

# *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices Edition II*

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Iowa Department of Education  
Student and Family Support Services  
Grimes State Office Building  
400 E 14th St  
Des Moines IA 50319-0146

2007

# Beliefs

*Paraeducators play an active and essential role in their work with children and youth by providing encouragement, support, assistance, and advocacy.*

*Paraeducators are critical to the social, emotional, academic, and vocational success of children and youth.*

*Paraeducators are respected and valued members of the educational team.*

*Paraeducators understand the needs of children and youth and have the specialized training to meet student needs.*

*Communication among paraeducators, licensed personnel, and parents is carefully planned and carried out.*

*Teachers, administrators and other members of the educational team enable paraeducators to be effective in their work by providing resources, support, feedback, and assistance.*

*Leaders at the state, regional, district, and building level provide the systems level support and resources to enable paraeducators to be effective in their work.*

*Paraeducators have a professional identity and advocate for their profession by maintaining positive, supportive, cooperative, and professional relationships.*

*All paraeducators are provided with training prior to initiating services and ongoing professional development to keep updated on best practices and current, effective strategies.*

*The value of paraeducators and the complexity of their roles are recognized as important to the success of the school.*



# Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices

Edition II



Presented by  
Iowa Department of Education  
Student and Family Support Services

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# State Board Page

State of Iowa  
Department of Education  
Grimes State Office Building  
Des Moines, Iowa 50319-0146

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# Acknowledgements

The *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa (Edition II)* was authored by an Iowa Paraeducator Task Force that was convened in 2005. The charge of the task force was to revise the 1998 *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa* to reflect Iowa's paraeducator certification system and changes in state and federal statutes. Each member brought to the task multiple areas of expertise in paraeducator services. The completed revision reflects the commitment of these authors who were able to renew the vision of the crafters of the 1998 edition.

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## *Notes:*

- *The Iowa Rules of Special Education cited in this document reflect the new numbering system that was in the final stages of adoption at the time of this printing.*
- *This document may be reproduced with appropriate acknowledgement to the Iowa Department of Education.*

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# *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices – Edition II*

## **Introduction**

### **Purpose and Audience**

**T**he *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Practices in Iowa (Edition II)* describes the services that are necessary to support effective paraeducator practices in Iowa schools.

The guide is intended to serve as a resource for local and area education agency personnel—paraeducators, teachers, administrators, and staff development coordinators—parents, and faculty and students of community colleges, colleges, and universities. Potential uses include:

- A resource for assessing paraeducator skills and designing paraeducator professional development.
- A resource for designing training for teachers who work with paraeducators.
- A resource for preparatory courses for paraeducators and other educators.
- A reference for requirements established by state and federal rules and regulations.
- A resource for reviewing policies and practices to ensure they provide appropriate supports and are in line with state and federal requirements.
- A resource for considering paraeducator certification needs.
- A tool for accessing Iowa’s paraeducator certification institutions.
- A resource for addressing challenging situations in paraeducator services.
- A resource to enhance communication among parents, paraeducators, and teachers.

Specifically, users of the guide are asked to consider the following:

- Local education agencies (LEAs) and area education agencies (AEAs) are encouraged to provide staff and families with opportunities for using the guide to assess and support effective paraeducator practices.

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- College and university faculty and AEA staff who prepare certified paraeducators are encouraged to adopt the guide as a resource for their programs.
- College and university faculty and AEA staff who prepare other educational providers are encouraged to provide information from the guide to their students.

Because paraeducators are key service providers in a variety of educational settings, they contribute to the social, emotional, and intellectual growth of children and youth. Subsequently, support for quality paraeducator practices results in improved services for Iowa children and youth in infant programs, in preschool, school, and post-school settings, and in specialized service programs.

### ***History***

The original *Guide for Effective Paraeducator Practices* was published in 1998. It was conceived and developed by a dedicated group of stakeholders under the direction of Deb Hansen, a consultant for a staff development project supported by the Iowa Department of Education. The guide achieved national recognition and was adopted and modified by numerous states. It remains one of the premiere documents in the United States for guiding the work of paraeducators.

The vision and beliefs that were developed by the original writers of this document remain relevant and helped to guide this 2007 revision. Much of the original document has been retained, a testament to the caliber of the work of the original crafters. This updated version reflects new legislation and the competencies that guide Iowa's paraeducator certification process. The belief statements developed by the original group of stakeholders anchor this revised edition on page i. A list of the stakeholders and their vision can be found in Appendix A.

### ***Roles of Paraeducators***

#### ***What Are Paraeducators?***

Paraeducators are essential members of the educational team serving Iowa's children and youth. The definition of a paraeducator provided in the 1998 edition of this guide is as follows:

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*A paraeducator is an employee who works under the supervision of teachers or other licensed personnel. The ultimate responsibility for the design and implementation of education and related service programs belongs to the supervising teacher or other licensed personnel. The paraeducator is one whose position is either instructional in nature or who delivers other direct or indirect services to children, youth, and/or their parents. Synonyms for the term “paraeducator” include: paraprofessional, educational aide, instructional aide, or associate.*

In Iowa, the following paraeducator positions titles are provided in the *Iowa Code*: (a) paraprofessional (special education), (b) instructional aide (Title I), and (c) educational aide (general education).

A myriad of other position titles are used to describe paraeducators in educational settings: teacher associate, teacher aide, instructional assistant, learner assistant, transition trainer, job coach, education technician, home, and community liaison, childcare worker, native language tutor, media associate, clerk, health aide, lunchroom aide, office interventionist, library assistant, student support assistant, behavior management aide, student coach, and tutor. Additional roles that are occasionally described as paraeducator positions include physical therapy assistant, occupational therapy assistant, and hearing interpreter. Those roles are not addressed in this guide in that they are increasingly being associated with related service or support positions.

In today’s schools, assistants to teachers are best described as paraeducators just as their counterparts in law and medicine are designated paralegals and paramedics. The prefix “para” means “along side of” as in working along side of an educator. Subsequently, the term “paraeducator” is an accurate term.

Approximately 9,000 paraeducators work in schools and other educational settings in Iowa. Although nationwide information on numbers of paraeducators is not consistently collected and reported, rough estimates put the number of educational paraeducators nationwide at about 1.2 million.

### **Competencies: The paraeducator’s role**

**P**araeducators provide assistance to a variety of students including those with and without disabilities, with health needs, with limited English proficiency, and others. Typically employed by school districts and area education agencies,

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they work in a range of educational settings including classrooms, lunchrooms, playgrounds, school buses, vocational work sites, computer labs, and school media centers. They provide instructional support to children and youth in early childhood, elementary, middle, and secondary school programs, in residential educational facilities, community services and work-study instruction, postsecondary education programs, numerous adult service programs, and rural, suburban, and urban sites.

Because paraeducators work under the supervision of licensed educators, their roles change to reflect the systemic changes within teaching practices. The evolution of teaching has experienced some profound changes under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA). An increased emphasis on measuring student achievement and on partnerships among all teachers of students with diverse needs has impacted not only the teaching profession, but all educational personnel. Paraeducators are seeing new service delivery models such as consultative and co-teaching options (see section on IDEA 2004) and are discovering new opportunities through these models to contribute to the educational growth of Iowa's children and youth.

Iowa paraeducators can be well prepared to meet these systemic changes through appropriate supports and training. Their supportive roles can take shape in six major areas as outlined by Iowa's paraeducator generalist certification. For more detailed information on certification options, see section entitled "Certification."

### 1) Support a safe, positive teaching and learning environment

Paraeducators are often the first adults to greet students as they leave the bus and enter the school building. They supervise students in a variety of settings with varying amounts of structure and often accompany students as they move around the building and in the community.

Paraeducators are positive role models. They may prompt students to use previously learned strategies to solve problems and gather information.

Paraeducators, under the guidance of licensed staff members, help organize and maintain the physical space, keep records for reports, and monitor behavior and learning.

Paraeducators facilitate the integration of students with individual needs in typical classrooms and settings. Although some students require one-to-one support, the integration of students is ideally provided by more than one paraeducator.

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Paraeducators follow guidelines established by the school district to protect the safety and well-being of learners and staff.

### 2) Assist in physical and intellectual development

Paraeducators support the teaching and learning of all students. Teachers or other licensed professionals provide initial instruction. Paraeducators then review lessons and provide drill and independent practice opportunities with individual students or groups of students. Under teacher direction, they may modify or create learning materials.

The role of paraeducators in assessment may include, under the direction of teachers, reading tests, scribing, and adapting tests. They may observe students, record and summarize data, maintain records, and share information with teachers and other professionals.

Paraeducators foster the learning of students from diverse cultures, language backgrounds, learning styles, and abilities.

### 3) Support social, emotional, and behavioral development

Paraeducators carry out behavior management plans developed by teachers and other professionals. They support and assist students in meeting class and school expectations for appropriate behavior. Paraeducators help students interact successfully by modeling and prompting appropriate behavior. They may work with small groups of students to reinforce social skill learning.

Paraeducators often support integration of students with specialized needs by providing close supervision and reinforcing generalization of positive behavior. They may accompany students, gather behavioral data, provide immediate prompts, and implement previously planned intervention.

Interventions may include positive verbal and physical reinforcement strategies, point sheets, time out procedures, or token economies.

### 4) Establish positive and productive relationships

Paraeducators work with a variety of staff including other paraeducators, teachers, administrators and support staff. They may also have contact with the extended families of the students. They respect the legal and human rights of students and their families and school staff.

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Paraeducators communicate effectively as members of the instructional team. They are open, respectful, and cooperative. They respect the individual role distinctions of various team members. Paraeducators communicate information to appropriate personnel in a timely manner.

### 5) Integrate effectively technology to support student learning

Paraeducators use high and low tech methods and equipment to facilitate learning for all students. Paraeducators may use special equipment in their work or support students as they learn to use special equipment. Examples of specialized equipment include computers, mechanical aids for movement and exercises, assistive augmentative communicators, pencil grips, closed circuit television, or colored papers or tapes.

Paraeducators in some cases work with students who need specialized equipment for health or mobility. These paraeducators receive training from professionals in order to modify or implement strategies and materials. The devices utilized by students include oxygen, feeding tubes, positioning equipment, and wheel chairs.

Paraeducators may use technology to record grades, points, or observations. They enlarge, modify, and duplicate materials.

### 6) Practice ethical and professional standards of conduct

Paraeducators practice the standards of ethical conduct approved by their school district. They often represent the school in a positive manner to the community and take concerns through the appropriate channels. They maintain the confidentiality of all information regarding students, respecting the dignity of every student and family. For a suggested list of ethical responsibilities for paraeducators see Appendix B. For the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners *Code of Professional Conduct and Ethics* required for certified paraeducators see Appendix C.

Paraeducators work in complex situations and perform a variety of tasks. When confronting unfamiliar procedures or situations, they ask for directions, instructions or guidance. They model life-long learning by participating in professional, college, or inservice opportunities.

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### **Teaming: The paraeducator's role**

Effective teaming among paraeducators and teachers\* requires thoughtful contribution from individuals in both roles. The teaming contributions of paraeducators can occur through a variety of practices as outlined below. A more complete list of suggested teaming activities is available in the publication *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals*, by Kent Gerlach. To foster an effective teaming environment, paraeducators are encouraged to:

- Discuss ideas or problems with the teacher. Ask for his or her ideas, suggestions, and opinions. Use terms like “we” and “us” instead of “I” and “you” because both paraeducators and teachers have a responsibility for the classroom.
- Know the school rules, policies for school discipline, confidentiality, health, and safety. Ask for them if they haven't been given to you.
- Know classroom rules; expectations for the class; daily routines and schedules; instructional procedures, strategies, and tools; and procedures for handling student work, room organization, dismissing the class, bathroom rules, etc.
- Discuss appropriate roles of the administrator, teacher, and the paraeducator. Share your expectations and seek out the teacher's expectations of you.
- Learn vocabulary/educational jargon in connection with student performance, assessment techniques, program planning, and educational methods. Ask about nonverbal cues that will enable the team to communicate in the classroom.
- Discuss the roles of the substitute teacher and paraeducator.
- Recognize and respect the knowledge and expertise the teacher brings to his or her role. Each person has unique skills, special interests, and experience that are vital to the team.

