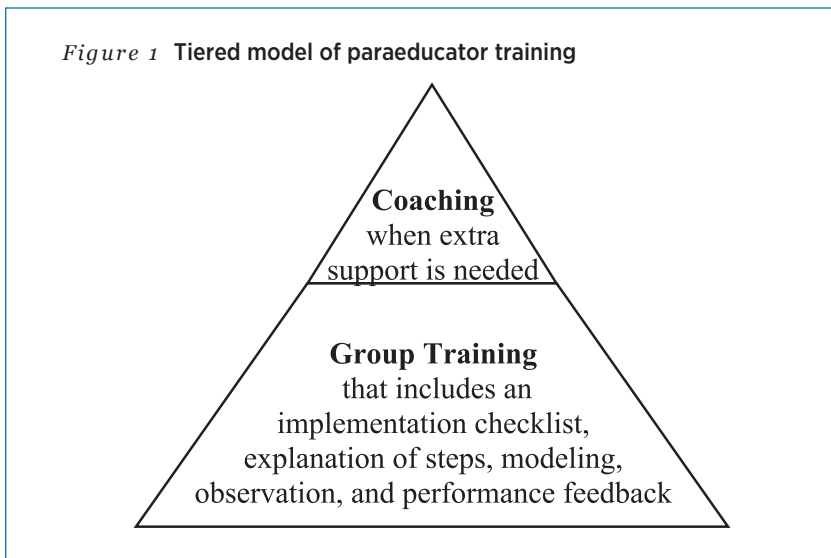# A Tiered Approach for Training Paraeducators to Use Evidence-Based Practices for Students With Significant Disabilities

Matthew E. Brock iD, The Ohio State University

Paraeducators are vitally important members of educational teams who serve students with significant disabilities. Across the United States, schools are hiring increased numbers of paraeducators, who are taking on increased responsibilities in teaching and supporting these students (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). Paraeducators report that their roles frequently involve providing one-to-one and small-group instruction, supporting students who are included in general education classrooms, and modifying or adapting instructional materials (Carter et al., 2009). For many students with significant disabilities, the quality of their education is heavily impacted by the degree to which paraeducators deliver effective instruction and support (Brock, Barczak, Anderson, et al., 2020).

Unfortunately, paraeducators are often asked to provide instruction without first being trained to implement evidence-based practices (Carter et al., 2009). Without training in evidence-based practices, paraeducators lack the most effective tools for improving student outcomes (Cook & Odom, 2013). This is unfair both to the paraeducators themselves and to the students with significant disabilities whom they serve. Furthermore, this falls short of a legal mandate for all students—including students with significant disabilities—to be taught using evidence-based practices (Every Student Succeeds Act, 2015).

Better training and supporting paraeducators can be a major challenge for schools. Typically, this responsibility falls to the special education teachers who supervise paraeducators. These teachers report that it is a struggle to balance paraeducator training with their many other responsibilities and that their teacher preparation programs do not always prepare them to train and supervise paraeducators (Chopra et al., 2011). Furthermore, the most prominent forms of research-based paraeducator training may not be feasible for teachers. Specifically, much of the research on paraeducator training involves research teams delivering multiple one-on-one coaching sessions to paraeducators to train them in a single evidence-based practice (Brock & Anderson, 2020). For teachers who supervise large teams of paraeducators, this model of training may

Figure 1 **Tiered model of paraeducator training**

Coaching when extra support is needed

Group Training that includes an implementation checklist, explanation of steps, modeling, observation, and performance feedback

> **For many students with significant disabilities, the quality of their education is heavily impacted by the degree to which paraprofessionals deliver effective instruction and support.**

not be realistic (Brock, Barczak, & Dueker, 2020).

