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The Formation of a Guide for Licensed Educators Supervising and Supporting Paraeducators in Special Education

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THE FORMATION OF A GUIDE FOR LICENSED EDUCATORS SUPERVISING AND
SUPPORTING PARAEDUCATORS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

According to Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and the Oregon Administrative Rules, the work of paraprofessionals is required to be directed and supervised by a licensed teacher. While the typical licensed special educator is often unprepared for these duties, there are also very few accessible and applicable resources to support growth in this area. Through bracketing and memoing of literature on the topic, this content development dissertation examines what aspects of supervision and support of paraprofessionals should be included in a guide. It then proceeds to offer a succinct guide for licensed special educators on how to supervise and support paraeducators. It includes clarification and delineation of the responsibilities of team members, scenarios, and other tips for consideration which bring the application closer to the reader's individual placement and work.

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This work is dedicated to the Spedettes and the students we have served, with whole-hearted thanks to my family for sharing my time and loving me anyway. My thanks to my coworkers and cohort for their encouragement, and to Dane for being that guiding voice who could candidly pull me back on track.

I am grateful for the early Friday mornings spent in prayer, and standing proverbially side-by-side with Scot, Jim, and Neal, and others who were lead to join us. This heart and soul-sustaining time helped me pay attention to what God wanted to do and not give up. May we continue to listen.

There are many special educators who have lead the way before me, who have worked within this system and done amazing things with their teams, the hard way. For each of them, there are likely a half-dozen more who struggled through and felt the sting of failure and inadequacy due to lack of preparation and support. While we can't go back in time to make sure that everyone had what they needed, I have hope that this work will begin to improve outcomes for future teams and the students they serve. This is for them, with gratitude for those who paved the way.

“By improving yourself, the world is made better. Be not afraid of growing too slowly. Be afraid only of standing still.” -- Benjamin Franklin

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Chapter 1

Problem

In the current models for the provision of special education in the United States, paraeducators (instructional assistants) provide the majority of services for students with disabilities (Yates et. al., 2020; Shurr, et al., 2021). These services are required to be “under the supervision of a licensed teacher or provider,” (OAR 581-037-0015(2); Rothstein & Johnson, 2021). This means that instructional decisions, assessment, and supervision of the work are the responsibility of the licensed teacher. They may delegate and supervise instructional activities and personal care support for the student to paraeducators. The number of paraprofessionals working in special education in Oregon has skyrocketed in recent years to 7,058 during the 2019/20 school year (Data Profiles, 2019/20). It is now at the point where demand is not keeping up with the supply of available and willing staff to fill the positions (Miller, 2022).

Licensed Special Education (SPED) teachers are generally thought to be ill-prepared for the job of supervising and managing paraeducators (Biggs et al., 2019; French, 2001; Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2012; Massafra, 2019; McGrath et al., 2010; Wallace, 2003). There are very few resources and little guidance on best practices for this area of the work within the state of Oregon (University of Colorado, 2021). The resources that do exist are often not easily accessible or relevant for the typical educator. This often leads to paraprofessionals arriving on the job and being handed little more than a schedule to follow. They may be only working with the hope of applicable training in the future.

Purpose

This conceptual research project aimed to develop an accessible guide to support the improved adherence to Oregon's codes and laws regarding paraeducator support and supervision. The hope is that this would also improve team dynamics, paraeducator satisfaction and

performance, and program outcomes. It developed a best-practices resource guide for licensed teachers so that they can better support the development of special education paraeducators to carry out their duties and responsibilities. If there is an expectation that all communication and decision-making will be handled professionally, individuals may feel more secure and respected as professionals in their position.

Research questions included:

- 1) What are the legal requirements and implications for the licensed special educator in regard to paraeducator supervision and support?
- 2) How can the licensed teacher support the development of the core competencies of a special education paraeducator in their program?
- 3) How might this support and supervision differ in application between the self-contained and mainstreamed environments?

Significance

Before beginning a supervisory position, licensed teachers are frequently unprepared. Educators must be trained on the importance of supervision, how to supervise, what to do when witnessing inappropriate behavior, and to whom instances of inappropriate behavior should be reported. Training volunteers, playground supervisors, cafeteria workers, bus drivers, substitutes, and other individuals who may be responsible for the supervision of students is equally important (Johns, 2016, p. 70).

The ability to run an effective local special education program depends upon having consistent staff who are knowledgeable and supported in their work. While there are a few works on this that pertain to other states and their codes or laws for special education, there is a lack of literature relating to the specifics of Oregon's education system. None are comprehensive or easily accessible and applicable for the typical educator. This study aims to begin to fill the gap

by providing a resource that will allow licensed teachers to more appropriately plan for and execute supervision and support of paraeducators within their local program of services. I have hope that the guide will allow educators to support a general improvement of their program, *especially* as it pertains to the leadership and supervision of paraeducators on their team.

While a broad range of sources were utilized (from laws and state codes to handbooks or policies from other states), many of the most applicable sources were from other states with rules or policies that vary from those in Oregon. For example, a policy handbook for a district in the state of Washington had excellent information on paraeducator competencies and responsibilities (Puget Sound, 2007). However, their state requires training and certification for paraeducators. This is something that Oregon does not have and may impact our need for more professional development that would not be included in the Washington resource. Due to these variances in the applicability of sources, I utilized memoing of themes and experience from the field to apply best practices in this specific context.

Definition of Terms

Free Appropriate Public Education

Under federal education law (IDEA, Section 504) all students, regardless of disability or other limiting factors, are entitled to a public education that is free and where they are appropriately placed academically and developmentally.

Least Restrictive Environment

Under federal education law (IDEA), students are to be provided free, appropriate public education in the environment which is the least restrictive for them. This means that the student should be educated alongside typical peers and with their general education teacher(s) as much as possible given their individual needs. This allows the student equal access to the core curriculums and opportunities afforded to all students.

Oregon Administrative Rules

Abbreviated as the OARs, these are the state codes which apply federal and state laws and rules into action. They are the means by which state agencies carry out the Oregon Revised Statutes (laws).

Paraeducator

This is an individual who is employed by a district or Local Education Agency (LEA), for direct contact and provision of services for students, who is qualified for the position but not a licensed teacher or educator. This term is an umbrella for other job titles, including Instructional Assistant, Teacher's Aide, Educational Assistant, Learning Specialist Assistant, or Paraprofessional (among others).

Supervising Teacher

This term is used in this document to refer to any licensed educator responsible for students' educational progress and required to provide support and supervision of paraeducators in their program. This may include special education teachers, co-teaching general education teachers, school counselors, speech and language pathologists, and other related service providers who are in a similar position.

Methodology

I combed through research on leadership in education, the required competencies and responsibilities of paraeducators, and the legal requirements and responsibilities of the licensed educator who is to supervise their work. After amassing a variety of perspectives on the topic and finding areas that had few available resources, I outlined the knowledge and skills necessary for a licensed educator to adequately supervise the paraeducators in their program.

To flesh out the guide's contents, I memoed common terms and themes which emerged in the literature. These included the lack of pre-service preparation to supervise or lead a

program team, the need for role differentiation within the team, the importance of clarity in communication and positive working relationships, and the necessity of applicable professional development for paraprofessionals. It also became evident that the variety of environments for the paraprofessionals' work would make it important to differentiate between the self-contained and mainstream classroom settings. Each of these aspects were then written into the outline. To form the guide, I then elaborated on the concepts and themes by including information and applications based on research and personal experiences. This application included scenarios common to the field so that they would be engaging and useful to the average Special Education teacher as they support their team and program.

For this conceptual dissertation, I utilized texts for teacher educators, policy handbooks from local districts and neighboring states, OARs (Oregon Administrative Rules), and other texts regarding paraeducators. The objective of the guide is to assist Special Educators as they plan for, supervise, and support paraeducators who provide special education services to students who qualify under IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act). I detailed how the guide might best be utilized, and in which settings, suggests future implications of its application, and provides limitations of the work. A dissertation Director of Project monitored the progress of the project, and it has been presented to the George Fox University Education Guild for scrutiny and feedback. This work focused on the development of the resource, with the goal of a near-future content validity study to further vet it for open-source publication and distribution.

Elements of the Guide

In sifting through the problems and themes relating to this topic, I gathered information and perspectives around the emerging themes. Once it seemed that saturation of data had been obtained for the themes, I turned my attention to the format. As noted below, scenarios are a research-based method of learning, so this format is included in each main section to offer

applicability and accessibility to the guide. Each applicable section was also differentiated for the two main environments of special education work: self-contained and mainstreamed classrooms.

The Inclusion of Scenarios

With the goal of applicability and engagement for the target audience, I sought to utilize the appropriate formats and exercises which might be helpful for the typical educator.

In qualitative studies regarding how to better prepare special educators to lead teams with paraprofessionals, participants suggested modes and strategies of instruction which could also develop applicable leadership skills. These included “class discussions, lecture, group work, real-life examples, practical resources, scenarios, or case studies, drawing connections with the development of each competency. For example, teachers discussed how mock scenarios or case studies could help develop skills in assertive communication, conflict management, coaching, and collaboration.” (Biggs et al., 2018).

Another survey of educators suggested that case studies, role plays and video models, reflections, paraeducator and teacher guest speakers, and ‘opportunities to actually practice the skills’ as ways to better incorporate preparation on the topic in the higher-education setting (Sobeck et. al., 2019). While all of these may be best practices for professional development and most beneficial in tandem, due to the limitations of this work, we will be focusing on case studies (scenarios) and reflections to connect and apply the knowledge to the educator’s individual experiences and assignment.

The format of the application was to begin with a basic overview section on the topic. I then offered a scenario of a common experience for educators and included questions about the scenario. The sections then end with other tips for consideration that help the reader move the application closer to their own environment or setting.

Differentiated for Multiple Settings and Environments

When conducting the initial research for this project, I saw applications of the available resources in a variety of settings in special education. This often made for a lengthy or complicated overview of the topics in the available literature. While the detailed information could be useful, one of the goals of this work is to make it accessible for the average educator. I determined that some sections of the work should be split into the information applicable to self-contained and inclusive environments. With this, educators may go directly to pertinent information within the guide.

While there are resources which cover the work of paraeducators, they are often more than 15 years old, and somewhat outdated in their application. Over the last few decades, the application of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) has led to a shift in how special education services are generally provided. In an effort to provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as per the act, districts and educational agencies have created policies and program shifts that prioritize inclusive environments. These have put more children in the general education environment where they receive their special education services alongside typical students.

Where a student may have previously been moved to a different school or classroom to be educated separately, they might now be more likely to have a pull-out “resource room” intervention in their day, or a teacher’s aide who comes in to support the modifications and accommodations which allow access to the core curriculum (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). In connection with this work, the increase of mainstreaming has increased the need for paraeducators significantly. Where there may have been one or two paraeducators in a school in the 1990s, now there are often whole teams that support grade levels or mainstreamed programs in a school building (Data Profiles, 2019/20).

To be sure, there are still programs and classrooms for highly impacted students who need more specialized care or support to access their education. Educational agencies are required to have a continuum of placement options, from most restrictive (such as home or hospital placement) to least restrictive (in general education classrooms receiving specialized supports), to best meet the needs of the individual student. As part of this, districts will generally maintain self-contained classrooms for students impacted by low-incidence/high-needs disabilities. Both settings should be adequately supported and supervised, depending on the assignment.

With these issues in mind, the guide will include sections dedicated to both the inclusive (mainstreamed) and self-contained environments so that it may be as useful and applicable as possible for the typical special educator.

