



Position Paper on Training for Paraeducators in Special Education

**Teacher Education Division
Council for Exceptional Children**

Vision

Every professional educator possesses the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and values to enable students with exceptional needs to reach their potential.

Mission

The Teacher Education Division is a diverse community of professionals who lead and support teacher education on behalf of students with exceptional needs and their families. We accomplish this through:

- Research
- Professional and leadership development
- Advocacy

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Executive Summary
Teacher Education Division
Council for Exceptional Children

Position Statement on Training for Paraeducators in Special Education

The Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children recognizes that paraeducators are essential to special education teams, delivering individualized services to children with disabilities under the supervision of a fully licensed special education professional. Due to the increasingly prominent instructional role in a wide variety of settings, paraeducators must be well-prepared to meet the needs of the students with disabilities. Despite repeated calls for quality preparation over the last several decades, paraeducators continue to receive little or no training for the important role they play in special education. For paraeducators to be prepared for their critical instructional role, TED endorses implementing ongoing, competency-based, systematically planned preservice, as well as ongoing inservice professional development specifically targeted for paraeducators.

Key Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Educational agencies must define appropriate roles and responsibilities of paraeducators.

Recommendation 2: Educational agencies must create clear and comprehensive guidelines for paraeducator training specific to their job responsibilities along with supervision and guidance from a fully licensed professional.

Recommendation 3: Educational agencies must provide competency-based, systematically planned, and ongoing training to ensure that paraeducators have the content knowledge and skills to assist in the provision of special education and related services.

Teacher Education Division
Council for Exceptional Children
Position Paper on Training for Paraeducators in Special Education

The Teacher Education Division (TED) of the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) endorses high standards for students with disabilities and recognizes that all special education personnel, including paraeducators, must be well-prepared to help students meet these standards. CEC provides the *Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines* to describe the knowledge and skills paraeducators need to serve students effectively. Paraeducators must have high-quality training targeted specifically to the knowledge and skills needed for the various students and settings they serve. This position paper focuses on the necessity for preservice and ongoing inservice professional development for paraeducators serving students with disabilities. In conjunction with this critical need of training for paraeducators is the necessity for supervision by the licensed professional.

According to Pickett (1989), the term paraeducators describes these technicians in their role to licensed professionals similar to their counterparts in law and medicine designated as paralegals and paramedics. These assistants were defined as “school/agency employees 1) whose positions are either instructional in nature or who provide other direct services to children and youth and/or their families; and 2) who work under the supervision of teachers or other professional practitioners who are responsible for a) the design, implementation, and assessment of learner progress, and b) the evaluation of the effectiveness of learning programs and related services for children and youth and/or their families” (Pickett, 1999). These definitions remain consistent with the personnel qualifications for IDEA 2004 that states “paraprofessionals and assistants who are appropriately trained and supervised, in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy, in meeting the requirements of this part to be used to assist in the provision of special education and related services under this part to children with disabilities” (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)).

Background on Paraeducators in Special Education

The number of paraeducators serving students with disabilities continues to increase with data from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey noting the number of paraeducators in public and private schools exceeds 450,000 in the United States (Bitterman, Gray, & Goldring, 2013). Reasons for the increased numbers include the growing inclusion of students with disabilities into general education setting, recent standards-based reforms, and the shortage of qualified special education teachers (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, Pelsue, 2009; Giangreco, Broer, & Suter, 2009; Steinbrecher, McKeown, & Walther-Thomas, 2013).

Paraeducators in the United States and several other countries are known by various titles including paraprofessional, instructional assistant, educational assistant, special needs assistant, one-on-one assistant, personal learning assistant, teaching assistant, or paraeducator as used in this paper.

TED notes that paraeducators have assisted special educators for more than 50 years initially providing clerical services (e.g. taking attendance, checking papers, preparing bulletin boards, copying or filing paperwork, and housekeeping duties) to now assisting with individualized functional living tasks. Since the 1990's there has been a growing trend toward inclusive education of children with disabilities. Paraeducators are now an essential part of the special education team providing critical supports for the success of the students by delivering individualized services and playing an **increasingly prominent instructional role** in inclusive and specialized settings (Carter, et al., 2009; Chopra, 2009; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Fisher & Pleasant, 2012; Liston, Nevin, & Malian, 2009). Paraeducators typically live and work within their communities. With their familiarity and often times similarity with the contexts the students and their families, paraeducators also serve as cultural bridges and cultural brokers in diverse classrooms (Chopra et al., 2004; Hemmings, 2009; Jorgelina & Pugach, 2009; Rueda & Genzok, 2007).

