



January 2010 Update for District Contacts for Paraprofessional Issues

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), established the District Contacts for Paraprofessional Issues to disseminate information of importance to paraprofessionals and their supervisors.

Following are suggested questions for administrators to include when interviewing teacher candidates about the role of Paraprofessionals

1. Did your student teaching or internship experience provide any opportunity to work with paraprofessionals?
2. How would you define the term "Paraprofessional?"
3. How do you see the paraprofessional role with teachers?
4. How comfortable are you directing and managing the work of paraprofessionals?
5. Both No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) state that paraprofessionals must be "appropriately supervised." How would you define "appropriate supervision?"
6. Have you ever supervised any adult in a work setting?
7. How comfortable are you in a supervisory role?
8. What are some of the duties you would assign a paraprofessional?
9. How do you see the paraprofessional role in the classroom?
10. What do you see as the main responsibilities of a supervisor of paraprofessionals?

Supervision and Evaluation of Paraprofessionals "If You Are Not Sure Where You Are Going, How Do You Tell Someone Else How to Get There" – Bob Mager 1976

Over 40 building and district level administrators attended a session of the Supervision and Evaluation of Paraprofessionals presented by Dr. Kent Gerlach, Professor, Pacific Lutheran University.

Dr. Gerlach has been recognized nationally for his contributions, research and publications on paraprofessional issues, including their supervision, employment and training. Kent co-authored the texts, "Supervising Paraeducators in Educational Settings: A Team Approach" and "Paraeducators in School Settings."

The focus on Kent's presentation was to help administrators understand the current national issues affecting paraprofessionals and their supervisors. Some highlights of the National perspective on paraprofessionals are:

1. Every state has more paraprofessionals than 10 years ago.
2. Paraprofessionals deliver more services than certified staff without training and supervision.
3. 400 paraprofessionals across the nation were interviewed. They overwhelmingly responded that they did not feel respected, recognized, or part of a team; however, they still like what they do. Only 15% expressed an interest in becoming Special Education teachers. The rest want to be regarded as professionals.

It is anticipated that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) Reauthorization will focus on an evaluation of teachers and paraprofessionals. Specifically, how do we define quality? There is discussion of updating the current requirements to require title I paraprofessionals to have a 2-year degree or rigorous assessment and/or certification for paraprofessionals.

In light of the important contributions that paraprofessionals make and in view of national trends emphasizing the importance of differentiated staffing in the delivery of educational services, it will become more and more important that the management, training and career support of paraprofessionals be directed by state and professional standards. The standards should reflect appropriate concern for (a) the quality of service provided to students and (b) the substantive role and contribution of the paraprofessional in the process of educating students.

The CSDE along with the State Education Resource Center (SERC) has finalized a frequently asked questions document to answer common questions that educators have regarding paraprofessionals. In each update, we will include one question and its answer. The full document can be downloaded from the CSDE Paraprofessional Information and Resources page: www.ct.gov/sde/para-cali.

What is the definition of "direct supervision?"

According to federal guidelines in the **No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act**: "A paraprofessional works under the direct supervision of a teacher if (1) the teacher prepares the lessons and plans the instructional support activities the paraprofessional carries out and evaluates the achievement of the students with whom the paraprofessional is working, and (2) the paraprofessional works in close and frequent proximity with the teacher."



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Independence or Dependence?

By Stefanie Carbone, Consultant, Teaching and Learning, SERC

Our goal for all students is for them to become independent, lifelong learners. Throughout their education, however, many students need additional supports, especially our students with disabilities in the general education classroom. Often, paraprofessionals are the ones who provide these supports. But how much support is too much?

Research has shown that unnecessary close paraprofessional proximity can have unintended negative consequences on students with disabilities.¹ Some examples of this proximity include maintaining physical contact with the student, sitting immediately next to the child, having the student sitting on the paraprofessional's lap, and accompanying the child to most every place within the classroom, school building and grounds. While close proximity can have benefits such as one-to-one guidance, immediate feedback, and positive reinforcement, constant hovering may cause problems such as excessive separation from classmates, dependence on adults, interference with ownership and responsibility by the general educators, separation from classmates, dependence on adults and other problems.¹ The question that remains is: how do we ensure that the supports we provide are moving students toward independence and not perpetuating dependence?

If a student is capable of performing a task independently, he or she should be allowed and encouraged to do so. By assisting a student with a task that does not require adult assistance, a student's dependence on the adult to complete that task is increased. If you always help a particular student locate the correct page in his math book because he turns the pages slowly, he eventually will not even attempt to find the correct page. He will simply wait for you to do it for him. Without meaning to, you are teaching him to be dependent on an adult. Instead, use what the child already knows to move him forward to where he needs to be. This will begin to build his capacity to be more independent. Vygotsky calls this the "zone of proximal development" (ZPD) and it means that with adult modeling and assistance, the child will follow the example set and gradually increase his ability to perform certain tasks without assistance. The key here is that you must know the student's strengths and areas of need well and assist just beyond what the student can do independently.

Once the child has mastered a particular skill or task, it is important to discontinue any adult prompting. Prompts that occur naturally in the environment (such as a bell ringing to signal the end of a class period) can be used by the student. Everyone uses natural supports in the environment to "prompt" their actions.² We should encourage students to do the same.

Ultimately, we want our students to be as independent as possible. By putting in place appropriate supports and monitoring students carefully, we can ensure that the transition from dependence to independence is a smooth one.

Walkthrough Protocol

Recently, data on appropriate programming for students with intellectual disability in Connecticut was gathered using a walkthrough protocol approach. Although this data collection tool was used to identify programming practices for students with intellectual disability, it is likely an appropriate and efficient way to begin collecting data relative to the use of paraprofessional with students with other disabilities or without disabilities. School personnel may want to consider adding to this to develop a more comprehensive tool for gathering baseline data on the appropriate use of paraprofessionals in their schools and across the district. *The Walkthrough Protocol is included in the Connecticut Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals: Working with Students Birth to 21.* <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=321752>

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¹Giangreco, Michael F., Edelman, Susan W., Luiselli, Tracy Evans & MacFarland, Stephanie Z. C. Helping or Hovering? Effects of Instructional Assistant Proximity on Students with Disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 64(1), 7-18.

²Causton-Theoharis, J., & Mamgren, K. Building bridges: Strategies to help paraprofessionals promote peer interaction. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37(6), 18-24.