



# ROCKFORD AREA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## SPECIAL EDUCATION

### PARAPROFESSIONAL HANDBOOK

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This handbook contains general employment guidance, instructional expectations, and role-specific responsibilities for paraprofessionals and may be disclosed in accordance with Minnesota Statutes Chapter 13, FERPA, and applicable district policies.

Disclaimer: This handbook is administrative guidance and does not replace Board Policy, Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), Behavior Intervention Plans (BIPs), medical care plans, collective bargaining agreements, or applicable state and federal law. In the event of conflict, governing law, Board policy, student-specific plans, and district procedures shall control.

# Welcome to Rockford Area Schools!

## ISD #883 Mission Statement

**“In partnership with our communities and families, Rockford Area Schools provides challenging opportunities to engage, inspire, and educate globally minded citizens.”**

We welcome you to the Rockford School District. It is a pleasure to have you join our team! Special Education paraprofessionals are an integral team member, assisting students with Special Education needs to meet their educational goals. This handbook will assist you in answering any questions, however, you will also find that as a member of the Rockford Schools team, you have resources in your colleagues who possess a wealth of knowledge.

Thank you!

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Mr. Paul Menard, Rockford High School, IB World School

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# Introduction

## The Purpose of this Handbook

This handbook was created to provide paraprofessionals with information and resources to be successful in their careers. This handbook should not be considered a training module or replace the yearly required training, but rather treated as a wealth of information and strategies for paraprofessionals.

Potential uses for this handbook include:

- A resource to enhance communication among teachers and paraprofessionals.
- A reference for requirements established by state and federal rules and regulations.
- A resource to enhance and improve classroom and behavior management and promote independence.
- A reference for characteristics of disabilities.

## IDEA

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the federal law that supports special education and related service programming for children and youth with disabilities. It was originally known as the Education of Handicapped Children Act, passed in 1975. In 1990, amendments to the law were passed, effectively changing the name to IDEA. In 1997 and again in 2004, additional amendments were passed to ensure equal access to education.

This federal legislation is designed to ensure that children with disabilities be granted a free appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE). IDEA does the following:

- Ensure that all children with an identified disability receive special education and related services to address their individual needs.
- Ensure that children with disabilities are prepared for employment and independent living.
- Ensures that the rights of children with disabilities and their families are protected under the law.
- Assesses and ensures the efforts of institutions providing services to people with disabilities.
- Aids states, localities, federal agencies, and educational service agencies in providing for the education of children with disabilities.

Source: [IDEA Section 1400](#)

Your role, as a Rockford school employee, will be to participate on a team of professionals who implement the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for students identified as eligible for special education services ([MN Rule 125A.08](#))

Your specific responsibilities may vary, but you will spend your days working with students. Your role may be one of a behavior manager, an instructional assistant, or any number of other duties designed to

help ensure students with disabilities are able to meet academic standards and have a successful school experience.

Consistent with [MN Statute 125A.08 \(section c, 1-3\)](#), this handbook supports the training requirements for paraprofessionals. Yearly, paraprofessionals must receive training in the following areas:

- emergency procedures
- building orientation
- confidentiality
- vulnerability and reporting
- disability and behavior-specific information related to the student with whom the paraprofessional is working
- how a student's disability affects the student's education and behavior
- following lesson plans
- implementing follow-up instructional activities

## Description of Paraprofessionals in Schools

Special Education is defined as “specially designed instruction, at no cost to the parent, to meet the unique needs of a handicapped child, including classroom instruction, home instruction, and instruction in hospitals and institutions”. Therefore, a district must adapt its content, methodology, and delivery of instruction (C.F.R. § 300.39.(a)(1). Classroom teachers, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals work collaboratively as “flexible” teams to maximize their efforts to increase student achievement and independence. Note that throughout this handbook, the term “paraprofessional” will be synonymous with “special education paraprofessional.”

