

***SPECIAL EDUCATION IN NORTH DAKOTA***

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***Resource Manual:  
The Implementation of Effective  
Paraeducator Practices in  
Educational Settings***

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## **Acknowledgements**

This document was designed and developed by the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction Paraeducator Task Force. The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction gratefully acknowledges the involvement of the members of the Task Force for their assistance in the development of this document.

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Special appreciation is extended to Jan Schimke for her contribution and leadership in the development of appropriate training programs for paraeducators working in North Dakota. Ms. Schimke was one of the original members of the Paraeducator Task Force when she was employed with the Department of Public Instruction. She continued to assist the Department after her retirement in completing final edits to this document.

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## Introduction

### Historical Aspects:

Paraprofessionals have been used to assist certified/licensed educators in educating students in the public schools in North Dakota for over 40 years. This practice became prevalent in the late 1950's when there was a rapid increase in class size in the larger cities in the state. Although students with disabilities were often excluded from attending public school programs, those who were allowed to attend were often provided a paraprofessional to assist with classroom activities. When special education programs were started in some of the schools in North Dakota in the early 1960's, it was a common practice to hire a teacher aide, or non-certified individual, to assist the special education teacher. These programs were usually in self-contained classrooms and often times located in facilities other than school buildings such as churches, community centers, or special buildings rented for the purpose of creating a 'special school'. After the enactment of PL 94-142 in 1975, mandating that public schools educate all students with disabilities, there was a rapid increase in the need for certified special education personnel to serve children with various disabilities. To meet staff shortage needs for teachers, school districts significantly increased the number of non-certified personnel employed to assist certified/licensed staff in delivering instruction. Trends over the years illustrate the historical increase in the use of paraprofessionals in the public schools.

### North Dakota: Paraprofessionals by Year Statewide Totals

Year	Total FTE
1976-77	99.95
1977-78	Not Available
1978-79	120.75
1979-80	Not Available
1980-81	Not Available
1981-82	196.70
1982-83	231.90
1983-84	272.80
1984-85	309.50
1985-86	364.10
1986-87	360.05
1987-88	390.28
1988-89	435.29
1989-90	531.16
1990-91	600.60
1991-92	683.79
1992-93	716.48
1993-94	776.77
1994-95	837.69
1995-96	893.11
1996-97	898.15
1997-98	968.64
1998-99	1,100.41

**Titles** A variety of job titles have been used across the state based on the preferences of the school districts. Examples of job titles currently being used include teacher aide, teacher assistant, instructional assistant, paraprofessional, and paraeducator. Although the titles are used indiscriminately and have changed over the years, the essential duties have remained consistent. These persons are employed to assist certified/licensed special education personnel in the delivery of services to students with disabilities. As practices in the field have evolved from utilizing self-contained classroom models to more inclusive practices involving educating students with disabilities in general education settings, supervisory personnel for the paraeducators has shifted to include additional certified/licensed personnel such as administrators, general education teachers, related service specialists, and adult service providers.

**Training** The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction (NDDPI) has been aware of the need for providing training to paraeducators since the inclusion of the first reference to paraeducators in the North Dakota *Guide I: Laws, Policies, and Regulations for Special Education for Exceptional Children*: in 1984. The requirement consisted of documentation of 6 clock hours of training provided at the local level. To date there has been no state certificate, license, credential, or endorsement for paraeducators. The North Dakota Center for Disabilities located at Minot State University wrote a federal grant in 1992 to design a paraeducator training project. The grant was written in response to the perceived lack of training for paraeducators across the state and the interest expressed by paraeducators in the field. A survey conducted by Minot State University indicated that 96% of practicing paraeducators were interested in receiving pre-service and inservice training. The scope of this project included utilizing curriculum review committees to assist in writing 26 training modules, field testing the modules in selected school districts in the state, and creating a model for delivering the training. Each module was designed to serve as a stand-alone module or to be completed in a sequential manner resulting in more comprehensive training. The modules used a pre-post test format to document successful mastery with options for completing the training through participation in group training sessions or on an individualized basis. The training design included having paraeducators complete sequences of four modules for a four-semester hour undergraduate college course. Completing successive modules for college credit would eventually result in an Associate of Arts degree in Special Education.

**Using Modules** The North Dakota Department of Public Instruction utilized the Minot State University paraeducator training program to provide statewide training to paraeducators. Discretionary grants were awarded to local special education units to access the training for the paraeducators employed in the schools served by the units. Each unit was required to select an adjunct instructor who received training through Minot State University. The adjunct instructors then taught the modules locally and submitted the post-tests to Minot State University to be scored. The state adopted, as a minimum requirement, the completion of the first four modules as required training for all paraeducators. The required modules included: *Roles and Responsibilities of Paraeducators*; *Introduction to Disabilities and Effective Instruction*; *Serving Students with Disabilities in Integrated Settings*; and *Strengthening Behavior*. Minot State University issued a certificate of completion to paraeducators successfully completing these modules.

Although the four modules were designed to meet the requirements for the first of the four semester hour courses, *Sped. 105 Paraeducator Orientation to Special Education*, enrolling for college credit was optional for the paraeducators. Progress in completing the training was tracked at the state level via computer printouts periodically submitted by Minot State University to state special education personnel.

**Legal  
Authority**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) Amendments of 1997, Rules and Regulations make provisions for the use of paraprofessionals and assistants.

“A state may allow paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulations, or written policy, in meeting the requirements of this part to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities under Part B of the Act.” Sect. 300.136(b)(4)(f).

This provision is contained within the context of describing the Personnel Standards provisions of the IDEA. Each state is required to have a Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD) committee which addresses the issues inherent in assuring an adequate supply of qualified special education, general education, and related services personnel, including paraeducators. State education agencies are required to establish and maintain personnel standards to ensure that personnel are appropriately and adequately prepared and trained. Rule language has been added that allows paraeducators who are appropriately trained to assist in the provision of special education.

**Study**

In 1995 the North Dakota CSPD committee began a review process of the status of paraeducator guidelines. In 1996 the CSPD established a special task force to review existing state guidelines and to make recommendations for appropriate changes in the state requirements, process, and procedures for documenting training. In April 1998 the paraeducator task force commissioned a study designed to research existing local school district practices and procedures relative to the utilization of paraeducators. The study was completed by John Hoover, Ed Simanton, and Carole Milner of the Bureau of Educational Services and Applied Research at the University of North Dakota in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The survey was completed by 554 special education teachers, 153 administrators, 572 paraeducators, and 297 general education teachers. The survey was designed to measure the respondents' prior experiences with paraeducators, preferences for changes in state guidelines, and existing practices. The CSPD task force utilized this input in the design of recommendations for changes in *Guide I: Laws, Policies, and Regulations for Special Education for Exceptional Children*. These changes are reflected in the number of hours of required training, the procedures for accessing and documenting the training, and the content of the training. This resource guide reflects the outcome of the task force's recommendations, approval by the CSPD and IDEA Advisory Committees, and review by NDDPI personnel.

## **How Should the Resource Manual Be Used?**

The *Resource Manual: The Implementation of Effective Paraeducator Practices in Educational Settings* document was developed to assist school districts in making decisions about the appropriate use of paraeducators in providing services to all students in the public schools, including those with disabilities. It is designed to delineate the state requirements for training to ensure that adequate support and training is provided to the professionals hired in this capacity. The manual is meant to serve as a resource for general education teachers, special education personnel, related service personnel, administrators, and the paraeducators themselves. Potential uses include:

- a resource to enhance communication among parents, teachers, and paraeducators;
- a reference for requirements established by state and federal rules and regulations;
- a tool to assist school district personnel in developing and adopting local district guidelines for effective paraeducator practices;
- a resource for reviewing district policies and practices, for planning paraeducator staff development activities, and for considering resource allocation; and
- a convenient source in which to locate the training modules with references for additional training content.

## **What Does the Term Paraeducator Mean?**

The term paraeducator is recommended as the title for the teacher assistant utilized in public school classrooms in the state. This title was selected by the CSPD task force as a result of the 1998 study conducted by the University of North Dakota, which showed that a majority of respondents were either utilizing or preferred that title. The term paraeducator is defined as:

“...a school employee whose position entails providing instructional support and who delivers other direct services to students under the supervision of a certified teacher or other licensed personnel. Professionals competent to supervise a paraeducator consist of special education teachers, general education teachers, licensed related service personnel, and administrators. The certified or licensed personnel have the ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation, and evaluation of educational and related service programs and student progress. The certified or licensed personnel coordinate and supervise the paraeducators in their role in helping students achieve the objectives in their individualized education programs (IEP).”

Paraeducators are essential members of the educational teams serving students with disabilities. They provide assistance to a variety of students in the public school programs and other community learning environments. They work anywhere special education services are provided, including general education classrooms, lunchrooms, playgrounds, school buses, vocational work sites, computer labs, and school media centers. They are employed in early childhood, elementary, middle school, secondary school programs, and residential educational facilities. They provide a resource that contributes significantly to the success of individual students, schools, and educational programs.



## **Statement of Beliefs and Vision**

This document, *Resource Manual: The Implementation of Effective Paraeducator Practices in Educational Settings*, is based on the spirit and convictions expressed in the beliefs and vision statements which were developed by the CSPD Paraeducator task force. They are offered as a model for local school districts for use in developing their own beliefs, vision and goals. The vision and beliefs are also offered to encourage other stakeholder groups such as special education administrative units and colleges and universities to have conversations and reach consensus on their commitment to improving the supports provided to paraeducators. The beliefs and vision statements apply to both general and special education teachers, as well as to related service personnel and other support staff professionals. The statements also consider parents to be essential partners in effectively meeting the needs of all students. The term “educational team” refers to the various individuals who are involved in the planning and implementation of individualized education programs (IEPs) and other teams that function within a school to serve students with and without disabilities. An example of a typical educational team includes general and special education teacher(s), related service personnel, paraeducator(s), parents, students and the local building principal or administrator.

### **Beliefs:**

- The value of paraeducators and the complexity of their roles are recognized as important to the success of the school.
- Paraeducators are respected and valued members of the educational team.
- Paraeducators are critical to the social, emotional, academic, and vocational success of students.
- Paraeducators play an active and essential role in their work with students by providing encouragement, support, assistance, and advocacy.
- Communication among paraeducators, certified and licensed personnel, and parents is carefully planned and carried out.
- Paraeducators understand the needs of students and have the specialized training to meet the student’s needs.
- All paraeducators have a professional identity and advocate for their profession by maintaining positive, supportive, cooperative, and professional relationships.
- Teachers, administrators and other members of the educational team enable paraeducators to be effective in their work by providing resources, support, feedback, and assistance.
- Leaders at the state, district, and building level provide the systems-level support and resources to enable paraeducators to be effective in their work.

### **Vision**

North Dakota’s educational systems provide quality paraeducator services, which contribute to the best educational opportunities for students being educated in public schools. This vision will be operationalized when the following goals are achieved.

- Each Local Education Agency (LEA) in North Dakota has adopted and consistently implements effective paraeducator practice standards.

- A plan for providing coordinated, ongoing staff development for paraeducators, and the administrators and teachers, who work with them, has been developed by the agencies employing the educational team. The staff development opportunities provide paraeducators with the knowledge and skills they need to meet the needs of students. Staff development opportunities provide teachers and administrators with the knowledge and skills to effectively supervise and work with paraeducators.
- School improvement efforts offer a variety of options for supporting and preparing paraeducators, including support groups, study teams, and access to statewide and national networks of paraeducators and those concerned with paraeducator issues.
- Preservice opportunities throughout the state are available to individuals interested in becoming paraeducators. During preservice training of teachers and administrators, knowledge and skills on how to effectively work with and supervise paraeducators are provided.
- The role of a paraeducator is valued as a lifetime career. Access to training will be available to those paraeducators who wish to pursue careers in teaching or other professional careers in education.
- Adequate recognition is given to paraeducators to enhance recruitment and ensure maximum retention of paraeducators. Pay and benefits are commensurate with experience and specialized training.
- Paraeducators are actively supported by the teachers, administrators, and other members of the educational team and each other.
- Paraeducators are given time to actively plan and communicate with all individuals involved in the students' educational programs.

## North Dakota State Policies

This section contains recommended guidelines for making paraeducator services more effective. It is intended to facilitate decision-making by various consumer groups. The guidelines may be considered a tool to assist in developing and adopting standards for effective paraeducator practices at the local level. The guidelines reflect current best practices in the state and nation and are designed to assure that the mission of the Department of Public Instruction's responsibilities to all students in North Dakota, including those with disabilities, is enhanced through the successful utilization of paraeducators. **Sentences presented in bold text are the policies, as they appear in North Dakota Guide I: Laws, Policies, and Regulations for Special Education for Exceptional Children.**

### 1.0

**QUALIFICATIONS OF PARAEDUCATORS: Paraeducators must work under the direct supervision of a licensed teacher. Although the licensed teacher may delegate specific tasks to the paraeducator, the legal and ethical responsibility to the student for all services provided or omitted cannot be delegated; it must remain the sole responsibility of the supervising licensed teacher. A minimum of twenty (20) clock hours of inservice instruction must be provided to the paraeducator.**

The paraeducator should be considered an integral member of the school's educational team and of the educational teams for individual students. They should be respected and supported as essential team members responsible for assisting certified, credentialed, and licensed personnel in the delivery of instruction, support, and related services.

### 1.1

**A job description must be developed and maintained on file, with a copy maintained in the special education office, outlining the duties and skills to be performed by the paraeducator.**

The entire educational team participates within clearly defined roles to provide an appropriate educational program for all students. The job description should address critical job duties and limitations evidenced by the following:

#### **Quality Indicators:**

- The job description specifically defines the job expectations and serves as a basis for the paraeducator's evaluation.
- The role of the paraeducator is clearly defined.
- Paraeducators are regularly involved in planning but are not responsible for planning the instructional program for students.
- Paraeducators are not required to assume responsibilities assigned to licensed staff, such as developing IEP goals, creating lesson plans, formally evaluating students, and modifying lesson plans without supervision. Paraeducators should not be assigned to serve as a substitute teacher unless the paraeducator holds the appropriate teacher license. The conditions of employment must specify the circumstances under which a licensed teacher employed as a paraeducator will serve as a substitute teacher.
- Clearly written procedures for routine and emergency tasks for paraeducators and licensed staff members are in place.