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\*The term “teacher” is used throughout the guide as a synonym for teacher or other professional service provider.



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- Learn the teaching philosophy and teaching style for each teacher you work with throughout the day. This includes:
  - ✓ Teacher guides
  - ✓ Student motivation systems
  - ✓ Individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with special needs
  - ✓ Supports/accommodations/modifications for various students
  - ✓ Explanations of paraeducator roles in instruction (drill-and-practice, assessments, adapting lesson plans according to teacher directions, and monitoring student performance)
  - ✓ Progress monitoring techniques.
- Clarify your role with the families of students. Discuss confidentiality and your role in parent communications and parent conferences. Be clear with families that your communications regarding student progress, academic content, classroom behaviors and other educational concerns and issues are guided by the licensed teacher.
- Discuss and clarify discipline procedures in the classroom and expectations for managing student behavior. The paraeducator needs to know written/formal and unwritten/informal rules and how the rules complement the instructional delivery and/or process.
- Discuss with the teacher your comfort level with assisting students with complex subject matter. Students with advanced academic skills (chemistry, advanced math, etc.) may need physical assistance from paraeducators who understand the subject matter, i.e., where to place answers and computations on assignments. Ask for assistance when you need it.
- Orient yourself to the school/building/setting. Ask questions of your supervising teacher or administrator to make your first days and weeks less uncertain. Some things you might ask about are included in “First Day Questions” in Appendix D.

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- Create an open and professional relationship with the teacher. Get to know each other, and areas of interests, experience, strengths, and needed growth or skill building.
- Practice active listening, which includes asking encouraging questions; clarifying to obtain clear information by asking who, what, when, and where questions; restating the facts to make sure you've understood; reflecting on the other person's feelings; summarizing the issue; and validating the other person's dignity, efforts, and opinions.
- Attempt to understand why conflicts occur and work with the teacher on conflict resolution and problem solving strategies. (See section entitled "Challenging Situations.")
- Request a listing of professional development opportunities in the area, such as community college programs, area education agency services, district inservice opportunities, and state initiatives. Accept the responsibility for improving your own skills.
- Prompt conversations with the teacher to ascertain how the working relationship is developing. Possible questions include:
  - ✓ Are we meeting often enough?
  - ✓ Are we sharing information about student performance?
  - ✓ Do we need to work on redefining roles and setting goals?
  - ✓ Are we treating each other with respect and valuing each other's roles?
  - ✓ Do we feel able to talk freely with each other about problems and issues?
- Conduct self-evaluations of instructional sessions that help establish goals for improvement. A suggested list of questions is available in the publication *Project Para: Paraeducator Self Study Program*, by Vasa & Steckelberg. Some questions to consider include:
  - ✓ Did I establish rapport with the student?
  - ✓ Did I follow the lesson plan and understand the goals?

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- ✓ Did I introduce the lesson so that the student understood the concept that the lesson attempts to teach?
  - ✓ Was I enthusiastic enough to get the student interested in performing the task?
  - ✓ Did I give the instructions in a clear, concise manner?
  - ✓ Did I explain what the student was to do in a practice activity so that he or she understood it?
  - ✓ Did I have all the materials I needed to provide the teacher's lesson?
  - ✓ Did I use appropriate reinforcement techniques?
  - ✓ Did I encourage the student if he or she was having difficulty?
  - ✓ Was the lesson successful in terms of reaching the behavioral objective for the unit?
  - ✓ Did I feel comfortable in the situation?
  - ✓ Did the lesson have closure?
  - ✓ Did I maintain accurate records and comments about the session?
- 
- Maintain your own wellness, composure, and emotional stability while working with students and staff. Present yourself as a positive role model for students.
  - Provide accurate information about students to those who need to know (i.e., supervising teacher, related service personnel, and other staff). Discuss confidential school issues only with appropriate personnel. (See Appendix E for more confidentiality information.)
  - If you have concerns about a teacher's methods, first discuss those concerns directly with the teacher.
  - Be flexible. Paraeducators and teachers are both valuable assets to the team. Paraeducators can provide needed support to both students and teachers. Be willing to listen, to experiment, and to make changes as needed.

### **Roles of teachers**

#### **Teaming: The teacher's role**

The teaming contributions of teachers can occur through a variety of practices as outlined below. A more complete list of suggested teaming activities is available in the publication *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals*, by Kent Gerlach. To foster an effective teaming environment, teachers are encouraged to:

- Create and communicate a shared vision of teamwork.
- Discuss ideas and problems with the paraeducator. Ask for his or her ideas, suggestions, and opinions. Use terms like “we” and “us” instead of “I” and “you” to reaffirm that you both have a responsibility for the classroom.
- Acquaint paraeducators with school rules, policies for school discipline, confidentiality, health, and safety.
- Clarify classroom rules with paraeducators: expectations for the class; daily routines and schedules; instructional procedures, strategies, and tools; and procedures for handling student work, room organization, dismissing the class, bathroom rules, etc.
- Work with administrators to provide paraeducators a desk, mailbox, and a place to leave personal property, lesson plans, student work, and so forth. Many paraeducators travel among several classrooms and other settings during the day and may require a station in each setting.
- Clarify the appropriate roles of the teacher and the paraeducator. Share your expectations and acknowledge the paraeducator's expectations of you.
- Share vocabulary/educational jargon in connection with student performance, assessment techniques, program planning, and educational methods. Nonverbal cues need to be established that will enable the team to communicate in the classroom.
- Build time in your schedule to plan and communicate with the paraeducator. Plan a set meeting time, either daily or weekly.
- Discuss the roles of the substitute teacher and paraeducator.

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- Recognize and respect the knowledge and expertise paraeducators bring to their role, ensuring that students do also. Each person has unique skills, special interests, and areas of expertise that are vital to the team.
- Explain your teaching philosophy and teaching style. This includes sharing:
  - ✓ Teacher guides
  - ✓ Student motivation systems
  - ✓ Individualized education programs (IEPs) for students with special needs
  - ✓ Supports/accommodations/modifications for various students
  - ✓ Explanations of paraeducator roles in instruction (drill-and-practice assessments, adapting lesson plans according to teacher directions, and monitoring student performance).
  - ✓ Progress monitoring techniques
- Clarify with the paraeducator and families the paraeducator's role with the families of students. Be clear about confidentiality and the role of the paraeducator in parent communication and parent conferences.
- Discuss and clarify discipline procedures in the classroom and expectations for managing student behavior. The paraeducator needs to know the written/formal and unwritten/informal rules regarding discipline in order to assist students in the classroom.
- Discuss with the paraeducator his or her comfort level with assisting students with complex subject matter. Students with advanced academic skills (chemistry, advanced math, etc.) may need physical assistance from paraeducators who understand the subject matter, i.e., where to place answers and computations on assignments.
- Provide paraeducators with opportunities for on-the-job professional development. Such opportunities could include coaching in the areas of behavior management, instructional strategies, and individual student needs.
- Provide regular, constructive feedback on the paraeducator's job performance. Share what the paraeducator does well and give suggestions for improvement.

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- Be flexible. Paraeducators are valuable assets to the team. They can provide needed support to both students and teachers. Be willing to listen, to experiment, and to make changes as needed.

### ***The supervision of paraeducators by teachers***

The classroom teacher and paraeducator must work together as a team to assist student learning and to truly make a difference in the classroom. It is most often the responsibility of the teacher to design and implement a system of supervision for the paraeducators.

The following suggestions for supervisors of paraeducators provide some guidance for approaching the supervisory role.

The amount and type of supervision required should be based on:

- Skills and experience of the paraeducator
- Needs of the students served (or change in the student's status such as educational, medical, or personal complications)
- Service setting
- Tasks assigned
- Other factors such as the initiation of a new program, equipment, or task

Major responsibilities of the teachers include:

- Planning the tasks the paraeducators will perform
- Defining the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators
- Developing appropriate schedules for paraeducators based on their strengths, interests, and needs of the students
- Monitoring the performance of the paraeducators
- Providing meaningful ongoing feedback and training to the paraeducators
- Working with the building administrators on addressing paraeducator's strengths and needs

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- Modeling expectations for work by the paraeducators with students

### Supervisory skills for teachers

Providing training in supervisory skills for teachers working with paraeducators is an ongoing process. Paraeducators need supervision, support, guidance, and positive role models. To support these efforts teachers, need skills that include:

- Time management
- Effective communication and collaboration
- Team work and team building
- Planning and delegation
- Role clarification
- Professionalism and ethics
- Problem solving
- Providing feedback and evaluation of paraeducators

## ***Roles of Administrators***

### ***Teaming: The administrator's role***

The teaming contributions of administrators can occur through a variety of practices as outlined below. A more complete list of suggested teaming activities is available in the publication *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers, and Principals*, by Kent Gerlach. To foster an effective teaming environment, administrators are encouraged to:

- Provide a copy of *Guide to Effective Paraeducator Services* to each paraeducator and all teachers who work with paraeducators.
- Create a school climate in which paraeducators have a professional identity, and in which they have respect, recognition, and open communication with the other staff members.

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- Include paraeducators in newsletters, web sites, mailboxes, e-mail addresses, staff meetings as appropriate, school-based committees, and school improvement teams.
- Support the teacher/paraeducator team:
  - ✓ Build time into the schedule for teachers and paraeducators to plan, communicate, discuss student needs and progress, and receive feedback.
  - ✓ Make sure paraeducators and teachers understand their roles.
  - ✓ Ensure that all new teachers understand their work with paraeducators.
  - ✓ Make sure teachers and paraeducators have the necessary skills for effective teamwork.
  - ✓ Provide valuable feedback to the paraeducator and teacher with regard to the work they are doing.
- Work with the teachers to develop a vocabulary list of terms or acronyms used throughout the building that may need an explanation including such terms as Title I, IEP (individualized education program), CSIP (comprehensive school improvement plan), and others.
- Work with teachers to provide paraeducators a desk, mailbox, and a place to leave personal property, lesson plans, student work, and so forth. Many paraeducators travel among several classrooms and other settings during the day and may require a station in each setting.
- Provide professional development opportunities for paraeducators. See section entitled “Professional Development” for detailed information on professional development needs and options for paraeducators.

### ***Supervision of paraeducators by administrators***

School principals play a critical role in supervising and supporting the work of paraeducators. Principals are primarily responsible for the administrative supervision of hiring, preparing, evaluating, and dismissing paraeducators. Major responsibilities of the principal and/or other school administrators include:



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- Recruiting, interviewing, and recommending for hire the paraeducators.
- Working with teachers to assign paraeducators to specific services, teachers, classrooms, or teams.
- Working with other administrators to develop appropriate policies for employment, training, and supervision of paraeducators.
- Evaluating paraeducators and their supervising teachers.
- Providing training opportunities for supervising teachers and their paraeducators based on needs.
- Developing job descriptions for paraeducators that: 1) are specific enough to provide necessary guidelines for responsibilities and evaluation of performance, and, 2) allow for adjustments to be made for the varying levels or expertise, individual work styles, and student needs. Utilize “List of Possible Tasks and Duties for Paraeducators” from Appendix F to develop a job description for each paraeducator assignment. Job descriptions should include the following:
  - ✓ Job title
  - ✓ Position setting
  - ✓ Qualifications
  - ✓ Purpose for the position
  - ✓ Duties and responsibilities
  - ✓ Training requirements and opportunities
  - ✓ Needed subject matter expertise
  - ✓ Supervision guidelines
  - ✓ Evaluation guidelines
- Developing a policy manual for school district procedures and policies. Topics for a suggested paraeducator handbook are included in Appendix G.

