

Ten Tips for Paraeducators

Classroom aides can support teaching, foster student independence, and discourage learned helplessness.

Let students make mistakes and take risks.

Everyone learns from mistakes. Let natural consequences be part of the classroom experience.

Watch your voice and volume.

Discussions with other adults or students during instruction disrupt the class. Save important discussions for the hallway.

Maintain student dignity.

Be discreet about the student's physical needs. Refrain from making comments aloud. Schedule tube feedings, splint changes, stretching and toileting in between classes.

Communicate and consult with caregivers.

Listen to families and keep them informed. Some strategies that work at home can work at school.

Facilitate peer relationships.

Remind others to communicate directly with the student. Seat the student with other students in the classroom and cafeteria. Give students the space and freedom to socialize and develop friendships.

Help the classroom teacher.

Use class lectures as an opportunity to program a student's communication device, make copies for the next teacher, or plan for next week. Time away from the student's side promotes independence.

Ask for help.

You are not alone. Ask for direction in the classroom. Request assistance with disciplinary issues. Leave decisions about content and curriculum modifications or adaptations to the teacher.

Give as few prompts as possible.

Foster independence. Limit hand-over-hand assistance. Give hand-over-hand assistance to teach a task, not to complete a task. Resist the temptation to give verbal directions for every aspect of a task.

Help students to create authentic work.

Students learn when they actively participate in assignments. Avoid completing assignments, taking tests, or answering questions for students. Show caregivers their child's genuine work and progress.

Enable students to make choices.

Give students the ability to control their lives and interact with the environment. Offer choices to the student, no matter how insignificant they may seem.

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Pennsylvania Department of Education
Bureau of Special Education
Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network
Pennsylvania Partnership for Professional Development

The Pennsylvania Department of Education, Bureau of Special Education has developed a Credential of Competency for special education paraprofessionals to help them achieve "qualified" status as required by Chapter 14. While there are other ways a paraprofessional can meet the requirements of Chapter 14, the credential is a competency-based approach. This credential addresses ten standards that are modeled after the ones developed by the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) for special education paraprofessionals. Training modules specific to each standard can be found on the PaTTAN website at www.pattan.net.

Special education paraprofessionals work with their supervisors to complete the skill and knowledge areas under each standard on the Credential of Competency Checklist. This checklist can be found on the PaTTAN website at www.pattan.net/files/Paraed/Checklist.pdf.

When an entire standard is completed, the supervisor signs that standard page in blue ink to signify that the signature is an original. When all ten standards are complete, the entire checklist is sent to the address on the cover page and, on approval by the Bureau of Special Education, a Credential of Competency will be sent to the paraprofessional.



The standards have knowledge areas that define what a paraprofessional needs to know, as well as skill areas that define what a paraprofessional needs to be able to do. The ten standards are listed below:

Standard 1: Foundations of Special Education

This standard has two parts: understanding the purposes of programs for individuals with exceptional learning needs and understanding the basic educational terminology regarding students, programs, roles, and instructional activities.

Standard 2: Development and Characteristics of Learners

This standard relates to understanding the effects exceptional conditions can have on an individual's life.

Standard 3: Individual Learning Differences

This standard requires an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of families and children as they relate to individual learning needs, and an ability to recognize the indicators of abuse and neglect. It also requires the ability to demonstrate sensitivity to the diversity of individuals and families.

Standard 4: Instructional Strategies

This standard requires an understanding of basic instructional and remedial strategies and materials, as well as basic technologies appropriate to individuals with exceptional learning needs. It includes the ability to:

- Use strategies, equipment, materials, and technologies as directed to accomplish instructional objectives.
- Assist in adapting instructional strategies and materials as directed.

- Use strategies as directed to facilitate effective integration into various settings.
- Use strategies that promote the learner's independence as directed.
- Use strategies as directed to increase the individual's independence and confidence.

Standard 5: Learning Environments and Social Interactions

This standard addresses the demands of various learning environments as well as the rules and procedural safeguards regarding the management of behaviors of individuals with exceptional learning needs. It includes the ability to:

- Establish and maintain rapport with learners.
- Use universal precautions and assist in maintaining a safe, healthy learning environment.
- Use strategies for managing behavior as directed.
- Use strategies as directed, in a variety of settings, to assist in the development of social skills

Standard 6: Language

This standard requires an understanding of the characteristics of appropriate communication with stakeholders.

Standard 7: Instructional Planning

This standard includes the ability to follow written plans, seeking clarification as needed, and prepare and organize materials to support teaching and learning as directed.

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Standard 8: Assessment

This standard involves understanding the rationale for assessment and its use in reading and math. It includes the ability to demonstrate basic collection techniques, and make and document objective observations as directed.

Standard 9: Professional and Ethical Practice

This standard requires an understanding of ethical practices for confidential communication about individuals with exceptional learning needs. It also calls for an awareness of personal cultural biases and differences that affect one's ability to work with others. It includes the ability to:

- Perform responsibilities as directed in a manner consistent with laws and policies.
- Follow instructions of the professional.
- Demonstrate problem-solving, flexible thinking, conflict management techniques, and analysis of personal strengths and preferences.
- Act as a role model for individuals with exceptional learning needs.

- Demonstrate commitment to assisting learners in achieving their highest potential.
- Demonstrate the ability to separate personal issues from one's responsibilities as a paraprofessional.

- Maintain a high level of competence and integrity.

- Exercise objective and prudent judgment.
- Demonstrate proficiency in academic skills, including oral and written communication.
- Engage in activities to increase one's own knowledge and skills.

- Engage in self-assessment.

- Accept and use constructive feedback.

- Demonstrate ethical practices as guided by the CEC Code of Ethics and other standards and policies.

Standard 10: Collaboration

This standard calls for an awareness of the common concerns of families of individuals with exceptional learning needs as well as an understanding of the roles of stakeholders in planning an individualized program. It includes the ability to:

- Assist in collecting and providing objective, accurate information to professionals.
- Collaborate with stakeholders as directed.
- Foster respectful and beneficial relationships.
- Participate as directed in conferences as members of the educational team.
- Function in a manner that demonstrates a positive regard for the distinctions between roles and responsibilities of paraprofessionals and those of professionals.

Bureau of Special Education

Credential of
Competency

for

Special Education
Instructional
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