

Paraprofessional Support for Students with Disabilities

Teachers often rely on paraprofessionals as a fundamental source of 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, or for specific tasks. Because they work closely with students with disabilities, paraprofessionals can provide daily support for learning, physical, communication, behavioral, and social skills needs and can be a powerful facilitator of learning and social relationships.

Paraprofessionals work under the supervision of a certified teacher. Fulfilling a wide variety of roles can be a complex balancing act for paraprofessionals, however, their roles are largely determined by the unique needs of the students being supported. The best practice is to ensure that these roles are clearly defined.

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



Instructional Tasks

Review content, run a station, provide remediation, help with make-up work, administer individual tests, help students with 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 organizational skills



Clerical Tasks

Make copies, enlarge or modify materials, filing, record student data or implementation of accommodations



Behavior Support Tasks

Provide positive reinforcement, address sensory needs, support behavior plans, calm students, collect data, maintain logs



Supervision Tasks

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



Preparation Tasks

Create communication tools, prepare group materials, individualize materials based on student needs, gather materials for themes



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 equipment with training

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. The following tips can be used to form a plan for working together to support students with disabilities.

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

Use active listening skills to communicate with each other to develop a balanced, united partnership that reflects common perspectives and ideas.

Help maximize time by establishing and following a clear daily and weekly schedule with predictable routines and tasks.

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

Follow a shared, consistent classroom behavior management plan that is clearly written.

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

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

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

Review information about accommodations. Try new or different ways to assist various students.

Section 1012.38, Florida Statutes (F.S.) states that paraprofessionals may not:

1. Establish instructional objectives;
2. Make decisions regarding the relevancy of certain activities or procedures to the attainment of instructional objectives;
3. Make decisions regarding the appropriateness of certain teaching materials for accomplishing instructional objectives; or
4. Make judgments regarding the attainment of instructional objectives unless these judgments are based upon clear and objective criteria, such as specific achievement standards on a true-false test.

