
Appendix F

Roles of Team Members Supporting Students with Disabilities in Inclusive Classrooms

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PREMISE

For decades the literature has offered descriptions of roles for paraprofessionals in special education. These descriptions have shifted from being primarily noninstructional duties to those that are increasingly instructional in nature. There has been disagreement within the field about just how far instruction-related roles of paraprofessionals should extend. In part, the premise of this appendix is that, even in situations where there is agreement about paraprofessional roles, such agreement is insufficient to pursue effective education in inclusive schools. This requires clarifying and agreeing on the roles of all team members, understanding their interrelationships, and ensuring that they are consistent with IDEA (e.g., free appropriate public education, least restrictive environment) and exemplary practice described in the professional literature. This appendix highlights key roles for team members based on available research and contemporary practices considered desirable in inclusive schools; it is not meant to be a comprehensive list of competencies. See the resources at the end of this appendix that formed the basis for the roles, along with our collective experiences in inclusion-oriented schools.

The following individuals provided editing feedback that helped shape this appendix through their involvement in the Inclusive Special Education Service Delivery Consortium as part of Project EVOLVE Plus at the University of Vermont's Center on Disability and Community Inclusion: Carolyn Dickinson, Peg Gillard, Joan Larsen, Carrie Lutz, Blythe Leonard, Allegra Miller, Walter Nardelli, Marianne Nealy, Leslie Noble, Scott Orselet, Duane Pierson, Don Schneider, Carter Smith, Susan Stewart, Barbara Tomasi-Gay, Beverly White, Lauren Wooden, and Michael Woods.

USING THIS DOCUMENT

Your team or school is encouraged to use this appendix as a starting point to consider the respective roles of team members in your own setting. You can self-assess the status of the conceptual underpinnings (see Table 3) and roles of team members in your school or start a discussion among school faculty and families. Following review and discussion within your school, you are encouraged to modify this appendix by changing the wording, adding or deleting items, rearranging the content, or otherwise editing the document so that it assists you in clarifying team members' roles. A digital version is available on the CD-ROM accompanying this edition of COACH to facilitate any modifications you find desirable. The next step is to explore ways to put these roles into action by using them as a basis for identifying staff development and support, in hiring, orientation, collaborative teamwork, and supervision.

EVERY TEAM MEMBER'S OVERLAPPING ROLES

Every team member contributes to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms by:

- E1 Ensuring a safe and healthy environment for learning
- E2 Collaborating and communicating with other team members to develop, implement, and evaluate the individualized education programs (IEPs), access to the general education curriculum, and individually determined supports
- E3 Participating in team meetings and offering ideas and input to educational program and support decisions
- E4 Advancing his or her own learning to acquire or improve the attitudes and skills necessary to successfully include students with the full range of disabilities in the classroom (e.g., evidence-based practices)
- E5 Advocating to ensure that students' educational and support needs are adequately addressed in ways consistent with IDEA, state standards, and evidence-based practices, as well as appropriate independence and interdependence

Table 3. Conceptual underpinning

| Roles of team members should | Roles of team members should not |
|---|--|
| Be grounded in collaborative teamwork based on shared purpose and goals | Be based on disjointed approaches based on individual purposes or separate goals |
| Be consistent with their respective skills, knowledge, training, and certification/licensure to engage in tasks they are qualified to undertake | Include engaging in tasks for which they are inadequately qualified |
| Be complementary, synergistic, and based on evidence-based practices | Be contradictory, working at cross-purposes, or lack an evidence base |
| Result in equitable opportunities for students with disabilities (e.g., participation in class/school activities and environments, access to instruction from highly qualified teachers and special educators, access to the general education curriculum, access to appropriately modified/adapted curriculum and instruction, access to necessary supports) | Result in inequitable, though unintended, double standards (e.g., restricted involvement in class/school activities and environments, separation from classmates, inadequate access to instruction from highly qualified teachers and special educators, inadequately modified/adapted curriculum and instruction, inadequate or unnecessary supports) |
| Contribute to positive outcomes for students with disabilities (e.g., classroom membership, achievement of individually appropriate learning outcomes, positive peer relationships, access to increasing opportunities) | Interfere with positive outcomes by inadvertently creating barriers to membership, access to inclusive settings, achievement, peer relationships, or other opportunities available to students without disabilities |

TEACHER ROLES

Teachers contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms and demonstrate educational ownership by:

