

Paraprofessionals



My kids continued to grow and develop as learners in a happy and caring classroom community. I cannot however, take credit for all their success. I had a para educator who was in my classroom most of the day, specifically for 3 of my special needs kiddos. Her name is Mrs. M.

(From A First Year Teacher Finds a Hero in Her Paraeducator)

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A special education **paraprofessional**, sometimes called a teacher's aide or assistant, can be a real right-hand man (or woman) to the classroom teacher. Generally speaking, the para provides support to the teacher and especially to students with disabilities in the classroom who need modified instruction or assistance, as keeping with their Individualized Education Program (IEP). Many a student and teacher rely on the skills and presence of paraprofessionals at their side.

Typical Duties of a Paraprofessional

While duties of paraprofessionals vary from state to state, **typical tasks for paras include:**

- modifying or adapting instruction for students with disabilities;
- working with individual students or small groups of students to reinforce learning of material or skills introduced by the teacher;
- providing one-on-one assistance to students with disabilities;
- guiding independent study, enrichment work, and remedial work with students as set up and assigned by the teacher;
- assisting students with self-care tasks (as necessary); and
- record-keeping.

Defining "Paraprofessional"

Did you know that the No Child Left Behind Act provides the federal definition of the term "paraprofessional"? According to NCLB, all paraprofessionals shall have:

- completed at least 2 years of study at an institution of higher education;
- obtained an associate's (or higher) degree;
- met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate (through a formal State or local academic assessment) knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics, or (as appropriate) knowledge of, and the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness. (20 U.S.C. § 6319(c))

Also part of NCLB's requirements for paraprofessionals are these restrictions:

- A paraprofessional "may not provide any instruction to a student unless the paraprofessional is working under the direct supervision of a teacher... "
- A paraprofessional may not provide one-on-one tutoring when the teacher is available. (20 U.S.C. § 6319(g))

The fact that NCLB defines the term *paraprofessional* has several interesting implications, Suzanne Whitney of Wrightslaw notes in her article *Doing Your Homework: Why You Should Request a Paraprofessional, Not an "Aide."* Two of particular note are:

It's time to stop using the term "aide"– and stop writing "aides" into IEPs. The No Child Left Behind Act provides the federal definition of "paraprofessional." There is no federal legal definition for an "aide". When you use the term "paraprofessional" in the IEP, you refer to a federal legal definition and a quality standard. This is not the case when you use the term "aide."

You may also want to consider writing the paraprofessional into the IEP as a support for the *teacher*, not the child. Why? [Because of the restrictions NCLB puts on paras, mentioned above.] You want educational responsibility assigned to the teacher, not the paraprofessional. The paraprofessional is a tool used by the teacher to accomplish her responsibility to deliver an education to her students. [1]

Resources for Paraprofessionals

National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals. www.nrcpara.org/

Oh, tailor-made! If paraprofessionals are your training concern, or you ARE a paraprofessional, the NRC for Paras is for you. It publishes six different paraprofessional training manuals, including the *Core Curriculum for Paraprofessionals*. The goal of these instructional materials is to provide personnel developers and trainers with resources they can use to improve the performance of their paraeducator workforce. Here are some of the other resources you'll find at the NRC, too.

State Resources, which will connect you with state-developed regulations and resources for paras.

The *State of the Art Report*, which provides an overview of how federal, state and local education agencies have addressed issues that influence the roles, preparation, and supervision of paraeducators.

A *Message Board* for paraprofessionals.

Books and manuals: Materials on and for paraeducators, all available at low-cost.

Project EVOLVE.

Project EVOLVE is an OSEP-funded project that's generated a wealth of resources, including the paraprofessional literature from 1990-2009 and *A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports*.
<http://www.uvm.edu/cdci/evolve/>

Paraeducator Resource and Learning Center (PRLC).

The PRLC provides information for paraeducators about six important topics: Collaborative Teamwork, Inclusive Education, Families and Cultural Sensitivity, Characteristics of Children and Youth with Various Disabilities, Roles and Responsibilities of Paraeducators and Other Team Members, and Implementing Teacher-planned Instruction.
www.uvm.edu/~cdci/prlc/

CEC's standards for paraprofessionals.

CEC is the Council for Exceptional Children. Its *Parability: The CEC Paraeducator Standards Workbook* includes CEC Standards for Paraeducators, a Code of Ethics of Paraeducators, and two tools that can be used by district personnel, principals, trainers, and paraeducators to ensure that paraeducators meet the CEC Standards. The product number is #P5691 , cost is \$10.95 (\$12.95 for non-CEC members). To order, call toll-free 1-888-232-7733.
http://www.cec.sped.org/ScriptContent/Orders/ProductDetail.cfm?section=CEC_Store&pc=P5691

ParaEducator Learning Network.

This network helps school systems address paraeducator training needs via an e-learning program currently offering over 115 courses in a wide range of areas. A service center, district, or school starts the process by

subscribing to the network services, purchasing individual “seats” for trainees (\$75/seat). This gives the trainees access to the online training modules. <http://www.paraeducator.net/>

Project PARA.

Project PARA conducts research and develops training materials for paraeducators and teachers who supervise them. The project provides web-based self-study programs that offer school districts resources to provide introductory training for paraeducators and/or the teachers who supervise them. These resources are offered free of charge to schools and teacher training programs. Participating schools provide an instructor or mentor who manages their own self study participants. <http://para.unl.edu/index.lasso>

National Clearinghouse for Paraeducator Resources.

The Clearinghouse offers a variety of resources including a focus on supporting paraeducators of culturally diverse backgrounds. <http://www.usc.edu/dept/education/CMMR/Clearinghouse.html>

References

Whitney, S. (n.d.). *Doing your homework: Why you should request a paraprofessional, not an “aide.”* Available online at <http://www.wrightslaw.com/heath/parapro.aide.htm>

National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities