

Hiring and Retention of Preschool Paraprofessionals

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Who are our paraprofessionals?

- Our program paraprofessionals come to us with a variety of experiences and may not have experience in preschool special education
- Often hired via one generic posting from the district at a similar compensation
- Many are parents who like the idea of working the school day while their children are in school

How are paraprofessionals currently hired in district?

- A blanket posting from the district that fills the needs of both special education paraprofessionals and general education paraprofessionals
- A high school diploma or equivalent is the current requirement for employment as a paraprofessional
- Paraprofessionals are assigned to the grade level upon being hired
 - This practice may or may not play to the strengths of the individual who is applying

What we should do for hiring quality preschool paraprofessionals?

- Require candidates to hold a CDA, 12 credits in ECE, or successful completion of ParaPro Assessment
- Compensate based on education, experience, as well as program-specificity
 - Currently, program-specific paras are not compensated differently, yet their job demands are higher than non-program paras
- Honor the request from the paraprofessional to be placed in preschool
 - We should honor the strengths of the people who are being hired into our workforce. Everyone comes with their strengths and gifts, and it makes sense to focus on those

Preschool Program Expectations of Paraprofessionals

- Building and maintaining relationships with staff, students and families
- Assist with diapering, which includes the ability to lift students
- Maintain current CPR/First Aid Credentials
- Obtain PMT training, should it be required
- Assist with implementing IEP accommodations and modifications and collecting associated data
- Assist with data collection for progress marks and report cards, 3 times a year

Preschool Program Expectations of Paraprofessionals Cont.

- Understand the developmental stages of young children and how to differentiate to meet student needs
- Be familiar with requirements of School Readiness as well as The National Association for the Education of Young Children, NAEYC
- Strengths with both written and verbal communication
- Ability to remain calm and patient, especially when the situation may be challenging
- Excellent problem-solving skills with the ability to think quickly on their feet

Why is this important to the preschool program?

- For the teacher and the paraprofessionals to have a mutual understanding of the roles and responsibilities for all adults in the classroom
- To maintain and foster positive working relationships between the teacher and paraprofessional as well as between the students and the paraprofessionals
- The teacher and the paraprofessional are on the same page when it comes to classroom expectations
 - Data collection, toileting, communication, are examples

Bottom line...

- Recruiting and hiring program-specific paraprofessionals will take the guess work out of providing para assignments and will provide validation for our workers
- When we value and respect the wishes of the potential paraprofessional, they will feel more appreciated and valued
 - In turn, student outcomes rise and student success is had by all
 - Better collaboration will occur between the teacher and para
 - The classroom will be happier and not seen as negative
 - In some situations, paras who are moved to programs are seen as weaker, yet those are the folks who should be the strongest