Paraprofessionals are traditionally supervised by a licensed teacher or an administrator who is responsible for the education of students with disabilities. Your role is to work with students. General classroom maintenance and beautification are not part of your job. A teacher may ask you to make classroom copies in an emergency, but this is not part of your overall responsibility. As a paraprofessional, you are an essential part of a special education team, and as such, you are valued for the contribution you make to student success.

The following is a sample of a special education paraprofessional responsibility:

- Provide instructional support in small groups or 1:1 student interaction
- Assist teachers in a resource room and/or classroom setting
- Provide one-to-one instruction and/or support
- Make daily accommodations and modifications specified in the IEP
- Support implementation of behavior plans
- Supervise students in hallways, the bus, or other non-instructional settings
- Collaborate with other professionals to help ensure student success
- Collect data on individuals with exceptional learning needs
- Provide personal care assistance
- Reinforce a concept the teacher has taught

- Reteach components of a lesson under the supervision of teacher
- Implement behavior management strategies

Training may be provided to you in areas such as instructional methods, teamwork, behavior management, facilitating interactions between peers and the student with a disability, use of technology, maintaining confidentiality, fostering independence in children, and providing personal care.

Special Education Teachers: They have training and require licensure to meet the needs of students receiving special education services. A special education teacher will likely be your immediate supervisor and determine your schedule and plan lessons for students.

The following are a sample of a special education teacher's responsibility:

- Develop the IEP (Individualized Education Program)
- Plan activities and lessons for students
- Communicate all plans, policies, and instructions to parents, paraprofessionals, and general education teachers
- Communicate information about individual students and data privacy
- Administer assessments for student evaluation
- Plan behavior management strategies
- Monitor progress on goals and objectives
- Coordinate related services
- Manage due process mandates
- Meet as need or regularly with paraprofessionals

General Education Classroom Teachers: They typically instruct groups of students per grade level or content area. You may work in a general education classroom assisting the teacher with the needs of special education students.

The following is a sample of a general education teacher's responsibility:

- Primary instructor
- Content expert
- Attend and participate in IEP Meetings
- Provide accommodations and modifications in the general education classroom
- Collaborate with Special Education Teachers

## Common Acronyms and Terms

As a paraprofessional, you will likely hear a variety of acronyms and terms that may be unfamiliar. Below is a list of common acronyms and terms that are used in special education.

### Acronyms

Acronym	Meaning
ABA	Applied Behavior Analysis
ADA	American with Disabilities Act
AT	Assistive Technology
BA	Behavior Analyst
BIP/PBSP	Behavior Intervention Plan/Positive Behavior Support Plan
CBM	Curriculum Based Measure
ESY	Extended School Year
FAPE	Free and Appropriate Public Education
FBA	Functional Behavior Assessment
FERPA	Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act
IDEA	Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
IEP	Individual Education Program
IFSP	Individual Family Service Plan
LRE	Least Restrictive Environment
OT	Occupational Therapist
PBS	Positive Behavior Supports
PLAAFP	Present Level of Academic Achievement and Functional Performance
PT	Physical Therapist
SLP	Speech Language Pathologist

## Terms

Term	Description
Eligibility	Student documents that identifies whether a student meets the criteria for special education services under one of 13 disability categories. Eligibility must be determined every 3 years once a student is made eligible for services.
IEP	Individual Education Program is a written document that is developed for eligible students with a disability and documents the specially designed instruction and related services. The IEP is developed, reviewed, and revised at least annually.
Annual IEP Goal	A measurable statement of desired student progress
Progress Monitoring	Data that is collected to monitor a student's progress toward annual IEP goals.
BIP/PBSP	Behavior Intervention Plan/Positive Behavior Support Plan. A plan comprising practical and specific strategies designed to increase or reduce definable behavior. These strategies address preventative techniques, replacement behaviors, how to respond to or resolve behaviors, and crisis management, if necessary.



# Confidentiality and FERPA

## Confidentiality Considerations

One of the most important aspects of ethical behavior for paraprofessionals is the handling of confidential information about students and their families. During the normal course of daily activities, you will encounter a wide variety of information about students. Information may include test scores, behavior, attendance, family matters, as well as other kinds of personal information.

