Investing in Paraeducators: A School’s Journey to Develop, Empower, and Transform In-classroom Paraeducator Support

National Education Association
ESP Webinar
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Learning Targets

Today, I will be able to:

Understand how targeted professional learning for paraeducators positively impacts employee equity.

Identify ways to apply strategies and structures presented within my school or division to create optimal student learning supports in co-taught settings.

Develop concrete action steps to build the agency and effectiveness of paraeducators as it relates to their role in supporting students with disabilities.
### Program Leadership Overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Students (Grade Levels)</th>
<th>Paraeducators</th>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Starting Year</th>
<th>Implementation Year</th>
<th>Division Vertical Pilot</th>
<th>Division wide implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Swanson Middle School, Arlington</td>
<td>1100 Students (6-8)</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>2017</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2019</td>
<td>2021</td>
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<td>Shirley C. Heim Middle School, Stafford</td>
<td>1000 Students (6-8)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2021</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carl Sandburg Middle School, Fairfax</td>
<td>1465 Students (7-8)</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>2023</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2023</td>
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</table>
Learning from Paraprofessionals as a New Assistant Principal (SMS 2017)

DEFINING THE PROBLEM & IDENTIFYING ROOT CAUSES

Paraeducators

Often Overlooked. Critical to Schools.
Waterfall Activity 1: We are going to place responses into the chat and then press enter together at one time.

As paraeducators, what challenges do you face in your current school or program?

What is something you need to feel more efficacious/confident in your role?
Paraprofessionals felt they had inadequate resources to be successful in the classroom.

Professional learning was not differentiated for staff based on their role in the classroom.

The master schedule did not consider paraprofessional knowledge or experience.

Paraprofessionals supported all core content areas across all three grade levels daily.

Paraprofessionals did not feel efficacious in their content knowledge.

Perceived lack of empowerment among the group.
This is an equity issue.

- Student support in classrooms
- Co-teaching / team-taught
- Professional training and development
- School scheduling
- Content knowledge
- Workforce Investment

DEFINING THE PROBLEM & IDENTIFYING ROOT CAUSES
Site Based Timeline

Defining the Problem & Identifying Root Causes

Building Sustained Capacity & Efficacy of Paraprofessionals

**F 2017**
- Needs Assessment
  - Stakeholder engagement
  - Fall baseline data collection
  - Problem of Practice
  - Identify solutions
  - Program Development

**S 2018**
- Site Based Pilot Program
  - Program procurement
  - Pilot program implementation
  - Assessment of program through feedback surveys and assessments

**SY1819**
- FY Program at Site
  - Full year program implementation
  - Beginning, Middle and End of Year program evaluation
  - Engage district leadership for program expansion and funding

**SY1920**
- FY Program at Site
  - Full year program implementation
  - Beginning, Middle and End of Year program evaluation
  - District adoption for multi-level pilot program K-12
  - Day of learning for Paras

**SY2021**
- FY Program at Site
  - Full year program implementation
  - Beginning, Middle and End of Year program evaluation
  - District continued adoption for multi-level pilot program K-12
  - Day of learning for Paras
DEFINING THE PROBLEM & 
IDENTIFYING ROOT CAUSES

Starting with Data
Describe the level of support the assistant provides to struggling students in MATHEMATICS. Check all that apply.

- Support is task oriented (complete the problem / write this step down etc.)
- Support is behavior oriented (correcting / redirection of misbehaviors)
- Support is generally passive (assistant is present in class, requires prompting to engage with students, observer like)
- Support is generally active and engaging (assistant seeks out students in needs and regularly offers support)
- Support is content oriented (basic level - teacher must teach the content to assistant before they assist students)
- Support is content oriented (intermediate level - assistant sometimes requires the teacher to teach them content for effective support to be provided- limited working knowledge of content is evident)
- Support is content oriented (advanced level - assistant demonstrates appropriate content knowledge to effectively assist students with learning content (can provide additional examples, content support, manipulative assistance, prompts through effective questioning)
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's appropriate knowledge and use of additional function calculator (yellow)
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's appropriate knowledge and use of scientific calculator
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's appropriate knowledge and use of a graphing calculator (Algebra I or higher)
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's knowledge of the order of operations (GEMDAS)
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's familiarity with positive and negative integers
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's basic knowledge of identifying a mathematical expression.
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's familiarity with understanding charts, diagrams, content imagery
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's familiarity with online calculator
- Support provided demonstrates assistant's familiarity and use of formula sheet