Tiered training is a promising and feasible alternative to exclusive reliance on one-to-one coaching (see *Figure 1*). Like a response-to-intervention (RTI) model for students, tiered staff training involves providing initial training for groups of paraeducators, monitoring their performance, and then providing follow-up coaching to only the paraeducators who need extra support (Brock, Barczak, Anderson, et al., 2020). In this model, most paraeducators are successful after group training alone, and only a small subset requires one-to-one coaching in order to implement an evidence-based practice with fidelity. For example, researchers have documented that a team of three paraeducators can implement least-to-most prompting with fidelity after only 75 minutes of group training (Brock, Barczak, Anderson, et al., 2020) and that coaching models can involve multiple hours of training per paraeducator to achieve the same goal (Brock & Anderson, 2020). A tiered model

leverages the key ingredients of effective, research-based training: a written step-by-step implementation checklist, explanation of the steps, modeling of the steps, observation of the paraeducator practice, and performance feedback (Brock et al., 2017; see *Table 1*). When teachers delivered tiered training with paraeducators in research studies, the paraeducators have implemented evidence-based practices with fidelity and students with significant disabilities have made progress toward individualized education program goals (Brock, Barczak, Anderson, et al., 2020).

A tiered approach is best suited for situations in which multiple paraeducators have opportunities to implement the same evidence-based practice with multiple students. Fortunately, there are many highly versatile evidence-based practices that are effective across many different students and situations. Examples include systematic prompting strategies, positive reinforcement, task analysis, and peer-support arrangements (Browder

Table 1 **What Makes Paraeducator Training Effective?**

Key component	What is it?	What are some options?
Implementation checklist	Provide a sequential list of steps for implementing an evidence-based practice.	• Individualized checklist: Write down your plan for what each step should look like in the context of a specific student and skill; see *Figure 3* for an example.
Explaining steps	Explain each step from the checklist.	• Verbal explanation: Read through the steps together and talk through what each step means. • Written explanation: Have paraeducators read a detailed explanation of steps from a trusted source.
Modeling steps	Demonstrate how to implement each step from the checklist.	• Role-play: Demonstrate implementation by pretending you are teaching the paraeducator or another adult. • Live student: Have the paraeducator observe you implementing the practice with a student. • Video: Show a video of you or someone else implementing the practice.
Observing practice	Watch the paraeducator attempt to implement the practice.	• Live observation: Schedule a time that you can watch as the paraeducator implements the practice with a student. • Video observation: Direct the paraeducator to video record instruction with a student so that you can watch it at a convenient time.
Performance feedback	Highlight the steps that were implemented well and describe which steps could be improved.	• Verbal feedback: Talk with the paraeducator to share feedback; see *Figure 5* for a checklist of what to cover. • Written feedback: Write the paraeducator a note or email with feedback.

“

Tiered staff training involves initial training for groups of paraeducators, and then providing follow-up coaching to only the paraeducators who need extra support.

et al., 2014). However, there may also be times that a teacher wishes to train only one paraprofessional for a specialized practice that will be used only with a single student. In these situations, a coaching model may be more appropriate.

The following section provides a step-by-step guide for how teachers can implement tiered training with teams of paraeducators. Tiered training can be used to target any evidence-based practice with sequential steps; examples are listed in *Table 2*. Teachers should select practices from this list that are the best fit for their

students and goals. Vignettes illustrate how Ms. Chapman, a middle school special education teacher, trains a team of paraeducators to use least-to-most prompting—an evidence-based practice she determines to be a good fit for her students and their goals. Least-to-most prompting is a systematic prompting strategy that can be used to target any observable behavior. This strategy involves first giving a student the opportunity to perform a skill independently before providing a small amount of support and then increasing

levels of support until the student is successful (Neitzel & Wolery, 2009). A teacher selects the specific prompts that will be used based on the characteristics of the student and the target behavior. A highly versatile strategy, least-to-most-prompting is an example of an evidence-based practice that may be useful for paraeducators with a variety of students and situations.