**You are required by law to keep this information private.**

IDEA ([34 CFR 300.623](#)) addresses a school district's obligations to protect the confidentiality of student information. The Minnesota Data Practices Act ([MN Statute 13.02 Subd.7](#)) prohibits the unauthorized sharing of personal information. The Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) forbid the disclosure of information about students. It is necessary for you to follow the spirit and the letter of each law. The list below is a practical application of data privacy.

- Families have permission to learn about their child, NOT other children within the classroom or school
- Never discuss students with others while out in the community (ex. at the grocery store, at the park).
- Never discuss information about a student with other faculty members unless they have a need to know the information.
- Never share information in hallways, faculty lounges, and wherever someone could overhear you.
- Always err on the side of NOT disclosing information when you have a question.
- If you have a question about what kind of information you are allowed to access, speak with your building supervisor or principal.

The purpose of confidentiality is to protect our students and is not just about following the law. As parents, we would not want our children discussed in the teacher's lounge or in the office where others could hear. It is important that we protect educational records and personal identifiable information about our students.

## Communication with Teachers/Staff

Confidentiality of student information should always be considered when discussing students with teachers, staff, and even other students within the school. Information or concerns about students should only be discussed with those individuals with a legitimate educational interest in the student. If you are unsure who has a legitimate educational interest, ask your supervisor.

Examples of questions you may be asked and how might respond:

Question	Possible Response
"Is Mindy doing better now that she isn't in Ms. Schneider's class all day?"	"I appreciate that you're concerned about Mindy, but unfortunately I can't talk about that." <b>OR</b> "I am not sure if I can share that with you since you are not her teacher this year. Could you ask Ms. Houck about it? Thanks for understanding."
"Does Jesse need special math classes this year?"	"I can't share information about student placements, sorry." <b>OR</b> "Information like that is confidential, so I cannot talk with you about it. Thanks for understanding."
"Is there anything I can do to support Nicole when I see her on the playground or in the lunchroom?"	"That is a great question! I would suggest that you check with her case manager."

## Communication with Parents/Community Members

Communication with parents and other community members should be directed to the special education teacher unless he or she has directed you otherwise. At times, this might be difficult as people often expect that a paraprofessional will communicate with them either at school or in the community.

Examples of questions you may be asked and how might respond:

Question	Possible Response
"Is Levi in Special Ed?"	"That's not something I can share with you, sorry." <b>OR</b> "Information like that is confidential, so I cannot talk with you about it. Thanks for understanding."
"Why do you have to be at recess with Hunter?"	"Sorry, I can't discuss that with anyone outside of school." <b>OR</b> "Part of my job is to protect student confidentiality, so I can't explain that."
"I noticed that there is a boy in Ms. Shoop's class that is pushing other kids and yelling all the time. Is anyone doing anything about this?"	"I am sorry, but I cannot talk about students outside of school. Thanks for understanding." <b>OR</b> "I appreciate your curiosity, but unfortunately I can't share that information with you."

## Abuse and Neglect

[MN Statute 626.556, The Reporting Maltreatment of Minors Act, requires school employees to report suspected child abuse and/or neglect.](#) In most cases, schools have procedures in place for you to make a report. Be sure you understand the procedures in your school. In Minnesota, you are charged with a misdemeanor if you fail to report. It is not your responsibility to determine whether or not abuse or neglect occurred; it is simply to report your suspicions and observations. Your identity is protected by law when you make a report. This is an important responsibility and should be taken very seriously by you.

