



# SPECIAL EDUCATION GUIDANCE

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## The Use of Paraprofessionals to Support Speech-Language Pathologists

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## Introduction

This guidance document is an extension of [Wisconsin DPI Information Update Bulletin 10.05](#) “Frequently Asked Questions about Special Education Paraprofessionals” in relation to question 11: May a paraprofessional provide support services to students in a speech and language program?

The use of *extenders*, adults not licensed in speech-language pathology (including caregivers, teachers, and support staff including paraprofessionals), is supported by the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA). Extenders, support licensed speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in balancing workload and caseload responsibilities in school-based settings (see [ASHA Service Delivery Resources](#)). The use of paraprofessionals may allow SLPs to focus on professional-level tasks and achieve more efficient and effective use of time and resources. The use of extenders also may increase the frequency and intensity of services to students on the caseload. In all cases, SLPs must ensure students are afforded a free appropriate public education (FAPE) so that students are making progress on IEP goals and in their general education curriculum and are on track to be college and career ready.

Research shows that student outcomes are increased when peers and other adults are trained to reinforce skills and strategies that the student initially learns and practices with a licensed practitioner. Brock and Carter (2013) conducted a systematic review of research regarding paraprofessional-delivered educational practices. They found that when paraprofessionals are given adequate training on specific evidence-based practices, they are capable of effectively implementing a number of educational practices that improve student academic and social outcomes. For example, paraprofessionals could be taught skills to support student communication skills, reduce problem behaviors, and increase independence for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities (p. 211).

## Support versus Instruction

Support from paraprofessionals cannot replace speech-language services delivered by a licensed SLP. Paraprofessional support should always be supplemental, with licensed professionals responsible for primary instruction as well as all planning and pedagogical decision making (Brock and Carter 2013, 219).

## Licensing

If a speech and language pathologist is also licensed by the State of Wisconsin’s Department of Safety and Professional Services (DSPS), the practitioner must also ensure they meet the direct supervision requirements of [Wisconsin Administrative Code Chapter HAS § 6.14 and 6.15](#) in addition to this guidance from DPI when working with paraprofessionals.

According to [DPI Bulletin 10.05](#), ‘under the direct supervision of an SLP’ means “regular, continuing interaction between a properly licensed special education teacher (including an SLP) and a paraprofessional, which includes the SLP’s time to

evaluate the services being provided.” Contact between the SLP and the paraprofessional and between the SLP and the student should be sufficient, so the SLP is able to diagnose educational needs, prescribe teaching and learning procedures, and evaluate the effects of teaching. Paraprofessionals cannot be assigned teacher (or SLP) duties.

The Wisconsin special education aide license allows an individual to assist as a paraprofessional to support SLPs in addressing communication needs of students with IEPs. The DPI Bulletin 10.05 states “Paraprofessional responsibilities include, but are not limited to, supporting the lesson plan of a properly licensed teacher (or SLP), providing technical assistance to the teacher (or SLP), and helping with classroom management.” Duties of a paraprofessional may include the following:

### **Examples of Paraprofessional Logistical Support**

#### 1. Maintaining and programming communication equipment:

- Program communication devices used by students on the caseload.
- Ensure communication devices used by students on the caseload are operational.
- Trouble-shoot when a communication device breaks down for a student.
- Charge and maintain communication devices used by students.

#### 2. Providing clerical and scheduling support:

- Perform recess, lunch, and bus supervision duties.
- Deliver materials to teachers for classroom use.
- Collect interoffice mail.
- Co-create and put up bulletin boards.
- Take attendance and maintain attendance records.
- File and organize speech and language records.
- Prepare documents as directed by the SLP.
- Photocopy and laminate materials to be used in sessions with students.
- Gather materials as directed by the SLP for student sessions or for home programs.
- Co-create low to high tech visual supports needed for students to be able to engage in academic and functional instruction.
- Assist in setting up learning environments.

### **Examples of Paraprofessional Reinforcement of Speech and Language Skill Development Under the Direction of a Licensed SLP**

#### 1. Assist the SLP with supporting student behavior and social engagement:

- Model positive social skills, problem solving, self-talk, self-regulation strategies, and other social and emotional competencies.
- Support students in implementing sensory breaks, visual schedules, and other supports as needed.
- Support students in following directions while the SLP leads a group lesson.
- Role-play a situation in a group.

- Collect data on social and other behavioral interaction for review and analysis by the SLP.

2. Take notes on an observation form, prepared by SLP, regarding student academic and functional performance in the school environment for the SLP to review and analyze as part of monitoring student IEP progress.

3. Support the lesson plan of the SLP by providing direct support to students through review and reinforcement, after the skill has been introduced by the SLP. \*

- Observe a therapy session between the SLP and student and then provide opportunity for reinforcement of skills through additional practice throughout the week.
  - Providing extra practice for an articulation drill that was introduced by the SLP.
  - Using language script cards designed by the SLP to support extra practice during free time with peers.
  - Using scripted prompting strategies developed by the SLP to elicit response and initiation throughout daily interactions.
- Assist a student or groups of students with independent practice work assigned by the SLP.
- Assist the SLP and classroom teacher during instructional times with monitoring or assisting students with independent work.

