



Maximizing the Paraprofessional Role

District Leadership Forum

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1) Executive Summary

Key Observations

Similarly sized profiled districts demonstrate a wide variation in the number of paraprofessionals employed. Across District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, the student population ranges between 14,000 and 17,000. Between 10 and 16 percent of students receive individualized education programs (IEPs). Across profiled districts, administrators employ between 125 and 400 paraprofessionals.

Prior to assigning paraprofessional support, explore alternative student and classroom supports and interventions. At District C, District D, and District E, administrators assign paraprofessional support to individual students only after building staff have already tried alternative supports and interventions. Examples include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), functional behavior assessments, assistive technology, support from a registered behavior technician, and classroom management coaching for teachers. At District D, before administrators assign a new paraprofessional to a student, district-level teacher consultants conduct classroom observations to evaluate how that school uses current staff support and resources. When building administrators clearly demonstrate why a paraprofessional represents the best choice to support a student, administrators reduce the likelihood of assigning paraprofessionals unnecessarily.

At all profiled districts, paraprofessionals provide academic, behavioral, and/or physical/medical support, depending on students' needs. Contacts at District C and District E emphasize that paraprofessionals do not possess the training and certification necessary to provide core academic instruction to students (e.g., deliver primary instruction, plan lessons). Instead, paraprofessionals provide academic supports and accommodations so that students with special needs can access the general education curriculum. For example, paraprofessionals at profiled districts may reteach concepts and clarify assignment instructions. As examples of behavioral support, paraprofessionals at profiled districts may redirect students when they are off-task and coach students on how to cope with stressors. Paraprofessionals may support students in general education settings and self-contained settings (e.g., resource room, self-contained classroom).

To increase paraprofessional effectiveness, provide general training for all paraprofessionals at the beginning of the school year and offer ongoing professional development. At District A, District C, District D, and District E, administrators provide training at the start of the year to reinforce paraprofessionals' understanding of their role and responsibilities. Examples of training topics include trauma-informed care, strategies to help students gain independence, and an overview of the IEP. Administrators at all four profiled districts also provide professional development opportunities during the school year to deliver up-to-date best practices. At District E, administrators required all paraprofessionals in the 2019-2020 school year to complete online training modules from [RethinkEd](#) on topics such as visual supports and instruction differentiation. At District C, the student services department created a series of 25 videos on how to support students with different types of disabilities.

2) Paraprofessional Service Delivery Model

Overview

Similarly Sized Profiled Districts Employ Between 125 and 400 Paraprofessionals

Across District A, District B, District C, District D, and District E, the student population ranges between 14,000 and 17,000. At profiled districts, between 10 and 16 percent of students receive individualized education programs (IEPs). The number of paraprofessionals ranges between 125 and 400.

Overview of Students and Paraprofessionals at Profiled Districts

District Name	Student Population	Percentage of Students with IEPs	Number of Paraprofessionals
District A	16,700	13%	400
District B	15,800	16%	125
District C	14,100	10%	130
District D	15,400	11%	< 300
District E	15,900	12%	< 250

The percentage of students with IEPs who receive paraprofessional support varies at profiled districts. Contacts at District C state that approximately 10 percent of students with IEPs receive 1:1 or 2:1 student-to-paraprofessional support. In contrast, at District A, contacts report that approximately 50 percent of students with IEPs receive some level of paraprofessional support.

At District D and District E, paraprofessionals more often support elementary students compared to secondary students. Contacts at District D highlight that middle and high school students typically possess higher levels of independence and thus require paraprofessional support less often. At District D, contacts report that approximately 70 percent of elementary students with IEPs receive paraprofessional support and approximately 25 percent of secondary students do so. Contacts at District E describe a similar trend—at the district, 145 paraprofessionals work with elementary students while 96 paraprofessionals work with secondary students.

In contrast, at District A, contacts do not report significant differences in the extent of paraprofessional support between elementary and secondary students. Contacts attribute this lack of difference to challenges in fading (i.e., reducing) paraprofessional support over time.

Roles and Responsibilities

Students who participate in the general education setting may receive **resource room** support. In a resource room, students receive direct, specialized support from a special education teacher in a 1:1 setting or in a small group. For example, a student may receive intensive support to access grade-level work in a specific subject area (e.g., reading, math).¹

Paraprofessionals Provide Support in General Education and Self-Contained Settings

At all profiled districts, students may receive special education services in general education settings and/or self-contained settings (e.g., resource room, self-contained classroom). Paraprofessionals provide support in both types of settings, depending on students' individual needs.

For example, at District C, students may receive special education services in the following self-contained settings: resource rooms, specialized programs (e.g., autism spectrum disorder (ASD), moderate cognitive impairment (CI)) or cross-categorical programs (i.e., students with different disabilities in the same classroom). Contacts emphasize that paraprofessionals most often provide behavioral and/or physical/medical support in these three settings.

