



# *PARA***PROS**

## **Make The Difference!**

### **Guidelines for using paraprofessionals to support inclusive practices**

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## INTRODUCTION

This guidebook is designed to outline how paraprofessionals support inclusive practices in schools. Paraprofessionals have a significant impact on student performance; they are integral members of instructional teams. As such, they need effective professional learning opportunities and on-going support in order to be of maximum benefit to both students with and students without identified disabilities.

Often, paraprofessionals are underutilized in schools and, therefore, are seen as non-essential members of instructional teams. However, with appropriate training and adequate support, paraprofessionals provide a very essential service and often are the difference between some students with disabilities being successful in general education settings and others failing to make progress.

The purpose of this guidebook is to identify the role paraprofessionals play in implementing effective inclusive practices and the types of tasks they may perform in order to ensure improved student outcomes. It also will outline the responsibilities school site leaders and teachers have in ensuring that paraprofessionals are employed in meaningful tasks and are respected for those tasks. Three important questions will be answered:

*1. What is the role of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings?*

*2. What is the responsibility of school site leaders, classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in ensuring paraprofessionals are utilized in effective ways?*

*3. What needs to be in place so that paraprofessionals are able to perform their duties in effective ways resulting in improved student outcomes?*

NOTE: Specific procedures, models and approaches to inclusive practices referred to in this guidebook are referenced in other documents prepared by the Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant (LASPDG). Please refer to the *Louisiana Co-teaching Guidelines* and the *10 Steps to Implementing Effective Inclusive Practices – A Guide for School Site Leaders*. Both documents are located on the LASPDG's website - [www.laspdg.org](http://www.laspdg.org).

# ***Roles of Paraprofessionals***

## *1. What is the role of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings?*

The paraprofessional's job is to support and assist students within the classroom or other educational settings under the guidance of a classroom teacher. Relative to inclusive practices, the role of the paraprofessional is to support and assist students with identified disabilities in general education settings so that all of their support needs are met in the general education class. In this role, they are an integral part of the core instructional team.

While an inclusive practices paraprofessional works in the general education classroom under the direct supervision of a general education teacher, s/he also must maintain on-going communication with the special education teacher of the students with identified disabilities assigned to general education classes. The special education teacher will provide important information regarding specific students relative to learning styles, deficit areas, instructional support needs and behavior support needs. This information is critical if the paraprofessional's support is to be effective. Day-to-day, class-to-class direct supervision, however, will be provided by the general education classroom teacher since this is the teacher under whom the paraprofessional will be working.

### **Benefits of a Paraprofessional**

Inclusive practices paraprofessionals bring an added dimension of support to the general education classroom. Their presence benefits both the students as well as the general education teacher. By capitalizing on their skills and talents, an enhanced instructional environment is provided. Paraprofessionals bring a myriad of benefits to the general education classroom environment including the following:

- ∂ Paraprofessionals function as an extension of the classroom teacher, thereby, increasing the amount of support that is provided to students.
- ∂ Paraprofessionals offer different points of view or different perspectives that will enhance the delivery of lessons to diverse groups of learners.
- ∂ Paraprofessionals facilitate a teacher's instructional delivery by re-teaching, re-enforcing, re-clarifying, modeling, demonstrating and guiding.
- ∂ Paraprofessionals facilitate a teacher's behavior management system by reinforcing students, collecting behavior data and implementing Behavior Intervention Plans.
- ∂ Paraprofessionals serve as a stabilizing force, especially in schools with high teacher turnover, because paraprofessionals often remain in the same school for longer periods of time and have a historical perspective of the school population.

## 'Incidental' Benefits to All Students

Inclusive Practices paraprofessionals provide support to all students in a class, those with disabilities and those without. If the paraprofessional's position is paid for with IDEA (federal) funds, then the primary beneficiary should be students with identified disabilities. However, students without disabilities may receive 'incidental' benefit from a paraprofessional assigned to a general education class even though s/he was assigned because of the supports needed by students identified with disabilities. In this way, **all** students in a class benefit from the assignment of a paraprofessional to a general education class.

## Role Determined by Support Needs

The role of the paraprofessional is determined by the support needs of students whether they are academic and/or behavior needs. Paraprofessionals may work sometimes with one student, a small group of students, or even a whole class (under the direction of the classroom teacher). They support and assist students within the classroom based on a prescribed instructional program. For students with identified disabilities, input from the special education teacher into the student's prescribed instructional program via an Individualized Education Program (IEP) is required.