- T1 Cocreating opportunities that facilitate the valued membership of all students in the classroom (e.g., location of desk, purposeful student grouping, purposeful participation, preplanning instruction), including those with the full range of disabilities
- T2 Serving as a primary adult role model for the class to demonstrate acceptance and inclusion of individuals with diverse characteristics (including disabilities) as well as problem solving when faced with unique challenges
- T3 Knowing the student's learning characteristics, performance levels, and individualized learning outcomes (e.g., IEP goals, general education curriculum)
- T4 Engaging students with disabilities in classroom instruction and activities in various groupings (large group, small group, individual) at a level commensurate with other students in the class who do not have disabilities
- T5 Retaining a prominent role in curricular and instructional planning, adaptation, and decision making with special educators and related services personnel to adapt and modify curriculum and instruction in ways that facilitate participation of students with disabilities in typical class activities
- T6 Applying differentiation, universal design, multilevel instruction, and curriculum overlapping so that students who perform at substantially different levels can pursue individually determined learning outcomes within shared class activities
- T7 Facilitating interactions between peers with and without disabilities by teaching students with disabilities prosocial behaviors, applying positive behavior supports, and teaching students without disabilities how to interact with their classmates who have learning differences
- T8 Codirecting (along with special educators) the work of paraprofessionals who are present in the classroom by:
 - Discussing the student's characteristics, educational program, and general support needs
 - Talking about the school and classroom (e.g., expectations, procedures)
 - Training related to paraprofessionals roles as described in a clear job description (e.g., evidence-based literacy approaches, positive behavior supports) through a variety of options (e.g., workshops, teacher modeling, online learning)
 - Planning for paraprofessional interactions and lessons with students so that they are not inappropriately expected to make pedagogical decisions
 - Monitoring paraprofessional performance and communicating with them about their work in both formative and summative ways

SPECIAL EDUCATOR ROLES

Special educators contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms by:

- S1 Cocreating opportunities that facilitate the valued membership of all students in the classroom (e.g., location of desk, purposeful student grouping, purposeful participation, preplanning instruction), including those with the full range of disabilities

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- S2 Serving as a primary adult role model for the class to demonstrate acceptance and inclusion of individuals with diverse characteristics (including disabilities) as well as problem solving when faced with unique challenges
- S3 Maintaining a working knowledge of the general education curriculum and practices (e.g., classroom units, lesson plans, assessment practices) in order to contribute to contextually appropriate supports and maintain high expectations for student learning
- S4 Providing specially designed instruction in a variety of formats, such as coteaching with the classroom teacher, teaching small mixed-ability groups, or individual tutoring, ensuring that the combination of individually determined instructional formats are implemented in concert with classroom teacher(s) and context, not merely providing instruction in the physical classroom space in ways that may be disconnected from its overall operation or resorting to primarily pull-out instruction
- S5 Retaining a prominent role in curricular and instructional planning, adaptation, and decision making with classroom teachers and related services personnel to adapt and modify curriculum and instruction in ways that facilitate participation of students with disabilities in typical class activities
- S6 Applying differentiation, universal design, multilevel instruction, and curriculum overlapping so that students who perform at substantially different levels can pursue individually determined learning outcomes within shared class activities
- S7 Facilitating interactions between peers with and without disabilities by teaching students with disabilities prosocial behaviors, applying positive behavior supports, and teaching students without disabilities how to interact with their classmates who have learning differences
- S8 Codirecting the work of paraprofessionals with classroom teachers by
- Discussing the student's characteristics, educational program, and general support needs
 - Talking about the school and classroom (e.g., expectations, procedures)
 - Training related to paraprofessionals roles as described in a clear job description (e.g., research-based literacy approaches, positive behavior supports) through a variety of options (e.g., workshops, teacher modeling, online learning)
 - Planning for paraprofessional interactions and lessons with students so that they are not inappropriately expected to make pedagogical decisions
 - Monitoring paraprofessional performance and communicating with them about their work in both formative and summative ways
- S9 Applying creative problem-solving principles to extend the power of a team's collaborative efforts
- S10 Providing primary case management (e.g., facilitate team meetings and interactions, complete required paperwork such as IEP, conduct special education evaluations, serve as a key liaison with families and collaborating agencies)

PARAPROFESSIONAL ROLES¹

Paraprofessionals contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms and help create opportunities for classroom teachers and special educators to spend time instructing students with disabilities and collaborating with each other by:

- P1 Implementing supplemental (not primary) small-group and individual instruction (e.g., academic, functional, prosocial) and homework help for students with disabilities that has been planned by a qualified professional
- P2 Engaging in classwide instructional monitoring of student work (e.g., independent or small-group work) identified and planned by teachers and special educators
- P3 Collecting data on student performance and progress based on data collection systems designed by teachers or special educators
- P4 Assisting students who require personal care supports (e.g., eating, using the bathroom, dressing)
- P5 Facilitating peer interactions based on guidance from the teacher and special educator (e.g., teaches prosocial skills, fades presence and supports as appropriate, invites students to help each other)
- P6 Engaging in noninstructional tasks (e.g., clerical tasks; group supervision such as in the cafeteria, on the playground, bus boarding, field trips) identified by teachers and special educators
- P7 Responding to reassignment by school administrators as student and classroom needs change (e.g., student illness, student crisis, student success, personnel changes)

