

Guidance on Initiation or Continuation of an IEP-Assigned Paraprofessional

This document provides guidance to IEP teams considering a recommendation of an IEP-assigned paraprofessional. It applies to paraprofessionals assigned to individual students, whether in general education classrooms or in special classes. It does not apply to programmatic paraprofessionals (e.g., the classroom paraprofessional in a 12:1+1 class).

In developing paraprofessional support recommendations, IEP teams must ensure that students with disabilities have the opportunity for academic achievement, social integration, and a level of independent functioning that will prepare them for and allow them to succeed in college, a career, and/or independent living. IEP-assigned paraprofessional services, when properly supported by the student's present levels of performance, thoughtful annual goal development, and team collaboration in IEP implementation, can make a profound difference in the development of a student's academic well-being, social-emotional growth, and ultimate movement toward independence, within the least restrictive environment. Data-driven student progress and the continued necessity for the support of an IEP-assigned paraprofessional are reviewed annually (or more frequently, as needed) by the IEP team.

Summary of Regulatory Requirements

State regulations require that IEP teams consider certain factors prior to recommending an IEP-assigned paraprofessional. These considerations must be documented on the IEP. IEP teams must consider and document:

- the management needs of the student that would require a significant degree of individualized attention and intervention;
- any skills and goals the student would need to achieve that will reduce or eliminate the need for the paraprofessional;
- the specific support that the paraprofessional would provide for the student (e.g., assistance with personal health needs or behaviors that impede learning);
- other supports, accommodations, and/or services that could support the student to meet these needs (e.g. behavioral intervention plan, environmental accommodations or modifications, instructional materials in alternate formats, assistive technology devices, peer-to-peer supports);
- the extent (e.g. portions of the school day) or circumstances (e.g. for transitions from class to class) the student would need the assistance of a paraprofessional;
- staff ratios in the setting where the student will attend school;
- the extent to which assignment of a paraprofessional might enable the student to be educated with students without IEPs and, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the least restrictive environment;
- any potential harmful effect on the student or on the quality of services that s/he needs that might result from the assignment of a paraprofessional; and
- the training and support to be provided to the paraprofessional to help him/her understand the student's specific disability-related needs, learn effective strategies

for addressing the student's needs, and acquire the necessary skills to support the implementation of the student's IEP.

Refer to the [NYSED guidance](#) for more information.

Considerations and Decision Making

The determination that a paraprofessional is appropriate for a student must be based on a documented need. At the IEP meeting, the team should ensure that the parent is aware of the full range of supports, services and strategies that can be used to meet the student's goals, as well as both the positive and negative consequences of the intensity of IEP-assigned paraprofessional services. The IEP team must:

Consider both the restrictiveness and intensity of the program and services.

When considering the appropriate recommendations for a student, the team must develop a thorough understanding of the student's needs and consider how these needs may be addressed. In particular, the IEP team must weigh two critical factors of each service: its **restrictiveness** and its **intensity**.

The level of **restrictiveness** of a service is determined by the extent of removal from the general education environment. The level of **intensity** of a service is determined by the ratio of staff to students, as well as the duration of the service during the course of the school day. While the recommendation for an IEP-assigned paraprofessional in a general education classroom may be less *restrictive* than a special education program outside of the general education environment, it represents a highly *intensive* recommendation — especially when the recommendation is for a 1:1 staffing ratio — and therefore should be recommended in limited circumstances, based upon the individual needs of the student.

Consider the potential for unintended negative impact on the student.

The IEP team must consider whether the high level of intensity of service provided by an IEP-assigned paraprofessional could limit student independence or have other unintended negative effects. Unintended negative effects of an IEP-assigned paraprofessional may include: frequent isolation of the student from peers; lack of access to direct instruction from teachers and appropriate academic content; reduced participation in classroom instructional groups; and dependence on adult assistance for interaction with teachers, peers, and instructional materials.¹ Thus, the IEP team must carefully consider whether [other, less intense services](#), for all or part of the day, will result in the achievement of the annual goals while building student independence and facilitating classroom interaction.

Consider how goals can be developed to promote increased student independence.

