

Working with Paraeducators in the Physical Education Program

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Paraeducators are a natural source of support for the physical educator and can provide strong, multidimensional support for students' success in the physical education classroom settings, i.e. gymnasium, locker room, outdoor environment.

Physical education teachers should expect the paraeducator to come to physical education class with the student with a disability. IDEA 2004 states that paraeducators should assist in the provision of special education services to students with disabilities. Since physical education is defined as part of special education in the IDEA 2004 law, the expectation should be to have the paraeducator in the physical education class when students with disabilities are participating. The physical educator should work closely with the paraeducator to develop and implement the student's IEP goals and help students with disabilities participate fully in the activities of the physical education lesson.

Physical education teachers should collaborate with the paraeducator to ensure that the following occurs:

- Knowledge/ understanding of physical education terminology and equipment. The terminology and equipment used in physical education classes are often very different from what paraeducators hear, know, and understand when working with students with disabilities in the regular classroom setting, i.e. dynamic vs static balance, muscular strength, cardiovascular endurance. The physical educator should train and work with paraeducators to ensure they have a working knowledge and understanding of physical education terms and equipment.
- Open and two-way communication between the paraeducator and the physical educator. The paraeducator should inform the physical educator about any "special considerations" regarding the student with disability. The paraeducator works closely with the student for most, if not all, of the day and thus probably has a better knowledge and understanding of the student and his abilities. Open communication between the paraeducator and the physical educator will help to ensure successful participation by the student with a disability in the various physical activities.
- Appropriate dress for physical activity. The physical educator should expect the paraeducator to be dressed appropriately for activity in the physical education class. To help with this the physical educator may offer to keep a change of clothes and/or shoes in the gymnasium office so the paraeducator can change into active clothes when needed.
- Safety considerations are of foremost concern. The physical educator should work with the paraeducator to identify those areas of safety concern so the

paraeducator can monitor and actively intervene when necessary. For example, throwing activities, crowded playing conditions, working on uneven surfaces, and inappropriate use of equipment, could all have implications for safe participation in the physical education class. Paraeducators should be trained to look for safety considerations, actively intervene, and communicate with the physical educator about them.

- Determining the paraeducator's responsibilities and roles in the physical education class. The physical education environment and lesson activities are quite different from the typical classroom, of which the paraeducator is most familiar. These differences include a noisier teaching/ learning environment, a larger teaching area, bigger equipment, more and frequent transitions, and more movement. The physical educator should collaborate and communicate with the paraeducator on his/her expectations when working with students with disabilities in the gymnasium or other physical education environments. Physical educators are encouraged to develop a list of specific roles and responsibilities for the paraeducator so everyone knows exactly what is expected. The physical educator might list the day's activities and general expectations of the paraeducator to facilitate that activity such as:
 - Warm-up activities - the paraeducator will stay beside the student with a disability to ensure warm up activities are done correctly. The paraeducator will give assistance only when necessary to successfully complete the activity.

The responsibilities of paraeducators will vary based on the lesson activities but can include the following:

- providing instructional support in small groups
- monitoring equipment usage and activity participation
- providing one-on-one instruction
- collaborating with the physical educator on a regular basis
- modifying materials and/or equipment
- collecting data on students, especially as it regards the student's IEP
- implementing behavior management plans
- providing personal care assistance

Paraeducators and the IDEA 2004 law:

The IDEA 2004 law requires paraeducators to be appropriately trained and supervised in accordance with state law and to assist in the provision of special education and related services to children with disabilities. In addition, the state must develop a policy that requires local educational agencies take measures to recruit, hire, train and retain highly qualified personnel, including paraeducators, to provide related services to children with disabilities. Special education paraeducators who provide instructional support in Title I school wide programs must meet the NCLB requirements.