’ ownership of their tasks  
• Developing effective means of communicating; inviting discussion, questions, and suggestions  
• Propagating respect for parapros and their work                                                                                                                                 |
| Certain teacher understandings appear to be associated with successful teacher-parapro partnerships. | • Parapros 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 parapros, the more effective the parapros 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. | • 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  
• Parapros who have professional knowledge and experience working with children  
• Parapros who demonstrate initiative, are receptive to learning, and can work independently                                                                                                                                 |
| Effective teacher-parapro partnerships tend to be long lasting.                                | • Using performance evaluations to support parapros’ 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**

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| Effective communication appears to be a critical component of high quality teacher-parapro partnerships. | • Providing instruction, giving feedback, inviting questions and suggestions  
• Resolving conflicts  
• Maintaining confidentiality  
• Using inclusive language                                                                                                                                 |
Involving parapros in educational conversations contributes to effective teacher-parapro communication.

- Discussing student needs and performance
- Providing background information so parapros develop holistic understanding of students
- Including parapros in team meetings (e.g., Teacher-based Teams and IEP teams), instructional planning, professional learning communities, professional development whenever possible

### Table 8: Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Parapros

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<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Training provided by teachers and by school professional development programs professionalizes the work that parapros can do. | ● Providing training and experience in instructional tasks, e.g., planning, scaffolding, assessing  
  ● Including parapros in TBTs, IEPs, professional development, professional learning communities, OPEPP program  
  ● Familiarizing parapros with school laws, norms, procedures, codes of conduct  
  ● Giving parapros information about students, enabling parapros to take initiative in supporting student learning |
| Teachers’ actions contribute to a climate of professional respect for the work of parapros. | ● Considering parapros as members of students’ instructional teams  
  ● Giving parapros independent tasks, a voice in choosing job responsibilities, and input into planning instructional activities and materials  
  ● Involving parapros in TBTs, IEPs, conferences, school events, professional learning communities  
  ● Promoting respect for the work of parapros among teachers, students, and families |
| Effective teacher-parapro communication is associated with professionalizing the role of parapros. | ● Clarifying responsibilities, providing feedback, inviting questions and suggestions  
  ● Treating parapros 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 Parapros

### Table 9: Professional Preparation of Parapros

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<th>Consideration</th>
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| Parapros might consider broadening their skill-sets and expanding their      | ● College-level coursework in a parapro preparation program or other program in the field of education  
  role.                                                                         | ● Associates or bachelors degree, parapro certification |
access to job opportunities by seeking out various types of training.

- 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

Table 10: Continuity and Quality of the Teacher-Parapro Partnership

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<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| Parapos’ actions play a major role in the development of effective teacher-parapro partnerships. | - 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 parapro understandings appear to be associated with effective teacher-parapro partnerships. | - Parapos are part of the community of educators.  
- The more parapos 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-parapro partnerships. | - Teacher-parapro partners working together over multiple school years  
- Teacher-parapro partners communicating and collaborating well  
- Effective systems for conflict resolution  
- Mutual trust and respect  
- Parapos who have professional knowledge and experience working with children  
- Parapos who demonstrate initiative, are receptive to learning, and can work independently |
| Certain conditions of effective teacher-parapro partnerships seem           | - Using job descriptions and performance evaluations to meet teacher and school expectations |
### Table 11: Effective Communication

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<th>Consideration</th>
<th>Examples</th>
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| to help those partnerships become long-lasting. | ● Requesting to continue to work with the same teacher  
● Celebrating successes |

**Table 12: Establishment of a Climate that Professionalizes the Role of Parapros**

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| Training provided by teachers, school professional development programs, and OPEPP programs professionalizes the work that parapros can do. | ● 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 |
| Parapros’ actions contribute to a climate of professional respect for the work of parapros. | ● 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 parapros.

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|   | • Asking for instructions, suggestions, feedback, and assistance  
|   | • Responding positively to feedback and corrections  
|   | • Collaborating with teachers to meet student needs  