Getting Started

Step 1: Select an Evidence-Based Practice and Identify Implementation Steps

Select an evidence-based practice that is a good fit for multiple students. Examples are listed in *Table 2*, and detailed lists and descriptions of evidence-based practices are available online from the CEEDAR Center (Browder et al., 2014) and the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (Steinbrenner et al., 2020). Consider which of these practices could be

Table 2 **Examples of Evidence-Based Practices for Students With Significant Disabilities That Could Be Targeted With Tiered Training**

Evidence-based practice[a]	Resource[b]
Differential reinforcement	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/differential-reinforcement
Least-to-most prompting	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/prompting
Most-to-least prompting	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/prompting
Naturalistic intervention	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/naturalistic-intervention
Peer-mediated instruction and intervention	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/peer-mediated-instruction-and-intervention
Picture Exchange Communication System (PECS)	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/picture-exchange-communication-system
Simultaneous prompting	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/prompting
Time delay	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/time-delay
Video modeling	https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/video-modeling

[a]All practices listed here have been identified as an evidence-based practice for students with severe disabilities by the CEEDAR Center (Browder et al., 2014) and for students with autism by the National Clearinghouse on Autism Evidence and Practice (Steinbrenner et al., 2020); practices are listed alphabetically.
[b]Research-based modules developed by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders that include implementation checklists that could be used in a tiered training model.

used across a variety of students and their goals. Next, obtain an implementation checklist that details exactly how the practice should be implemented. Implementation checklists are embedded in free modules developed by the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders (AFIRM Team, 2015) and the Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence (2020). Direct links for research-based implementation checklists are provided in *Table 2*.

Ms. Chapman is a middle school special education teacher for 11 students who are eligible for their state's alternate assessment for students with significant cognitive disabilities. Some of these students have an educational label of intellectual disability, and others have labels of autism or multiple disabilities. All 11 students split their day between general education classrooms and Ms. Chapman's special education classroom. It would be impossible to teach and support all 11 students without the help of her team of three paraeducators, who provide supplemental instruction in the special education classroom and support in the general education classroom.

Ms. Chapman gets along well with the three paraeducators on her team and is always thanking them for how hard they work to support students. She is thankful for how they have built such a great rapport with students and how they seem to have a natural talent for teaching. At the same time, Ms. Chapman knows that these paraeducators have not received any formal training in evidence-based practices for students with significant disabilities, and she wants to help them provide more effective instruction and support. She is concerned that sometimes, in a well-meaning effort to be helpful, her paraeducators are overprompting her students through classroom routines. For example, she often sees Ms. Walker telling Jose every step of how to open his locker and get the things that he needs for the next class. Mr. Greene always sits very close to Veronica and is telling her what to do next—even when she is doing the same morning work routine that she has done many times before. And Ms. Douglass goes through the lunch line with DeAndre while carrying his tray for him and prompting him to tell the cafeteria staff which choices he wants to eat. She is worried that this overprompting is going to make her students prompt dependent, or unable to complete simple tasks without constant prompting from an adult. Ms. Chapman knows that the paraeducators are not intentionally making the students prompt

dependent—they simply do not know any better way to help.

Ms. Chapman decides that she needs to train the paraeducators in an evidence-based strategy that will enable them to fade their prompts and encourage student independence. She scans the CEEDAR Center report on evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities and thinks that least-to-most prompting could be an excellent fit. She remembers that the National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders has an implementation checklist for least-to-most prompting that she can download for free. She goes to its website, downloads the checklist, and prints it out.

Step 2: Develop Student-Specific Plans

Consider how the evidence-based practice will be used with each student. Identify the situations in which the evidence-based practice will be used and the student behaviors that will be targeted. If the student behavior has multiple steps, create a task analysis by making a list of each individual step that makes up the skill. See *Figure 2* for an example of a task analysis. Then develop a written, student-specific plan that details how the evidence-based

Figure 2 Task analysis for opening locker and getting books for class

1. When you are dismissed by your teacher, take your binder and walk to your locker.
2. Turn knob to the right two times so that you pass zero twice.
3. Then stop when the number 22 lines up with the triangle at the top of the lock.
4. Turn the knob left until it is lined up with 14.
5. Turn knob right until it is lined up with 6.
6. Pull down to open the lock.
7. Take the lock off of the locker.
8. Open the locker.
9. Pull out the book for the next class, a notebook, and a pencil.
10. Close the locker.
11. Put the lock back on the locker.
12. Push the lock closed.
13. Turn the knob to the right one time.