The reason an inclusive practices paraprofessional is assigned to a general education class is because of the support needs of students with identified disabilities. In other words, there are students in the class for whom the general education teacher needs an additional adult to support the basic instructional program so the students will be successful. If there are no students who need additional support, i.e., the general education teacher is able to meet all of their support needs, then a paraprofessional would not need to be assigned to that class.

## Categories of Support

When the types of tasks a paraprofessional may perform in a general education class are analyzed, they fall into two basic categories – *General School/Classroom Support* and *Direct Instructional Support* (academic or behavior). Some of these tasks provide direct support to the general education teacher so that s/he may perform their duties more effectively and efficiently and some of these tasks provide direct support to students. The most effective supports are those to students and those that relate more to direct instructional supports than general school/classroom supports.

## General School/Classroom Supports

General school/classroom supports assist with everyday, routine school/classroom activities. They are essential tasks that apply to a wide variety of situations and are often considered 'environmental' supports. Usually, these tasks are more supplemental to the basic instructional program than explicitly related to direct instruction. But, this type of support helps enable maximum student learning. For example, collecting lunch money, taking attendance or escorting a student to the restroom may not be directly related to whatever lesson the teacher is delivering, but these things support the overall classroom environment and make the delivery of the lesson flow more smoothly. By performing these general, routine tasks, the paraprofessional ensures the classroom teacher has more time for direct, explicit teaching.

## Direct Instructional Supports

Direct instructional support is another way paraprofessionals provide support. Direct instructional support, with either academics or behavior, interfaces with the actual lesson being delivered by the teacher. The purpose of instructional support tasks is to help ensure that students are focused on the lesson, fully engaged in the learning process, and mastering critical skills. This type of support is directly related to curriculum implementation and has a direct impact on student learning; it affects what and how students learn. Instructional supports are delivered under the direction and guidance of a classroom teacher. They are an extension of whatever instruction the teacher is delivering.

While both categories of support are essential, inclusive practices paraprofessionals should emphasize those tasks related to direct instructional support. By focusing on instructional activities, paraprofessionals are in a position to drastically affect student learning. Performing these types of tasks increases the likelihood of students with identified disabilities mastering critical skills and improving performance outcomes. In this way, utilization of a paraprofessional in a general education classroom is maximized.

Below is a chart that provides examples of each category of support:

General School/Class Routine Supports*	Direct Instructional Supports*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∂ Assisting with student hygiene</li> <li>∂ Escorting students to various settings in the school</li> <li>∂ Providing meal assistance</li> <li>∂ Dispensing medication/performing non-complex health procedures</li> <li>∂ Maintaining the classroom setting (e.g., straightening areas, getting out/putting away materials, using a bleach solution to clean manipulatives, etc.)</li> <li>∂ Physically supporting students (e.g., lifting students, setting up work areas, helping students use mobility devices)</li> <li>∂ Checking folders/backpacks</li> <li>∂ Copying/clerical work</li> <li>∂ Doing bus, cafeteria duty</li> </ul> <p><i>* Please note: The appropriateness of some duties may be determined by district/school administration in accordance with district/school policies or in accordance with specific bargaining contractual agreements.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>∂ Adapting instructional materials/activities</li> <li>∂ Tutoring/ providing academic feedback</li> <li>∂ Facilitating lessons</li> <li>∂ Coaching struggling learners</li> <li>∂ Re-reading, re-clarifying, repeating directions</li> <li>∂ Implementing behavior management strategies and delivering reinforcements</li> <li>∂ Facilitating positive peer play, positive social interactions</li> <li>∂ Collaborating with teachers (general or special) on strategies for specific students</li> <li>∂ Taking notes for students</li> <li>∂ Assisting students with using assistive technology during lessons</li> <li>∂ Collecting instructional (academic or behavior) data</li> <li>∂ Shadowing students while they engage in independent activities</li> <li>∂ Grading papers and checking homework</li> </ul>

## ***Utilization of Paraprofessionals***

*2. What is the responsibility of school site leaders, classroom teachers and paraprofessionals in ensuring paraprofessionals are utilized in effective ways?*

In order for paraprofessionals to be effective, it is imperative that school site leaders validate the importance of the paraprofessional's position and include them in decisions regarding instructional delivery. School site leaders set the tone for their schools and that tone must state **everyone** is important and valued in the school – children and adults. School site leaders must ensure paraprofessionals receive appropriate training with clearly articulated job expectations. In addition, school site leaders must ensure that all teachers who will work with paraprofessionals understand how to effectively use paraprofessionals in their classrooms to support the daily instructional program. It is unfair to hold paraprofessionals accountable for high expectations if the school site leader and the classroom teacher have not outlined those expectations to the paraprofessional and/or have not supported the paraprofessional in meeting those expectations.

