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Professional Role of Paraprofessionals: A Literature Review

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A Glance into the Professional Role of the Paraprofessional: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Paraprofessionals are an integral component to the learning and growth of students with unique needs. While paraprofessionals are heavily relied upon to provide guidance, communication, instruction, and behavior management amongst other things, studies have found that many individuals working within this field feel underprepared expressing lack of training necessary to carry out the duties to which they are assigned. Professional development for paraprofessionals is limited, and the acknowledgement of such training lacks attention. Research shows that the roles, duties, and responsibilities of paraprofessionals are blurred and often overlooked. This literature review aids in defining the needs of paraprofessionals to diligently carry out the tasks of which they are assigned. Perspectives are also addressed with differing viewpoints and theories shedding light on the unique position in which paraprofessionals are placed. Development of a virtual clearinghouse for paraprofessionals is shared within the latter portion of this paper providing a description of the layout, importance of the creation, and benefits of such a resource in supplying applicable training as well as establishing expectations of professionalism for paraprofessionals.

Professional Development

The rapidly changing world of education continues to grow and develop in a variety of areas, however, professional development for paraprofessionals continues to be an area lacking the high importance of implication. Teachers in this profession are provided adequate training and education before starting their professional role as an educator. Professional development for teachers is also continually offered to further develop their education and keep updated on current topics and trends. Unfortunately, literature shows that paraprofessionals are typically not offered these types of opportunities and feel unprepared to carry out their assigned duties. McKenzie explains that this lack of opportunity contributed to paraprofessional turnover, job dissatisfaction, and low morale (2011). In a study conducted by Wright and Prescott, findings state that paraprofessionals are vital members of special education classrooms yet there is limited information regarding effective professional learning for paraprofessionals, and paraprofessionals report that they are not adequately trained (2017). Training has been identified as a critical element in the effective utilization and retention of paraeducators (Deardorff et al., 2007). The issue surrounding insufficient opportunities for training paraprofessionals often results in higher turnover rates, miscommunication, frustration, and a lack of effectiveness in the classroom.

With the time constraints of special education teachers, oftentimes paraprofessionals are placed into positions of working with students with unique needs unfortunately being offered little to no previous training of the duties they are expected to perform. According to a study conducted by Patterson, “Paraprofessionals, who begin their full time responsibilities with limited training, are often unprepared to teach children with special needs, which is often their primary responsibility” (2006). While this study was conducted about fifteen years ago, it shows

that this issue has been a continual struggle for school districts to find a ‘fix-all’ solution. IDEA specifies that services set forth within the IEP should be provided through the highest qualified individuals. Findings from the study indicate that many paraprofessionals were providing services without written plans, and few formal sit-down contact meetings with teachers and other professionals who, not only were more qualified, but were also ultimately responsible for IEP outcomes (Patterson, 2006). Brock and Anderson state that “findings across studies recommend that paraprofessional roles be well-defined and focused on the implementation of evidence-based practices” (2020). They also share that “administrators should ensure that teachers have the time and support that are required for effective paraprofessional training and supervision” (Brock & Anderson, 2020). While this may seem required by districts before placing someone in the position of working with students, unfortunately this is not always the case. The necessity of properly training and preparing paraprofessionals for the position of which they are hired requires immediate attention and action.

Paraprofessionals hold a significant place in the education of students with disabilities by assisting students in maintaining and generalizing learned skills, organizing the environment for seamless teaching, and protecting teachers’ valuable instruction time (Stockall, 2014).

Paraprofessionals have been a part of the educational system for over fifty years. According to the Annual Report to Congress, there were 250,000 teacher assistants nationwide in 2000 (RESA, 2021). In 2020, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, there were 1,206,300 paraprofessionals employed in the United States (2021). They are an extension of the special education classroom, and they need to be trained properly to adhere to their expectations as well as ensuring they are within the legalities of federal and state laws pertaining to special education. In a study conducted by Suter and Giangreco, their findings indicate that (a) many special