Unfortunately, the surge in the employment of paraeducators in their instructional role to assist in providing special education services has not resulted in professional development for them (Katsiyannis et al., 2000), despite literature over the past 30 years insisting that paraeducators require training (Blalock, 1991; Breton, 2010; Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, & French, 2011; Hilton & Gerlach, 1997; Passaro, Pickett, Latham, & Hong Bo, 1994; Riggs, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001).

Paraeducators play an increasingly prominent instructional role by facilitating activities individually or in large or small groups, teaching functional life skills and vocational skills, collecting data, supporting social skills and facilitating interactions, bridging cultural gaps, and supporting students with challenging

behaviors. Their need for training is critical.

Although the paraeducator role is to “assist in providing special education and related services to children with disabilities” as defined within IDEA 2004, without sufficient clarity of responsibilities by state and local education agencies (LEAs), paraeducators are being given direct responsibility for the provision of special education to children with disabilities. This practice is contradictory to the mandates of IDEA and pose a risk of legal proceedings when paraeducators are inappropriately utilized (Etscheidt, 2005). Serious ethical and legal questions are raised about paraeducators performing tasks, such as making important curricular, instructional, management, and activity participation decisions and all without adequate professional direction or supervision (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2004; Brown, et al., 1999; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, et al., 2006; Giangreco et al., 2010; Heller & Gerlach, 2003).

In addition to the ethical and legal issues posed when paraeducators perform tasks inappropriate to their position is the potential disservice to individuals with exceptionalities when paraeducators are asked to perform tasks for which they have not been properly trained. “Just having a warm body in the classroom is not only ineffective, but also often a distraction for the teacher who is already occupied instructing a large class” (Schmidt, 2002, p. 3). The consequences of improperly trained or untrained paraprofessionals results in issues such as separation from peers and an impact on peer interactions, dependency on adults, interference with ownership and responsibility by the general educator, and students receiving instruction not planned by the teacher (Giangreco, Edelman, Luisell, & MacFarland, 1997).

Unfortunately, research continues to find that too often paraeducators are assigned duties for which they are not given adequate training (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2001; Griffin-Shirley & Matlock, 2004; Riggs & Mueller, 2001) with some paraeducators never receiving formal training in the instructional strategies they need to support students (Carter et al., 2009; Patterson, 2006). It is both unethical and unfair to the students and to the paraeducators when they paraeducators are expected to assist in an instructional role without adequate training and support (Brock & Carter, 2013a; Giangreco, 2010).

“The analysis of administrative decisions and case law revealed both the need to train paraprofessionals adequately for assigned duties and the need for those paraeducators to be supervised

adequately by credentialed, qualified professionals” (Etscheidt, 2005, p 75). Attorneys who practice education law emphasize the necessity to provide training for paraprofessionals to perform their assigned instructional duties (Darden, 2009; Minney, 2010; Walsh, 2010) and failure to “provide them with proper training may compromise the child’s legal right to receive a free appropriate public education” (Ashbaker & Minney, 2007, p. 1-4). Yet, paraeducators continue to lack knowledge about the expectations of their position, orientation, and training upon hire (Ashbaker & Minney, 2007), and paraeducators continue to be utilized to provide services to students who have the most challenging educational needs (Breton, 2010; Brown, Farrington, Knight, Ross, & Ziegler, 1999; Patterson, 2006).

Challenges with Quality Professional Development/Training for Paraeducators

Limited Guidance for the Terms “Appropriately Prepared and Trained”

IDEA 2004 stipulates that State Education Associations “must establish and maintain qualifications to ensure that personnel necessary to carry out the purposes of this part are appropriately prepared and trained, including that those personnel have the content knowledge and **skills to serve children with disabilities**” (Authority: 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(14)). These regulations do not provide specific guidance or clarification for what is deemed “appropriately trained” (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Breton, 2010).