Classroom teachers, both general and special, also have specific responsibilities to ensure the skills of paraprofessionals are maximally utilized. If paraprofessionals are not effective in classrooms, then classroom teachers need to determine if they (the teachers) have clearly articulated what is expected of the paraprofessional and if they have provided job-embedded professional development. Every teacher may have a different approach to classroom routines, instructional strategies and behavior strategies. In order to effectively benefit from a paraprofessional, a teacher must communicate those things.

## School Site Leader's Responsibilities

In general, **school site leaders** have these responsibilities to ensure paraprofessionals are effectively utilized in inclusive settings.

- ∂ School site leaders must embrace the philosophy of 'Inclusion' and articulate support through words and actions.
- ∂ School site leaders must be willing to change what is not working in order to improve outcomes for all students. Research has shown that schools already involved in educational reforms do a more effective job of implementing inclusive practices.
- ∂ School site leaders must ensure students with identified disabilities are assigned to general education classes based on the identification of their academic, behavior and classroom support needs. S/he must ensure support staff (i.e., special education teachers, paraprofessionals) are assigned to students based on those support needs. Assigning staff based on student support needs will ensure more effective use of both special education teachers and paraprofessionals.
- ∂ School site leaders must ensure current job descriptions are in place for all positions and all staff understand each other's responsibilities.
- ∂ School site leaders must be familiar with the Collaborative Teaching Support Models (i.e., Co-teaching, Consultant, Paraprofessional) and familiar with the co-teaching approaches.
- ∂ School site leaders must hold **everyone** accountable for student progress.
- ∂ School site leaders must maintain an awareness of the 'pulse' of the school so s/he will know what is working well and what is not.
- ∂ School site leaders have a responsibility to ensure that effective and on-going professional development is provided to all staff, including paraprofessionals.
- ∂ School site leaders must commit to providing adequate planning time so that teachers and paraprofessionals are able to plan effective lessons.



## General Education Teacher's Responsibilities

In general, **general education teachers** have these responsibilities in order to ensure that paraprofessionals are effectively utilized in inclusive settings.

- ∂ General education teachers must take time to learn the paraprofessional's strengths and skill areas in order to utilize them effectively.
- ∂ General education teachers must maintain on-going communication with the paraprofessional so that they learn to respect each other.
- ∂ General education teachers must clearly outline specific expectations of the paraprofessional relative to classroom routines, instructional strategies and behavior management.
- ∂ General education teachers must include the paraprofessional in lesson planning. The paraprofessional often brings a different perspective that may make the lesson stronger.
- ∂ General education teachers must provide constructive feedback to the paraprofessional in order to help improve the paraprofessional's skills.
- ∂ General education teachers must be willing to listen to constructive feedback from the paraprofessional.
- ∂ General education teachers must ensure the paraprofessional has an appropriate work space area if s/he is assigned to work with one student or a small group.

## Special Education Teacher's Responsibilities

In general, **special education teachers** have these responsibilities in order to ensure that paraprofessionals are effectively utilized in inclusive settings.

- ∂ Special education teachers should include the paraprofessional in the IEP development process and in the overall instructional design for students they will support in general education settings.
- ∂ Special education teachers must share pertinent information about the students who the paraprofessional is supporting.
- ∂ Special education teachers must clearly outline specific expectations of the paraprofessional relative to classroom routines, instructional strategies and behavior management systems as they relate to the students the paraprofessional will be supporting in general education settings.
- ∂ Special education teachers must share student performance data with the paraprofessional. This will provide the paraprofessional with important information that affects how they work with students and on what skills they should be focusing.

## Paraprofessional's Responsibilities

The **paraprofessional** has these responsibilities as related to effective job performance. These include:

- ∂ A willingness to learn new strategies
- ∂ A commitment to treating everyone with respect - students and adults
- ∂ Being positive in all interactions, especially in building rapport with all students
- ∂ Being actively involved with children every minute of the instructional day
- ∂ Showing initiative and being proactive in all situations
- ∂ Being present and being on time each day
- ∂ Knowing when to ask for assistance or when and how to voice a concern
- ∂ Following a classroom teacher's prescribed program as outlined or respectfully articulating concerns about the program
- ∂ Preparing a 'Substitute' binder or folder in case of an absence that outlines what is expected of the substitute paraprofessional
- ∂ Being willing to work with all children, not just a few

## Expectations Checklists for Stakeholders

In the 'Resources' section of this Guidebook, there are checklists for school site leaders, general education teachers, special education teachers and paraprofessionals. The checklists will assist each individual in ensuring they fulfill their responsibilities relative to effective utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings. They are designed to be used as a self-reflection tool to assist everyone in meeting their specific expectations. They provide a quick overview of what each individual should be doing and a basic 'roadmap' of the path to successful utilization of paraprofessionals in general education settings.