Why Role Differentiation

One of the themes in the research was the need for role differentiation and clarity. The daily schedules are often extremely complex and tight, causing overlap or gaps in coverage for students or assigned tasks. Where a paraeducator may have formerly been doing primarily clerical tasks, their responsibilities often now run the gamut from functional or personal care of students (feeding and toileting) to small group instruction under the supervision and direction of the teacher. (Pickett, 2002; Nevin et al, 2009) Oregon Administrative Rule delineates this supervision as follows:

- The supervising teacher plans instructional activities which the paraeducator then carries out.
- The supervising teacher evaluates the achievement of the students being served.
- The supervising teacher has a supervision plan, including regular monitoring of the paraeducator's effectiveness, access to assistance, and consultation.

- Title I paraeducators must work “in close and frequent proximity to the appropriately licensed teacher identified as ‘highly qualified’ as defined by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (OAR, 581-037-0015).
- Plans for supervision shall include access to assistance and consultation, regular monitoring of performance, and the effect of the program on students and their families.

Much of the overlap between licensed teachers and paraprofessionals' daily activities and interactions with students may look the same on the surface. The key difference is that all planning, curriculum and instructional decision-making, evaluation, and assessment of outcomes are done by the licensed teacher. Paraprofessionals may "assist in instruction, classroom management, student discipline, student safety, and conflict resolution. They can participate in preparing materials for learning, monitoring student learning, delivering instruction, grading papers, recording scores, motivating students, developing students' social skills, and communicating with parents" (Yates et al., 2020).

In addition to a lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities, prep time may also be limited for the licensed educator, so they may choose to delegate as many tasks as possible. There may oftentimes be paraprofessionals who have been at the site or position for longer than the licensed teacher, leading them to take more of a leadership role in the team relationships or take on more responsibilities which were formerly considered to be within the realm of duties of the licensed educator (Johns, 2016). Although this is natural given the paraprofessional's institutional knowledge and network affiliations, this can sometimes lead to contentious relationships among staff as they feel overburdened, underutilized, or are put in positions where they are not qualified to make decisions or should not be responsible for that work.

These issues and responsibilities are not new to the 2020 decade, but the preparation programs in higher education and professional development offered by LEAs have largely not

kept pace with the increased demands on licensed teachers as supervisors and team leaders (Pickett et al., 2003). This may leave them at a disadvantage and at higher risk of early burnout as they are stretched thin and trying to learn a key aspect of the job while doing it.

Foundation of core competencies that need to be supported

Paraprofessionals need to be supported in the core competencies of their position. This includes providing or connecting them with professional development opportunities to learn the skills and acquire the necessary knowledge to be successful in their work. The licensed educator should also ensure that the paraeducators are scheduled adequately and provided the resources and direction necessary to utilize the curriculums and programs to which they are assigned effectively and efficiently.

There are several organizations which have created lists of responsibilities or competencies for paraeducators, but none are based in or written for those who work in Oregon. Washington's Puget Sound ESD published a handbook for paraeducators in 2007 which delineates their roles and responsibilities in educational environments similar to those discussed in this study. However, Washington requires a training program and certification before beginning a paraeducator position (Washington State Professional Educator Board, 2022), whereas Oregon does not and may need more support or professional development at the local level. While helpful, the resource was created for the broader use of *all* paraeducators, not just those in special education. It is also slightly outdated, as requirements and available resources for training have both increased, according to the Washington Professional Educators Standards Board (2017).

The Council for Exceptional Children published a guide of standards for licensed educators which contains a chapter on paraeducators (2017). It is very detailed and focuses on the aspects of the work and goals which the organization values. However, it was lengthy and

contained information for specific job assignments that are not common for a paraeducator and may reduce the readability or applicability for the typical educator. It was a useful resource when researching the generally agreed-upon competencies of the paraeducator position and condensing this information into appropriate themes for this specific environment and audience.

In 2003, authors Pickett and Gerlach published a detailed book on the topic of leading paraeducator teams. I was able to glean information on the requirements for supervision and role differentiation within the team. It was a useful resource regarding responsibilities and team relationships, and the themes around the roles of the paraeducators lined up with those from other sources. It was slightly outdated and lengthy, and thus not always applicable to the average setting or assignment.

I took the themes from the literature and returned to the local laws and policies in an attempt to make the guide most applicable in Oregon. The Puget Sound guide for Paraprofessionals (2007) was informative as a model for organization of the guide and what background knowledge might need to be included. It also helped to narrow down the basic duties or competencies required for a paraprofessional. Oregon Administrative Rule states that paraprofessionals' assigned tasks may include (but not be limited to) instructional support, clerical support, student control, personal care, translation or family involvement activities, and media center or lab support (OAR 581-037-0015). This aligns with IDEA and the themes which emerged in the literature around the competencies of a paraeducator.

While some states require that there be licensure or initial training for paraprofessionals, Oregon is not one of them. Nor does Oregon require or track paraprofessionals ongoing training or professional development (Massafra, 2020; University of Colorado, 2021). By letter of the law, only paraprofessionals who are providing services paid for by Title 1 funds are required to be "Highly Qualified" in Oregon. This effectively means they hold a two-year college degree or

equivalent aptitude testing (U.S. Department of Education, 2002, 2007; OAR 581-037-0006). Districts may apply this to their special education assistants since they often provide similar academic services. In the absence of qualified individuals though, there may be variances or adjustments to this. The position may be considered a long-term substitute until a qualified candidate can be hired. This inconsistency can create difficulty in maintaining a qualified, trained staff, so it is important to create a list or set of basic skills all individuals on the local special education team must know. All individuals on the team must have an agreed-upon baseline knowledge before interacting with students— notably, behavioral support and personal care assistance policies. This can alleviate some of the issues resulting from the inconsistency of initial qualification or knowledge.

In simple terms, the paraprofessional should be capable of completing the physical tasks given in the district's job description for their specific assignment. They should follow standards of ethical treatment of children (including maintaining confidentiality and reporting abuse or neglect), and be capable of following the directions of their supervisor as programming is adjusted to meet the ever-changing needs of the student(s). This is a fairly brief description because job descriptions for the position of paraeducator are varied and based on the site and program requirements. For example, the paraeducator may be physically required to lift heavy objects to help with wheelchair transfers or the use of physical therapy equipment, or to run or react quickly to support student safety for those who need behavior support. They may need to be able to handle higher-order thinking and more complicated academic tasks to assist secondary students who need support to access their general education classes. Primarily, the paraeducator will need a disposition which allows them to be calm and flexible as they respond to students' needs and programming adjustments as determined by the licensed educator who directs and supervises their work.

Professional Development Requirements

The utilization of paraprofessionals has risen significantly over the last few decades in order to provide the support required for inclusion in the general education classroom. As Martin writes "Often, paraprofessionals have the greatest contact with students with disabilities and the least amount of training..." (2009, p. 26). A common theme across the literature on paraprofessional support, retention, and utilization is the fact that they are often undertrained (or given no targeted instruction or feedback at all) while working with the highest-need students in the school setting. (Bagawan et al., 2022; Brock & Carter, 2013; Brown et. al., 2014; Jones et. al., 2011; Lang & Fox, 2004)

Federal regulations state that the licensed supervisor must provide appropriate training and professional development for paraeducators (Section 1462, IDEA). At the state level, Oregon defines this as the following:

“Training of Educational Assistants

Districts employing educational assistants in any capacity shall provide or arrange for suitable training to prepare them to perform such functions as they may be assigned.”
(OAR Division 37)

This rule places the responsibility for providing training or resources for training on districts and Educational Service Districts. This is key in ensuring that all individuals are trained in overarching policies and procedures from those who created their job descriptions. However, it is the licensed teacher who supervises the paraeducator on a regular basis. They know which curriculums and processes the paraeducator should be familiar with for their specific assignment, and should ensure that they are connected with resources and training to be able to execute their assigned duties.

Another key aspect of professional development is feedback on performance (Brown et. al., 2014). While the overall responsibility for training lies with the LEA or district, the

only individuals who can provide feedback on an individual's performance are the supervisors who witness their work— the licensed educators. Additionally, studies on the most effective formats of professional development show that there are three critical components of training: modeling, feedback, and accountability. (Brock, M. E., & Carter, E. W. 2013; Brock, Barczak, Anderson, & Bordner-Williams, 2021). Brock and Carter explain that trainers should “communicate how to implement an intervention (modeling), ensure participants attempt to implement the intervention in everyday practice (accountability), and then follow up with participants to reinforce what they are doing well and to help them correct their mistakes (performance feedback)” (2013, p. 40).

The guide will include suggestions for strategies to be modeled, progress and implementation checks as a normal occurrence, and the cogent feedback that is necessary for true learning. These are required elements of the supervisory aspect of team leadership.

Best practices for efficient teams

For teams to function well, the leadership must be competent and grounded in sound principles for management. While there is research into effective leadership strategies in education in general, most focus on the role of the administrator, or on grade level or subject teams. This may look different from the needs of a departmental team that has an interdisciplinary focus, a variety of educational and vocational backgrounds or preparation, and may work across the school environment. Due to this specific need, a basis for best practices has been pulled from sources in and outside of special education settings to provide educators with a more solid understanding of how to support a team in this environment.

Topchik (2007) notes five keys to building a solid “team spirit”. These include: clear roles and responsibilities, open and honest communication, a supportive and knowledgeable leader, decision-making authority, and rewards or recognition for achievement and/or

accomplishments. This is similar to other texts on the topic which stress the priority that boundaries and roles are clearly defined and communication is clear. These initial principles allow teams to avoid many of the simpler pitfalls that come from misunderstandings and a lack of understanding of the various perspectives at play.

Leading any group of people requires “soft skills” or relational finesse to guide interactions and move the group together toward the common goal in a positive manner. (Brungardt, 2011). Bagawan et al. noted in 2022 that "effective supervision happens when the teacher is a strong leader who fosters a positive classroom/team culture, and practices clear communication." In 2019, Biggs et al. identified four primary competencies of leadership in this role: assertive communication skills, collaborative skills, conflict management, and respect. Each competency must be present in how an educator conducts themselves as a leader and model cooperation with and amongst their team.

Assertive communication skills may look like setting up systems of objective communication within the team to ensure that there are regular exchanges of information. This reduces the miscommunications and misunderstandings that can come from unclear expectations or feeling unheard. It also reduces opportunities to be “blindsided” by information avoided, or omitted due to a team member’s discomfort.

Teams often rely on oral directions and communication for their daily interactions. Care should be taken so that expectations and responsibilities are carefully laid out and communicated. This prevents miscommunication or misunderstandings that lead to conflict. Using written schedules and goals that clearly present the expectations for each assignment makes for clear communication from the beginning. Team leaders often neglect to have regular meetings as a whole team to ensure equitable communication (French, 2001).

The importance of setting norms for regular, objective communication will be woven into the guide in the areas of team leadership and role differentiation. The most common and likely effective means of ensuring regular communication is to have scheduled meetings. Setting an agenda to cover all important and time-sensitive topics, and having meetings at regular intervals ensures that priority communication occurs across the team. It is often difficult for educator teams to schedule weekly 30-40 minute meetings, so if this is not possible, the leader should consider scheduling multiple shorter sessions before or after school. (Carnahan et al. 2009).

Knowing the team well from the beginning can go a long way toward having a healthy team structure to build on. The team lead should get to know the strengths, skills, preferences, and experiences of the members. The leader should ask where members feel more training or support are needed, and then follow through to provide it to benefit their students and thrive themselves. Having team members who are supported and valued for their professionalism and contributions creates a stronger team overall (Brungardt, 2011).

