

Exploring the Role of Special Education Paraeducators

Programs 4-6 Participant's Packet

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Program 4: Community-Based Instruction

Program 5: Health and Medical Issues

Program 6: Supervising Paraeducators

The final three programs in this six-part series continue the exploration of the role of paraeducators in meeting the needs of students with moderate and severe disabilities. Like the first three programs, Programs 4 and 5 are targeted to the paraeducator. The fourth program—“Community-Based Instruction”—focuses on the ways in which paraeducators can help students prepare for life in the “real world.” Program 5 provides an overview of the paraeducator’s role in providing for the health and medical needs of students, along with specific instruction in basic procedures. The final program, intended for teachers and administrators, addresses the responsibilities of supervisors in supporting and directing paraeducators.

As was the case in Programs 1-3, the programs feature teachers and paraeducators from Brookside Elementary in Jessamine County, White’s Tower Elementary in Kenton County, Lincoln County Middle, and Woodford County High.

About This Packet

This packet includes overviews and content outlines for the three programs along with other relevant materials and information. See the table of contents on the next page for details.

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Professional Development Credit

Stage of Participant Development: Practice/Application

The Kentucky Department of Education has approved all KET Star Channels Seminars for professional development credit if schools or districts choose to include them in their professional development plans. Districts or schools may choose to include preparation and/or follow-up time as part of professional development. For example, if a teacher participates in one 90-minute program and spends an additional 30 minutes in related activities, he or she could be awarded a total of two hours professional development credit.

Individual teachers who wish to use these videotapes for professional development credit should check with their school professional development chair or with their district professional development coordinator.

Professional development can also be used to satisfy requirements for the fifth year program. Contact your local university or the Division of Teacher Education and Certification at 502-564-4606 for more information.

Program 4: Community-Based Instruction

Not all instruction takes place inside the school building. Most special education students' IEPs require that part of their instruction take place out in the community. Program 4 focuses on some of the skills paraeducators need to provide community-based instruction or CBI. Before beginning this instruction, paraeducators also need to familiarize themselves with school policies regarding CBI, with the state regulation that allows schools to provide CBI, and with federal labor laws affecting students.

The program features teachers and paraeducators from Lincoln County Middle School and Woodford County High School, concentrating on CBI at the middle and high school levels. The elementary schools featured in the series—White's Tower in Kenton County and Brookside in Jessamine County—use an inclusive model, so students with disabilities receive services in general education classrooms rather than in self-contained classes. So both schools combine CBI with general education curriculum, often incorporating it into field trips and including peers in the instruction.

CBI for secondary students also can occur on field trips, include non-disabled peers, and be combined with general education curriculum. However, secondary instruction often focuses on helping older students achieve personal goals and prepare for life after school. Using a combination of interviews and footage of paraeducators providing instruction in community settings, Program 4 explores how paraeducators can help students achieve these objectives.

Functional Skills Students Need To Participate in Community Living

- Using public transportation
- Planning and preparing meals
- Shopping
- Maintaining safe environments
- Staying on task
- Completing tasks
- Following work rules
- Managing money alone or with assistance
- Acquiring medical services
- Gaining access to financial and personal support systems

Social and Communication Skills Students Need for Active Community Participation

- Learning to monitor and control their behavior
- Listening and asking questions
- Asking for help
- Talking about their feelings and needs effectively
- Sharing with others
- Helping others
- Dealing with peer pressure
- Being able to solve problems

Tips for Providing Quality Community-Based Instruction

- Continue to follow the student's IEP.
- Keep lines of communication to students, parents, teachers, employers, and community members open.
- Be creative in coming up with accommodations students need to work in the community.
- Understand students' characteristics and interests.
- Talk with students' employers about the type of work, training, and evaluation available.
- Use auditory, visual, and tactile cues to keep the student involved and on task when providing instruction in a community setting.
- Make sure the student understands exactly what he or she is expected to do.
- Provide appropriate guidance or prompting for students as they practice skills, gradually withdrawing assistance as the student masters the skill.
- Whenever possible, provide students with a process to find answers to their questions themselves.
- Use appropriate behavioral supports for students in community settings (see Program 3 for more information).
- Keep track of what is happening to the students and what needs to change for more successful learning.
- Work to strengthen the connection between the community and people with disabilities.