Paraprofessional Involvement in Self-Contained Settings at District C

Educational Setting

Type of Paraprofessional Support

Specialized Programs (e.g., ASD, moderate CI)



Support: Behavioral, Physical/Medical

- Since all students in a specific specialized program have the same disability, the special education teacher tailors the classroom to students' specific needs. Thus, students in a specialized program rarely require academic support from paraprofessionals.
- Paraprofessionals may provide physical/medical support for students who have the most severe medical needs (e.g., epilepsy) or the most severe behavioral needs.

Cross-Categorical Programs



Support: Academic, Behavioral, Physical/Medical

- Since students present different disabilities in a cross-categorical program, special education teachers may struggle to differentiate instruction to all students.
- Paraprofessionals typically provide 1:1 or 2:1 support to students.
- 25 to 30 percent of students in a cross-categorical program participate in the general education setting—with the intent to join general education full-time. Paraprofessionals may provide academic support to these students in the general education classroom to build students' independence.

Resource Room



Support: Behavioral, Physical/Medical

- Paraprofessionals provide pull-out support to students in resource rooms. Most often, these are students with ASD, severe emotional impairment (EI), or medical needs (e.g., diabetes).

Paraprofessionals Provide Academic, Behavioral, and Physical/Medical Support to Students

Across all profiled districts, paraprofessionals may provide academic, behavioral, and/or physical/medical support to students, depending on students' needs.

1) "Resource Room Introduction," National Association of Special Education Teachers, accessed July 15, 2020, http://www.naset.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Powerpoint/Resource_Room_Introduction.ppt.

Contacts at District C and District E emphasize that paraprofessionals do not possess the training and certification necessary to provide core academic instruction to students (e.g., deliver primary instruction, plan lessons). Instead, paraprofessionals provide academic supports and accommodations so that students with special needs can access the general education curriculum.

Examples of Academic, Behavioral, and Physical/Medical Support Provided by Paraprofessionals at Profiled Districts



Academic Support

- Clarify assignment or assessment instructions
- Pre-teach concepts
- Reteach concepts taught by lead teacher
- Reinforce learning strategies



Behavioral Support

- Provide prompts to follow the lead teacher's directions
- Encourage participation in class (e.g., raise hand, point to something on the board)
- Train student to use assistive technology for functional communication purposes
- Assist student with organizing materials
- Coach students on how to better cope with stressors
- Facilitate task transitions and sensory breaks
- Redirect student when they are off-task
- Teach self-regulation strategies (e.g., [5-Point Scale](#) for students with ASD)



Physical/Medical Support

- Support student's daily living needs (e.g., mobility, positioning, feeding, medication needs)
- Assist student with physical transfers into wheelchairs
- Accompany student during class transitions

Paraprofessional Assignment

Prior to Assigning Paraprofessional Support, Explore Alternative Student and Classroom Supports and Interventions

At District C, District D, and District E, administrators assign paraprofessional support to individual students only after building staff have already tried alternative supports and interventions. Examples include Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS), functional behavior assessments, assistive technology, support from a registered behavior technician, and classroom management coaching for teachers.

Reference the **Appendix (pages 22-23)** for the paraprofessional determination form used at District C.

At District D, before administrators assign a new paraprofessional to a student, district-level teacher consultants conduct classroom observations to evaluate how that school uses current staff support and resources. At District C, building administrators must identify—via a form—why a student needs paraprofessional support, list existing supports and interventions that address this specific need, and explain the duration for which administrators have provided existing supports. These processes—in which building administrators must clearly demonstrate why a

paraprofessional represents the best choice to support a student—reduce the likelihood that district administrators assign paraprofessionals unnecessarily.

Research literature affirms that, to effectively serve students with special needs, administrators should first explore alternative supports to paraprofessionals. For example, administrators could provide explicit training to general education and special education teachers on how to differentiate instruction and teach mixed-ability groups. Administrators could also offer peer supports to students (e.g., peer mentoring), establish a co-teaching model between the general education and special education teacher, and reduce caseloads for special education teachers.²

Analyze Data from Previous Interventions and Student Needs Rubric to Determine Need for Paraprofessional Support

Administrators at District C and District E grant paraprofessional support when they identify demonstrated need in student data (e.g., data documenting the outcomes of previous interventions) and documentation (e.g., student needs rubric, behavior intervention plan), rather than automatically granting paraprofessional support in response to every teacher, building principal, and/or parent request. By relying on student data and documentation, administrators standardize the paraprofessional request process and ultimately reduce the likelihood of assigning paraprofessionals unnecessarily. Contacts at District A, District C, and District E add that administrators can use data to tackle a common misperception among stakeholders (e.g., parents, building principals, general education teachers) that every student with an IEP would benefit from paraprofessional support.

For example, as part of the paraprofessional request process, building administrators at District E must submit the student's IEP, behavior intervention plan (if relevant), documentation of attempted interventions and strategies, and data on the duration and success of interventions. Administrators also complete a student needs rubric to demonstrate clear justification for paraprofessional support. On the rubric, administrators indicate the student's current level of functioning in six different categories: health/medical, personal care, communication, ability to participate in class instruction, behavior, and executive functioning. Administrators assign ratings between zero and four for each category.