Similarly, collaboration with the team, related service providers, and other stakeholders are a necessity to have a productive and efficacious team. Multiple studies on successful team interactions in education show that collaborative planning time is seen as a key indicator of team success (Nevin et al., 2009). It goes hand in hand with supporting an environment where all individuals feel respected and valued for their contributions. As Johns (2016) put it, there are as many opportunities for collaboration as there are for pitfalls. "The teacher is the primary supervisor for the paraprofessional and must communicate clear expectations for him or her, making it understood that the paraprofessional is provided direction by the teacher rather than acting unilaterally." There is a tremendous need for cooperation and leadership, but often so little preparation. "Teachers find themselves in the position of supervising individuals without receiving any training because of the increase in special education paraprofessionals." (p. 32) In

a legal analysis by Etscheidt in 2005, it was made clear that "paraprofessionals may not serve as the sole designer, deliverer, or evaluator of a student's program" (p. 68). This is an assumed norm, but in the present-day environment, with such a high turnover of supervisors and staff, role confusion is very common and may lead to conflict.

In this particular setting and team environment within the education field, conflict is common, especially relating to role or relational confusion (Gerlach, 2002). For the management of conflict, the licensed educator may often need to reflect on the boundaries and responsibilities of the respective positions and ensure that conflict is not due to overstepping these boundaries or a lack of follow-through on responsibilities. Barring these missteps, the leader must also ensure that they are being an authentic listener- hearing the concerns and perspectives of those on their team, and balancing this with their responsibilities to maintain a safe, efficacious learning environment that supports students' academic progress. Exhibiting humility through being willing to take on difficult tasks or accept responsibility in difficult situations while still maintaining boundaries and professionalism, can go a long way in creating a safe environment where colleagues trust each other to be supportive of team members' needs. For instance, "Leaders also fulfill their role by leading by example so that the effective leader will demonstrate good practice by being the 'lead learner' and participate actively in [professional development]" (Kydd, 2008, p. 15). These ideas are similar to service or participatory leadership, which values humility and respect for all stakeholders. It is important that all team members feel recognized for their contributions and professionalism so that they know they are valued members of the special education team (Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2012; Lindberg et al., 2014).

Special education is a very demanding profession, with responsibilities beyond that of a typical classroom teacher. It can be a stressful assignment, for both the licensed educator and paraprofessional, leading to less than ideal interactions. Creating an environment that ensures the

required breaks, safety, support, and communication (opportunities to be heard) can alleviate some of the main stressors, and increase tolerance for issues as they arise as individuals see that they can trust those who lead to be supportive of program needs. Having an overarching infrastructure and policies that support the leadership development of the licensed teacher, and sets the team up for success through mentorship, feedback, and professional development for the paraprofessional(s) is crucial, but often not available or in place in LEAs (Pickett, 2002). This leaves the responsibility at the local building or district level to ensure that they are setting their team up for success by setting common goals for their teams and providing mentorship to leaders.

These primary leadership competencies will be covered in section three of the guide, with applicable scenarios and questions which assist the educator with applying it to their specific assignment and team needs.

Outline of the Guide

Having found the inclusion of the previous elements and themes necessary, the following is an outline of the guide which will be found in chapter two of this document:

Section 1: Definitions, Laws, and Regulations

- Oregon Administrative Rules (OARs) relating to paraprofessionals
- Requirements for supervision
- Requirements for the offering of professional development and oversight
- Scenario(s) highlighting ethical considerations and giving context

Section 2: Paraeducator Competencies and Responsibilities

- Introduction to Roles in a Local Special Education Team
- Application in general education setting (inclusion or mainstreaming)
 - Roles in the inclusive or mainstreamed environment

- Role differentiation and boundaries
- Scenario
- Application in special education setting (self-contained)
 - Roles in the self-contained classroom
 - Role differentiation and boundaries
 - Scenario
- Tips and Suggestions Regarding Roles and Responsibilities of Your Team

Section 3: Best Practices for a Building or Site Team

- Leadership of a team
 - Regular meetings (clear communication)
 - Roles and voice (respectful communication)
 - Supporting across the program
- Best practices for direct supervision
 - Scheduling (Student-specific or classroom assignments? Based on the IEP and minutes/location.)
 - Professional development needs
 - Physical environment as a tool
- Working with other educators or staff in conjunction with the team (specialists, general education teachers, etc).
 - Facilitating collaboration with general education
 - Behavior support
 - Health and activities of daily living
 - Scenario(s)

Section 4: Appendices and Further Resources

- Appendix A: IDEA document section
- Appendix B: OAR documents
- Appendix C: Professional Development Resources
- Appendix D: Basic Forms and Questionnaires for Team Use
- Appendix E: Further Readings

Ethical Considerations, Bias, and Limitations

As in any study, there are limitations to the application of this work and precautions when generalizing its product. I have worked for several years in elementary special education and have experienced both the paraeducator and licensed special educator roles and perspectives of this issue. I have seen the positive and negative impacts that team relationships and mutual support can have on student programming. This may make it easier to infer meaning from the literature and give applicable suggestions for issues found in the review. It may also bias me toward solutions that work well in settings where I am most familiar, perhaps overlooking other needs or applications which another researcher might select as a priority. I was intentional in considering multiple perspectives and types of sources when gathering the research. However, given my individual scope and background, other useful methods or perspectives from other areas of the field may have been overlooked which might have been applicable or appropriate.

To reduce the impact of bias due to limited perspective, I used a memoing process akin to bracketing and recorded emerging themes in the literature as they surfaced. I connected the related themes and topics by way of a rough guide book outline, which was refined as more sources and themes fed into the data. As new themes emerged, they were either incorporated into an existing, related category, or given their own category if novelty required it.

Since I am basing the work on currently available literature on related topics and previous works from other locations, there are no human subjects for consideration.

Supervising and Supporting Paraeducators

A Guide for Special Educators

By Catherine Parry

based on dissertation research conducted at George Fox University, 2022/23

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Introduction

Welcome to a brief guide and resource for working with and leading a paraprofessional team in special education. It is my hope as a fellow special educator that this information helps relieve some of the stress and missteps that are common in teams and can positively impact the working environment and delivery of services for students with disabilities. This guide is geared towards the special education niche of the education field, but many aspects are applicable to other teams which utilize paraprofessionals, such as Title I or English Language Development. It should be applied to those environments only with caution and special care to adhere to the job description of the individuals involved. This work is also based on dissertation research and should not be considered legal advice, nor is it a legally binding resource.

Each section of this guide includes scenarios, questions about them, and tips to consider that may help you connect it to your context. It is my hope that you find it easy to jump to a section that applies or is interesting to you.

The field of special education has many demands and responsibilities that call upon the licensed teacher to perform above and beyond the job description of the typical general educator. One of these responsibilities is often the supervision of a team of paraeducators, including but not limited to instructional assistants, educational assistants, learning specialist assistants, and paraprofessionals. This guide is meant to be a springboard or foundation for building a healthy team which can best support the needs of the students in their care.

One of the most common causes of conflict in a special education team is confusion about roles, responsibilities, and boundaries. Many new teachers have had little to no preparation for supervising paraprofessionals and their responsibilities in this role (Biggs et al., 2019; French, 2001; Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2012; Massafra, 2019; McGrath et al., 2010;

Wallace, 2003; Sobeck et al., 2020). Likewise, paraprofessionals may have received little or no preparation for their assignment and need significant guidance, mentoring, or professional development in order to be successful with their responsibilities (Martin, 2009). On the flip side, the paraprofessional may have been in the position for a significant amount of time and have more experience in the field than the licensed teacher, but *still are not legally qualified* to make many of the decisions that are legally the responsibility of the supervising teacher.

Another responsibility of the licensed professional is to ensure that the paraprofessional is receiving appropriate professional development to be able to do their work (Section 1462, IDEA; OAR, Division 37). While it is the responsibility of the LEA to provide this, as the supervising teacher in the room, you are the paraprofessional's direct supervisor and know which skills and knowledge they must possess in order to be successful in their job.

The background and research for this project were conducted for schools and teams in the state of Oregon; keeping in mind its specific legal requirements and subsequent ramifications. It may be applicable in other places with similar regulations but should be utilized carefully if and when doing so.

Section 1 - Definitions, Laws, and Regulations

Definitions:

“Instructional Assistant” – a classified school employee who does not require a license to teach, who is employed by a school district or education service district and whose assignment consists of and is limited to assisting a licensed teacher in accordance with rules established by the Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (ORS 342.120(6)).

“Paraeducator” or “Paraprofessional” – an individual who is employed by a district or Local Education Agency (LEA), for direct contact and provision of services for students, who is qualified for the position but not a licensed teacher or educator. This is an umbrella term for other job titles, some of which are Instructional Assistant, Teacher’s Aide, Educational Assistant, and Learning Specialist Assistant.

“Supervising Teacher” – used in this document to refer to any licensed educator who is responsible for the educational progress of students and required to provide support and supervision of paraeducators in their program. This may include special education teachers, co-teaching general education teachers, school counselors, speech and language pathologists, and other related service providers who are in a similar position.

“Oregon Administrative Rules” – Abbreviated as the OARs, these are the state codes which apply federal and state laws and rules into action. They are the means and strategies by which state agencies carry out the Oregon Revised Statutes (laws).

The Legal Requirements

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

In 2004, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) amended the Education for All Handicapped Children Act and further supported the ideal that students with disabilities should be educated in the “least restrictive environment” alongside typical peers as much as possible. This significantly increased the number of paraeducators employed by school districts to support students in their access to the classroom and core curriculum.

IDEA specifically notes that paraeducators can support student learning, but *must* be under the supervision and direction of a licensed professional. Specifically, as per section 300.156, paraprofessionals who are appropriately and adequately trained and supervised are allowed to “be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities.”

Section §1462 gives the responsibilities of the Local Education Agency or District to provide professional development, and allows for funding, “including interdisciplinary training to enable the paraprofessionals to improve early intervention, educational, and transitional results for children with disabilities.” While districts in Oregon do provide yearly training for classified staff, it varies by district and is rarely comprehensive. It may not be tied directly to their assignments, job description, or yearly performance goals. This is where the licensed teacher may play a role in helping to decide what areas the individual paraprofessional needs support or further instruction. Then, follow through with modeling, accountability, and feedback for deeper learning and improved program outcomes.

See appendix A for the complete IDEA document section and wording of the act.

Oregon Revised Statute

While IDEA outlines the overall requirement for supervision and provision of professional development for paraeducators, each state determines its own rules and statutes that describe how these laws are to be interpreted.

Oregon Administrative Rule delineates this supervision as the following:

- The supervising teacher plans instructional activities which the paraeducator then carries out.
- The supervising teacher evaluates the achievement of the students being served.
- The supervising teacher has a supervision plan, including regular monitoring of the paraeducator's effectiveness, access to assistance, and consultation.
- Title I paraeducators must work "in close and frequent proximity to the appropriately licensed teacher identified as 'highly qualified' as defined by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (OAR, 581-037-0015).
- Plans for supervision shall include access to assistance and consultation, regular monitoring of performance, and the effect of the program on students and their families.

See appendix B for the complete document section and wording of the Oregon Revised Statutes for this topic.

Section 2 – Paraeducator Competencies and Responsibilities

Introduction to Roles in a Local Special Education Team

While there are many service providers, educators, and staff who will interact with your department team, your team's roles and relationships are a most crucial aspect. Having clearly defined roles and boundaries will help produce success as your team adjusts to ever-changing student and programming needs.

Being clear about the roles of each team member removes many opportunities for misunderstandings or conflict. It gives you (the supervising teacher) knowledge of the supports, professional development, accountability, and feedback which will be needed for each assignment. This allows you to appropriately plan for and provide for each student's services within their local program.