**1.2**

Paraeducators must work under the direct supervision of a licensed teacher. The responsibility for students remains with the licensed supervisor. The supervisor may be a general education teacher, administrator, credentialed special education personnel, and/or related service personnel working within the context of the student's Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Provided that the training, supervision, documentation, and planning are appropriate, the following tasks may be delegated to a paraeducator.

- 1.2.1 Assist in the implementation of IEPs developed by the team, and under the direction of the supervising teacher in individual or small group settings.
- 1.2.2 Assist in collecting student assessment and performance data or document student progress toward meeting IEP objectives and reporting to the supervising teacher
- 1.2.3 Perform noninstructional duties such as preparation of materials, scheduling, and space/equipment maintenance and supervise student activities in the resource room or other various educational settings.
- 1.2.4 Assist general education teachers in implementing student adaptations, modifications, and accommodations within the classroom settings.

Paraeducators must receive appropriate supervision to ensure the delivery of effective educational services to students. The school district is responsible for assuring that the supervisory responsibility for paraeducators is being implemented.

**Quality Indicators:**

- Documentation that licensed teachers, related service personnel, and administrators received a minimum of two clock hours of training in the supervision of paraeducators prior to being assigned to direct, support, or supervise a paraeducator.
- Documentation of content of training. Suggested topics include:
  - Interviewing skills
  - Mentoring
  - Communication
  - Problem solving
  - Motivation skills
  - Coordinating skills
  - Delegating skills
  - Feedback and evaluation skills
  - Learning and professional development skills
- The supervisory assignment is in writing and has been clearly communicated to both the supervising teacher and the paraeducator.
- Specific procedures, which outline the structured, systematic management, supervision, and performance evaluations of paraeducators have been established.
- Paraeducators receive similar content training, ideally at the same time, as licensed teachers, related service personnel, and administrators.
- The policy and procedures address providing supervision that supports the professional growth of the paraeducator. These would include opportunities for self-evaluation and input by the paraeducator.

**1.3**

**Orientation for the paraeducator must be conducted within the first five (5) working days in which the paraeducator assumes assigned duties. Documented orientation must include a minimum of five (5) clock hours of training, including the following: expectations of the paraeducator; confidentiality of records and verbal information; introduction to assigned supervisor(s) and work areas; building routines; and reviewing the individual needs of students being served.**

The orientation training must be verified by the certified, credentialed or licensed staff member assigned as the paraeducator's supervisor. Initial training provided should include the following elements:

- Five (5) clock hours of training must be provided by the supervising teacher or building administrator.
- The training must include school policy, rules, and routines in addition to the individualized needs of the students to be served.
- Training must be individualized.
- Training must be completed within five (5) calendar days of assuming responsibilities.

**Quality Indicators:**

- Documentation that the *assigned* supervisor provided the training within the first five working days in which the paraeducator assumed assigned duties.
- Documentation that the training addressed the expectations of the paraeducator, confidentiality of records and verbal information, and introduction to assigned supervisor, administrators, works areas, and building routines.
- Copy of the school's handbook provided to the paraeducator with a review of those components pertinent to the paraeducator's work requirements.
- Documentation that there was a review of the individual student programs including the impact of the disabilities on the student's ability to make acceptable progress within the general education curriculum. The training should address the unique needs of the student(s), expected outcomes, and instructional procedures and monitoring techniques and procedures.

**Orientation Checklist:**

- |       |  |
|-------|--|
| _____ | The supervisory assignment is presented to the paraeducator in writing.  |
| _____ | The paraeducator has been introduced to the principal and other teachers, paraeducators, and support staff.                                    |
| _____ | The paraeducator has been given a tour of the building.  |
| _____ | The paraeducator has been given a copy of the school's policy and procedures manual.   |
| _____ | The paraeducator has been informed of the roles and responsibilities of the supervisor.  |
| _____ | The Paraeducator Training/Inservice Record has been completed and signed by the supervisor and paraeducator (see sample form in Appendix E-2). |

**1.4**

Inservice for the paraeducator must be conducted within one year of employment in which the paraeducator assumes assigned duties. The training must consist of at least an *additional* fifteen (15) clock hours of instruction including three (3) hours in each of the following five topical areas:

**1.4.1** *North Dakota Resource Manual: The Implementation of Effective Paraeducator Practices in Educational Settings*

**1.4.2** *Student Support Concepts*

- a) applicable laws
- b) referral process including BLST and evaluation processes
- c) procedural safeguards
- d) IEP and LRE
- e) paraeducator involvement in the IEP process
- f) service delivery system
- g) preparation checklists for paraeducators
- h) communication and interpersonal relating skills

**1.4.3** *Human Growth and Development and the Impact of Disabilities*

- a) physical development including sensory and motor, cognitive, social and emotional, and communication and language
- b) categories of disabilities
- c) personal care concepts including seizure management, CPR, first aid, universal precautions, basic positioning and transferring, adaptive equipment care and maintenance, and toileting and self-care needs

**1.4.4** *Utilizing Effective Instructional Strategies to Serve Students with Disabilities in Integrated Settings*

- a) adult’s role
- b) task analysis and discrepancy analysis
- c) instructional designs and data collection
- d) teaching strategies, prompting, and fading
- e) providing feedback to the students on task performance
- f) selective attention and motivation
- g) documenting student progress through data collection and anecdotal recording

**1.4.5** *Strengthening Behavior*

- a) definitions
- b) causes and needs
- c) observational strategies
- d) data collection
- e) reinforcement techniques
- f) legal and ethical parameters

**Quality Indicators:**

- Documentation that the paraeducator received the training within one calendar year of assuming assigned duties.
- Documentation that the training content included: *North Dakota Resource Manual: The Implementation of Effective Paraeducator Practices in Educational Settings; Student Support Concepts; Human Growth and Development; Utilizing Effective Instructional Strategies; and Strengthening Behavior.*

**1.5**

Indication of completion of twenty (20) hours of training by the paraeducator must be documented by a letter of verification, or certificate of completion signed by the person providing the training. The letter of verification, or certificate of completion; must be on file in the special education administrative office. (See Samples, Appendix E-1).

**Quality Indicators:**

Acceptable forms of documentation of training consists of:

- Transcripts of college course work in special education;
- Documentation of the completion of paraeducator modules from Minot State University;
- Certificates or Letters of Completion documenting the successful completion of other equivalent modules, courses, or inservice training sessions (CEUs);
- Paraeducator Training/Inservice Record form signed by supervisory personnel or trainer; and
- Documentation of the completion of equivalent training in other states.

**1.6**

A plan for the paraeducator for ongoing training, supervision, support, and consultation must be developed by supervisory personnel. The plan must include a minimum of four (4) clock hours of training per year, and the frequency of supervision and consultation as approved by the building and/or special education administrator.

**Quality Indicators:**

- Documentation that paraeducators are included in district/unit staff development plans and programs.
- Documentation that paraeducators are trained with certified staff whenever possible to provide common understanding and effective teamwork.
- Documentation that training needs, including those of paraeducators, are assessed periodically at the district level or unit level.
- Documentation that outlines staff development needs, including those of paraeducators, on an annual basis.

**1.7**

Administrators provide support for effective paraeducator practices.