It is suggested the checklists be used at the beginning of the school year and then again at mid-year. This will help facilitate a smooth initial beginning and then ensure that everyone is continuing to meet their expectations as the year evolves. The checklists are not designed to be used as an evaluation tool of either teachers or paraprofessionals by school site administration. They simply identify what each person should be doing and serve as a guide to individuals to help them ensure effective implementation.

## ***Paraprofessional Needs***

*3. What needs to be in place so that paraprofessionals are able to perform their duties in effective ways resulting in improved student outcomes?*

Everyone wants paraprofessionals to be successful – school site leaders, teachers, paraprofessionals themselves. If they are not successful, it may result in decreased student performance. Everyone has a part to play, including the paraprofessional. In order for paraprofessionals to be successful, certain things need to be in place. Everyone needs to be committed to working in collaboration and supporting each other for the common good of all students. If the work environment is arranged in such a way as to support effective use of paraprofessionals, then the result is increased student performance in both the academic and behavior areas.

Effective utilization of paraprofessionals is contingent on an environment that includes the following:

- ∂ Mutual respect
- ∂ On-going communication
- ∂ Provision of effective and on-going professional development to improve skills
- ∂ Accessible information regarding various types of disabilities and their characteristics as well as the specific acronyms used in special education
- ∂ Training on how to use specific assistive technology systems/devices
- ∂ Access to student information and student performance data
- ∂ Access to a school's/district's email system if that is the way information is communicated to staff
- ∂ Time to participate in planning with their inclusive classroom teachers
- ∂ Substitutes to work in their place in case of absences
- ∂ The right to be included, respected and valued!

## **CLOSING**

If utilized appropriately and effectively, paraprofessionals increase the likelihood of all students achieving individual student growth targets. They are beneficial in general education classes that have students with identified disabilities. With proper training, established expectations and on-going communication, they are able to support students with identified disabilities not just in the area of academics but also in the area of social behaviors. Paraprofessionals are in a perfect position to model and demonstrate appropriate social skills. They help establish environments where students feel safe and nurtured.

*Paraprofessionals truly **MAKE A DIFFERENCE!***

To support schools in their efforts to more effectively implement inclusive practices and to more effectively utilize the skills of paraprofessionals, there are a number of resources available. Schools are encouraged to visit the Louisiana State Personnel Development Grant at [www.laspdg.org](http://www.laspdg.org) for tools that will assist in better implementation and utilization.

# EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

## School Site Leader Expectations Checklist

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist is a self-reflection/self-assessment tool designed for a School Site Leader to use to help gauge effective utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings. It may be used two times a year (at the beginning and then at mid-term) to guide the School Site Leader in ensuring that his/her responsibilities are fulfilled.

Date	Date	Expectation	Comments
		I understand the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings.	
		I provide all staff with detailed, current job descriptions that outline their specific responsibilities.	
		The Collaborative Teaching Support Models (e.g., Co-teaching, Consultant, Paraprofessional) are utilized to support students with identified disabilities in general education settings.	
		I ensure that students with identified disabilities are scheduled according to the <i>Student Needs First</i> scheduling Process.	
		Through my words and actions, I foster a school climate that respects and values everyone, children and adults.	
		I provide or arrange for on-going, job-embedded professional learning opportunities for all staff, including paraprofessionals.	
		I arrange the schedule so that teachers and paraprofessionals have adequate time to plan for the students they jointly support.	
		I provide ongoing feedback to staff regarding implementation of inclusive practices to ensure effective implementation.	
		I ensure that all confidentiality requirements are followed relative to both the spoken and written word in conversations and in student records.	
		I conduct continuous monitoring of the content and delivery of instructional programs to ensure positive student outcomes.	
		I hold everyone accountable for student progress and have specific measures in place to ensure accountability.	
		I am flexible regarding implementation of inclusive practices and am willing to make changes when needed to ensure the support needs of students with identified disabilities are being met.	
		Other:	
		Other:	

# EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

## Classroom Teacher Expectations Checklist, page 1 of 2

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist is a self-reflection/self-assessment tool designed for a Classroom Teacher to use to help gauge effective utilization of paraprofessionals in his/her classroom. It may be used two times a year (at the beginning and then at mid-term) to guide the Classroom Teacher in ensuring that his/her responsibilities are fulfilled.