Professional development and training are interchangeable terms in this document.

Some states created competency guidelines for certification or mandate continued training; yet, minimal qualifications exist in other states to comply with the federal mandate. A high school diploma is mandated for all paraeducators, regardless of their position, while only Title I school systems require paraeducators become “highly qualified.” Although three options exist to earn the “highly qualified” status, the option often used to determine a paraeducator’s basic academic skills is through paper-pencil or computerized tests. These tests are the only method of defining whether paraeducators qualified to serve children with disabilities with no measure to assess the performance of their skills (Christie, 2005).

Federal mandates did not specify the type of associate degree or college work necessary for preparing “appropriately trained” paraeducators to support students with disabilities; therefore, any associate

degree is deemed acceptable regardless of the coursework about effective instruction or special education. Unspecified associate degree programs, unrelated college coursework, and basic academic skill tests represent options for **compliance** with the federal mandates, but don't address the need for creating **competencies** to ensure paraeducators who serve students with disabilities have the appropriate skills to meet the duties of the position.

Preservice Training

Paraeducators training falls into three categories: on the job, inservice and preservice training (Likins, 2003). According to research, preservice training is often missing or inadequate (Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2002). In a policy statement by Goe and Matlock (2014), an emphasis is placed on the necessity for states through policy and guidance to ensure paraeducators have the knowledge and skills to **perform their duties prior to beginning their job**, such as requiring an orientation with access to and understanding of IEPs.

Education paraeducator associate degree programs serve as one model to provide the necessary preservice training to paraeducators. These programs develop an individual's knowledge and skills for the paraeducator's instructional role in the classroom through field experiences and performance evaluations, therefore providing paraeducators with the preservice training for their roles and develop **competencies** as well as provide a career path into the teaching profession. When the NCLB Act was passed, these programs flourished, although only a few focused on specific training for students with disabilities. With the minimal qualifications to pass a computerized test of basic academic skills that exist in many states, college programs offering education paraeducator associate degrees, especially those developing the skills of paraeducators in special education continue to close.

Court cases are beginning to emerge regarding the necessity for preservice training of paraeducators. In *Warton v. New Fairfield Board of Education* the court ruled that the paraeducator was grossly unprepared and untrained as she was not informed of the child's disability, provided with limited, if any, training to deal with the child's disability, and had not worked with a child with disabilities previously. In a California case, *Parents on Behalf of Student v. Clovis United School District*, (2013) the court ruled that a two-and-a-half-hour training in which paraeducators received a district instructional aide manual and a PowerPoint presentation was adequate. The paraeducators were able to begin work prior to reviewing the manual but as soon as possible after beginning their assigned duties. The necessity to provide

paraeducators with preservice and ongoing inservice training to assist them to better perform their duties and responsibilities is recommended in this case (Ashbaker & Minney, 2007).

The issue raised by TED regarding the training of paraprofessionals is the focus on **compliance** with federal legislation versus the **competencies** paraeducators require to appropriately serving students with disabilities. With the focus on student achievement and **closing the gap** between diverse sub-groups of students, the necessity of providing **appropriately prepared and trained** paraeducators through quality training programs remains critical.

With the **focus on student achievement and closing the gap** for all students, the *necessity of providing “appropriately prepared and trained” paraeducators through quality training programs remains critical.*

Voices from the field:

“I had never done this kind of work before. So I came in the first day, was handed a schedule, and was told to go to the first class. That basically was my training. It was trial by fire” (Downing et al., 2000, p. 177).

“Being provided with training and information to better assist in the classroom is crucial to the success of those students serviced” (personal communication, D. Uitto, February 17, 2012).

Paraeducators typically begin their instructional role on the first day of employment without training for the specified position, with this reality it is not reasonable to expect satisfactory results or meaningful outcomes in student achievement (Schmidt, 2002). Professional development is therefore imperative for paraeducators to be “appropriately prepared and trained.”