DEFINING THE PROBLEM & IDENTIFYING ROOT CAUSES

TEACHER STAKEHOLDER SURVEY DATA

ASSESSING BASELINE SUPPORT IN MATHEMATICS

MATH COACH, DIVISION SPECIALISTS, AND TEACHERS HELPED DEVELOP THESE LOOK FOR ITEMS FOR THE SURVEY
In previous years (2017/2018 or before), have assistants in your classroom expressed concern regarding their knowledge of the content area?

26 responses

- Yes: 69.2%
- No: 30.8%
Describe the assistant's knowledge of the content area you teach.

26 responses

- 6 (23.1%)
- 2 (7.7%)
- 13 (50%)
- 2 (7.7%)
- 3 (11.5%)
Select the content areas where you are identified as being highly qualified

11 responses

- Mathematics: 6 (54.5%)
- History and Social Studies: 5 (45.5%)
- Science: 6 (54.5%)
- English / Reading and Language Arts: 4 (36.4%)
Developing Questions for Your Team
From the **teacher** perspective

What questions might you ask teachers to get a sense of what they believe strengths, growth opportunities, and professional learning might be beneficial for paraeducators in your school?

From the **paraeducator** perspective

What questions might your fellow paraeducators need to be asked to start the conversation around paraeducator growth, professional development and efficacy?

From the **administrator** perspective

What questions do you think school leaders should ask of your paraeducator team to get a sense of your role, strengths, growth opportunities or areas of investment?
INNOVATION & CONNECTION TO SUPPORT LEARNING
All stakeholders reported that this structure contributed greatly to their concerns.
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<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
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<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Number of Teachers</th>
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<tr>
<td>Para 1</td>
<td>Math 6</td>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Grade 8</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
<td>Math 6</td>
<td>Algebra I</td>
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<td>Health</td>
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<td>LUNCH DUTY</td>
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<td>LUNCH</td>
<td>English 6</td>
<td>Reading 6</td>
<td>Health</td>
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<td>Reading / English</td>
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<td>Para 7</td>
<td>Math 7</td>
<td>Math 7</td>
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<td>Science 6</td>
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<td>Math / Science</td>
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<td>History / English</td>
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<tr>
<td>Para 9</td>
<td>Civics 7</td>
<td>Civics 7</td>
<td>Grade 7</td>
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<td>EL LAR</td>
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<td>LUNCH DUTY</td>
<td>LUNCH</td>
<td>LUNCH DUTY</td>
<td>DL</td>
<td>DL</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>Distance Learning</td>
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</table>
What is an area of professional learning that you would like to focus on in your work?

Place your answer in the chat.... Wait for the signal to submit your response!
What is our model of PD for A-scale employees? Our model is a combination of virtual learning modules and collaborative learning experiences that occur throughout the school year on an on-going basis.

We use a combination of:
- TA time
- School PD ½ days
- Division ½ days.
Why did we choose this model?
Through a needs assessment survey, we identified the need for applicable professional development that will build knowledge, skills and abilities of instructional assistants.

- Content Knowledge Skills
- Specific disabilities
- Supporting Reading / Writing
- Supporting students with cognitive and emotional needs
- Classroom management.
We utilized Master Teacher’s Para-Educator Online curriculum modules as a starting point. The modules serve as the base curriculum upon which, we add practical, collaborative and hands on learning experiences.
- Reading and Writing Workshop
- Station Rotations in Mathematics
- Document Based Questions in Social Studies
- Measurement and Equipment in Science
- SIOP for English Language Learners
- Discipline and Behavior Management, Positive Behavior Supports
What is the DBQ?

- DBQ stands for Document-Based Question
- It is an essay that requires the student to use historical documents to support their point of view.