¹ Giangreco, Michael F., PhD and Betsy Hoza, PhD. "Are Paraprofessional Supports Helpful?" Attention Magazine, August 2013. <http://www.chadd.org/Membership/Attention-Magazine/Attention-Magazine-Article.aspx?id=39>. July 2018

Whenever appropriate, the IEP team must develop clear goals to promote increased student independence, and consider whether and how the student's providers, including an IEP-assigned paraprofessional, will support attainment of these goals. Progress should be monitored and recommendations changed over time to address developmental changes and/or changes in a student's needs. For example, a student may have a chronic health condition, but it may be appropriate for the student to begin to manage associated needs more independently as the student matures. The IEP team should review the student's medical needs and documentation annually (including any information/documentation provided by the parent) to understand how the student's needs may have evolved.

Consider the specific times/activities when an IEP-assigned paraprofessional might be required.

The IEP team must consider and specify the periods or activities (e.g., ELA and Math general education or ICT classroom instruction, SETSS, lunch, gym, hallway transition) when the paraprofessional is required, including if the IEP-assigned paraprofessional is necessary when the student is receiving individual or small group related services or SETSS. To ensure that students are given opportunities to interact independently to the greatest extent appropriate, a less than full-time paraprofessional assignment should be considered whenever it may be appropriate, with careful consideration given to times of the day and activities when paraprofessional support is and is not required. The IEP team may also consider assigning a paraprofessional for a limited period of time with specific plans to meet again to review updates on the student's progress and consider the continued need for paraprofessional support, including whether it may be needed for fewer or additional times/activities.

Consider the ratio of students assigned to the IEP-assigned paraprofessional.

Based on the students' documented individual needs and specific classroom groupings, more than one student may be served by the same paraprofessional (e.g., to serve students with allergies, or students with intermittent or inconsistent needs for intense support). A paraprofessional ratio of 2:1 or 3:1 should especially be considered for students at the secondary level, for whom fading of paraprofessional support may be appropriate. The number of students to be served simultaneously by an IEP-assigned paraprofessional may not exceed 3. Except in rare circumstances, a student should never have more than one paraprofessional assigned for the same time period. (An example of a need for more than one paraprofessional would be a student who requires the assistance of two adults to safely transfer out of a wheelchair on to the toilet.)

Completing the IEP

A student's need for an IEP-assigned paraprofessional should be clearly articulated in the Present Levels of Performance, and subsequent IEP sections should be aligned to those needs. The following tool describes the factors to consider and the information needed in each section of the IEP.

Present Levels of Performance and Individual Needs (PLOP)

In this section, describe the effects of the student's needs on his/her involvement and progress in the general education curriculum.

Evaluation Results:

For Behavior Support Paraprofessional Recommendations: Include a summary of the behaviors that necessitated the Functional Behavioral Assessment, as well as any ongoing serious behavior issues (which may include daily incidents of injurious behaviors to self and/or others or inability to maintain the student within the classroom even with the implementation of the BIP). The team should also note any interventions that were attempted prior to the FBA, and should describe the BIP's impact. Desired behaviors should be explicitly taught. The FBA should be uploaded in SESIS. A copy of the BIP should be uploaded in SESIS, and, as it is a living document, it must be monitored regularly and should be revised as needed.

Academic Achievement, Functional Performance and Learning Characteristics:

Identify the student's specific instructional needs to access the curriculum. Consider how the student will receive instruction from trained professionals, specially designed to meet the student's needs, ultimately improving academic performance. While a paraprofessional can assist with instruction under the direction of the classroom teacher, it is the general education and special education teachers who must adapt the curriculum and provide the primary instruction.

Social Development:

Describe the impact and areas of concern surrounding the student's behavior, health, and/or physical development on his/her interaction with and relationship to adults and to peers.

For Behavior Support Paraprofessional Recommendations: The IEP must clearly describe any classroom and other tiered supports that have been attempted (such as an FBA and BIP) and their impact. The team must consider whether the student demonstrated progress and consider the continuation of the BIP or adjustments to implementation as alternatives to paraprofessional support. The team should also consider whether unmet academic needs may be contributing to the behavior. It is important that desired behaviors have been taught explicitly.

Physical Development²:

For Behavior Support Paraprofessional Recommendations: If the student's behavior may be related to an underlying medical condition (e.g., ADHD, Traumatic Brain Injury), briefly describe any diagnosis and medication needs, as applicable.

