



Special Education Paraprofessional Handbook

Summer 2018

Definition of Paraprofessional and Special Education

MN3525.0200 Definition
Special Education

Subp.10a. Paraprofessional, “Paraprofessional” means a district employee who is primarily engaged in direct instruction with one or more pupils for instructional activities, physical or behavior management, or other purposes under the direction of a regular education or special education teacher or related services provider.

Legislation MS125A.08 (b)

(b) For paraprofessionals employed to work in programs for students with disabilities, the school board in each district shall ensure that –

1. Before or immediately upon employment, each paraprofessional develops sufficient knowledge and skills in emergency procedures, building orientation, roles and responsibilities, confidentiality, vulnerability, and reportability, among other things, to begin meeting the needs of the students with whom the paraprofessional works.
2. Annual training opportunities are available to enable the paraprofessional to continue to further develop the knowledge and skills that are specific to the students with whom the paraprofessional works, including understanding disabilities, following lesson plans and implementing follow-up instructional procedures and activities.
3. A district-wide process obligates each paraprofessional to work under the ongoing direction of a licensed teacher and where appropriate and possible, the supervision of a school nurse.

Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) and Principles of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

FAPE is Free and Appropriate Public Education; the education of each child with a disability must be “provided at public expense and without charge” to the child or the child’s parents. All specially designed instruction is provided without charge, but does not preclude incidental fees that are normally charged to non-disabled students or their parents as a part of the regular education program. What is an appropriate education differs for each child with a disability. The IDEA specifies in some detail how the school and parents are to plan the education that each child receives so that it is appropriate. Evaluations are conducted to identify the child’s individual needs so that the school and parents can design an education that responds to these needs. Together school personnel and parents specify what this education will be and write the Individualized Education Program (IEP). The IEP must be reviewed and as appropriate, revised each year, to ensure that the education being delivered remains appropriate to the child’s needs. Public generally refers to our public school systems. Children with disabilities have the right to attend public school just as other children do regardless of the nature or severity of their disabilities. Education is what the law is all about. IDEA is an education act. It guarantees that a free appropriate public education is available to eligible children with disabilities and that this free

appropriate public education consists of special education and related services provided in conformity with an IEP.

Paraprofessional Training Needs and Skills Requirements

The State of Minnesota and ISD 318 have identified basic training requirements that school districts must develop annually. Schools must have highly qualified paraprofessionals in place with training in the following areas:

- Building Rules, Emergency procedures, Orientation
- Confidentiality In Special Education
- Team Member Roles and Responsibilities
- Providing follow-up to teacher instruction and instructional support in General Education
- Vulnerability and mandated reporting
- Third Party Billing
- Basic First Aid
- OSHA Universal Precautions
- Positive Behavior Interventions

Building Rules, Emergency Procedures, Orientation

Specific building rules, information, and emergency procedures will be provided by the supervising staff and building administrator. Please ask for specific information if you have questions.

Confidentiality in Special Education

Confidentiality and Its Application

Confidentiality is the most critical and important aspect of the paraprofessional's job. It is a legal responsibility to observe both the rights of students with disabilities and parents in regard to data privacy. Like teachers and administrators, paraprofessionals have access to personal information about children and their families including these examples:

- The results of formal and informal tests;
- Behavior in classrooms and other education settings;
- Academic progress;
- Family circumstances and family relationships;

Both the children and the family have the absolute right to expect that all information will be kept confidential, and made available only to personnel in school or another agency who require it to ensure that the rights, health, safety, and physical well being of the children are safeguarded. Confidentiality must be maintained and protected, and the rights of students to due process, dignity, privacy, and respect must be promoted.

Always ask yourself

- What information would you want discussed with others regarding your child?
- What would you like said about yourself as a parent?
- What would you like said about your family, your values, your lifestyle?

Confidentiality Pointers

- Avoid using names if you are asked about your job.
- Suggest that questions about a student are best directed to the building principal
- Do **NOT** share other student's names or information regarding their programs with parents during IEP meetings, conferences or informal conversations.
- Information regarding specific students and programs should not be shared in the lunchroom, staff room, office areas, out in the community or any other setting.
- When conferencing or writing information regarding a student or family that contains confidential information, be aware of those around you who may be within hearing distance. Look for a more private place within the school building.
- No matter who asks you a question about a student, if you are unsure whether you should answer, **DON'T**. You can do this gently and politely. Remember only staff that has a need to know should be given information about a student.
- For consistency of program as well as confidentiality, paraprofessionals must support teacher techniques, materials and methods, especially in the presence of students, parents and other staff. Questions should be directed to the specific teacher privately.

