

# PARAPROFESSIONAL HANDBOOK

FRESHWATER EDUCATION DISTRICT

**FRESHWATER**  
  
Education District **6004**

Welcome to the new school year! Freshwater Education District serves 13 school districts with a variety of programs including special education. We provide support for teachers, paraprofessionals, administration and families of our member districts.

You have been hired to assist students with special education needs meet their educational goals. As you begin to settle into your new job, we are providing you with this manual as one way to share some general information intended to support you in your day-to-day work with students and staff. Please take some time to familiarize yourself with the information on the following pages. If after reading this material you have any questions, comments, or concerns about your role as a paraprofessional, please contact your immediate supervisor or the principal of your building.

We are confident that your district will benefit in many ways from your contributions to the students and staff. Freshwater Education District provides a variety of workshops and trainings to help develop

your talents and skills. Let us know how we can be of assistance.

## ROLE OF A PARAPROFESSIONAL

### Who are paraprofessionals?

As you may already know, a variety of job titles are used throughout the country to refer to personnel who function in the role of a “paraprofessional”. Titles in other districts include: teaching assistant, paraeducator, instructional assistant, teacher’s assistant, individualized learning assistant, pupil support assistant, and many more. In this handbook, we are using the term “paraprofessional” to refer to school employees:

whose position is either instructional in nature or who delivers other direct or indirect services to students and/or parents; and who work under the supervision of a teacher or other professional staff member who is responsible for the overall conduct of the class, the design and implementation of individualized educational programs, and the assessment of the effect of the programs on the student progress (Pickett, 1988, p.2).

The focus of this handbook is for paraprofessionals who work primarily in an instructional capacity with students and who may be included in one or more educational teams with certified professionals.

### Distinguishing Roles:

#### *Special Education and General Education Teachers:*

- have the primary responsibility for the design and development of daily instruction for all the students in the class, including students with disabilities and other unique learning needs.

*Paraprofessionals:* Your duties and tasks will vary and may change frequently. These are examples of things you may be assigned to do:

- supporting implementation of the instructional program
- classroom management

- provide input to generate ideas
- assist in development of materials and adaptations for students
- implementing specific instructional procedures developed by the special educator
- assist with physical management and positioning of students as instructed
- review practice skills
- monitoring student testing
- assisting a student's understanding of classroom expectations

## **WHAT IS INCLUSION?**

### **INCLUSION IS...**

A belief that all students have the same needs for acceptance, friendships, and feeling of being connected.

A belief that we need to have one educational system for all students; that all students are regarded as rightful members of the class and school.

Providing each and every student the curriculum and instruction needed to meet their individual needs and learning styles.

All students learning side by side even though they may have some different educational goals.

All educational staff sharing responsibility for all students.

### **INCLUSION IS NOT...**

Placing students with disabilities into general education classes without preparation or support.

Trading the quality of a student's education for inclusion or the intensive support services the student may need.

Doing away with or cutting back on special education services.

All students having to learn the same thing, at the same time, in the same way.

Sacrificing the education of typical students so that students with disabilities can be included.

Doing the student's assigned tasks for them.

## **GETTING TO KNOW AN INDIVIDUAL STUDENT**

Throughout the school year you will learn many things about all of the students in the classrooms in which you work. Given the nature of your job, there are specific student(s) with whom you will work more closely and for whom you will need more information. This section identifies ways that you can become familiar with the interests, unique characteristics, abilities and needs of the individual student(s) that you support.

### **What is an Individualized Education Plan?**

All students receiving special education services have an individualized education plan (IEP). Among other information, the IEP contains a list of the student's learning priorities for the school year. These are stated as annual goals and short term objectives. The IEP is developed each year by the student's educational team which consists of personnel from school, the student's parents or guardians, and may include the student with a disability and his/her friends. Increasingly, paraprofessionals are being asked to assist in the development of IEPs as well.

