

APPENDIX C

SUGGESTIONS FOR SUPERVISORY PERSONNEL

Competencies for Supervisors of Paraeducators

1. **Interviewing Skills**
2. **Mentoring**
 - a. clarifies the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators
 - b. delineates lines of authority
 - c. demonstrates/models instructional skills behavior
3. **Communication**
 - a. applies interpersonal skills
 - b. demonstrates effective listening skills
 - c. uses team-building skills
 - d. exhibits effective written and oral skills to provide team management
4. **Problem Solving**
 - a. resolves conflicts
 - b. identifies and clarifies a problem
 - c. assumes the perspective of another
5. **Motivation Skills**
 - a. creates a positive environment
 - b. sets achievable goals
 - c. rewards goal achievement
 - d. shows respect and acknowledges achievement of others
 - e. promotes change and growth
6. **Coordinating Skills**
 - a. demonstrates time management skills
 - b. designs effective meeting strategies
 - c. implements scheduling techniques
7. **Delegating Skills**
 - a. selects tasks to be delegated based on an individual's competence
 - b. clarifies roles and clearly delegates responsibilities
 - c. provides constructive feedback to the delegate
8. **Feedback and Evaluation Skills**
 - a. monitors the performance of others
 - b. provides constructive feedback
 - c. participates in formal evaluation process
 - d. describes and clarifies evaluation processes and content
 - e. participates in individual personnel growth plan
 - f. uses appropriate record keeping and documentation

9. **Learning and Professional Development Skills**
 - a. demonstrates knowledge of state professional guidelines/regulations/policies regarding employment of paraprofessionals
 - b. shares information regarding professional development

Working with Paraeducators

In many schools, the role of the special education teacher has been transformed. In addition to their instructional responsibilities, special education teachers are also acting as supervisors of paraeducators. Special education teachers often supervise at least one paraeducator, and some supervise as many as 20. Recent estimates report that between 250,000 and 280,000 paraeducators work in special education alone, and about 500,000 provide some kind of instructional activity or other direct service to students.

As special education teachers assume the role of supervisory, they may need to learn new skills regarding personnel management and the delegation of responsibility. This shift in responsibility may also require special education teachers to change their beliefs and attitudes about their job.

“The special education teacher must give up some of the control but not the responsibility,” said Anna Lou Pickett, professor at New York University and member of CEC Chapter #742. “As in any business, the special education teacher must determine what needs to be done and select staff. They must be able to direct, delegate, and assess the quality of performance of the paraeducator.”

One of the primary challenges special educators face is determining which duties to assign a paraeducator and which to maintain. Experts agree that special education teachers must perform all professional responsibilities such as diagnosing a child’s disability, planning programs to meet the child’s identified needs, and developing the child’s Individualized Education Program (IEP). They should also determine which adaptations should be made in the classroom, evaluate instructional programs, and assess student performance.

The paraeducators may perform a variety of instructional and noninstructional tasks. They may provide direct instruction to individuals or groups of students following the teacher’s guidelines concerning choice of materials and the instructional plan and/or observe and record data. Paraeducators may also perform other duties such as maintaining inventory and ordering supplies.

In addition to defining duties, special education teachers may need to develop a number of other skills to promote a positive working relationship for themselves, the paraeducators, and the students:

Develop and maintain an effective communication system between themselves and paraeducators and among paraeducators. The special educator must ensure the paraeducator knows the goals for each student, which type of behavior management techniques to use for individual students, and why different techniques are used for different children. The special educator must also ensure that he or she is regularly informed of information that conveys the progress of each child.

One teacher who supervises 11 paraeducators devised a system using clipboards to help with communication. Every paraeducator is armed with a clipboard on which he or she has notes, the

goals and objectives, and the kinds of adaptations to use with the children he or she works with. With this information, the paraeducator can make-on-the spot decisions about which adaptations to use. On the same clipboard, the paraeducator has a reporting sheet on which he or she records the skills worked on that day and to what degree the child has mastered those skills.

Special educators should also establish regular meetings with paraeducators. Those meetings can be used to set goals for students, plot instructional strategies, solve problems, or deal with any conflicts between staff.

Be a good delegator. The special educator must decide which tasks or partial tasks to delegate. If the teacher supervises more than one paraeducator, he or she must determine who is best for a particular task.

Provide on-the-job coaching. Some say this is the most important aspect of working with paraeducators, as they often receive little or no preservice training. For on-the-job coaching to be most effective, the special education teacher should evaluate the needs of their students, their program design, the skills of the paraeducator, and the skills the paraeducator needs to have. Special educators may find that they can easily increase a paraeducator's effectiveness by teaching him or her instructional strategies such as how to use questions to elicit information from a child or how to prompt a child. On-the-job coaching also provides an additional benefit in that the educator can feel more confident about the quality of the paraeducator's work, and the paraeducator can be effective in more situations.