**Neglect** is the most common form of maltreatment in Minnesota. It is usually the failure of the child's caregiver to:

- Supply the child with necessary food, clothing, shelter, medical, mental healthcare, education, or appropriate supervision
- Protect the child from conditions or actions that endanger the child
- Take steps to ensure that a child is educated according to the law

Here are some signs that may suggest a caregiver is being neglectful:

- Malnutrition
- Poor hygiene
- Inadequate clothing for weather conditions
- Poor school attendance
- Injuries that are untreated
- Constant fatigue or listlessness

**Physical Abuse** is defined by the state of Minnesota as “...any physical injury or threat of harm or substantial injury, inflicted by a caregiver upon a child other than by accidental means. Physical abuse can range from minor bruises to severe internal injuries and death.” At times, a child will make statements that indicate physical abuse has occurred. In other cases, you may notice marks on the child’s body.

**Sexual Abuse** is the subjection of a child to a criminal sexual act or threatened act. Behavioral signs can differ depending on the age and maturity level of the student and the relationship of the child to the abuser, but they may include the following:

- Difficulty walking, sitting, or complaints of genital pain
- Frequent urinary tract infections
- Suddenly acting younger and more immature
- Acting more sexually mature than the student’s age would indicate
- Repeated toileting accidents that occur after the child has previously mastered these skills

**Emotional Abuse** is harm to the child's psychological capacity or emotional stability evidenced by an observable and substantial impairment of the child's functioning and is considered abuse in Minnesota. Signs are, for instance:

- Very high or very low body weight
- Sleep disorders
- Depression/Anxiety
- Lack of concern for physical appearance

These signs do not always indicate abuse. But remember, the statute requires you to report if you suspect abuse. The best way to determine if a student is experiencing neglect or abuse is to listen. Listen to what the student says and what the student does not say. Also, pay close attention if the student’s behavior changes abruptly.

The importance of the safeguards in ADA and IDEA, which protect the rights of students with disabilities, legislation concerning confidentiality and a student’s right to privacy, and your role as a mandated reporter of abuse and neglect, cannot be overstated. Make sure you understand them and adhere to them.

**How do I report Abuse or Neglect?** Contact the School Counselor, Case Manager or Administrator for more information regarding reporting procedures.

# What is a Disability?

Americans with Disabilities Act defines (US EEOC, 2009) an individual with a disability is a person who:

- Has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities.
- Has a record of such an impairment.
- Is regarded as having such an impairment

Minnesota defines a person with a disability as any person who:

- Has a physical, sensory, or mental impairment which materially limited one or more major life activities.
- Has a record of such an impairment.
- Is regarded as having such an impairment.
- Or is discriminated against because of an association with a person with a disability (Minn. Stat. § 363).

## **Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)**

Autism Spectrum Disorder is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects how an individual processes information and interprets the world. Core features of autism are persistent deficits in social interaction and communication and restricted, repetitive, or stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, or activities. Each individual with ASD displays a unique combination of characteristics, ranging from mild to severe, requiring individually determined educational and treatment programming.

## **Blind-Visually Impaired (BVI)**

"Visually impaired" means a medically verified visual impairment accompanied by limitations in sight that interfere with acquiring information or interaction with the environment to the extent that special education instruction and related services may be needed." A student with visual impairments and a functional need may be considered for special education under the Blind – Visually Impaired (BVI) category.

## **Deaf-Blind (D/B)**

Deaf-Blindness means concomitant hearing and visual impairments. The combination causes severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.

## **Deaf and Hard of Hearing (D/HH)**

Deaf/Hard of Hearing means a medically verified diminished sensitivity to sound that is expressed in terms of standard audiological measures. Students with an identified hearing loss qualify for special education services if the hearing loss affects educational, communicative, or social functioning.

## **Developmental Cognitive Disabilities (DCD)**

Developmental Cognitive Disability is defined as a condition that results in intellectual functioning significantly below average and is associated with concurrent deficits in adaptive behavior that require special education and related services.

### **Developmental Delay (DD)**

Developmental Delay (DD) is defined as a child up to age seven who is experiencing a measurable delay in development according to diagnostic instruments and procedures that fit the Developmental Delay (DD) disability category.