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- Formulating interview questions for paraeducators that include the following:
  - ✓ Previous work experience with children with and without special needs
  - ✓ Reasons they want to work at the school and with children
  - ✓ Personal strengths, interests, skills they could bring to the students, teachers, and school
  - ✓ Views on diversity and inclusion issues
  - ✓ Their definition and expectations of the term paraeducator
  - ✓ Confidentiality and the school setting
  - ✓ Personal responses for dealing with various student-learning scenarios.
  - ✓ Parent communication
- Developing with a committee a building-based handbook for paraeducators which will be covered at orientation and could include the following:
  - ✓ Map of building, including staff restrooms and work room
  - ✓ Phone numbers of faculty and staff
  - ✓ Emergency procedures (fire, tornado, crisis, reporting suspected child abuse concerns, etc.)
  - ✓ School schedules/calendars/meeting schedules
  - ✓ Student handbooks
  - ✓ Appropriate channels for problem-solving
  - ✓ Discipline procedures/supervision suggestions (playground, bus, cafeteria, etc.)
  - ✓ Person to call if they are ill or absent and procedures for substitutes

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- ✓ Location of stored materials and procedures for obtaining them
- ✓ Other building specific information
- Following the evaluative process for paraeducators and supervisors.
  - ✓ The evaluation process must be clear and workable and should include frequent performance observations; specific competencies and performance standards to help the paraeducator identify and work on specific skills; honest, straightforward, and tactful statements; and consistent evaluation standards for all professional team members.
  - ✓ The evaluative process for the supervision of paraeducators needs to consider the following questions:
    - Are district and building policies that provide guidelines for supervision and evaluation in place (scheduled meeting time, criteria for evaluations, procedures for conducting the evaluations)?
    - Does the supervisor provide necessary supports for the paraeducator? (i.e., regular observations and feedback, lessons plans that list expectations, appropriate job coaching, flexibility and variety in assignments, adequate information about student needs, and respect for the paraeducator.)
    - How does the presence of the paraeducator impact students and other professionals? (Allows teacher more time for consulting with other school/service personnel, assessing and meeting student needs, providing individualized attention.)
- Preparing, with the teacher and paraeducator, a substitute paraeducator folder. Consider including the following:
  - ✓ General information including a map, daily building schedule
  - ✓ Student rules and expectations for lunchroom, recess, hallways, restrooms, library, bus, special occasions, emergencies, other

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- ✓ Building procedures – obtaining and requesting supplies, materials, and equipment; locations of restrooms, staff work room, staff phone, personal storage areas; end of day procedures for sign out and timesheet
- ✓ Individual daily schedule – classroom times and locations, assignments such as bus, recess, and lunch duties; schedule changes, special events, and activities; and lunch and break times.
- ✓ Paraeducator/supervisor working arrangements – specific lesson plans to follow; behavior management strategies; confidentiality; class lists/names
- ✓ Individual student needs including medical, physical, behavioral, academic, and social, as well as procedures to follow for these needs

### ***Roles of Families***

#### ***Teaming: The family's role***

The role of the family is most effective when family members are aware of the school's goals and programs and the methods and personnel used to achieve these goals. With this context, family members can be active and informed partners in considering paraeducator services in the education of their child. Sometimes paraeducators are assigned to assist teachers in classrooms in which more than one adult is needed, such as early childhood settings, early elementary classrooms, or classrooms of students with multiple needs. Other times, paraeducators are assigned to assist specific programs or to assist specific students. In each of these types of assignments, family members interact with teachers and paraeducators as members of the educational community. The term *family* includes the student when appropriate.

#### General Classroom Assignments

In cases in which paraeducators are assigned to assist a teacher in all facets of classroom operation, families are encouraged to seek out information about the distinctive roles and responsibilities of paraeducators versus teachers. Asking teachers the following questions will assist family members in effective teaming and communication:

- What is the difference between what a teacher does with my child and what a paraeducator does with my child in school?

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- With whom should I communicate if I have questions or concerns?
- Has the paraeducator had training or staff development that will assist him or her in the classroom?
- My child doesn't know which of you is the teacher and which is the paraeducator. Is that OK?
- My child is an English language learner. Will the paraeducator be able to understand him if he communicates in his first language?

Recognizing the key, but very different, roles of teachers and paraeducators helps families be informed partners in the education of their child.

### Paraeducator Assignments Identified in the IEP

When paraeducator services are considered as a component of a child's IEP, family members are among the decision-makers on the team. Several factors must be weighed as paraeducator services are considered. The following categories can help family members consider the factors and contribute to the decision-making.

#### *Family role in considering options prior to determining paraeducator services*

As family and other team members plan for meeting the needs of the student and the needs of the classroom program, they should consider options for using all the possible resources available. The use of paraeducator services may or may not be the most appropriate option. Possible alternatives to assigning a paraeducator include:

- Using peer tutoring or cooperative learning practices with structured supports.
- Reassigning existing paraeducators to help the student.
- Increasing training to existing staff in making accommodations.
- Assigning a paraeducator for a brief time for initial transition into a new setting.
- Utilizing volunteers
- Using assistive technology to assist the student.
- Utilizing co-teaching with two licensed teachers.

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*Note: Also see “Alternatives to a one-to-one paraeducator” in the section “Paraeducators (Paraprofessionals) Who Serve Children and Youth with Special Needs in Educational Settings.*

### *Family role in considering the need for paraeducator services*

If the family and other team members determine that the services of a paraeducator are needed to assist with the implementation of the IEP, the next step is to plan for how the services will be delivered. It is not the role of team members to assign an individual person to that role. The responsibility of assigning a specific person as the provider of services to the student typically belongs to the building principal.

### *Family role in determining paraeducator and teacher responsibilities*

As a member of the IEP team, the family assists in developing an IEP that specifically describes the supports and services a child needs to be successful in meeting goals and objectives. Once the IEP is designed, the team makes decisions about who will work with the child to meet the academic and non-academic goals. The teacher is the primary academic instructor who is responsible for designing the activities and instruction so that the child may make progress in meeting IEP goals. The teacher also supervises paraeducators.

Family members can assist with the development of specific IEP tasks that are appropriate for trained and supervised paraeducators by considering some of the following examples of paraeducator duties:

1. Implementing instructional, curricular, and material adaptation plans (e.g., modifying material) according to teacher’s instructions.
2. Assisting teachers in implementing behavior management plans.
3. Providing instructional support, for example, repeating and reinforcing lessons and providing practice in small groups or one-to-one.
4. Under teacher guidance and supervision, take data, keep records, and document student performance.
5. Provide feedback to the teacher regarding student performance.
6. Provide personal care assistance.

### *Family contributions to describing specific services and setting*

Family and other IEP members are responsible for developing an IEP with a specific description of the services the paraeducator will be expected to provide. The IEP should also describe the educational setting in which the student will be working with

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the paraeducator. For example, whether the student will work with the paraeducator in the general education or the special education setting should be discussed and documented, as well as how the paraeducator will assist with IEP objectives.

### *Family contributions to additional IEP considerations*

Additionally, family and other IEP members should specify the following:

- The approximate schedule for when the paraeducator will be assisting the student with IEP objectives.
- When to discontinue paraeducator services. Paraeducator services may be discontinued when the student has accomplished specific skills, when the student achieves a determined level of independence, or when specific conditions identified by the IEP team are met.
- Position of the person responsible for monitoring and following progress on the goal. The name of the paraeducator should never be listed. Questions about substitutes or coverage in the event that the paraeducator is absent may need to be addressed for some students.
- The level of independence or skill acquisition that will indicate the need to revise the level of support and the type of modification and services needed. Discussion at the IEP meeting might address these issues:
  - ✓ The skills that need to be accomplished before the student is able to be successful without the supports of the paraeducator
  - ✓ How the team will know when the student has attained mastery of these skills

In addition to assisting in developing a clear and definitive IEP in regard to paraeducator services, family members should obtain the following information about the paraeducator's role in IEP implementation.

- Who has the responsibility for observing and evaluating whether the paraeducator is working effectively with my child?
- To whom do we take concerns about paraeducator services?
- What skills does the paraeducator need to work effectively with my child on IEP objectives?
- How will the paraeducator be trained prior to starting services?

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- Who is going to train the paraeducator?
- What ongoing staff development will be provided to the paraeducator?
- How can the paraeducator participate in the IEP process with the student?
- Should the paraeducator participate in IEP meetings?

The role of the family also calls for accessing precise information about the day-to-day procedures impacting paraeducator duties. Since many school districts follow varying approaches to the issues, families can partner with teaching staff and administrators in utilizing appropriate procedures. Questions that can guide this teaming process include:

1. Who should I call to discuss routine issues such as day-to-day care of ordinary events that arise?
2. Who should I call about programming issues such as the student's progress, class scheduling, instructional needs or social interaction with peers?
3. How will information the paraeducator has about the student's experiences at school be shared with me?

### *Appropriate expectations*

One component of the family's role in working with paraeducators is to have appropriate expectations that call for the paraeducator to:

- Discuss the student's progress, limitations, and/or educational program only with the supervising teacher (and in some cases the building administrator) in the appropriate setting.
- Discuss school problems and confidential matters only with appropriate personnel and only when the student is not present.
- Refrain from engaging in discriminatory practices based on my child's disability, race, sex, cultural background or religion.
- Respect the dignity, privacy, and individuality of all students, parents, and staff members.
- Present themselves as positive adult role models.



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- Use behavior management strategies that are consistent with standards established by the local school district and classroom teacher.

### *Research evidence regarding paraeducators and family members*

Only a few studies have addressed topics that relate to both paraeducators and parents (e.g., paraeducator communication, paraeducator role in inclusion, paraeducator as bridges between educators, parents, and community). Most of these studies involve parents of students with disabilities and the paraeducators who support them.

Some research focuses on parents from diverse cultures who may share linguistic and cultural similarities with paraeducators more often than with teachers. The research notes that dynamics of these types of relationships can be significant in shaping roles of family members, teachers, and paraeducators.

Additional relevant findings of parent and paraeducator research are summarized below:

- Most parents of students with disabilities regard their child's paraeducator positively and believe that successful inclusion is not possible for their children without paraeducators.
- Parents consider paraeducators as liaisons or connectors between school and themselves, community and their children, and other students.
- Parents want paraeducators to be accepted as part of the school community and to be respected and valued for their contributions to the child's educational team.
- Paraeducators and parents often communicate on a daily basis, sometimes extensively, a practice which many times leads to close relationships. However, close relationships between parents and paraeducators do not necessarily help, and may sometimes negatively affect the education of the child, particularly when the supervising teacher is not in the loop of the parent-paraeducator communication.
- Parents tend to be critical of paraeducators who fail to foster independence, who make their child develop a sense of helplessness and overdependence, and who interfere or create barriers to interactions with others.
- Parents of students with disabilities recommend that paraeducators who support their children be well trained. Parents recommend providing paraeducators with information on the child's disability, techniques for positive behavior intervention, health issues, communication strategies for interacting with the child, and approaches that encourage independence for their child.

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For more information on these research findings or additional research, go to

<http://www.paracenter.org/PARACenter/parents/faqs.aspx>.

See additional information on roles of families and children with disabilities in the section entitled *Paraeducator Services in Special Education* under the subsection of *Family requirements and issues*.

### ***Paraeducator Certification***

Iowa's voluntary certification system for paraeducators is based on competencies that reflect the skills necessary for multiple paraeducator assignments. Although the certificates are not mandatory, the Iowa Department of Education strongly recommends that districts, AEAs, and community colleges provide supports and opportunities to encourage paraeducators to obtain certificates appropriate to their roles. Paraeducators can earn certificates in the following categories:

- Level I Generalist PK-12
- Level II areas of concentration
  - ✓ Early Childhood PK-3
  - ✓ Special Needs PK-12
  - ✓ English as a Second Language PK-12
  - ✓ Career and Transition Programs: Grades 5-12
  - ✓ School Library Media PK-12
- Level II Advanced PK-12

Additionally, paraeducators who work in special education settings and who hold a generalist certificate may complete coursework to serve as an authorized substitute for the teacher in their elementary, middle, junior high or high school special education assignment.

