

Paraprofessional Roles & Responsibilities

A primary responsibility of general and special educators is to teach children and youth academic content and learning strategies. In inclusive general education classrooms, paraprofessionals (who may be given such titles as teaching assistants or instructional assistants) frequently support the development and improvement of these skills for learners who struggle, speak another language, or have a disability. A paraprofessional may be assigned to a whole class to support the teacher in general, including assisting with instruction, preparing materials for lessons, or assisting with data collection on learner responses to instruction. A paraprofessional may also be assigned to support one or more learners who have need additional assistance for learning, personal care, or positive social-behavioral engagement.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance for paraprofessional roles and responsibilities.

Supporting the Classroom

Consider the academic, behavioral, social-emotional, and executive function skills for demonstrating routines and tasks. Note: the examples are not exhaustive lists.

1. Name the routine or task.

Begin with procedural and instructional routines and tasks such as:

- entering/exiting the classroom
- getting the attention of the class
- submitting work
- accessing online platforms/resources
- requesting support/help from an adult
- independent learning tasks
- small group instruction
- whole group instruction
- cooperative learning tasks
- taking a break/using the classroom calm space
- leaving the classroom (i.e., bathroom, drink, nurse, etc.)
- phonemic awareness instruction (may utilize call and response structures)

2. Describe the expectations of the routine/task.

Think through the steps of the routine/task as well as the behavioral, social-emotional, and academic skills the routine/task requires.

Example of routine steps for the procedure of entering the classroom:

- ◆ Walk to desk.
- ◆ Set up laptop & get out homework.
- ◆ Stow backpack and jacket in coat room.
- ◆ Complete warm up task in Google Classroom.

Examples of learner skills:

- ◆ Navigate the space of the classroom.
- ◆ Hang backpack and jacket.
- ◆ Unzip backpack and remove charger, laptop, & homework.
- ◆ Connect the charger to laptop and plug in charger to outlet.
- ◆ Place homework on top of the desk.
- ◆ Log into laptop, access Google Classroom, find warm up.
- ◆ Remain on task.
- ◆ Manage time.
- ◆ Interact with classmates.

3. Assign the roles and responsibilities for each adult.

Based on the expectations of the routine/task, determine what needs to be managed as well as what supports are needed by all, some, or few learners.

Consider:

- materials, technology
- visuals, prompts

Example of assigned roles during the procedure for entering the classroom:

Teacher is ...	Paraprofessional is ...
✓ Greeting learners at the door	✓ Setting visual timer
✓ Taking attendance	✓ Placing visual checklist on learner A and B's desk
✓ Verbally praising to all learners	✓ Verbally praising all learners
✓ Providing whole-class verbal prompt at the last 2 minutes (i.e., "Check with your neighbor to see if they need any assistance.")	✓ Ensuring speech-to-text is working for learner A
✓ Calling the attention of the class to begin instruction	✓ Providing individual prompts to learner A and B prior to 2 minutes remaining

4. Reflect on and revise the roles and responsibilities as needed.

Consider:

- What is working?
- What is not working?
- Where is there an opportunity for strengthening the routine/task?
- Where is there an opportunity for creating more learner independence?
- What revisions will be made?

Example of assigned roles during the procedure for entering the classroom:

- ◆ What is working? – visuals and prompting
- ◆ What is not working? – learners have not yet learned the routine and need repeated verbal reminders
- ◆ Where is there an opportunity for strengthening the function of the routine/task? – post **Entering Class Routine** slide on SMART Board for all learners to see
- ◆ Where is there an opportunity for more independence? – provide prompts to learner A and B at 1 minute remaining on visual timer

Planning Template

Routine or Task	Learners are ...	Teacher is ...	Paraprofessional is ...
Entering the Class	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Walk to desk. ✓ Set up laptop & get out homework. ✓ Stow backpack and jacket in coat room. ✓ Complete warm up task in Google Classroom. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Greeting learners at the door ✓ Taking attendance ✓ Verbally praising all learners ✓ Providing whole-class verbal prompt at the last 2 minutes (i.e., “Check with your neighbor to see if they need any assistance.”) ✓ Calling the attention of the class to begin instruction 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Setting visual timer ✓ Placing visual checklist on learner A and B’s desk ✓ Verbally praising all learners ✓ Ensuring speech-to-text is working for learner A ✓ Providing individual prompts to learner A and B prior to 2 minutes remaining
	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓
	✓	✓	✓

Supporting Individual learners

The role of a paraprofessional when assigned to one or more individual children in the classroom is to **supplement** and support the direct instruction provided by the teacher. The paraprofessional will be most effective when using the evidence-based teaching strategies that they have learned through a professional learning opportunity, and when they stand away from the learner as much as possible and only provide one-one personal support (verbal direction or other prompts and guidance) when needed. Even when assigned to an individual learner, the paraprofessional should be a general support to others in the classroom, so they do not appear to be “owned” by a single child.