Similarly, the IEP team at District C uses a rubric that details criteria for physical, academic, and behavioral needs that would justify paraprofessional support. The IEP team assigns ratings of "mid," "moderate," or "severe" for each category. To receive paraprofessional support, a student must display severe or moderate-to-severe physical, academic, and/or behavioral need(s).

Some Profiled Districts Assign Paraprofessionals to Self-Contained Classrooms

At District B, District D, and District E, administrators assign some paraprofessionals to self-contained classrooms. This way, every student in the classroom may access and benefit from paraprofessional support. Paraprofessionals may also help with classroom management in these settings.

- At District B, administrators assign two paraprofessionals to every ASD and EI classroom, which serves up to 10 students.

2) Michael F. Giangreco, "Working with Paraprofessionals," *Educational Leadership* 61, no. 2 (October 2003): 7. https://www.lu17.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/working_with_paraprofessionals_-_Ed_Leadership_october_2003.pdf.

- At District E, administrators hire some paraprofessionals to exclusively support ASD classrooms and classrooms for medically fragile students. Paraprofessionals who support ASD classrooms are trained as, or are completing their training to become, registered behavior technicians (RBTs). Administrators typically use a 3:1 or 4:1 student-to-paraprofessional ratio for ASD classrooms and 2:1 or 1:1 ratio for classrooms for medically fragile students.

At these three profiled districts, administrators still assign paraprofessionals to individual students as well.

Promoting Student Independence

Paraprofessionals Should Fade Support Over Time to Build Students' Capacity to Function Independently

Research literature demonstrates that an over-dependence on paraprofessionals may negatively impact students' growth, both socially and academically. For example, in a general education classroom, when a teacher seats a student with special needs on the periphery of the classroom with a paraprofessional next to them, the student may experience inadequate peer interactions.³ Contacts at District A state that paraprofessionals may inadvertently create restrictive environments in which students consistently rely on an adult for academic or behavior support. Contacts at District E add that when students who have had constant paraprofessional support and limited opportunities to practice independence enter middle school, they tend to demonstrate adverse behavioral outcomes (e.g., poor acclimation to new social dynamics).

To that end, administrators at District B, District C, and District E fade paraprofessional support over time to promote student independence.

Precisely Define Parameters of Paraprofessional Support in the IEP to Avoid Overprescribing Support

To promote student independence, Planning and Placement Teams (PPTs) at District E clearly describe the settings, time of day, and structure of paraprofessional support in the student's IEP. By specifying the extent of paraprofessional support that a student receives, administrators ensure that the student develops the ability to function as independently as possible in school. When administrators more selectively allocate paraprofessionals' time, administrators can also maximize paraprofessional use. For example, one paraprofessional may be able to support up to three to four students across the school day.

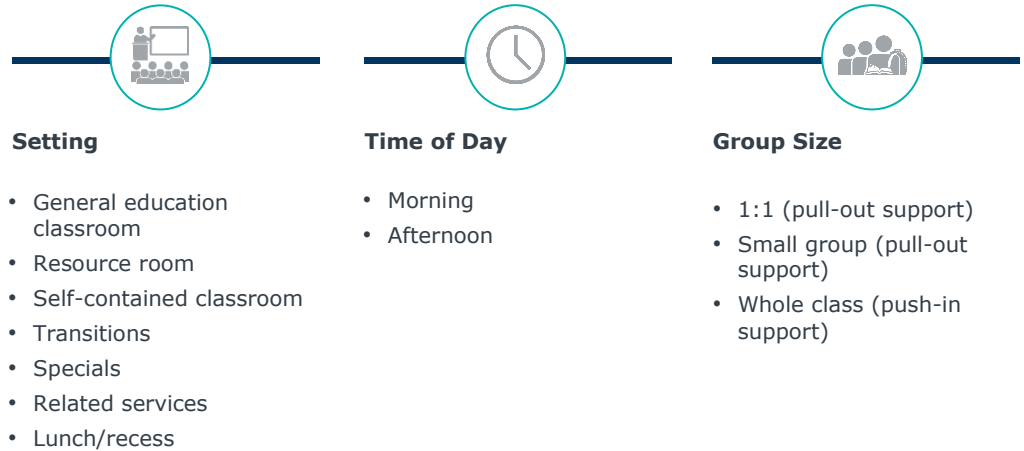
At District E, the **Planning and Placement Team (PPT)** determines student eligibility for special education. The PPT typically includes the student, parents, at least one general education teacher (if the student participates in general education), at least one special education teacher, and a district administrator.⁴ At other districts, administrators may refer to the PPT as the IEP team.

3) Michael F. Giangreco, "Working with Paraprofessionals," *Educational Leadership* 61, no. 2 (October 2003): 5-6. https://www.iu17.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/working_with_paraprofessionals_-_Ed_Leadership_october_2003.pdf.

4) "PPT 101: Understanding the Basics of Planning and Placement Team Meeting," State of Connecticut Department of Education, accessed July 15, 2020, <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/SDE/Special-Education/PPT101.pdf>.