Lack of Role Clarification

A substantial gap exists between the realities of what paraeducators do and the defined roles of paraeducators stated in professional literature as exemplary practice (Giangreco et al., 2001). The

diversity of duties assigned to paraeducators is evident in research studies (Carter, et al., 2009; Chopra, 2009; Etscheidt, 2005; Fisher & Pleasant, 2012). Roles and responsibilities for paraeducators vary significantly by local education agencies, individual schools, and programs for students with disabilities. The roles routinely change based upon teacher perceptions of the paraeducator as an assistant to students or to them; re-assignments to a different grade, teacher, or school; or the unique needs of children they are assigned to support (Capizzi & DaFonte, 2012). The consistent trend is the increasingly instructional role that paraeducators play often without supervision (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2004; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Giangreco, Smith, & Pickney, 2006; Giangreco et al., 2010).

A lack of clarity exists regarding the expanded role for instructional support that paraeducators play (French, 2003; Giangreco, Suter, & Graf, 2011). Paraeducators report that they perform the following tasks on a daily or weekly basis: provide one-on-one instruction; facilitate social relationships among students; offer instructional support in small groups; implement behavior management programs; and perform clerical work (Carter, et al., 2009). The primary roles for the paraeducators in the study by Fisher & Pleasant (2012) include providing behavioral and social support to students; implementing teacher-planned instruction; supervising students; and personal care support. Paraeducators are also responsible for student safety, health services including invasive procedures and toileting (Etscheidt, 2005).

Beekman (2011) cites *Richland Springs Independent School District* court case when a one-on-one paraeducator substituted on frequent occasions for the physical education teacher, prompting the courts to find that the student was denied FAPE. Paraeducators are planning lessons for students, teaching, creating and administering tests, and grading (McKenzie & Lewis, 2008; Patterson, 2006). These roles are problematic in reference to IDEA as it is clearly defined in federal regulations to be the responsibilities of the teacher. Ashbaker and Minney (2007) state that paraeducators should not develop lesson plans, assign grades, develop a behavior intervention plan, or serve as substitute teachers; yet the reality is that these responsibilities are given to paraeducators.

Voices from the field:

- “According to what I understand about my job description, I am expected and asked to do things that I am technically not responsible for such as lesson planning, organization-taking

work home, dealing with parents. It seems like a rock and a hard place” (Fisher and Pleasant, 2012, p. 33).

- “If a teacher is absent, I could be asked to cover that class.” (Patterson, 2006, p. 8)
- “Because I am a man, everyone thinks I am a security guard. If a fight breaks out or child is unruly, they call me. Although I don’t mind helping, I don’t think it is fair for me to leave what I am doing to break up every fight” (Patterson, 2006, p. 7).

Lack of Systematic Inservice Training

To prevent ethical problems, TED advocates the essential need for a comprehensive system of ongoing training opportunities for paraeducators specifically targeted for them. The CEC *Special Education Professional Practice Standards*, approved in 2011, state special education professionals need to assure that paraeducators receive: 1) appropriate training for the tasks assigned; 2) assigned only tasks for which they are appropriately prepared; 3) given constructive feedback on their performance for the assigned tasks; 4) provided timely, supportive, and collegial communications regarding tasks and expectations; and 5) professional intervention when behavior is illegal, unethical, or detrimental to children with disabilities (CEC, 2011). These standards reinforce the need for clarity of roles and the need to master the *CEC Paraeducator Common Core* and appropriate areas of specialization.

Paraeducators often receive no formal training, rather learning on-the-job by interacting with students or receiving instruction from a teacher or another paraeducator (Patterson, 2006). Learning from other paraeducators means the least qualified personnel are providing training to others which is a concern. By using these options for on-the-job training, researchers report that school districts are relying on informal, localized, individualized approaches to training (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2006; Carter et al., 2009). These professional development opportunities are **random rather than linked to a comprehensive system of personnel development required by IDEA 2004** (Section 635). Likins (2003) states “adequate training” (p. 12) is competency-based, systematically planned, and ongoing to protect students and maximize the effectiveness of paraeducators in their instructional role; yet, systematic inservice training for paraeducators lags behind due to economics, size, time, and capacity challenges. .

Without a purposeful, comprehensive, evidence-based curriculum, preservice and inservice training opportunities remain a “shot in the dark.” Workshops or one-time events including those using instructional videos have very limited effect on the skills of licensed professionals or paraeducators to implement instructional strategies for support children with disabilities in the classroom (Barnes, Dunning, & Rehfeldt, 2011; Hall et al., 2010). Yet one-time events and sporadic on-the-job training continue to be the most prominent professional development opportunities for paraeducators.

