

SUSAN ZEIDERS: Hi, I am Susan Zeiders with Early Intervention Technical Assistance, and I am here to talk with you about some of the nitty-gritty pieces of supervision, policies, team roles, and ethical considerations. This section is intended to help administrators review their policies, procedures, and strategies that support effective use of paraprofessionals in classrooms. A guiding resource for this section is the Administrator Review of Systems and Supports for Paraprofessionals, which was adapted by PaTTAN from other existing tools in the paraprofessional literature. If you have not already done so, please stop at this point and download that document, which is posted with all of the materials designed for this series.

This tool will be used along with videos of special education administrators and trainers, with supporting articles, to help you all evaluate the degree to which your school or your program is effectively providing for effective and efficient use of paraprofessionals. All handouts referenced are available for printing and/or -- for viewing and/or printing under the PowerPoint on this screen. Before you go further, please gather any documents and policies that guide the use of paraprofessionals in your district or program. These may include, but are not limited to, paraprofessional job descriptions, including classroom aides, instructional aides, personal care assistants, and other specific titles your organization might use, the teacher job description, an organization chart that specifies lines of supervision, policies and procedures that specify job- or building-level staff orientation and lines of communication, any collective bargaining agreements that impact paraprofessionals or the teachers with whom they work. You will use these documents, along with the Administrator Review of Systems and Supports for Paraprofessionals, to identify the strategies and supports that are currently in place and where you might need to make some revisions.

The first consideration as we are looking forward to what is needed for paraprofessionals is the knowledge that administrators and supervisors have about the roles and needs of paraprofessionals. Just as we can't expect students to meet high standards if teachers don't know what the standards are, we can't expect paraprofessionals to perform their jobs well if their supervisors don't know what to expect of them. The answers to the questions on this slide will become evident as participants review the policies and procedures related to paraprofessionals that are currently in use in your district or program.

On this slide, these three questions are questions that you will need to be able to answer for your organization. If after reviewing your documents and comparing it with the Administrators Review, you are able to answer these explicitly and with confidence, you should

be reasonably certain that children in your district are receiving appropriate paraprofessional assistance.

This slide indicates Section A of the Administrator Review of Systems and Supports for Paraprofessionals. This is the document that has already been referenced and that you should have downloaded at this point. Although it is simple to just read through this and to simply check a box and move on, please take the time to review and list the documentation that you used to determine which box to check. You may find surprises in terms of higher or lower quality policies and procedures than you anticipated. The previous section of these training materials reviewed the state and federal requirements for skills and training for paraprofessionals. If necessary, refer back to that section to determine if your documents accurately reflect those requirements. The section following this one will more specifically address decision-making about using paraprofessionals to support students with IEPs. In this section, we will review what your organization currently has in place for communicating requirements and providing appropriate supports to paras and to the professionals with whom they work.

First, let's take a look at job descriptions. What is -- what does your organization say is expected of paraprofessionals? What is the role of teachers related to paraprofessionals? And what is the role of administrators related to paraprofessionals? On this slide, the letters and numbers before each item refer to the items on the Administrator Review that correspond to these components. Although both groups are considered paraprofessionals, instructional paraprofessionals may be assigned to support several students or an entire classroom. Personal care assistants may only work with one student at a time. Because of this important distinction, it will provide more clarity and minimize the risk of improperly using a paraprofessional if each of these roles has a separate job description.

The role of the teacher in providing daily guidance to paraprofessionals in the classroom is important, but sometimes not clearly defined. If it is clearly defined in both the paraprofessionals' and the teachers' job descriptions, the clarity provides the foundation for a productive relationship. An additional resource related to teachers and paras working together that may be of use to you is the paraprofessional training needs tool. It is also on your list of handouts and can be printed out for use with your staff.