Roles in the Inclusive or Mainstreamed Environment

General education is the most common or 'default' placement for services in special education. Students should receive their services (as outlined in their IEP document) in the way that best meets their needs and keeps them with their peers as much as possible and is of educational benefit. That said, students often require some pull-out instruction outside the classroom, or push-in support that assists them or a small group of students with core content to increase their access to the curriculum (Causton-Theoharis, 2009). These services are often delegated to a paraeducator since the work is directed and supervised by a licensed professional (either the special education teacher for pull-out instruction or the general education teacher for push-in support). The roles of the paraeducator may not end here, though. It always depends on the needs of the student. If a student has mobility or personal care needs, a paraeducator may be given those responsibilities. If a behavior support or health plan requires adult involvement, this

may also be assigned to them. Truly, the list of possible tasks could be miles long, because the students have individual needs and personalized plans to meet those needs. This means that *all* of the work that happens under your supervision is technically your responsibility (Biggs et al., 2019; French, 2001; Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2012; Massafra, 2019; McGrath et al., 2010; Wallace, 2003). The important thing to keep in mind is that the paraeducator may be a supporter or assistant to the plans and decisions that you, as the licensed teacher, direct and supervise. You must see that it occurs and that the student receives the appropriate support and services that were agreed on by their IEP team.

A few national groups and state agencies have assembled lists of the responsibilities of paraeducators and licensed educators (Puget Sound ESD, 2007; The Council for Exceptional Children, 2017; Picket & Gerlach, 2003). The content is similar in their themes but have variance according to specific state policies and the goals of the group or agency. The following is a table which outlines the responsibilities of each team member (as assembled and summarized from applicable research) next to the linked or similar responsibility for the licensed educator. This helps to clarify the boundaries, which can feel muddled in the daily work of interacting with students and running the local program of services.

Table 1 - Role Differentiation and Boundaries*Roles and Responsibilities of Team Members in the Inclusive Environment*

Responsibilities of the Licensed Educator	Responsibilities of the Paraprofessional
Provide assignments and learning objectives for students based on their individual goals.	Implement instruction and assignments as directed by a licensed teacher, and collect data or work samples on progress.
Communicate goals and maintain data collection for review to ensure students' adequate progress toward goals. Conduct IEP, eligibility, or placement team meetings as required. Maintain legal paperwork regarding eligibility and IEP progress.	Collect and communicate data on students' progress toward goals, as requested.
Diagnose needs and strategies for differentiation, accommodations, and modifications of curriculum to support students' progress toward IEP goals.	Implement strategies, differentiation, accommodations, and modifications of curriculum as directed by the licensed educator, either in supervised small groups or in support of the general education teacher.
Provide or request on-the-job training to prepare paraeducators to be independent decision-makers within their assignments.	Participate in on-the-job training and notify the supervising licensed educator of training needs or when clarification is needed.
Provide access to, and professional development opportunities for, specific curriculums or strategies used with students or for the interventions the paraprofessional has been assigned.	Seek out professional development or feedback on how to use specific curriculums and strategies for student groups or interventions.
Schedule paraeducators' time, following state employment laws (breaks, lunch, etc., as applicable), keeping in mind how to best utilize skills and knowledge for program efficacy.	Be aware of and follow scheduled assignments closely. Request clarification of assignment as needed.
Support communication and cooperation with general education teachers for the best utilization of the paraeducator in that environment.	Communicate clearly with all licensed supervising teachers regarding work assignments and responsibilities.
Communicate with families regarding student progress toward goals, maintaining confidentiality and professionalism.	Maintain confidentiality at all times, only communicating with families as requested. Direct questions about students' programming or progress back to the licensed teacher.

(Table 1 cont.)

Model strategies for modification and accommodations required for specific students to access their learning.

Seek out and be teachable regarding services, accommodations, and modifications which are being provided.

Monitor the daily performance of the paraeducator.

Be available on a regular basis to answer questions and provide feedback on performance.

Convey relevant information about paraeducator performance to administrators as lead supervisors of classified staff.

The following is a scenario to help begin to apply these ideas to the field.

Scenario

Jennifer is a new special educator preparing for the school year with 3rd-5th grade resource room services. There is a group of three 4th and 5th-grade students who were together for math intervention at the end of last year. She has the curriculum they were using and has scheduled the same paraeducator, Amy, to provide the 30-minute pull-out group.

Amy suggested that she begin where the instruction left off in the curriculum so that she can just keep the children progressing. Amy knows the lesson format, so she does not need orientation on the curriculum, but there is a question about whether or not the students have had any “summer slide” and should backtrack a bit to review.

Jennifer decides to have Amy redo the most recent curriculum-based assessment or “check-in” with the students to see if their skills are still solid. This will help her assess their present levels and compare them with the spring scores to see if they need extended school year services next year. It will also allow her to better support and direct Amy because she will be

able to determine exactly where the students are in their progress. In the short term, it will give the team information about where the lessons should begin.

Questions to consider for this scenario:

- What else does Jennifer need to consider when scheduling this group?
- What should Jennifer ask Amy so that she has background information for this group as she makes decisions about their instruction?
- How can Jennifer approach this discussion with Amy so that she feels involved while maintaining the expectation that Jennifer must make the instructional decisions?

Roles in the Self-Contained Environment

A self-contained classroom is a special place in the special education world. While it serves significantly fewer students than services provided in general education, it is likely the environment that comes to mind for the average person when they think of special education. Work in this environment can be very intensive and requires specialized support and care for the highest-need students entrusted to your team. You often have much more contact with related service providers and larger IEP and team meetings than does the general education teacher. The goal is to bring everyone together to best support your students.

Each district's continuum of services varies slightly, making the classroom setup and support unique to its own needs. You may serve high-need students who are still assigned to a general education classroom but are unable to access the core curriculum, making it necessary to provide the majority of their instruction in a core-replacement classroom. You may be in a classroom for students with Autism, Emotional, or Intellectual Disability so that you can best provide the specific support they need to be successful and make progress. The specifics of your

placement will dictate what services and supports you can delegate to paraprofessionals, and what training and skills they will need to be successful.

Wherever your services take place, or however the system is set up which puts you there, you have the weighty responsibility of your students' educational experience. You will need to ensure that you are keeping the whole child in mind as you plan the day and rhythms of the classroom. Hopefully, you will have exclusive use of your paraeducator's assigned hours so that they can dedicate themselves to the success of your classroom. If not, you will need to be particularly careful to set up accountability factors for the continuity of services, safety, and care. It can also be an environment where unclear roles and responsibilities can cause conflict. With multiple adults in the room, students should be held to the same expectation of respect for all adults, but behind the scenes, the licensed teacher continues to be the one responsible to track student progress and make instructional decisions.

A few national groups and state agencies have assembled lists of the responsibilities of paraeducators and licensed educators (Puget Sound ESD, 2007; The Council for Exceptional Children, 2017; Pickett, 2002; Pickett & Gerlach, 2003). The content is similar but has variance according to specific state policies and goals of the group or agency. The following is a table which outlines the responsibilities of each team member (as assembled and summarized from applicable research) next to the linked, or similar responsibility for the other. This helps to clarify the boundaries, which can feel muddled in the daily work of interacting with students and running the routines of your classroom.

Table 2 - Role Differentiation and Boundaries*Roles and Responsibilities in the Self-Contained Environment*

Responsibilities of the Licensed Educator	Responsibilities of the Paraprofessional
Provide assignments and learning objectives for students based on their individual goals.	Implement instruction and assignments as directed by a licensed teacher, and collect data or work samples on progress.
Communicate goals and maintain data collection for review to ensure students' adequate progress toward goals. Conduct IEP, eligibility, or placement team meetings as	Collect and communicate data on students' progress toward goals, as requested.
(Table 2 cont.) required. Maintain legal paperwork regarding eligibility and IEP progress.	
Diagnose needs and strategies for differentiation, accommodations, and modifications of curriculum (or use of alternative curriculum) to support students' progress toward IEP goals.	Implement prescribed strategies, differentiation, accommodations, and modifications of curriculum, either in supervised small groups or independently as prescribed by the licensed special educator.
Provide on-the-job training to prepare paraeducators to be independent decision-makers within their assignments.	Participate in on-the-job training and notify the supervising licensed educator of training needs or when clarification is needed.
Provide access to, and professional development opportunities for, specific curriculums or strategies used with student groups or for the interventions the paraprofessional has been assigned.	Seek out professional development or feedback on how to use specific curriculums and strategies for student groups or interventions.
Support communication with and access to support from related service personnel (Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, Nurse, Speech Pathologist, etc.), to ensure cooperation and efficiency of the program.	Clearly communicate the needs and performance of students with supervisors and related service providers as requested.
Communicate with families regarding student progress toward goals, maintaining confidentiality and professionalism.	Maintain confidentiality at all times, only communicating with families as requested. Direct questions about students' programming or progress back to the licensed teacher.

(Table 2 cont.) Schedule paraeducators' time in accordance with state employment laws (breaks, lunch, etc as applicable), and to best utilize skills and knowledge for program efficacy.

Be aware of and follow scheduled assignments closely. Request clarification of assignment as needed.

Supervise the classroom, attending to the safety needs of students and staff. Schedule supervision so that adults are able to support a safe learning environment across the day.

Provide active supervision of the classroom (monitor behavior and interactions, be aware of student personal support needs) as scheduled, supporting a safe learning environment for students and staff.

Model strategies for modifications and accommodations required for specific students to access their learning.

Seek out and be teachable about how services, accommodations, and modifications are being provided.

Monitor the daily performance of the paraeducator.

Be available on a regular basis to answer questions and provide feedback on performance.

Convey relevant information about paraeducator performance to administrators as lead supervisors of classified staff.

Ensure that paraeducators are up to date with the required health and safety trainings necessary to support student safety and supervision.

The following is a scenario to help begin to apply these ideas to the field.

Scenario

Tamara is a second-year teacher assigned to a self-contained classroom for eight students with low-incidence disabilities in a suburban district. She has three paraeducators also assigned to her classroom, two of whom have been there longer than she has.

One student, Jeremy, has angry outbursts which can become violent. The district has been supportive and sent behavior specialists to help Tamara write a behavior support plan (BSP) with de-escalation sequences and seclusion as a last resort if the other steps fail and safety is an issue. Tamara shared the new BSP with the team during their weekly meeting and told them to let her know if they had questions.

At the next incident, though, one of the paraeducators skipped past the de-escalation sequences and moved Jeremy to seclusion. When confronted about it, she said, “It’s what we have always done, and it works.” Tamara attempted to explain that while it is true that immediate seclusion creates a safe environment in the moment, it has failed to teach Jeremy how to have self-control or improve the outcomes in the long run. That’s why there is a new BSP. Emily refused to engage in further conversation about the incident, but later Tamara heard from another teacher that Emily was talking negatively with others about the decision while in the staff lounge.

Questions to consider about the scenario:

- What needs clarification to avoid this issue and conflict? What could Tamara have done differently to possibly avoid this conflict in her team?
- What policies or district procedures should Tamara seek out to inform her next steps?
- How might the school culture be impacting staff’s willingness to discuss students in a deficit rather than asset or support mindset?
- Who could Tamara involve to help reset the expectations and boundaries moving forward? (Administrator? District representative? Mentor teacher? Team meeting?)

Conclusion – Suggestions Regarding Roles and Responsibilities on Your Team

The boundaries can feel nuanced when both parties are working together and interacting with students and other staff, but the law is clear. The paraprofessional can *assist* and *support* instruction, classroom management, record scores and data, and be independently involved in non-academic tasks like student safety, personal care, and social skills. The key is that they can assist and support the licensed educator, but the licensed individual is the one who is responsible for the instruction and outcomes, including assessment and programming decisions, for all students. The paraprofessional cannot act alone and should have a regular schedule of observation, supervision, and feedback on their performance to ensure student growth outcomes and success (Yates et al., 2020).