When you are providing support to a student with a disability who has an IEP, it is important that you have a working knowledge of what the individual student(s) learning priorities are and how you will support the student in moving closer to achieving those learning priorities. Thus, it may be helpful for you to take some time to review the IEP with the assistance of the special educator or ask one of the members of the student's IEP team to summarize the IEP in writing or in person for you.

*(Note: Information on an IEP is confidential and can be communicated only with members of the student's IEP team. Do not share this information with other individuals.)*

## **STUDENT'S SCHEDULE**

You will need to be familiar with the student's daily schedule. While the schedule may change or be modified over time you will need to know where the student(s) with a disability is supposed to be throughout the school day. If you have not already received a schedule, please request the schedule from the general and/or special educators on your team.

It will also be helpful if you familiarize yourself with the activities, times and schedule of the school such as the bus and lunch schedules, and the other routines of the building. Your first few days will be smoother if you know the layout of the building and the rules for cafeteria, hallway, and playground use.

## COMMUNICATION & ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Teachers are required to follow certain ethical standards of professional behavior. Paraprofessionals, too, need guidelines for appropriate conduct in their work with teachers and students. The following points about confidentiality, communication, and mandatory reporting provide an overview of considerations to guide you in work-related communications.

### **Establishing Effective Communication**

As you can imagine, there are many things that need to be communicated with educational team members. Minimally you will need to communicate about issues related to: individual student programs, curriculum planning and adaptations, roles and responsibilities, behavioral and/or health considerations, and scheduling. Communication is the foundation of effective teamwork and occurs both in person and in writing. As you begin your role as a paraprofessional, it may be helpful for you to ask both the special and general educators that you work with how you will fit into the communication loop. Of particular importance will be how to communicate on a regular basis about individual student programming needs. Some teams have a regularly scheduled time to meet weekly, even if for only ten to fifteen minutes.

Even with proactive systems of communication in place, you may encounter situations with students that require you to think and act on-the-spot. When these situations arise, make your best decision based on your knowledge of the student and the situation as it presents itself. Frequently these spontaneous decisions are made related to difficulties with changes in schedules, activities, or student groups. It may be helpful to

document these incidents in order to keep the entire educational team informed of the student's instructional and behavioral progress.

## DOCUMENTING SPONTANEOUS INCIDENTS

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Paraprofessional: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: This worksheet is to be used by paraprofessionals for the purpose of documenting challenging situations that occur during the day or week when there is not an immediate opportunity to problem solve in collaboration with the general or special educator. Bring this form completed when you (paraprofessional) meet with the general or special educator to discuss the identified issues.

1. What is the student having difficulty with? Describe the situation and the specific activity.
2. What are some of the times or situations that these difficulties may arise?
3. What are some ways that you have tried to alleviate these difficulties?



4. What were the outcomes of each of the strategies that you identified in Question #3?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
5. Do you have any suggestions or ideas?

Source: Yourk-Barr J., Doyle, ME., Kronberg, R. (1996). Creating Inclusive School Communities: Module 3b: Curriculum as everything students learn in school: Individualizing learning outcomes. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.

## **PROFESSIONAL ETHICS**

### **Accepting Responsibilities:**

- Engage only in non-instructional and instructional activities for which you are qualified or trained.
- Do not communicate progress or concerns about students to parents, community members, or other teachers.
- Refer concerns expressed by parents, students, or others to your teacher.
- Recognize the supervisor has the ultimate responsibility for instruction and management and follow the prescribed directions.
- Help to see that the best interests of individual students are met.

### **Relationships with Students and Parents:**

- Discuss a child's progress, limitations, and/or educational program only with the supervising teacher in an appropriate setting.
- Express differences of opinion with your supervising teacher only when students are absent from the room.
- Discuss school problems and confidential matters only with appropriate personnel.
- Do not engage in discriminatory practices based on a student's handicap, race, sex, cultural background, or religion.
- Respect the dignity, privacy, and individuality of all students, parents, and staff members.
- Be a positive role model.