Figure 3 Example of an individualized plan paired with an implementation checklist

Least-to-Most prompting planning sheet for teaching *Jose's Locker Routine*

Steps	Explanation	Your Plan
1. Cue/task direction	• Start by providing a cue or task direction. • If there is a natural cue for the student to begin the next step, just wait for that cue.	*Wait for Jose to be dismissed from class (first step only), or for him to finish the previous step in the task analysis (all other steps).*
2. Deliver no prompts; wait for an independent student response	• Wait about 4 seconds, or until the student responds.	*Wait for 4 seconds without providing any prompts.*
3. Respond to the student	• After a correct student response, praise the student and say what they did right. Provide additional reinforcement if needed. Proceed to step 4. • After an incorrect response, or 4 seconds with no response, provide the next prompt in the hierarchy and repeat Step 3.	*After a correct response say, "Great job Jose, you just unlocked the lock by yourself!"* *If you wait 4 seconds and Jose has not started to do the next step, work your way up this prompting hierarchy until he is successful.* *1. Gesture toward the visual schedule on the back of his binder and wait 4 seconds* *2. Point to the picture for the step he is on and wait 4 seconds* *3. Model the step and tell him to copy what you did*

practice will be implemented. Ensure that the plan is aligned with the implementation checklist for the evidence-based practice. See **Figure 3** for an example of a student-specific plan to teach a student how to access their locker between classes using least-to-most prompting.

Ms. Chapman thinks through how she wants her paraeducators to use least-to-most prompting with her students. She thinks of different ways that each of them could use this practice with different students and situations. Ms. Walker could use least-to-most prompting to teach Jose to use his locker independently, Mr. Greene could use it to teach Veronica how to complete the morning classroom routine by

Trainer Checklist

- ☐ Today we are going to add a new strategy: least-to-most prompting.
- ☐ [Read first paragraph on the page that describes least-to-most prompting.]
- ☐ This is a strategy you can use to fade your support after you have already taught a skill.
- ☐ This strategy is effective because it fades out support, but still makes sure that the student practices the correct response.

What is Least-to-Most Prompting?

Least-to-most prompting involves using a hierarchy of at least three different levels of prompting, with each level involving more support than the previous level. The first level is always independent (no prompts) and the last level should always be the controlling prompt (that ensures the correct response). It is sometimes also called system of least prompts or increasing assistance.

When Should You Use It?

- When teaching a student to perform a new skill or a partially acquired skill.
- This approach is effective across many outcome areas including academic, self-help, communication, motor, play, and social skills.

Why Should You Use It?

- Least-to-most prompting naturally fades the intensity of prompts.
- Least-to-most prompting provides opportunities for independent responses, but then ensures that the student practices the correct response.

---

herself, and Ms. Douglass could use it to teach DeAndre how to navigate the lunch line on his own. She realizes that all three of these skills have multiple steps and that she needs to create a task analysis of each skill. To be sure that she does not overlook any steps, she actually goes through the process of doing each skill and writes down the steps as she goes. The cafeteria workers chuckle as she goes through the lunch line and jots down steps in her notebook until she explains what she is doing. When she is done, she has a list of the component steps for each skill.

Ms. Chapman makes three copies of the least-to-most prompting checklist—one for each paraeducator. She thinks through how she will design an individualized plan for how the paraeducators should prompt each student. She knows that she will need to carefully choose prompts based on the student and the skill they are working on. She will also need to pick the natural cue that tells the student to begin the task so that the paraeducators will know exactly when to start using the prompting procedure. First, she thinks about Jose. The natural cue for him to access his locker is when

*he is dismissed from the previous class. As for the prompts for him to complete the locker routine, Ms. Chapman thinks about how Jose has been very successful with following picture schedules. She makes him a picture schedule of all steps in the task analysis (see **Figure 2**) and uses clear mailing tape to attach it to the back of his binder that he takes to all classes. With this support in place, Ms. Walker can first give him an opportunity to do a step independently before gesturing to his binder, where he can access the picture schedule. If he still does not do the step, she can point to the specific picture that shows what he needs to do next. If he still struggles, she can model the step and ask him to imitate. Ms. Chapman records the individualized plan next to each step on the checklist that she will share with Ms. Walker. Then she does the same for Mr. Greene and Ms. Douglass.*