Consider:

- Careful scheduling so that you or another licensed professional are on hand or nearby at all times during instruction.
- Scheduling occasional quick “stand-up meetings” with general education teachers and the paraeducators with whom they work to ensure that everyone understands any programming changes and why they are needed to adequately provide services for students.
- Give a building administrator a copy of your schedule of services and ask them to audit it for appropriateness of assignment. Ask if they believe that you are supervising and observing enough. Ask if they would be willing to observe groups occasionally or walk through randomly to assist with supervision.
- Get feedback from your paraprofessional(s) as to whether they believe that their

responsibilities are appropriate and within reason, and what professional development they need in order to feel confident and successful. Be open and take constructive criticism well, as this builds trust that they can bring issues to you and problem-solve together.

→ Notice what skills, strategies, or curriculums your team may need additional training or support to implement, and arrange training or observation and feedback (see appx. C for possible professional development resources).

Section 3 – Best Practice for a Building or Site Team

Leadership of a Team

Roles and Voice - Respectful Communication. Solid leadership skills are important when guiding a team in a stressful environment. Soft skills, positivity, and relationship building are seen as key to setting up a positive team environment and are difficult to teach in a class to prospective educators (Brungardt, 2011; Topchik, 2007; Bagawan et al., 2022). If this is an area that you struggle with, consider seeking out a mentor's feedback on your interpersonal skills and interactions with your team. Humbly accepting constructive feedback will set you up for success in the long run. Be sure to set the expectation of clear, honest communication with your team, so that conflict and issues can be resolved quickly (Biggs, Gilson, & Carter, 2019).

With humility and leadership in mind, consider your roles and responsibilities and how you can show your team that you value them and their work. Listen to their input on how services are going from their perspective. Just listen. Even if you disagree, accept their perspective and the emotion behind it, then problem-solve so that they can feel supported and competent in the tasks you have assigned to them (Brungardt, 2011).

Consider how you can schedule yourself into some of the less desirable or more difficult aspects of your program's services so that you can lead by example (Kydd, 2008). Can you set yourself up to lead the most difficult group in the same room and time as the group of a new paraeducator who needs to see how to guide positive behavior or the use of a specific support? Would you be willing to handle some of the students' personal care or a tedious task to maintain perspective for the paraeducators' work and assignments, making it possible to model and give good feedback? Being intentional about how you schedule yourself and your team can allow you to be more connected and have opportunities to provide authentic mentoring and feedback.

Regular Meetings - Clear Communication. One of the most neglected but most effective means of communication in a team is the regularly scheduled department meeting (French, 2001). While no one likes or wants another boring meeting that simply checks the boxes, a weekly or monthly check-in is an important way to communicate to your whole team clearly and to get and give feedback on how the program is running. (Nevin et al., 2009) Without intentionally meeting, you will find yourself trying to remember quick chats in the hallway about programming, or deciphering random sticky notes on your desk regarding materials or student needs. Something will fall through the cracks.

These meetings can also be a time to invite in a related service provider to do a check-in with the staff on the support they provide, or to give a quick mini-lesson (professional development) on how to provide a specific support, accommodation, or modification so that there is fidelity with how it is provided across your program.

It can be very difficult to find a time to schedule a longer meeting for everyone involved. If this is the case, consider scheduling a longer monthly or quarterly meeting and doing quick “stand-up meetings” on a weekly basis before or after school to do whole-team communication (Carnahan et al., 2009). Making this a priority shows your team that you want them to have what they need to be successful and that you want to hear from them and value their input. It is important that all team members feel recognized for their contributions and professionalism so that they know they are valued members of the special education team (Madigan & Schroth-Cavataio, 2012; Lindberg et al., 2014).

Supporting Across the Program. With the responsibility for tracking progress and knowing your students’ needs, you will need first-hand knowledge of each student on your caseload. While this can be daunting if you have a large caseload and team, regular

communication with your teammates can give you insight as they share what is working and what needs to be adjusted in the support they provide. Also, if you are regularly observing and giving feedback on a paraeducator's work and performance, you will have the opportunity to see the students in action and can trust that the instruction you designed is being implemented because you have set up these accountability measures.

As the lead educator on your team, you have the responsibility of coordinating services and supports for your students, including facilitating communication between the paraeducators and other educators. You will need to schedule regular visits from related service providers, coordinate supported inclusion times (or resource pull-out times) and determine how to provide accommodations or modifications with general education teachers. You may also need to contend with setting up busing and transportation supervision, or use of building spaces for modified classes which will be supported by paraeducators, depending on your placement. While your team members need to be independently capable of professional, courteous communication, the responsibility of ensuring that they are given the appropriate connections, materials, direction, and supervision are yours.

Your building administrator is responsible for performance feedback of classified staff, including the paraeducators on your team. That said, you are the licensed professional who has first-hand knowledge of their work and needs. Due to this, your administrator may involve you in the yearly evaluation process. This may mean providing a statement to them about performance, filling out a rubric, or meeting with the paraeducator to go over their performance and evaluation with the administrator. While this can feel awkward, if your team has had clear and respectful communication throughout the year, it can just be the conclusion of a year-long conversation. The involvement of administrative observation or evaluation is an important aspect

of receiving feedback and continuing their professional growth, and also allows the administrator to assess your professional growth as a team leader.

Having common forms, routines, or protocols can help your team be on the same page. Rather than having data collection in various forms or methods, having a similar format for data collection keeps the expectations clear and discernable to anyone on your team who needs to pick up the support in a program shift or unexpected absence. Having a common “sub note” format makes it easier for substitutes to jump into your team and be supported by other coworkers. It ensures that all the necessary information is included. If your district has a format for BSPs or health plans that would be the same for everyone, use it! This allows any person to pick it up and find the important information quickly. It also reduces miscommunication (see appx. D for sample forms).

The following is a scenario to help begin to apply these ideas to the field.

Scenario

It is May, and the principal has asked Ethan (a high school learning specialist) to sit down with the paraprofessionals to go over their yearly performance assessment. His previous administrator invited him to fill out a rubric for each of them based on personal observations then lead the evaluation meetings separately. Ethan assumes that it will be similar, but with his involvement.

The day before the meetings however, the principal sends Ethan a copy of each of their yearly goals and the empty rubric and says that she would like it returned by the following week, implying that she will not be involved in the process. Ethan stops in to the principal’s office in the morning to clarify. She responds that since Ethan is the licensed teacher who witnesses the daily work of the paraprofessionals, he is the most equipped with pertinent information to

complete the evaluation. If they have any questions they can clarify with her, and she will add her comments to the submitted paperwork.

While Ethan has worked hard to build a positive relationship with each of the team members, he feels that this will be awkward; especially in the rare areas where he will need to mark “needs improvement” or “approaching”.

Questions to consider about the scenario:

→ What systems can Ethan have set up, or set up for the following year, that would make decisions about the rubric more data-driven and less of a personal judgement?

→ In the future, can Ethan set up a mid-year check-in with the team members so that issues have an opportunity to be resolved and are less of a surprise at the year-end evaluation? Who might he involve in these conversations? How might that impact the team’s comfort level at the meeting?

→ Checking with other specialists in his district, what is the protocol or policies regarding assessment and evaluation? Can he request that the principal be present?

→ How can Ethan and the team connect this process to their professional development and goals?

→ In the meeting itself, how can Ethan structure the meeting so that the paraprofessionals feel heard and represented or supported?

Conclusion - Suggestions for Team Leadership

When leading a team in a high-stress environment, there *will* be hiccups and disagreements. Communication is key to keeping everyone on the same page and working toward the same priorities and program goals. As a leader who may have to make difficult

decisions, you may not always be the favorite or popular team member, but you should strive to be approachable and supportive of all team members.

Consider:

- How can you lead by example in your teamwork and schedule?
- What are the skills and preferences of your team members, and can you schedule them into something that they enjoy or feel confident about for part of their day?
- Schedule regular sit-down meetings with an agenda that allows the whole team to share and be on the same page.
- Host weekly, or as-needed, ‘stand-up’ meetings to convey necessary information quickly to the whole team.
- Utilize common forms and communicate district policies around behavior and health.
- Lean on district policies and state laws when making and communicating difficult or unpopular decisions. This will take some of the social pressure off of you, and allow you to foster a positive team environment, even when it is stressful.
- Use every opportunity to hear from your team and get constructive feedback. Perhaps use a “Rose and Thorn” or similar outline to keep sharing brief and on topic (see appx. D. for basic forms and questionnaires to use with your team).

Best Practices for Supervision

Scheduling. Approaches to scheduling your team are as varied as the programs that you may support. You might begin with covering lunches, breaks, and transitions so that your legal workforce requirements are met. You might start with scheduling the required academic support minutes and build out from there.

If you are in the self-contained environment, you could schedule the main subjects and build them around the given lunch or recess times. Alternatively, if you have students with extremely involved health or behavior plans, you may structure your day around these supports and then ensure that you have adequate adult coverage of the room for safety throughout the day.

In the inclusive or mainstream environment, you will need to be intentional about scheduling your supports to best meet the environmental needs. You might do this in a student-specific manner: specific adults working with a student so that they know their plans. Or, if you have multiple students grouped in the same class, schedule support around classroom assignments. If the latter, you can facilitate a whole-class or co-teaching style of support provided by your paraeducator which can reduce the stigma or discomfort students may feel from having an adult shadowing them in classes.

No matter your scheduling method, it should be based on the IEP minutes on your caseload and the location given in that document. If the team decides on the location for a service, *that is where it should be* unless the document is amended. Be prepared for the eventuality that you *will* be amending the schedule, likely multiple times, as IEPs are amended, services adjusted, and students' needs change throughout the year.

Professional Development Needs. While the legal responsibility of providing professional development belongs to the LEA or district, you do have an important role to play. As mentioned earlier, the licensed teacher is the one who knows the paraeducator's assignments and observes their work first-hand. You know which curriculums, behavior supports, and instructional strategies they will need to know for how they will interact with the students on your caseload. You can connect them to resources, advocate for specific topics to be included in the school or district classified professional development day, or request a related service provider visit and

give on-the-job training. It is an often-overlooked aspect of supervision (Bagawan et al., 2022; Brock & Carter, 2013; Brown et. al., 2014; Jones et. al., 2011; Lang & Fox, 2004), but the professional development you connect them to or provide for them can make or break their ability to adequately execute their assigned duties without burning out.

There are three key components to adequate supervision and training. These are *modeling*, *feedback*, and *accountability* (Brock & Carter, 2013; Brock et al., 2021; Brown et. al., 2014). The three work in concert to create a cycle of improvement and growth that will benefit the individual paraprofessional and your program.

If there is a new curriculum or instructional strategy, you should model it. If a student has specific behavior, health, mobility, and personal care support, have a related service come to model the supports or the equipment use and keep a log of who is recently trained. If someone is needing support for a format of instruction, schedule it to happen in proximity to you or another teacher who can follow up with them and make adjustments later. If there is a new paraeducator who needs to be shown how to “move and monitor” for safety during unstructured times, pair them up with a more experienced paraeducator or a teacher who can show them the routine.

Feedback should be given with your goals and desired outcomes in mind. Utilize your “soft skills” of leadership to add constructive feedback. Rather than beginning with the problem, report about something you saw that was done well or helpful. At that point, give constructive feedback about areas needing improvement. Finish with what you hope to see or outcomes that you are hoping for and ask how you can support them through their work.