*\*When the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team determines a student needs paraprofessional support to reinforce skills initially taught by a licensed professional, that support should be documented in the student's IEP. The minutes the paraprofessional spends supporting the student in practicing these skills can be considered for Medicaid reimbursement. When paraprofessionals support review and practice of instruction provided by an SLP, these minutes must be clearly identified as review and practice and differentiated from the instruction provided by the SLP.*

### Appropriate Use of Paraprofessionals and IEP Documentation

Appropriate Use of Paraprofessionals	Documentation in the IEP
During a therapy session, the SLP works in one part of the room with a student/group of students while the paraprofessional works at a table with another student or group of students to reinforce or practice items taught by the SLP. Students rotate to both groups.	No change to the usual documentation of service because the services are provided either by the SLP or are repeated practice of skills previously taught by the SLP.
SLP provides service to a student 3x 20 minutes a week for a designated amount of	SDI: direct instruction in [skill] by SLP 3x 20 minutes/week for 8 weeks

Appropriate Use of Paraprofessionals	Documentation in the IEP
<p>time and then meets once a week with a student for 20 minutes while the paraprofessional meets with the student 10 minutes a day to practice skills taught by the SLP*. This is documented in the IEP as Supplementary Aids and Services (SAS).</p>	<p>SDI: direct instruction in [skill] by SLP 20 minutes week for 28 weeks</p> <p>SAS: reinforcement of [skill] by paraprofessional 10 minutes/day for 28 weeks</p>

*\*The IEP team should determine the frequency, amount, duration, and location of service. Based on student progress on IEP goals, this timeline may need to be revised to adequately support student progress.*

### Example IEP Documentation

Supplementary Aids and Services	Frequency	Amount	Location	Duration
Reinforcement of [skill] by paraprofessional	1x a day	10 minutes	General Education	11/2/20-9/6/21

Special Education/Specially Designed Instruction	Frequency	Amount	Location	Duration
Direct instruction in [skill] by SLP	3x a week	20 minutes	General education	9/7/20-10/30/20
Direct instruction in [skill] by SLP	1x a week	20 minutes	General education	11/2/20- 9/6/21

## Inappropriate Use of Paraprofessionals

Inappropriate Use of Paraprofessionals	Reason Why This Is Not Appropriate
<p>The paraprofessional meets regularly with students and the SLP “checks-in” monthly to monitor progress on goals.</p> <p>IEP indicates oral language or speech instruction 2x/week for 20 minutes</p>	<p>Direct supervision of the paraprofessional cannot be provided in this example and the SLP is not implementing the SLP’s instructional responsibilities. Monthly check-ins between an SLP and the paraprofessional are not considered regular. Continuous interaction with the student is required to be sufficient for the SLP to monitor progress on IEP goals and to make adjustments in lesson planning as appropriate. The paraprofessional can only be listed in the IEP as “supporting instruction.”</p>
<p>The SLP has the paraprofessional “run” the session while the SLP attends an IEP meeting in a different part of the building.</p>	<p>“Running a lesson” goes beyond review and reinforcement. The SLP may not delegate their instructional responsibilities to a paraprofessional.</p>

## Additional Responsibilities of the SLP to Comply with Direct Supervision Requirements

Some SLPs may use a paraprofessional when appropriate to provide support to students who receive speech and language services. SLPs who provide direct supervision to paraprofessionals must take on additional responsibilities to ensure adequate training and supervision of the paraprofessional occurs.

- SLPs supervising support personnel require specialized knowledge and skills specific to supervising.
  - [ASHA Professional Development Supervision Courses](#) are previously recorded sessions available for purchase and count toward Continuing Education Units (CEUs).
  - The Council of Academic Programs in Communication Science and Disorders (CAPCSD) now offers school-based SLPs the opportunity to participate at no charge when collaborating with university CSD programs that are CAPCSD members. To access enrollment codes for the CAPCSD eLearning courses, contact the university graduate training program clinical education or practicum placement administrator. [Universities that are CAPCSD members](#) will provide you with information about your no-cost online registration.

Paraprofessionals are most effective in their support to students when given clear instructions, focused training, and ongoing supervision and support to implement a specific instructional strategy for a specific student. To ensure fidelity of support, the SLP should provide initial training, follow up training and ongoing support, including modeling and performance feedback to the paraprofessional (Carter and Brock 2013, 217-218).

- The SLP provides detailed direction regarding prompts and reinforcements for the paraprofessional to use when supporting individual students. The SLP meets regularly with the paraprofessional so the SLP can recommend adjustments as necessary based on changes to individual student needs.
- The SLP must ensure that review and reinforcement of the SLP's instruction, and other support, is appropriate for a special education paraprofessional to implement. This determination will vary based on the paraprofessional's skill level, the level of training provided, the model of service delivery, and needs of individual students, and the SLP's caseload.

## Resources

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- Brock, Matthew E. and Erik W. Carter. 2013. "A Systematic Review of Paraprofessional-Delivered Educational Practices to Improve Outcomes for Students with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities." *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 38(4): 211-221. <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F154079691303800401>.
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