### **Emotional or Behavior Disorder (EBD)**

Emotional or Behavioral Disorders are defined as students who need specialized services for emotional or behavioral support for a wide range of complex and challenging emotional or behavioral conditions. Medical, biological, and psychological conditions as well as genetic dispositions can affect these students' ability to learn and function in school.

### **Other Health Disabilities (OHD)**

Other Health Disabilities include a wide range of chronic or acute health conditions, including Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD), that can range from mild to severe. Medications, treatments, therapies, and repeated hospitalizations can affect a student's ability to learn and function at school. A student with such a condition may be considered for special education under the OHD category.

### **Physically Impaired (PI)**

Physically Impaired is defined as having a medically diagnosed, chronic, physical impairment, either congenital or acquired, that may adversely affect physical or academic functioning and result in the need for special education and related services.

### **Severely Multiply Impaired (SMI)**

Severe Multiple Impairment is defined as meeting the criteria for two or more of six categorical areas: deaf or hard of hearing, physically impaired, developmental cognitive disability (severe/profound), visually impaired, emotional, or behavioral disorders and autism spectrum disorders.

### **Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD)**

Specific Learning Disability is a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using spoken or written language. The disability may be exhibited as an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations. SLD also includes conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia.

### **Speech and Language Impairment (SLI)**

Speech and Language Impairments are defined as speech/language impairment as "a communication disorder such as stuttering, impaired articulation, language impairment or a voice impairment that adversely affects a student's educational performance."

### **Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)**

Traumatic brain injury is an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both. TBI adversely affects a child's educational performance. Traumatic brain injury applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as: cognition; language; memory; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. Traumatic brain injury does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals**

### **Responsibilities of a Paraprofessional**

The responsibilities of a paraprofessional can vary between districts, schools, and even between classrooms. The special education teacher, principal, or other staff members will identify the daily responsibilities of the paraprofessionals they supervise. In some cases, you might be given a Responsibility Matrix that outlines the responsibilities of the teacher and the paraprofessional. Once those responsibilities are outlined, it is important that you review them, and ask questions to clarify any information that is unclear.

Some examples of questions that you might ask your direct supervisor are:

- Who will provide me with my weekly or daily schedule?
- Will I be working in multiple classrooms or have any duties outside of your classroom?
- How do you prefer that I bring questions or concerns to you?
- Will I be collecting data for the students I work with? What are the procedures?
- What is the procedure if I need to take a day off?
- What staff development will I be expected to participate in?
- What are the district's policies and regulations regarding harassment, teasing, or bullying?
- What is the evaluation procedure for my work?

## Examples of Possible Responsibilities:

Supervision of Groups of Students	Behavioral Supports	Delivery of Instruction/Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Assist individual students on arrival and/or departure</li> <li>● Supervise individual students during lunch</li> <li>● Supervise individual students during recess</li> <li>● Monitor students during hall passing periods</li> <li>● Accompany students to services</li> <li>● Circulate in the classroom to provide behavioral supports where needed</li> <li>● Enforce class and school rules</li> <li>● Facilitate appropriate social interactions among students</li> <li>● Supervise individual students while on field trips</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Implement positive behavior management strategies using the same emphasis and techniques as the teacher, including observing and rewarding student behavior.</li> <li>● Provide reinforcement and support according to IEPs/Individualized Behavior Plans</li> <li>● Provide physical proximity for students with behavior problems</li> <li>● Assist students who are self-managing behavior (e.g. provide cues, prompts)</li> <li>● Help students develop/self-monitor organizational skills</li> <li>● Provide cues, prompts to students to use impulse/anger control strategies</li> <li>● Provide cues, prompts to students to employ specific prosocial skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Provide instruction based on provided lesson plans</li> <li>● Read/repeat tests or directions to students</li> <li>● Read with students</li> <li>● Support classroom teacher in providing accommodation as outlined in the IEP.</li> <li>● Help students work on individual projects.</li> <li>● Support students' participation in classroom activities (e.g., using the computer, gathering materials, cooperative groups)</li> <li>● Re-teach/reinforce instructional concepts introduced by teachers to small groups or individual students.</li> <li>● Provide prompts during instruction as outlined by the teacher to promote student independence.</li> <li>● Provide instruction based on provided lesson plans</li> </ul>
Data Collection/Reporting	Activity Preparation/Follow-up	Health/Personal Related Services
<p>Observe and record:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Student progress in academic areas</li> <li>● Individual student behaviors</li> <li>● Student health needs</li> <li>● Student food/liquid intake</li> <li>● Student bathroom use/needs</li> <li>● Student use of communication skills, adaptive equipment, or devices</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Create, prepare, and organize supplies and materials.</li> <li>● Prepare classroom displays.</li> <li>● Help prepare and clean up snacks.</li> <li>● Help students clean up after activities.</li> <li>● Collect completed work from students/ return papers to students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Follow a personal care plan.</li> <li>● Assist students using the restroom.</li> <li>● Transfer, turn, position lift students.</li> <li>● Assist students to use wheelchairs, stander, other mobility devices.</li> <li>● Provide support with assistive technology</li> </ul>