educators have large caseloads, (b) there are substantially more paraprofessionals than special educators, and (c) more than half of all special education paraprofessionals are assigned to students with disabilities one-to-one (2009). Combined, these factors indicate that schools employed models of service delivery for students with disabilities that are substantially supported by paraprofessionals, thus raising concerns about students' access to a free, appropriate public education (Suter & Giangreco, 2009). Federal law allows schools to hire special education paraprofessionals to deliver instruction and support to students with disabilities given adequate training, direction, and supervision (Brock & Anderson, 2020). Deardorff et al. explains that the reauthorized Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA, 2004) requires the development of state personnel standards and allows appropriately trained paraeducators to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities served under Part B of IDEA (2007). If paraprofessionals are not properly trained, they may be in violation of the law without even knowing. IDEA requires that all students with a disability are entitled to a free appropriate public education (FAPE), meaning that students with disabilities should be gaining as many educational instructional services within the mainstream setting, as long as it is deemed appropriate by the IEP team. Accommodations set forth within the IEP need to be explicitly and clearly explained to paraprofessionals working within the inclusive setting for them to best serve the student providing a free and appropriate public education.

The lack of professional development available for paraprofessionals inhibits their ability to assist in the most effective way possible within their unique positions. However, providing relevant and cost-effective professional development to paraeducators continues to be a challenge, especially in rural communities (Deardorff et al., 2007). Deardorff et al. also explains

that training for paraeducators in some rural areas may be impacted by reduced access to professional development opportunities, greater costs, and travel challenges (2007). However, in Write and Prescott's article discussing the utilization of technology for professional development, the study conducted found that after providing trainings through video-based modeling, didactic training, and applied practice activities in the classroom, paraprofessionals improved their knowledge and self-efficacy in the application of evidence-based practices (2018). When paraprofessionals are provided training opportunities, they feel better equipped to carry out the responsibilities required of them in their positions. Students and teachers also benefit from professional development being offered to paraprofessionals. Students with disabilities need and deserve instruction from highly qualified teachers and highly qualified paraprofessionals (Stockall, 2014).

Roles and Responsibilities of the Paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals encompass a plethora of duties and responsibilities during their day. The role of the paraprofessional may vary depending on the needs of students with whom they work as well as district policies. Paraprofessionals are often with the student(s) from their arrival at school to their dismissal at the end of the day with roles including getting the student on and off the bus, attending to the students while in class, and accompanying them to lunch and in the bathroom (Seeley et al., 2020). Seeley also explains the role of the paraprofessional is to increase instruction and feedback in the student's classes, to motivate the student, to provide behavior management, and to document skill development (2020). Paraprofessionals need to be under the direction and supervision of a certified classroom teacher. It is not their responsibility

to give full instruction, but rather to complement, supplement, or reinforce instruction to the individual student or to a small group of students.

It is important that paraprofessionals be provided with a clear guideline of their duties and expectations necessary to complete their responsibilities to best provide students with what they need to learn. Brock and Anderson explain that paraprofessionals must be given well-defined roles, and suggest that these well-defined roles emphasize the use of specific interventions or support strategies (2019). Paraprofessionals assist in some of the following duties: maintaining safety and discipline within the school setting; complimenting instruction provided by the teacher by helping students who need additional supports; adapting curriculum; assisting students with daily living skills (toileting, eating, dressing, grooming, vulnerability); communicating between students, special education teachers, and general education teachers; supporting student social interactions; reporting progress observed in the classroom; and many more duties specific to the needs of the student(s) with whom they are working. This is just a small snippet of the duties paraprofessionals encounter on a daily basis. Inappropriate responsibilities include: being solely responsible for a special education instructional or related service; selecting educational activities and developing programming for a student; be used as a substitute teacher; and being responsible for administering formal diagnostic or psychological assessments (RESA, 2021). It's essential that teachers utilize paraprofessionals for duties that are within the scope of their profession, not for irrelevant tasks or jobs that are outside of their description.

Professionalism is necessary to maintain as a paraprofessional, and ethical practices must be adhered to during the school day as well as encounters with students, families, and staff outside of the school. As an important part of the educational team, paraprofessionals have a

commitment to maintain ethical standards of behavior in their relationships with students, parents, their supervisor, and other school personnel (RESA, 2021). Confidentiality must be maintained, not only out of respect for the students and their families, but also because it is illegal to share information about students with those outside of the educational team. All information about students and/or employees is treated with the strictest confidence, and disclosure of confidential information gained through employment is an act of prohibited conduct subject to formal disciplinary action (Ripley-Ohio-Dearborn Special Education Cooperation, 2021). Federal laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) help protect the confidentiality of students. Questions, information, and communication regarding students should be directed to the teacher. Even if parents are seeking information about their child, the paraprofessional is not to discuss anything. Boundaries with parents must be maintained. It is critical that these laws and standards be communicated to paraprofessionals working within the school system.