Finally, accountability is key to a positive, peaceful team environment. You can model and then give feedback if they initially understand the assignment, but if you don’t follow up later, the paraeducator may feel left adrift. Make sure that you are scheduled to check in with

them about how things are going, talk to other licensed teachers they interact with, and most importantly be available to answer questions or provide support. If you are unapproachable, then it is unlikely that you will hear about issues until problems have developed and you must react rather than plan ahead and problem-solve. As mentioned earlier, if your schedule is too tight to check in regularly and observe, consider tapping into resources in your building such as administration or other specialists who can walk through occasionally. This can give you peace of mind knowing that the services you scheduled are happening, and paraeducators know that a licensed teacher is never far away if they need support.

One pitfall to be aware of is that professional development is often considered part of paid work hours, so be sure to check their contract or check with the union or department head before assigning training or meetings outside of work hours. A district may provide paid time for a monthly meeting or training, or suggest scheduling it into in-service training or building PD days. The first week of school is often more relaxed as teachers are getting students into routines, and so it may be a good time to cover support for each other so that everyone completes required yearly training without the need to pay for or provide additional hours. Additional training or resources could be offered but not required if they are not paid. Some of these are links to online training or providing books to be read at their leisure followed by an offer to discuss it, perhaps during a meeting.

I cannot say this strongly enough: the support and growth opportunities you offer to your team can make or break their ability to provide services appropriately. This is the key factor in their ability to teach and aid children. It can also be the key to your relationship with them as a leader or supervisor as they see that you will do what it takes to support them and help them be successful. It is all woven together with your soft skills and the technical aspects of the job. If

this element is missing, it can silently drag your team down. (*See appx. C for a list of possible professional development resources*).

Physical Environment. Depending on your setting, you may have your students in your room for the majority of the day (self-contained), or you may see dozens of students come through your door for short periods for breaks or small group instruction (mainstream). No matter the schedule, you need to be aware of how your environment impacts supervision, behavior, and access to support.

You should be able to see, hear, or otherwise supervise the adults in the room as they work with and supervise students. Much like setting up a classroom so that you have a line of sight for all students at all times, you should be able to stand up or walk in and observe what is happening at all stations or work areas in the classroom.

Also, clutter or disorganization can lead to team conflict as multiple people work in close proximity. Depending on your environment, you may want to organize materials by student, by the curriculum, or by subject so that shared materials are easy to find. Consider how you and your team want to organize materials and visuals so that they are easily accessible without creating visual clutter or overstimulation for your students.

The following is a scenario to help begin to apply these ideas to the field.

Scenario

Leslie is a veteran special educator who just moved to her current district. She has never had a consistent paraprofessional team before this year, but now works in a middle school with two assistants—Naomi and Josh. The two were each in their same positions last year. Previously, Leslie's caseload has been mostly students with learning disabilities who require small group instruction or push-in support to access content. In her new position, her caseload is much more

diverse and she supports students with multiple disabilities to access content and receive some core replacement instruction.

Upon arrival and orientation to the position, Leslie finds out that two of the students do require assistance with personal care (bathrooming) at scheduled times. This was not a part of her previous job, and she wants to focus her time on giving quality core replacement instruction, as well as planning and leading small-group instruction. When scheduling, her initial gut reaction was to schedule the paraprofessionals to deal with the personal care aspect of the students' day entirely. This would give her more time to focus on the aspects of the day that required a licensed teacher, such as core-replacement instruction.

At one point in the day, a student needs personal assistance at the same time as two small groups are being taught in the learning center. Leslie must decide who will assist the student, and who will be leading the groups. She decides to give the assistance task to Naomi while she (Leslie) and Josh lead the small groups. This will keep a licensed teacher within sight and sound of the instruction lead by the paraprofessional while leading the second group herself.

Naomi is then upset by this choice and feels put-upon and like her instructional skills are not being utilized. She mentions that the previous teacher "jumped in to trenches with them," implying that Leslie was taking the easy route.

Questions to consider about the scenario:

- When scheduling, how should Leslie prioritize her time and the paraprofessional's time? Are there specific rules or district policies she can point to which show the validity of her choices?
- Are there other times in the day when other, non-academic content is being covered when Leslie might step in to cover a personal care or other difficult task to support the team morale?
- If she decides to share the load of less-desirable tasks, what might be other tasks that she

could assign the paraprofessionals which would not overstep their responsibilities? What instructional tasks or other work could boost their morale and increase opportunities for growth?

→ If there are multiple small groups which must occur at the same time, what can she do to ensure adequate supervision and support of the paraprofessionals for accountability and mentoring?

Conclusion - Suggestions Regarding Supervision

It can be difficult to balance the requirements and boundaries of the roles in your team with the demands of the schedule of support. Layer that in with the need to adequately supervise instruction and safety, and the schedule becomes even more complex. There was a year in elementary school when my teaching partner and I had more than 40 iterations of our daily schedule by June due to the pandemic, absences (sub schedules), and move-ins/outs. This made it important to have a list of the priorities in coverage, supports, and how groups could be combined or supervised in emergency situations. Our team was excellent with knowing what they needed more training in and self-advocacy if there was a task which was too much, but that is not always the case.

The licensed teacher is responsible for ensuring the paraprofessionals have the training for any service or support they are scheduled to provide and providing the feedback and accountability which allow them to grow and improve. Being proactive and ensuring that multiple people are trained in each area or curriculum can give you the flexibility you need for continuity of services (and your own sanity).

Consider:

→ Survey paraprofessionals' skills and professional development needs/requests at the beginning of the year. If they are trained in a program, health, mobility, or safety support but need a required yearly refresher, you can get ahead in scheduling it.

→ Ensure that each student has more than one adult that they are scheduled to work with so that they don't become too entrenched in one routine or relationship in case of emergency, absence, or future schedule change.

→ Be mindful of transitions and build strong routines across the team. Students' needs are not always predictable, but if there is some room or time on the other end of a transition to follow through on behavioral support, or if the routines are solid, the team can respond more appropriately.

→ When possible, schedule someone to cover student sensory breaks or "float". This can help the program run more smoothly on a daily basis. They can pick up a last-minute task, clean up an unexpected mess, or follow up with a student who was struggling earlier in the day.

Proactivity is better than reactivity.

→ Talk with related service providers at the beginning of the year or as soon as possible to see which accommodations or support your team needs for training or refreshment. Schedule the providers to pop in and train the appropriate staff during school hours, or ask if they can attend a team meeting if applicable.

→ Make note of which curriculums your district or program uses and which paraeducators are already trained in them. Who is using it and who needs modeling and feedback to be successful?

- Look for training about support for the specific disability categories you serve in your program, and see if you can find resources and background information for your team so that they can build their skills and feel competent and successful in their work.
- Know who can step into an intervention or group during an emergency or absence. This can help you be proactive when a student moves in or someone is out unexpectedly.
- Read through all behavior support plans and health plans. Consider training extra adults in these in case of emergency or absences so that students have continuity of services, no matter the staffing issues.
- Are you able to see and/or hear small groups that are being led by paraeducators?
Being in either sight or sound of a licensed educator is a good rule of thumb for paraeducators, especially during academic instruction. If this is not possible, consider how to occasionally visit the stations or ask if there are other licensed individuals who could walk through to support accountability.
- If groups are scheduled back-to-back in the same space, the materials need to be accessible, but easy to clear away.
- Set up learning spaces or stations so that like-subject groups meet in the same space and can share materials that may be used by multiple groups or teachers without having to transport them.
- Allow paraeducators to have a space to keep their belongings and personalize their space in a way that does not encroach on student learning space (physically OR visually).
- Look around. How student-centered is your room? Students should be able to access their tools easily, not be overstimulated, and be able to practice supported self-advocacy.

→ Be intentional about sorting student materials either by group/subject or by student for ease of access. Make the whole team aware of your organizational system.

Working with Other Educators or Staff Alongside Your Team

Collaborating with General Education

Your involvement with general education will vary depending on your environment (self-contained or inclusion), but you *will* be working with a general education teacher for each student as they are involved with the IEP team. You will need to facilitate the relationship between the other licensed teachers and your team of paraprofessionals.

If your program includes students alongside others for the majority or entirety of their day and provides all push-in services, your paraeducators will likely have many more opportunities to interact with the general education teacher than you will. This is a great opportunity to foster that relationship as the other licensed teacher will be providing supervision of the paraeducator's work. You will need to insert yourself, however, and ensure that you are providing the resources needed so that the student receives the appropriate accommodations and modifications. You will also need to be clear about who is responsible for collecting the data on the student's growth toward their IEP goals. Is the licensed teacher using typical curriculum-based measures, or is the paraeducator taking routine data in a small group or during observations? It is your responsibility to set up these routines or systems so that you have the information you need when making instructional, placement, or IEP decisions and when reporting them to the IEP team.

If your students are primarily included in general education during "specials" or electives, you will need to be involved in the conversations about modifications to allow full participation in activities (also alternative activities that work toward similar skills or the

students' IEP goals.) Look for meaningful ways to include students and help them feel fully a part of their class, and utilize the paraprofessional as a support for the needed modifications. Ensure that the paraprofessional is not simply forcing the student through the motions of the typical activities or “helping” them accomplish the task by completing the task for them. The goal is to increase their skill or inclusion.

Behavior Support

Depending on the format of your school's PBIS (positive behavior interventions and supports) system, your team for behavior support at the tier 2 or tier 3 level could include Administrator or Dean of Students, counselor, psychologist, Tier 3 specialist, district behavior specialist, resource officer, or other classified behavior support staff. You are considered part of the team as it relates to students on your caseload. If your student(s) have a behavior support plan, any adult who interacts with them is obligated to know and follow the plan. Often these interactions and some of the most difficult incidents are outside the classroom, such as in the cafeteria or hallway. These may include a paraeducator alongside another licensed educator (general education teacher, counselor, etc). This is why it is so important to impress upon on your team that the plans for behavior support *must* be followed and data taken with fidelity. All adults interacting with the student or walking in on the issue will know what has been done to support the student and what should be done next. This fidelity also makes situations more predictable for the student, which can lead to increased on-task and safe behavior in the future as their self-regulation or executive functioning skills improve with the practice.

Health and Activities of Daily Living

As they work with students who have more impactful disabilities, your team may need to discuss or problem-solve with other staff (cafeteria, bus drivers, related service providers) about

how to provide services or support. For example, the timing of a functional routine or scheduling a wheelchair bus for a trip or drill is your responsibility as the licensed educator, but the paraeducator may likely be the first point of contact and can independently problem-solve many smaller issues based on previous precedent or routines. Be willing to facilitate or follow up on these conversations, and be sure to communicate with the paraeducator where the boundary of their responsibility ends.

The following are scenarios to help begin to apply these ideas to the field.

Scenarios

1) Sharon is a paraeducator who is new to the job. She is very passionate about how students are included in general education and having them feel included. In the 4th grade classroom where she supports a student during whole-group instruction and independent work, she has a positive relationship with the student and teacher. When you check in with her and the general education teacher, the teacher seems as if she is trying to hint to Sharon to back off a little and give the student room to gain some self-efficacy skills rather than rely on her so much. Sharon does not take the hint and continues to “help” the student constantly, even doing some of the work for them so that it is done “right”.

Questions to consider about the scenario:

→ What skill or knowledge of child development or instructional strategies does Sharon seem to be lacking that you could support which could fix this problem moving forward?

→ How could you foster a conversation about this that empowers the general education teacher to be the lead and give Sharon performance feedback?

→ Knowing Sharon’s passions about her job, how can you connect to these passions to help her make changes positively?

→ What part of Sharon's responsibilities need to be made more clear for her and how can you use this opportunity to build her skills positively?

2) Amanda and Ramone are paraprofessionals who have worked in the same program together for several years. A new student has moved in, and they are both scheduled to work with the student for personal care and mobility needs at different times of the day. At one point there is a hand-off between the two. The two begin to bicker occasionally about how the student is supervised during transitions between classes/subjects. They each start to try to be the one who is there during the whole transition time that they share (showing up early and staying later, respectively). This is causing issues with other parts of the schedule as they are leaving early, or arriving late. It also is causing friction between them, which others in the building are starting to notice.