Team Member Roles and Responsibilities

Description of paraprofessional role:

The role of the paraprofessional in special education is to directly or indirectly assist and support in the provision of services to students with disabilities in order to help them access the general education curriculum in as independent a manner as possible. The role and assignments of a paraprofessional are not defined by a particular student, setting or program but rather by students' needs as determined by the IEP.

Description of paraprofessional responsibilities:

The responsibilities of the paraprofessional may vary based upon specific assignment. Duties may also change at anytime based upon administration or teacher examination or reexamination of student or program need.

What follows is a non-inclusive list of responsibilities which may be part of a paraprofessional's assignment.

Supporting functional skills:

- Assist the student with daily living skills and needs, such as eating, toileting, grooming, dressing, etc.
- Assist in transferring, positioning and mobility needs as directed by physical therapist, occupational therapist, or other special education or related service providers
- Act as job coach

Supporting social/emotional needs:

- Redirect behavior and implement behavior management plans
- Facilitate interaction between students with disabilities and classmate

- Teach and model strategies to peers about how to interact with the student with a disability
- Support the development of communication skills
- Assist in student crisis management and de-escalation

Supporting academic development:

- Carry out the instructional programs and lessons as developed by the supervising teacher in all learning environments
- Assist individual students or groups of students in performing activities initiated by the teacher
- Individually or in small groups, reinforce concepts and skills introduced by the teacher in all learning environments
- Keep students on task
- Implement assistive technology
- Implement accommodations indicated by the IEP (read tests aloud, take notes, enlarge materials, etc.) as directed by the special education teacher.

Serving as a communication link:

- Provide the special education teacher/staff with information about general education assignments, activities and student participation and behavior
- Inform general education staff about student programs and adaptations
- Observe, record and collect data as directed
- As directed, share information with other paraprofessionals or family
- Attend IEP meetings at the request of administrator, teacher or parent

General support:

- Assist special education teacher with clerical tasks, correcting of student work, and material or room preparations, and equipment maintenance
- Intervene with other students about inappropriate behavior, language or actions
- Provide supervision and assistance on playgrounds, in the lunchroom, at assemblies, in the swimming pool, on field trips or other locations as directed for special education students.

Supporting medical needs:

- Paras would be able to provide the following cares with training and supervision from appropriate professional personnel:
 - Administer tube feedings
 - Administer oral emergency seizure medication
 - Recognize and respond to critical symptoms of seizures, asthma, diabetes, food/bee allergies
 - Use PT, OT equipment needed for students to meet their goals under the supervision of the Therapist. (i.e. bike, stander, walker, smo's)
 - Provide assistance with student's Activities of Daily Living (assistance may range from verbal cues to total assistance) (i.e. toileting, feeding, dressing, grooming, Passive range of motion, i.e.)
 - Accompany and assist medically fragile students in all settings where the district is responsible

Minimal expectations of a paraprofessional:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the curriculum content for classes in which s/he assists

- Participate in skill and competency trainings and in-services
- Be discreet and respectful of confidential information
- Possess physical and emotional health necessary for effective job performance
- Examples:
 - Independently lift 40 pounds
 - Capable of transferring and positioning students
 - Work with physically aggressive students
 - Structure teaching for low incidence disabilities
- Work cooperatively with all school personnel
- Demonstrate a warm and receptive attitude toward all students
- Complies with school district employment policies

The following set of guidelines is taken from Guidelines for Training, Utilization, and Supervision of Paraprofessionals and Aides, published by the Kansas State Department of Education, Topeka, Kansas in 1977. The list is provided to illustrate more specifically activities that the paraprofessional could undertake in the classroom.