Outside of working directly with the students, paraprofessionals are expected to communicate and collaborate with special education and general education teachers. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act requires collaboration among schools, parents, and professionals to ensure that students with disabilities have access to equal educational opportunities. Skills for effective collaboration must be understood and abided by for the success of student progress and achievement. The importance of applying such a practice allows for “varied expertise and perspectives about a student to be shared among those responsible for the student’s learning and well-being” (McLeskey, J. et al., 2017). Professional relationships must be established and maintained for the success of the students. Communication with the

special education teacher may be about strategies to utilize in the mainstream classroom pertaining either to academics or behaviors, discussing accommodations for students, monitoring and sharing progress, and many other items throughout the day. Communication with general education teachers may also occur through paraprofessionals assisting students within the mainstream classroom. This may consist of ideas for modifying assignments and/or tests, suggestions for complimenting and reteaching the materials taught by the teacher, as well as seeking information from the teacher to enhance the students involvement within the mainstream setting. Both the special education teacher and the general education teacher may have ideas or strategies to foster fading support within the classroom thus encouraging independence for the student, which is the ultimate goal.

Perspectives of Paraprofessionals, Students, Parents, and Teachers

While there are multiple components to the variety of relationships between students, parents, and staff, it's important to understand perspectives of those involved. While perspectives vary with each unique relationship, or lack thereof, knowledge and awareness of the multiple perspectives are essential to keep in mind to aid in the success of the students.

Student perceptions of working with paraprofessionals differ depending on the relationship between the student and the para. Some students enjoy being with the paraprofessional, however, others report that working with the paraprofessional left them feeling stigmatized and rejected by their peers, and that they faced inadequate instruction when working with paraprofessionals (Giangreco et al., 2010). In a qualitative study conducted by Giangreco et al., the findings described four interrelated themes pertaining to participants' perspectives of paraprofessionals as mother, friend, protector from bullying, and primary teacher, thus

highlighting the lack of connection between students with intellectual disabilities and general education teachers and peers (2010). Some students find having a paraprofessional within the mainstream classroom as intrusive, and they prefer not to work with them in that setting as it singles them out from their typically developing peers. Others enjoy having the ‘mother or friend’ in class, while some prefer to work with them only within the special education setting to minimize the stigma of being a student with a disability.

Consideration to the perspectives of paraprofessionals toward the students with whom they work also plays a contributing factor. Some paraprofessionals aim to gain a relationship with the student while others prefer to keep the line strictly drawn between each other. Paraprofessionals need to understand what their role is with each specific student as well as guidance in providing appropriate assistance. In a study conducted by Chopra et al., findings show that paraprofessionals saw themselves as connectors or bridges among parents, students, and other members of the school and community (2004). While paraprofessionals understand that they may be placed in the general education setting to assist students with academics, they also recognize the importance of building peer relationships. In the study mentioned above, most paraprofessionals stated that when they were forced to deal with difficult situations between students, they utilized problem-solving and resolution skills (Chopra et al., 2004).

Another perspective that demands attention is the relationship between paraprofessionals and parents. In more rural communities, paraprofessionals reside in the same town or city as the families with whom they work. There are differing viewpoints on perceptions of the parent and paraprofessional relationships. In regard to paraprofessional perspectives of parents, in some cases, paraprofessionals considered themselves friends of the family (Chopra et al., 2004). This may result in breach of confidentiality laws, and may also impede the relationship between the

paraprofessionals and the teacher of the student. As explained by the ROD Special Education Cooperative, as paraeducators it is not the right or responsibility of their position to meet with parents or staff to discuss student progress (2021). Discussions of student progress and other factors involved need to be communicated by the teacher.