Step 3: Introduce the Practice in an Initial Group Training Session

Identify when it is possible to talk to all paraeducators at the same time for about

30 minutes. This might be before school, after school, or during a shared lunch. If no 30-minute blocks of time are available, spread out the training over multiple days. This time will be used to introduce the evidence-based practice. First, provide a rationale for how the evidence-based practice will benefit students in the class. For example, explain that students in the class have grown dependent on adult support in order to transition between activities and that visual schedules and least-to-most prompting are evidence-based ways to build student independence and fade adult support. See **Figure 4** for an example guide for how to introduce least-to-most prompting during an initial training. Next, provide the implementation checklist and student-specific plans that were developed in Step 2. (See example in **Figure 3**.) Talk about each implementation step, and model what it looks like. Provide models that are as close as possible to the instruction that paraeducators will be providing to students in the class. Then have the paraeducators

Figure 5 **Feedback checklist for video viewings**

☐ Explain that the purpose of the feedback session is to identify what is going well and what could be done differently. Explain that feedback is one of the most powerful professional development tools that we have.

☐ Review the steps on the implementation checklist and explain that you will look together for those steps in the video.

☐ Provide examples of common mistakes and explain how they differ from correct implementation.

☐ Watch the video together and invite the paraeducator to reflect on their own implementation to identify what they did well and what they could do differently. Chime in when you agree and point out mistakes that they missed.

☐ Compliment the paraeducator about the steps they followed well and highlight what ways (if any) they could improve the way that the implemented the steps.

☐ If there was an error on any step, model the practice again and draw attention to that step. Switch roles and have the paraeducator teach you to confirm that the error is fixed. Repeat if errors continue.

☐ Compliment the paraeducator and thank them for sharing their video.

practice through role-play in which one person pretends to be the student and a second person pretends to teach the student using the new practice. Provide positive feedback for steps that are done well and suggestions for improvement when steps are not implemented as planned. Next, direct paraeducators to video record their implementation of the practice with students and to bring the recording to subsequent training sessions. Assure them that because their video will show one of their first attempts of implementing with a real student, no one expects things to be perfect.

Ms. Chapman knows she will need about 30 minutes to complete the initial training on least-to-most prompting, but the only time she can sit down with all three paraeducators is the 20 minutes they are paid to be at school before the busses arrive. Therefore, she decides to break up the training into two 15-minute chunks. This will leave 5 minutes each morning to transition to getting students off of busses.

*During the first 15-minute meeting, Ms. Chapman excitedly shares how she thinks least-to-most prompting can help their students to be more independent with routines. She checks off the steps of her training guide as she goes (see **Figure 4**). She asks the paraeducators to imagine how proud they would feel if Jose accessed his locker without any help, if Veronica did her morning routine all by herself, or if DeAndre could go through the lunch line without an adult. With least-to-most prompting, it is possible that they*

*may be able to realize these outcomes by the end of the semester. Next, Ms. Chapman hands each paraeducator a task analysis of their student's respective skill and explains how it is helpful to break down multistep skills into their component steps. Finally, she provides an implementation checklist to each paraeducator, with a student-specific plan jotted along the side (see "Your Plan" column in **Figure 3**). She briefly explains each step on the checklist before they have to stop—it is time to meet the students at their busses.*

When they meet again the next morning, Ms. Chapman models the implementation steps and asks the paraeducators to take turns practicing the strategy with each other. First, Ms. Walker pretends to teach Ms. Douglass how to access her locker. It feels a little silly at first, but soon they see the benefit in trying out the strategy before they attempt to use it with students. Ms. Chapman compliments them when they use least-to-most prompting well and gives them pointers when there is something that they could do better. After everyone has had a turn to practice, Ms. Chapman asks them to please video record themselves implementing least-to-most prompting with their student on the classroom iPad.