In addition to the lack of continuity toward systematic training, workshops or one-time event training sessions do not utilize on-the-job coaching which is the critical component of professional development training for the application and generalization of knowledge and skills into the classroom setting (Joyce & Showers, 2002; Rienochl & Halle, 1993). A deliberate focus on the generalization of skills is a component of a systematically planned professional development necessary for paraeducators to use the intervention skills and strategies learned in their training (Hall et al., 2010).

French (2003) notes that if paraeducators do not apply skills from their training sessions for their instructional role in the classrooms or work sites, the time and effort spent on professional development is wasted. School districts cannot afford to ‘waste’ time or money.

Researched-Based Practices for Professional Development of Paraeducators

Role Clarification for Paraeducator Training

Morgan and Hofmeister (1997) reported the necessity for training be “tailor made” to fit the needs of the paraeducator. Often paraeducators attend professional development opportunities for teachers focused on curriculum, assessments, or teacher-specific practices, which do not address their professional needs. Mikulecky and Baber (2005) in their policy statement reinforce the necessity for training of paraeducators emphasizing the link between the knowledge and skill requirements for their specific job. In a policy statement, Goe and Matlock (2014) stress the necessity for clarifying roles through performance standards and job descriptions and establishing policies and requirements to ensure adequate supervision, constructive feedback, initial and ongoing training.

Competency-Based Professional Development

The Specialty Set of Knowledge and Skills for Paraeducators in Special Education (CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines) validated by the Council of Exceptional Children [CEC] in 2011 serve as the essential knowledge and skills that paraeducators serving individuals with exceptionalities should possess to assist children with disabilities and to perform their instructional role in the schools (CEC, 2015). These standards are evidence-based, research based, and professionally endorsed. Specialization knowledge and skills for the unique needs of children with disabilities can be built upon this foundation through high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused professional development through coaching by the licensed/certified professional/practitioner, typically the teacher (Davis, Kotecki, Harvey, & Oliver, 2007; Jones, Ratcliff, Sheehan, & Hunt, 2012; Lieberman & Conroy, 2013; Uitto & Chopra, 2015). CEC states the expectation that all paraeducators working with children with disabilities will, at a minimum, master the knowledge and skills within *CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines (2015)*. Beyond this minimal expectation is the development of appropriate specialization knowledge and skills through ongoing, effective, preservice professional development providing professional educators with training that is specifically targeted for paraeducators (2015).

The *CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines* are evidence-based, research based, and professionally endorsed.

Research studies find that similarities in tasks are noted across paraeducators in elementary, middle, and high schools and paraeducators who support students with low-and high-incidence disabilities hold similar responsibilities (Carter, et al., 2009). Therefore, training formats focused on a common core set of knowledge and skills, such as *CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines* (CEC, 2015), are an effective approach for competency-based professional development, which include necessary evidence-based instructional strategies necessary for paraeducators to assist in the instructional role assigned to them.

Features of Systematically Planned, Ongoing Professional Development

French (2002) highlighted the importance of paying attention to adult learning theory and addressing the unique needs of in-service paraeducators who may bring a wide variety of previous learning experiences and knowledge to their professional training sessions. These experiences assist paraeducators in making the relationships between what they are learning and their daily activities with students (Wood & Thompson, 1993). Furthermore, training programs need to address topics that have

immediate application to the classroom; provide opportunities for practicing what they learn and receive feedback and coaching from a supervisor; utilize small groups to share ideas then apply and analyze their new knowledge; and permit the paraeducators to determine when, where, what, and why they learn (Wood & Thompson, 1993). Based upon the literature of adult learning and the need for feedback through practice, standards defining the knowledge and skills and importance of teamwork with the supervising teacher providing feedback to the paraeducator are an important component of a comprehensive professional or career development program.