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### ***Resources on where to go and what to do***

Programs for paraeducator certificates are available throughout Iowa at institutions whose programs have been approved by the State Board of Education. A list of the certification institutions can be found in Appendix H or at [www.state.ia.us/boee/para.html#b](http://www.state.ia.us/boee/para.html#b). Forms to apply for a paraeducator certificate or substitute authorization upon completion of the appropriate coursework can be found at [www.state.ia.us/boee](http://www.state.ia.us/boee) under the category of “License Forms.”

The text of the law that guides the certification of paraeducators—Chapter 22 Iowa Administrative Code 282 of the Board of Educational Examiners—can be found in Appendix I.

The requirements for becoming an institution approved for paraeducator certification programs—Chapter 80 of Iowa Administrative Code 281 of the Iowa Department of Education—can be found in Appendix J.

### ***Process and certificates***

In order to receive a paraeducator certificate, an individual must obtain a recommendation from the institution where the approved paraeducator program was completed. The recommendations are signed and forwarded to the State Board of Educational Examiners by the certifying official of the institution once the paraeducator candidate has demonstrated the competencies required for each certificate. Paraeducator certificates must be renewed every five years through completion of additional coursework. Paraeducators are encouraged to contact the Board of Educational Examiners for information on associated costs such as fees for application and background checks.

#### Generalist certificate

To obtain the prekindergarten through grade 12 paraeducator generalist certificate paraeducators must demonstrate that they have met all of the required competencies during their required classes. Applicants must hold a minimum of a high school diploma (or equivalent) and be a minimum age of 18. Applicants must also complete required background checks.

To qualify for the generalist certificate, a paraeducator must complete an approved program that includes at least 90 clock hours of training in the areas of behavior management, exceptional child and at-risk child behavior, collaboration skills, interpersonal relations skills, child and youth development, technology, and ethical responsibilities, and behavior.

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The approved program assures the Board of Educational Examiners that the paraeducator has demonstrated the ability to:

- a. Support a safe, positive teaching and learning environment including the following competencies:
  - (1) Follow prescribed health, safety, and emergency school and classroom policy and procedures.
  - (2) As directed, prepare and organize materials to support teaching and learning.
  - (3) Use strategies and techniques for facilitating the integration of individuals with diverse learning needs in various settings.
  - (4) Assist with special health services.
  - (5) Assist in adapting instructional strategies and materials according to the needs of the learner in content areas including, but not limited to, reading, writing, and mathematics.
  - (6) Assist in gathering and recording data about the performance and behavior of individuals.
  - (7) Assist in maintaining a motivational environment.
  - (8) Assist in various instructional arrangements (e.g., large group, small group, tutoring).
  - (9) Demonstrate knowledge in the content areas of reading, writing, and mathematics.
- b. Assist in the development of physical and intellectual development including the following competencies:
  - (1) Assist with the activities and opportunities that encourage curiosity, exploration, and problem solving that are appropriate to the development levels and needs of all children.
  - (2) Actively communicate with children and provide opportunities and support for children to understand, acquire, and use verbal and nonverbal means of communicating thoughts and feelings.

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- (3) Actively communicate and support high expectations that are shared, clearly defined and appropriate.
  - (4) Make and document observations appropriate to the individual with specific learning needs.
  - (5) Use strategies that promote the learner's independence.
  - (6) Assist in monitoring progress and providing feedback to the appropriate person.
- c. Support social, emotional, and behavioral development including the following competencies:
  - (1) Provide a supportive environment in which all children, including children with disabilities and children at risk of school failure, can begin to learn and practice appropriate and acceptable behaviors as individuals and groups.
  - (2) Assist in developing and teaching specific behaviors and procedures that facilitate safety and learning in each unique school setting.
  - (3) Assist in the implementation of individualized behavior management plans, including behavior intervention plans for students with disabilities.
  - (4) Model and assist in teaching appropriate behaviors as a response to inappropriate behaviors.
  - (5) Use appropriate strategies and techniques in a variety of settings to assist in the development of social skills.
  - (6) Assist in modifying the learning environment to manage behavior.
- d. Establish positive and productive relations including the following competencies:
  - (1) Demonstrate a commitment to a team approach to interventions.
  - (2) Maintain an open, friendly, and cooperative relationship with each child's family, sharing information in a positive and productive manner.

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- (3) Communicate with colleagues, follow instructions, and use problem-solving skills that will facilitate working as an effective member of the school team.
  - (4) Foster respectful and beneficial relationships between families and other school and community personnel.
  - (5) Function in a manner that demonstrates a positive regard for the distinctions among roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, professionals, and other support personnel.
- e. Integrate effectively the technology to support student learning including the following competencies:
  - (1) Establish an environment for the successful use of educational technology.
  - (2) Support and strengthen technology planning and integration.
  - (3) Improve support systems for technical integration.
  - (4) Operate computers and use technology effectively.
- f. Practice ethical and professional standards of conduct on an ongoing basis including the following competencies:
  - (1) Demonstrate a commitment to share information in a confidential manner.
  - (2) Demonstrate a willingness to participate in ongoing staff development and self-evaluation, and apply constructive feedback.
  - (3) Abide by the criteria of professional practice and rules of the board of educational examiners.

### Paraeducator areas of concentration

To add an area of concentration, paraeducators must hold an Iowa paraeducator generalist certificate and, through additional coursework, demonstrate the required competencies. The five areas of concentration and the competencies for each are listed below.

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### *Early childhood—prekindergarten through grade 3.*

- a. Reinforce skills, strategies, and activities involving individuals or small groups.
- b. Participate as a member of the team responsible for developing service plans and educational objectives for parents and their children.
- c. Listen to and communicate with parents in order to gather information for the service delivery team.
- d. Demonstrate knowledge of services provided by health care providers, social services, education agencies, and other support systems available to support parents and provide them with the strategies required to gain access to these services.
- e. Demonstrate effective strategies and techniques to stimulate cognitive, physical, social, and language development in the student.
- f. Gather information as instructed by the classroom teacher about the performance of individual children and their behaviors, including observing, recording, and charting, and share information with professional colleagues.
- g. Communicate and work effectively with parents and other primary caregivers.

### *Special needs—prekindergarten through grade 12*

- a. Understand and implement the goals and objectives in an individualized education plan (IEP).
- b. Demonstrate an understanding of the value of serving children and youth with disabilities and special needs in inclusive settings.
- c. Assist in academic subjects using lesson plans and instructional strategies developed by teachers and other professional support staff.
- d. Gather and maintain data about the performance and behavior of individual students and confer with special and general education practitioners about student schedules, instructional goals, progress, and performance.
- e. Use appropriate instructional procedures and reinforcement techniques.
- f. Operate computers and use assistive technology and adaptive equipment that will enable students with special needs to participate more fully in general education.

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### *English as a second language—prekindergarten through grade 12*

- a.* Operate computers and use technology that will enable students to participate effectively in the classroom.
- b.* Work with the classroom teacher as collaborative partners.
- c.* Demonstrate knowledge of the role and use of primary language of instruction in accessing
- d.* Demonstrate knowledge of instructional methodologies for second language acquisition.
- e.* Communicate and work effectively with parents or guardians of English as a second language students in their primary language.
- f.* Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate translation and interpretation procedures.

### *Career and transitional programs—grades 5 through 12*

- a.* Assist in the implementation of career and transitional programs.
- b.* Assist in the implementation of appropriate behavior management strategies for career and transitional students and those students who may have special needs.
- c.* Assist in the implementation of assigned performance and behavior assessments including observation, recording, and charting for career and transitional students and those students who may have special needs.
- d.* Provide training at job sites using appropriate instructional interventions.
- e.* Participate in pre-employment, employment, or transitional training in classrooms or at off-campus sites.
- f.* Communicate effectively with employers and employees at work sites and with personnel or members of the public in other transitional learning environments.



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### *School library media—prekindergarten through grade 12*

- a.* Be aware of, implement, and support the goals, objectives, and policies of the school library media program.
- b.* Assist the school library supervisor or school librarian in general operations, such as processing materials, circulating materials, performing clerical tasks, assisting students and staff, and working with volunteers and student helpers, and to understand the role of the paraeducator in the library setting in order to provide efficient, equitable, and effective library services.
- c.* Demonstrate knowledge of library technical services including, but not limited to, cataloging, processing, acquisitions, routine library maintenance, automation, and new technologies.
- d.* Be aware of and support the integration of literacy initiatives and content area standards, e.g., visual information and technology in support of the curriculum.
- e.* Be aware of the role school libraries play in improving student achievement, literacy, and lifelong learning.
- f.* Demonstrate an understanding of ethical issues related to school libraries, such as copyright, plagiarism, privacy, diversity, confidentiality, and freedom of speech.
- g.* Assist in the daily operations of the school library program, such as shelving, working with volunteers and student helpers, inventory, and materials repair and maintenance.
- h.* Exhibit welcoming behaviors to all library patrons and visitors to encourage use of the library and its resources.
- i.* Demonstrate knowledge of the school library collection and the availability of other resources that will meet individual student information or research needs.
- k.* Demonstrate a general knowledge of basic technology skills and assist in troubleshooting basic hardware and software problems.

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### *Prekindergarten through grade 12 advanced paraeducator certificate*

- a. Currently hold or have previously held an Iowa paraeducator generalist certificate.
- b. Possess an associate's degree or have earned 62 semester hours of college coursework from a regionally accredited institution of higher education.
- c. Complete a minimum of two semester hours of coursework involving at least 100 clock hours of a supervised practicum with children and youth. These two semester hours of practicum may be part of an associate degree or part of the earned 62 semester hours of college coursework.

### Renewal

Paraeducator certificates can be renewed through completion of coursework totaling three units in any combination listed below. Acceptable coursework used to renew a certificate must be taken during the term of the certificate (after the issue date and before the expiration date). Renewal does not require an added area of concentration; however, adding an area of concentration is one option.

- a. One unit may be earned for each hour of credit that leads to the completion of the requirements for an area of concentration not currently held.
- b. One unit may be earned for each hour of credit that will assist a paraeducator to demonstrate the knowledge of and the ability to assist in reading, writing, or mathematics.
- c. One unit may be earned for each hour of credit completed which supports either the building or district's career development plan.
- d. One unit may be earned for each semester hour of college credit.

Additionally, all applicants renewing a paraeducator certificate must complete an approved child and dependent adult abuse-training course.

### Substitute authorization

A substitute authorization allows individuals to substitute in their elementary, middle, junior high, or high school for no more than five consecutive days in one job assignment. An individual who holds a paraeducator certificate and completes the substitute authorization program is authorized to substitute only in the special education classroom in which the individual paraeducator is employed.

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A substitute authorization may be issued to an individual who is a minimum of 21 years of age, completes required background checks, and meets the following requirements:

- a. Has successfully completed all requirements of the Board of Educational Examiners' approved substitute authorization program consisting of the following components and totaling a minimum of 15 clock hours:
  - (1) Classroom management. This component includes an understanding of individual and group motivation and behavior to create a learning environment that encourages positive social interaction, active engagement in learning, and self-motivation.
  - (2) Strategies for learning. This component includes understanding and using a variety of learning strategies to encourage students' development of critical thinking, problem solving, and performance skills.
  - (3) Diversity. This component includes understanding how students differ in their approaches to learning and creating learning opportunities that are equitable and are adaptable to diverse learners.
  - (4) Ethics. This component includes fostering relationships with parents, school colleagues, and organizations in the larger community to support students' learning and development and to be aware of the board's rules of professional practice and competent performance.
- (or)*
- b. Has achieved at least one of the following:
  - (1) Holds a baccalaureate degree from a regionally accredited institution.
  - (2) Completed an approved paraeducator certification program and holds a paraeducator certificate.
- c. The substitute authorization must be renewed every three years.

