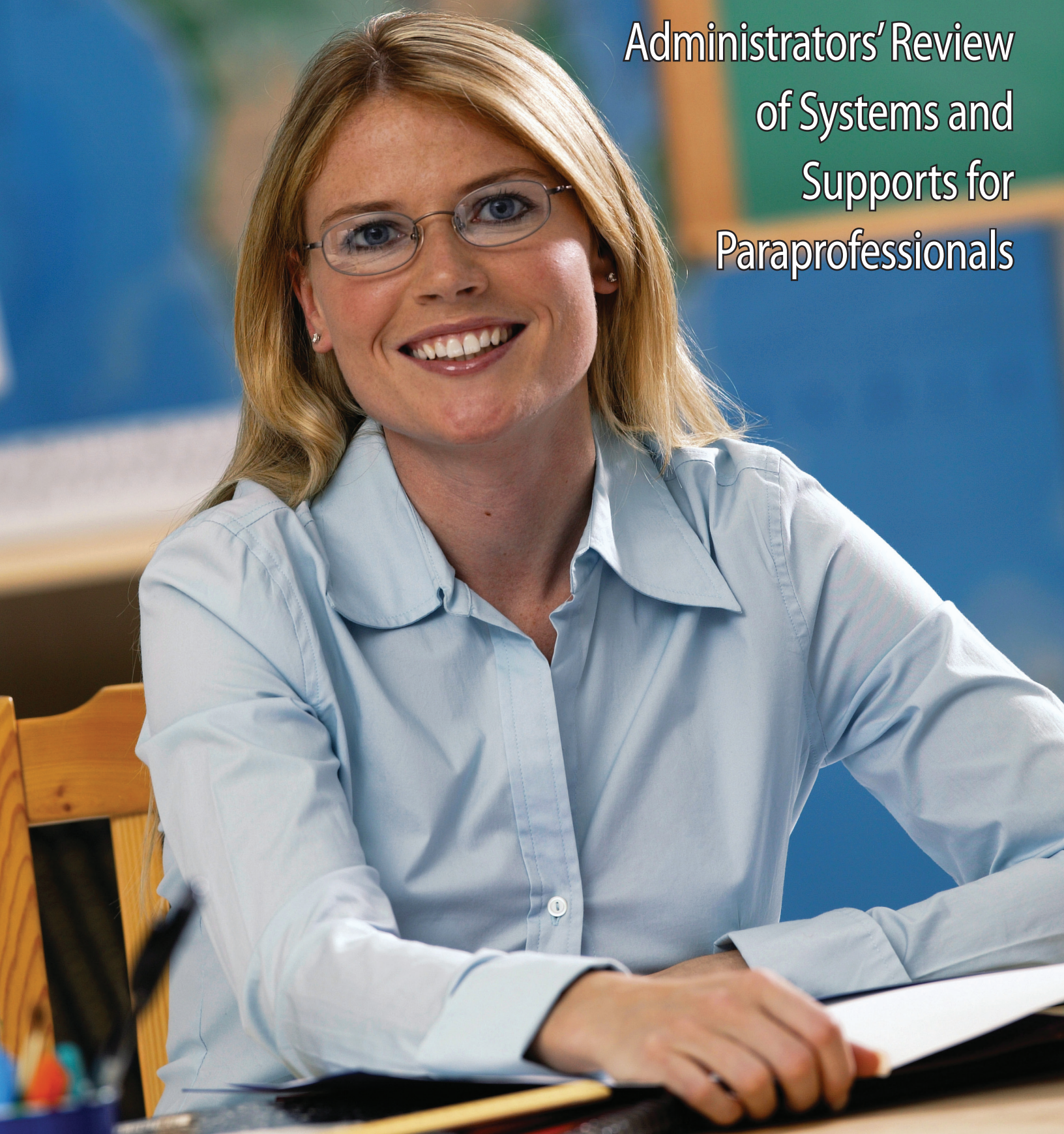


Volume 4, Issue 1

# Education Leader

Administrators' Review  
of Systems and  
Supports for  
Paraprofessionals





**M**ost school leaders have some level of responsibility for ensuring the appropriate hiring, supervision, and daily utilization of special education paraprofessionals. This is an important charge in that the deployment of special education paraprofessionals in public schools must comply with the Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Chapter 14 requirements, as well as result in the provision of appropriate educational supports to students with disabilities in accordance with their individualized education programs (IEPs). The definition of effective practice as applied to the use of paraprofessionals in schools has evolved in parallel with overall advances in the design and delivery of educational programs for students with disabilities. School leaders should periodically examine the practices and procedures related to special education paraprofessionals to determine areas of strength and those in need of improvement, so the educational needs of students with disabilities are met in the most effective and efficient ways.