- 1.7.1 Administrators are well informed about how appropriate paraeducator services should be implemented and what situations require the assignment of a paraeducator.**
- 1.7.2 Administrators inform the school board of the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators.**
- 1.7.3 Administrators assume an active and substantive role in overseeing the participation of paraeducators in effective instructional programs.**
- 1.7.4 Administrators provide leadership to the teaming process which enables paraeducators to be partners in planning and delivering services.**
- 1.7.5 Administrators create a work schedule that provides time for regular, organized and systematic communication among the paraeducators and other members of the educational team.**
- 1.7.6 Time, funding, and other resources are provided to enable paraeducators to participate in staff development, meetings, and other opportunities for communication.**

**Quality  
Indicators:**

Documentation will be reviewed during state and local monitoring activities and may include:

- interviews with superintendent and principals;
- interviews with paraeducators; and
- review of school district staff development plan.



## ***Roles and Responsibilities of the Paraeducator***

### ***What duties can be delegated to paraeducators?***

Paraeducators are most effective when they work alongside the professional educator in delivering instructional and other direct services. The paraeducator serves as a resource and support to the teacher by providing additional time and attention to individuals and small groups of students. The paraeducator can effectively compliment the licensed personnel's mission by being an additional observer in the instructional setting for monitoring student responsiveness, being alert to individual needs and problems, providing tutorial instruction for individuals and small groups of students, and providing the extra "personal touch" that many students need. Specific duties that may be performed by paraeducators consist of:

- implementing plans as specified by the teacher;
- assisting with the administration, monitoring, and scoring of criterion referenced measures;
- assisting small groups and individuals with lessons, practice exercises, and independent work;
- implementing positive behavior management strategies using the same emphasis and techniques as the teacher;
- collecting data and observing and rewarding student behavior;
- sharing ideas and concerns during conferences; and
- constructing or acquiring instructional materials designed by the supervising teacher.

### ***What responsibilities cannot be delegated to a paraeducator?***

Certain responsibilities are specified by law and require that a licensed professional with appropriate training perform the duties. Teaching duties and responsibilities that fall in this category cannot be delegated to a non-licensed professional. Examples of duties in this category consist of:

- completing standardized assessment measures;
- setting goals for the students and designing lesson plans to attain those goals;
- determining appropriate objectives for class and for individual children;
- planning lessons and activities for entire class and individual students;
- designing behavior management strategies for entire class and for individual children;
- meeting independently with parents and initiating conferences concerning the student's progress; and
- revising student's individualized education program based on progress and observation.

	Duties Performed by Teacher	Duties Performed by Paraeducator
<b>Classroom</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans weekly schedule</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implements plans as specified by the teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Organization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans lessons/activities for entire class and individual children</li> </ul>	
<b>Assessment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assesses individual children</li> <li>Administers tests to entire class</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assists with monitoring, scoring and may give daily or weekly criteria tests for IEP objectives</li> </ul>
<b>Setting Objectives</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Determines appropriate objectives for class and for individual children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implements lessons to meet child's instructional objectives</li> </ul>
<b>Teaching</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaches lessons for entire class, small groups, and individual children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assists small groups and individuals with lessons, practice exercises, and monitors seat work for understanding</li> </ul>
<b>Behavior Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans behavior management strategies for entire class and for individual children</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implements positive behavior management strategies using the same emphasis and techniques as the teacher, and may be responsible for data collection, observing and rewarding student behavior</li> </ul>
<b>Working with Parents</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meets with parents</li> <li>Initiates conferences concerning child's progress</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Meets with parents in conjunction with the teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Lesson Planning</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Plans lessons for students and paraeducators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Carries out teacher's plans for students, and assists teacher when appropriate</li> </ul>
<b>Building Classroom Partnership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Arranges schedule for conferences, shares goals and philosophy with paraeducators, organizes job duties for paraeducators</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Shares ideas and concerns during conferences; carries out duties as directed by teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Revisions to Student Programming</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Revises student program based on progress and observation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Monitors student progress in educational programs and relates findings to supervising teachers</li> </ul>
<b>Instructional Materials</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Designs instructional materials to implement IEP goals and objectives</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Constructs or acquires instructional materials designed by the supervising teacher</li> </ul>
<b>Discipline</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Responsible for following district guidelines for discipline and implementing individualized discipline plans</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disciplines students following district or individualized plans communicated by the supervising teacher</li> </ul>

***Paraeducator's Roles Should Be Clearly Defined***

The paraeducator's role when working alone with students should also be clearly defined. These are guidelines, and if an individual situation varies from these suggestions, the administration should be aware of the situation. Some of the responsibilities paraeducators should and should not be required to perform include the following:

**Paraeducators may:**

1. Be left alone in the classroom, in a planned way, when the supervising teacher is called away.
2. Work without direct supervision with individuals or groups of students on concepts introduced by the supervising teacher.
3. Have specific instructional and management responsibility for students.
4. Be involved in the student staffing, if appropriate, and their duties with the child are substantial.
5. Be used to support integration of students with disabilities in general education classes by tutoring students in general class assignments, giving tests orally, and/or providing other services necessary for the student to participate in the least restrictive environment.
6. Be assigned record keeping tasks relevant to classroom assignment.
7. Aid the teacher in supervising assemblies and group field trips, take individual students on school-related errands, job interviews, recreation, or shopping.

**Paraeducators may not:**

1. Be used as a substitute for certified teachers, unless they have appropriate teacher certification.
2. Teach completely new concepts and skills.
3. Be given primary responsibility for developing programs when working with individual students.
4. Be assigned to attend student staffings in lieu of the supervising teacher.
5. Be given primary responsibility for the integration into general education efforts of one or more students or used to teach general education curriculum content to students without disabilities.
6. Be used to carry out clerical responsibilities usually assigned to other staff members in the building.
7. Take full responsibility for supervising field trips, assemblies, or other non-teaching duties usually assigned to teachers (e.g., extra duty and school clubs).

***What are the essential skills for a paraeducator to develop?***

- Confidentiality (as explained below)
- Basic verbal communication, interpersonal relationship, and teaming skills
- Knowledge of their role as a paraeducator in contrast to that of a licensed teacher or other credentialed or licensed professional
- Knowledge of the policies and procedures of the school district or system in which they work
- Basic knowledge of child development including emotional development and self-esteem
- Basic knowledge of the nature of the disabilities and the impact of the disabilities on the student's ability to succeed in school
- Basic knowledge of instructional procedures
- Basic knowledge of observational and recording skills including data collection
- Basic skills in first aid, CPR, and other emergency procedures
- Basic understanding of behavior strengthening techniques and motivational variables
- Demonstration of consistent use of positive behavior management strategies
- Information specific to individual students including unique learning style, motivational variables, and physical needs

***What is confidentiality?***

As part of the educational team(s) providing services to students with special needs, paraeducators may have access to private information about students and their families. This may include areas such as:

- formal and informal test results;
- records of student behavior in the educational setting;
- student academic progress;
- family relationships; and
- family income or economic status.

This information, along with other records and files, is usually contained in the student's permanent records. This information is gathered from the family, observed in various settings, or secured from other school personnel.

