

# Training, Retaining, and Supporting Paraprofessionals

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The Power of Effective Para Support

# 3 Reasons Why We Won't Be Hiring More Paraprofessionals

1. Unintended Negative Consequences

2. Human Support Is the Support of Last Resort

3. Band-Aid Approach to Systemic Issues

## 3 REASONS WHY WE WON'T BE HIRING MORE PARAPROFESSIONALS

Hiring just one more paraprofessional seems like the logical solution when educators are overwhelmed by individual student needs or behavior. We get it...you want to provide support and it even seems like a good idea...after all...it costs less than hiring another teacher!

But...the request for another paraprofessional often means that other issues are at play and the solution may create more negative consequences.

In fact, 20 years of research suggests that saying "No" to more paraprofessionals is a better long-term strategy to support educators and create more inclusive schools.

### 3 Reasons MORE Paras are NOT the answer.

#### 1. UNINTENDED NEGATIVE CONSEQUENCES FOR STUDENTS

Research repeatedly demonstrates that paraprofessionals come with many unintended, and often negative consequences, including:

- Significant reduction in teacher engagement with students assigned to a paraprofessional
- Negative social and academic consequences solely based upon the proximity of the adult (e.g., one-on-one aide)
- Stigmatization, limited sense of agency, and negative impact on a student's sense of belonging
- Creation of new behavior problems (e.g., withdraw, escape, refusal, learned helplessness, over dependence on adult support)
- Necessary peer relationships are replaced with paraprofessional relationships

#### 2. HUMAN SUPPORT IS THE SUPPORT OF LAST RESORT

Students with the most needs also require instruction and support delivered by adults with the most skill. Paraprofessionals, who often support students with the most significant needs, are often those with the least amount of training. Think about it for a minute, when was the last time your paras received training that was directly related to their roles and responsibilities? In particular, how much training have they received around effective co-teaching, differentiation, and effective ways to support behaviors that are challenging? The research is clear...with training and supervision, paras can take on critical roles in the delivery of inclusive education...even for students with the most support needs.

#### 3. BAND-AID APPROACH TO SYSTEMIC ISSUES.

Hiring a para is often done for a student who only needs temporary support or in a classroom where better supports are not available. This support is not necessarily needed for all students. When we hire more paras, it's a band-aid, or short-term fix. It's not a financially smart decision. We have to problem solve together about how to fix the actual problem. The best investment is more training for the paraprofessionals and educators you currently have.



# Beware...

Unintended challenges can arise for students because of para/EA support

Becoming dependent on adults

Interference with friendships

Provocation of behavior problems

Separation from classmates

Paraprofessional relationship replaces the peer connection

Stigmatization- impact on belonging



*“But I thought my job was to sit next to Joe.”*

- Paras/EAs are there to do three things...
  1. Help Joe to become as independent as possible.
  2. Help Joe connect to other kids.
  3. Fade support.