## Considerations

Questions school leaders may consider in building a picture of how the school, district, or agency uses paraprofessionals may include:

- How do we use paraprofessionals in our school?
- How does the school leadership promote use of paraprofessional supports throughout the school?
- What skills do paraprofessionals need to be effective in supporting students in various school

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environments (e.g., general education, special education, noninstructional)?

- What skills do general and special education teachers need to guide paraprofessionals in their classes?
- Do our schools and programs have the necessary supports in place to ensure that paraprofessionals effectively support their educational programs?

## Administrators' Review of Systems and Supports for Paraprofessionals

In order to facilitate exploration of these and other pertinent considerations, the Pennsylvania Training and Technical Assistance Network (PaTTAN) has drawn upon several published resources to create a tool, the *Administrators' Review of Systems and Supports for Paraprofessionals*, to be used by school leaders as a guide for evaluating a system's current practices.

The *Administrators' Review* tool provides a framework for examining multiple sources of evidence to identify effective practices, procedures and supports that are in place, as well as identifying potential additions, revisions, or clarifications. In preparation for using the *Administrators' Review* tool, it will be helpful to gather a variety of documents and policies that may serve as sources of evidence to support the ratings assigned to each item listed in the framework. Documents that guide the use of paraprofessionals and may serve as sources of evidence include: job descriptions for paraprofessional roles (e.g., classroom aides, personal care assistants); teacher job descriptions that reference paraprofessionals, documents that articulate supervision responsibilities for paraprofessionals; policies and procedures regarding paraprofessional and teacher orientation, supervision and lines of communication; collective bargaining agreements that impact paraprofessionals and/or the teachers with whom they work.

## Administrators' Review of Systems and Supports for Paraprofessionals

**Directions:**

1. Read each item. Place a check in the box that best describes your system's current practice. List sources of evidence for your rating.
2. Although it is tempting to simply check a box and move on, please take the time to review and list the evidence 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.
3. Use the "Action Steps" section to prioritize your next steps to address areas of need that you identified. You may wish to review the resources listed at the end of this publication as sources for further action and study.
4. Contact your local intermediate unit or PaTTAN for more information or technical assistance.

	Documentation Used for Decision Making	In Place	In Process	Not in Place
<b>A. Hiring and Assigning Paraprofessionals</b>				
1. District policy exists regarding paraprofessional qualifications.				
2. Procedures and practices are in place to recruit, hire, and retain paraprofessionals.				
3. Process and criteria for determining the need for paraprofessional support for students with disabilities to receive an appropriate education are in place.				
4. Paraprofessionals have job descriptions that outline their roles and responsibilities.				
5. Where paraprofessional support is indicated in the IEP, written plans exist to clarify the nature and extent of that support (i.e., specially designed instruction, accommodations, IEP goals, individual/classroom support).				
6. In cases when a paraprofessional is needed for an individual student, efforts are made to ensure that paraprofessionals provide supportive, rather than primary or exclusive services.				
7. When administrators make work assignments and reassignments to meet students' needs, input is solicited from paraprofessionals, teachers, and other team members to understand factors that may influence job performance.				
8. Substitute paraprofessionals are recruited and trained to ensure that a student's access to education and participation in his/her educational program is not unduly disrupted when the usual paraprofessional is unavailable.				