1. Clearly define the roles and responsibilities and provide embedded training/coaching.

Paraprofessionals come to schools with varying backgrounds, skills, and experiences in working with children. They may or may not have had any contact with a person who has a disability. From a systemic perspective, a training program with periodic coaching will help clarify the expectations and build paraprofessional competencies. Just as importantly, teachers may not have had supervisory experience. It is incumbent that they be supported to know how to provide specific directions, make supportive corrections, and guide the paraprofessional in their work.

“Some kind of help is the kind of help that helping’s all about, and some kind of help is the kind of help we all can do without.”

–Shell Silverstein



THE SHADOW KNOWS:
RODNEY'S SUSPICIONS WERE ACCURATE. UNBEKNOWNST TO HIM, A PARAPROFESSIONAL HAD BEEN ASSIGNED TO BE HIS SHADOW.

2. Develop a teacher partnership and paraprofessional support plan

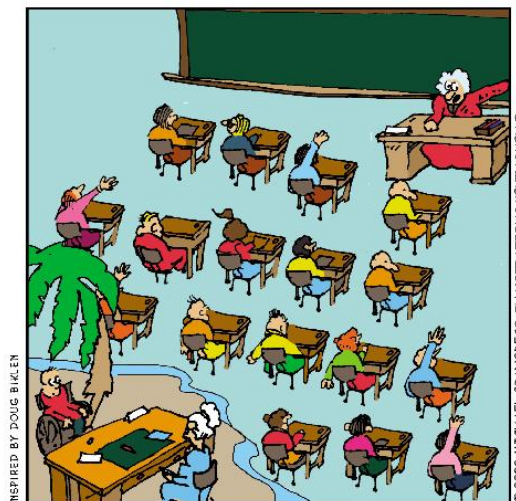
Based on the learner's schedule and the instructional routines of the class, the team can use a "[Planning for Participation](#)" tool or another structure to identify the personal support as well as material modifications and other supplemental support that might be needed. The team will clearly articulate when and how a specific learner should be provided support to avoid the practice of inadvertently over-supporting. Lockman Turner and Mansouri (2022) provide guidance for creating effective partnerships with paraprofessionals.

Examples of types of support:

- ◆ Systematic prompting to organize materials, travel through the building, follow class routines.
- ◆ Data collection of level of prompting provided, completion of assignments, use of developing social behavior, time engaged in lessons.
- ◆ Direction to complete independent work.
- ◆ Support peers to include the learner in class activities.
- ◆ Cut out pictures to be pasted into adapted book.
- ◆ Create prompts on sticky notes to be used for independent reading or assignments.
- ◆ Provide accommodation (e.g., read aloud monitor testing in a quiet location, highlight key words in text).

3. Implement the support plan

As the paraprofessional is providing constant, daily support for children and youth with academic and social/behavioral learning needs, it is important for a para-support plan to be put in place. This can serve to both guide the delivery of services by the paraprofessional, as well as coaching on the next best steps. It will be helpful to ensure the paraprofessional understands the learning goals of the lesson (in advance), the connection to academic grade level standards, and IEP goals – if relevant to the class or activity. Lockman Turner et. al. recommend goal setting with paraprofessionals to support their implementation.



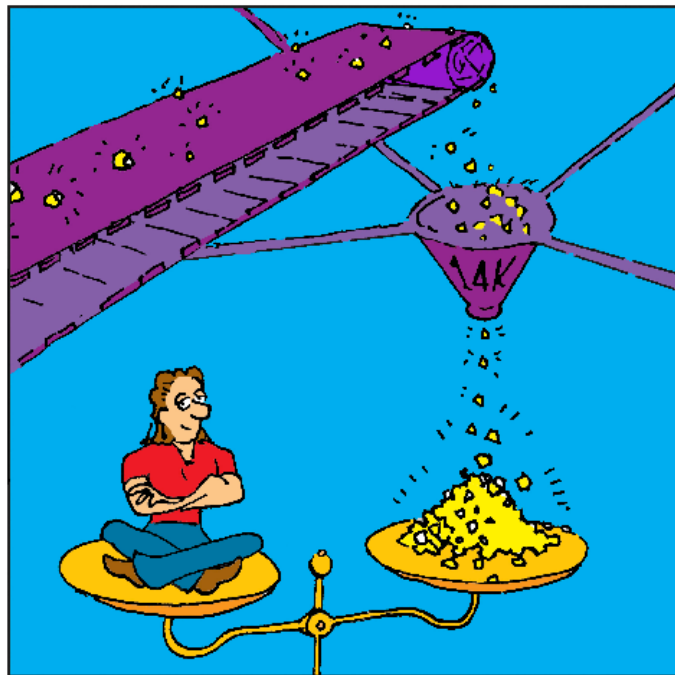
ISLAND IN THE MAINSTREAM
MRS. JONES AND MRS. COOPER ARE STILL TRYING TO FIGURE OUT WHY FRED DOESN'T FEEL LIKE PART OF THE CLASS.

