

# **Para-Educator Handbook**

SPECIAL EDUCATION DEPARTMENT  
CLEARFIELD AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

## **Welcome to the Clearfield Area School District!**

You are going to find yourself at the center of both a challenging but rewarding adventure. No two days are alike, but if you live with expectancy, you will have the opportunity to have a positive impact on the lives of young people. Moreover, you can be the difference-maker for students to find success.

You are a valued member of an educational team. Your assistance will be essential for students to develop skills, discover abilities, and gain confidence in their competencies. You will build a rapport with students and celebrate their successes as you help them recognize their accomplishments along the way.

Embrace the challenge as you work with students who demand a lot, and remember this always: students are observing you. It is important for you to be the best example possible. Remain thoughtful, patient, and caring. Celebrate the successes, accept the challenges, and even after a difficult day come back ready to go the next morning. You will provide assistance to the students who need it most.

Thank you for your commitment to the students of Clearfield Area School District. You have been granted the opportunity to play a significant role in their growth and success.

## *Thank you in advance for:*

*Taking the time to listen to difficult speech because they can be understood when allowed to persevere.*

*Not asking them to "Hurry up" or take their tasks from them and do them yourself. They often need time, rather than help.*

*For standing beside them when entering new and untried educational ventures.*

*For smiling and encouraging them to try "One more time."*

*Maintaining perspective on the reason(s) why they asked the same question three times.*

*For fostering their independence so they may live successfully.*

*For looking beyond their physical appearance and seeing their hearts and minds.*

*For respecting them just as they are.*

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## IEP INFORMATION:

### What is an IEP (Individualized Education Program)?

Students must go through an educational evaluation process in order to receive special education services. This process looks at and must identify one of the disabilities as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act listed in the table below. Prior to many evaluations the Child Study Team meets to determine interventions that are needed for student success. These interventions are implemented by regular education instructors and/or special education instructors.

Students who have been evaluated and found to meet eligibility criteria to qualify for special education are offered an Individualized Education Program (IEP). This is a document that is developed by an IEP Team that includes parents, school personnel, and student (if appropriate).

As a para-educator, you are a member of student's IEP team; as a team member, you have access to the IEPs of students with whom you work. You may be invited to these meetings. IEPs are provided for each student that you work with on a daily basis. These documents must be in a secure area within the school building. Special Education Aides are responsible for following the IEP as written by the IEP team.

Designated Disability Information	Characteristics and Impact
SLD: Specific Learning Disability	The student's ability is higher than their level of achievement. Frequently impacts one or two areas of classroom academics or "information processing"
ID: Intellectually Disabled	Significantly sub average general functioning, In addition, their "adaptive skills" must be significantly below expected.

ED: Emotional Disorder	Student has either a mental health diagnosis and/or an educational need for services due to significant social, emotional or behavioral concerns
OHI: Other Health Impaired	Student has a medical diagnosis that interferes with their ability to be successful in school (ADHD, heart condition are two examples)
ASD: Autism Spectrum Disorder	Student has an educational need for services due to delays in social skills, communication and behavior.
SLI: Speech/Language Disorder/Impairment	Student has either an articulation delay or language delay which impairs their ability to successfully communicate or understand communication
VI: Vision Impairment	Student has a medically verified visual impairment accompanied by limitations in sight that interfere with acquiring information or interaction with the environment
DH/H: Deaf/Hard of Hearing	Student has a diminished sensitivity to sound, or hearing loss, that is expressed in terms of standard audiological measures.
SMI: Severely Multiply Impaired	Student has severe learning and developmental problems resulting from two or more disability conditions.
TBI: Traumatic Brain Injury	An acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability

	or psychosocial impairment both, that may adversely affect the student’s educational performance.
PI: Physically Impaired	Student has a medically diagnosed chronic, physical impairment, either congenital or acquired, that may adversely affect physical or academic functioning.
DB: Deaf/Blind	Verified vision loss coupled with a medically diagnosed hearing loss that together interfere with student’s ability to interact with their environment.
ECSE/DD: Early Childhood Special Education/ Developmental Delay	Students have demonstrated a need for service through an evaluation that documents a developmental delay.

**504 PLAN-** Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act was the first Civil Rights Law to protect the rights of individuals with disabilities. Students who qualify for a 504 Plan have a physical or mental impairment that “substantially limits” a major life activity i.e. breathing, walking, working, eating, concentrating etc. The 504 Plan outlines specific accommodations/modifications agreed upon by the team to be implemented in the school setting. You may find yourself as a team member and/or someone assisting in the implementation of the plan.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The Clearfield Area School District recognizes the need to protect the confidentiality of personal identifiable information in the education records of students with disabilities.

### **What is confidential information?**

Any and ALL student information/knowledge that involves academic, behavioral, social, emotional, medical, psychological, family background, child abuse/neglect, or disciplinary data is CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION et. Seq.

\*The name of the student, the student's parents/guardians or other family members.

\*The address of the student or student's family.

\*A personal identifier, such as the student's social security number, student number, or biometric record (computer data).

\*Other indirect identifiers, such as the student's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name.

\*Other information that, alone or in combination, is linked or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty.

### **Who can discuss or access confidential information?**

\*Discuss information only with faculty and staff directly involved with the student (student's instructor, principal, nurse, etc.) in a location that is private and NOT in front of student or peers.

\*Refer a parent/guardian to discuss information with the student's instructor.

\*Parents/guardians have the right to access their child's records (per FERPA: Family Educational Rights Privacy Act); this includes any and all documentation on a student. This may include: School-Based ACCESS logs, emails, anecdotal notes, etc. When a parent request is made for any educational record(s) notify the student's caseload teacher.