	Documentation Used for Decision Making	In Place	In Process	Not in Place
<b>B. Orientation and Training of Paraprofessionals</b>				
9. Paraprofessionals receive orientation and entry-level training prior to working directly with students.				
10. Paraprofessionals receive ongoing, on-the-job training for skill building that matches their specific job responsibilities and assignments.				
11. Paraprofessionals have access to ongoing professional development, in addition to their on-the-job experiences.				
<b>C. Paraprofessional Interactions With Students and Staff</b>				
12. Paraprofessionals are expected to demonstrate constructive interpersonal skills with students and team members.				
13. Paraprofessionals demonstrate interactions and work habits that encourage student independence, foster appropriate interdependence, promote inclusion and peer interactions; and enhance each student's self-image.				
<b>D. Teacher Support and Guidance of Paraprofessionals</b>				
14. Administrators, teachers, and related service providers have the ultimate responsibility for ensuring the appropriate design, implementation, and evaluation of instruction carried out by paraprofessionals.				
15. Teachers have a system in place to provide regular communication with paraprofessionals, sharing student-related information and providing guidance about the paraprofessional's role in the classroom.				
16. Time is allotted in the school schedule, daily or weekly, to allow opportunities for paraprofessionals and teachers to collaborate about plans, strategies, and student progress.				
17. Teachers engage in planning and scheduling activities with paraprofessionals. Teachers consider the strengths and interests of paraprofessionals when assigning tasks.				
18. Teachers model caring and respectful interactions with students.				
19. Teachers provide constructive feedback to paraprofessionals about their work performance on an ongoing basis.				

	Documentation Used for Decision Making	In Place	In Process	Not in Place
20. Teachers maintain positive and supportive interactions with paraprofessionals, contributing to the evaluation of paraprofessional performance and supporting skill development.				
<b>E. Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals</b>				
21. The district has an agreed upon definition of the role of the paraprofessional.				
22. Paraprofessionals function as a vital support to students under the direction of certified teachers or administrators.				
23. Administrators, teachers, and parents are informed about the roles and responsibilities that paraprofessionals have in the educational program.				
24. Paraprofessionals are informed about the educational needs and characteristics of their students, as well as classroom and school practices and schedules.				
25. Paraprofessionals have opportunities to contribute to the development of the educational program created by each student's educational team.				
26. Functions of paraprofessionals may include: assist and support the implementation of instructional programs, facilitate learning activities, collect data, and carry out other assigned duties based on plans developed by the supervising teacher.				
<b>F. Acknowledging Paraprofessionals</b>				
27. Paraprofessionals are considered members of the educational teams corresponding to their work assignments.				
28. Paraprofessionals provide important services, under the direct supervision of certified teachers or administrators.				
29. School community values, appreciates, and recognizes paraprofessionals for their unique competencies and contributions to the classroom and school.				
30. Administrators, teachers and paraprofessionals advocate for the paraprofessional (e.g., training, leave time, modifications to responsibilities, involvement in decision making groups).				

	Documentation Used for Decision Making	In Place	In Process	Not in Place
<b>G. Supervision and Evaluation of Paraprofessional Services</b>				
31. Paraprofessionals receive ongoing supervision and regular performance evaluations based on their job descriptions.				
32. Supervisors of paraprofessionals (teachers/administrators) receive training in effective supervisory practices and ethical and legal issues concerning paraprofessional roles and responsibilities.				
33. A process is in place to determine how and when paraprofessional supports can be faded or replaced by more naturally occurring supports.				
34. An up-to-date district paraprofessional performance evaluation process is in use.				

Adapted from Giangreco, Edelman, and Broer, "Schoolwide Planning to Improve Paraeducator Supports," University of Vermont, Burlington; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, and Stahl, "Knowledge and Skills for Teachers Supervising the Work of Paraprofessionals;" and K. Gerlich, Pacific Training Associates, "District and/or Building Assessment of Paraeducator Issues," Seattle, Washington.

### Action Steps

As a result of your review, you have determined whether all of the components outlined in the framework are addressed in your system's policies and procedures. If they are not written into policies and procedures, are they currently happening? If so, how do administrators, staff, and families know the expectations? Are the procedures for sharing expectations adequate in case of staff turnover? If not, how might these practices be infused into your policies and procedures?

You may choose to use the following action planning format to help guide your next steps to address the areas of need you identified through your review.

Areas of Priority			
Areas of Need	Action to Address Need	Lead	Proposed Date of Completion

*Example:*

E. Roles and Responsibilities of Paraprofessionals 21. The district has an agreed upon definition of the role of the paraprofessional.	Convene a small committee to explore policies of local districts regarding definition of roles. Outcome: Develop an agreed upon, written definition of the role(s) of the paraprofessional in our district. Take definition through the usual adoption process.	Special Education Supervisor	End of school year
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## Resources

- Causton-Theoharis, J.N. (2009). The golden rule for providing support in inclusive classrooms: Support others as you would wish to be supported. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 42(2), 36-43.
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- Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl. (2001). Knowledge and skills for teachers supervising the work of paraprofessionals. *Exceptional Children*, 67(4), 520-533.

# Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

**Tom Wolf**

Governor