## **Attitude**

All employees convey an image of the school to other professionals, to parents, and to the community as a whole. We want this to be a positive image. The special education paraprofessional is as much a part of creating this image as is the certificated staff member. Therefore, your actions, speech, and dress should be appropriate and professional at all times. Show your support for the special education program as well as your supervising teacher verbally, enthusiastically, and actively. For example, just remembering to smile and being friendly towards others can make a difference, as well as looking for ways to assist others.

When working with students, having a sense of humor, praising their efforts, and using positive statements show students that you care about them and that you enjoy what you are doing.

Remember, all staff members are responsible for the welfare of ALL students. Be willing to take initiative. Show responsibility by looking ahead at what needs to be done. Listen to directions and if unclear about what is being asked, ask questions! Work only on teaching concepts the teacher has set for the student. If unclear, ask questions.

## **Attendance**

Attendance and punctuality convey how seriously you take your job. Your supervising teacher and the students you work with count on you being at work and on time every day. Whenever possible, personal appointments should be scheduled after work hours. Talk with your supervising teacher on how to notify them in case of an absence.

# **Classroom Considerations**

## **Classroom Expectations and Routines**

As a paraprofessional, it will be important for you to understand and support schoolwide and/or classroom expectations, as well as the classroom routines for each classroom or school setting that you work in. School or classroom expectations identify behaviors that make the school or classroom a good place for students to learn. Classroom routines are established ways for students to complete a task such as sharpening pencils, requesting help, or turning in assignments.

When working with students, all staff should be positive models of the expectations, as well as provide students with praise for following the expectations. If a student is struggling to follow an expectation, it is important to provide feedback to the student to help them correct their behavior. This might include reminding them of the expectation, explaining how they need to change their current behavior to meet the expectation, or having them practice the correct way to demonstrate the expectation. Check with your direct supervisor to identify what approach he or she prefers that you take with students.

Examples of questions that you might ask your direct supervisor are:

- What are the school and classroom expectations?
- What is my role in supporting or teaching the classroom expectations?

- Are there classroom routines that I need to be aware of, and how are those routines taught to students?
- Do any of the students I work with have Behavior Intervention Plans? If so, how do I implement those?

## Instruction

As a paraprofessional you may be providing instruction to students under the direction of the special education teacher. This could be academic instruction, such as reading or math, behavioral instruction, or even social skills instruction. You might also be preparing instructional materials for lessons. There are a wide variety of instructional strategies and techniques that are effective with students with disabilities. The special education teacher will select the instructional method to be used.

Before teaching a lesson, it is helpful to review the lesson and ask yourself questions such as:

- Do I know what the goal of the lesson is?
- Are the directions clear for myself and for the students?
- Do I have the materials I need ready?
- Do I know how to implement the lesson as outlined? If not, could I ask the teacher to demonstrate it for me?
- Do I know what prompts I might need to use?
- Do I understand how the students will show that they have learned the material?
- Do I know what to do if the students are not getting it?
- Do I know what data or work samples I need to collect?