Parameters of Paraprofessional Support at District E

IEPs define the extent of paraprofessional support across three categories:



Source: "Student Needs Rubric," District E, provided June 24, 2020.

For example, a paraprofessional may provide 1:1 support to a student—but only during transitions and only in the afternoon.

Integrate a Student Independence Goal into the IEP

Administrators should write an independence goal in the IEP of every student who receives paraprofessional support. By doing so, administrators ensure that paraprofessionals actively foster—rather than hinder—students' capacity to function independently in the school environment.

At District E, the PPT must integrate an annual independence goal with corresponding short-term objectives into the student's IEP. These short-term objectives progress from foundational behaviors to full independence. During meetings throughout the year, the PPT reviews student progress towards the short-term objectives. Contacts at District E provided the following examples.

Examples of Student Independence Goals at District E

Goal: Student will be able to monitor his feelings and emotions and handle disappointment and frustration without exhibiting maladaptive behaviors.

- 1 Student will be able to **identify emotions** such as happy, sad, angry, tired, etc. when shown pictures on a card.
- 2 Student will be able to **identify his own emotions** when asked using pictures. Student will be able to identify situations that may make him feel happy, sad, angry, tired, etc. when presented with pictures.
- 3 Student will be able to identify **how to handle emotions** such as cool-down strategies, taking a walk, giving a high five, etc.
- 4 Student will begin to **identify his emotion and the attached response** that can be used, with no maladaptive behaviors, with paraprofessional or adult support.
- 5 Student will be able to **manage his feelings and behaviors** when they are negative or positive, **without adult support**.

Goal: Student will improve her ability to interact with peers from baseline over the course of the year.

- 1 Student will **greet her peers independently** with a name and a verbal greeting such as "hello" or "good morning."
- 2 Student will **initiate a communicative interaction** with a peer, following an adult prompt, during a learning activity.
- 3 Student will initiate a communicative interaction with a peer, **with no adult prompt**, during a learning activity.
- 4 Student will **initiate a social interaction** with a peer during a less structured time such as lunch or recess.
- 5 Student will continue her social interaction with peers during a less structured setting and will include at least **five verbal interactions**.

Source: "Developing District Norms for Independence Goals," District E, provided June 24, 2020.

3) Increasing the Effectiveness of Paraprofessionals

Professional Development

Provide General Training at the Beginning of the Year to Reinforce Paraprofessional Roles and Responsibilities

Research literature demonstrates that the quality of training positively impacts the degree of fidelity with which paraprofessionals deliver interventions, which ultimately connects to student outcomes.⁵ At District A, District C, District D, and District E, administrators provide training at the start of the year on a variety of topics.

Sample Training Topics for Paraprofessionals Across Profiled Districts

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Overview of IEP components | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Trauma-informed care |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Perspective-taking and empathy: family challenges of supporting a child with special needs | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strategies to help students gain independence |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Nonviolent crisis intervention (NVCi) training and de-escalation techniques | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Common interventions, such as PBIS |

5) Alicia A. Mrachko and Louise A. Kaczmarek, "Examining Paraprofessional Interventions to Increase Social Communication for Young Children with ASD," *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education* (August 2016). <https://doi.org/10.1177/0271121416662870>.

The below table demonstrates how administrators at profiled districts structure this training.

Structure of Beginning-of-the-Year Training at Profiled Districts

Schedule: Break Down Training Day into Short, Single-Topic Workshops



- At District C, the coordinator of student services facilitates half-hour workshops on visual supports, behavior plans, data collection, and paraprofessional support review meetings (see **pages 16-17**). Half-hour, as opposed to hourlong, workshops help maximize focus.

Engagement Strategy: Facilitate Trainings in Small Groups



- At District D, district-level teacher consultants—instructional coaches who work for the special education department—facilitate trainings in small groups. By delivering training in small groups, administrators may increase participant engagement.

Collaboration: Dedicate Time for Paraprofessionals and Special Education Teachers to Review IEPs



- Administrators at District E provide a half-day training for all paraprofessionals, in which external guest speakers present on a variety of topics. Paraprofessionals spend two hours of the half-day training with special education teachers to review students' IEPs together and discuss teamwork expectations.

Modality: Implement Online Training Options for Paraprofessionals During COVID-19