\*Compliance to The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) is mandatory. These regulations must be followed for all communication regarding



the students. According to HIPAA, electronic communications regarding students are restricted to approved sites and e-mail which has been assigned by the Clearfield Area School District.

Where should it NOT be discussed?

Faculty room, school office, hallways, cafeteria, library, gym, playground, arrival/dismissal at the locations, community outings, social media, or classrooms. It is never appropriate to discuss information outside the school setting. In other words, confidential information may never be discussed in areas where those who are not privileged to the information can overhear the conversation.

### **PARA-EDUCATOR SCHEDULE FORM**

The Para-educator Form is to be completed and submitted to the Special Education Office within two weeks from the first student day and revised as needed throughout the school year. The form will be emailed to your district email address. It will need to be completed online, saved, and sent as an attachment to Mrs. Tiffany Irwin, at [tirwin@clearfield.org](mailto:tirwin@clearfield.org)

### **TRAINING/MANDATORY 20HRS/HIGHLY QUALIFIED**

Twenty hours of staff development “related to the assignment” are required annually by every para-educator. You are responsible for fulfilling these hours prior to June 30<sup>th</sup> of every year. Employees hired throughout the school year will be prorated accordingly. The district in collaboration with IU#10 and PaTTAN provide various opportunities to obtain these hours. You will be paid your hourly rate for any *district required trainings* i.e. Annual IU Para Conference in Centre County; First Aide/CPR; annual in-service. All other trainings will be for hours only. All independent trainings must first be approved by the Director of Special Education before hours would be granted. Check first before you sign up! Time spent in training or on completing paperwork and documentation for Medical Assistance does *not* constitute professional development hours.

All paraprofessionals must obtain a Highly Qualified status. There are a number of ways to become HQ (1) take two years of postsecondary education or (2)

complete an Associates Degree (3) Meet a rigorous standard of quality demonstrated through a state/local assessment (IU#10- Assessment) (4) Complete the Pennsylvania Special Education Para-educator Credential of Competency via PDE.

### **SCHOOL DISTRICT EMAIL**

You will be provided with a school district e-mail which should be used exclusively for communication within the Clearfield Area School District. You may not use this e-mail for personal communication. Please be sure to check your e-mail DAILY.

### **SPECIAL EDUCATION PARA-EDUCATOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- \* Conduct yourselves in an appropriate and professional manner. Professional conduct is essential.
- \*Adhere to your daily schedule and not be out of assigned areas when you are to be with your student/class.
- \*Refrain from engaging in “personal” activities during instructional time; such as: utilizing cell phone, eating, grooming activities, sleeping, reading novels, collecting/delivering items from fundraisers, etc.
- \*Support student thinking and problem solving; and avoid simply “giving” students the “right” answer.
- \*Complete School-Based ACCESS logs with accuracy and in a timely manner.
- \*If you are unsure about what to do ASK the instructor (s)–
- \* When instruction is taking place, you should not be socializing with other adults in the classroom, this can be very distracting to the instructor as well as other students.
- \*Be flexible, you may be directed by a teacher or administrator to supervise a classroom, a group of students, remediate a lesson, or gather academic/behavioral data on a student.
- \*Be sure that being busy = being productive.

## **DRESS AND GROOMING**

As per the Faculty/Staff Handbook all school personnel can be rightly expected by the school community to give a professional appearance during the conduct of their duties.

- \*Be physically clean, neat, and well groomed.
- \*Dress in a manner reflecting professional assignment.
- \*Proper attire for males shall be at least an appropriate collared shirt, dress slacks, and shoes to compliment the rest of the outfit.
- \*Proper attire for female employees include dress, blouse, and skirt or an appropriately coordinated slacks outfit.
- \*Shorts, jeans, leggings without a top of suitable length and flip flops are examples of prohibited clothing.

## **COMMUNICATION**

***Communication skills with students, staff and parents are paramount in the field of special education.***

- \*Maintain student dignity. Refrain from making comments aloud. Watch your voice and volume. Remember praise in public discipline in private.
- \*Your communication and comments against staff, other employees, students and or parents using social media could be a violation of professionalism and lead to dismissal.
- \*Gossip can become a toxic habit of those with tacky poor character so use your conversations in a wise and productive manner.
- \*You are highly encouraged not to have communication with parents or students via phone, written letters, e-mail, text messages, social media etc. Parent/guardian contacts will be handled by the instructor – if parents/guardians have a question or concern regarding their child, please direct them to an instructor.

## **SCHOOL BASED ACCESS PROGRAM (SBAP)**

Depending on your assignment you may be required to participate in the School Based ACCESS Program by electronically submitting data for your student(s) and by participating in the Random Moment Time Study.

Requirements for participation in SBAP include CPR & First Aid certification. This will be provided by the school district. High School Diploma is also a requirement.

Some para-educators will be required to enter School-Based ACCESS billing electronically via EZ Trac for related services provided to students by the **5<sup>th</sup> of every month**. Training will be provided for the billing procedures for Special Education Aides. Computer skills are required for this requirement. Your School-Based ACCESS paperwork and notebooks must be kept in the approved area in each building. These items **do not** leave the building at any time. All School-Based ACCESS billing must be completed during your regularly scheduled working hours.

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Mr. Mark Bender – Director of Special Education 765-5511 ext. 6009

Mrs. Jackie Seger – Assistant Director of Special Education, 504 Coordinator 765-5511 ext. 6009

Mrs. Tiffany Irwin – Special Education Secretary 765-5511 ext. 6009