### **Relationship with the Teacher:**

- Recognize the teacher as your supervisor.
- Establish communication and a positive relationship with the teacher.
- When problems cannot be resolved, utilize the school district's grievance procedures.

### **Maintaining Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is an important aspect of your job as a paraprofessional. Through your work you will learn information about students and families. Such information is personal and private and must not be shared beyond the family and team. Not only is it potentially disrespectful to do so, it is illegal.

Beyond students with disabilities, the privacy rights of all students and families who are associated with your school must be regarded. Following are suggested guidelines for maintaining confidentiality:

1. Never discuss information about a student in a public place (e.g., faculty lounge, hallway, grocery store).
2. Never discuss information about one student with parents of another student.
3. Never discuss information about one student with another student.
4. Never discuss information about a student with school personnel who are not considered a member of that student's service providing team.
5. If you need to access a student's records or other personal information, go through the proper channels as developed by your school.
6. Do not create your own personal files on a student or family.
7. Review the confidentiality policies of your specific school with your immediate supervisor. If you have questions regarding the policies and procedures of your school regarding confidentiality, speak to your supervisor immediately.

### **Mandatory Reporting**

All public school employees have a responsibility to be mandatory reporters under the Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act. Bring any concerns or questions you may have to your supervisor, principal, or social workers immediately.

### **Communicating with parents and families**

Another situation in which you may need to communicate with your supervising teachers regards contacts, either written or verbal, with family members. Given your close proximity to students, you may sometimes come in direct contact with parents or other family members. Ongoing communication with parents is the responsibility of the case manager and classroom teacher. However, there may be situations in which you are the person to whom parents initially communicate a need or questions. Be sure to inform the teachers about the information discussed.

### **Respectful interactions towards students**

You may develop a close relationship with the student(s) you support on a daily basis. Thus, it is important that you consider what interactions are the most respectful to the student(s) and those around him or her. Your body language, tone of voice, facial expression, choice of words, and age appropriate language all need to be considered when communicating with the student(s).

## **CURRENT TERMS IN EDUCATION**

**ASSISTIVE TECHNOLOGY DEVICE:** Any item, piece of equipment, or product system that is used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of children with disabilities. Frequently such devices aid communication and mobility.

**ATTENTION DEFICIT WITH HYPERACTIVITY DISORDER (ADHD):** Similar to ADD, ADHD is also a medical diagnosis. Some children diagnosed with ADHD may demonstrate difficulty with their educational program. In addition to those listed for ADD, students labeled ADHD typically exhibit some of the following behaviors/characteristics:

- high activity level
- impulsive and lacks self-control
- demonstrates difficulty with transitions
- maybe socially immature

**AUGMENTATIVE COMMUNICATION:** A system/mechanism by which a student who does not use spoken words to communicate, can establish effective means of communication. This could include pictograms, sign language gestures, or mechanical devices.

**AUTISM:** Autism is a neurological disorder that interferes with development of reasoning, social interaction and communication. The type and extent of learning and social challenges experienced by children with autism varies greatly.

**CASE MANAGER:** The individual who coordinates the services for a student with an IEP. This person monitors student progress, coordinates the team, and completes necessary paperwork.

**COLLABORATION:** A style of direct interaction between at least two people. Usually, the people voluntarily engage in shared decision-making as they work toward a common goal. It is common for general and special educators to collaborate in designing and implementing instruction.

**COMMUNICATION DISORDER:** An identified need for students who have articulation, voice, fluency, and/or other language impairments.

**DEAF/HARD OF HEARING (D/HH):** Services for children who have significant hearing loss.

**DEVELOPMENTAL ADAPTIVE PHYSICAL EDUCATION (DAPE):** A supplemental physical education program for students with motor needs.