### ***Challenging Situations***

When members of a team work as closely as teachers and paraeducators, conflicts are inevitable. Additionally, since teachers and paraeducators serve the community in a public role, they often come under the scrutinizing lens of parents, community members, business officials, and other professionals in the

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community. Addressing such challenging situations as conflict resolution, confidentiality, and representation as a public employee takes time, communication, planning, and above all respect.

Paraeducators are typically hired by a principal, supervised by a teacher, and often trained by a third party which can include a specialist or consultant who is also serving the classroom or the specific student. The complexity makes establishing the appropriate channels for resolving issues difficult. However, when conflict arises, the best approach is to involve as few people as possible.

Paraeducators and teachers can typically resolve their conflicts without involving a third party simply by understanding each other's roles and comfort levels. Paraeducators come from numerous backgrounds and have a wide variety of skill levels. It is essential that the supervising teacher take the time necessary to know paraeducators with whom they work. Knowing the skill and comfort levels of paraeducators allows effective planning and development of a mutually satisfying line of communication.

At the same time, paraeducators need to take the time to understand the role and educational approaches of teachers. Sometimes, it is just a matter of allowing time to see the "fruits of change" brought about by new teachers and new methods. Paraeducators need to pursue continuing education opportunities and be aware of new methods of teaching and learn how they can support that teaching.

In some cases, issues cannot be resolved without bringing in an additional party such as an administrator. Understanding and following appropriate channels of authority and communication can help bring a quick resolution to those kinds of issues.

The situations outlined below can occur in paraeducator and teacher teams, even those that have close and positive working relationships. Teachers and paraeducators are encouraged to discuss these scenarios and jointly consider the following questions and issues.

- 1) What are the issues raised in each scenario?
- 2) What channels would you use to resolve these issues?
- 3) How do you feel about each of these scenarios?
- 4) Discuss each scenario from the perspective of the administrator, teacher, parent, and paraeducator.

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- 5) What are the professional and ethical implications of each scenario?
- 6) Discuss the potential problems that could result from the situation in each scenario.
- 7) If you were the paraeducator in this situation, how would you handle it?
- 8) How could handling this scenario differently have brought about a change of outcomes?

### ***The situation . . .***

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#### ***Mary Knowsthejob***

Mary has been a paraeducator at Great Elementary School for many years. She is competent, professional, dependable, and well liked. Mary knows the children and spends a lot of time and energy doing her job. This year a new teacher, Barry Bestpractice is coming to Great Elementary. This is his first classroom. He is very excited, has lots of new ideas, and is anxious to make his mark.

Mary does not like change, thinks everything is just fine, and is immediately skeptical of her new co-worker. Mary spends a great deal of time sharing her concerns with other paraeducators. Barry senses her displeasure and not knowing what else to do makes no requests of Mary. As a result, Mary decides Barry doesn't think she does a good job.

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#### ***Deanna Detail***

Deanna has worked with Jack for three years. She is determined and able to work as part of a team to help Jack meet goals in his IEP and exceed expectations. Because of Deanna's abilities, the teacher Susie Shareinfo has shared Jack's file with Deanna while preparing for Jack's three-year evaluation.

Friday night at the high school football game, Deanna is overheard discussing Jack's home life with a friend. News gets back to Jack's mom and she wants to know why confidential information concerning her family has been shared with the community. Deanna is defensive because she would never do anything to hurt Jack. Susie is confused having believed that Deanna understood the information was extremely confidential.

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### *Wanda Worried*

Wanda attends the same church as several parents who have children at Typical Middle School. The school has gone through many changes recently and parents are becoming concerned. After services during an informal social time, the subject of school comes up. Everyone is talking about their concerns and Wanda feels comfortable sharing her concerns and opinions, not all of which are positive or supportive.

Monday morning. Darla Doingmybest, the principal at Typical is horrified by the phone calls she is receiving. She has always believed that Wanda liked her job and understood the focus of Typical Middle School. Wanda is embarrassed and believes she should be free to express her opinions.

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### *Velma Velcro*

Velma worked with Nikki for three years at Happy Valley Elementary. When it was time for her to go to middle school, Velma assumed that going with Nikki was best practice. Velma was uncomfortable with the new middle school expectations and did not easily accept the other classroom paraeducators working with Nikki. Nikki sensed the tension and began refusing to be productive with other adults. Velma's defense is that she knows Nikki better than anyone else because she is her one-to-one paraeducator.

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### *Paul Pensive*

Paul has been a paraeducator at Follow the Rules High School for several years. His strength is language arts but he finds himself assisting students with math assignments. Because math is out of his comfort zone, Paul often shortens assignments, allows students to work together, and lets students work on other subjects. Sara Sumtotal, the math teacher, is unsure of how to impose different expectations.

### ***Professional Development for Paraeducators***

Because of their increasingly complex role, paraeducators need professional development in a number of areas and through a number of avenues. Professional development can encompass generalized skills that all paraeducators need but should also address individual skill needs. For example, several of the skills in the generalist paraeducator certificate such as behavior management, support of intellectual growth, and technology integration are professional development areas that benefit all paraeducators. Paraeducators that are assigned to assist students with specific needs—language acquisition, specific disability needs, specific age populations—may need additional professional development to assist teachers who are instructing those students.

The avenues for increasing skills for paraeducators are numerous. Adding an area of concentration such as early childhood or special education to a paraeducator's certificate is one means of increasing skills. Paraeducators should also be given opportunities to participate in school wide workshops on instructional strategies, have access to AEA professional development courses and college classes, and be encouraged to participate in teacher study groups or other professional development opportunities.

Often, administrators play a major role in determining paraeducator professional development needs and opportunities. Administrators can increase the capacity of paraeducators to meet student needs through a variety of professional development opportunities.

- Make district and other opportunities for professional development match the specific job responsibilities, such as training in new curriculum and strategies. Possible topics for paraeducators could include:
  - ✓ Roles and responsibilities of team members
  - ✓ Behavior management
  - ✓ State rules and regulations regarding paraeducators
  - ✓ Ethical and confidentiality issues when working with students
  - ✓ First aid and emergency procedures
  - ✓ Instructional strategies



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- ✓ Communication and teamwork
  - ✓ Technology and computer skills
  - ✓ Diversity issues
  - ✓ Stress management/wellness issues
  - ✓ Specialty care such as lifting and wheelchair safety
  - ✓ Progress monitoring – observation and recording strategies
  - ✓ Special education
  - ✓ Bullying – recognizing and addressing it
- Additional professional development considerations:
    - ✓ Include paraeducator needs and professional development priorities in school wide professional development plans.
    - ✓ Utilize “List of Possible Tasks and Duties for Paraeducators” from Appendix F to assess current skill level and design professional development.
    - ✓ Provide opportunities for paraeducators to attend appropriate professional development sessions with teachers.
    - ✓ Include paraeducators in needs assessment efforts to measure needs and collect data on issues.
    - ✓ Consider incentives for encouraging paraeducators to gain competencies and participate in appropriate school wide professional development programs.
    - ✓ Work with nearby agencies (AEAs, community colleges, and colleges) to provide access to certification opportunities for paraeducators.
    - ✓ Establish linkages among AEAs, LEAs, and colleges to increase preservice and inservice opportunities for paraeducators and those who supervise and direct paraeducators.

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- ✓ Consider recruitment and retention strategies to attract and retain competent paraeducators.
- ✓ Provide paraeducator training materials in AEA media collections.
- ✓ Provide training to administrators, teachers, and other licensed personnel in how to support and supervise paraeducators.
- ✓ Provide professional development opportunities for paraeducators who substitute for other paraeducators.

### ***Iowa professional development model and paraeducators***

To ensure that paraeducators have skills that are aligned with the district's teaching practices, their needs should be considered within the context of the Iowa Professional Development Model (IPDM). The IPDM was developed to meet the requirements of the Teacher Quality Act and is intended to provide training and learning opportunities for the purpose of increasing student achievement. The model describes how to engage teachers and administrators in learning new teaching practices. The teaching practices are deliberately selected to meet the needs of students based on district and building data and learning goals. The District Career Development Plan identifies the practices to be learned and delivered in the classroom and spells out how teachers are to participate in professional development.

Although the IPDM does not specifically address how to include paraeducators, it is appropriate to consider ways to engage paraeducators in learning the skills and strategies being studied as part of the district career development plan. Paraeducators who are responsible for assisting with instruction play an essential role in supporting student learning. These paraeducators can be of greater help to the teachers they work with and provide more effective support to students, if they are skillful in the strategies being emphasized as part of the district/building career development plan.

Roles a paraeducator may play vary depending on the context in the building, the paraeducator's assignment, needs of students, etc. If a paraeducator helps the teacher with the functions listed below, participation in the professional development described in the district or building plan would be beneficial.

- Assisting the teacher by helping small groups of students with lessons or activities

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- Tutoring individual students
- Helping individual students with assignments
- Collecting data
- Preparing instructional materials under the direction of the teacher

How to involve paraeducators in learning and using the practices being studied depends on several factors including:

- The content being studied
- The role of the paraeducator in the classroom
- How the teacher and paraeducator work together in the classroom to help students learn

The paraeducator who is expected to apply the skills and strategies that are part of the professional development initiative should be included in the training and learning opportunities to the extent needed to be effective in his or her role. Paraeducators may be included in workshops and other training events and collaborative team meetings. While it is important for the paraeducator to understand how the strategy helps students, know what it looks like, and have a chance to try it out, the paraeducator may not need to spend as much time as the teacher in learning theory, seeing demonstrations, and practicing newly learned skills. How to include the paraeducator in training opportunities and collaborative activities is a local district and building-level decision.

The IPDM recommends that a Professional Development Leadership Team be formed to help design and support the implementation of professional development. Depending on the size of the district, teams may be formed at the district and building level or both. The PD Leadership Team may be helpful in planning ways to include paraeducators and in helping to support their learning. A local district/building may decide to include a paraeducator on the leadership team to represent the paraeducators, to increase communication, and to help plan meaningful training for their peers.

The leadership team should examine what the teachers are being asked to learn and apply and determine whether the paraeducators need to learn the full model or all aspects of the strategies. There are likely to be some skills that are readily applied by the paraeducator and others that should be delivered by the teacher.

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Options for engaging the paraeducator:

- Involve the paraeducator along with the teachers in the workshops and training events.
- Provide an overview and follow-up sessions specifically designed for the paraeducator with a focus on aspects of the new strategy that paraeducators will use.
- The teacher provides one-to-one coaching to the paraeducator to present the new content.
- Provide demonstrations by encouraging the paraeducator to observe lessons or watch videotapes.
- Review existing initiatives underway to determine if paraeducator roles are being addressed in the planning and implementation.
- Include paraeducator roles, skills, and needs in reports to school boards.

As in any situation where paraeducators are assigned to support instruction, the teacher is responsible for delivering instruction and assessing results. This necessitates close supervision by the teacher and frequent communication with the paraeducator.

### ***Implementing Effective Practices for Special Populations***

#### ***Paraeducators in early care and education settings***

Paraeducators play a special role in supporting the learning, health, and physical care of Iowa's youngest children and their families. They not only contribute to the development of young children, they also serve as an important link to the local community and to the resources available at numerous neighborhood settings because they are frequently integral members of the community.

Paraeducators meet the needs of young children in public and private settings including child care settings, preschools in public schools, and private preschools. They partner with licensed staff in a variety of settings including community based early childhood programs, Head Start Programs, and Early Childhood Special Education settings.