Joyce and Showers (2002) defined five features of effective professional development with each component providing some impact on the knowledge and skill development of teachers in their research. The combination of effective training activities include presentation of theory, demonstration of a skill or modeling, practice of the skill within the training setting, feedback, and coaching for application. Only when coaching was added to the professional development did a significant increase in the transfer of training to the classroom occur. Additional empirical research states five characteristics of high-quality professional development for teachers: 1) coherent practices building on experiences and prior learning, aligned with a set of standards; 2) focus on specific instructional practices integrated into the classroom practice; 3) active learning strategies for engagement by participants; 4) collaboration opportunities or group learning; and 5) embedded follow-up and feedback to support the implementation of instructional practices (Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon, & Birman, 2002; Garet, Porter, Desimone, Birman, & Yoon, 2001).

To translate these practices into training for paraeducators, activities must include these characteristics: 1) align content of training to a set of standards to be competency-based, e.g. *CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines*; 2) provide the theory or purpose of instructional practices with clear descriptions of the educational practice (teachers understand theory from their preservice training, paraeducators need this understanding); 3) provide models or demonstrations of skills; 4) ensure participants are actively engaged in the learning opportunities that promote the use of knowledge and skills (e.g. partner or small group discussions and scenarios, case studies, or role plays); 5) link the context of training to participants' experiences from their work settings; and 6) utilize constructive feedback from the supervising teacher to support the implementation and transfer of practices into the work setting. Licensed professionals need to model and coach paraeducators using specific feedback. These practices develop a mastery and application of skills for use with individual students within

specific settings, thus fully impacting the paraeducator's ability to "assist in providing special education and related services to children with disabilities" (IDEA, 2004).

Evidence of the Impact of Systematic Professional Development

A review of experimental research studies by Giangreco et al. (2010) and Brock and Carter (2013a) demonstrates that paraeducators, when given effective training, can carry out a variety of tasks that have a positive impact on student performance, such as embedding teacher-planned instruction, facilitating social interactions, implementing social stories, and evidence-based instructional practices such as time delay. Clear descriptions of the educational practice, modeling, follow-up training and support using performance feedback to the paraeducator are keys to for effective implementation and generalization of newly learned instructional strategies (Barnes, Dunning, & Rehfeldt, 2011; Brock & Carter, 2013b; Hall et al., 2010; Westover & Martin, 2014).

Essential Practices for Paraeducator Performance

Teachers, as supervisors, must understand the training provided to the paraeducator and delegate only those duties and responsibilities for which the paraeducator is "adequately trained" to avoid deferring curricular, instructional, and management decisions to the paraeducator (Etscheidt, 2005). Often teachers give instructional responsibilities to paraeducators if they believe the paraeducator has special training to work with students with disabilities (Giangreco, 2003), yet the paraeducator may only have attended a college course which was irrelevant to their duties (Patterson, 2006). On-the-job training for paraeducators is common, this training approach is dependent upon the special or general education teacher, who may or may not be trained to supervise, coach, or provide feedback to the paraeducator (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2004; Carter et. al, 2009).

TED recognizes the substantial growth in the use of paraeducators in special education programs and the supervisory role of teachers. Therefore the *CEC Initial Level Special Educator Preparation Standards* approved by NCATE in 2012 includes this statement, "Beginning special education professionals provide guidance and direction to paraeducators, tutors, and volunteers" (CEC, 2012). TED identifies the importance of teachers playing a supervisory role and to provide this "in accordance with State law, regulation, or written policy" as defined in IDEA 2004. Preparation for this supervisory role is essential.

In addition to the teachers assuming the role of instructional leaders and serving as supervisors for paraeducators, building level administrators or principals also hold the responsibility for establishing norms and creating a collaborative culture among teachers and paraeducators to ensure successful inclusion of students with disabilities (Biggs, Gibson, & Carter, 2016; Chopra & Uitto, 2015; French, 2003).

Summary of Competency-Based, Systematically Planned, Ongoing Professional Development

Therefore research on professional development supports competency-based, systematically planned, and ongoing training for paraeducators, which aligns with a comprehensive system plan of professional development plan referenced in IDEA 2004. Professional development for paraeducators needs to be competency-based with a set of standards such as state standards or the *Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines*; systematically planned; and ongoing with plans from orientation and preservice to inservice training and coaching. Careful planning is essential and based upon the systematic review of research involving professional development for paraeducators, as Brock and Carter (2013b) state “careful planning and forethought are essential for paraeducators to appropriately and effectively support students with individualized goals and complex support needs” (p. 217).

