

A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports

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General Directions & Tips

- This guide is meant to be used as a workbook. Please write in it, add to it, or change the wording. Feel free to adapt it in ways that make sense to you and your team. In other words, make it your own!
- Teams that have field-tested this guide have found that it works best to meet regularly to get things accomplished. If you have too much time between meetings, things tend to get bogged down.
- Some teams have found it helpful to get input from people beyond their planning team, particularly in reference to Step 3. They have gathered peoples' perspectives in a variety of ways such as, talking to people directly, by email, or through questionnaires.
- While team members may each have copies of this guide book to refer to, we suggest you maintain a master version of this guide book to record the activities and work of your team.
- At your team meetings, we suggest that you practice collaborative teamwork principles by establishing an agenda and rotating roles (e.g., facilitator, recorder, time keeper). During meetings it also can be helpful to record information and ideas publicly on large chart paper or on overhead transparencies made from the forms in this guide book. This can help focus the work of the group visually and conceptually.

Summary of Team Activities

PLANNING STEPS	Person(s) Responsible	Date Initiated	Date Completed
1. Inform your local school board of your intention to establish a team, or use an existing team, to address paraeducator issues			
2. Ensure that the team includes the appropriate members of the school and local community			
3. Have the team assess their own status and fact-find in relation to the six paraeducator topics: a. Acknowledging b. Orienting & Training c. Hiring & Assigning d. Interactions with Others e. Roles & Responsibilities f. Supervision & Evaluation			
4. Prioritize and select topics and specific issues that reflect areas of need within the school that the team will work on first			
5. Update your local school board of the team's ranked priorities			
6. Design a plan to address the team's ranked priorities			
7. Identify local, regional, and statewide resources to assist in achieving team plans			
8. Implement the team's plans			
9. Evaluate the plan's impact and plan next steps			
10. Report impact and needs to your local school community			

1. Inform your local school board of your intention to establish a team, or use an existing team, to address paraeducator issues

Suggested "To Do's"

Informing your school board should help raise awareness about the importance of paraeducator issues as they relate to the educational needs of all students. Talk to school and community members to identify concerns and determine the level of interest in addressing paraeducator issues.

People to contact:

Outline a rationale highlighting the importance of addressing paraeducator issues within the context of overall school improvement planning.

List some of the key reasons:

Consider possibilities for embedding paraeducator planning within ongoing school improvement efforts (e.g., existing teams) or for establishing a team dedicated primarily to paraeducator issues.

List options and rationales:

Make arrangements to inform your local school board.

2. Ensure that the team includes the appropriate members of the school and local community

Suggested "To Do's"

Try to maintain a workable team size of 5 to 8 people who represent different constituencies (e.g., parents, students, teachers, special educators, school administrators, paraeducators, community members). Enlist people who have different experiences. For example, you may want a paraeducator who is assigned to a classroom and another who is assigned to an individual student. You will want people who have experience working with various types of students. Because the issues addressed through this planning are so important to paraeducators, sometimes the teams include a disproportionate number of paraeducators. Be aware of balancing the team's membership. Also, be aware that because of the time commitment involved in this type of planning, you may have to go the extra mile to involve people and keep them involved. Consider supports for parents such as child care, meeting times, and transportation. Consider supports for school personnel such as release time, comp time, or compensation for hourly employees.

Our Paraeducator Team Members:

Name	Constituency Represented
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	
5.	
6.	
7.	
8.	

3. Have the team assess their own status and fact-find in relation to the six paraeducator topics:

Self-Assessment

As a team: (a) rate your school's performance on each numbered statement (1-28); and (b) rate your school's performance on each of the six areas major headings (A-F). List additional relevant facts you already have or need to get.

Check one box for each statement

A.	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Acknowledging Paraeducators				
1. Paraeducators should be considered members of the educational teams corresponding to their work assignments. These teams typically consist of the student (when appropriate)				

Other Relevant Facts:

Items based on: Giangreco, CichoskiKelly, Backus, Edelman, Tucker, Broer, CichoskiKelly & Spinney (1999).