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Paraeducators in early care and education settings meet a variety of needs including:

- Health
- Physical development
- Safety
- Language development
- Physical care
- Self help skills
- Social skills
- School readiness skills
- Ongoing assessment

In early care and education settings, opportunities for informal and formal communication with family members are frequent. Family members routinely interact with staff members when they arrive or depart with their child and often spend time volunteering in early childhood classrooms. Because the communication is frequent and informal, paraeducators in these settings need to be especially vigilant regarding ethics, confidentiality, and sensitivity to diversity and other differences. As is the case with paraeducators in all roles, they need to be aware of agency policies regarding communication practices and refer concerns to their supervising teacher.

Some young children in these settings have medical needs such as feeding tubes. Paraeducators need training in the specific medical needs of each child and in how to recognize early onset of allergies and sensitivity to medications. They should employ only those techniques and interventions for which they have specific training, practice, and authorization.

In some cases paraeducators may be called upon to provide input to the individualized family service plan (IFSP) team regarding developmental planning and progress for children age birth to age three. The IFSP is the document used to record the evaluation, assessment, planning, implementation and review information related to the development of infants and toddlers birth to age three, who have special needs.

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Additionally, paraeducators play a critical role in helping young children progress toward autonomy. They work with the teacher to implement strategies toward helping each child move from dependence to independence. As the children mature in these developmental settings, and develop life-long traits and characteristics, paraeducators serve as role models.

As young children develop autonomy and independence, they move through a variety of transitions. A key role of paraeducators in early care and education settings is to support positive transitions from infancy to toddler-hood to preschool. Those supports include social skill training, rewarding positive behavior and helping the children use problem solving techniques.

### ***Paraeducators who serve ELL students***

Iowa's growing population of students who are English Language Learners (ELL) has created a growing need for system supports and personnel. Among those needs are the services of paraeducators.

Three principles that guide ELL student success and are widely published in the literature can also provide general guidelines for paraeducators who serve the ELL population:

1. Increased comprehensibility — Paraeducators can assist in producing materials, visuals, adapting reading materials, etc. to provide increased ELL student access to the academic content.
2. Increased interaction — Paraeducators can assist in ELL student interaction with materials, teachers, peers, and provide additional time for ELL students to practice the target language in a variety of instructional settings through increased interaction. The point in this work is more student talk, less teacher talk.
3. Increased thinking skills — Paraeducators can assist the classroom teacher in providing accommodations to ELL students that do not lower academic content exposure or lessen expectations for grade level appropriate higher order thinking questions and skills.

The services of paraeducators who assist ELL students can be understood in two dimensions: those who provide traditional supportive services to ELL students and those who are bilingual and provide translation as well as supportive services. The

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importance of the role of paraeducators in Iowa's multi-lingual classrooms is recognized through Iowa's ELL paraeducator certificate. The competencies that guide the certificate include among other skills the ability to:

- Demonstrate knowledge of the role and use of primary language of instruction in accessing English for academic purposes.
- Demonstrate knowledge of instructional methodologies for second language acquisition.
- Communicate and work effectively with parents or guardians of English as a second language students in their primary language.
- Demonstrate knowledge of appropriate translation and interpretation procedures.

Bilingual paraeducators fill an important role in the schools. Sometimes they are the student's only support in his or her first language and culture. A valuable link is also provided to language minority family members and communities.

It is important to recognize that translation is a skill that needs to be "directly instructed." It should not be assumed that because a paraeducator has oral proficiency in a native language that the individual paraeducator can translate formal documents or translate academic content areas. Many paraeducators report they don't have the content vocabulary in their native language to be able to translate for ELL students. Assessment of paraeducator skill sets is needed prior to translation assignments.

Once the appropriate assessments of bilingual paraeducators' knowledge and competencies are completed, job responsibilities can include:

- Assisting ELL students to learn academic content and language and to adjust to U.S. schools under the guidance of a licensed teacher.
- Helping provide ELL students instruction for English language development, starting with basic survival skills.
- Working with ELL students individually, in small groups, and during whole class instruction under the guidance of a licensed teacher.

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- Preparing ELL students to understand and participate in the teacher's instruction by identifying ELL students' prior knowledge and language and by previewing lessons in the students' native language or modified English.
- Supporting ELL students' literacy development by using reading and writing strategies appropriate to each student's level of proficiency under the guidance of a licensed teacher.
- Assisting ELL students to prepare for assessments by reinforcing thinking and study skills and reviewing material learned.
- Facilitating cooperative work and cross-cultural understanding between ELL students and native English speakers in the classroom.
- Providing feedback to the teacher regarding ELL students' progress and challenges in learning academic content and language and in adjusting to U.S. schools.

Both traditional and bilingual paraeducators need professional development activities to continuously improve their understanding of diverse cultures and their ability to work with multiple student needs.

### ***Paraeducators who serve students with 504 plans***

Section 504 is federal civil rights legislation ensuring equal access for individuals with disabilities that substantially limit a major life activity. In educational circumstances that fall under Section 504, students are provided with accommodations and services to ensure equal access to education. The Section 504 services are identified in an evaluation process and outlined in a plan.

Depending on unique needs identified in a student's 504 plan and on the settings in which the student receives services, paraeducators can assist with needed supports under the direction of a teacher or, in some cases, teachers and school nurses can delegate certain procedures to the paraeducators. Some possible services that can be provided by a paraeducator include:

- Deliver homebound services for academic tasks
- Help implement adapted physical education program
- Take notes in classes



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- Provide supervision during transitions, disruptions, field trips
- Place assignments, directions on tape for auditory learner
- Assist with mobility for a student with serious difficulties with fine and gross motor skills
- Monitor behavior management plans
- Assist with make-up academic work
- Assist with curriculum modification
- Provide special health care procedures after training and with supervision of a health care provider

### ***Paraeducators (Paraprofessionals\*\*) Who Serve Children and Youth with Special Needs in Educational Settings***

Paraeducators work with children with special needs ranging from birth to age 21. Iowa's certification system for paraeducators addresses the special education needs of these age ranges through two certifications that overlap but also call for distinct skills: Special Needs PK-12 and Career and Transition Programs: Grades 5-12. Because so many paraeducators work with children and youth with special needs in educational settings, and because the laws and best practices guiding those services are so explicit, a detailed explanation of the roles of paraeducators in the provision of special education and IEP services is provided.

#### Special Needs PK-12

Among the competencies called for in Iowa's special education paraeducator certificate are the abilities to work in inclusive settings and to understand IEPs and specialized instructional strategies.

The practice of assigning paraeducators to work in the general education classroom to assist children and youth who receive all or part of their special education in the

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*\*\* The term paraprofessional is used periodically in this guide to reflect the language in the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education*

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.general education classroom is increasing. However, the assignment of a paraeducators is not the only option that should be considered in planning how to provide for the needs of children and youth. Existing personnel and other resources can be utilized in a variety of ways to deliver accommodations and fulfill various roles in diverse educational settings.

### *Determining the need paraeducator services*

The decision about whether to utilize paraeducator services to assist in the implementation of IEPs is based on a variety of factors. The IEP team must identify the student's present levels of academic achievement and functional performance, describe the needs of the student, and then plan how to meet these needs by designing goals. Once the needs and goals have been established, the IEP team determines the extent of the student's participation in general and special education. Decisions are then made about where services will be provided and how much time the student will spend in general education settings or in special education settings or in a combination of settings. Once these variables have been discussed, the team determines what services will be provided. It is at this point that the need for paraeducator services may be explored. The actual determination of who will provide the paraeducator service is an administrative decision. A checklist that can be used as a resource for assessing whether a paraeducator is needed for special education services can be found in Appendix K.

### *Services that do not need to be included on the IEP*

It is standard practice for paraeducators to support children and youth and assist teachers in implementing educational programs. The Iowa rules of special education authorize paraeducators to serve in this capacity. (See 281—41.403(1) in Appendix L.)

In many situations paraeducators are assigned to a special education program or classroom. The paraeducator works in the classroom and in other parts of the building supporting children and youth in special and general education environments. The children and youth benefit from the assistance and support of a paraeducator as a component of that program model. When tasks and activities performed by paraeducators are routine aspects of the child's program and are typically implemented by the paraeducator as a member of the educational team, those services do not need to be included on the IEP. There is no need to specifically justify the need for paraeducator service or to define the role and function of the paraeducator in delivering those services on the IEP. The IEPs for children and youth in these programs do not need to list the paraeducator as part of the child's program unless there are specific circumstances that require the assignment of a paraeducator to meet the student's IEP goals and objectives.

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### *Services that must be documented on the IEP*

The assignment of the paraeducator to perform services and tasks needs to be discussed, planned, and documented as part of the IEP and individualized family service plan (IFSP) process when:

- The student requires the support of a paraeducator to implement a health plan under the supervision of a professional. When the performance of health-related tasks is essential to health and safety of the student, the individual health care plan and the IEP must describe the duties to be performed by the paraeducator.
- The student is unable to access appropriate educational services without a paraeducator to assist with specific IEP objectives.
- The services of a paraeducator are essential to implement the support and modifications needed to achieve IEP objectives and enable the student(s) to acquire a free appropriate public education.

### *Requirements for documenting services*

The IEP document should describe goals and objectives to meet the needs identified in the present level of academic achievement and functional performance (PLAAFP) and the appropriate person or persons to be responsible for implementing these goals and objectives. If a paraeducator will be assigned to implement objectives, both the paraeducator and the teacher or other licensed professional should be listed by position on the IEP form. Rules require that the paraeducator be under the supervision of the licensed professional, who is appropriately authorized to provide direct services in the same area where the paraeducator provides assistive services. (See 281-41.403(1) in Appendix L.)

If the IEP team determines that the student requires the assistance of additional personnel to deliver the services required to address the goals and objectives in the educational setting, the information is recorded on the Special Education Services section (Page F) of the IEP. If a student is unable to access or receive educational benefit without the support of a paraeducator and the assignment of a paraeducator to the student's classroom/program is essential for implementing the IEP objectives, the IEP team must describe the service the paraeducator will perform in the Special Education Services Section of the IEP (Page F). IEP teams should discuss strategies for increasing independence and decreasing need for individualized assistance from a paraeducator.

*Examples of modifications:* 1) The IEP team determines some special education services need to be provided in a segregated setting. The team also determines that the student requires the services of a paraeducator to provide intensive assistance

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with one of his or her goals for part of the day. 2) The IEP team determines that the student will receive all of his special education services in the general education classroom and that a paraeducator is needed to implement specific instructional IEP goals and objectives.

A paraeducator may also assist with extracurricular or nonacademic activities. The Administrative Rule of Special Education 281—41.117 states:

In providing or arranging for the provision of nonacademic and extracurricular services and activities, including meals, recess periods, and the services and activities, each agency shall ensure that each eligible individual participates with nondisabled individuals in those services and activities to the maximum extent appropriate to the needs of that individual. Those services and activities may include counseling services, athletics, transportation, health services, recreational activities, special interest groups or clubs sponsored by the agency, referrals to agencies which provide assistance to persons with disabilities, and employment of students, including both employment by the agency and assistance in making outside employment available.

A paraeducator may be assigned to enable a student to participate in nonacademic activities if the IEP team determines that 1) the student wants to participate in the nonacademic or extracurricular activity, 2) the student could not participate without the modifications, and 3) the services of the paraeducator are required to deliver modifications.

For the student who requires a paraeducator to assist with or supplement the implementation of a related service, the IEP should describe the services of the paraeducator as a related service. Examples of paraeducator services that may be a related service include: speech-language associates implementing specific communication goals under the supervision of a speech-language pathologist, a certified occupational therapy assistant (COTA) implementing specific objectives under the supervision of a licensed occupational therapist, or a physical therapist assistant (PTA) implementing specific objectives under the supervision of a licensed physical therapist. Only PTAs and COTAs who carry out therapy under the supervision and direction of a physical therapist or occupational therapist respectively should be listed on the IEP as a provider of a related service. Paraeducators serving in classrooms to provide assistance with therapy-related activities should not be listed as a related service but may be listed as one of the persons responsible for implementing a specific IEP objective.

