

September 2009 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.

Paraprofessional Overview of CALI (Connecticut Accountability or Learning Initiative)

This module provides a one day overview of the components of the initiative so paraprofessionals are better equipped to support teachers in implementing the strategies and goals of CALI. In this interactive workshop, participants will:

- Learn about CALI and why it is a priority of the Connecticut State Department of Education
- Develop tools for documenting information that helps teachers plan or modify lessons to accommodate the different learning needs of children
- Explore how paraprofessionals can assist teachers with maintaining environments that create a physically, emotionally, and intellectually safe environment for all learners
- Learn the 10 effective teaching strategies and how paraprofessionals can reinforce these strategies during individual or small group instruction; and
- Understand how and why teachers use data to make instructional decisions.

This one day training will be available on the following date: 8:00 a.m.—4:00 p.m.: October 22, 2009, at CREC, Hartford.

Registration is available on the CALI website: www.sdecali.net

ETS (Educational Testing Services) has announced the 2009-2010 testing dates for the ParaPro Assessment paper and pencil version: September 12, 2009; January 9, 2010, and June 12, 2010. For test centers and more information regarding the ParaPro Assessment, log onto: www.ets.org/parapro.

“Clarifying the Confidentiality Myth”

The CSDE regularly receives questions regarding confidentiality and the appropriateness of paraprofessionals viewing student’s Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and attending IEP Team Meetings. The purpose of this article is to clarify the “myth” surrounding confidentiality of certain student information and inform public school districts of their responsibilities under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Under the FERPA, each public school district is required to have written policies and procedures that address the confidentiality of student records and access to those records. FERPA allows the disclosure of information from a student’s record without first obtaining the consent of the parent (or eligible student if the student is over 18 or an emancipated minor) if the disclosure is to other school officials, including teachers within the school district and consultants on contract with the school district who have been determined by the school district to have a legitimate educational interest in accessing the student’s file. The same holds true for the paraprofessional. The education records policy of the school district must define the term “legitimate educational interest” and should indicate in their policy which employees of the school district have a legitimate educational interest in accessing a student’s education record without parental consent. School districts should be clear with their staff on who should have access to a child’s record without written parental consent by providing staff with copies or other access to the district’s education records policy.

Where a paraprofessional supports a child eligible for special education, it is important that the paraprofessional understand what is expected of them within the context of the implementation of the child’s IEP. Access to the child’s IEP is one means of achieving this familiarity with the services included in the child’s IEP and understanding the role of the paraprofessional in the implementation of the child’s IEP. Disclosure of information from the child’s IEP by the supervising teacher and other staff working with the child would also be appropriate. Each child’s record has an access sheet included in the front of the individual record. If a staff member accesses the child’s record, they must sign in on the access form indicating the reason they are accessing the child’s record.

Paraprofessionals are not required members of the IEP team under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) nor is a paraprofessional a required member of the state defined planning and placement team. Although the IDEA says “the IEP team for each child with a disability includes...at the discretion of the parent or school district, other individuals who have knowledge or special expertise regarding the child...”, the paraprofessional is employed by the school district and the school district will determine whether it is appropriate or feasible for the paraprofessional to attend the child’s IEP team meeting just as the district determines the appropriate staff members generally for the child’s IEP team meeting.

For more information, please contact Theresa DeFrancis, Consultant, Bureau of Special Education, 860-713-6933 or theresa.defrancis@ct.gov.

The CSDE along with SERC is finalizing 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.

Is there any research on strategies for assigning paraprofessionals year to year?

This specific question has not been explicitly researched. Dr. Michael Giangreco, a professor at the University of Vermont, has conducted a number of research studies regarding the effects of paraprofessional support on students with disabilities. Full-text pdfs are available on his project Web site: www.uvm.edu/~mgiangreco.

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A Problem-Solving Exercise: Each month, we will provide a case study and discussion questions to facilitate discussion among teachers, paraprofessionals, and administrators.

Miss Clark is a brand new teacher. Mrs. Hall, a veteran paraprofessional with 16 years of experience, has been assigned to work with her. Problems arise in the classroom because Mrs. Hall continues to take over with little regard for Miss Clark.

1. Why might Mrs. Hall feel the need to take over frequently?
2. How can Miss Clark tactfully handle this situation?
3. If the situation continues what should Miss Clark do?

Appropriate Roles for Paraprofessionals

The following are 10 examples of appropriate and effective utilization of paraprofessionals, taken from the model of roles, responsibilities and training of paraprofessionals identified in the *Connecticut Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals* document:

1. Participation in regularly scheduled meetings and sharing relevant information.
2. Implementation of proactive behavior and learning strategies.
3. Use of strategies that provide learner independence and positive self-esteem.
4. Assistance in accommodating and modifying learning strategies based on learning styles, ability levels and other individual differences.
5. Review and reinforcement of learning activities.
6. Assistance in engaging learners through an awareness of cognitive, physical, social, emotional and language development.
7. Use of developmentally and age-appropriate reinforcement and other learning activities.
8. Collection of data on learner activity.
9. Carry out functional (informal) assessment activities.
10. Participation in continuing professional development.

In each update, we will highlight a district that has developed a quality, comprehensive professional development program for their paraprofessionals. In this edition, the spotlight is on the Plainville School District.

Plainville School District has worked to create a high-quality professional development program for their paraprofessionals. As part of their contract, paraprofessionals are allowed to attend two staff development days which are noninstructional days. Training over the years has included: effective skills to support students in the mainstream, Wilson, and other specialized reading programs, curriculum-based training and CPR/First Aid. In addition, paraprofessionals who work with specialized populations (e.g., Autistic or Emotionally Disturbed) are offered training in behavior management and applied behavior analysis (ABA). In-district staff present all workshops with the exception of CPR and First Aid. The outside presenters are paid out of the district general staff development fund. The district has used a train the trainer model whereby they send a certificated staff to an out of district training and have him or her provide training to the paraprofessionals at a later time.

For more information, please contact Maureen Schiffer, Director of Special Education and Pupil Services, Plainville Community School, 860-793-3214, schifferm@plainvilleschools.org.