

## Special Education Paraprofessionals: Roles and Responsibilities

Special education **paraprofessionals**, also known as teacher's aides or instructional assistants, play an essential role in supporting students with disabilities in various educational settings. Their responsibilities vary depending on the needs of the students, the nature of the classroom, and the specific tasks assigned by the lead teacher or school.

A **special education teacher overseeing paraprofessionals** plays a critical leadership role in guiding and supporting the paraprofessionals to ensure they are effectively assisting students with disabilities. This responsibility involves mentoring, training, supervision, and coordination, all of which help paraprofessionals meet the educational and personal needs of students. The following is a breakdown of roles and responsibilities:

| Area                       | Special Education Teacher                                      | Paraprofessional   |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| <b>Instruction</b>         | Designs and delivers personalized instruction                  | Assists in delivering lessons and reinforcing concepts   |
| <b>Behavioral Support</b>  | Develops and oversees behavior intervention plans              | Implements behavior plans  |
| <b>Personal Care</b>       | Ensures paraprofessionals are trained to provide proper care   | Provides direct personal care to students (feeding, toileting)                                     |
| <b>IEP Management</b>      | Writes, manages, and adjusts IEPs for each student             | Supports IEP goals through direct student engagement   |
| <b>Supervision</b>         | Supervises paraprofessionals and classroom dynamics            | Monitors students during non-instructional times   |
| <b>Collaboration</b>       | Leads collaboration with parents, staff, and specialists       | Works under the direction of the special education teacher   |
| <b>Documentation</b>       | Oversees documentation and uses it for assessments and reports | Assists in recording student progress for teacher review (under discretion of supervising teacher) |
| <b>Crisis Intervention</b> | Develops crisis intervention strategies and leads responses    | Assists in crises, following protocols   |
| <b>Material Adaptation</b> | Develops instructional materials suited to individual needs    | Modifies materials based on teacher's instructions   |
| <b>Decision-Making</b>     | Makes final decisions on curriculum, behavior plans, and IEPs  | Follows teacher's decisions on instructional strategies  |

**Paraprofessionals** are essential in supporting special education students, but they must always work under the supervision and guidance of the special education teacher. They **can** help with instructional support, behavior management, and personal care, but **cannot** make instructional decisions, create or modify IEPs, or handle formal communication with parents regarding student progress. Their role is to implement and support strategies developed by certified staff, ensuring consistency and structure in the students' learning environment. Here is some additional guidance on expectations for paraprofessionals:

| Sped Paraprofessionals May:  | Sped Paraprofessionals May Not:  |
|--|--|
| <b>Implement IEP Goals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support students in achieving the goals outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under the guidance of the teacher.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Carry out activities and interventions as directed by the teacher to address academic, social, or behavioral goals.</li> </ul>         | <b>Develop or Modify IEPs:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> create, modify, or independently implement IEPs. This is the responsibility of the special education teacher and the IEP team.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> set or change academic, behavioral, or social goals for students.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Supervise Students:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Supervise students during transitions between classes, recess, lunch, and other non-classroom activities.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Ensure student safety in non-academic settings (e.g., on field trips, in the cafeteria).</li> </ul>   | <b>Provide Formal Instruction:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> deliver formal, independent instruction or lessons without the direction of a certified teacher.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> design or modify lesson plans or curriculum.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Provide Academic Support:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Assist students with completing assignments, tests, and projects.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Reinforce skills and concepts that the special education teacher has taught.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Work with students individually or in small groups to meet their IEP goals.</li> </ul> | <b>Assess Students' Progress:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> perform formal assessments, evaluations, or diagnostic tests. These are handled by the special education teacher or specialized staff.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> make determinations about a student's eligibility for services or suggest changes in services.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Implement IEP Goals:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support students in achieving the goals outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under the guidance of the teacher.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Carry out activities and interventions as directed by the teacher to address academic, social, or behavioral goals.</li> </ul>         | <b>Make Decisions Regarding Accommodations or Modifications:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> independently decide on accommodations, modifications, or interventions for students. These decisions must come from the IEP team or special education teacher.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> change or ignore</li> </ul>                       |

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|   | accommodations outlined in a student's IEP (e.g., extended time on tests, use of assistive technology).  |
| <b>Implement Behavior Plans:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Follow the behavior intervention plan (BIP) designed by the special education teacher or school psychologist.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use techniques such as positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Help manage classroom behavior by supporting students in following routines.</li> </ul> | <b>Create Behavior Intervention Plans:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> develop or alter behavior intervention plans (BIPs). They are responsible for implementing plans created by the special education teacher or behavior specialist.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> create new behavioral strategies or interventions on their own without approval from the teacher.</li> </ul>                      |
| <b>Support Disciplinary Decisions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Use techniques such as positive reinforcement to encourage appropriate behavior.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Aid in crisis management under guidance provided by the case manager</li> </ul>   | <b>Make Disciplinary Decisions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> discipline students or enforce school policies independently.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> remove students from the classroom for behavioral reasons without following school protocols or without the teacher's direction.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Communicate with Teachers:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide feedback to the special education teacher about students' performance, progress, and any challenges they observe.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Relay any incidents, behavioral issues, or academic struggles to the teacher for further guidance.</li> </ul>   | <b>Communicate with Parents Regarding Student Progress:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> independently discuss a student's academic progress, behavior, or performance with parents without the teacher's approval or presence.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> handle formal communications related to IEPs or student performance reports, which must come from the teacher or administration.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Support Educational or Placement Decisions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Provide input upon request by the case manager.</li> <li><input type="checkbox"/> Support students in achieving the goals outlined in their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) under the guidance of the teacher.</li> </ul>  | <b>Make Educational or Placement Decisions:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><input type="checkbox"/> <b>Cannot</b> decide on classroom placements or determine which setting (e.g., general education classroom, resource room) a student should be in.</li> </ul>  |