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### *Documenting paraeducator services on the IEP*

A paraeducator's services are documented on the IEP in the Special Education Services section (Page F). The section should include:

- 1) A circled "Y" on Supplementary Aids and Services
- 2) A specific description of the service to be provided. The roles and functions to be performed by the paraeducator pertaining to the goals and objectives should be listed.
- 3) Beginning date of service
- 4) Who will provide the service. The IEP should list the position of the person responsible. The name of the paraeducator should not be listed.
- 5) The amount of time and frequency or when the service will be provided. The IEP should specify an approximate schedule for when the paraeducator will be assisting with IEP objectives.
- 6) The number of minutes per day, week, or month and the location or setting in which the services of the paraeducator are to be delivered.

If the student's needs dictate that the presence of the paraeducator is essential for the health, safety or the provision of a free appropriate public education, the IEP should specify that the student shall not participate without the presence of the paraeducator to perform the service listed on the IEP. If the paraeducator is not available, a trained substitute must be provided. Having the student stay home when the paraeducator is absent is not an option.

### *Individual health plan*

Children and youth requiring special health services provided by a paraeducator have an individual written health plan. The plan, developed by licensed health personnel with the IEP team, describes the services to be provided by the paraeducator and how the paraeducator will be trained and supervised. A written emergency plan describing the procedures to be implemented by the paraeducator may also be warranted.

### *Family requirements and issues*

Federal and state rules and regulations require that parents and, if appropriate, the student, be involved in the IEP meeting to determine the services to be provided and to discuss how the IEP objectives will be implemented. Parents, and other family members when appropriate, should be actively involved in decision-making about:

- What services are to be provided

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- Determination of the appropriate least restrictive environment

Parents may expect assurances from the local district administrator that the individual person assigned to implement paraeducator services has been selected using local district standards of effective practices and that the paraeducator has received appropriate training to perform his or her assignment.

Family members are not expected to be involved in the recruiting, hiring, or assignment of paraeducators. Local district or AEA administrators (depending on the service) are responsible for providing qualified personnel. Family members' input about the competencies they feel a paraeducator should have to implement their child's IEP may be considered by the administrator in the process of hiring or making assignments. The establishment of the job description and position requirements are the responsibility of the administrator.

If family members disagree with the IEP recommendations concerning paraeducator service or have concerns on any other aspect of the IEP process, they have specific due process procedures available to protect their rights. Each AEA distributes parental rights information to family members or other individuals who request information regarding the due process requirements of the IEP process.

### *Funding considerations*

It is not the role of the IEP team to determine the funding necessary to support the paraeducator, to determine levels of weighting, nor to assign an individual to provide the services described in the IEP. The student is entitled to an appropriate special education program regardless of the funding mechanism. The design of the appropriate program is based on discussion of the student's needs rather than funding available. The administrator who is responsible for allocating resources, typically the building principal, determines who will provide the service, makes assignments, and acquires the fiscal resources to support the program. The extent of the individual student's program needs is reviewed by the AEA director of special education or his or her designee to assign a weighted index for the generation of program funds to support special education in the local education agency.

The assignment of human resources should emphasize program needs as well as the needs of individual children and youth. Therefore, paraeducators should typically be assigned to serve the program rather than be assigned exclusively to an individual student. An individual student's IEP may require that a paraeducator perform specific functions to provide needed supports and accommodations. A paraeducator may be assigned to perform those functions and to perform additional duties to support the overall program or other children and youth requiring the support of a paraeducator.

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Paraeducator services may be supported by more than one source of funding. For example, an individual may be supported by Title I and special education, enabling the paraeducator to spend part of his or her work week serving children and youth and programs funded by Title I and special education resources.

### *Alternatives to a one-to-one paraeducator*

The practice of assigning one paraeducator to work exclusively with one student may result in negative outcomes such as increasing dependence of the student on the paraeducator; creating an unwanted stigma or negative attitude of peers toward a student who has an adult in constant proximity; limiting opportunities for social interaction; and inefficient use of the paraeducator and district resources.

It may be appropriate to assign paraeducators to the classroom or building rather than directly to the student. Unless the IEP stipulates that the student requires intensive services of significant duration, paraeducators may be assigned to work with other children and youth in the classrooms and perform other duties in close proximity to the student. The paraeducators can provide an important service to the overall program serving general education and special education children and youth.

As teachers and administrators plan for meeting the needs of individual children and youth and the overall needs of the classroom program, they should consider all possible options for using available resources. Paraeducators can play a critical role in the successful delivery of services to individual children and youth and in the implementation of effective classroom programs if their services are used appropriately.

Possible alternatives to providing a one-to-one paraeducator include:

- Peer tutoring and cooperative learning practices.
- Reassigning existing paraeducators to help the student.
- Using special education resources to increase the hours of general education paraeducators (such as Title I assistants) to address the needs of students with disabilities in the general education setting.
- Increasing training to existing staff in making accommodations.
- Assigning a paraeducator for a brief time to a student going through initial transition into a new setting.
- Utilizing volunteers.
- Using assistive technology to assist students with taking notes.

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- Team teaching among licensed teachers, with the paraeducator alternating between two teachers and classrooms.

### Career and Transition Programs: Grades 5-12

Although Iowa's career and transition certification for paraeducators recognizes skills for paraeducators who support students with and without IEPs, paraeducators are most frequently called upon to meet the specialized transition needs of students with IEPs. Paraeducators in these assignments often interact with employers and other community members as students gain skills towards adult independence. Paraeducators who work in transition programs need specific training and supports to effectively:

- Assist in the implementation of assigned performance and behavior assessments including observation, recording, and charting.
- Provide training at job sites using appropriate instructional interventions.
- Participate in pre-employment, employment, or transitional training in classrooms or at off-campus sites.
- Communicate with employers and employees at work sites and with personnel or members of the public in other transitional learning environments.

Paraeducator supports and services provide multiple opportunities for students to practice socialization, problem solving, and communication skills in community environments. Paraeducators support youth with disabilities at work sites and help them learn skills to be effective workers. Additionally, they gather and maintain data, implement behavior management programs, and use instructional techniques developed by supervising teachers.

Because much of their time is spent away from the school setting, paraeducators in transition and work-study assignments have more autonomy than their counterparts in traditional settings. They are often called upon to adapt instructional strategies, problem solve work setting challenges, and serve as a communication link between teachers and job-site supervisors.

Paraeducators in transition settings need continuous support and professional development opportunities in order to facilitate the transition of students from school to post-school opportunities.



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### **Legislation**

Several federal and state legislative requirements guide the work, roles, competencies, and assignments of paraeducators. Many of the requirements under the Iowa Administrative Rules of Special Education are outlined in the section entitled “Paraeducators (Paraprofessionals) who Serve Children and Youth with Special Needs in Educational Settings.” The following additional federal and state requirements provide policy guidance for implementing Iowa’s system of paraeducator services.

### ***NCLB Paraprofessional\*\*\* requirements for Iowa schools***

The 2001 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) calls for paraeducator (paraprofessional) competencies for paraeducators whose work is supported by Title I funds. Title I funded paraeducators include those who work in “targeted” assistance programs or any instructional paraeducator who works in a school building that has a school wide Title I program. (See Appendix M for information on targeted and school wide programs.)

The following guidance on meeting NCLB paraeducator standards was developed by the Iowa Department of Education for Iowa schools and area education agencies.

#### Definition of paraprofessional

For the purposes of Title I, Part A, a paraprofessional is an employee who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds.

This includes paraprofessionals who (1) provide one-to-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher, (2) assist with classroom management, such as organizing instructional and other materials, (3) provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory, (4) conduct parental involvement activities, (5) provide support in a library or media center, (6) act as a translator, or (7) provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a teacher [Title I, section 1119(g)(2)].

Individuals who work in food services, cafeteria or playground supervision, personal care services, non-instructional computer assistance, and similar positions are not considered paraprofessionals under Title I.

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\*\*\* The term paraprofessional is used periodically in this guide to reflect the language in NCLB.

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### *Requirements*

Title I paraprofessionals whose duties include instructional support and who were hired after January 8, 2002, must have (1) completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; or (2) obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or (3) met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to 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, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness); or (4) obtain voluntary certification through the Board of Educational Examiners.

All Title I paraprofessionals must have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent. This includes paraprofessionals who serve as translators or who conduct parental involvement activities.

### *Paraprofessional Assessment*

LEAs should carefully choose an assessment that will measure the knowledge of and ability to assist in instructing reading, writing, and mathematics (or as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness). The criterion established for approval as a paraprofessional under No Child Left Behind Act must be rigorous and defensible. Examples of measures available to LEAs include Work Keys (which has been normed for paraprofessionals), Parapro Assessment from ETS, and COMPASS from ACT. The assessment chosen must ensure that more than just basic skills are being assessed.

### *Recommendation*

All LEAs should encourage their paraeducators to acquire Iowa's voluntary paraeducator certification offered through the Board of Educational Examiners, even those who have already been approved using an assessment. Federal funds, including Title I funds, can be used to assist paraeducators to complete this coursework.

## **Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973**

Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 is a civil rights law that prohibits schools from discriminating against students on the basis of disability. Under Section 504, students are considered disabled if one of the following conditions applies

1. Presence of a mental or physical impairment which substantially limits one or more major life activities;
2. There is a record of such impairments; or,

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3. A student is regarded as having such an impairment.

All special education students are automatically covered under Section 504. However, there are some students who have conditions or disabilities that require reasonable accommodations to the educational program in the form of a 504 plan but who do not require special education services. Examples would be a student with asthma or diabetes, if that condition results in a substantial barrier to a major life activity, such as walking, breathing, or learning. Services provided under 504 are typically accommodations made within the school setting. Section 504 services are not supported through federal or state funds.

Paraeducators could be involved with students receiving Section 504 services as part of their regular duties if assigned by their supervisor. If this is the case, the paraeducator should be fully informed of the student's particular needs and how they are to be accommodated.

### ***Special education – state and federal requirements***

#### ***IDEA 2004***

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA 2004) requires paraeducator qualifications to be “consistent with any state-approved or state-recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the professional discipline in which those personnel are providing special education or related services.” Under IDEA 2004, Iowa paraeducators who provide services to students with disabilities do not have any certification requirements because Iowa's state-approved system for paraeducators certification is voluntary.

IDEA 2004 also requires assistants and paraprofessionals who assist service providers of infants and toddlers to be appropriately trained and supervised in accordance with Iowa laws. Paraprofessionals and assistants who work for the Department of Education, Public Health, Human Services, and Child Health Specialty Clinics (agencies who partner to provide infant and toddler service) must meet their own agency's personnel requirements. Additionally, all agencies that provide regional services for infants and toddlers must maintain policies and procedures regarding training and supervision of paraprofessionals and assistants.

The highly qualified teacher component of IDEA 2004 (based on and regulated by NCLB) has some implications for paraeducators. That component calls for teachers of core content subjects to have endorsements or subject mastery of content areas such as reading, math, science, and other academic subjects. Iowa secondary

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(middle and high school) special education teachers are encouraged by the Iowa Department of Education to meet this mandate through collaborative teaching with content-endorsed teachers.

Paraeducators at the secondary setting who work with special education teachers will, in some cases, see a new service delivery model for special education services. The collaborative model can take two forms: 1) co-teaching in which two teachers jointly plan, instruct, and assess students in the same classroom, or 2) consultation in which the special education teacher provides skill instruction to students with IEPs who then apply the skills in the general education classroom. In this second approach, the special education teacher also regularly consults with the general education teacher about IEP goals, accommodations and/or modifications, progress in the general education curriculum, and other related issues.

In both the co-teaching and the consultative approach, the paraeducator can play a key role with appropriate supports and training. For example, in the co-teaching approach, special education teachers cannot always be present in each classroom that includes students with IEPs. In such situations, although paraeducators cannot “co-teach,” they can assist the general education teacher and multiple students in a variety of ways when the special education teacher is not available to co-teach. In the consultative approach, paraeducators can assist the special education teacher in instruction of the learning strategies, and also assist the students in applying the strategies in the general education setting.