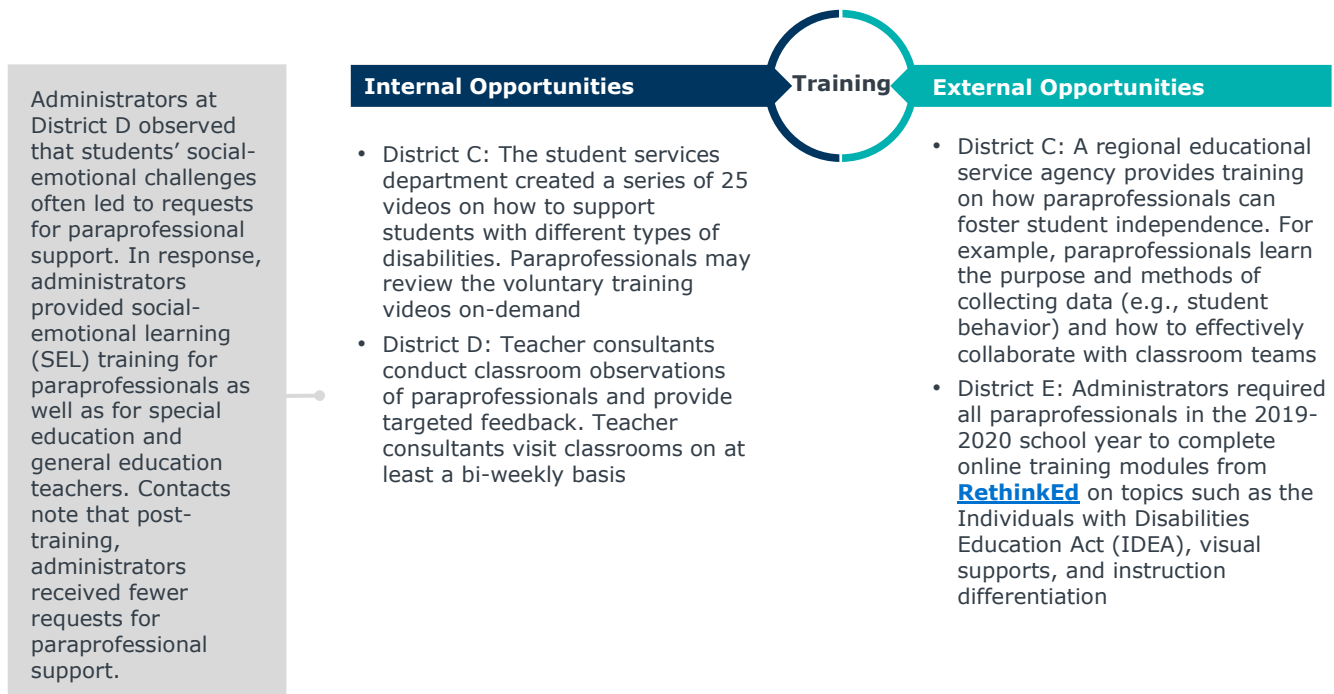


- Given the pandemic, administrators at District A seek to train paraprofessionals on the district's technology platforms so that paraprofessionals can effectively serve students in a virtual environment. Since paraprofessionals have varying levels of access to devices and the internet, administrators plan to schedule staggered blocks of times for paraprofessionals to complete online training modules on-campus.

Offer Ongoing Professional Development Opportunities to Equip Paraprofessionals with Best Practices

Administrators at District C, District D, and District E provide internal and/or external (i.e., via third-party organizations) professional development opportunities during the school year. By delivering ongoing training to paraprofessionals, administrators ensure that paraprofessionals learn up-to-date best practices to support students effectively.

Examples of Ongoing Paraprofessional Professional Development at Profiled Districts

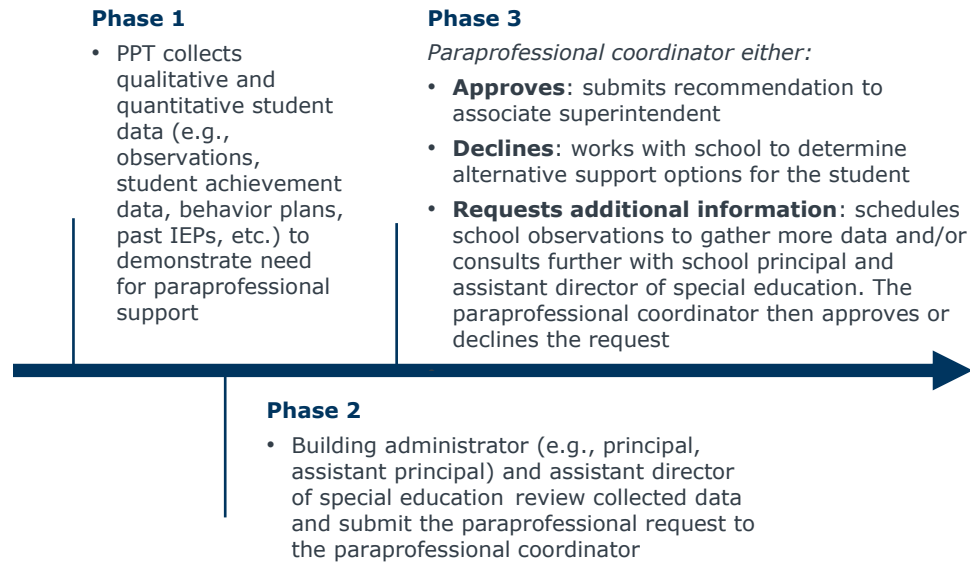


Creating Shared Understanding of Paraprofessional Role

Involve Multiple Stakeholders in a Tiered Approval Process for Granting Paraprofessional Support

District-level administrators at District D and District E collaborate with school-level staff to determine student eligibility for paraprofessional support, which promotes a shared understanding of the paraprofessional role. For example, administrators at District E use a tiered evaluation and approval approach—which involves the building administrator, assistant director of special education, district-level paraprofessional coordinator, and associate superintendent—to grant paraprofessional support. By requiring school-level and district-level stakeholders to reach consensus on a student's need for paraprofessional support, administrators build shared expectations of the paraprofessional role.