For Health Paraprofessional Recommendations: Summarize the most recent medical evaluations, including any information and documentation provided by the parent, and describe the impact of the student's medical condition on health (including school attendance), mobility/ambulation, self-care, and risk of injury relevant to the school setting or during transportation. Most recommendations for a Health Paraprofessional should be the result of the need for assistance in ambulation, self-care, medical monitoring, and/or injury prevention, multiple times per day due to a medical condition that cannot be addressed by the classroom team and school nurse. If the primary purpose of the IEP-assigned paraprofessional will be to address behaviors that may result from a condition such as ADHD (e.g., low frustration tolerance, impulsivity) but are not directly health related, the IEP team will consider a Behavior Support Paraprofessional, *not* a Health Paraprofessional.

Management Needs:

Describe the type and extent of human or environmental materials and resources needed to address the behavioral issues and/or medical conditions identified in the **Social Development** or **Physical Development** sections. If an IEP-assigned paraprofessional is recommended, the IEP team must:

- Explain the intensity (staffing ratio, time of day/activity/content areas) and purpose of the IEP-assigned paraprofessional and the strategies/materials to be used by the teacher, related service providers and paraprofessional to influence the student's behavior or address medical issues; and
- Indicate the specific periods or activities (e.g., ELA and Math general education or ICT classroom instruction, SETSS, lunch, gym, hallway transition) when the paraprofessional is required, including if the IEP-assigned paraprofessional is necessary when the student is receiving individual or small group related services or SETSS. Examples include, but are not limited to: "during classroom instruction only"; "at all times during the school day except lunch and counseling"; "at all times during the school day except during special class instruction"; and "at all times during the school day except during related services".³

² Medical concerns may be described under "Physical Development." However, the need for medication administration is a separate consideration from that for an IEP-assigned paraprofessional. Information on the process for arranging for medication administration can be found under [504 Accommodations – Guidance for Students and Families](#); please also review the [SOPM](#) section on Recommending In-School Skilled Nursing Services.

³ A paraprofessional should rarely be recommended for "all times during the school day". When this recommendation is appropriate, the IEP team must specifically explain why the paraprofessional is required during

Effect of Student Needs on Involvement and Progress in the General Education Curriculum:

Describe how a student’s disability affects his/her ability to access, participate, and make progress in the general curriculum. This summary would provide the rationale for a Behavior Support Paraprofessional or Health Paraprofessional.

Student Needs Relating to Special Factors

Behavioral Issues:

For Behavior Support Paraprofessional Recommendations: If a student’s behavior impacts his/her learning to the extent that there is consideration of a Behavior Support Paraprofessional, the IEP questions regarding the student’s need for behavioral interventions and supports as well as for a BIP must be answered “Yes”. If the student does not have an FBA and BIP, then **the FBA must be completed prior to making a recommendation of a Behavior Support Paraprofessional and finalizing the IEP**, except when a paraprofessional must be assigned immediately for the safety of the student (or others in the school).⁴ Only if the student presents with severe behaviors that cannot be addressed through a BIP implemented with fidelity should a Behavior Support Paraprofessional be recommended.

English Language Learners:

If a student is assigned an Alternate Placement Paraprofessional (because s/he is recommended either a bilingual special class or ICT, but those services are not available), and the student also requires an IEP-assigned paraprofessional, only one paraprofessional should be assigned to the student. This individual must speak the same language as the student to fulfill both the role of the IEP-assigned paraprofessional and the Alternate Placement Paraprofessional. The school should contact the ASE to confirm that there is no appropriate bilingual special class or ICT available; the FSC should contact BSEprograms@schools.nyc.gov for information regarding available bilingual special education programs.

Measurable Postsecondary Goals (When Applicable⁵)

The IEP team should aim to decrease the student’s need for and dependence on paraprofessional support, as appropriate, in order to support the student’s ability to

lunch, gym, transitions, and other non-instructional time. In addition, measurable annual goals specific to decreasing the student’s need for the paraprofessional’s support during these non-instructional times should be considered.

⁴ In such cases, the IEP team may recommend and assign a paraprofessional (who must be informed of the student’s needs and sufficiently trained and otherwise capable of meeting them) prior to completion of the FBA and BIP. The school/CSE must immediately seek consent to conduct an FBA and complete the FBA and BIP as soon as feasible. An FBA is a special education assessment; please review the [SOPM](#) sections on Evaluation and Reevaluation to ensure that all required steps are taken prior to conducting an FBA. Whenever possible, schools/CSEs should plan for and complete FBAs in advance of the IEP meeting, to ensure that the student’s needs are addressed as quickly as possible and within applicable timelines for evaluation and placement.