The student and his/her family expect, and are guaranteed by law, that the information will be kept confidential, and made available only to personnel authorized to view it. Parents must be permitted to inspect any, and all, information related to their children without any delay. Parents may have a representative, such as an attorney, inspect the records. School officials, including teachers and administrators who have a legitimate educational interest may also access educational records.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA, 1974) requires that school districts maintain a record of each disclosure of personally identifiable information or a request for disclosure. This requirement does not apply to school officials, parents, students over age 18 regarding their own records, or individuals with written consent from the parents.

**Any information on students requested of a paraeducator should be referred to the supervising teacher.**

Teachers may disclose directory information such as: name, address, telephone number, date, and place of birth. However, the information that is given may or may not be harmful to the student and should be scrutinized for the effect it will have. A general ethical principle held by most professional organizations is that confidentiality can be broken only when there is clear and immediate danger to an individual or society. A paraeducator should not be put in a position to make these types of decisions. If a situation of this type arises, the supervising teacher should be informed.

Teachers are required to report known and suspected incidents of abuse and neglect. North Dakota was one of the first states to enact a child abuse and neglect reporting statute. Criminal penalties for failing to report abuse and neglect can be imposed on educational personnel. If this becomes an issue, a supervising teacher must be notified immediately.

**Confidential**

Examples of confidential information in the student's file include:

- transcripts of grades;
- video and audiotapes of the student;
- medical records (e.g., illnesses, inoculations, hospital treatment plans);
- family information;
- evaluation results;
- reports from juvenile court or social service agencies;
- behavior programming issues (e.g., psychological examinations, discipline reports);
- IEP and case study information; and
- correspondence concerning the student.

**School Responsibility**

The school is responsible for protecting student/family confidential information by:

- naming the person responsible for ensuring confidentiality;
- guaranteeing all persons who collect or use such information are trained in the school district's policies regarding confidentiality;
- keeping, for public inspection, a list of employees who can view these records. People on the list are the only ones authorized to share information contained in the records. As paraeducators, these are the only individuals with whom the information may be discussed;
- permitting those on the list to see only information concerning the student they work with;
- requiring parental consent before using a student's records for any purposes other than those related to providing special education and related services; and
- informing parents when confidential information on their child is no longer needed. This information should be removed from the file, unless it is needed later (e.g., to secure benefits from other agencies).

## Rights

The rights of students and their families must be balanced against specific school interests. A student's right to privacy may need to be surpassed in the form of:

- search and seizure, when there is a reasonable suspicion of illegal behavior;
- disclosure in order to provide appropriate supervision to protect others from violent or aggressive behavior;
- reporting suspected child abuse; and
- creating, maintaining, and releasing educational records.

To avoid infringing on privacy rights, it is imperative that reports, statements and records created by the school are used only as required and permitted by the school district.

As members of an educational team, paraeducators may have special relationships with different teachers (both general and special education), administrators, support staff, parents, students, and other community members. The effectiveness of these relationships depends not only on the quality of work performed, but also on the professional and ethical behavior demonstrated. The professional duties of paraeducators include:

- respecting human and legal rights of students, their families, and others with whom they work;
- maintaining strict confidentiality about all information connected with students and their families;
- following district guidelines and procedures on handling information and situations;
- being a dependable and cooperative team member; and
- seeking information from various sources on best practices in working with students.

The role paraeducators play within the school system does not end when the school day is finished. They are representatives of the school, like administrators and teachers, in the community. Paraeducators will have contacts outside the school environment. In fact, with increased vocational and community placement of students with disabilities, paraeducators have contacts with the community during the school day, as well as after school. Paraeducators can be an effective link between school and community.

### ***What is the paraeducator's Code of Ethics?***

Paraeducators must follow ethical guidelines when working with all students including those with disabilities. Paraeducators will be involved with many other educational personnel, parents, students, administrators and encounter highly sensitive information concerning students and families. It is extremely important that paraeducators develop a code of ethics that outlines acceptable practices for working with students and adhering to the principles of confidentiality. The code should include specific responsibilities as well as a guide for maintaining relationships with students, parents, teachers, school personnel, and community members. A suggested code of ethics for paraeducators consists of:

**Code of Ethics –****Accepting  
Responsibility**

- Engage only in activities for which you are qualified or trained.
- Do not communicate student progress or concerns to parents or others unless directed to do so by the supervising teacher(s).
- Refer concerns about the student by other students, parents, teachers, administrators, and community members to the supervising teacher.
- Recognize that the supervising teacher has the ultimate responsibility for instruction and management of the educational environment.
- Follow directions prescribed by the supervising teacher.
- Ask the supervising teacher for direction and guidance if questions arise.
- Observe and share findings with the supervising personnel concerning the children with whom you work.

**Code of Ethics –****Relationships  
With Students  
And Parents**

- Discuss school problems and confidential matters only with appropriate personnel.
- Refrain from engaging in discriminatory practices based on a student's disability, race, sex, cultural background, religion, or socio-economic status.
- Respect the dignity, privacy, and individuality of all students, their family, and staff members.
- Present yourself as a positive adult role model.
- Learn student's name, interests, and other characteristics as soon as possible.
- Show interest in students and adapt instruction to their unique characteristics as much as possible.

**Code of Ethics –****Relationships with  
Teachers and  
Related Service  
Personnel**

- Recognize the teacher as the supervisor in the setting.
- Establish effective communication and a positive relationship with the teacher.
- Discuss concerns and questions about the teacher or his/her teaching methods with the teacher.
- Readily share information about students and the educational setting with the teacher.
- Follow the school district's grievance procedure when problems cannot be solved.

**Code of Ethics –****Relationships  
With School  
Administrators and  
Other Personnel**

- Accept responsibility for improving your skills in helping students reach their full potential.
- Seek information on activities that will benefit the students.
- Know school policies and procedures and follow the appropriate chain of command.
- Represent the school in a positive manner.
- Be on time and have a regular attendance pattern.
- Be cooperative and honest with all professional staff, administrators, and support staff members.

**Summary of  
Qualities of An  
Effective  
Paraeducator**

1. **Flexible:** Needs to be able to accept and deal with changes. Schedules, student assignments, techniques, routines are all subject to change.
2. **Conscientious:** Follows through with instructions of supervisor and team of professionals. Regards all team members with respect, realizing all are important contributing members to the student's progress.
3. **Open-Minded:** Needs to be a willing learner. Listens, asks questions, follow instructions and asks for clarification from case manager/supervisor. Always directs questions and concerns to the supervisor first, who then routes questions and information.
4. **Sense of Pride in Work** A paraeducator working with students with special needs is an important team member. This work in the field of education and special education has a direct impact on a student's life. As a team member, a paraeducators is a representative of the program, the school, the public school system and the overall field of special education. Therefore, appropriate dress, behavior, conversation and a positive attitude are essential.
5. **Concise:** Keeps accurate records as instructed by supervisor and team, such as program data, contacts from parents and any concerns or observations about a child's health, safety, etc.
6. **Confidential:** Keeps information about a student and their family private and confidential as Public Law 105-17 (IDEA) and FERPA require. Knows what is heard and seen in school stays in school. Remembers information is not to be used as conversation or gossip in the lounge with school staff or in the community.