Check one box for each statement				
B.	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Orienting & Training Paraeducators				
4. Paraeducators should receive orientation (e.g., information about the student, classroom, and school) and entry-level training prior to working directly with students (e.g., teamwork, inclusive education, roles and responsibilities of team members, principles of learning).				
5. Paraeducators should receive ongoing, on-the-job, training to match their specific job responsibilities and assignments.				
6. Paraeducators should have access to ongoing learning opportunities, in addition to their on-the-job experiences (e.g., workshops, courses, internet study) that promote their skill development in relevant areas (e.g., supporting students with challenging behaviors; approaches to literacy; use of technology; needs of students with low incidence disabilities) and have input into what training they need.				
7. Paraeducator training experiences should be designed to allow individuals to gain continuing education or college/university credit.				
Other Relevant Facts:				

Hiring & Assigning Paraeducators

8. Practices should be established to recruit, hire, and retain paraeducators.
9. Substitute paraeducators should be recruited and trained to ensure that a student's access to education and participation in his/her educational program is not unduly disrupted when the regular paraeducator is unavailable due to occurrences such as illness, injury, personal leave, or professional development.
10. Each school should have an agreed upon team process and criteria for determining whether paraeducator support is needed for students with disabilities to receive an appropriate education.
11. When paraeducator support is determined to be necessary for a student, a written plan should explicitly clarify the nature and extent of the support and explain how it is referenced to the student's educational program (e.g., IEP goals, general education curriculum).
12. In most circumstances it is advisable to assign paraeducators to classrooms or instructional programs rather than to an individual student. In the rare

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Check one box for each statement				
	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Hiring & Assigning Paraeducators (continued)				
13. When administrators are making work assignments and reassignments to meet students' educational needs, it is advisable to gain input directly from paraeducators and other team members (e.g., parents, teachers, special educators, related services providers) to understand factors that may influence job performance, job satisfaction, and reduce burnout (e.g., variety of duties, interpersonal dynamics, individual skills and interests, longevity with a particular student).				
14. Paraeducators should have an accurate job description that outlines their roles and responsibilities. This job description should be commensurate with the paraeducator's skill level as it pertains to students both with and without disabilities.				
15. Paraeducators should be compensated in accordance with their level of education, training, experience, and skills.				
Other Relevant Facts:				

Paraeducator Interactions with Students & Staff

16. Paraeducators are expected to demonstrate constructive

Check one box for each statement				
F.	Needs Major Work	Needs Some Work	OK for now	Doing Well
Supervision & Evaluation of Paraeducator Services				
24. Paraeducators should receive ongoing supervision and regular performance evaluations which are based on their job descriptions and apply clearly defined processes and procedures.				
25. Supervisors of paraeducators (e.g., teachers; special educators) should be trained in effective supervisory practices through preservice, inservice, or graduate training.				
26. Paraeducator services should be considered in school and district-level school improvement action-planning to ensure that appropriate services are available and effectively utilized.				
27. When a student is receiving support from a paraeducator, an evaluation plan should be established to determine, if possible, how and when paraeducator services can be faded through increased student independence or replaced by more naturally occurring supports (e.g., classroom teacher, peers).				
28. School districts should develop ways to evaluate the impact of paraeducator services on individual students, classrooms, and staff.				
Other Relevant Facts:				

5. Update your local school board of the team's ranked priorities

Suggested "To Do's"

- As a team, make a decision about whether this is an appropriate time in the process to inform your local school board about your team's self-assessment and ranked priorities. Depending on your school, this could be an important step in keeping the board informed, especially since there may come a point when the board may be asked to take actions (e.g., consider policy changes, make budget adjustments).
- If your team decides this is the right time to update your local school board, decide:

How will the team communicate with the board (e.g., copy of ranked priorities, written report, presentation)?

Specify here:

Who will prepare written materials or give the presentation?

List names of designated team members here:

When will the information be shared?

Date:

- If your team decides this is **not** the right time to update your local school board, decide who might be appropriate to update (e.g., school committees) and when.

