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FOCUS on… Issues in Special Education

GUIDANCE & TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE
From the Missouri Office of Special Education

Paraprofessionals

PURPOSE OF THIS BULLETIN

The Office of Special Education has developed this technical assistance bulletin to clarify some of the common issues surrounding paraprofessionals and their use in supporting students with disabilities. Paraprofessionals are employed by a school district to provide support to school staff and students. They do not provide direct instruction or introduce students to new skills, concepts, or academic content. Paraprofessionals are sometimes called aides, para-educators, instructional assistants, teacher assistants, teacher aides, shadows, etc. The information contained in this technical assistance bulletin pertains to staff working as paraprofessionals regardless of the job title.

Qualifications of a paraprofessional

Educational qualifications for paraprofessionals vary based upon the type of school building to which they are assigned as well as by the specific duties that the paraprofessional will carry out. It is important to note that these qualifications do not apply to special education paraprofessionals **solely** assigned to act as personal assistants to a student for completing activities of daily living (e.g. feeding, toileting, mobility, etc.).

More detailed information can be found in the Title I Guidance on Paraprofessionals at http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/fedprog/grantmgmnt/NCLB_PDF/TitleI_Paraprofessionals_NRG_03012004.pdf

Below is a summary of the requirements related to the qualifications of a paraprofessional:

- Buildings with Title I targeted assistance programs (use Title I funds to serve only at-risk students)
  Any paraprofessional must have a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent (GED). **Please note** that some school districts have higher standards based on school board policy. It is important to know your district's requirements for paraprofessional qualifications.

- Buildings with Title I schoolwide programs (use Title I funds to serve all students)
  Any paraprofessional working in a Title 1, Part A program must have a high school diploma or its recognized equivalent (GED) and meet one of the following requirements:
  - ✓ Completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education;
  - ✓ Obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or
  - ✓ Met a rigorous standard of quality and can demonstrate, through a formal state or local academic assessment (the Paraprofessional Assessment in Missouri), knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing and mathematics; or knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing, reading readiness, writing readiness and mathematics readiness, as appropriate.
    Exception: These qualifications do not apply to a paraprofessional whose primary responsibility is to serve as a translator or whose duties consist solely of conducting parental involvement activities under Title 1, Part A.

- Specialized Assignments and Duties
  Please note that paraprofessionals who are assigned to specialized areas such as Orientation and Mobility or Braille have additional qualification requirements. Please refer to the Missouri State Plan, Regulation VI starting on page 104 for specifics http://www.dese.mo.gov/divspeced/stateplan/documents/Regulation_VI_2010.pdf

Duties of a paraprofessional

Paraprofessionals assist with the implementation of IEPs under the direction of the teacher. Paraprofessionals provide instructional support; they should not be providing direct instruction or introducing students to new skills, concepts, or academic content.

Additional responsibilities may include meeting the physical needs of the student, assisting with classroom management such as preparation of materials, grading papers, data collection and record keeping, and providing other supports that may be necessary based on the student's needs and disability.

Districts may choose to only allow paraprofessionals with at least 60 college hours of education to supervise, not instruct, students without a certified teacher in the classroom.

Training and professional development requirements for paraprofessionals

Paraprofessionals who do not hold a teaching certificate shall receive a minimum of fifteen (15) hours of training during their initial year of employment and a minimum of ten (10) hours of training in subsequent years.

Responsible public agencies must provide paraprofessionals with the orientation and training necessary for the individual to perform the duties associated with the work assignment. At a minimum, such training shall include information and experiences related to:

- The type of disabilities displayed by the students with whom they will work;
- Basic principles of behavior modification;
- Basic instructional techniques expected to be used (demonstration, modeling, cueing, reinforcement, correction, etc); and
- Other areas as necessary (positioning, lifting, and transferring techniques, feeding procedures, etc.)

Documenting paraprofessional services on the IEP

When a paraprofessional is determined to be necessary for a student to receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE), that paraprofessional is considered to be **supplementary aids and services.** The Missouri State Plan for Special Education defines this as follows:

Supplementary aids and services means aids, services and other supports that are provided in regular education classes, other education-related settings, and in extracurricular and nonacademic settings, to enable children with disabilities to be educated with nondisabled children.

The IEP must list the amount of time including frequency, location and duration that the IEP team determined that paraprofessional support is needed for the child as a supplementary aid and service. That would include services with a one-on-one paraprofessional the team has determined necessary. That would also include time with a paraprofessional who also works with other students in the class if the IEP team determined that dedicated time was needed for that paraprofessional to work with this child (individually or in a group) for a particular amount of time daily, weekly, etc. to address the annual goals.

If a paraprofessional is working in a classroom and a child with an IEP gains incidental benefit from this, it would not be reflected on the IEP. The key factor is whether the team determined that paraprofessional services were necessary and for what period of time in order to implement the IEP.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. Is it okay to list paraprofessional support on the accommodations and modifications page of the IEP or in the Present Level of Academic and Functional Performance ?

No, paraprofessional support is considered a **supplementary aid and service** and therefore, would be listed on the services summary page of the IEP showing the amount of time including frequency, location and duration that the IEP team determined paraprofessional support is needed for the child.

2. If a child is in a co-teaching or class within a class (CWC setting, is it sufficient or compliant to have a certificated general education teacher and a special education paraprofessional, not a special education teacher,

No, the co-teaching or CWC model requires that a certificated general education teacher and a certificated special education teacher provide the instruction, not a special education paraprofessional. However, there is nothing that prohibits the IEP team from determining that a student requires the support of a paraprofessional in the general education classroom *in addition* to the student receiving specialized instruction through the co-teaching model. In that case, the paraprofessional support would be listed under supplementary aids and services. Remember, as previously stated, the paraprofessional cannot replace the certificated special education teacher in the co-teaching or CWC model.

3. Can a paraprofessional implement special education instruction in a general education setting?

No, this will not count as special education. The paraprofessional can implement services but not those, such as instruction, that must be implemented by a certificated teacher.

4. If more than one special education student in a classroom has periodic contact with a paraprofessional and receives assistance from that paraprofessional does the child's IEP have to reflect these services?

No, frequently classrooms are staffed with a classroom paraprofessional who provides supports or occasional assistance to the general education and/or special education students but whose main function is to support the classroom teacher. In this case, the key question to answer by the IEP team is "does the student with an IEP require the paraprofessional support in that general education classroom?" If the answer is "yes", then those minutes would be documented on the IEP as supplementary aids and services; if the answer is "no", then those paraprofessional minutes are not documented on the services summary page of the IEP.

Missouri Department of Elementary & Secondary Education
Office of Special Education

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