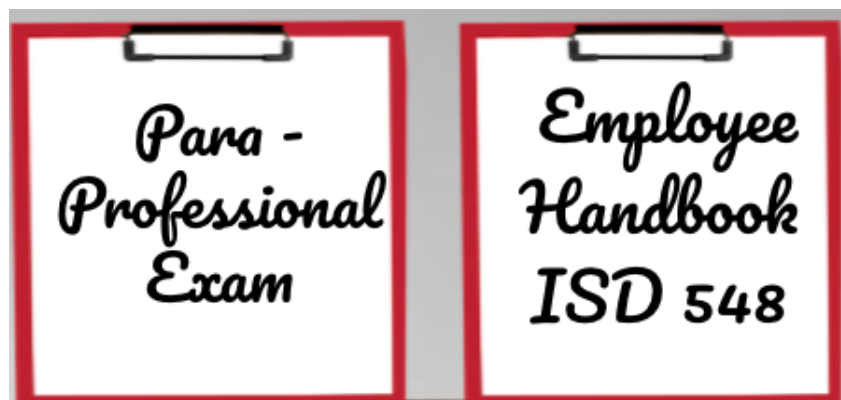
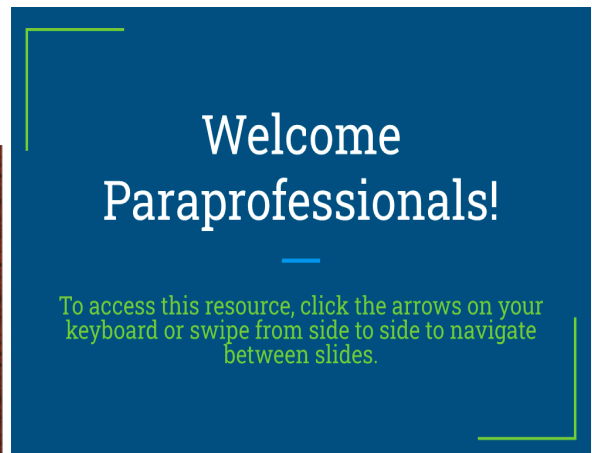
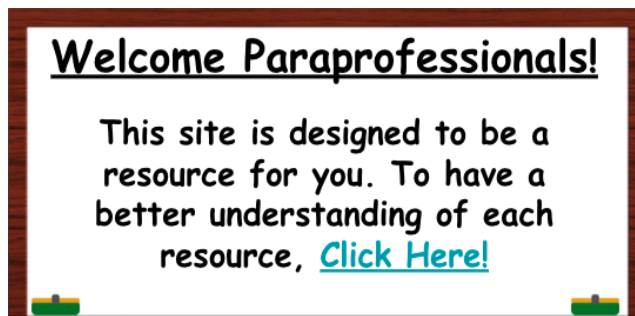
Due to the unique needs of students with special needs, it's essential for teachers and paraprofessionals to maintain a working relationship with boundaries clearly stated. The effects of minimal communication time between paraprofessionals and teachers leaves many important questions and concerns unanswered consequently resulting in barriers of relationships and understanding between a variety of parties involved. FAPE continually requires increased mandates, and paraprofessionals are being hired to assist in both special education classrooms and general education classrooms across multiple settings. With this being the case, paraprofessionals are expected to communicate with a variety of professionals and educators which can also lead to certain barriers when communication and relationships are not understood or agreed upon at a professional level. Malian conducted a national study of paraprofessionals and found that these individuals expressed a desire for "more time for collaboration with teachers and additional targeted training in disabilities, behavior management, and law" as professional development areas (2011). Time constraints for collaboration with teachers are a theme throughout paraprofessional needs and desire for professional development to better understand their roles.

Virtual Clearinghouse for Paraprofessionals

After extensive research to aid in understanding the desire for paraprofessionals to become more knowledgeable and confident in their roles, a virtual clearinghouse containing

information pertaining to the duties, expectations, responsibilities, and legalities of a paraprofessional have been obtained and are provided within this project. Within the district, time constraints have been expressed to be of concern for the proper training of the paraprofessionals. Therefore, this project will serve as a valuable resource providing guidance and information to assist in the development of professionalism and understanding expectations for the paraprofessionals hired to work with the students.