The paraprofessional may perform these instructional duties:

- Assist in organizing field trips.
- Read aloud or listen to children read.
- Assist students in performing activities that have been initiated by the teacher.
- Hand out papers and collect paperwork.
- Assist with supplementary work for advanced pupils.
- Provide special help such as drilling with flash cards, spelling, and play activities.
- Assist in preparing instructional materials.
- Reinforce learning with small groups.
- Assist children in learning their names, addresses, telephone numbers, birthdays, and parents' names.
- Supervise free play activities.
- Prepare flash cards and charts.
- Prepare art supplies and other materials.
- Hear requests for help, observe learning difficulties of pupils, and report such matters to teachers.
- Score objective tests and papers and keep appropriate records for teachers.

Instructional duties the paraprofessional may not perform:

- Be solely responsible for a classroom or a professional service.
- Be responsible for the diagnostic functions of the classroom.
- Be responsible for preparing lesson plans and initiating instruction.
- Be responsible for assigning grades to students.
- Be used as a substitute for certified teachers unless he or she possesses the appropriate substitute teacher certificate and is hired as a substitute.
- Assume full responsibility for supervising assemblies or field trips.

Non-Instructional duties the paraprofessional may not perform:

- Shall not assume full responsibility for supervising and planning activities.
- Shall not take children to clinic, dental, or medical appointments unless permission is granted by authorized personnel.
- Shall not prescribe educational activities and materials for children.
- Shall not grade subjective or essay tests.
- Shall not regulate pupil behavior by corporal punishment or similar means.

Positive Behavior Interventions

Special education paraprofessionals implementing IEP's containing behavior intervention plans and regulated procedures must be trained in the following:

- Positive behavior interventions
- Standards for using restrictive procedures
- Alternatives for using restrictive procedures
- De-escalation methods
- Physiological and psychological impact of the implementation of regulated procedures

Whether you work in education, healthcare, human services, business, or any field, you might deal with angry, hostile, or noncompliant behavior every day. Your response to defensive behavior is often the key to avoiding a physical confrontation with someone who has lost control of their behavior.

The following characteristics are important to embody when interacting with students with behavioral challenges:

- Honesty
- Confidence
- Openness, care, and empathy
- Humor

These 12 tips will help you build a toolkit of go-to strategies to use when students become agitated. You will move from reacting to emergency situations to responding to them.

Strategy	Examples
Actively Listen	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Giving the student total and complete focus● Giving eye contact and having a friendly and open expression on your face● Listening closely● Withholding judgment● Give student wait time to process and respond
Set Clear Limits	Guide to Setting Limits: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Clearly state the specific boundary with a corresponding consequence.● The corresponding consequence should be a logical or natural consequence that results from not following the limit.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It should be enforceable.
Offer Choices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Provide two positive options. ● Be clear and specific. (First/Then) ● Make sure that both choices are acceptable and feasible.
Build Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The more you can genuinely engage with your students in an <u>authentic</u> way, the more they feel respected and valued.
Side-Step Power Struggles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish an agenda for the day. ● Find a win-win. Compromise. ● Brainstorm solutions. ● Ignore the challenge, not the person.
Meet Physical and Emotional Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● H - Hungry. Hunger can be a physical or an emotional need. If the hunger is physical, offer nutritious snacks ● A- Angry: It's important to name the emotion and to explore what's causing it. ● L-Lonely: If you notice your student is withdrawn, engage them in conversation. Reach out and engage in active listening. Help the student connect with a peer. ● T- Tired: If your student feels tired, encourage them to rest or to take a short nap. If that's not possible, go for a walk around the block or encourage them to take a couple of deep breaths.
Catch Them Being Good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● 5 positives for every redirection ● The goal here is to praise the positive behaviors and neutralize or ignore the negative behaviors. ● By acknowledging when a student uses expected behavior, we can increase the likelihood of them using that behavior again.
Model Prosocial Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Prosocial skills are those behaviors that we engage in that benefit others. These behaviors include cooperation, sharing work, sharing toys, and emotionally supporting others who are in distress. ● Students who have behavior disorders often have not developed strong prosocial skills. ● Students need to see prosocial skills modeled and need several opportunities to practice the skills after they are taught.
Alter Volume/Cadence of Your Voice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Lower the volume of your voice and speak more quietly. As you speak more quietly, your student will have to become quieter to hear you. ● Alter the cadence of your voice and speak more slowly. ● Modulate your tone of voice and be calm and supportive. ● Simplify your vocabulary. <p>* Remember that as your student starts to escalate, they're starting to lose rationality. Speaking loudly and quickly will increase their agitation.</p>
Monitor Nonverbals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Use Non-Threatening Nonverbals <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The more a person loses control, the less they hear your words -