Questions to consider about the scenario:

→ What needs to be clarified about the schedule or the roles played by each team member?

→ Who is responsible for clarifying each of their roles and what should occur during the transitions?

→ Should anyone else be involved in the discussion? (consider: administrator of record, related service providers such as OT or PT)

→ Are there other ways to soften this relationship, or any approaches that you could take to ensure a positive outcome and the team relationship moving forward?

Suggestions Regarding Collaboration:

Fostering connections and collaboration between your team and other educators is a key piece of your responsibility. The team's positivity and ability to collaborate can have an impact

on attrition, attitudes with students, and the willingness of other staff members to work with your team.

Consider:

→ Schedule a regular check-in with teachers or grade level teams about your team's push-in supports and student needs.

→ Getting feedback from the paraprofessionals about what is working well in their push-in supports, and what they see that needs improvement or problem-solving.

→ Facilitate discussions between teachers, related service providers, and paraeducators so that all have the same situational understanding. This will improve the fidelity of services for students.

→ Become aware of the majority of grade level standards so that you can support the paraeducator in fostering authentic learning and inclusion at each student's level.

→ Having extremely clear boundaries and expectations about responsibilities, and when issues should be directed to you.

→ Clearly define who is responsible for data collection for each student and their goals, whether it is the other licensed educator or paraeducator, and how progress will be tracked.

→ Make sure that all adults who work with the student(s) know the accommodations, supports, or plans that are required when working with them. Perhaps use a shorter form or overview that would be more likely to be read and understood. (See appx. D for a sample *Mainstream Learner Profile* as a model).

Final Thoughts

I hope that this guide has been helpful and instructive. Your work with paraprofessionals can be difficult but also one of the best aspects of the job. The team will likely go through both

tense days and days when you laugh until you cry. My biggest hope is that you are prepared to be intentional in how you plan for, support, and lead your team. This will create a better learning environment for everyone involved, and possibly impact your program in ways you did not even consider.

Section 4 – Appendices and Further Resources

Appendix A - Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Excerpt

300.156 Personnel qualifications.

(a) General. The SEA must establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of this part are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained, including that those personnel have the content knowledge and skills to serve children with disabilities.

(b) Related services personnel and paraprofessionals. The qualifications under paragraph (a) of this section must include qualifications for related services personnel and paraprofessionals that—

- (1) Are 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; and
- (2) Ensure that related services personnel who deliver services in their discipline or profession—

- (i) Meet the requirements of paragraph (b)(1) of this section; and
- (ii) Have not had certification or licensure requirements waived on an emergency, temporary, or provisional basis; and
- (iii) Allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy, in meeting the requirements of this part to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities.

(continues with additional requirements for licensed educators, not relevant to this document).

§1462. Personnel development to improve services and results for children with disabilities

(1)(a) In general,

The Secretary, on a competitive basis, shall award grants to, or enter into contracts or cooperative agreements with, eligible entities to carry out 1 or more of the following objectives:

...

(2) Personnel development In carrying out paragraph (1)(A), the Secretary shall support not less than 1 of the following activities: ...

- (D) Developing and improving programs for paraprofessionals to become special education teachers, related services personnel, and early intervention personnel, including interdisciplinary training to enable the paraprofessionals to improve early intervention, educational, and transitional results for children with disabilities.

Appendix B - Oregon Administrative Rules Regarding Paraeducators
Oregon Department of Education
Rule 581-037-0015

Assignment and Direction and Supervision of Educational Assistants

- (1) The educational assistant shall assist a teacher or Early Childhood Specialist or Supervisor or related service provider only in a supportive capacity. The role of the educational assistant is adaptable to many support tasks, and nothing in these rules should be interpreted as limiting assistants only to the performance of classroom duties. Educational assistant tasks may include but are not limited to:

- (a) Instructional support — Tasks performed by assistants to supplement students' basic instruction by offering students opportunities to practice and apply what they have learned, including social skills, life skills, and transition skills;
- (b) Clerical support — Tasks such as preparing materials, duplicating and operating audiovisual equipment, which are primarily concerned with the physical arrangement of the learning environment; and
- (c) Student control — Duties such as supervision of students in school buildings, buses, and grounds including but not limited to lunch rooms, and playground areas, assisting with fire drills, monitoring students in hallways, etc.
- (d) Personal care;
- (e) Translation or Parent/Family Involvement activities; and
- (f) Media center or computer laboratory support.

- (2) Any educational assistant assigned to instruction-related activities shall work under the supervision of an appropriately licensed teacher (or administrator, Early Childhood Specialist or Supervisor; or related service provider). Supervision means:

- (a) The assigned teacher (or administrator, Early Childhood Specialist or Supervisor; or related service provider) plans the instructional activities that the educational assistant carries out;
- (b) The assigned teacher (or administrator, Early Childhood Specialist or Supervisor; or related service provider) evaluates the achievement of the students with whom the educational assistant is working; and
- (c) The assigned teacher (or administrator, Early Childhood Specialist or Supervisor; or related service provider) provides a supervision plan that includes regular monitoring of the educational assistant's effectiveness and access to assistance and consultation.

- (3) In addition to the supervision requirements under section (2) of this rule, Title I educational assistants must work in close and frequent proximity to the appropriately licensed teacher identified as "highly qualified" as defined by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act.

- (4) A plan of supervision for the educational assistant shall provide for:
- (a) Access to assistance and consultation; and

- (b) Regular monitoring of the educational assistant's performance to determine effectiveness of the assigned tasks and the effect on students and their families

Rule 581-037-0025

Training of Educational Assistants

Districts employing educational assistants in any capacity shall provide or arrange for suitable training to prepare them to perform such functions as they may be assigned

Appendix C - Professional Development Resource list (not exhaustive)

The following table contains links and known opportunities for professional development for paraeducators. These could be a resource to the typical licensed educator who is looking for ways to support professional development in their team which would best connect to their individual assignment and responsibilities. The links and costs listed were as of the writing of this document and may have changed since, so the team leader should research them and find what fits best for their team.

	Type of Resource	Funded or Provided by	Cost	Where
First-Aid, Epi-pen, Glucagon, or other medical trainings	Safety. Required for all employees, or those in contact with specific students	Contact your school or district nurse	Free - ~\$120	Depending on location
Introduction to Augmented Communication	Health and Safety. Virtual Courses and videos on Boardmaker and AAC	Tobii Dynavox	Free with free membership/ Sign up	https://tobiidynavox.talentlms.com/
Restraint and Seclusion Safety Training Programs	Safety. List of Oregon-Approved training programs to support safe environments for dysregulated students. Ensure that your staff are up to date on the program that your district policies adhere to and that their job description requires.	Depends on the district or ESD policy	District or ESD provided or scheduled trainings	https://www.oregon.gov/ode/students-and-family/healthsafety/Documents/approvedtrainingprograms.pdf
Conference on	Yearly Conference, Covering	Western Oregon University	\$40	Virtual or Monmouth, OR

Learning and Instruction for Paraeducators (CLIP)	multiple disciplines and topics			
Discrete Trial and Pivotal Response Training	Training. Virtual or in-person, 1-3 day workshops	STAR Autism Support Network	Free-\$300 (depending on ESD collaboration)	https://starautism.support.com/training
Google Classroom	Training Tool. Customize learning by inserting videos and links or feedback forms specific to the curriculums and policies of your district or program.	Google	Free with Google account	https://edu.google.com/workspace-for-education/classroom/
Helping with Instruction	Training. Multiple virtual training modules on supporting instruction in the classroom	Ohio Partnership for Excellence in Paraprofessional Preparation	Free	https://www.openpp.org/course/helping-with-instruction/
High-Leverage Practices for Paraeducators Program	Training. Online membership and training modules	Council for Exceptional Children	\$40/year	Virtual https://highleveragepractices.org/search?query=%20&f%5B0%5D=i_want_to%3A239&f%5B1%5D=i_want_to%3A239
Oregon Response to Instruction and Intervention conferences and trainings	Conferences and trainings on RTI (response to intervention) systems for reading and	Oregon RTIi	Free	http://www.oregonrti.org/

	behavior, detailed training on reading methods.			
Supports for Autism in the Classroom	Training. Online book	Autism Speaks	Free	https://www.autismspeaks.org/sites/default/files/2018-09/Early%20Childcare%20Providers%20Guide%20to%20Managing%20Challenging%20Behaviors.pdf
Curriculum Associate's Webinars	Curriculum. Webinars on instructional strategies and tools for struggling learners	Curriculum Associates (iReady)	Free	https://www.curriculumassociates.com/resources/webinars
Edmark Overview	Curriculum. Website with visuals for components of the Edmark reading program	The Autism Helper program	Free	https://theautismhelper.com/using-edmark-reading-program/
Handwriting Practice- 3 Strategies for Effective Handwriting	Curriculum. Video course on supporting fine motor and handwriting	Handwriting Without Tears	\$29	https://shopping.lwtears.com/LWTstore/s/product/3-strategies-for-effective-handwriting-practice/01t4V00008hOXGQA2
Reading Mastery, Corrective Reading, Connecting Math Concepts	Curriculum. Virtual curriculum trainings, live or pre-recorded	McGraw-Hill publications	Free	https://www.mheducation.com/pr ek-12/explore/product-trainings.html

Read Naturally Courses	Curriculum. Virtual tutorials for Read Naturally and Read Live curriculums	Read Naturally	Free with login	https://www.readnaturally.com/account/online-courses
Touchmath training	Curriculum. Virtual (or in- person if sponsored by ESD/district)	Touchmath curriculum	\$99	https://www.touchmath.com/tmuniversity/tmteach/

Appendix D - Forms for Use with Paraprofessionals

- D1) Preferences assessment
- D2) Mainstream Learner Profiles
- D3) Rose/Thorn meeting strategy
- D4) Basic data collection sheets
- D5) Substitute notes outline for paraprofessionals

Appendix D1 - Paraprofessional Preferences Survey

This is a brief preference survey to be given to the members of your special education team. It may be most useful at the beginning of the year, or when adding a new team member. This survey can be used to gain background information for planning schedules and the work assignments of specific paraeducators. Team leaders should make it clear to the team that they will use the information to match skills and experience with the needs of students and the program as a whole. It is also an opportunity to gain insight on what professional development your team may need, or how you might support their growth.

Paraprofessional Preferences

Name: _____

What do you see as your strengths in this work?

What areas do you need the most support in to be successful?

Do you work best with (circle all that apply):

Younger students

Older students

Students with functional needs

Students with resource room/academic needs

Students with behavior challenges

What curriculums do you have experience with?

Have you led small groups before?

What are your goals for this school year?

What trainings are you already up to date on?

What trainings do you need to do your job more effectively?

Appendix D2 - Mainstream Learner Profile

While all teachers or staff on a student's team should have access to or have read the IEP, it is a long and technical document which may be difficult to understand. Using a short form to communicate the most necessary information can increase the likelihood of the teacher being involved and informed of their responsibilities. They may also be able to advocate for the student's needs in more informed ways. If every team member knows the student and their needs, then it will positively impact the continuity and fidelity of services.

The following document is an example of a student profile you might use to communicate the basics of a student's individualized programming with team members who work with that student. It is useful for initial communication with classroom teachers, paraprofessionals, and specialists (PE, electives, etc), alike. The document does not legally replace access to the IEP document. However, it can be an introduction to the student's needs for a new teacher or at the start of the year.

--CONFIDENTIAL--
MAINSTREAM LEARNER PROFILE

STUDENT:
Classroom Teacher:

Grade:
Case Manager:

Summary of impact (i.e.; disability, academic needs, behavior/attentional needs, etc.)