The layout of the clearinghouse is similar to that of a classroom. The paras are welcomed to the virtual clearinghouse with a sign providing the link explaining the resources available as well as directions on how they may be accessed. After extensive research of the literature surrounding the needs of paraprofessionals and brainstorming specifics to the needs of the paraprofessionals within the district, the development of the virtual clearinghouse includes an abundance of resources to assist with common questions as well as professional development. The welcome sign brings paraprofessionals in and gives them a resource as to the navigation of the clearinghouse. Each slide describes in detail the variety of resources offered through the clearinghouse. This will assist paraprofessionals using the resource to better understand how each item is beneficial to their daily expectations. Also, paras are able to access the general information including the employee handbook and the paraprofessional exam.



The filing cabinet contains three drawers with housekeeping, information regarding confidentiality, and expectations as well as tips for supporting the unique needs of the students. The housekeeping drawer contains information specific to the district in which they work. Links available include a quick reference guide, how to access email, Skyward, Smarter, vouchers, and requesting an absence. Also included within this link is the school's master calendar and salary/benefits. This is a time saver for many individuals as these are common questions that arise throughout the school year. Rather than seeking staff in the office or asking a special education teacher, the information will be readily available within one specific resource. On top of the filing cabinet, a picture frame offers a link pertaining to mental health. Our district utilizes the Seven Habits by Stephen Covey, therefore we named the frame, "Sharpen the Saw" referring to the importance of mental health and resources to utilize to keep themselves above the line.





Confidentiality is...

- A critical aspect of being a paraprofessional.
- A legal right of the students and the parents you work with.

Ask yourself...

- If it were my child, what information would I want shared?
- If I were the parent what would I want said about me?
- What would I want said about my child and my family in regards of our values and lifestyle?

Click to the next Slide for Two Professional Development Videos on Confidentiality.

Pointers to maintain Confidentiality

- Avoid using names when asked about your job.
- Suggest that questions about students are best directed to the building principal or supervising teacher.
- Do Not share names or specific information about students, their programming, or anything else during meetings, or informal conversations.
- If you are unsure if you should answer a question, Don't answer and refer them to the supervising teacher.

<https://www.isd318.org/cms/lib/MN50000512/Centricity/Domain/66/SPED%20Paraprofessional%20Handbook%20-%20COVID%20Update.pdf>

Below are two resources to give you a better understanding of Confidentiality and why it's critical in special education. To access, click the links or use the Infintec website found on the resource page.



Certificate of Completion

Privacy in Education: Understanding FERPA and HIPAA

It's our ethical and legal responsibility as educators to safeguard student information against unauthorized disclosure. Understanding our pri... [View More](#)

23:00

Running Time

CC Closed Captioning

Presented by Infintec

0.75

Credits

<https://www.myinfintec.org/module/5f10da3797a98c001ee6d138>



Certificate of Completion

Student Confidentiality (FERPA)

Safeguarding personal privacy in a digital and data driven world is a serious responsibility that requires serious thought. It's our ethical and legal... [View More](#)

07:24

Running Time

CC Closed Captioning

Presented by Infintec

0.25

Credits

<https://www.myinfintec.org/module/5f10da5d97a98c001ee6d550>

Responsibilities and Expectations

- Have a “good attitude” towards the school and its personnel; like and respect children and have a desire to work with them.
- Keep up with a fast paced schedule with possible lifting required.
- Support student interaction with peers.
- Be flexible in your duties and responsibilities to work with ANY of our students in Special Education.
- Be dependable in promptness and attendance; reliable in job performance and discreet in confidential matters.
- Be able to give help and assistance without being asked; come to assigned class with the purpose of helping in varying capacities.
- Use good judgement when unusual situations arise.
- Be able to assist in the instructional process and to share perceptions of student progress and needs.
- Engage in lessons and model behaviors which support inquiry and exploration.
- Encourage independence while balancing support.
- Assist students with activities for daily living (grooming, toileting, changing, dressing, etc.).
- Communicate and support students by using a variety of virtual platforms such as Google Meets/Hangouts and Zoom.
- Collaborate with case managers and look for ways to fade support.
- Model professionalism on and off campus by being respectful to school staff and students.

