

# 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 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.

Thank you in advance for embracing the challenges ahead and celebrating the success you help create. Remember this always: **Students are always observing you.** It is important for you to remain thoughtful, patient, kind, caring and to be the best example possible.

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

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### Special Education

Students must go through an educational evaluation process to receive special education services. A student is first referred to the Child Study Team. Prior to an evaluation the Child Study Team meets to determine

interventions that are needed for student success. When an evaluation occurs, the process looks at and must identify one of the disabilities as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) to be eligible for Special Education Services.

The following definitions apply to the 13 categories of exceptionality as defined by IDEA:

Autism	Developmental disability significantly affecting verbal and nonverbal communication and social interaction, generally evident before age 3, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. Other characteristics often associated with autism are engagement in repetitive activities and stereotyped movements, resistance to environmental change or change in daily routines, and unusual responses to sensory experiences. The term does not apply if a child's educational performance is adversely affected primarily because the child has an emotional disturbance.
Deaf-Blindness	Concurrent hearing and visual impairments, the combination of which causes such severe communication and other developmental and educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for children with deafness or children with blindness.
Deafness	A hearing impairment that is so severe that the child is impaired in processing linguistic information through hearing, with or without amplification, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
Emotional Disturbance	A condition exhibiting one or more of the following characteristics over a long period of time and to a marked degree that adversely affects a child's educational performance: 1. An inability to learn that cannot be explained by intellectual, sensory, or health factors. 2. An inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relationships with peers and teachers. 3. Inappropriate types of behavior or feelings under normal circumstances. 4. A general pervasive mood of unhappiness or depression. 5. A tendency to develop physical symptoms or fears associated with personal or school problems. The term includes schizophrenia. The term does not apply to children who are socially maladjusted, unless it is determined that they have an emotional disturbance.
Hearing Impairment	An impairment in hearing, whether permanent or fluctuating, that adversely affects a child's educational performance but that is not included under the definition of deafness in this section.
Intellectual Disability	Significantly sub average general intellectual functioning, existing concurrently with deficits in adaptive behavior and manifested during the developmental period, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.

Multiple disabilities	Concurrent impairments (such as Intellectual Disability-blindness, Intellectual Disability-orthopedic impairment, etc.), the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf blindness.
Orthopedic Impairment	A severe orthopedic impairment that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes impairments caused by congenital anomaly (e.g., clubfoot, absence of some member, etc.), impairments caused by disease (e.g., poliomyelitis, bone tuberculosis, etc.), and impairments from other causes (e.g., cerebral palsy, amputations, and fractures or burns that cause contractures).
Other health Impairment	Limited strength, vitality, or alertness, including a heightened alertness to environmental stimuli, that results in limited alertness with respect to the educational environment, that- 1. Is due to chronic or acute health problems such as asthma, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, diabetes, epilepsy, a heart condition, hemophilia, lead poisoning, leukemia, nephritis, rheumatic fever, and sickle cell anemia; and 2. Adversely affects a child's educational performance.
Specific Learning Disability	A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken, or written, that may manifest itself in an imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. 1. Disorders not included. The term does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage.
Speech or Language Impairment	A communication disorder, such as stuttering, impaired articulation, a language impairment, or a voice impairment, that adversely affects a child's educational performance.
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, or both, that adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments in one or more areas, such as cognition; language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory, perceptual, and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing; and speech. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or to brain injuries induced by birth trauma.
Visual Impairment, including blindness	An impairment in vision that, even with correction, adversely affects a child's educational performance. The term includes both partial sight and blindness.

## IEP/504

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

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

As a para-educator, you are a member of the student's IEP team; as a team member, you have access to the IEPs of students you work with. You may be invited to these meetings. IEPs are provided for each student that you work with daily. Some IEPs include a Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP). These documents must be in a secure area within the school building. Special Education para-educators are responsible for following the IEP and/or any PBSP as written by the IEP team.

#### What is a Positive Behavior Support Plan?

A Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP) outlines the supports and strategies to be implemented for reducing problem behavior and for teaching positive skills designed to replace the behavior. A team completes a Functional Behavior Assessment (FBA) to identify behavior related information. The team uses that information to develop a PBSP plan.

#### What is a 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.

### **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 Study.

Requirements for participation in SBAP include CPR & First Aid certification. This will be provided by the school district. A 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 para-educators. Computer skills are required. 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 for questions about School Based ACCESS Program:

*Emmylu Accordino* 814-765-5511 Extension:6000 /Email: eaccordino@clearfield.org

*Abby Danko CIU10:* 814-342-0884 Extension: 3040/ Email: adanko@ciu10.org

### **Special Education Para-Educator Roles and Responsibilities**

*Special Education para-educators are expected to demonstrate professional conduct with staff, students, and families.*

- Obtain a Highly Qualified Status.