Services Required (per IEP team):

Subject:	Amount:	Location:	Description:	Team members involved in the provision of services:
(Ex: Reading)	(Ex: 45 min a day/5 days a week)	(Ex: Gen Ed. classroom)	(Ex: Push in support during independent/small group time.)	(Ex: Instructional Assistant, General education teacher plans/supervises)

Accommodations and Modifications:

Behavior Plan? Yes or No

(If yes, the plan must be reviewed with grade level team & specialists)

Safety Plan? Yes or No

(If yes, the plan must be reviewed with all adults working with the student)

Adapted from a form utilized in Tigard-Tualatin School District, 2021.

Appendix D3 - Rose and Thorn Handout

The following handout is a conversation guide. It may best be used during, or in preparation for team meetings. It ensures that each individual has the opportunity to share issues that need to be addressed and feel heard. It also brings positive focus on what they or others are doing well, and can foster a more positive team environment. Finally, it keeps the conversation on track and brief, especially if paired with a meeting agenda.

Rose and Thorn

In a challenging work environment, there are many opportunities for growth and difficulty, sometimes in the same situation. Try to share in 1-2 sentences, then listen to others with the intent to connect and learn something new.

Rose

What in your work has been 'blooming' and going well?

Thorn

What in your work has been most challenging?

Bud

What in your work is promising, and needs the right nurturing to bloom?



Appendix D4 - Sample Data Collection Sheet

The following sheet is a basic sheet which can be used in most situations and adapted for various student goals or small group tasks. It can be paired with work samples, record scores from assessments, or be used to track students' independent functional skills. If your team is tech-saavy, a spreadsheet software can be used which could be written to calculate percentages and averages for you.

While there are many versions of basic data collection sheets online, a simple, versatile option that works across most settings is beneficial. If all team members are familiar with the format, you have more flexibility when assigning emergency or substitute coverage. It also may foster more fidelity of data on which to base programming decisions.

Data collection

Quarter/Semester: _____

Student: _____

IEP goal:

Curriculum(s):

Date:	Wk. 1	Wk. 2	Wk. 3	Wk. 4	Wk. 5	Wk. 6	Wk. 7	Wk. 8	Wk. 9	Wk. 10	Avg. %
Ex: multiplicati- on facts	8/10 80%	3/5 60%	7/10 70%	4/5 80%	8/10 80%	9/10 90%	6/10 60%	12/ 15 75%	18/ 20 90%	16/ 20 80%	85%
Ex: independe- nt morning routine	+	-	+	+	+	-	-	+	+	+	70%

Notes:

Appendix D5 - Substitute Notes

Similar to the data collection sheet, having a common form for substitute notes and lesson plans can reduce miscommunications. It also ensures that all of the necessary information is included without having to individually mentor paraeducators on the topic. Having a common form also makes it easier for team members to sub into each others' responsibilities when there are unfilled absences or changes to the schedule of support.

Whether you use this form or create one of your own, it is important to include contact information, when and who is involved in the assignment, and what is to be done or covered. Keep it brief so that substitutes have time to read and digest it in the midst of what is likely to be a busy day.

Appendix E - Further Reading

What Every Special Educator Must Know— professional ethics and standards, The Council for Exceptional Children, 2015.

The Paraprofessional's Guide to the Inclusive Classroom, Mary Beth Doyle, 2008.

Supervising Paraeducators in Educational Settings— a team approach, Anna Lou Pickett & Kent Gerlach, 2003.

Paraeducator Handbook, Puget Sound Educational Service District, 2007.

A First-Time Manager's Guide to Team Building, Gary Topchik, 2007.

A Systematic Approach for Supporting Paraeducators in Educational Settings— a guide for teachers; Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke, & Sorensen; in: *Teaching Exceptional Children*, May/June 2009.

Working with Paraprofessionals, Michael Giangreco. In: *Educational Leadership*, October 2003.

Paraeducator Handbook, Puget Sounds Educational Service District, 1999.

The Paraprofessional's Handbook for Effective Support in Inclusive Classrooms, Julie Causton-Theoharis, 2009.

The PAR²A Center - www.paracenter.org

The National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals - www.nrcpara.org

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Chapter 3

This project was written to create a guide in support of licensed special educators who have the legal and ethical responsibility of leading and supervising a team of paraeducators in Oregon. In the span of my career thus far, which has included work as a classified and licensed teacher in special education, I have been on both sides of this working relationship. I have seen the effect of good team leadership, and of novice or inadequate leadership and supervision by licensed teachers. This prompted me to dig into the resources available to support the work. When reviewing the available resources, I found that there was a gap in the literature.

There were very few resources regarding the supervision of paraeducators and the literature professed a lack of preparation for licensed educators, despite legislation requiring it. The resources that existed were either geared for specific states other than Oregon (with differing requirements) or were lengthy and cumbersome for the typical educator to apply. I then pursued the necessary elements for a guide to begin to fill that gap.

Guiding Questions

When gathering the background research for the project, I began with the following questions:

- 1) What are the legal requirements and implications for the licensed special educator in regard to paraeducator supervision and support?
- 2) How can the licensed teacher support the development of the core competencies of a special education paraeducator in their program?
- 3) How might this support and supervision differ in application between the self-contained and mainstreamed environments?

To begin, I delved into the legal requirements under IDEA and the Oregon Administrative Rules. This was used as the baseline for the non-negotiable responsibilities that the rest of the guide was built around. Using bracketing to organize emerging themes, I then gathered research on the responsibilities and competencies of paraeducators in special education. I found texts for teacher educators, policy handbooks from local districts and neighboring states, OARs (Oregon Administrative Rules), and other texts regarding paraeducators. This area yielded the most data, with entire books dedicated to standards for those working in special education. The difficulties with utilizing some of these works were threefold. They were generally lengthy and dry, with little nod to application in local programs. This reduced their accessibility and applicability for the typical educator. They were also written by specific organizations with their goals and aims at the forefront. While these texts were not at odds with the legal requirements, they often prioritized skills or responsibilities that may not match the needs of the typical educator or program. The third issue with these texts was their age. With a couple of exceptions, they were published between one to three decades ago. While much of the information was still valid, the educational environment and how special education services are provided have changed in many ways during that time. This may impact their applicability in the details.

Due to these issues, I employed memoing and experience to record how themes were connected across texts and which were most applicable and appropriate for this guide. This allowed me to glean from the wisdom and tips given. I then summarized the competencies and responsibilities into a shorter, more applicable document that the typical teacher could easily utilize.

As noted in the first chapter, the primary themes which emerged around paraeducator supervision and leadership included: professional development, role differentiation, supervision

and feedback on the work, team leadership (soft skills), communication, and support for the core competencies of the job. Additionally, the application of some themes in the material seemed diversified into the self-contained and the mainstream (inclusion) environments in special education. Part of the guide have been organized into applications in the two main environments in special education so that educators can flip directly to applicable pages and information. There are also sections with topics that are more universal to the field and thus are not delineated by the environment. It is also organized into the primary themes which emerged during the research. Finally, each main topic has a concluding scenario with questions and suggestions or tips for application.

When researching how to best provide a professional development resource to licensed special educators, it became apparent that an engaging format was needed for increased application. While other tools could be useful such as mentoring, role play, class work, or group discussion (Biggs, Gilson, and Carter; 2018; Sobeck et. al., 2019), I encountered the limitations of writing a guide which offers text in isolation. Scenarios based on real-life situations and experiences were included to foster engagement and personal application through a written guide. Despite these considerations and the ability to use this guide in isolation, it would be most beneficial if brought into play as part of a more comprehensive professional development opportunity. This could be through reading or exploration of the topics in a cohort, with a mentor, or with a colleague.

This guide has been written with the typical licensed special educator as the intended audience. A thought partner for applying these concepts to the teacher's specific work environment would increase the applicability of the guide. In this way, the guide could support

teacher-mentors or administrators by informing their leadership of the special education teams in their building.

Limitations

Many of the scenarios or suggestions would be familiar to special educators across the globe. However, the guide's themes and legal applications were memoized and written with special educators and programs in Oregon in mind. While IDEA gives an overview of the requirements nationwide, each state interprets it differently and may have stricter or looser requirements around supervision and professional development. Information from other states or agencies which were tied to specific codes or rules for other states were generally disregarded unless they had a parallel in Oregon's statutes under IDEA's federal requirements. This was to zero in on what would make the guide applicable and appropriate for special educators here in Oregon. That said, educators in other states with similar guidelines, rules, or requirements might find the guide a useful tool. It should be used with caution and a clear understanding of local laws or rules that may differ from those which informed this guide.

Another consideration is that this guide is written specifically for an audience working in a special education department. It has applications, roles, scenarios, and suggestions which are specific to that environment and steer the application of the support specific to that area of education. Other departments may have paraeducator teams who also require supervision and have similar responsibilities, but readers should be cautious when applying the suggestions to that environment. If they choose to peruse this guide for ideas or support, administrators or supervisors must be aware of the job descriptions, local legal requirements, and union protections for the positions they supervise.

The reader should also consider that this guide should be one piece of the training for licensed teachers alongside mentoring for this and other aspects of the job. It is not a magic key to fix or improve a program on its own, but rather a piece of a complex, unique puzzle. Each district or program has its idiosyncrasies, so new training and support should not be implemented in a vacuum. Rather, with mentoring from an experienced teacher, peer discussions, and self-reflection regarding the application, it can be a useful tool.

The scenarios in the guide are fictitious, though based on experiences on both sides of the supervisory relationship in special education teams. The scenarios were intentionally written to represent various environments in which this research might be applicable, but not every section is representative of every environment. Care should be taken not to overreach connections made which would not be applicable in the audience's specific environment.

As for methodology, a qualitative study may have served to give data on the supervisory needs of paraeducators and what a licensed teacher should know. However, it likely would not have been as accessible or simple for the typical educator to independently apply and utilize in their program. Utilization of the Delphi technique of feedback with field experts would ensure that no important aspects of the work were overlooked, and could yield further topics to be covered.

Implications for Future Research

The opportunities for further research in this area seem nearly interminable, and multiply with each new connection made or impact observed. There are many opportunities for research regarding paraeducator professional development in the state and the impact that such a study could have on student success. Additionally, there are a lack of preparation programs or requirements in Oregon for paraeducators, nor solid systems to prepare licensed educators for

this area of the profession. Research could be done on how to best provide training to licensed teachers regarding supervision and what it should entail. Another underrepresented area is the lack of voice and background from paraeducators on how best to supervise their work. There are studies and articles on paraeducator satisfaction and attrition, but very little of this delves into the team relationship or supervision aspect.

In direct connection with the present study, the next steps will be a content validity study to verify the necessity of the included elements, format, and if other cogent aspects of supervision were missed due to researcher bias. Following this, the hope is to have the guide published for use. At that point, a study will need to be conducted to verify its effectiveness. This could perhaps be through qualitatively assessing team member satisfaction, and attrition rates, or through auditing the provision of I.E.P. service minutes and student success pre-and post-intervention.

Conclusion

I committed to this work with the intention of beginning to fill in the gap in the literature and resources around paraeducator supervision in Oregon. For a framework, I chose to do bracketing of themes in the available literature and use them to build the outline and sections of the resource. Each section was then fleshed out with deeper dives into the themes and my personal experiences as a paraeducator and licensed special education teacher. The scenarios were again based on the key factors of each theme and applied to realistic situations to improve applicability and engagement with the content. The result is a brief, informative, applicable handbook for this slice of special education program management. It will hopefully prove useful and enlightening. This work is meant to serve the ultimate goal of improving the outlook of programs, and outcomes for the students they support.

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