Date	Date	Expectation: The following are expectations a <b><i>General Education Teacher</i></b> should meet:	Comments
		I understand the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings.	
		I provide the paraprofessional(s) with a detailed, current daily schedule that outlines his/her specific responsibilities while in my classroom.	
		I am knowledgeable about the support needs of all of my students, including those with identified disabilities.	
		I adhere to all confidentiality requirements regarding student information.	
		I provide the paraprofessional(s) access to student instructional information as well as student performance data.	
		I articulate my classroom expectations relative to academic, behavior and classroom routines.	
		I provide training to the paraprofessional on how I want him/her to implement specific programs or instructional/behavioral strategies.	
		I actively solicit input from the paraprofessional for lesson development and lesson delivery approaches.	
		I develop a binder/folder on each student that includes pertinent information, e.g., current IEP, accommodations needed, behavior plans, lesson plan information and any other important information regarding a student's instructional or behavior management program.	
		I provide constructive feedback to the paraprofessional on how s/he performs specific tasks.	
		I communicate regularly with the paraprofessional both informally and at scheduled sessions.	
		I am flexible and open to new ideas and strategies the paraprofessional may suggest.	
		I am always prepared with lessons and necessary materials before the lesson begins.	
		I always interact respectfully, calmly and positively with both adults and students.	
		I collaborate with all individuals working with students in my class (e.g., OT, PT, APE, Speech, etc.)	

**Classroom Teacher Expectations Checklist, page 2 of 2**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Date	<b>Expectation: The following are expectations the <u>Special Education Teacher of IEP Responsibility</u> should meet if students on his/her roster are in general education classes and supported by a paraprofessional in those classes:</b>	Comments
		I conduct environmental inventories of general education classrooms to determine expectations for students with identified disabilities and how they will need to be supported to meet those expectations.	
		Based on the environmental inventories, I develop an instructional plan for each student with identified disabilities that includes support needs, accommodations, and behavior plans to be provided in the general education class.	
		I articulate the instructional plans to the classroom teacher and the paraprofessional who will work with the students.	
		I regularly monitor student progress and share progress data with the classroom teacher and the paraprofessional.	
		I include the paraprofessional in the IEP development process for the students s/he supports in general education classes.	
		I am flexible and open to new ideas and strategies the paraprofessional may suggest.	
		Other:	
		Other:	

*Classroom Teacher's Checklist*

# EFFECTIVE UTILIZATION OF PARAPROFESSIONALS IN INCLUSIVE SETTINGS

## Paraprofessional Expectations Checklist

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Position: \_\_\_\_\_  
 School: \_\_\_\_\_ School Year: \_\_\_\_\_

This checklist is a self-reflection/self-assessment tool designed for a Paraprofessional to use to help gauge effective utilization of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings. It may be used two times a year (at the beginning and then at mid-term) to guide the Paraprofessional in ensuring that his/her responsibilities are fulfilled.

Date	Date	Expectation	Comments
		I understand the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals in inclusive settings.	
		I review student data and information on instructional plans, behavior plans and student learning habits/styles prior to working with a student.	
		I follow a prescribed schedule as developed by the classroom teacher.	
		I follow a prescribed instructional and/or behavior plan for students as developed by the classroom teacher.	
		I function as an extension of the classroom teacher to facilitate lesson delivery.	
		I am always actively engaged in the lesson delivery process supporting students the entire class period.	
		I develop a Substitute Para binder or folder in case I am absent and a substitute paraprofessional is assigned to assume my responsibilities.	
		I articulate my strengths and my current need areas to the classroom teacher to ensure s/he is aware of what I am able to do and where I need more guidance.	
		I am punctual in daily and class attendance.	
		I maintain documentation on all job tasks that have been assigned by the classroom teacher.	
		I adhere to all confidentiality requirements.	
		I am a team player and willing to work in collaboration with all instructional team members.	
		I am flexible and willing to assume other tasks, try new strategies, or work with a variety of students.	
		I maintain ongoing communication with all instructional team members.	
		I interact with all, adults and students, respectfully, calmly and positively.	
		Other:	
		Other:	

*Paraprofessional's Checklist*



## 2013 Strategist Group Contributors

The LASPDG Staff appreciates the contributions by the Strategist Group in creating this resource for all educators. Thank you for your time, expertise, research, and continued commitment to all students!

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