4. Evaluate the impact of supports and develop a fade plan

When a learner needs intensive individualized support from a second adult in order to participate and learn in general education, the team will want to revisit the supports to identify how and when the paraprofessional can be successful in fostering natural supports from the classroom teacher or special educator, peers, or other natural cues in the environment.

Questions that teams can ask are:

- ☑ What's working in the support plan?
- ☑ What's not working: what supports are not effective, not needed, or no longer appropriate for the setting or the social and learning activity?
- ☑ Where can the paraprofessional physically move away to allow natural cues and peers to step in?
- ☑ What does the paraprofessional need to successfully increase the independence of the learner in social situations and in learning?
- ☑ Where can the classroom teacher step in to engage the learner in academic activities?
- ☑ Can anyone else provide this support naturally for the learner?
- ☑ When next less intensive support could be provided?
- ☑ What material, content, class structure can be developed to enable the learner to be more independent?
- ☑ When is it truly necessary to sit directly next to the learner, vs them being next to peers?



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GREAT PARAPROFESSIONALS,
USED WISELY,
ARE WORTH THEIR WEIGHT IN GOLD!

5. Considerations

Inadvertent DETRIMENTAL effects associated with excessive paraprofessional proximity	
Effect	Description
Separation from classmates	A student with a disability and paraprofessional are both seated in the back or side of the room, physically separated from the class.
Unnecessary dependence	A student with a disability is hesitant to participate without paraprofessional direction, prompting, or cueing.
Interference with peer interaction	Paraprofessionals can create physical or symbolic barriers interfering with interactions between a learner with disabilities and classmates.
Insular relationship	A student with a disability and paraprofessional do almost everything together, to the exclusion of others (e.g., peers).
Feelings of stigmatization	A student with a disability expresses embarrassment/discomfort about having a paraprofessional because it makes him/her stand out in negative ways.
Limited access to appropriate instruction	Paraprofessionals do some of the work for the students in an effort to keep up; this is a sign that instruction has not been adequately adapted.
Interference with teacher engagement	Teachers are less involved when a student with a disability has a one-to-one paraprofessional because individual attention is already provided.
Loss of personal control	Paraprofessionals may not only do too much for the learner but may also exercise choices on behalf of the child when communication skills have not been adequately addressed.
Feelings of persecution	Some learners feel that their behavior is scrutinized differently; minor infractions may result in more serious consequences, or they may feel targeted for observation by adults.
Provocation of problem behaviors	Some learners may express their dislike of close paraprofessional support by displaying undesirable behaviors (e.g., running away, foul language, aggression).
Risk of being bullied	Some students are teased or bullied because they are assigned a paraprofessional.

Adapted from: Giangreco, M. F., & Hoza, B. (2013). Are paraprofessional supports helpful? *Attention*, p. 25.

Collaboration and Communication

Clear paraprofessional roles and responsibilities as well as understanding a paraprofessional's perspective specific to their assignments is critical to effective classroom and learner support plans. Predetermined methods for communication and scheduled opportunities for collaboration can be established by determining the purpose, method, frequency, and structure for communication.

Purpose: What is the goal or intent of our communication?

- Debriefing the day
- Sharing an update
- Upcoming support plan for the week(s)
- Discussing progress of individual student(s)

Method: What is the best method of communication?

- Email
- Text
- Shared document (i.e., Google doc, online lesson planner, etc.)
- Virtual Meeting
- Face-to-face meeting

Frequency: How often should communication occur?

- Daily: 5-15 minutes
- Weekly: 30 minutes
- Bi-weekly
- Monthly
- Quarterly

Structure: What is needed to strategically accomplish the purpose?

- Agenda with clearly defined items and approximate time limits
- Specific information/data
- Meeting location
- Coverage or use of time when students do not need support (i.e., recess, specials, lunch, etc.)

References:

Giangreco, M. F. & Hoza, B. (August 2013). Are paraprofessional supports helpful? *Attention*, 20(4), 22-25.

Lockman-Turner, E., & Mansouri, M. C. (2022). Tips for special education teachers to create effective partnerships with paraprofessionals. *Inclusive Practices*. Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas.

[Resources](#) from Michael Giangreco, University of Vermont.