## Student Accommodations

### Understanding Accommodations

Accommodations are tools and procedures that provide equal access to instruction and assessment for students with disabilities. “Access” is the opportunity and ability for an individual to participate in the instruction, discussions, activities, products, and assessment provided to all students within a public school. Accommodations are provided to “level the playing field.” Without accommodation, students with disabilities may not be able to access grade-level instruction or participate fully in assessments. They are intended to offset the effects of the disability and to provide students with the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge and skills. Accommodations are intended to reduce, or even eliminate, the effects of a student’s disability. They do not, however, reduce learning expectations and should not give a false picture of what a student knows and can do.

### Implementing Accommodations

When working with students, you might be asked to implement or support student accommodation in a special or general education setting. The special education teacher will indicate what the students’ IEP accommodations are and how they should be implemented. It is important to remember that when implementing accommodations, they must be followed as outlined. This helps to ensure that the

student is getting equitable educational support to “level the playing field,” allows them to show what they are able to do, and work toward student independence. If you are unsure of what an accommodation means, or if a teacher you are working with asks you to change the accommodation, be sure to talk to your direct supervisor about it.

## Levels of Support

While serving as a paraprofessional, you must walk the tightrope between assisting and enabling. Think back to a time when you struggled to learn something and the achievement you felt when you were successful, like your first bike ride. Students need to experience that same achievement. Now remember when you tried to learn something that was too hard and you needed help, like getting your car to start when the battery is dead. Students need to know that there is someone who will help them when they need it. This is the tension inherent in your job. When is helping necessary and when do we let the student struggle a bit? At times paraprofessionals give students more assistance than they need in an attempt to be helpful. Students have learned that if they say something is too hard, sit there and do nothing, an adult may rescue them. This is called “learned helplessness” and can create a very dependent student. Be very careful to provide the least level of support that is needed at the time in order to encourage independent behavior. There is no acid test to determine when help is necessary and when it is not. If you work with a student and are not sure, talk it over with your team.

**INDEPENDENT:** The student knows how to do this task without any help from you.

**INDIRECT VERBAL:** An indirect verbal prompt tells the student that something is expected but not exactly what. Example: “What next?” “Now what?” Start here when using increasing hierarchy.

**DIRECT VERBAL:** This is a direct statement of what we expect the student to do or say. Example: "Come here." "Put the glass on the counter." This level of prompt requires that the student be able to follow your direction. If the indirect verbal assist did not work, move to this level.

**GESTURE:** Pointing, facial expression, mouthing words silently or otherwise indicating with a motion what you want the student to do.

**MODELING:** Modeling is simply showing the student what you want him or her to do. You do not physically touch the student. In order for modeling to work, the student must know how to imitate another person's actions.

**PARTIAL PHYSICAL ASSIST:** Less intense or intrusive than a full physical assist. If full physical assistance is hand-over-hand, the partial physical assist can be visualized as providing minimal supportive guidance—touching the wrist to stabilize handwriting.

**FULL PHYSICAL ASSIST:** Hand-over-hand assistance to complete the targeted response. This is usually used when the target response is motor in nature. For example, a full physical assist might involve putting your hand on the student's hand and moving the student's hand through the action of writing his or her name.

## Service Delivery Models

Every student has special education services based on their individual needs. These services can be organized in categories of service delivery models. Service delivery models range from minimal support (consultation in the general education classroom) to more extensive support, where students spend most of their day in a special education setting. Below is a general overview of the most common service delivery models:

### **Inclusive Instructional Setting**

A student participating in the inclusive instructional setting will be a full-time participant in the regular education classroom and have all the special education services delivered in that regular education classroom. The student does not leave the regular education setting as all or most of the student's special education services come to his regular education classroom.

