



# Core Competencies for Special Education Paraeducators

## Preamble

The Core Competencies for Special Education Paraeducators represent the required knowledge and skills all paraeducators need to safely and effectively support students with disabilities in K-12 settings. Paraeducators work in general education and special education classrooms, non-classroom school settings (e.g., cafeteria, playground), and community-based learning sites supporting an entire classroom of students or individual students with disabilities. Paraeducators provide individualized services to students with disabilities through a range of tasks directed by the instructional team consisting of licensed professionals responsible for planning and implementing specially designed services for students with disabilities. These core competencies address the corresponding role of paraeducators in the four aspects (collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction) of the High Leverage Practices for special educators developed by CEC in collaboration with the Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center.

Acquisition of these Core Competencies by paraeducators requires support from licensed professionals including administrators, general and special education teachers, and related services personnel who are equipped with knowledge and skills to oversee and direct the work of paraeducators. Licensed professionals provide supervision and guidance to paraeducators, clearly define their roles, direct their work, and determine which practices they implement to support students with disabilities. Licensed professionals can utilize these core competencies to understand the essential knowledge and skills that paraeducators should possess and ensure that they are appropriately prepared for their assigned tasks. It is important to note that in the knowledge and skill statements listed under each competency area, skills supersede the knowledge; in other words, it is understood that paraeducators have acquired the knowledge that is necessary to demonstrate the skill.

## Core Competency Area 1: Professional Learning and Ethical Practice

Paraeducators follow district policies, guidelines, and procedures. Paraeducators understand that their practice requires attention to the professional and ethical considerations such as confidentiality, scope and limits of their roles and skill level, and culturally responsive practices. Paraeducators understand that their role is to assist the instructional team and support students under the direction of licensed professionals. As lifelong learners, they participate in professional growth and development, reflect on their professional practices, and use feedback from licensed professionals to improve their skills. **Tasks performed by paraeducators are under the ongoing guidance and direction of the instructional team.**

### Knowledge

K1.1	Principles, standards, and policies that guide ethical practice
K1.2	Personal and cultural biases and differences and how they may influence one's practice
K1.3	Professional growth opportunities for continued learning

### Skills

S1.1	Conduct activities with integrity and in compliance with applicable local, state and federal standards, policies and guidelines
S1.2	Maintain the dignity, privacy, and confidentiality of all students with disabilities, families, and school personnel
S1.3	Follow the chain of command established by the district to address policy questions, system level issues, and personnel practices
S1.4	Report suspected child abuse, suicidal ideation, and dangerous behaviors as required by law, policies, and local procedures
S1.5	Recognize and respect role differences of teachers, paraeducators, and other licensed professionals
S1.6	Recognize the role of the licensed professional as the leader of the instructional team
S1.7	Practice within the limits of the defined paraprofessional role
S1.8	Practice within one's skill limits and request direction, instruction, guidance or additional training for new or unfamiliar tasks
S1.9	Maintain boundaries for relationships and communication with students and their families within the professional and ethical scope of responsibility
S1.10	Refer questions about student progress to appropriate licensed professionals
S1.11	Reflect on one's performance, seek guidance and use feedback from licensed professional to continually improve practice
S1.12	Advocate for participation in ongoing professional growth and development opportunities
S1.13	Demonstrate respect and appreciation for cultural differences in verbal and written interactions with students, families, and school personnel

## Core Competency Area 2: Learner Development and Individual Learning Differences

Paraeducators demonstrate understanding of the unique learning needs of individual students. Paraeducators understand the impact of disabilities on development for individual students and their families. They understand and value the diversity and individual differences including the culture, religion, gender, and sexual orientation of individual students, family members, and school personnel. Paraeducators promote the growth of students with disabilities and encourage their independence and self-advocacy skills to assist with transitioning to life after high school.