- Participate in a minimum of 20 hours of staff development annually.
- Develop a detailed schedule in collaboration with your support teacher and update it as needed.
  - Adhere to your daily schedule and be present in assigned areas.
  - Refrain from engaging in personal activities during instructional time (i.e., use of cell phone, eating, grooming, sleeping, reading, collecting/delivering items from fundraisers, etc.).
- Check and maintain a school district email.
- Adhere to the building level staff/faculty dress and groom expectations.
- Be productively busy
  - Promote student independence and problem-solving skills.
  - Complete tasks that support student learning and the learning environment.
  - Demonstrate respect to the learning environment (i.e., on task, student focused, appropriate language/volume during instruction).
  - Be flexible and willing to support the learning environment in other ways as directed.
  - Complete School-Based ACCESS logs with accuracy and in a timely manner (when applicable).
- Engage in professional communicate/collaboration.
- Maintain Confidentiality.

## Highly Qualified Status

All para-educators must obtain a Highly Qualified Status. There are several ways to become Highly Qualified.

1. Take two years of postsecondary education.
2. Complete an Associate's Degree.
3. Meet a rigorous standard of quality demonstrated through a state/local assessment (IU10-Assessment).
4. Complete the Pennsylvania Special Education Para-educator Credential of Competency via PDE.

## Training/Mandatory 20hrs

Every para-educator is required to complete **20 hours** of staff development "related to the assignment" each year. You are responsible for fulfilling these hours prior to June 30<sup>th</sup> of every year.

The district, in collaboration with CIU10 and PaTTAN provide various opportunities to obtain staff development hours. All independent trainings must be pre-approved by the Director of Special Education before hours will be granted.

Time spent in training or on completing paperwork and documentation for Medical Assistance **does not** constitute staff development hours.

## Para-educator Schedule/Form

The para-educator in collaboration with instructor/case manager should develop a daily schedule. The para-educator schedule form should be completed and submitted to the Special Education office within two weeks from the first student day (or within two weeks of hire) 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 Ms. Tiffany Irwin at [tirwin@clearfield.org](mailto:tirwin@clearfield.org).

Additionally, a copy of your schedule must be provided to the building office and copy must be provided to the case manager/teacher of student/classroom in which you are assigned.

## School District Email

You will be provided a school district email which should be exclusively for communication with the Clearfield Area School District. You may not use this email for personal communication. Please be sure to check your email **daily**.

## Dress and Groom

As per the Faculty and 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 and neat.
- Dress in a manner that reflects the professional assignment.
- Shorts, jeans, flip flops, and leggings (without a top of suitable length) are some examples of prohibited clothing.

## Professional Communication/Collaboration

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

- Engage in professional communication/collaboration with school staff.
- Maintain student dignity in your communication with students and focus on positive language as much as possible.
- Be aware of your surroundings/audience, language, and tone of voice during redirection.
- Avoid gossip and unproductive conversation.
- Parent/guardian contacts will be handled by the instructor – If you are approached with a question or concern regarding a child, please direct them to an instructor. *You are highly encouraged not to have communication with parents or students via phone, written letters, email, text messages, social media etc.*
- Your communication and comments relative to staff, other employees, students, and/or parents using social media could be a violation of professionalism and lead to dismissal.
- Efforts to resolve concerns and/or conflicts within your workday should begin with the case manager of your assigned student/classroom. Please make at least three formal and documented attempts to resolve conflicts through communication/collaboration with the assigned case manager/instructor. If a resolution is not met, communication with Special Education Administration is an appropriate next step.

## 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?

***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 students' 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 student's date of birth, place of birth, and mother's maiden name.
- Information that alone, or in combination, is linked to or linkable to a specific student that would allow a reasonable person in the school or community, who does not have personal knowledge of the relevant circumstances, to identify the student with reasonable certainty.

Who can discuss confidential information?

- Discuss information only with faculty and staff directly involved with the student (the student's instructor, principal, school nurse, etc.) and in a location that is private. Information should not be discussed in front of the student, peers, or other school staff.
- If/when approached, refer a parent/guardian to discuss information with the student's instructor/caseload teacher.
- Parents/guardians have the right to access their child's records (per FERPA: Family Educational Rights Privacy Act); this includes all documentation on a student. It may include School Based ACCESS logs, emails, anecdotal notes, etc. When a parent request is may for any education record(s), please notify the student's caseload teacher.
- Compliance to the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) is **MANDATORY**. These regulations must be followed for all communication regarding the students. According to HIPPA, electronic communications regarding students are restricted to approved sites and email which has been assigned by the Clearfield Area School District.

Where should it NOT be discussed?

Never discuss confidential information in areas where those who are not privileged to the information can overhear the conversation such as a faculty room, school office, hallways, cafeteria, gymnasium, playground, arrival/dismissal locations, community outings, social media, classrooms. It is never appropriate to discuss information outside of the school setting.

## Contact Information

**Mr. Mark Bender** – Director of Special Education 814-765-5511 Extension 6009

**Mrs. Jackie Seger** – Assistant Director of Special Education/504 Coordinator 814-765-5511 Extension 6009

**Ms. Tiffany Irwin** – Special Education Secretary 814-765-5511 Extension 6009