Now we will step away from listening to me and let you hear from Susan Sams, the preschool /early intervention supervisor from Allegheny IU3, talking about the realities of the

role of paraprofessionals when the classroom in which they work is not a district, classroom, or is not run by the program that employs the paraprofessional.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

SUSAN SAMS: There is a big difference in -- for us, especially as far as paras providing supports in community preschools versus in a regular ed school district -- I mean, a regular ed classroom within a school district because we're in almost over 300 preschools within Allegheny County, and they're not our employees in those preschool. The only employees we have is within our special ed classrooms. And so we teach our paras that they're guests there. Whereas if you're in a regular ed school-age building, they are a member of that building, that team, that school.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: Susan just shared some specific considerations when paraprofessionals are working in classrooms operated by other programs. Those are some specific and special issues that must be considered and that must -- that require that you also address those with the paraprofessionals and their needs and their knowledge about those other programs. Here are some additional considerations when assigning a paraprofessional to a student or a classroom.

The issues that we need to think about are, what are the particular needs of the students involved? And that would include issues like, what content areas in which the -- what are the content areas in which the child needs assistance? What are the individual challenges both of the student and the paraprofessional, and in fact perhaps the classroom? What are the modes or languages of communication needed by the student? And how old is the child, and what is the range of experience of the paraprofessional in terms of the age of that child? It's very different to work with a preschooler versus a tenth grader, and you may need to provide some additional training when a staff member is asked to make a leap like that from one age group to the other.

Other things to consider besides the needs of the student are the characteristics of the classroom, such as is it an inclusive classroom, a segregated classroom? What are the number of children in the classroom? Is it learning support, specialized, et cetera? And what are the skills and characteristics of the paraprofessional? And here we also need to think about the communication skills of the adult. What is their fluency in the communication modes or language of the student? What is their content knowledge for the needs that the child has? And what instructional support skills do they currently have?

Here again, this is an area where you may need to think about their experience with age groups because instructional strategies may vary widely depending on the age of the student. And we also need a process for ensuring that substitute paraprofessionals have the knowledge and skills to minimize disruption to the students' education programs. All of these items are from Section A of the Administrator's Review, which can look at items A5 through A8 for more guidance on this topic.

An ongoing challenge for many schools and early intervention programs is being able to identify competent and trained professionals who are willing and able to substitute for the regularly assigned staff as needed. As challenging as this is, it is an essential need for which the administration must be prepared. Susan Sams from Allegheny Intermediate Unit describes a strategy that they have used to ensure access to qualified staff.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

SUSAN SAMs: Another issue or challenge that we found is having enough coverage, and I'm sure that's across the state as well too, is when paras are off or on leave, you know, finding appropriate coverage so that there's that consistency across the board. And one of the things that we've done is hired everyday subs in which that person can sub for us. We hire them for the whole year and so they will -- they're ready 7:30 in the morning when our secretary calls them up and says, "Hey, we need you over in this classroom." They're able to get over to that classroom in time to be able to, you know, to fill in for whoever's out. So that has been a huge benefit for us because it's not only within our classrooms, but also for one-on-one's. Personal care assistants call off as well too. We're able to use them to fill in for a child who needs that support within that early childhood environment or within our special ed classroom.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: Depending on size and resources, not all schools or programs may be able to, or need to, have a person on staff every day to serve as a substitute, but it is highly recommended that the substitute paraprofessionals receive periodic training to ensure that they are able to provide appropriate services. Every organization has days when they are thankful that they are able to simply find a person who is -- who has the appropriate clearances to be able to be in a classroom, but that is really not a long-term, effective plan for the students, the substitute paraprofessionals, or the organization. Maintaining and supporting a pool of frequently used paraprofessionals through training not only provides better services for

students, it may also reduce turnover on the substitute list as the paraprofessionals see themselves as competent, confident, and valued.

