

Training and Supporting Paraprofessionals for Quality Work in the Field

OPEPP Research Brief #5

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Ohio
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in Paraprofessional Preparation

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IDEA requires paraprofessionals to possess the skills and knowledge necessary to meet the needs of students with disabilities. In 2018, a total of 440,215, or 93.8 percent, of the 469,251 FTE special education paraprofessionals who provided special education and related services for students ages 6 through 21 under IDEA, Part B, were qualified (report to Congress, 2021).

Check out the:

[National CEC Standards for Paraprofessionals](#)
[Ohio's Guidelines for Qualifying Paraprofessionals](#)



The term **qualified** often refers to the minimum qualifications of paraprofessionals including a high school diploma and 2 years working in a school setting and in accordance with the State law, regulations, or policy. The law does not provide how the training and supervision should be conducted (Brock & Carter, 2013).



What do Paraprofessionals Need to Know

One alternative to fading and using paraprofessionals to provide academic and/or social support to students with disabilities, especially students with severe disabilities, in inclusive settings is to solicit the support of their peers.

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of peer partners or interventions as an alternative to the one-to-one paraprofessional (e.g., Biggs et al., 2017; Brock & Carter, 2017; Brock & Huber, 2017).

As students get older, they seek more independence from adults and autonomy. Some peer support and interactions happen naturally such as being a part of a collaborative team for a project or pairing up students for a specific assignment. For students with more severe disabilities, peer training may be required. Sometimes, peers without disabilities may go into a self-contained special education class to assist with academic or daily life skills training. Other times, they assist in specific classes.

Key Topics for Training Paraprofessionals

1. Curriculum
2. Technology
3. Academic Knowledge
4. Instructional Strategies
5. Behavior Management
6. De-escalation Strategies



What do Special Educators Need when Supporting Paraprofessionals

1. Balanced leadership
2. Supervisory knowledge and skills
3. An attitude to build positive relationships
4. Skills on how to coach, observe, and provide feedback
5. Effective communication skills and conflict management skills



A collegial partnership is key to the student success of teachers and paraprofessionals working together. Balanced leadership, is a term referred to by Biggs and her colleagues (2018) which teachers both use:

- 1) supervisory knowledge and skills
- 2) have attitudes toward paraprofessionals that build positive relationships.

Teachers need the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to build the collegial partnership (Gilson & Carter, 2018) and need to learn to coach, observe and provide feedback (Mason, et al., 2017)

Teachers need skills in effective and clear communication, collaboration, coaching, organization, and conflict management as well as fostering a positive classroom team culture (Bagawan et al., 2022; Biggs, et al., 2018; Brock & Carter, 2015).

Teachers must use evidence-based practices in teaching and learning and provide the training and support to paraprofessionals.



evidence based practices

Classroom and special education teachers should also monitor the paraprofessional's behavior to enhance inclusive practices.



inclusive practices

For example, ensuring the paraprofessional isn't sitting next to the student during the whole class period or activity, and that they are facilitating typical peer interactions, following classroom and school culture, norms, and routines, as well as implementing instructional best practices versus their specific way of instructing.



How to Best Train and Support the Use of Paraprofessionals

Listening to the voices of students and their perspectives of paraprofessional roles is limited in the research . One study asked students with intellectual and developmental disabilities about their experience with paraprofessionals (Broer, Doyle, & Giangreco, 2005) . Students felt paraprofessionals sometimes got in the way of developing peer relationships; assisted with bullying, and served as the primary teacher, rather than the classroom teacher, in general education classes.



Are we Delegating Too Much Responsibility?

Delegating too much responsibility to the paraprofessional is often indicated when:

- the paraprofessional knows the student better than the classroom teachers
- the paraprofessional knows the family better than the teacher and special educator, the paraprofessional is making the important instructional or management decisions
- a paraprofessional is absent and school personnel lack the knowledge on how to support the student.

(Giangreco, et al. 1999)



When students have 1:1 support, several cautions need to be considered:

- Ensuring the support is there for students to do the work and not having the paraprofessional do the work for them
- Promoting a dependency on one another where the paraprofessional has the sense of “being needed”
- Both student and paraprofessional may not be a good personality fit
- Both student and paraprofessional may burn out and impact their interactions and learning
- for older students, very few, if any, adult service providers can provide a 1:1 support.



For Further Reading

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