- |     |                                    |   |
|-----|------------------------------------|---|
| 7.  | <b>Acts, Not Reacts:</b>           | As situations arise with a student or others, remembers to STOP, THINK, and then ACT. Mature attitude and behavior are a must.  |
| 8.  | <b>Responsible:</b>                | Realizes the importance of listening to instructions and training in techniques. Views work with students as important. Therefore, any details, observations or concerns about a student are noted and reported to the supervisor.  |
| 9.  | <b>Enthusiastic:</b>               | Views work as a challenge not as insurmountable obstacles. Utilizes follow-through, creativity and persistence.   |
| 10. | <b>Positive “We Can” Attitude:</b> | Has a strong belief in the importance of work with students. Realizes the negative or positive image one can give to others through comments, gestures, expressions and behaviors. Therefore, chooses to emphasize the positive “We Can!” or “Anything is Possible!” attitude knowing that trying on a daily basis eventually leads to success. |

***Suggestions for  
Paraeducators about  
Supervision***

The opportunities are unlimited; the paraeducator will be involved in many different situations. This will not happen all at once. The principal and the supervising teacher(s) will decide the areas of involvement in the educational program for the paraeducator.

The paraeducator is responsible to the principal and to the supervising professional(s) in the workplace. They are ready to answer questions, supply information, and suggest solutions to problems. The key to the success of this program is the paraeducator’s ability to work together as part of an educational team. A sense of loyalty to the school and a proper regard for professional ethics are essential. Therefore, the paraeducator should become acquainted with the general policies of the school and maintain strict confidence about the children’s records, school problems, and opinions about others in the workplace.

A “good relationship” means that the paraeducator should:

- become a member of the team, in spirit, as well as in name;
- strive for a consistent approach in working with students;
- not allow students to circumvent the supervising teacher’s directions or authority;
- remember that school is designed to help students grow independently as well as to gain knowledge;
- maintain an attitude of encouragement with students;
- remember that each student needs successful experiences and wants to be important to the paraeducator;
- refer to each student by name;
- emphasize the positive whenever correcting a student;
- plan ahead;
- try to foresee and prevent trouble before it happens;
- react maturely in emotional situations; usually when students disagree with the paraeducator, it is not meant personally. They may be demonstrating frustration with their perception of the educational demands and experiences;
- treat all information about students and families in strictest confidence;
- recognize that each student is different and has a unique pace and pattern of growth and development; and
- remember that each student has a need for special attention and caring from adults.

## ***Roles and Responsibilities of Supervisors***

Licensed teachers and administrators working with paraeducators, either inside or outside the classroom, must rely upon their own professional judgement when assigning duties. Although the paraeducator will attend inservice classes to learn skills that will be helpful in the classroom, the orientation training must be provided by the supervising professional. It is important for the supervising professional to discover any special talents the paraeducator may have, to have conferences about the paraeducator's work, and to guide the paraeducator in developing professionally to his/her fullest potential.

With careful planning, the supervising professional and the paraeducator will develop a good working relationship. The paraeducator must be made to feel comfortable and welcome and given the time to discuss the expectations and duties of the position. Gradually, the paraeducator will become an integral part of the school activities and can be a valuable addition to the entire school. Planning between the supervising professional and the paraeducator is critical to promote positive interactions including:

- giving the paraeducator a clear assignment of duties and responsibilities as they are developed;
- clarifying the discipline role and expectations of the paraeducator;
- sharing information that will help in understanding the students' needs;
- assisting the paraeducator to learn to contribute positive and helpful communications;
- assisting the paraeducator to maintain an open-minded and objective outlook;
- assisting the paraeducator to recognize the need to allow students to make errors and approach tasks creatively; and
- assisting the paraeducator to develop a realistic viewpoint about the students.

### ***Planning***

The administrative and programmatic duties of both teachers and paraeducators are linked to achieving the educational goals and objectives established for individual students and an entire class. The most important functions the team must carry out include but are not limited to: assessing the developmental and functioning levels of all students; developing instructional objectives for individual students; designing and implementing curriculum activities to meet the objectives; evaluating the impact of the program on student performance; developing a classroom environment that encourages learning; recordkeeping; material selection and preparation; and ordering supplies and equipment.

For the teacher to determine how best to integrate the paraeducator into the various elements of instruction and classroom management, the teacher needs to learn about the educational background and work experience of the paraeducator, as well as any special interests and talents the paraeducator may have.

How teachers decide on what tasks to assign to paraeducators will depend on the management and instructional styles of individual teachers. Some teachers may include the paraeducator in the planning process. Other teachers may prefer to develop the plan alone and inform the paraeducator either orally or in writing about weekly and daily schedules, the duties the paraeducator will be expected to perform, and the materials required for various activities.

### **Directing and Assigning Tasks**

It is important for a teacher to understand the distinctions in assigning and delegating tasks in order to avoid the pitfalls of practicing inappropriate delegation or assigning inappropriate tasks to the paraeducator.

Directions/assignments may be given orally, in writing, by demonstrating, or a combination of all three techniques. The key to giving effective directions is to make sure that the paraeducator comprehends what is expected of her or him. Therefore, the teacher must take care to use clear terms and to determine whether or not the paraeducator understands what is expected. This may be accomplished by asking the paraeducator to model the skills while the teacher observes, and encouraging the paraeducator to ask questions and share concerns about the nature of the assignment.

### **Questions Teachers Need to Ask and Answer About Directing and Assigning Tasks**

Do I know what functions I expect the paraeducator to perform in the classroom?

When I assign a task to the paraeducator do I describe:

- ✓ What is to be done?
- ✓ Why does it need to be done?
- ✓ What materials will be needed?
- ✓ Who will be doing the job (the teacher, the paraeducator or both the teacher and the paraeducator)?
- ✓ How do I want it to be done?
- ✓ Where will the task be performed?
- ✓ How will student performance be monitored and assessed?

To carry out their assigned duties effectively **paraeducators will need to know:**

1. **WHY** is it necessary to perform this particular task?
2. **WHAT** is needed to do the job (equipment, material)?
3. **WHO** will be doing the job (the paraeducator, the teacher, or both the teacher and paraeducator)?
4. **WHERE** the task will be performed?
5. **WHEN** will the task begin and end?
6. **HOW** will the task be performed (teaching methods, reinforcers, and other techniques)?
7. **HOW** the progress of the students will be monitored and assessed?
8. **HOW** the performance of the paraeducator will be monitored?

### **Delegating**

Sometimes teachers will find it beneficial to delegate tasks. Teachers have the overall responsibility for getting the teaching/learning job accomplished successfully. It is also true that teachers may require different levels of assistance to ensure that educational goals and objectives for students are achieved. Data about student functioning levels and performance must be gathered and assessed, records maintained, and necessary supplies and equipment must be available. Delegation means giving another person the responsibility for completing a task and using his/her own judgement as to whether the task has been performed properly. The delegator is still responsible for the administration, oversight, and conduct of the task.

**Questions Teachers  
Might Ask and  
Answer About  
Delegating Tasks**

- Have I determined that the paraeducator is ready to take on the responsibility?
- Am I prepared to give the paraeducator the necessary authority to perform the task?
- Have I determined how I will monitor the performance of the paraeducator?
- Do I avoid inappropriate delegation?