Process for Managing Requests for Paraprofessionals at District E



Source: "Process for Managing Requests for Paraeducators," District E, provided June 24, 2020.

Articulate Paraprofessional Role Through Formal Documentation and in Regular Meetings and Trainings

Administrators at profiled districts create formal documentation on the paraprofessional role and responsibilities and/or integrate discussion of paraprofessionals in existing meetings and trainings with building administrators. Through these mechanisms, district administrators reinforce expectations of the role among different stakeholders.

Strategies to Build Shared Expectations of Paraprofessional Role at Profiled Districts



Create district-wide formal documentation on paraprofessional role and expectations

- At District E, administrators created a parent guide that provides a high-level overview of the paraprofessional role, outlines differences between the roles of the paraprofessional and lead teacher, and explains how paraprofessionals promote student independence.
- In a staff-facing guide, administrators discuss effective communication and collaboration between paraprofessionals and lead teachers (i.e., general education teachers, special education teachers). For example, the special education teacher must train the paraprofessional on how to implement an IEP, including data collection. The general education teacher must provide an initial orientation to the classroom, such as daily routines, daily and weekly schedules, and classroom procedures.



Integrate discussion of paraprofessional role in existing meetings and trainings

- At District C, the director of student services provides reminders on the roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals, as well as the criteria for requesting and maintaining paraprofessional support, in standing monthly meetings with building principals.
- At District A, the executive director for special services teaches a 15-hour workshop (divided across two days) on “what every administrator needs to know about special education.” In the workshop, the executive director discusses how to train paraprofessionals to understand and implement the IEP. The executive director also discusses adverse consequences of an overreliance on paraprofessionals (e.g., diminished student independence).



Include paraprofessionals in staff-wide trainings on curriculum changes

- Administrators at District B aim to include paraprofessionals in mandatory all-staff trainings on new curriculum implementation. Thus, paraprofessionals and general education teachers can discuss—from a shared place of understanding of the curriculum—how paraprofessionals can provide appropriate academic supports and accommodations to ensure student access to the curriculum.

Evaluating Outcomes

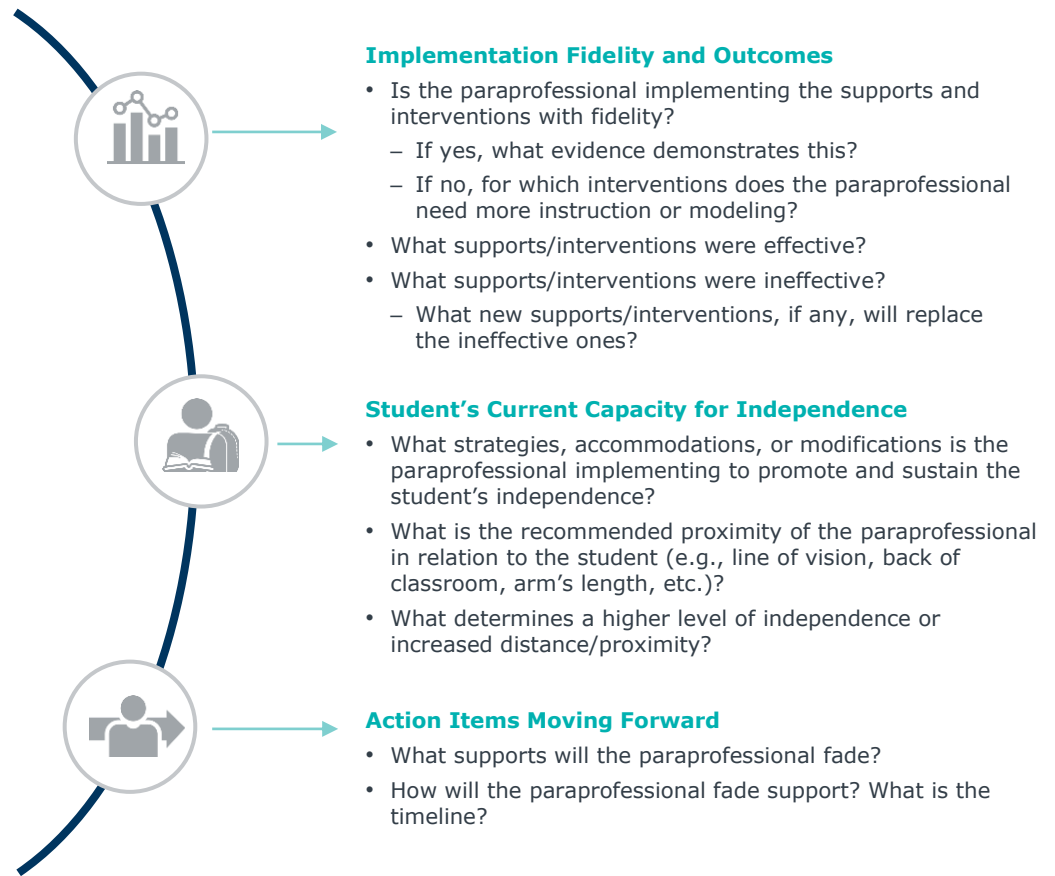
At District C, **team leaders** of self-contained programs work with general and special education teachers to support the implementation of interventions, behavioral plans, peer-to-peer programming, and data collection. Team leaders also cultivate strong relationships between families and staff.