Helpful Tips for Paraprofessionals

- Communicate with the classroom and special education teacher daily.
- Offer suggestions and ideas.
- Remember that final decisions are up to the teacher.
- Give feedback to the special education teacher and classroom teacher in regards to the student and the progress or problems they are having.
- Ask questions!
- Work as a team.
- Familiarize yourself with the needs of the student you are working with.
- Be sensitive to the feelings of the children you are working with and around.
- Support and respect the children and adults you work with at all times.
- Demonstrate professionalism.

Caring for your mental health is essential when working as a paraprofessional. Below are two resources that can help you care for your mental health in this demanding position.

[31 Tips To Boost
Mental Health](#)

[Mental Health Support
for ISD 548 Staff](#)

The bookshelf contains resources labeled inclusion, resources, sensory, communication, fading, and due process. These areas have been carefully chosen after finding common themes throughout the review of literature as well as previous knowledge from our own personal experiences. The inclusion link provides videos as well as articles related to perspectives of inclusion, least restrictive environments, and how we can guide the importance of students with special needs learning in the same classrooms as their typically developing peers. The resources link provides information for training including Infinitec directions, a variety of trainings offered, and navigation of the site. This is a resource that the district has access to through the special education consortium. Other resources within this link include information on minimizing and navigating behaviors, training on the beauty of diversity, and a link to online resources made available specifically for paraprofessionals. Sensory is a topic that our paraprofessionals ask many questions about and seek to understand. The resources provided within this link include training provided by individuals from the special education consortium. The reading resources within the link were provided by the Occupational Therapist. Communication is a huge component of the paraprofessionals day. Unfortunately, research and experience have shown that this critical component of daily duties is often overlooked with minimal time provided. Teachers and paraprofessionals are both busy with the chaos of the school day, and many questions go unanswered. The chain of command is included within the slides as well as a description of what needs to be communicated and how. The resource labeled fading provides information sharing the desire to guide and foster independence for the students. Ideas for breaking tasks into smaller steps, utilizing peer support, prompting, and training to do so are included within this link. Finally, the Due Process link provides information regarding the special education process including how students qualify for special education services, the

evaluation process, the IEP components and how they are determined, as well as providing the *why* in understanding paraprofessional needs.



Inclusion

Click here for **videos** that show the importance of Inclusion and why it's important for all students!

Click here to read about a **mothers story** and why her son deserves to be Included

Click here to learn more about Inclusion. Information and **videos** help identify the importance of inclusion.

Click here to read about **Inclusion** and why it's the right choice for all students.