Step 4: Provide Feedback in Two or More Group Training Sessions

Use the checklist provided in *Figure 5* to guide the feedback sessions. Begin each session by reviewing the implementation checklist and the student-specific plans (see *Figure 3*). While going through the

checklist, model what each step should look like and then give examples of common mistakes. For example, when implementing least-to-most prompting, a paraprofessional might forget to provide an opportunity for the student to respond independently, skip to a more intrusive prompt before working their way up the prompt hierarchy, or repeatedly deliver the same prompt instead of moving on to a more intrusive prompt. This will help paraeducators more accurately analyze their own performance in the video. Next, have each paraeducator share their video with the group. Direct the paraeducators to score their implementation checklist as they watch, and fill out your own checklist at the same time. After watching each video, encourage the paraeducators to reflect on their own performance by identifying what they did well and how they could improve. Chime in when you agree with their self-assessment, or explain why you might disagree. Be sure to compliment any correctly performed steps and correct mistakes by remodeling the step. If necessary, have paraeducators practice any steps that need to be fixed through role-play. Provide at least two group training sessions before moving on to Step 5.

The next week, the team sits down to review the videos together on the classroom iPad. Mr. Greene says he is a little nervous about sharing his video. Ms. Chapman says that she understands—she felt the same way when she shared a video of herself in her teacher

training program for the first time but felt differently after she realized how much it helped her to improve her instruction. Ms. Chapman pulls out her feedback checklist (see Figure 5). Each paraeducator shares their video, and Ms. Chapman compliments them each on what they did well and explains and models any steps that they could improve. Ms. Walker realizes that she is jumping in with a prompt before providing a full 4 seconds of wait time. Ms. Chapman assures her that wanting to jump in quickly to help is normal but that it is important to give Jose enough time to attempt each step on his own. Mr. Greene sees that he keeps jumping straight to the most intensive prompt—physical prompting—instead of starting with a less intrusive prompt. Ms. Chapman remodels the sequence of prompts for him and has him practice a few times through role-play. Ms. Douglass does the steps perfectly at first but then makes a few mistakes. Ms. Chapman assures her that this is to be expected when trying something for the first time and that she will get more consistent with practice.

When they meet a few days letter, Ms. Chapman is amazed by what she sees. Not only is Ms. Walker implementing least-to-most prompting very well, but she does not have to provide many prompts anymore because Jose is beginning to do most steps independently. Ms. Douglass is doing a great job of implementing least-to-most prompting with DeAndre in the lunch line. He is still doing very few steps independently, but he is much more engaged and enjoys when the cafeteria staff speak directly to him. Mr. Greene is still struggling a little bit with starting with an opportunity for an independent response and then delivering the least intrusive prompt. Sometimes he falls back on immediately providing physical prompts. Ms. Chapman thinks that maybe this is just a habit that he has gotten into after working with Veronica for over a year and that it might take some extra practice before least-to-most prompting becomes more natural for him.

Step 5: Determine Who Needs Extra Support

In this step, you will determine which paraeducators are implementing the practice as planned and if anyone might need extra support. Analyze the implementation checklists that were scored during the last group training session. Were steps performed correctly nearly all the time? If a mistake was made, was this part of a larger pattern of errors

or just a one-time mistake? Paraeducators who make consistent errors will need extra support (see Step 6). Paraeducators who implement all steps correctly or who only occasionally make a mistake do not need more intensive support.

Ms. Chapman looks back at the implementation checklists that she scored as she watched the videos. Ms. Walker and Ms. Douglass are both implementing well above 90% fidelity—Ms. Walker is at 95% and Ms. Douglass is at 93%. They occasionally make a mistake, but there are no consistent patterns in which steps they miss. Ms. Chapman knows that it is OK for them not to be at 100% because it is not responsible or necessary to expect perfection. Mr. Greene is making progress but still has room for growth. He is doing a better job waiting a full 4 seconds before jumping in with a prompt but still sometimes goes straight to physical prompting instead of a less intensive prompt. She calculates his fidelity at 74%. Ms. Chapman decides that Mr. Greene would benefit from a little extra support and that she will provide some one-to-one coaching until he gets up to 90% fidelity.

