

THE CLASSROOM TEACHER'S GUIDE FOR

WORKING with PARAEDUCATORS

By Wendy Dover Balough

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Given that I am a special educator and I do a great deal of training and staff development for paraeducators, I was surprised to discover my limited perspective on general education teachers and the placement of paraeducators in their classrooms. In my own school, I expected shouts of joy, squeals of delight, and everlasting gratitude from teachers when I proudly announced the addition of a paraeducator to their classrooms. What I got was hesitancy, questions, and even reluctance from classroom teachers—all due to a lack of information from me, the special education representative. Through the development of an inservice short session titled “Who Are You and Why Are You in my Classroom?” (that no one attended the first time), lunch-time inservices, after-school meetings, individual face-to-face conversations, and a pile of handouts and flyers, I began to understand the need for a type of information that’s been overlooked for so long. This manual targets information to help overcome the unknowns of having paraeducators working alongside in classrooms and how special educators and administrators are a necessary part in facilitating successful collaboration fundamental to effective paraeducator participation in classrooms and schools.

There are two realities of which we must be aware. First, paraeducators have become an integral part of services and supports for programs with special needs. Programs would not be the same without them, but, paraeducators’ success is dependent on the actions of others (Konza and Fried, 2012). Thus, the second reality is accountability for the specific management and supervision of paraeducator support and services is now part of the job of special education teachers and therapists, general education teachers, and administrators. The information and processes provided in this book will help.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Wendy Dover Balough, Ed.D., is director of special services for the Lexington One School District in Lexington, S.C. A practicing educator since 1981, Wendy has taught students with mild and moderate disabilities in South Carolina, Texas, and Kansas through a wide variety of service models at the elementary, middle, and high school levels. She served as a special education coordinator for the Junction City Schools and as an Inclusion Facilitator for the Manhattan-Ogden Schools in Kansas during the 1990s. She was an Assistant Professor of Special Education at Winthrop University in South Carolina from 2001–2005, a special education coordinator with the Fort Mill Schools in South Carolina, and Director of Exceptional Student Education for the Rock Hill Schools in South Carolina from 2007 –2015.

Throughout her educational career, Wendy has worked as an inclusive schools consultant and workshop facilitator for many schools, districts, and educational service centers around the nation, and has made presentations at numerous state- and national-level conferences. Wendy received the 1996 Kansas Special Educator of the Year Award from the Kansas Federation of the Council of Exceptional Children.

Wendy earned her Bachelor of Science in Special Education from Winthrop University in Rock Hill, S.C. in 1981. She completed her Master of Science and Doctor of Education in Special Education at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kan. She has several other work text publications and video series on inclusive education and paraeducators with *THE MASTER TEACHER*, which have enjoyed national success.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Section 1: Introduction	1
Section 2: General Information About Paraeducators	5
Section 3: Working with Your Paraeducator	15
Section 4: Paraeducators and Planning	31
Section 5: Evaluating and Empowering the Paraeducator	43
References	49
Forms	51

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Paraeducators as Support for Students with Special Needs

Today, almost all students with identified special needs spend some, if not most, of their school day in the general classroom benefiting from a broad menu of support possibilities. Laws limiting the removal of students and requiring their inclusion in general instructional programs and curricula have compelled teachers, schools, and districts to consider instructional alternatives. Supports like collaborative programming, accommodations, and curricular modifications in the general classroom makes “less restrictive placements” possible, instead of always placing students in resource rooms, self-contained classrooms, or special schools. Special programs now offer a much, much wider array of options other than “remove and isolate.” Special education is viewed as a service and not a place (Stodden, 2013). Knowing that students with special needs represent a variety of needs and levels of support, the all-or-nothing option of removal seems inadequate, as well as difficult to legally defend. The following is a list of support options teachers and schools may develop for students with special needs in the general classroom.

A Brief History of Inclusion in Special Education

1975 – Access to Schools

PL 94-142 required public schools to provide a free and appropriate education to all students, regardless of the severity of a disability. Special education programs were developed around a continuum of services and placements. Most placements were separated from the general classroom. Placements included resource rooms, self-contained classrooms, and special schools.

Mid/Late 1980s – The Regular Education Initiative (REI)

After 10 years, special education was found to have many successes—specialized programs and individualized instruction. But students with disabilities were separated, and there continued to be problems with low graduation rates, unemployment, and underemployment. Discussions included “merging” special education and general education into one system.

1990 – Access to the General Classroom

The federal law was renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), and several key changes were made. The concept of “least restrictive environment” (LRE) made teachers consider the general classroom as the starting point for planning and delivering special education services rather than removal to a separate setting. Special education and other support programs began to look to ways to include more students with needs in classrooms with non-disabled peers. Transition services were mandated in this reauthorization. The areas of Autism and Traumatic Brain Injury were added as areas of disability.

1997 – Access to the General Curriculum

Updates to IDEA added more emphasis to ensuring that student participation goes further than a physical presence in the classroom. Students with special needs are to be included in the general classroom curriculum and receive instruction to the maximum extent appropriate.

2001 – No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

This federal law outlined changes to other student support programs, including Title I, ESL, and Bilingual programs through increased accountability standards, focus on reading achievement, and quality of teachers and assistants/paraeducators. Many of the standards and regulations also applied to special education and were confirmed after IDEA was reauthorized in late 2004.

2004 – Increased Accountability

This reauthorization of IDEA included a focus on academic accountability for student and school performance. Many areas were refined and strengthened to further the inclusion, performance, and achievement of students with special needs in the general classroom.

2015 – Every Student Succeeds Act

This law replaced the 2001 No Child Left Behind law, but the provisions for paraprofessional certification, training, and supervision requirements for instructional assistants supporting students with educational needs did not change.