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### Knowledge

K2.1	Cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and language development which impact milestones of students with disabilities compared to typically developing peers
K2.2	Educational challenges manifested as a result of varying disabilities
K2.3	Effect of disabilities on students, families, and society through the lifespan
K2.4	Family systems and their influence on the educational process
K2.5	Common concerns of families of students with disabilities
K2.6	Effects of cultural and linguistic diversity on the educational process and relationships between school, home, and community
K2.7	Characteristics and implications of one's own culture and use of language, including verbal and nonverbal communication, and how this may differ across cultures
K2.8	Effect of speech and language development on academic and nonacademic learning of students with disabilities
K2.9	Non-verbal modes of communication used by students with disabilities including augmentative and alternative communication

### Skills

S2.1	Support student's independence, self-advocacy, positive sense of identity, self-control, and self-reliance under the guidance of the instructional team
S2.2	Support students with disabilities in their use of self-assessment, problem-solving, and other cognitive strategies under the guidance of the instructional team
S2.3	Recognize and respect individual differences between culture, religion, gender, and sexual orientation of students with disabilities and their families
S2.4	Align communication methods to individual's language proficiency under the guidance of the instructional team

## Skills (cont.)

S2.5	Provide opportunities and support for children to understand, acquire, and use verbal and nonverbal means to communicate thoughts and feelings under the guidance of the instructional team
S2.6	Reinforce the use of oral and written communication efforts of students with disabilities under the guidance of the instructional team

## Core Competency Area 3: Special Education Services and Supports in the Learning Environment

Paraeducators understand services and supports for students with disabilities is based on the federal law for the inclusion of students with disabilities adhering to the guiding principles of free and appropriate public education (FAPE), least restrictive environment (LRE), and individualized education program (IEP). Paraeducators understand the purpose of special education services and support the instructional, behavioral, social, personal care, safety and medical needs, transitional life-skills and inclusion in school and society. They understand the importance of an organized and inclusive environment and facilitate accommodations, structure, and routines that maximize student's successful access to general educational programming. **Tasks performed by the paraeducators are under the ongoing guidance and direction of the instructional team.**

## Knowledge

K3.1	Purposes of supports, services and specially designed instruction which provide access to general education curriculum
K3.2	General knowledge of categories from federal law for students with disabilities
K3.3	General knowledge of principles of inclusive practices for students with disabilities
K3.4	Individual learner characteristics as the primary basis for instructional programming and decision making, rather than disability categories or educational placement
K3.5	District/agency policies and procedures for protecting the safety, health, and well-being of learners and school personnel
K3.6	Rights and responsibilities of students with disabilities and the personnel who serve them
K3.7	Effects of paraeducator's proximity and fading of paraeducator support on student engagement, learning and independence

## Skills

S3.1	Access credible and reliable websites and resources to expand understanding of special education services and students with disabilities under the guidance of the instructional team
S3.2	Support a safe and equitable learning environment that honors diversity and inclusion under the guidance of the instructional team
S3.3	Establish and maintain rapport with learners under the guidance of the instructional team

## Skills (cont.)

S3.4	Use knowledge of student's strengths and interests to encourage engagement in varied school and community activities under the guidance of the instructional team
S3.5	Prepare and organize materials to support teaching and learning as directed by the instructional team
S3.6	Adapt the physical environment and modify learning materials and activities as directed by the instructional team
S3.7	Support students with disabilities in following established school and classroom expectations and routines under the guidance of the instructional team
S3.8	Use routines and procedures to support effective transitions as determined by the instructional team
S3.9	Use and maintain adaptive equipment/materials and assistive technology for students with disabilities as determined by the instructional team
S3.10	Support students with disabilities in their use of augmentative and alternative communication devices and other assistive technology under the guidance of the instructional team
S3.11	Perform monitoring duties in learning environments as assigned by the instructional team
S3.12	Use universal precautions to assist in maintaining a safe, healthy environment in all settings
S3.13	Understand and articulate common educational and medical terminology used in the school setting
S3.14	Use techniques to address personal care, medical care, and physical assistance to students with disabilities as directed or authorized by a licensed professional

## Core Competency Area 4: Assessment

Paraeducators understand the purposes and rationale of various types of assessments, data collection processes and the link between these assessments and individualized instructional planning. Paraeducators play a vital role in assessment practices by collecting multiple types of data during instruction while using tools and assessments designed/provided by the instructional team. Accurate data collection contributes to informed educational decisions that optimize individual plans resulting in enhanced student outcomes. **Tasks performed by paraeducators are under the ongoing guidance and direction of the instructional team.**