Step 6: Provide Extra Support if Needed

If you identified any paraeducators who need extra support, provide one-to-one coaching that is tailored to their specific needs. Focus on the specific steps for which the paraeducator is struggling— often this will be only a small subset of all implementation steps. Meet individually with the paraeducator for brief coaching sessions. When beginning the coaching session, review the implementation checklist and the student-specific plan while emphasizing the specific steps that need to be corrected. Then watch the video together. Invite the paraeducator to identify their own successes and mistakes. Chime in when you agree. If the paraeducator does not recognize their own mistake, rewatch the relevant video footage and help them to identify what needs to change. If any targeted steps were implemented incorrectly, practice these steps through role-play until the paraeducator demonstrates correct implementation. Highlight or star any targeted steps on the implementation checklist, and direct the paraeducator to review the checklist immediately before attempting implementation with the student. Continue providing coaching

sessions until the paraeducator implements all steps correctly or only occasionally makes mistakes.

Mr. Greene is a little bummed that he does not quite have least-to-most prompting down but is happy that Ms. Chapman is so encouraging and supportive. When they sit down for the first coaching session, Ms. Chapman points out that he has steadily been improving and says he will get there in no time. They look at his last video and focus specifically on starting with the least intrusive prompt. She asks him to look for times that he does this correctly and for times that he jumps straight to the physical prompt. Mr. Green gets excited when he realizes that he made only two mistakes in the whole video. Then they role-play. First Ms. Chapman models with Mr. Greene pretending to be the student, and then they trade roles and Mr. Greene gets some practice. Ms. Chapman prints the order of prompts on a small piece of paper, laminates it, and tapes it onto the corner of Veronica's desk using mailing tape. She encourages Mr. Greene to refer to it and even use a dry-erase marker to check off each prompt as he does it.

When it is time for the second coaching session, Mr. Greene is excited to share his video. Soon Ms. Chapman knows why—his prompting looks perfect, and Veronica did a couple of steps all by herself! Ms. Chapman congratulates Mr. Green and encourages him to keep up the good work.

Step 7: Continue to Monitor Implementation

After directing a paraeducator to deliver any type of instruction with students, it is a teacher's responsibility to provide oversight to ensure that the instruction is delivered as intended (Yates et al., 2019). Ensure that all paraeducators continue to implement evidence-based practices with fidelity by scheduling regular times to observe them or review videos of their implementation. If implementation continues to meet your expectations, celebrate this success. However, it is normal for implementation fidelity to stray over time—especially after a winter or summer break. In these situations, plan for a brief "refresher" training.

Every other week, Ms. Chapman has her paraeducators record video of their implementation on the classroom iPad, and she watches them after school. This takes her only 10 minutes because she can fast-forward

> **Tiered training is a powerful tool that can improve the instruction and support that paraprofessionals provide, and in turn, improve outcomes for students with significant disabilities.**

through much of the video to watch a sample of each paraeducator's teaching. After 6 weeks, she is really impressed with how well her team is continuing to implement least-to-most prompting, but she knows it will be important to check the paraeducators' fidelity again after the upcoming winter break.

Concluding Thoughts

Tiered training is a promising and feasible way that special education teachers can train teams of paraeducators. This model is efficient because one-to-one coaching is used only in situations when group training is insufficient—similar to an RTI model for students. This approach is best suited for situations in which there are opportunities for multiple paraeducators to use the same evidence-based practice across multiple students. As teachers begin to plan how to use tiered training, they should consider focusing on foundational practices that are highly versatile across different students and situations (e.g., systematic prompting, positive reinforcement, task analysis, peer-support arrangements).

Despite the strong promise of this approach, it is possible that teachers may face barriers or challenges as they use tiered training with paraeducators. For example, some teachers may find it challenging to identify common times in which paraeducators are paid to be working and are all available for training at the same time. In research studies, this problem has been resolved by working with administrators to cover staffing or breaking group training sessions into smaller chunks that can fit within existing schedules. In addition, it is possible that not all paraeducators will reach fidelity with tiered training. Tiered training has been successful with all participants in research studies, but in practice there might be paraeducators who would

benefit from additional supplemental training strategies (e.g., peer modeling, administrator feedback). Furthermore, although paraeducators in research studies have been eager to learn new evidence-based practices, it is possible that some paraeducators may be resistant to change. In these situations, it is vitally important that administrators establish a culture where paraeducators are held accountable for implementing instruction that is consistent with teacher directions and training. Given the efficacy of tiered training, it is well worth the effort required to overcome these obstacles and challenges. Indeed, tiered training is a powerful tool that can improve the instruction and support that paraeducators provide and, in turn, improve outcomes for students with significant disabilities.