Recommendations for Competency-based, Systematically Planned, Ongoing Professional Development of Paraeducators

The Teacher Education Division of the Council for Exceptional Children recognizes the importance of paraeducators as members of the team delivering special education and related services to children with disabilities. For paraeducators to be prepared for their critical instructional role, it is the position of TED that competency-based, systematically planned, ongoing professional development be implemented using the following recommendations. Research from international studies indicates similar issues for the need to provide training for paraeducators. Educational agencies, including state, provincial, or local are responsible for the development of guidelines which can be utilized for defining roles and responsibilities and establishing training expectations and opportunities at the school level.

Recommendation 1: Educational agencies must define appropriate roles and responsibilities of paraeducators.

- Hold responsibility for the development of policies and guidance including the boundaries for paraeducator duties, aligned with IDEA principles and exemplary practices described in professional literature.
- Distinguish the legal and ethical responsibilities of the teacher's or related services providers and the paraeducators to delegate tasks to the paraeducator in various special education settings (e.g. inclusive and self-contained classrooms, specialized needs, and community/work settings).
- Create job descriptions which accurately specify the nature and scope of the tasks of a paraeducator candidate prior to employment.

Recommendation 2: Educational agencies must create clear and comprehensive guidelines for paraeducator training specific to their job responsibilities along with supervision and guidance from a fully licensed professional.

- Establish the adequacy of paraeducator training to ensure children with disabilities benefit from their IEP services.
- Create training for ongoing training for paraeducators to utilize evidence-based instruction to assist children with disabilities within inclusion, special education, community, and work settings.
- Ensure job descriptions accurately specify the nature and scope of the tasks and responsibilities of a paraeducator candidate to define their needs for training.
- Align training is relevant to the job descriptions and aligned to the responsibilities of the paraeducators to support individual students and the settings in which they work.
- Establish the expectations for supervisor role and examine whether a fully licensed professional is performing their supervisory role to ensure adequate direction is provided to paraeducators as stated in the *CEC Initial Level Special Educator Preparation Standards*.

Recommendation 3: Educational agencies must provide competency-based, systematically planned, and ongoing training to ensure that paraeducators have the content knowledge and skills to assist in the provision of special education and related services.

- Utilize paraeducators training components identified in research: 1) align content of training to a set of standards, (e.g. *CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines*); 2) provide purpose of instructional practices; 3) provide models or demonstrations of skills; 4) ensure participants are actively engaged in the learning opportunities through partner or small group discussions and scenarios, case studies, or role plays that promote the use of knowledge and skills; 5) link to participants' experiences from their work settings; and 6) utilize constructive feedback from the supervising teacher to support the implementation of practices into the work setting.
- Align preservice and inservice training with a competency-based set of standards to develop a core set of knowledge and skills aligned with a set of state standards that include evidence-based practices and/or *CEC Paraeducator Common Core Guidelines*. The alignment of standards will ensure that state and local education associations, teachers, higher education programs and professional development providers are consistent with the knowledge and skills being taught to paraeducators.
- Implement systematically planned, ongoing professional development within local education agencies using an orientation, inservice training, and on-the-job coaching.
 - Training must begin with an orientation to the job responsibilities and school setting or work site including information on the characteristics of the student(s); specific duties in their assigned role; discussions of building policies and procedures, (e.g.. confidentiality policies, student discipline procedures); daily schedule; introduction to school personnel; boundaries of communication with parents and colleagues; and policies affecting the paraeducator and their performance.
 - Ongoing inservice professional development and on-the-job coaching must develop the knowledge and skills for the implementation and generalization of skills to match specific task responsibilities and assignments including support for the unique needs of individual students and specific settings.
- Utilize a monitoring system with accompanying documentation system with regular performance feedback to support paraeducator growth and define future training needs.

- Design systematically planned training to allow paraeducators to gain continuing education credits or college credits as part of a career development plan (e.g. associate degree, bachelor degree).
- Conduct training activities during paid work hours or paraeducators must be compensated for participation.
- Ensure administrative support for the fully licensed professional's role as direct supervisors and the on-the-job coaches with collaborative team time with paraeducators including the allocation of funds for training

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