Questions To Ask When Evaluating Students in CBI Settings

- What distractions most often interfere with learning?
- Which rewards work best for a particular student?
- What progress has the student made?
- Does the student listen to and follow instructions?
- Does the student ask for help if required?
- Is the student becoming more independent?
- Does the student work well with others?
- Does the student express feelings and opinions appropriately?

Program 5: Health and Medical Issues

Students with moderate to severe disabilities often need help with personal care, and many also have health and medical needs. One role of the paraeducator is to help students with personal care—toileting, diapering, and feeding, for example. With proper training, the paraeducator also may perform medical and therapeutic procedures.

Program 5 is not a substitute for the specific training paraeducators need to perform medical procedures. However, it does explore the types of duties the paraeducator may encounter and the general skills he or she should have to take care of students' physical needs. The program features an interview with Lincoln County Middle School teacher Mark Hurte, as well as videotaped illustrations from Lincoln County and White's Tower Elementary.

General Guidelines for Providing Personal Care and Medical Assistance for Students

- Make sure what you are doing or are being asked to do is a task that is appropriate for you to do.
- Remember that licensed, certified staff (nurses, therapists, special education teachers) are responsible and accountable for managing students' health care needs.
- Registered nurses or therapists determine if a student requires special health care. They also decide who can provide it, and they are responsible for your training and supervision.
- Trained paraeducators *may not* train other unlicensed personnel.
- Parents *may not* train unlicensed personnel.
- Take medical directions *only* from a licensed nurse carrying out a doctor's orders.
- The following tasks are often part of the paraeducator's responsibilities:
 - Positioning (helping students assume postures they cannot initiate and maintain themselves)
 - Lifting
 - Transferring
 - Carrying
 - Feeding
 - Assisting with toileting, diapering and feminine hygiene

Working with Non-Verbal Students

- If available, use the communication system developed by the speech/language pathologist—symbols, line drawings, and/or photographs—to communicate with students.
- Show basic respect.
- Provide a predictable routine.
- Interact with and talk to the student.
- Give the student choices.
- Position the student to make it easier to communicate.
- Physically place yourself on the student's level.
- Be patient and wait for the student's response to directions.

Guidelines for Lifting Students

Proper lifting maintains the back health and safety of the lifter and the student's independence, function, and range of motion.

When lifting students . . .

- Clear both transfer surfaces and the movement path.
- Stabilize the transfer surfaces. Lock wheelchair brakes and any wheeled support.
- Wear non-skid shoes.
- Tell the student what you will do in the lift and what they will be expected to do.
- Unfasten all straps and belts.
- Keep feet shoulder-width apart to improve balance.
- Bend mainly at the hips and knees while maintaining normal back alignment, including an arch in the lower back.
- Lift the student as close to his or her center of gravity as possible, by the waist or crossed arms.
- Hold the student as close to your body as possible to decrease the weight of the load.
- Instruct and enable the student to help you as much as possible.
- Complete the lift before turning; do not twist your body while lifting.
- Use safety devices, including a gait belt, whenever possible.
- If the student is heavier than 35% of your body weight . . .
 - ✓ Use two people to lift.
 - ✓ Transfer the student, rather than lift. Examples of transferring include moving the student from the floor to a standing position; from a wheelchair to a mat or chair; and from a standing table to a wheelchair.
 - ✓ Use adaptive equipment to help lift the student.
- Always *transfer* rather than lift students who can assist you.
- Remember in lifting, transferring, and carrying, your personal safety and that of the student are the primary concern.
- Consult with the physical therapist or nurse if you have questions.

Guidelines for Toileting, Diapering, and Feminine Hygiene

- Respect the student's privacy.
- Remember important safety issues, such as how to handle body fluid and using correct transferring techniques.
- Allow the student as much independence as possible.
- Learn how the student communicates the need to go to the bathroom.
- Maintain the student's privacy by closing the door or using a screen.
- Wear gloves and bag and seal diapers or body fluid.
- Dispose diapers and other supplies in a proper container.
- Wash your own and the student's hands.

Guidelines for Feeding

Feeding can be a problem for students with abnormal oral muscle tone or lack of muscle control. They may have difficulty swallowing, poor head control, secretions, or other factors that make feeding difficult and risky.

Paraeducators should . . .

- Understand the critical nature of the eating process.
- Attend carefully to the guidelines developed for a student's feeding program.