Be a good evaluator. As a supervisor, teachers will evaluate paraeducators, either informally or formally. To ensure the evaluations are fair, teachers should observe the paraeducator frequently, according to Nancy French, professor at the University of Colorado, Denver. The teacher's feedback should be specific and honest and include information about what the paraeducator does well, as well as areas that need improvement. Finally, teachers need to be consistent in their expectations and evaluations, particularly in places when more than one paraeducator is on the team.

Advantage of Working with Paraeducators

While turning over some of their direct instruction time to paraeducators changes the roles of the special education teacher, working with these individuals offers many advantages. For instances, using a paraeducator gives special educators more time to plan for their students and perform assessments, as well as consult with colleagues. Paraeducators who are skilled at observation can be an invaluable asset, providing accurate information about whether or not a program is working over a period of months or of changes the teacher may not be aware of. Having a paraeducator in the classroom also gives the special education teacher time to observe what is going on in the class and determine where modifications need to be made. And, last but not least, having another adult in a class makes it possible to provide more students with the 5-10 minutes of personalized attention so many of our students need.

Improper Use of Paraeducators Detrimental to Students with Disabilities

Improper use of paraeducators can negatively affect the instruction, educational advancement, and social development of students with disabilities, according to a study reported in the Fall 1997 *Exceptional Children*. Researchers identified eight areas in which unnecessary proximity of instructional aides to students with special needs can impede progress. They are:

- The availability of paraeducators can allow professional staff to avoid assuming responsibility and ownership for the education of students with disabilities placed in general education classrooms.
- Paraeducators often separate students with disabilities from the class group.
- Paraeducators in close proximity to students with disabilities may foster dependence on adults.
- Prolonged close proximity of paraeducators to students with disabilities can adversely affect peer involvement.
- Paraeducators often do not have the training or instructional knowledge and skill to provide adequate academic instruction to students with disabilities.
- Students who have difficulty communicating may lose personal control when working with paraeducators regularly.
- The student's gender may become secondary to the gender of the paraeducator, e.g., for bathroom use.
- Paraeducator behaviors may interfere with the instruction of other students.

Problems Related to Instructional Assistant Proximity

Inference with Ownership and Responsibility by General Educators

- “I’m not sure how Holly is going to be involved in this activity, but that’s her aide’s job.” (Physical education teacher)
- “The teachers tend to kind of let the individual (assistants) kind of run the program.” (Mother of a student with disabilities)

Separation from Classmates

- An instructional assistant waited until all the other students had lined up at the teacher’s direction and had filed out of the classroom before prompting the student with disabilities to leave the room, trailing the group by about 10 yards.
- In the middle of an activity, after James had one turn, the instructional assistant quietly removed him from the group while the class continued their activity.

Dependence on Adults

- During a large literacy activity, the instructional assistant had positioned herself near the back of the group, a few feet away from Annie (the student with disabilities). Annie looked away from the teacher and toward her instructional assistant every few seconds as the instructional assistant offered her signed instructions (e.g., look at the teacher, sit down). After a couple of minutes, Annie walked back to the instructional assistant and sat on her lap.

Impact on Peer Interactions

- “A shadow is not necessarily good. It’s more of a stigma. I really hadn’t considered the fact that Mrs. Kinney (the instructional assistant) is always very close to Jaime, although there are times when she is out on a break or whatever and he is in very capable hands with his peers. I think it would be better to have her integrated more in the classroom and maybe not feel that she needs to hover so much.” (Classroom teacher)
- “It (close proximity of instructional assistants) may be kind of intimidating to them (peers). It may sort of be a barrier to them interacting with him.” (Speech/language pathologist)

Limitations on Receiving Competent Instruction

- In attempting to use discrimination learning to teach the difference between named objects, pictures, symbols, or colors, lessons yield little because the instructional assistants demonstrated limited knowledge or application of basic instructional design issues such as position bias, use of negative exemplars/distracters, and establishing mastery criteria prior to introducing new items.

Loss of Personal Control

- Did Holly really want to eat lunch apart from her classmates in a separate room? Did Helen really want to play the math game with an adult rather than a classmate like all the other students were doing?

Loss of Gender Identity

- Loss of gender identity was most commonly observed in reference to bathroom use when a male student was taken into a woman's bathroom by a female instructional assistant.

Interference with Instruction of Other Students

- An occupational therapist reported that the students without disabilities were more distracted by the instructional assistant doing different activities than by the "noises" of the students with disabilities.