Behaviors *Diversity* *A Resource for Para-Professionals*

Infinitec

How to Log In to Infinitec

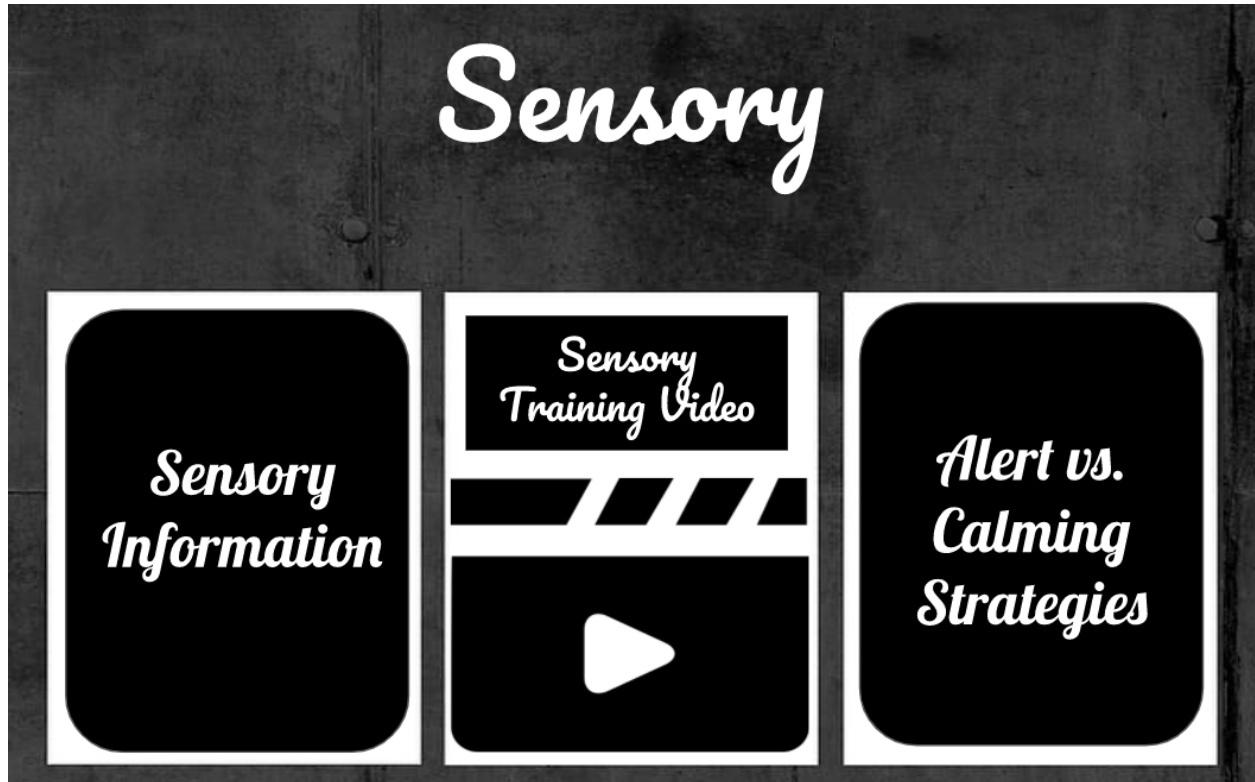
Trainings offered by Infinitec

IRIS Training on Behaviors

Additional Resource for Behaviors

Minnesota Department of Education Resource for Behaviors

Behaviors



Communication and the Expectations for Paraprofessionals

- Provide the Special Education teacher / staff with information about general education classes along with any assignments or activities that happen within the general education classroom.
- Share information about how the student is participating in and behaving in the general education setting.
- Inform general education staff about the student and their programming and adaptations they might have.
- Observe, record and collect data as directed.

Communication Chain of Command

When communication needs arise, the following chain of command should be used. Always start with the supervising teacher.

Paraprofessional

Supervising Teacher

Building Principal

Director of Special Education Services

Superintendent

School Board

Fading and Building Student Independence

- It's a goal for Every Student! We want our students to be independent and not dependent.
- Look for ways for students to make choices and decisions throughout their day. This can be hard to give up control on all aspects, but finding small ways to give the student choice and voice, can make them feel heard and empowered.
 - Example: "Would you like to start with this task, or this other task?"
 - Example: "Would you like to walk at the front of the line or at the back of the line".
- Student work should be done by the students as much as possible. Authentic vs. done by a teacher or paraprofessional
- Allow students to make mistakes and to experience natural consequences when appropriate.
- Look for ways to back up and give space between you and the student.

Due Process

This resource takes you through the special education process and how students qualify for services and how paraprofessionals needs are determined.

Additional Services

Many times, students with a high level of paraprofessional support will also work with other service providers.

- **Occupational Therapy (OT)** - OT is a services that works on motor skills, cognitive processing, visual or perceptual problems, organization, sensory responses/needs
- **Physical Therapy (PT)** - PT promotes motor development and the student's participation in everyday routines and activities that are part of the student's programming.
- **Speech/Language Therapy (SP)** - Students who have a speech/language need have an articulation delay or a language delay that interferes with their ability to successfully communicate or understand communication.
- **Developmental Adaptive Physical Education (DAPE)** - DAPE is a specifically designed physical education program for students who have a delay or disorder in physical development. During DAPE services, students work on physical fitness, motor fitness, fundamental motor skills and patterns, along with individual and group games/sports.

Accommodations and Modifications

Accommodations

These are the changes that are made for **HOW** a student accesses or demonstrates learning

Examples:

- Test taken orally
- Large print books
- Additional time to take tests
- Communication notebook for school and home.
- Peer helper for notes
- Using a computer for writing tasks
- Recorded lectures

Modifications

These are the changes to **WHAT** a student is expected to learn.

