

Paraprofessionals Play an Important Role in our Schools

Do you know who is teaching your children and in what capacity? The obvious answer is the teacher, of course. However, the teacher is not alone. Paraprofessionals are playing an increasingly important role in today's classrooms, by assisting teachers and enabling them to make real progress with students.

What exactly is a paraprofessional? Many children within the school have special needs and can benefit from an extra set of hands. Paraprofessionals can fill these needs by offering assistance to students and the teacher in the classroom.

After World War II, paraprofessionals were used to relieve teachers of certain non-instructional duties, such as clerical responsibilities, so they could concentrate on educating students. Paraprofessionals have progressed over the years. In today's schools, paraprofessionals most often work along-side teachers, assisting with the instruction of students. The partnership between the paraprofessional and the teacher is paramount to providing students with quality educational services.

Paraprofessionals most commonly assist students in special education, English as a Second Language (ESL), Title I, and early childhood education programs, by helping these students be productive along with their peers in a general classroom setting. However, while paras are instrumental in aiding students in federally mandated programs, they aren't limited to helping only these students. When paraprofessionals have taken care of their primary responsibilities with assigned students, they are free to assist any child in the classroom.

The paraprofessional's role of assisting the teacher takes on different characteristics in the various programs. Most often, paras work with small groups of student or with individual students under the supervision of the teacher. Both the classroom teacher and the special education coordinator determine the type of help and instructional modifications they offer. Paras help maximize the amount of one-on-one instructional time for students with disabilities, as well as provide another set of eyes, ears, and hands for safety concerns.

Paraprofessionals often come into the position without formal training and are usually trained on the job by the special program coordinator as well as the teacher. As the need for paraprofessionals in schools has grown, districts are providing more formalized training.

There is not a standard "profile" for a paraprofessional. Paras come from a wide variety of backgrounds, age ranges, and education levels. One trait they share, however, is a love for and a desire to work with children. Because paras are essentially "everyday people," working in the community in which they live, they also provide a vital connection between the school and its constituents. This tie

to parents, students, and the community at large is an invaluable one, and it builds the type of communication and support schools need to promote excellence.

Paraprofessionals are a constant presence in schools today and an essential part of the learning process. With proper training and supervision – and the support of parents and the school district – paras make a real difference in creating successful classrooms and are instrumental in the effort to provide the best possible education to students.