

The Teacher Para Learning Connection

State Support Team 9

Issue 2

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This newsletter is a means of connecting teachers and paraprofessionals as they learn new ideas together that support the students they serve. This newsletter will be published four times a year.

In this issue, we will discuss collaboration practices that support teacher-para teams. We start with an analogy of the Head Coach and Assistant Coach as a way to portray teams.



Head Coach & Assistant Coach

Teacher & paraprofessional teams are similar to the Head Coach and the Assistant Coach. Many of us are familiar with sports and observe the interactions between these two individuals as they work together to focus a group of players toward success. Each has a defined set of responsibilities. The Head Coach earns the “credit” for wins and losses, devises the game plans, and communicates goals, plans for practice sessions, and teaches both his/her assistants and the players. In the leadership role, the Head Coach teaches and directs or supervises the assistants and the players using praise and feedback on performance.

Similar to the Head Coach, the teacher holds the responsibility for the success of the students within his/her classroom or program. The teacher prepares the IEP using data collected by team members including paraprofessionals, plans daily lessons to address student goals, offers on-the-job professional development, and communicates with each individual team member. Praise and feedback for individual members supports the collaboration process and the energy of the team. Like the assistant coach, the para follows the coach’s plans, implements the daily plans, re-teaches lessons, and supports student goals.

Teacher – Paraeducator Collaboration

In addition to clearly defined roles which was discussed in Issue 1 (October 2013), effective collaboration develops with these key factors: 1) a classroom or individual paraprofessional schedule; 2) instructional strategies that each team member understands and uses; 3) an awareness of individual student characteristics including academic and social needs of each student, IEP goals as well as the necessity for confidentiality of this information; 4) communication to share observations, data, and interactions that occurred with students (the Access Center, 2005).

Ashbaker and Morgan (2001) emphasized clearly defined roles for each team member and boundaries of responsibilities defined for parent communication and those defined by school/district policies. In addition, regular time for teachers and paraprofessionals to hold “professional dialogues” or meetings support the factors described for effective collaboration in order to discuss schedule changes, provide on-the-job training through modeling of effective instructional practices

Perhaps the most valuable insights come from paraprofessionals in our own region. Recently, during a training series, the following comments were shared:

“Teachers should not be afraid to give specific directions to their paraprofessionals.”

“Communication is the key for success, communication between the general education teacher, Intervention Specialist, and paraprofessional. Keeping in mind that we all want what is best for each student and that remains our focus.”

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or behavior interventions, and explain specific data collection needed for progress monitoring. These authors noted that teachers need to have clear ideas about what to accomplish with students prior to sharing plans with paraprofessionals and asking for suggestions. Paraprofessional experiences and observations of students may provide insights on students such as preferences, interests, strengths, behaviors, social interactions, or schedule issues.

Hauge and Babkie (2006) shared comments from paraprofessionals that promote the same collaborative practices noted above. Paraprofessionals also indicate that they want respect, honesty, clearly defined directions or expectations, and specific feedback about their performance to know what they are doing particularly well and how to improve their skills. Each of us believes that private discussions are essential when an aspect of personal behavior or interactions with students need to be addressed. Other ideas are to have “special codes” or “phrases” that signal an action or plan for a situation. Cue cards or defined steps for paraprofessionals to use during direct instruction or as behavior escalates are helpful.

Having summary sheets or “Get Acquainted Questionnaire” with characteristics of a student, IEP goals, typical social behaviors, interests, strengths, accommodations/modifications, and plans for data collection are most helpful for paraprofessionals as they begin their work with a student.

Many resources to support Teacher-Paraprofessional Teams are available.

Here are just a few to check out:

Professional Work Style & Rehearsed Responses to Requests for Confidential Information, retrieved from <http://www.paracenter.org>

Scheduling of paraprofessionals for individual or classroom: Hume, K. (2005), Classroom choreography: The art of scheduling staff and students retrieved from <http://www.iidc.indiana.edu>

The Virginia Paraprofessional Guide to Supervision and Collaboration with Paraprofessionals:

A Partnership, retrieved from http://www.doe.virginia.gov/teaching/regulations/paraprofessional_guide.pdf
Considerations: Teachers' Tools for Building Productive Relationships with Paraeducators. Retrieved from <http://education.wm.edu/centers/ttac/resources/considerations/index.php>.

Hauge, J.M. & Babkie, A.M. (2006). Develop collaborative special educator –paraprofessional teams: One para’s view. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42 (1), p 51-53.

Morgan, J. & Ashbaker, B.Y. (2001). Work more effectively with your paraeducator. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 38 (4), p 230-231.

Railsback, J., Reed, B., & Schmidt, K. (2002). *Working Together For Successful Paraeducator Services: A Guide for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals*. Northwest Regional educational Laboratory. Retrieved from http://educationnorthwest.org/webfm_send/470

The Access Center. (2005). *Working together: Teacher-paraeducator collaboration*. Retrieved from <http://familiestogetherinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Tchr-ParaCollaboration.pdf>