Examples:

- Use of calculator on test
- Rewording questions to make easier to understand
- Important words or phrases highlighted
- Film or videos in place of text
- Word bank choice instead of fill in the blank

While accommodations and modifications are identified by the IEP team, paraprofessionals are usually the ones to carry them out in the mainstream setting. It's vital for paraprofessionals to be aware of adaptations that are in place and to communicate with both the case manager and general education teacher about how to carry out those changes to ensure success for the student in all settings.

Importance of Clearinghouse for Paraprofessionals

Literature expresses the desire for paraprofessionals to enhance their professional development through explicit determination of their roles and responsibilities. According to an article developed by Cathryn G. Riggs surveying responses from paraprofessionals directed toward areas perceived as the highest need for training, the following were included: knowledge of specific disabilities; behavior management; communication; learning styles; rationale and current issues in inclusion as well as other highly rated areas that include: assistive technology; promoting social acceptance of children with disabilities; small-group instruction; working with adults; information about the special education process and laws; and specific information about targeted students (Riggs, 2001). This information, as well as information provided through literature in relation to paraprofessionals and their roles, the development of this clearinghouse as a resource for paraprofessionals aids as a stepping stone to professional development in providing information specific to the roles, rights, and responsibilities of paraprofessionals. The clearinghouse created will aid as a starting point for newly hired paraprofessionals within the Pelican Rapids School District while opening communication between the special education teachers with whom they work. Not only will this clearinghouse assist paraprofessionals in understanding their expectations, it will also serve as a resource for special education teachers to reference when questions arise and time constraints restrict the opportunity for discussions.

Lack of professional development for paraprofessionals continues to be of great concern, but provided this resourceful reference as a starting point, paraprofessionals will have the opportunity to explore the expectations, responsibilities, legalities, and basic knowledge of IEP components related to why they are expected to conduct the duties of which they are expected to carry out in their daily duties. By better understanding the evaluation and IEP process,

paraprofessionals will have a deeper comprehension as to why they are hired to perform and complete the tasks that encompass their daily duties. Professionalism is clearly addressed and explained within the clearinghouse and will be referred to when issues arise regarding expectations. Special education laws and regulations are explicitly displayed, highlighting those of FAPE, IDEA, and FERPA. With better explanation and understanding of educational laws, paraprofessionals will be better equipped to handle situations involving laws and regulations. Not only will this provide paraprofessionals with knowledge, it will also enable them to politely decline information involving students or staff employed by the district. Evaluation components are openly shared within this resource and will be referenced throughout the year as they are conducted twice per year within our district.

This project is a starting point to assist our paraprofessionals in navigating the responsibilities and expectations of their positions. Continuation of building and adding to the clearinghouse to provide updated information and professional development opportunities will occur throughout the special education department at Pelican Rapids Public Schools. This project will be open to all staff, and information will be updated and added as it evolves. With our current research and newly found understanding of the need for paraprofessional professional development, we will actively seek out opportunities for training, learning, and growing the knowledge and development of our paraprofessional staff.

Benefits of the Clearinghouse

The project created involved careful consideration and strategic input as to what paraprofessionals need to know when working with students with disabilities. Literature shares that underpreparedness with lack of training offered for paraprofessionals is one of the greatest

frustrations within the field. Being placed into the position with an assumption that they understand the responsibilities of the position results in stress, hardships, and lack of professionalism ultimately affecting the students. Access to the components presented within this clearinghouse will provide basic knowledge of what the roles and responsibilities are of the position as well as explicit training in a variety of formats to assist in better understanding the unique needs of the students with whom they may work.

This virtual clearinghouse will not only assist newly hired paraprofessionals to be better prepared and equipped for the position of which they were hired, but it will also be beneficial for all staff who work within the district. With the time constraints of the busy school day, this resource will serve as a time saver for paraprofessionals, teachers, and office staff. Many questions arise during the day for special education teachers and office staff as to where information can be found and how it can be accessed. Resources ranging from email, salary, benefits, training, laws, expectations, responsibilities and much more will be located in one place for the paraprofessionals to easily access. Training modules are included within the clearinghouse as well providing guidance for specific areas of desired knowledge. This resource will also be referenced to paraprofessionals when they are seeking additional support to best assist the students in their specific areas of need. The clearinghouse established through this capstone opportunity will continually grow as materials specific to the needs and requests of our paraprofessionals develop, as well as updated information in the area of education regarding laws and regulations.

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