	<p>and the more they react to your nonverbal communication. Be mindful of your gestures, facial expressions, movements, and tone of voice.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Respect Personal Space <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Allowing personal space tends to decrease a person’s anxiety and can help you prevent acting-out behaviors.
<p>Choose Wisely What you Insist Upon</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● It’s important to be thoughtful in deciding which rules are negotiable and which are not. ● If you can offer a person options and flexibility, you may be able to avoid unnecessary altercations.
<p>Avoid Overreacting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Remain calm, rational, and professional. ● While you can’t control the person’s behavior, how you respond to their behavior will have a direct effect on whether the situation escalates or defuses. ● Your response to the situation or behavior should match that of the student.
<p>Monitor Triggers and Adjust</p>	<p>Often times, we spend precious minutes and hours of the school day de-escalating students. To address repeated escalating behaviors:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Track what events are causing escalated behaviors (triggers) 2. Remove the triggers if possible 3. Teach the desired behavior

General Principles and Strategies for Interacting with Students

In addition to implementing IEP goals, adaptations, behavior plans, etc, the following list of strategies may be helpful in your interactions with students.

Relationship Building

- Develop a positive rapport with student.
- Maintain a professional, but supportive role with student as opposed to a "friend" relationship.
- Provide positive, specific and frequent feedback.
- Maintain your voice at a non-threatening moderate level.
- Use respectful language with all students.

Behavioral Support

- Provide clear expectations of behavior and check for understanding of those expectations.
- Provide fair and consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Cue student to return to a task without drawing negative attention to him/her.
- Catch the student displaying appropriate behavior or for finishing a task well and praise him/her.
- Consistently follow individual behavior intervention plans that were developed by the student's team of professionals.
- Continually evaluate the stress and frustration level of student.
- Communicate your observations and perspectives with the general and/or special educator.

Moving Towards Independence

- Avoid becoming overprotective.
- Students may initially require intensive support, but you should fade to a coaching and indirect support role as soon as possible.
- Encourage independence and interdependence with classmates.
- Students will interact more naturally when you are not sitting or standing next to them.
- Recognize the importance of peer modeling of appropriate behavior and point out examples of effective behavior and its consequences.
- Natural supports enhance student's independence and social acceptance.
- Assist students by providing resources rather than giving them the answers.
- Allow students to make as many decisions for themselves as possible.
- Give opportunities for making choices.

Professionalism and Ethical Practices

Professional Ethics

Many times, the paraprofessional is in an awkward position. They are involved in the educational process with students and many of their expectations are similar to that of a classroom teacher. However, a paraprofessional is in a professional position that requires the following ethical guidelines.

Accepting Responsibilities:

- Engage only in instructional and other activities for which you are qualified or trained.
- Do not communicate progress or concerns about students to parents, community members or other teachers; this is reserved only for communication with your supervising teacher.
- Refer concerns expressed by parents, students, or others to your supervising teacher.
- Recognize the supervisor has the ultimate responsibility for instruction and management and follow the prescribed directions.
- Help to see the best interests of individual students are met.

Relationships with Students and Parents:

- Discuss a child's progress, limitations, and/or educational program ONLY with the supervising teacher in an appropriate setting (i.e. do not discuss students in the teacher workroom with other teachers during lunch time).
- Express differences of opinion with your supervising teacher ONLY when students are absent from the room.
- Discuss school problems and confidential matters only with appropriate personnel.
- Do not engage in discriminatory practices based on a student's race, sex, cultural background, religion, or disability.
- Respect the dignity, privacy, and individuality of all students, parents, and staff members.
- Be a positive role model

Relationship with the Teacher:

- Recognize the teacher as your supervisor.
- Establish communication and a positive relationship with the teacher.
- When problems cannot be resolved, use the school district's grievance procedures (a copy of which can be found in the district office).
- Discuss concerns about the teacher or teaching methods directly with the teacher in an appropriate setting.

Relationship with the School:

- Engage in behavior management strategies that are consistent with standards of the district.
- Accept responsibility for improving your skills.
- Know and follow school policies and procedures.
- Represent the school in a positive manner.