Review Paraprofessional Support Regularly to Determine if Support Can Be Faded

At District B, District C, and District E, administrators regularly (e.g., monthly, quarterly, annually) assess paraprofessional support.

At District C, administrators require regular—monthly to quarterly—paraprofessional support review meetings. The general education teacher, special education teacher, paraprofessional, district-level teacher consultant, ASD coach (if relevant), and/or team leader may participate in these meetings. During paraprofessional support review meetings, the team uses student data to assess the effectiveness of implemented supports/interventions and discuss fading support.

Paraprofessional Support Review Questions at District C



Source: Paraprofessional Support Review Form, District C, provided June 24, 2020.

At District E, contacts note that PPTs prioritize fourth and seventh grades as “testing years” for fading support. For example, if a student functions well in the settings in which they currently receive paraprofessional support, a PPT may decide to implement a “trial run” of reduced support for six to seven weeks. By conducting these trial runs during fourth and seventh grade, PPTs can observe the outcomes of reduced paraprofessional support a full year or more before the student transitions to middle or high school (i.e., which students attend starting in sixth or ninth grade, respectively). Then, in fifth and eighth grade, PPTs can adjust paraprofessional support as needed based on the outcomes of the trial run. Ultimately, contacts state that students ideally require less paraprofessional support as they move into middle school and then high school.

Profiled Districts Do Not Track Overall Impact of Paraprofessional Support on Student Outcomes

At all profiled districts, administrators do not regularly track—either formally or anecdotally—the overall impact of paraprofessionals on student outcomes.

Notably, despite the widespread use of paraprofessionals in school districts across the U.S., there is limited research literature that demonstrates paraprofessionals’ impact on student outcomes. In general, many non-school and school factors can impact student outcomes. Examples include gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, family expectations for education, parent involvement with school, class size, teacher

competence, curricular modifications, and paraprofessional support.⁶ Thus, it is difficult for administrators to isolate the impacts of paraprofessional support on student outcomes.

In a 2014 report, the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee of Connecticut's General Assembly reviewed existing literature on paraprofessional effectiveness and found:

- "There is no evidence that assignment of paraprofessionals to assist in general education classrooms leads to improved outcomes for all students or for students with disabilities generally.
- (However,) there is some evidence that the presence of paraprofessionals in both general education classrooms and special education classrooms can result in more teacher time being spent on instruction, more student time-on-task, and increased interaction between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers."⁷

Contacts at District A and District E suggest that administrators track academic metrics (e.g., graduation rates) and behavior metrics. For example, to evaluate a paraprofessional's impact on student's coping skills, contacts at District A recommend that administrators track how often the student displays classroom disruptions and how often teachers remove the student from a classroom setting. Contacts at District E add that administrators should track behavioral data to analyze the effectiveness of interventions and supports that behavioral specialists recommend in consultations.

For more information on program evaluation frameworks, see the EAB report [District Program Evaluation](#).

Importantly, contacts at District E emphasize that administrators should involve paraprofessionals and special education teachers in creating a paraprofessional evaluation framework.

Integrate Evaluation of Paraprofessional Support into District-Wide Assessments of Special Education Practices

Administrators should assess the paraprofessional role when conducting comprehensive reviews of district-wide special education programs and practices.

At District E, an external organization conducted a district-wide study of special education practices in 2016—in follow-up to a previous, comprehensive review in 2010. Study results indicated that district administrators needed to develop a more standardized process to determine when a student requires paraprofessional support. Study findings also highlighted the need for more targeted professional development to increase paraprofessional effectiveness. In follow-up to the 2016 study, administrators developed several formal documents and policies to standardize paraprofessional responsibilities and the process for managing requests. Administrators also created new job descriptions for specialized paraprofessional roles and implemented professional development targeted to those roles.

6) "School Paraprofessionals Staffing," Legislative Program Review and Investigation Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, 41-50, accessed July 15, 2020, http://aftct.org/sites/aftct.org/files/pri_para_staffing_study.pdf.

7) Ibid.

4) Organizational Structure

Special Education/Student Services Department

At Profiled Districts, Three to Six Individuals Manage Specific Special Education Programs

These titles vary across profiled districts: director, program coordinator, supervisor, and assistant director.