RELATED SERVICES PROVIDER ROLES

Related services providers contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms by:

- R1 Providing supports that have been determined by a student's educational team to be educationally relevant (for IEP goals and access to general education curriculum) and educationally necessary (required to receive an appropriate education) and, therefore, are linked to one or more aspect of a student's educational program (IEP goals, general education curriculum, accommodations/supports)
- R2 Providing supports that allow for student access or participation in typical school and class environments and activities
- R3 Providing supports in places and ways that are contextually compatible within the classroom schedule, activities, and culture
- R4 Selecting or developing adaptive equipment that allows for access, active participation, or prevents negative outcomes (e.g., regression, discomfort, pain)

¹Paraprofessionals referred to here may be funded by special education, general education, or some combination. Funding streams may influence their respective roles. Because IDEA "allows for paraprofessionals who are properly trained and supervised to assist in the delivery of special education," they are present to support and supplement the work of teachers and special educators, not supplant them. Therefore, it is inappropriate and undesirable for paraprofessionals to 1) provide the bulk of instruction for a student; 2) be asked to provide support in any subjects in which they are not qualified; 3) plan or adapt curriculum, instruction, or data collection; 4) serve as the primary liaison with the family; 5) develop behavior plans; 6) make decisions about where or when a student receives instruction; or 7) function as a student's primary friend in school.

- R5 Consulting with team members to transfer information and skills associated with their field to others (e.g., positioning a student for learning, programming an augmentative and alternative communication [AAC] device) that fits within inclusive educational contexts
- R6 Serving as a resource or support to the family pertaining to their field of specialty
- R7 Working directly with students to apply skills associated with their field to address students' educational or support needs (e.g., teaching braille, providing counseling)
- R8 Working with team members to determine when supports should be continued, modified, faded, or discontinued based on relevant student data

ADMINISTRATOR ROLES

Administrators, including building or district-level special education and general education administrators (e.g., superintendents, principals, assistant principals), contribute to the education of students with disabilities in inclusive schools and classrooms and display leadership and commitment to using inclusive practices by:

- A1 Communicating clear expectations about collaboration among team members and their respective roles
- A2 Communicating clear expectations and encouraging inclusive attitudes among all team members about the value, shared responsibility, inclusion, and instruction of all students with and without disabilities
- A3 Facilitating scheduled opportunities for collaboration among teachers, special educators, teacher assistants, and other services providers (e.g., master schedule, staff development, planning opportunities)
- A4 Providing access to relevant staff development opportunities related to inclusive practice (e.g., coteaching, universal design for learning, peer supports, directing the work of paraprofessionals, assistive technology, curriculum adaptation)
- A5 Ensuring constructive working conditions for personnel (e.g., staffing ratios, reducing paperwork burden, ensuring natural proportion of students with and without disabilities)
- A6 Ensuring the number of paraprofessionals assigned to any one professional (e.g., teacher, special educator) allows adequate opportunities for directing paraprofessional work as well as providing professionals with guidelines and a process for directing paraprofessional work and providing them with ongoing feedback and support
- A7 Making all personnel assignment decisions, supervising and evaluating all school personnel, and making arrangements to monitor any contracted personnel related to students with disabilities
- A8 Providing support to faculty, staff, students, and families during student crisis situations
- A9 Leading the school and/or district's annual service and school improvement planning for serving students with disabilities

STUDENT AND PARENT ROLES²

Students with disabilities and their parents contribute to the education of the student with a disability in the family within an inclusive school and classrooms by:

- F1 Developing an understanding of the student's strengths, interests, and needs (including information about his or her disability)
- F2 Offering information and insights to the team about the student that contributes to educational planning and learning (e.g., motivations, interests, disability characteristics, learning styles, talents, history)
- F3 Identifying or selecting a set of the highest learning priorities for the year that become a focus for the team
- F4 Making informed decisions about choices within the general education program and curriculum (e.g., elective courses, foreign language, cocurricular activities)
- F4 Helping to identify supports necessary for student success
- F5 Monitoring student progress and applying learned skills to nonschool settings (e.g., home, community)
- F6 Communicating key information to the team about health, mental health, and community issues that may have a bearing on the student in school
- F7 Playing a prominent role in long-range educational and transition planning as the only team members likely to be part of the educational team throughout the school career

RESOURCES

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²The balance of involvement among the student him- or herself compared with parents/guardians varies widely based on the age of the student, cultural norms of the family, and the student's ability to effectively communicate and self-advocate.

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