## Knowledge

K4.1	Rationale and methods for formative and summative assessment
K4.2	Link between assessment and instruction
K4.3	Accommodations on student IEP and procedures for proctoring accommodated tests

## Skills

S4.1	Record objective and accurate data using collection procedures determined by the instructional team
S4.2	Proctor routine classroom and standardized tests following student accommodations as directed by the instructional team

## Core Competency Area 5: Instructional Supports and Strategies

Paraeducators understand a range of instructional strategies to facilitate student learning and address IEPs. Under the direction of the instructional team, paraeducators support specially designed instruction for students with disabilities. Paraeducators follow written instructional plans, implement accommodation and modifications, reinforce concepts presented by the instructional team and use effective strategies to facilitate student learning, inclusion, and growth. **Tasks performed by paraeducators are under the ongoing guidance and direction of the instructional team.**

## Knowledge

K5.1	Concepts of differentiated instruction, accommodations, modifications, High Leverage Practices, specially designed instruction
K5.2	Instructional strategies and instructional technology to support the individual student's learning

## Skills

S5.1	Demonstrate proficiency in academics including oral and written communication, literacy, and mathematical skills appropriate to the job assignment
S5.2	Follow written instructional plans provided by the instructional team, seeking clarification and training as needed
S5.3	Communicate relevant information about the student with disabilities to the instructional team
S5.4	Support the use of effective and culturally responsive instructional strategies in literacy and mathematics as directed by the instructional team
S5.5	Review and reinforce learning activities, essential concepts, and modified content as directed by the instructional team
S5.6	Use instructional time effectively
S5.7	Modify pace of instruction and provide organizational cues under the guidance of the instructional team
S5.8	Make responsive adjustments to instruction under the guidance of the instructional team
S5.9	Provide least intrusive levels of support, fade support, and fade physical proximity from students with disabilities under the guidance of the instructional team

## Skills (cont.)

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| S5.10 | Provide feedback to students with disabilities regarding their performance under the guidance of the instructional team |
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## Core Competency Area 6: Social, Emotional, and Behavioral Supports

Paraeducators understand state and district policies and procedures as well as ethical and legal practices for the implementation of positive behavioral supports and interventions. Paraeducators facilitate positive social interactions and active engagement by students with disabilities in the learning process. **Tasks performed by paraeducators are under the ongoing guidance and direction of the instructional team.**

### Knowledge

K6.1	Basic principles of positive behavior supports to promote social, emotional, and educational well-being of students with disabilities
K6.2	Communicative purpose of behaviors
K6.3	Legal and ethical practices for the use of behavioral interventions
K6.4	State and district policies and procedural safeguards regarding appropriate use of behavioral supports with students with disabilities
K6.5	Importance of the paraeducator serving as a positive model for students with disabilities

### Skills

S6.1	Implement positive behavior supports outlined in a behavior support plan as determined by the instructional team
S6.2	Implement individualized reinforcement systems as determined by the instructional team
S6.3	Support the implementation of social-emotional and behavioral interventions as determined by the instructional teams
S6.4	Assist in teaching specific behaviors and procedures to facilitate safety and learning in each school setting as determined by the instructional team
S6.5	Respond to student actions using strategies under the guidance and direction of the instructional team
S6.6	Support development of social skills and facilitate proactive peer interactions for students with disabilities under the guidance of the instructional team
S6.7	Support students with disabilities by modeling and facilitating the use of conflict resolution and collaborative problem solving under the guidance of the instructional team

## Core Competency Area 7: Collaboration with Team Members

Paraeducators support the instructional team and collaborate with multiple team members such as general education and special education teachers, related service providers, administrators, families, and community agencies. Paraeducators use effective communication, conflict resolution/management, and problem-solving strategies to function proactively with team members and the broader community. **Tasks performed by paraeducators are under the ongoing guidance and direction of the instructional team.**

### Knowledge

K7.1 | Purpose of effective teamwork to improve student outcomes

K7.2 | Communication styles and strategies for problem-solving and decision making

### Skills

S7.1 | Establish and maintain professional, collegial, and appropriate relationships with school personnel, students, and their families

S7.2 | Communicate effectively with school personnel, students and their families as determined by the instructional team

S7.3 | Attend meetings and participate with other team members