

News notes

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Ready, Set, GO! The students are waiting! They want to learn and we want to teach. Now, how can we get started in a good way that will help the enthusiasm last all year?

Teachers are challenged daily to balance behavior, happiness and academic performance in their classrooms. A true test of a teacher is to do it ALL every day! How do you, as a returning or new teacher, meet the challenge?

Paraprofessionals—we need to follow the rules for new paraprofessionals. Here they are in case someone doesn't remember.

1. **Notify your coordinator** when you need to replace a paraprofessional position. The para leaving must turn in a written resignation to you (then you send to the coordinator), or the coordinator. Candidates who have filled out an application form can be interviewed by you and the coordinator.
2. When both you and the coordinator have agreed on a person to hire, the coordinator will notify the central office.
3. The selected candidate will go to the Interlocal office and complete paper work and medical screening before their first day on the job.
4. **The first day of employment will be after the central office requirements are completed.**
5. **The first day the para is on duty will be an in-service day.** During that day they will be instructed by the teacher about duties, confidentiality, routines of the school, blood-borne pathogens and specific training for this position. This in-service training will be 6 hours in length. It needs to be written as an in-service and turned in within a few days.
6. **20 hours of in-service** is required every year for a paraprofessional. (It is prorated for those hired later.) As the supervisor it is your responsibility to make sure this gets completed. When they pass the para test the rest of the hours for that one year are waived. The fall in-service for returning paras is worth 12 hours this year. Remind them to submit it within a week, please. A new para will have 18 hours of in-service completed by Aug.8th.

Other para information—

- Paras can come on local school in-service days and work on an online module for training and then go home.

- They can come to in-service provided by your district when it is relevant to what they do.
- They can read books, watch videos, and write reports for in-service.
- Paras can go visit other programs with prior approval.
- They can take college classes relevant to their work.
- There are other options too. Ask and see what we can develop to help the para be the best they can be with our students.

Paraprofessionals are a great help to us as we work with students. Remember that you are the teacher. New skills must be taught by you. Then the para can reinforce and re-teach. For example: You teach a study skill. Then the para can help the student practice the skill. So a para could have a group of students practicing the use of specific study skills that you have taught.

The study skills class is NOT about getting homework done. It is about practicing study skills to make special education staff unnecessary for the student in the future. Remember that students must learn to do it alone. We won't always be there. If appropriate accommodations are made and we teach students to depend on themselves then they should struggle just the way general education students do to complete their work. Please emphasis this to your para staff!

Paraprofessionals are a great help to us. Remember that they are NOT the teacher and many have not had training to deal with the most difficult students. Paras are people who want to help students and teachers be more successful but it is the teacher who is in charge of what the students should learn and how and which modifications/accommodations need to be made. **(Last year I sent a list of modifications/accommodations in a newsletter, if you need the information again ask me.)**

- Definition: Accommodations are practices and procedures in the areas of presentation, response, setting, and timing/scheduling that provide equitable instructional and assessment access for students with disabilities.
- Accommodations reduce or eliminate the effects of a student's disability and do not reduce learning expectations.
- Presentation Accommodations
- Response Accommodations
- Setting Accommodations
- Timing/Scheduling Accommodations

A good paraprofessional is a real asset to our program. Use them well and wisely.

Focus on getting RESULTS NOW. We work in a system that does not give enough attention to simple things like:

- How effective is this lesson?
- What evidence do we have that it is effective?
- How effective is this unit?
- Is this a common curriculum that everyone has a chance to learn?

What gets in the way of teaching and learning? How can we change things that get in the way?

A book that I'll be using as a focus for the year is Results Now: How we Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning by Mike Schmoker. He asks hard questions but the results of his research are impressive where teachers took the time to answer the tough questions. He also authored First things First, From the Brutal Facts to the Best Schools We've Ever Had.

We will still focus on poverty and strategies to get out of it. Please read Getting Ahead in a Just Getting by World.

I am looking for a few teachers to be leaders in their schools to improve teacher performance and student achievement using the results now research. If you are interested in being considered for this group please contact Margo at 331-0101.

Is your teacher assistance team effective? Is the team broadly represented? Is your team focused on problem solving? Does your intervention plan specify the person(s) responsible for each intervention component?

Good questioning by the team leader is essential to ensure best efforts are being made on behalf of the referred student. Asking good questions throughout the process also makes team members more accountable for the role they are to play in assisting a student toward learning or behavior improvements. Good question can lead to better results by all involved. But too many questions or the wrong questions can quickly erode trust and cause a breakdown in teamwork.

Many referrals are the result of inappropriate student behavior. I have many packets that focus on a student's misbehavior and help them understand the importance of school and classroom rules. I have used these in several settings and have found them to encourage students to think about where they have gone wrong and guide them toward developing realistic behavior improvement goals. They also provide documentation that is needed to determine whether a student is reaching behavior goals.

A story from aha! process

"My first year teaching was wonderfully difficult. My mentor was pregnant and had her baby the first week of school; she took the rest of the year off. I was teaching some difficult students, traveling between classrooms, and coaching the varsity cheerleading squad, while also continuing to study for my master's

degree. I had a lot of interesting firsts, especially in my first year teaching at the high school.

My first first happened on the first day of my first year teaching school. I felt prepared. I had lessons, I'd purchased many materials for my classroom, and I was ready to go. My first "class" of the day was actually a study hall that I had to supervise. I had read Harry Wong and had great education professors at the college I attended, so I knew I had to be prepared. I had assigned seats, rules, and a contract for students to sign, and I brought magazines, crossword puzzles, newspapers, etc. so that my students would have something to do during the first 80-minute period of the first day of school.

None of my education classes prepared me for what happened in the last five minutes of that first period of the first day. I was proud of myself for being so well-prepared and having such a great, cooperative group of kids. Then a student not really named Mark changed that. Suddenly, with five minutes left in the period, he got out of his seat, walked over to the emergency window, and jumped out. Fortunately, we were in the café on the first floor, but still—I did not know what to do. He disappeared. I turned to one of the girls in the study hall who happened to be one of the cheerleaders and asked her, "Did he really just jump out the window?" ...

Now, there are many other firsts I could share with you, but I don't want to spend too much time reminiscing about my days in the classroom. My point is that, as you embark into the field of teaching, there is much, much more to it than, well, teaching. Looking back on the five years since I graduated from college is a lot like playing a game of connect the dots. Steve Jobs, in his 2005 Stanford commencement address, talks about connecting the dots in life: "You can't connect the dots looking forward. You can only connect them looking backward, so you have to trust that the dots will somehow connect in your future. You have to trust in something—your gut, karma, destiny, (your mentor and coordinator) whatever—because believing that the dots will connect down the road will give you the confidence to follow your heart, even when it leads you off the well-worn path, and that will make all the difference."

I therefore urge you to remember that teaching is a journey. You don't know where it will lead you or when. Don't try to connect the dots too soon, but face the adversities and challenges head on, try your hardest, and look forward to the picture that will appear when you are finally able to connect all the dots. "Jennifer Ratka

This year will be gone in a few months. What happens in your school with your students will last forever. Make the most of the time everyday.

Ready, Set, GROW!