The DBQ Process

Using the Think – Pair – Share Protocol

- THINK:
  - On the next slide, you will see two questions. Think about your answer to each question.
- PAIR:
  - Share your thoughts with your partner.
- SHARE:
  - Share your thoughts with the group

Supporting Students

- Where might students experience the most difficulty in the DBQ process?
- How might you be able to support students?
Delve into a Strategy

Analyzing Documents
- To analyze documents, we use the acronym APPARTS:
  - A – Author
  - P – Place & Time
  - P – Prior Knowledge
  - A – Audience
  - R – Reason
  - T – The Main Idea
  - S – Significance

Take a look at the Documents!

Let’s Eliminate the Confusion & Frustration . . . . .

As you analyze each document, also think of your...

Buckets!

You will be practicing the bucketing process as social studies students.

Think about the question below as record any observations you have during the bucketing process.

How might you support students in the bucketing process?
Growing Paraeducators as Leaders
SY 2019-2020 Expanding our work

- Originated in Middle School setting
- Expanded to Elementary School and High School for Year 2
  - Intentional about which schools we selected based on leadership flexibility
Districtwide Day of Learning: February 12, 2020

- Planned by paraprofessionals, for paraprofessionals
- Paraprofessionals were allowed to choose which sessions they wished to attend
- Hosts were compensated with lunch
- Required support from administrators
5 Volunteers to Share!

What impact do you think this work had on our paraeducators at the school and district level?
Feedback

“I felt like I was treated like a professional today.”

“These are the kinds of sessions I need to help me grow as a professional.”
Setting Expectations - Making Sure They are Clear
In your school, are teachers aware of what paraeducator support is supposed to look like in whole group, small group, 1:1, or other settings?

Place your response in the chat and click enter/submit.
The descriptors below, although not exhaustive, provide highlights of the skills, abilities and expectations for student support in a variety of settings.

**Whole Group Instruction Support**

- Support all students with directions / activity expectation reinforcement.
- Support students with curricular content
- Support student engagement using proactive instructional supports
- Support student attention to task through use of proactive and instructional strategies
- Support students with content vocabulary
- Support student collaboration and communication through use of instructional support strategies
- Monitor chat function in MS Teams / Manage student use of microphones etc.
- Provide cues for attention, checks for understanding, clarification of direction through chat / small group (recorded)
- Assist students in moving from one group to another / assist in digital transitions
Small Group Instruction Support

- Support student learning at a workshop station / breakout room (recorded)
- Support student understanding of content by leading small group for re-teaching a specific concept, strategy or content. (recorded)
- Support student learning by facilitating a content activity
- Support student learning using small group instructional support strategies
  - Monitor chat function in MS Teams / Manage student use of microphones etc.
  - Provide cues for attention, checks for understanding, clarification of direction through chat / small group (recorded)
  - Assist students in moving from one group to another / assist in digital transitions

Individual Student Support

- Read aloud support
- 1:1 support as needed (recorded)
- Organizational Support
  - Agenda Checks, Assignment Recording Support and Check
  - Provide individual prompting / redirection as needed for attention, organization, engagement
  - Monitor chat function in MS Teams / Manage student use of microphones etc.
  - Provide cues for attention, checks for understanding, clarification of direction through chat / small group (recorded)
  - Assist students in moving from one group to another / assist in digital transitions
Small Group Testing
- Identify and reserve small group testing locations as needed.
- Implement small group testing accommodations as needed.
- Provide read aloud support as needed

Classroom Management
- Circulate throughout the learning environment to provide supervision
- Use proximity techniques to support students in remaining on task and engaged in learning activity
- Ask students questions in proactive manner to determine if further supports are needed
- Model and reinforce classroom & school expectations
- Provide prompts for redirection, cues for attention or reminders as needed
- Provide positive reinforcement

Other classroom supports
- Assist in transitioning to small group activity, learning centers, stations or rotations
- Assist in the distribution of learning materials for activity, learning center, stations or rotations
- Communicate any student learning needs to the teacher
Site Based Timeline

Building Sustained Capacity & Efficacy of Paraprofessionals

F 2017
- Needs Assessment
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  - Problem of Practice
  - Identify solutions
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REFLECTION & EVALUATION
OUR TEAM’S PERSPECTIVE
Describe how this learning was most useful to your work in the classroom?

