



Key points:

- **Determine exactly what student needs from paraeducator**
- **Encourage paraeducator to support both student, teacher**
- **Teach paraeducator evidence-based interventions**

Train paraeducators to foster student independence

Dedicated paraeducator support can be very useful and effective for a student with a disability. However, there are some inadvertent risks in assigning one to a student.

"It's never intended, but the risk of [student] dependency on supports is significant," said Aaron Stabel, director of [BCI Inc.](#) and [Behavior Advantage LLC](#) in Truckee, Calif. That risk grows if the paraeducator is not teaching the student self-regulation and self-management strategies, he said.

"Paraeducators can be a tool in promoting inclusion opportunities and success, but they are not intended to be a long-term support for some kids," Stabel said. "It seems like a lifetime away between 7 years old and 22 years old, but for some students skills can take a long time to learn."

Districts want to make sure they are setting students up with the skills for independence, he said. One way to do this is to train your paraeducators to work toward this goal. "Providing training to paraeducators gets them to understand that you are trying to build independence with this -- academics or socialization or behavior -- and that's one of your No. 1 goals," Stabel said.

Here are a few things you can train your paraeducators to do to help promote student independence:

- **Start with the basics.** Some paraeducator duties generalize to all students, Stabel said. Paraeducators should understand the basic strengths and disabilities of the student they're working with, maintain confidentiality, and know when to support the student and when to let the student be more independent.
- **Define paraeducator roles and responsibilities for specific students.** The IEP team needs to clearly determine what the student needs from the paraeducator, Stabel said, who himself trains paraeducators. Does the student really need paraeducator support all day throughout every activity or just specifically to help with personal care, behavior, instructions, or inclusion

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opportunities? In asking these questions, the team starts talking right away about being more strategic with paraeducator resources, Stabel said.

- **Encourage paraeducators to facilitate positive peer communication.** The paraeducator should not be impeding the student's socialization with his peers, Stabel said. This becomes more of an issue the older the student gets. If a student is in middle school with an adult following him around, it can be a social block for the student to make connections with his peers. A well-trained paraeducator can facilitate positive peer connection, Stabel said.
- **Have paraeducators defer to the classroom teacher.** The student should understand that the teacher is the boss, not the paraeducator, Stabel said. "The paraeducator can sometimes inadvertently get in the way of the student understanding that the teacher is the primary instructor," he said. Because the teacher is the certified instructor in the class, the paraeducator should not be the one delivering all the instructions to the student in an academic setting. There's a balance between supporting the student and supporting the teacher that the paraeducator should strive for, he said.
- **Share evidence-based interventions for paraeducator to use.** Without training, the paraeducator's go-to intervention is often a series of verbal prompts, Stabel said. Verbally instructing the student on what to do throughout day can be invaluable, but it can also create a level of dependency. "My question is, what are you going to do to replace yourself over time?" Stabel said. "What are you doing to teach them the skills they need so they can be more independent without paraeducator supports?"

Some evidence-based interventions Stabel said paraeducators can implement include:

- Peer-mediated intervention and instruction.
- Using gestures more than verbal prompts.
- Sitting next to the student only when necessary.
- Visual schedules and supports.
- Teaching the student to use checklists.

[Florence Simmons](#) covers Section 504, paraeducators, and transportation for LRP Publications.

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