It is critical that a decision to delegate a responsibility be made consciously and planned for carefully. Otherwise inappropriate delegation is likely to occur. Both are common problems in the classroom and often lead to paraeducator or other support personnel performing tasks that are unfair to them and to the students. An example of an inappropriate assignment is asking a paraeducator to deal with a difficult student almost exclusively so the teacher can spend his/her time with students who can “really learn and benefit from the teacher’s knowledge and skills.” Inappropriate delegation happens when a teacher does not adequately explain what is expected of the paraeducator and the paraeducator carves out his/her own place in the classroom by making decisions about what to do and how to do it.

Some teachers may not feel comfortable delegating because they really don’t understand how to determine what to delegate, or the benefits of delegating. In addition, as noted previously, teachers may have a variety of reasons for real concerns about delegating any part of the instructional process. These blocks can and should be overcome because effective, appropriate delegation can assure:

- that the paraeducator’s existing skills will be used well;
- that motivation will be improved;
- that teachers will have more time for evaluating student needs, planning programs and assessing the results of the instruction on student performance; and
- that the teacher’s time will be used more efficiently for the benefit of students.

**Guidelines for  
Utilizing  
Paraeducators**

- The paraeducator’s role is not to reduce the professional’s workload. If the supervisor and paraeducator are working well together and the paraeducator is making a positive contribution to the routines, the instructional benefit provided by the licensed teacher can be extended to more students and made more salient for all of the students.
- Supervising professionals should make suggestions of the specific content of the training programs for paraeducators to the person(s) responsible for providing inservice.
- Paraeducators should not be given confidential information unless it is accompanied with instruction as to how it is to be used and the legal requirements for maintaining confidentiality.
- Paraeducators should not be required to mark or score any papers that require a qualitative judgement; objective tests, with a “key” provided by the teacher, may be scored by paraeducators.

- Supervising professionals should be involved in the interviewing and selection process when hiring paraeducators.
- In most cases, paraeducators will be assigned to one supervising professional. In some instances, notably in secondary schools, a teacher may not have the opportunity to work closely with one paraeducator assigned to his/her own room. In a few cases, a department may share a paraeducator who frequently works outside of the classroom.

***Qualities of A Good Paraeducator as Observed by the Supervisor***

- likes all students;
- is interested in helping to provide for individual needs;
- listens to students, supports, and reassures them; and
- works closely with the supervising professional in learning about each student's interests, abilities, and special needs.

As students tend to identify with adults in their environment, the paraeducator must remember that he/she is a model. Students will imitate health habits, posture, grooming, facial expressions, mannerisms, and verbal speech patterns.

A paraeducator provides an extra pair of hands and legs, an extra pair of eyes and ears; when viewed as a member of the educational team, the paraeducator can be one of the most valuable resources in the school.

***Summary of Suggestions to the Supervising Teacher***

The responsibilities of the supervising teacher have evolved and changed to include the following:

- The teacher needs to develop strategies necessary to create the integration of paraeducators into the educational team.
- The implementation of the goals by the teacher, and a plan to achieve these goals in conjunction with the paraeducator will enable the team to motivate student development and creativity.
- Teachers need to familiarize themselves with the paraeducators educational background and experience prior to directing, assigning and delegating tasks.
- When directing, assigning, and delegating responsibility, it is essential that the team members understand the goals of the task and are comfortable implementing the goals.

## **Job Performance Evaluations**

### **Ensuring Paraeducator Involvement in the Evaluation Process**

Evaluation of a paraeducator's job performance is an important process. If approached in a professional manner, it provides information upon which the supervisor can make decisions about effective utilization of the paraeducator within the educational setting. It provides the supervisor an opportunity to utilize the observations made of the paraeducator for suggesting professional development activities. The goal is to utilize formal evaluation results as baseline data that paraeducators can use in designing their own professional growth plans. The evaluation process also allows the supervisor to give the paraeducator additional feedback, in summary form, about the strengths and needs observed incidentally during the course of the year.

The supervisor should provide written feedback of observations of the paraeducator's interactions with students and other adults. Remember to point out the positive things that are observed. In order to shape the behavior of another adult, it is essential to point out to him/her what it is that he/she is "doing right." He/she will then continue to refine those skills in the future. Critical antecedent and consequent events that you may want to observe can be found on the *Coaching Feedback* form included in Appendix D-7).

Observe the paraeducator on a regular basis several times a week. Use incidental observations so that the paraeducator equates the observations as "coaching" or "peer mentoring" strategies rather than just supervisory or evaluative in nature. Utilizing the feed back provided via incidental observations gathered on a weekly basis will allow the supervisor to evaluate the paraeducator without utilizing planned observations which are often stressful for adults.

Provide verbal feedback to the paraeducator. Express appreciation and convey to the paraeducator that his/her contributions are valued. Modeling praise of other adults provides an excellent role model for the students as well. Use descriptive statements about the specific behaviors or activities when praising the paraeducator. Examples include:

- "Barb, you did such a nice job presenting those cue cards. Your pacing was quick and variable, which really made Sam pay attention."
- "Barb, you were so prepared for that lesson. Not a minute was wasted on getting materials, finding the worksheets, or referring to the lesson plans."

When it is necessary to correct the paraeducator or provide feedback that is not entirely positive in nature, be sure to point out the positive aspects of the interaction or activity that was observed. The correction should be specific to the behavior or activity of the paraeducator and not viewed as a personal criticism. Examples include:

- "Barb, I know that you were trying to help Sam by pointing out that he had made an error, but I think he really viewed your comment as a negative statement about his abilities. In the future, try to use a phrase such as "Sam, you are doing such a good job on these math problems but let's take a look at this one."

- “Barb, you are so conscientious about supervising the students. I can see that you are trying to be helpful, but we have to remember to allow the students to try parts of the activity on their own; otherwise we will not be able to see progress as they develop the skill.”

Provide regular opportunities to sit down and plan with the paraeducator. Include paraeducators in the design of lesson plans and plans for individual students. It is important that paraeducators are involved in the decision making relative to expectations that will be placed on them. It is much easier to supervise an adult when the expectations are understood and there is mutual agreement about the appropriateness of the expectation. Suggested planning sessions should be held at least weekly.

### **Why Evaluate?**

There are several reasons for evaluating the performance of paraeducators. Although the priorities established by school districts vary, the reasons for formal evaluations fall into the categories listed below:

- to identify the individual and collective training needs of paraeducators for the purpose of planning staff development activities to enhance the quality of the educational programs;
- to modify the work objectives and behavior patterns of the paraeducators for the purpose of improving job performance;
- to communicate expectations of the school, the teachers, supervisors, and administrators, to the paraeducator;
- to assess the quality of the performance of the paraeducator for the purposes of making decisions about retention, promotion, and pay;
- to assist the paraeducators in designing professional development plans; and
- to review progress made over time by the paraeducator in accomplishing professional development outcomes.

Obviously the purposes of the evaluation need to be established prior to the development and implementation of the means for evaluating paraeducators. The instrumentation form, including the criteria, the response system, and the procedures, should be consistent with the local school district.

### **What are the Conditions of the Evaluation?**

The paraeducators to be evaluated, the supervisors, and those who receive the evaluation results must be aware of the conditions of personnel evaluations. The conditions become the reference from which evaluation procedures are designed, implemented, and judged by participants. The accepted conditions should be documented and available to all concerned either in the evaluation instrument or in the policy statements that support the evaluation procedures. Listed below are ten commonly accepted principles of personnel evaluation for educators.