ORCID ID

Matthew E. Brock [ID] https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7197-2120

Matthew E. Brock, *Associate Professor in Department of Educational Studies, Faculty Fellow at the Crane Center for Early Childhood Research and Policy, The Ohio State University, Columbus.*

Address correspondence concerning this article to Matthew E. Brock, The Ohio State University, 334 PAES Building, 305 West 17th Avenue, Columbus, OH 43210 (email: brock.184@osu.edu).

REFERENCES

AFIRM Team. (2015). *Autism focused intervention resources and modules website.* Chapel Hill, NC: National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorder, FPG Child Development Center, University of North Carolina. https://afirm.fpg.unc.edu/afirm-modules

Brock, M. E., & Anderson, E. J. (2020). Training paraprofessionals who work with students with intellectual and developmental disabilities: What does the research say? *Psychology in the Schools.* Advance online publication. http://doi.org/10.1002/pits.2238

Brock, M. E., Barczak, M. A., Anderson, E. J., & Bordner-Williams, N. M. (2020). Efficacy of tiered training on paraeducator implementation of systematic instructional practices for students with severe disabilities. *Exceptional Children.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0014402920947641

Brock, M. E., Barczak, M. A., & Dueker, S. A. (2020). A Randomized evaluation of group training for paraprofessionals to implement systematic instruction strategies with students with severe disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special Education.* Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1177/0888406420923769

Brock, M. E., Cannella-Malone, H. I., Seaman, R. L., Andzik, N. R., Schaefer, J. M., Page., E. J., Barczak, M., & Dueker, S. (2017). Findings across practitioner training studies in special education: A comprehensive review and meta-analysis. *Exceptional Children, 84,* 7–26. http://doi.org/10.1177/0014402917698008

Browder, D.M., Wood, L., Thompson, J., & Ribuffo, C. (2014). *Evidence-based practices for students with severe disabilities* (CEEDAR Document No. IC-3). https://ceedar.education.ufl.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/IC-3_FINAL_03-03-15.pdf

Carter, E., O'Rourke, L., Sisco, L. G., & Pelsue, D. (2009). Knowledge, responsibilities, and training needs of paraprofessionals in elementary and secondary schools. *Remedial and Special Education, 30,* 344–359. https://doi.org/10.1177/0741932508324399

Chopra, R. V., Sandoval-Lucero, E., & French, N. K. (2011). Effective supervision of paraeducators: Multiple benefits and outcomes. *National Teacher Education Journal, 4,* 15–26.

Cook, B. G., & Odom, S. L. (2013). Evidence-based practices and implementation science in special education. *Exceptional Children, 79,* 135–144. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440291307900201

Every Student Succeeds Act, 20 U.S.C. § 6301 (2015). https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/senate-bill/1177

Neitzel, J., & Wolery, M. (2009). *Implementation checklist for least-to-most prompts*. National Professional Development Center on Autism Spectrum Disorders, FPG Child Development Institute, University of North Carolina.

Ohio Center for Autism and Low Incidence. (2020). *Autism internet modules (AIM)*. https://www.autisminternetmodules.org

Steinbrenner, J. R., Hume, K., Odom, S. L., Morin, K. L., Nowell, S. W., Tomaszewski, B., Szendrey, S., McIntyre, N. S., Yücesoy-Özkan, S., & Savage, M. N. (2020). *Evidence-based practices for children, youth, and young adults with autism*. https://ncaep.fpg.unc.edu/

U.S. Department of Education, 2020. *Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Section 618 data products*. https://www2.ed.gov/programs/osepidea/618-data

Yates, P., Chopra, R., Douglas, S., Walker, V., Schulze, R., Sobeck, E., & Morano, S. (2019). *Preparing teachers for effective paraeducator supervision*. Teacher Education Division policy brief. https://tedcec.org/sites/default/files/2020-12/TED-Brief-3-Para-Supervision-Revised-Final-PDF_0.pdf