Suggested "To Do's"

Try to avoid reinventing the wheel. Find out if there are existing options, successfully used in other schools, that your team should consider adopting or adapting. Check www.uvm.edu/~cdci/parasupport/sharedindex.html. Find the priorities your team selected (1-28) from Step 4 and click on the corresponding links labeled "Additional Resources Available."

If no suitable options are identified, your team may need to **invent something customized**. Because the use of paraeducators to support a full range of students with disabilities within general education is a relatively new practice, there may be a somewhat limited set of existing options from which to select. The good news is that this is fertile ground to use your team's creative abilities to extend the possibilities.

Consider using creative problem-solving strategies (Parnes, 1997) as shown on the **Brainstorming Worksheet** and **Plan of Action**. Throughout this process there is an emphasis on deliberately alternating between divergent and convergent thinking. Divergent thinking relies on being open to new ideas and deferring judgment. Convergent thinking relies on focusing in and making judgments.

1. For each selected priority (from Step 4), **restate the item as an "IWWMW..." (I w w w ...) question**. For example: "In what ways might we recruit and retain substitute paraeducators?" or "In what ways might we decide if, or when, paraeducator support is needed?"
2. **For each IWWMW... question, "brainstorm" a list of possible solutions by:**
 - Emphasizing the generation of a quantity of ideas (at least 25)
 - Deferring Judgment (don't judge ideas prematurely)
 - Being open to seemingly wild or unconventional ideas
 - Encouraging hitchhiking on ideas
 - Relying on relevant facts to help spur ideas
 - Using metaphors and analogies to generate ideas
 - Using *i* *r* (e.g., take a fact of suggestion and make it *r*, *r,r* *rr* , *r r* , , *r* *wr r*

Suggested "To Do's" (continued)

3. **Determine a set of criteria** to help your team decide which of the brainstormed possibilities are most suitable for your situation.

1. *w w w*

Brainstorming Worksheet

2. List of Brainstormed Possibilities

3. Determine Criteria

4. Evaluate Ideas Using Criteria

5. Select the Ideas to Pursue
(indicate by circling)

3. Determine Criteria



4. Evaluate Ideas Using Criteria

A vertical column of 18 horizontal lines, providing space for notes or descriptions corresponding to the rows of the table.

5. Select the Ideas to Pursue
(indicate by circling)

Plan of Action

Priority Idea:

As a result of taking the actions listed below we hope the impact will include: _____

What will be done?	By Whom?	When?

Evaluation: How will we tell if the implementation of our plan is having its intended impact?

--

Plan of Action

Priority Idea:

What will be done?	By Whom?	When?

Evaluation:

--

Plan of Action

Priority Idea:

As a result of taking the actions listed below we hope the impact will include: _____

What will be done?	By Whom?	When?

Evaluation: How will we tell if the implementation of our plan is having its intended impact?

--

7. Identify local, regional, and statewide resources to assist in achieving team plans

Local Resources:

Regional Resources:

Statewide Resources:

Other:

8. Implement the team's plan

Implementation Notes (adjustments, progress, etc.)

Date	Notes

9. Evaluate the plan's impact and plan next steps

Suggested "To Do's"

1. What information will need to be collected to determine if your team's plan of action is having its intended impact on paraeducators, students with disabilities, and others?
2. How will it be collected and from whom?
3. When will the information be collected?
4. Who will organize, analyze, and interpret the information?
5. Summarize the information and review it with the team.
6. Make decisions, based on the information, about what needs to happen next.

***** Attach any relevant reports or information not recorded above *****

10. Report impact and needs to your local school community

Suggested "To Do's"

1. Summarize the impact of implementing your team's plan of action in a brief written report. Describe what impact your plan has had on people such as paraeducators, students with and without disabilities, teachers, special educators, and parents.
2. Share the report with your local school community and other appropriate groups.
3. Cycle through the planning process to continue improving your school's paraeducator services. Revisit team member and make needed changes. Return to your team's previously identified priorities and self-assessment to begin the process of selecting new challenges.

References

Brown, L., Farrington, K., Ziegler, M., Knight, T., & Ross, C. (1999). Fewer paraprofessionals and more teachers and therapists in educational programs for students with significant