1. Personnel evaluation policies, procedures, criteria and instruments should be developed for the particular school setting in the interest of relevance to the expectations and circumstances unique to that setting.



2. All personnel involved – evaluators, paraeducators and the recipients of the evaluations- should be informed about the evaluation system, including the purposes, the conditions, the instrumentation, the procedures, the respective roles of those involved and the uses of the findings prior to the implementation of the evaluation.
3. Evaluation procedures and results are enhanced when those being evaluated are actively involved in the process, therefore, pre-evaluation and post-evaluation conferences are desirable to ensure that paraeducators are aware of expectations, judgments thereof, and the behavior changes desired by the evaluators.
4. Evaluations should be made on numerous occasions over an extended period of time, with each observation for an appropriate amount of time.
5. Judgments, ratings and recommendations should be made in a manner to minimize emotions and insecurities of both the paraeducator and the evaluators. Those being evaluated should be afforded the opportunity to explain the rationale for those behaviors observed and judged.
6. The evaluator should provide specific suggestions for improvement and assistance to the paraeducator in cases where remediation is deemed necessary.
7. The better the evaluation process, the more likely it is to ensure civil due process, e.g., to protect persons from arbitrary, capricious or unreasonable procedures; thus evaluations should:
  - be achieved in a nondiscriminatory manner;
  - incorporate policies and procedures duly promulgated, known to all affected, and demonstrably relevant to the position being evaluated;
  - provide procedures for a hearing or review by an impartial group;
  - provide an opportunity for appeal; and
  - document and make available all observations to the person being evaluated.

***What should be the Instrumentation of the Evaluation?***

The instrument used in the evaluation is usually comprised of three parts: the criteria to be evaluated; the response system to be completed by the evaluator, and the supporting information requested in the form of concerns, suggestions for improvement, strengths, etc. The criteria, in whatever form, become the expectations of the paraeducator and thus are the most important part of the evaluation process. Thus, local schools are encouraged to develop their own criteria references and response systems in the interest of ensuring relevance to the job.

The following section consists of three parts: the form, the criteria and the response system of the evaluation instrument, complemented by a brief discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each.

**The Form** The *form* of the instrumentation is generally a checklist, a narrative, a job target, or some combination thereof. The checklist approach is the most common. It is a listing of the criteria deemed relevant for the position being evaluated on which the evaluator rates the performance of the paraeducator for each item.

The narrative format, a non-scaled response method, is sometimes called the “blank sheet of paper” approach, since the evaluator determines the concerns, strengths, and recommendations based upon immediate observations of the paraeducator’s performance.

The job target, or performance-oriented method, is a three-step approach. Step one is initiated by a conference in which the evaluator and paraeducator review the job responsibilities, identify specific goals, develop means by which to judge the degree to which they are achieved and establish dates for observation. Step two is achieved through periodic meetings and observations to ascertain progress and problems in achieving targeted performances. In step three, the evaluator and the paraeducator confer to assess the extent to which the paraeducator has achieved targeted performances.

A combination of several methods of evaluation is perhaps the most suitable approach for evaluating special education paraeducators. In applying this approach the instrument could include a checklist that presents the minimal conditions necessary for satisfactory performance, and a modified performance-oriented approach in which the evaluator and/or the paraeducator identify target areas for improvement, and a section in which the evaluator identifies the major strengths of the paraeducator for reinforcement purposes.

**The Criteria** The *criteria* or job-related responsibilities and behaviors to be observed and judged are the most important ingredients in the evaluation process. Certainly, those responsible for choosing or developing procedures for evaluating paraeducators will want to have input about the choice of items. A listing of items commonly included in evaluating special education paraeducators is given in the samples in Appendix D.

A review of the samples suggests the importance of selecting only those criteria references that are relevant and important to the performance of paraeducators. Additionally, those who select items should be concerned about achieving a reasonable balance among personal characteristics, classroom management skills, instructional skills, attending behaviors, and professional growth in order to avoid unintended weightings.

**The Response System** The *response system* format, though one of the least important facets in the evaluation process, remains significant since the person being evaluated may be number, letter, or scale conscious. It is for this reason that evaluators are urged to consider the advantages of verbal, non-scaled response systems. Listed below are response systems frequently used in personnel evaluations.

1. Numerical or letter oriented scales in which the evaluator rates items on a scale of A through F (with A being high) or 1 through 5 (or more).
2. Verbal oriented in which the evaluator rates items as “superior,” “adequate,” “needs improvement” or “excellent,” “outstanding,” “satisfactory” or “yes” and “no,” etc.
3. Paraeducators are made aware of who is evaluating them for what responsibilities in order that they can fulfill expectations adequately. Though the decision as to who should evaluate paraeducators will depend on particular school circumstances and may involve multiple evaluators, the immediate supervisor of the paraeducator should actively participate in the process.
4. Regardless of the form of the instrument by which paraeducators are evaluated – the checklist, the narrative, the target format, or some combination – the determination of criteria or behaviors to be observed is the single most important facet of the evaluation process since it communicates the expectations to be performed and judged.
5. Even though checklist type evaluations are an efficient means to communicate expectations and judgments about the achievement thereof, the necessity that evaluators identify concerns, complemented by specific recommendations for the paraeducator’s improvement, will increase significantly the likelihood of the paraeducator’s improved on-the-job performance.
6. The procedures, including instrumentation, by which the evaluation of paraeducators is to be accomplished should be documented and explained to them prior to their application, in the interests of instructional improvement and program quality.

The response system should be aligned with the criteria to be evaluated. Again, it is desirable to use a combination of evaluation instruments. Finally, if the purpose of the evaluation is the improvement of the performance of the paraeducator, evaluators are advised to suggest areas in need of improvement and to list the specific means by which improvement is evidenced.

### ***Completing the Process***

The evaluation process entails more than the establishment of purposes, conditions, evaluators and instrumentation discussed previously. Decisions need to be made, documented and disseminated as to the specific procedures by which the evaluation of special education paraeducators is to be achieved. This information should be detailed in supporting policy statements, or in the instruments itself, and made available to all concerned – the evaluators, the paraeducators, and those who receive the results of the evaluation. Among the items to be considered are:

- the dates and frequency of evaluations;
- conferencing procedures;
- notices to paraeducators regarding forthcoming evaluations;
- the distribution of completed evaluations; and
- review and appeal procedures.

**Summary:**  
**Job Performance**  
**Evaluations**

The evaluation of special education paraeducators can be a most effective supervisory and administrative tool to enhance the quality of program and instructional performance, if implemented in the spirit of the guiding principles that follow.

1. All involved in the evaluation process, particularly the paraeducators, are apprised of the purposes, the conditions, the instrumentation and the procedures of the evaluation.
2. Evaluations should always involve a two-way communication process.
3. Personnel evaluation procedures are beneficial when:
  - they are developed for a particular school setting;
  - the paraeducators are involved extensively in the process through pre- and post-evaluation conferences;
  - the paraeducators are assured an opportunity to receive and react to specific means by which their performance should be improved;
  - the paraeducators are assured due process with means established for review and appeal; and
  - these conditions are documented and disseminated in policy statements.