So far, we've been focusing on job descriptions and ensuring that qualified staff are appropriately assigned and available when needed. Now it's time to look more closely at other policies and procedures for their completeness and appropriateness. Again, we will refer to the Administrator Review tool for more guidance. Specific sections of the tool to consider include Section A, which is one we've been looking at a bit, but to think about the responsibilities of the administrator for orientation, day-to-day guidance, provision of training and technical assistance, official job performance evaluation, and the resolution of miscommunication among the paraprofessional and the teacher and/or with parents. Another key section we're going to be looking at is Section D, which is the responsibilities of the teacher for day-to-day guidance, provision of training if any, and the expectations of providing feedback to paraprofessionals about their work. Right now, we're going to hear from Susan Sams again to talk about the role of paraprofessionals in the classroom, responsibility of data collection, and the differentiation between the paraprofessional role and the teacher's role in this task.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

SUSAN SAMS: All of our paraprofessionals are trained in data collection, and so they help the classroom teacher with that data collection on children's IEP goals. And although the teacher is the one who analyzes it, our paraprofessionals are very instrumental in helping in collecting that data.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: Another section of Section D that I particularly wish to pay attention to are items 16 and 17. This is the provision of regularly scheduled time for the teacher and the paraprofessional to plan student and/or classroom support. Now, we're going to have a composite video to hear from all of these administrators about time to plan and the importance of what they've found from their work.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

CHERYL WISE: One of the key components is the relationship between the teacher and the teacher assistant. I think it's important that they collaborate almost daily for each student. Specifically, if there's a one-to-one para-educator assigned, I think that communication really is a key to the success of how the program is operated for the student.

JENNIFER PESZEK: If I could offer advice to anybody, I would say that really try and make the para-educators feel part of that team. Any kind of collaboration if you can get them involved, get them understanding with assistive technology, with instructional strategies, with all the new different initiatives the district offers, get the para-educators involved so they feel more a part of the community.

SUSAN SAMS: At the beginning of the school year when the teams are formed, teams meaning the classroom teacher and the paraprofessionals, we ask them to do team meetings. And team meetings have to be, at minimal, on a weekly basis, to as frequently as, depending on the team, they can meet after each session.

REBECCA CHADWICK: Really the most important thing I think any administrator can do to support their students, their teachers, and their paraprofessionals is make sure that there is time for the teacher and the para to talk and collaborate. What I see far too frequently is paraprofessionals are out on their own and they do not have time to meet with their partner teachers. They do not have time to prep things that need to be prepped. And I see paraprofessionals making decisions that they should not be let -- left to make those decisions. And if, as an administrator and as a person, I support administrators: time, time, time. It is worth the pay to give them even 20 minutes a week or half an hour every two weeks where they can meet with their teacher and plan and discuss.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: And again, now a related video from Susan Sams, again, talking about the administrator's role in supporting the team. The administrator is so essential in these aspects because you have the possibility of catching things early and/or helping as we move forward to make sure that the team can be successful.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

SUSAN SAMS: Many times, teams are put together, like paraprofessionals or teachers bid into a specific position because they're within a union and so they bid for a -- it's not necessarily that they know how to work with each other or -- and so the goal is that they work together and communicate and collaborate. And by having them meet on a weekly basis and have some kind of agenda, that helps them meet all those points in which need to be met. Some teams we have to help. We, meaning the supervisors, have to help the team structure those meetings a little bit

more. Depending on what the needs of the team are and the children's needs are depends on how frequent they meet.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: Another key section to be looking at is the responsibilities of the paraprofessional. It's Section E, the responsibilities of the paraprofessional related to seeking guidance when needed and lines of communication when initial requests are not immediately effective. We've talked a lot about the administrator's responsibilities and role, we've talked a bit about the teacher's responsibilities, but the paraprofessionals also have responsibilities related to their knowing and being able to do all the skills that are needed in the classroom. We're going to hear now from Becky Chadwick on what she has learned about how to help make sure that paras have what they need.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

REBECCA CHADWICK: Paraprofessionals, it's been my experience, will do absolutely anything that you ask them to do. Knowing that, they sometimes are not willing to speak up and say, hey, I don't know how to do this, or, I need help. So one thing administrators have to realize is you've got to know that about paraprofessionals, and you've got to be willing to say to them, hey, tell me, what's going on? What do you need support with? And giving them the time to -- the time to meet with their partner teachers. Those are big.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: As you review your policies and procedures, are all of these components addressed? If they are not written into policies and procedures, are they currently happening? If so, how do people know these expectations? Is the process by which they learn them adequate in case of staff turnover? If not, how can you include this into your policies and procedures?