**DEVELOPMENTAL COGNITIVE DELAYED (DCD):** Categories for students who have special needs in the intellectual area.

**EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION (ECSE):** Early intervention services provided for children ages 0-7. These services may be provided in a variety of settings including: community preschools, Head Start, childcare settings, homes, or center-based programs in school buildings.

**EMOTIONAL BEHAVIOR DISORDER (EBD):** A student who is labeled EBD may exhibit some of the following characteristics over a period of time and to a marked degree:

- difficulty learning that cannot be explained by other factors
- difficulty with building or maintaining interpersonal relationships
- inappropriate behaviors
- unhappiness or depression
- physical symptoms or fears related to personal or school problems

**ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL):** Students whose primary language is not English may qualify to receive services by a teacher who specializes in assisting students with their acquisition of English and other skills to prepare them for school.

**EVALUATION REPORT (ER):** This is a required document for the person assessed. Results of any or all assessments shall be summarized in a report. The summary report shall include the results and interpretation of the assessment, the person's present level of performance in the areas assessed, and the team's judgments regarding eligibility for services.

**GRADUATION STANDARDS:** Minnesota rule ensuring competency in basic standards of math, reading, and writing. (This competency test is taken in 8<sup>th</sup> grade). Profiles of learning are educational standards embedded into curriculum in a broader area of competencies.

**INDIVIDUAL EDUCATION PLAN (IEP):** A written document for a student with an identified disability that provides a statement of: the student's present level of educational performance; annual goals and short-term objectives; special education and related services. Each student identified as having special needs has an IEP.

**INDIVIDUAL INTERAGENCY INTERVENTION PLAN (IIIP):** Same as above document but also incorporates plans from other agencies involved.

**INDIVIDUAL EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM MEETING (IEP MEETING):** A conference among professionals, parents, students, and other appropriate persons for the purpose of determining eligibility for special education, developing recommendations for special education services, reviewing educational progress, or considering the continuation or termination of special education for a student.

**LEARNING DISABILITY (LD):** Students who have a learning disability have a discrepancy between their achievements. Students with this label may have difficulty either generating or receiving information that interferes with some aspect of their learning in either academic, memory, or processing skills.

**LEAST RESTRICTIVE ENVIRONMENT (LRE):** This term appears in the language of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA). It applies to the placement of students eligible for special education services in the educational environment which least restricts their interactions with students who do not receive special education services. For most students

this would be an age appropriate general education classroom in the school he/she would attend if they do not have a disability.

**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST (OT):** These school personnel provide consultation services that assist students with developing self-help, fine motor, and perceptual skills.

**OTHER HEALTH IMPAIRED (OHI):** “Other health impaired” means a broad range of medically diagnosed chronic or acute health condition that may adversely affect academic functioning and result in the need for special education instruction and related services.

**PHYSICAL THERAPIST (PT):** Physical therapists provide consultative services for students who have difficulty with their physical strength or endurance. Some of the services that physical therapists provide include: developing exercise routines, assisting with stretching and muscle tone, and improving the mobility of students.

**PHYSICALLY IMPAIRED (PI):** “Physically impaired” means 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.

#### **PRESENT LEVELS OF EDUCATIONAL/FUNCTIONAL**

**PERFORMANCE (PLEFP):** The descriptions of current functioning levels including in the areas of academic, motor, vocational, social/emotional, functional, and speech/language and communication. Present levels of educational performance are specified for each student in his or her IEP.

**RELATED SERVICES:** Many other professionals work with students who have disabilities, providing services that are related to the instruction that they receive by classroom teachers. School psychologists, therapists, school social workers, and counselors all provide related services to students with disabilities.

**REFERRAL:** A formal procedure, established by the local school district, by which a case study evaluation may be requested. It is not unusual for

classroom teachers or parents to request a referral be made to determine if special education services would be appropriate. Students cannot be evaluated without authorized consent from their parent(s) or guardian.

**SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST:** A certified person who specializes in teaching students who possess articulation, voice, fluency, and/or language impairments.

