

Paraprofessionals as Partners in Inclusion

Paraprofessionals have become a primary source of support for students with disabilities in inclusive educational programs (McDonnell and Jameson, 2014). Teachers in inclusive schools sometimes rely on paraprofessionals to provide extended support for students with disabilities in general education classrooms and other settings. Not every student with a disability needs the assistance of a paraprofessional. Most students with disabilities get the support they need from teachers working together. Others may only need paraprofessional support for part of the day or week. But for students with more extensive disabilities, paraprofessionals can provide daily support for learning, physical, communication, behavioral, and social/emotional needs. Because they are required to work closely with individual students, a paraprofessional can be a powerful facilitator of learning and social relationships.

Fulfilling a wide variety of roles can be a complex balancing act for paraprofessionals. Paraprofessionals' roles are largely determined by the unique needs of the students being supported, but best practice is to ensure that these roles are clearly defined.

In general, the supportive role of the paraprofessional might include the following tasks:



Instructional tasks

Review vocabulary, review lessons, run a center or station, provide remediation, help students with make-up work, administer individual tests, help students interpret and follow instructions



Communication or social tasks

Monitor assistive technology or use of augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices, foster independence, facilitate peer relationships



Collaborative tasks

Communicate and coordinate with general and special educators, complete daily notes home or homework logs



Organizational tasks

Help students organize materials in desks and lockers, help unpack or pack bags, monitor specific student organizational skills, create student work displays



Clerical tasks

Make copies, enlarge or modify materials, filing, recording student data



Behavior support tasks

Provide positive reinforcement, address sensory needs, support a behavior plans, help a student calm down, collect data and document behaviors, maintain logs



Supervision tasks

Supervise students in various locations, monitor work completion, oversee groups of students in the classroom, support classroom routines



Planning or preparation tasks

Make games, create communication tools, prepare materials, search online for new games or applications



Personal care tasks

Help students use the restroom, provide support for dressing, assist with brushing hair or teeth, help lift or rotate students, use specific medical equipment

Paraprofessionals and Teachers

Tips for Working Together

Clear communication among paraprofessionals, teachers, and the school community is highlighted throughout the best practice literature. Roles and responsibilities should be clear to all adults.

Develop shared expectations and ways of communication such as a daily notebook or weekly meetings for planning.

Be open to each other's perspectives and ideas. Use active listening skills.

Realize modeling a mature and respectful adult relationship may be your most important job.

Discuss potentially confrontational issues with other staff in private, not in front of students.

Develop specific ways the paraprofessional can assist as class begins.

Support students in getting organized with immediate tasks.

Help students refocus their attention by indicating they should be quiet and listen.

Use quiet positive verbal or gestural prompts to correct student behaviors.

Use a consistent behavior management plan that is clearly written.

Communicate with each other to develop a balanced, united partnership.

Review information about accommodations. Be willing to try new or different ways to assist various students.

Expect every student to learn in their own unique way. Model patience and flexibility.

Work with all students. The less students with disabilities or learning needs are singled out, the better.

Support students to maximize their independence by only providing support that is really needed.

Maintain a friendly but professional relationship with students. Your support is invaluable for students to be successful.

Encourage classmates to support each other. Support from peers should be a natural classroom practice.

Share routine tasks that communicate equity such as taking attendance, or passing papers out.

Provide clarification on the location of supplies and technology within the school or classroom.

Establish and follow a clear daily and weekly schedule.

Help maximize time by having predictable routines and tasks.

For more ideas on how paraprofessionals can help make inclusion work in your school, contact your local FIN facilitator by visiting our website and clicking on the **Meet the FINs** tab then selecting your county.



Remember:

Paraprofessionals work under the supervision of a certified teacher. Initial instruction is not to be provided by a paraprofessional.