Universal Precautions

- Treat all human blood and certain bodily fluids as if they are known to be infectious for blood-borne diseases.
- Avoid direct contact with bodily fluids.
- Use a barrier, such as gloves or a mask, and wash hands after removing gloves.
- Don't eat or touch your mouth or eyes while providing first aid care.
- Clean up and dispose of waste products and needles appropriately.
- Hand washing is the single most important thing you can do to prevent transmission of infectious organisms.
 - ✓ Soap in a dispenser and disposable towels are best.
 - ✓ When water isn't available, use germicidal wipes or a waterless, alcohol-based hand wash.
- Disinfect surfaces with a bleach solution.

Program 6: Supervising the Paraeducator

Paraeducators are important members of the team working with students with disabilities. They participate in every area of special education, including providing direct instruction. Teachers and other school professionals are responsible for supervising paraeducators as well as delegating tasks and providing training. However, many schools have no established administrative policies or systems to set standards for the paraeducator's employment, roles and responsibilities, training, and supervision.

The last program in the series, targeted to administrators and teachers, features interviews with school professionals from Lincoln County Middle School, Woodford County High School, Brookside Elementary in Jessamine County, and White's Tower Elementary in Kenton County, explaining how they effectively use paraeducators in special education. All emphasize teamwork and collaboration as essential components in providing quality education for students with disabilities.

Creating an Effective Special Education Team

Determining the Roles of Team Members

Discuss and clarify each member's role (see Program 1 and page 18 of this packet for more guidance). Both school professionals and paraeducators need to know their roles and how to use the skills and expertise of each team member effectively. The 1997 book *Supervising Paraeducators in School Settings: A Team Approach*, edited by Anna Lou Pickett and Kent Gerlach, lists several general factors to consider to determine the roles of team members. These include:

- Expertise
- Training
- Comfort level
- Time constraints
- Knowledge levels of individual team members

Providing Appropriate Leadership

Leadership is critical for an effective team. The team leader is the school professional designated as the paraeducator's supervisor, usually the supervising teacher. This person is responsible for:

- Assessing the paraeducator's skills and helping him or her use them to the fullest.
- Providing direction and ideas.
- Identifying alternatives.
- Raising questions.
- Supplying feedback.
- Soliciting input from the paraeducator.

Providing Training Opportunities for Paraeducators

Like everyone else in schools, paraeducators are lifelong learners. Schools and districts should:

- Provide opportunities for paraeducators to refine their skills and maintain their current knowledge.
- Evaluate the training they provide paraeducators who work with students with disabilities.
- Consciously plan to provide training that is specific to the role that paraeducators play within the school.

The Role of the Principal in Supervising Paraeducators

According to *Supervising Paraeducators in School Settings*, the principal's responsibilities include:

- Ensuring that school professionals and paraeducators understand their roles and are aware of district policies.
- Involving school professionals in the selection of paraeducators.
- Scheduling opportunities for school professionals and paraeducators to meet regularly for on-the-job coaching and planning.
- In collaboration with school professionals, developing criteria and instruments for assessing the performance of paraeducators.
- Preparing guidelines for involving teachers in the annual performance reviews of paraeducators.
- Supporting and assisting team members in resolving interpersonal or other problems that may arise.
- Providing teachers and paraeducators with career development opportunities and support services.

The Characteristics of Effective Paraeducators

- Good interpersonal skills
- A positive attitude
- A desire for self-improvement
- Self-confidence
- Patience
- Empathy
- Concern for children

The Roles and Responsibilities of Supervising Teachers and Paraeducators

Teacher Responsibilities:

Teachers have the primary responsibility for a student's education. Their role includes:

- Deciding on the types of instruction, supports, and services the student needs
- Determining student's goals and objectives
- Preparing lesson plans
- Modifying the curriculum and determining adaptations
- Ensuring that student's IEP is implemented
- Evaluating the effectiveness of student's IEP
- Evaluating student's progress
- Involving student's parents
- Working with other service providers

Paraeducator Responsibilities

Paraeducator's primary responsibility is to perform the tasks assigned by the supervising teacher, under his or her guidance. The paraeducator may be asked to:

- Implement teacher's lesson plans
- Assist students with their work
- Collect data about student's progress and behavior
- Score teacher-developed tests
- Maintain records
- Contribute information and/or attend IEP, IFSP, or other staff meetings
- Enforce behavior management plans
- Supervise students outside the classroom (i.e., lunchroom, playground, bus)
- Perform clerical work
- Assist with student's personal care (i.e. toileting, grooming, eating)
- Provide support to students with health care needs
- Provide direct instruction and collect necessary data