



Connecticut State Department of Education

June 2012 Update for District Contacts for Paraprofessional Issues

Building District Capacity to Train Paraprofessionals Through the COMPASS Curriculum

The Capital Region Education Council (CREC) and Cooperative Education Services (CES) teamed with Norwalk for two days in March to present a “Train the Trainers” program on The **COMPASS: Helping Paraprofessionals Navigate the Profession** curriculum. Developed by CREC Technical Assistance and Brokering Services (TABS), the **COMPASS** is a professional development curriculum designed specifically for paraprofessionals in educational settings. The **COMPASS** is aligned with national and state standards and responds to federal legislation by providing job-embedded support and training to ensure that paraprofessional services support effective instruction for all students.

Pauline Smith, Director of Pupil Personnel, contacted CREC to provide the training in Norwalk to district personnel in order to build Norwalk’s capacity for professional learning opportunities. During the two day Train the Trainers, district personnel received instruction in COMPASS training material on topics such as Roles and Responsibilities, Communication, Behavior Techniques, Legal and Ethical Issues, Instructional Strategies and School Climate: Creating Environments that are Safe for All. Comments from participants included, “It was great to be able to share strategies for behavior management and instructional strategies with other paraprofessionals”, “The materials that were given to us will be extremely useful, “I now have a clear description of what a teacher’s assistant does”, “I loved the hands-on activities”.

Districts can build capacity to do their own paraprofessional training or have qualified **COMPASS** trainers come into their district to conduct the sessions. The **COMPASS** curriculum provides modules on over 16 topics. Donna Morelli, CREC **COMPASS** trainer and developer states, “The excitement and determination to implement new strategies by paraprofessionals who have participated in the **COMPASS** professional development is making a difference in how paraprofessionals instruct and how students learn.” For more information contact Janet Scialdone, CREC TABS **COMPASS** Administrator at jscialdone@crec.org, 860-509-3681.

Roles of Program and Building Administrators in the Management of Paraprofessionals:

- ⇒ *Ensure that teachers and paraprofessionals understand the distinctions in their roles and are aware of school and district policies.*
- ⇒ *Schedule opportunities for teachers and paraprofessionals to meet regularly for on-the-job training and planning.*
- ⇒ *Provide support that will help team members to resolve interpersonal or other problems that may occur in classrooms or other learning environments.*
- ⇒ *Ensure that paraprofessionals are appropriately prepared to carry out assigned tasks.*
- ⇒ *Provide clear guidelines for the supervision of paraprofessionals.*
- ⇒ *Assess emerging training needs for teachers and paraprofessionals as educational program team members.*
- ⇒ *Create a community where paraprofessionals are respected and shared contributions are valued and acknowledged.*

In addition, administration can advocate for their paraprofessional work force by supporting the use of substitutes for paraprofessionals, career opportunities, reimbursement for training at institutes of higher education and improved wage and benefit packages.

Connecticut Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals, pgs. 68-69.

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What Every Teacher Should Know About Collaborating with Paraprofessionals

By Nancy French*

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) says that paraprofessionals may assist in the delivery of services to children with disabilities. It adds that paraprofessionals should be appropriately trained and supervised. While paraprofessionals have worked alongside teachers and related service providers to help students in special education for at least 40 years, neither teachers nor related service providers have received preparation to train or supervise paraprofessionals.

The following four principles guide teachers' work with paraprofessionals:

1. **Actively Involve Paraprofessionals:** During orientation, teachers and paraprofessionals should identify and compare their work style preferences. Teachers should also identify programmatic needs, then compare those needs to paraprofessional's skills so they can create a personalized "job description" that helps the paraprofessional know exactly what is expected.
2. **Conduct First-Hand Observations:** First-hand observations of the paraprofessional's required tasks enable feedback based on data rather than hearsay. Observations may be quite short—just five minutes. The key is to observe frequently—twice a week is not too much.
3. **Focus Observations on Tasks Assigned to the Paraprofessional:** The most useful information comes from observations of the specific tasks assigned to the paraprofessional in the personalized job description. The tasks on which a person's performance will be evaluated should never be a surprise.
4. **Use Written Data to Provide Feedback:** Written information is more useful than verbal information during conversations about the paraprofessional's work.

The following literature provides valuable information for teachers:

- Time Management—Mamchak, P. S. (1993). Teacher's time management survival kit: Ready-to-use techniques and materials. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Managing Workplace Relationships—Blanchard, K. H. & S. Johnson. (1983). The one-minute manager. New York: Berkley Books.
- Teamwork—Larson, C. E. & F. M. J. LaFasto (1989). Teamwork: What must go right/what can go wrong. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.
- Needs-Based Negotiating—Fisher, R., W. Ury, & B. Patton. (1991). Getting to yes: Negotiating agreement without giving in. 2nd Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin.

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