13 responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canvas</th>
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<th>Google</th>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Canvas/Personalized Learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helps me to incorporate new strategies when working with special education students in various classroom settings. Helps me to tweak the strategies that I have already been using.</td>
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</table>

| It provided me with more techniques to use with noncompliant behaviors. |
| It gave clear practical ideas/suggestions of how to help students. |
| Provides us with topics and information relevant to what we want and has provided new techniques |
Evaluating Program Outcomes to Sustain Student Learning
EVALUATING PROGRAM OUTCOMES TO SUSTAIN STUDENT LEARNING

4 YEAR STUDY OF PARAEDUCATOR CLASSROOM ENGAGEMENT MEASURED BY COOPERATING TEACHER SURVEY RESPONSES
SY2018-2021

[Bar chart showing the percentage of consistent task-oriented and consistent passive classroom support through SY2017-2021, with data points for each school year: 2017-2018 (baseline), 2018-2019, 2019-2020, and 2020-2021.]
### Evaluating Program Outcomes to Sustain Student Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A-Scale Look Fors</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Emotional Support</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive Communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
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<tr>
<td>Responsiveness to academic and social/emotional needs and cues</td>
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<td><strong>Student Interaction</strong></td>
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<td>Clear Expectations/Transmission of Procedures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proactive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Effective Redirection of Misbehavior</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Instructional Support</strong></td>
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<td>Effective Engagement</td>
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<td>Communication/Transmission of Concepts/Content</td>
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<td>Feedback Loops</td>
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<td>Encouragement and Affirmation</td>
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**Definitions of Descriptors**

- **Positive Communication**: Positive comments and expectations.
- **Respect**: Respectful language, use of each other's names, warm/calm voice, listening to each other, cooperation.
- **Responsiveness to academic and social/emotional needs and cues**: Individualized support, reassurance and assistance, adjusts pacing/wait time when needed, re-engagement, acknowledgement of emotions and out of class factors, timely response.
- **Clear Expectations**: Explicit, consistent, students know what to do.
- **Proactive**: Monitoring, anticipation of problem behavior, proximity, attention to the positive.
- **Effective Redirection of Misbehavior**: Use of subtle cues to redirect, problems resolved, little time lost, minimum/no disruption to the rest of the class.
- **Effective Engagement**: Active participation, sustained attention.
- **Communication/Transmission of Concepts/Content**: Essential components identified, conditions for how and when to use the concept/contents, multiple and varied examples, contrasting non-examples, clear and accurate definitions, effective clarifications, effective rephrasing.
- **Feedback Loops**: Back-and-forth exchanges, persistence, follow-up questions.
- **Encouragement and Affirmation**: Recognition and affirmation of effort, encouragement of persistence.

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*F. Underhill & N. Routson, 2020*
Professional learning provides you with strategies and approaches to support students in learning course content in the areas identified above.

10 responses

- 70% Strongly Agree
- 30% Agree
- 0% Disagree
- 0% Strongly Disagree
Professional learning that is provided to you throughout the year provides you with instructional strategies to support you in your role as an instructional paraeducator.

10 responses
Starting the Journey at Carl Sandburg Middle School-2023

Professional learning that is offered is designed with your role as an instructional paraprofessional at the center of the design.

10 responses
If you could design professional learning specifically for your role as a paraeducator, what would you like it to focus on / include? (Select All that Apply)

10 responses

- Mathematics content strategies
- History / Social Studies content strategies
- Science content strategies
- English / Reading content strategies
- English Learners (ELL) content
- Specific Learning Disabilities
  - Autism Spectrum (AUT)
  - Emotional Disability (ED)
- Other Health Impairment (OHI)
- Behavior Management Strategies
- Co-Teaching with General Education
- Data Collection
- Individualized Education Plan
- Providing Accommodations
- Working with students who have...
Resources we used during our journey...