Iowa Rules of Special Education (*The Iowa Rules of Special Education cited in this document reflect the new numbering system that was in the final stages of adoption at the time of this printing.*)

Iowa rules of special education make a distinction between “paraprofessionals” and “para-educators.” Paraprofessionals are assistants to licensed staff. Para-educators are those paraprofessionals who are certified through Iowa’s certification system. The following Iowa special education rules guide the work and assignments of paraprofessionals and para-educators.

### *281—41.403 Paraprofessionals*

**41.403(1) Responsibilities.** Special education personnel may be employed to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities and shall:

- a.* Complete appropriate preservice and ongoing staff development specific to the functions to be performed. The agency shall make provisions for or

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require such completion prior to the beginning of service wherever practicable and within a reasonable time of the beginning of service where the preentry completion is not practicable.

- b. Work under the supervision of professional personnel who are appropriately authorized to provide direct services in the same area where the paraprofessional provides assistive services.
- c. Not serve as a substitute for appropriately authorized professional personnel.

41.403(2) *Authorized special education paraprofessionals.*

Authorized special education paraprofessional roles include:

“*Audiometrist*” provides hearing screening and other specific hearing-related activities as assigned by the audiologist.

“*Licensed practical nurse*” shall be permitted to provide supportive and restorative care to an eligible individual in the school setting in accordance with the student’s health plan when under the supervision of and as delegated by the registered nurse employed by the school district.

“*Occupational therapy assistant*” is licensed to perform occupational therapy procedures and related tasks that have been selected and delegated by the supervising occupational therapist.

“*Para-educator*” is a licensed educational assistant as defined in Iowa Code section 272.12.

### Health services and medication administration

Paraeducator services may include assisting with related health services and school nurse services. The health services are overseen, planned and carried out by the licensed registered school nurse. The nurse determines the service(s) the paraeducator may provide and educates the paraeducator to perform the service(s). A paraeducator may administer medication after successfully completing the online Iowa medication administration course and skills demonstration to the school nurse as described in Iowa Rules of Special Education 281—41.404(3).

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### 272.12 Para-educator certificates

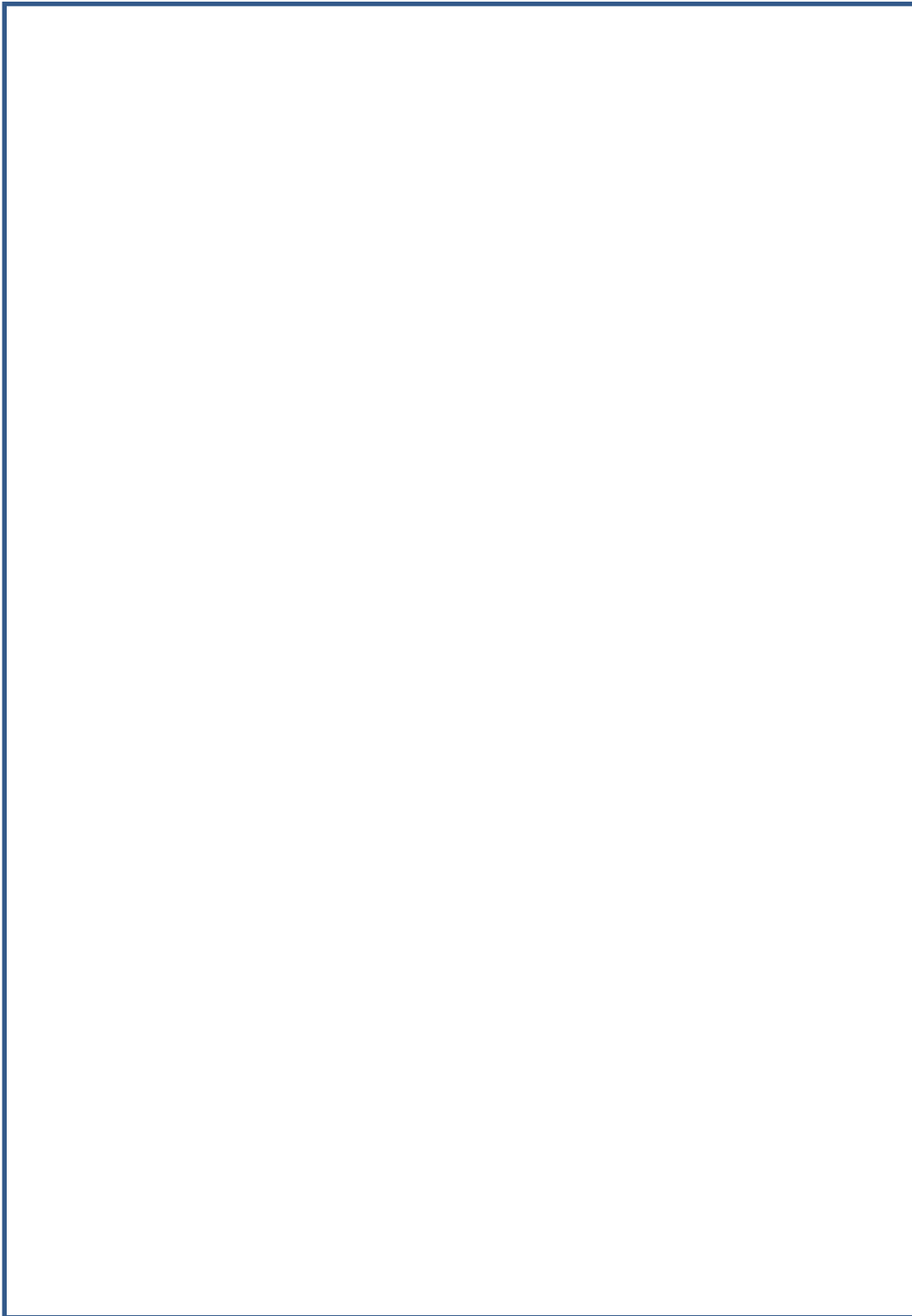
As required by Iowa Code section 272.12, the board of educational examiners adopted rules governing the certification of paraeducators. Code 272.12 specifically prohibits a certified paraeducator from performing the duties of a teacher through the following language: “A person holding a para-educator certificate shall not perform the duties of a licensed practitioner. A certificate issued pursuant to this chapter shall not be considered a teacher or administrator license for any purpose specified by law.” (See section on Paraeducator Certification.)

### ***Other Iowa Laws***

#### Mandatory Child Abuse Reporting

Iowa legislation (Iowa Code section 232.69. Mandatory and permissive reporters) identifies certified paraeducators as mandatory child abuse reporters. Those without certification are termed “permissive” reporters, which means they can (and should) report suspected cases of child abuse, but are currently not mandated to do so under Iowa law. The law requires mandatory reporters to “make a report within 24 hours” of suspected child abuse. Each local school district and area education agency has procedures in place for child abuse reporting. Mandatory reporters must obtain a copy of the reporting requirements within one month of employment and must complete two hours of training within six months of employment and an additional two hours of training every five years.

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### Summary

The following charts are provided as a summary of many of the concepts presented throughout this guide. They are intended as an easily accessible reference.

<b><i>Paraeducators Do's and Dont's</i></b>	
<b>Paraeducators May</b>	<b>Paraeducators May Not</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be left alone in the classroom, in a planned way when the supervising teacher is called away.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be used as a substitute for certified teachers unless the paraeducator is specifically certified.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Work without direct supervision with individuals or groups of students on concepts introduced by the supervising teacher or other teachers.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Teach completely new concepts and skills.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Have specific instructional and management responsibility for an individual student or groups of students.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be given the primary responsibility for the education of an individual student.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be involved in student staffings and meetings, as approved by licensed staff and family members.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Be assigned to attend student staffings and meetings in lieu of the supervising teacher.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Support the inclusion of children with disabilities into general education by activities such as taking notes, tutoring, giving tests orally, or supporting behavioral interventions.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Make accommodation decisions outside of a student's IEP.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Maintain records relevant to classroom assignments.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Carry out clerical responsibilities that are assigned to other staff members.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aid the teacher in supervising assemblies.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take full responsibility for supervising assemblies.</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accompany students on outings to the community, recreation sites, and school related trips or errands.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Take full responsibility for supervising students on outings to the community, recreation sites, and school related trips or errands.</li></ul>



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<b>Comparison of supervising teacher and paraeducator duties</b>	
<b>Supervising teacher</b>	<b>Paraeducator</b>
<u><i>Classroom organization</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans weekly schedule</li> <li>Plans instructional program: goals, lessons, activities for entire class and individual students.</li> </ul>	<u><i>Classroom organization</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assists with the planning process; copies, transcribes, types, files, etc.</li> <li>Implements plan as specified by the teacher.</li> <li>Plans review activities</li> <li>Maintains records</li> </ul>
<u><i>Assessment</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Administers tests to entire class.</li> <li>Evaluates and grades student performance.</li> </ul>	<u><i>Assessment</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Checks and scores student work.</li> <li>Monitors student progress and relates findings to teacher</li> </ul>
<u><i>Sets objectives</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determines appropriate objectives for class and individual students</li> </ul>	<u><i>Sets objectives</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implements lessons to meet student objectives</li> </ul>
<u><i>Instruction</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designs and selects instructional materials.</li> <li>Teaches lessons for the entire class, small groups and individual students.</li> </ul>	<u><i>Instruction</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assembles instructional materials suggested by the teacher.</li> <li>Leads small group lessons and individual lessons.</li> </ul>
<u><i>Behavior management</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans and carries out behavior strategies for the whole class and individual students.</li> </ul>	<u><i>Behavior management</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implements the behavioral management strategies using the same emphasis and techniques as the teacher.</li> <li>Conducts observations, collects data, and maintains records.</li> </ul>
<u><i>Working with family members</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corresponds and meets with family members.</li> <li>Initiates, conducts, and facilitates conferences concerning individual students.</li> </ul>	<u><i>Working with family members</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Corresponds and meets with family members under the direction of the teacher.</li> </ul>
<u><i>Individualized Educational Planning</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develops and implements IEP with IEP team.</li> </ul>	<u><i>Individualized Educational Planning</i></u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assists with implementation of IEP goals and objectives</li> <li>Carries out teacher's plan</li> </ul>

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<b>Comparison of supervising teacher and paraeducator duties</b>	
<b>Supervising teacher</b>	<b>Paraeducator</b>
<u>Inservice</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attends appropriate inservice and professional development opportunities.</li> </ul>	<u>Inservice</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attends appropriate inservice and professional development opportunities.</li> </ul>
<u>Other Duties</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Facilitates the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education.</li> </ul>	<u>Other Duties</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitors playgrounds, lunchrooms, study halls and busses.</li> <li>Facilitates the inclusion of students with disabilities into general education.</li> <li>Provides health services.</li> <li>Provides opportunities for students to practice skills in the community.</li> </ul>

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<b>Effective Teaming</b>		
<b>Administrators' Roles</b>	<b>Teachers/Service Providers' Roles</b>	<b>Paraeducators' Roles</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a manual for district and school procedures and policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow district and school procedures and policies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Follow district and school procedures and policies.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop appropriate job descriptions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn and follow the appropriate job responsibilities for teachers/service providers and paraeducators.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learn and follow the appropriate job responsibilities for teachers/service providers and paraeducators.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a school climate in which paraeducators have respect and a professional identity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Involve the paraeducators in planning and organizing learning experiences based on paraeducators' qualifications.</li> <li>• Consider the strengths and needs of paraeducators when planning schedules and assignments.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognize and respect the knowledge and expertise that the teachers/service providers bring to their roles.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Include paraeducators in school publications, committees, and teams.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide opportunities for paraeducators to participate in school wide activities.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participate in the life of the school.</li> </ul>