At District A, District C, District D, and District E, three to six dedicated individuals manage specific special education programs, sometimes across different grade ranges. For example, at District A, two directors oversee on-campus special education services—one at the elementary level and one at the secondary level. Two additional directors oversee different types of off-campus special education programs: behavioral schools, residential programs, and hospital programs.

The below table presents special education/student services department staffing at District A, District C, District D, and District E. Note that the table does not include district-level support staff, such as behavioral interventionists, speech pathologists, and ASD coaches.

Staffing in Special Education/Student Services Departments at Profiled Districts

District	Staff Positions
District A	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Executive director for special services• Directors for special services (4)
District C	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Director of student services• Program coordinators (6)• District-level teacher consultant
District D	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Executive director of special education• Supervisors (3)• District-level teacher consultants (5)
District E	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Director of special education• Assistant directors of special education (3)• IEP compliance teachers (4)• Paraprofessional coordinator

Notably, at District C and District D, district-level teacher consultants supplement support for students with special needs.

- At District C, the district-level teacher consultant supports elementary students with special needs who receive services in general education settings specifically. The district employs one teacher consultant.
- At District D, district-level teacher consultants do not hold teaching responsibilities. Teacher consultants primarily consult and collaborate with general education teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals who support students with IEPs. The district employs five teacher consultants, who specialize (respectively) in ASD, CI, EI, professional development, and assistive technology.

5) Research Methodology

Project Challenges

Leadership at a member district approached the Forum with the following questions:

- What percentage of students at contact districts receive IEPs?
- Of students with IEPs at contact districts, what percentage receive paraprofessional support?
- In what educational environments do teachers and paraprofessionals deliver special education services at contact districts?
- What form of support do paraprofessionals provide students at contact districts?
- What specific responsibilities do paraprofessionals have in each support role at contact districts?
- How do contact districts determine whether to assign paraprofessionals to specific students?
- How do contact districts determine whether to assign paraprofessionals to a classroom?
- What professional development do contact districts provide paraprofessionals?
- How do contact districts ensure that paraprofessionals and other building staff members share an understanding of the paraprofessional role?
- Do contact districts track the impact of paraprofessional support on student outcomes? If so, what outcomes have contact districts observed?
- How do contact districts organize and staff the department of special education?

Project Sources

The Forum consulted the following sources for this report:

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- District C. Paraprofessional Determination Worksheet. Provided June 24, 2020.
- District C. Paraprofessional Support Review Form. Provided June 24, 2020.
- District E. "Developing District Norms for IEP Independence Goals." Provided June 24, 2020.
- District E. "Guidance for Communication and Collaboration with Paraeducators." Provided June 24, 2020.
- District E. "Paraeducator Guidelines." Provided June 24, 2020.
- District E. "Paraeducator Support Grid." Provided June 24, 2020.
- District E. "Parent Guide to Paraeducators." Provided June 24, 2020.
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- PBIS World. "Check In Check Out (CICO)." Accessed July 15, 2020. <https://www.pbisworld.com/tier-2/check-in-check-out-cico/>.
- State of Connecticut Department of Education. "PPT 101: Understanding the Basics of Planning and Placement Team Meeting." Accessed July 15, 2020. <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/SDE/Special-Education/PPT101.pdf>.

Research Parameters

The Forum interviewed administrators at districts that enroll between 14,000 and 17,000 students, promote some level of inclusion for students with special needs, and are high performing (as identified by Niche.com rankings).

A Guide to Districts Profiled in this Brief

District	Region	Approximate Enrollment
District A	Midwest	16,700
District B	Midwest	15,800
District C	Midwest	14,100
District D	Midwest	15,400
District E	Northeast	15,900

6) Appendix

Sample Components of Paraprofessional Determination Form at District C

- Identify student needs/concerns. Complete only the primary purpose (i.e., A, B, or C) for the paraprofessional.
 - A. Physical needs/concerns:
 - B. Academic needs/concerns:
 - C. Behavior needs/concerns:
- List the current IEP goals and objectives that address this/these concern(s).
- What supports are currently in place to address this/these concern(s)?
- Mark each below intervention/strategy that has been implemented for this student over the last school year. Indicate the number of weeks each intervention/strategy has been implemented.

Administrators can learn more about the active supervision strategy in this [description](#) by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. Administrators can find more information on CICO in this [overview](#) by PBIS World.

Interventions for Students

- Active supervision plan for student
- Check-In/Check-Out (CICO)
- Home-school plans
- Adult mentors
- Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA)
- Targeted instruction in behavior expectations/social skills
- Behavior support plans
- PBIS Club
- Peer supports
- Academic support
- Visual and/or organizational supports/strategies
- Break system
- Functional communication system

Strategies for Staff

- Classroom crisis plan
 - Classroom management support for teachers
 - Professional development for staff (specify)
-
- Indicate the number of year(s) the student has received paraprofessional support.
 - Does this student need a paraprofessional? (Y/N)
 - Can this student share a paraprofessional? (Y/N)

- Full-time equivalent (FTE) requested (ranges from 0 to 1.0 in increments of 0.1).
- Explain rationale for requested FTE.