### **Cooperative Teaching Model**

In the cooperative teaching model, the special education teacher co-teaches with the regular education teacher in the regular classroom. The students with IEPs receive adaptive instruction and materials from the special education teacher as part of the instruction in the regular classroom. The special education teacher is co-teaching the class and provides individualized instruction required by each student's IEP, and the instruction is delivered in the regular education environment.

### **Pull-Out Services**

Pull-out services typically happen in a setting outside the general education classroom. The student goes to the provider's (special education teacher or related service provider) classroom to work one-on-one or in a small group setting. The specialist provides the instruction, and depending on the student's needs, instruction may or may not be integrated with the general education curriculum.

### **Consultation Services**

Consultation services are provided by a related service provider which assists other professionals in meeting a student's IEP goals and objectives. The individual who receives the consulting is not the student but another professional. Consulting is a type of service delivery that is best used to ensure that a student has multiple opportunities in a day to use a particular skill.

### **Self-Contained Classrooms**

Self-contained classrooms are classrooms specifically designated for children with disabilities. Self-contained programs are usually indicated for children with disabilities who may be able to participate in the general education classroom for a limited amount of time or may not be able to participate in general education programs at all due to their disability.

## Federal Instructional Settings

The Federal Instructional Setting is the location and the amount of time that the student with an IEP/IFSP receives special education services. The Federal Setting is based on the age of the student and the amount of special education services they receive.

Ages 3-6	Ages: 6-21
31 Regular early childhood or kindergarten program at least 80% of the day	00 No IEP/IFSP/IIIP
32 Regular early childhood or kindergarten program 40-79% of the day	01 Outside regular classroom less than 21% of the school day
33 Regular early childhood or kindergarten program less than 40% of the day	02 Outside regular classroom 21-60% of the school day
41 Separate class	03 Outside regular classroom more than 60% of school day
42 Separate school	04 Public separate day school facility greater than 50% of the school day
43 Residential Facility	05 Private separate day school facility greater than 50% of the school day
44 Service Provider Location	06 Public residential facilities greater than 50% of the school day
45 Home	07 Private residential facilities greater than 50% of the school day
	08 Homebound placement

# Collaboration Considerations

## Collaborating With School Professionals

You may encounter a variety of other professionals while working as a paraprofessional. The students' team must determine through an evaluation and team discussion the need for any of these services.

- Speech / Language Pathologists (SLP) – Speech and Language Pathologists help students to improve their expressive and receptive language as well as other skills such as articulation and social communication.
- Developmental Adaptive Physical Education Teachers (DAPE) – DAPE teachers work with students receiving special services to meet their physical education needs.
- Occupational and Physical Therapists (OT and PT) – OTs and PTs help students develop skills to become physically independent.
- School Social Workers (SWK) – Social Workers have an understanding of students and work to bridge the needs of school and home.
- Licensed School Nurses – Nurses meet the medical needs of students while they are at school.
- School Psychologists (School Psych) – School Psychs assess students to determine their level of intellectual functioning. They may also offer counseling sessions or teach small groups of students to learn to manage their emotions.
- Teacher of Deaf and Hard of Hearing (TDHH) – A TDHH works with students who have varying degrees of hearing loss to teach strategies and advocacy skills to be a more successful student and adults.
- Teacher of the Blind/Visually Impaired – A BVI Teacher works with students who are visually impaired, including, but not limited to, teaching Braille.
- Teacher of Physically Impaired (PI) – Students with medically diagnosed physical impairments may also work with a Teacher of the Physically Impaired.
- Audiologist – An audiologist may assist with checking a student's hearing levels and recommending and maintaining necessary amplification devices.
- Behavior Analyst - A BA is an expert in analyzing behavior and providing recommendations to intervene
- Lead Teachers/Coordinators – Leads coordinate the activities of teachers. Not all schools have a lead teacher.

# Acknowledgment of Para Handbook

I have read and understand the contents of the Rockford Special Education Paraprofessional Handbook. I understand that I am responsible for the information contained in this handbook. If I have specific questions I can ask my supervising teacher, principal, or special education supervisor.

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Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_ Building \_\_\_\_\_