**TITLE I:** Supplementary reading and math instruction available to all students.

**TRAUMATIC BRAIN INJURY (TBI):** “Traumatic brain injury” means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment, or both, that may adversely affect a child’s educational performance and result in the need for special education and related services.

**VISUALLY IMPAIRED (VI):** “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.



## CLASSROOM ADAPTATION GUIDELINES

Adaptations are defined “as any adjustment or modification in the curriculum, instruction, environment, or materials in order to enhance the participation of a member of the classroom community” (Udvari-Solner, 1992, p.3). Many students, with and without disabilities, benefit from adaptations in order to accomplish tasks more efficiently and to participate fully in classroom activities.

It is not uncommon for paraprofessionals to help in the development of adaptations for individuals and classrooms of students. This is a very important and valued support. When considering how to develop and use an adaptation:

- Focus on what the student CAN do
- Use the least obtrusive support first
- Use age-appropriate materials, goals, and activities when planning
- Maximize active student participation
- Facilitate positive and valued interactions with peers
- Enhance the respect and dignity of the student
- Promote independence
- Increase self-esteem

- Able to be used across school and community settings

(Robi Kronberg)

## **A PROCESS FOR CREATING ADAPTATIONS**

Based upon the subject and activity occurring in the classroom, consider the following questions to assist in creating adaptations for a student(s):

1. Can the student do the same activity, in the same way, at the same level as peers?
- If not... 2. Can the student do the same activity but with adapted expectations?
- If not... 3. Can the student do the same activity but with adapted expectations and materials?
- If not... 4. Can the student do a similar activity but with adapted expectations?
- If not... 5. Can the student do a similar activity but with adapted materials?
- If not... 6. Can the student do a different, parallel activity?

If not... 7. Can the student do a different activity in a different section of the room?

(Project Dakota Outreach)

## **STRATEGIES FOR INTERACTING WITH STUDENTS**

*The following is a list of strategies what may be helpful in your interactions with students. Some students who have IEPs will have specific objectives related to their behavior and engagement in learning tasks and with peers. Such students are likely to have a behavioral plan that will augment or extend some of these general guidelines.*

- Develop a positive rapport with student.
- Maintain a professional but supportive role with student as opposed to a “friend” relationship.
- Provide positive, specific, and frequent feedback.
- Maintain your voice at non-threatening moderate level.
- Use respectful language with all students.
- Provide clear expectations of behavior and check for understanding of those expectations.
- Provide fair and consistent consequences for inappropriate behavior.
- Cue student to return to a task without drawing negative attention to him/her.

- Catch the student displaying appropriate behavior or for finishing a task well and praise him/her.
- Give student a specific task to perform within a specified time allocation.
- Consistently follow individual behavior management plans that were developed by the student's team of professionals.
- Continually evaluate the stress and frustrations level of student. Communicate your observations and perspectives with the general and/or special educator.
- Use visual cues to communicate to the student about their use of appropriate or inappropriate behaviors.
- Teach problem-solving strategies that assist students to thoughtfully work through problems.
- When using consequences for an inappropriate behavior, address the specific behavior and avoid any indication that you dislike the student personally. The behavior, not the student, is the focus of the disapproval.
- Avoid becoming over protective. Students may initially require intensive support but you should fade to a coaching and indirect support role as soon as possible.
- Encourage independence and interdependence with classmates.
- Recognize the importance of peer modeling of appropriate behavior, and point out examples of effective behavior and its consequences.
- Remember, you are a model of appropriate behavior.




*The reauthorization of IDEA includes a need for training of paraprofessionals. The form included here will be used to document any group/individual trainings, classes, and or workshops taken. The FED office will ask for a copy of this yearly to document their staff development activities.*

**This handbook was developed by:**

**School District 742  
St. Cloud, Minnesota**

**Current Revision 9/09  
By**

# Freshwater Education District