Okay, now that you've done some more review of policies and procedures and identified some things that are well in place and maybe made a plan to enhance some things that need some work, what's your plan for making sure that these policies and procedures are followed? We all know that instruct and hope is not an effective strategy. The next handout we would like you to pull out and take some time to read is Management By Walking Around. You will find it on your -- again, on the list of handouts. Although written -- actually written for business, the reference article illustrates the importance of connecting with both the teachers

and the paraprofessionals in their work environments to ensure that they remain fully engaged in the business of educating students.

This will also nip budding problems between teachers and paraprofessionals, and allow administrators to support them before interpersonal challenges adversely impact student learning. This is part of the answer to the second and third questions on this section's second slide: how do we tell if we have those skills, and how are we monitoring whether the tasks the paraprofessionals are asked to do are appropriate for their position? Before you step away to read the article, let's listen to what Cheryl Wise has to say about really being present and knowing what's happening with paraprofessionals in the classrooms.

[VIDEO BEGINS]

CHERYL WISE: So it's important that another person, maybe the special education teacher, the administrator, or someone else in the building observe the para-educator working with the student not just in instructional activities, but in other areas of the building. That brings to their attention how they are or are not fostering independence in the child.

[VIDEO ENDS]

SUSAN ZEIDERS: Now that you've heard from Cheryl, please take a few minutes to read the article and think about, what will your plan be to regularly schedule time to be out and about in the classroom so that you know what is going on and the skills that paraprofessionals have and are using, the tasks that they are being asked to do, and their success at being able to fulfill them?

This is another article that you should have downloaded and/or printed to be able to reference. It provides an excellent illustration of the issues that can often arise between paraprofessionals and teachers. It also highlights some ethical issues that can arise when teachers or administrators rely on paraprofessionals to perform as teachers. This I think can be a particularly challenging issue when, as the article references, you have a brand-new teacher and a very skilled and experienced paraprofessional. Use this article to carefully review your policies and procedures, as well as your day-to-day observations. Are these kinds of situations happening in your school? And if so, how can you address this and provide guidance to both the teachers and the paraprofessionals about how to rectify some of the challenges that you are seeing?

While certainly not intended to contradict any collective bargaining agreement, this slide is intended to challenge administrators to consider how the administrator who is responsible for the paraprofessionals' performance evaluations will gather complete information about their performance. Management by walking around is definitely a big contribution to having a strong sense of how things are going, but how else will input be gathered? The suggested sources on this slide all have benefits and limitations. How will you collect and incorporate information from the variety of sources of information about performance?

I want to send you back again to the Administrator's Review tool. We did not cover every single item on that tool in this presentation, but please do take the time to look at them carefully. This was put together, as I said, from a variety of tools from the paraprofessional literature. It was not made up as just, that seems like a good idea. This is research-based. It's found to be keenly important to guide what paraprofessionals are doing and how they are supported by the other professionals with whom they work.

In addition, here are some resources that you are going to want to be thinking about. CSPG was referenced by Shatarupa in the last session -- section, and she can provide you -- you can return to that for more information. The Administrator's Needs Assessment, we've talked to -- we've talked about many times. Refer back again to the article from NRCP on the distinction of the roles of paraprofessionals, the article on Management By Walking Around, and the paraprofessional training needs tool, which can be used again, as we said, as a self-assessment for paraprofessionals, or it could be used as part of an observation tool. As you notice, some of the things that are on here that paraprofessionals may need to build some additional skills, so add, again, to the variety of resources that you have available to make sure that paraprofessionals are effective, efficient, and being asked to do ethically appropriate work.