⁵ For a student age 14 or older (and at a younger age, if determined appropriate), the IEP must include measurable postsecondary goals based on age-appropriate transition assessments and the student’s preferences and interests as they relate to transition from school to post-school activities.

pursue post-secondary goals. If the student's goals include living independently, without assistance, the IEP team must plan to fade paraprofessional support, as appropriate, prior to the student's final year of high school.

Transition Needs (When Applicable)

For a student who has been recommended to receive a paraprofessional, Transition Needs should include services that will develop the students' independent living skills and reduce the student's dependence on intensive adult assistance as s/he prepares for post-secondary education or employment.

Measurable Annual Goals / Short Term Objectives

When appropriate, a student with an IEP-assigned paraprofessional should have annual goals that address the skills the student needs to master to maximize independence. The IEP should include the measurable annual goals (and, where needed, short-term objectives and/or benchmarks) that the IEP-assigned paraprofessional will assist with implementing. It is through these goals that desired behaviors should be explicitly taught. The monitoring of progress on these goals is critical to inform the necessity, nature, and amount of continuing service.

For Behavior Support Paraprofessional Recommendations: The annual goals/short term objectives should be aligned with the expected behavior changes indicated on the Behavioral Intervention Plan.

For Health Paraprofessional Recommendations: A student recommended for a Health Paraprofessional should have annual goals reflecting his/her physical development and health needs, when appropriate. These goals should address the skills to be learned and the behaviors to be adopted that, when mastered, could allow the student to manage his/her health needs independently or reduce the student's dependence on intensive adult assistance, including enabling the student to direct the paraprofessional and advocate for him/herself.

Recommended Special Education Programs and Services

The recommendation for an IEP-assigned paraprofessional cannot be made without first considering the general education and special education programs and services that the student requires.

Special Education Program:

For a student who has been determined to require a special class (part- or full-time) and who may also require an IEP-assigned paraprofessional, the IEP team must determine whether a program with a more intensive programmatic student to staff ratio (e.g., 12:1+1 versus 12:1; 8:1+1 versus 12:1+1) cannot meet the student's needs for all or part of the day. IEP teams must consider the specific needs to be addressed and the impact of a paraprofessional on those needs, as compared to other program or service options. These considerations will vary depending on the type of paraprofessional being considered and the programs that may be appropriate for the student's individual needs.

Related Services:

The IEP team must consider whether an IEP-assigned paraprofessional is necessary while a student is receiving an individual or small group related service. Although observation by the IEP-assigned paraprofessional may serve as a training support, the presence of the paraprofessional may be unnecessary during the student's interaction with the provider. The determination as to the extent of the participation of an IEP-assigned paraprofessional in a related service session is planned for and reflected in the **Management Needs** and **Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Modifications/Accommodations** sections of the IEP.

Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Modifications/Accommodations:

In this section, indicate the type of IEP-assigned paraprofessional that is recommended (e.g., Behavior Support Paraprofessional). When completing the **Supplementary Aids and Services/Program Modifications/Accommodations**, follow the column-specific guidance below:

- The Service Delivery Recommendation must indicate *individual* or *group*. This recommendation reflects the potential of non-1:1 support when appropriate.
- The Frequency of the service must indicate *daily*. Services required for only a specific activity, *time of day*, or location should be described under **Management Needs** in the PLOP.
- The Duration of the service should specify the *length of time* per day the paraprofessional is required (e.g., .2, .5, .8, or full-time).

Supports for School Personnel on Behalf of the Student:

The IEP should indicate any specific skills, traits (including physical characteristics) and supports (including training) that the IEP-assigned paraprofessional will need to assist in implementing the annual goals and short-term objectives and meet his/her other responsibilities. The paraprofessional may require in-service training in particular behavioral strategies or instructional techniques, sensory integration activities or progress monitoring mechanisms, or in the use of assistive technology that has been assigned to the student. Training from a speech therapist, occupational therapist, or

physical therapist may be needed if the paraprofessional is to engage in activities such as feeding assistance, positioning, or assistance with ambulation. If the paraprofessional is expected to be responsible for the implementation of test accommodations, training in this process should be indicated. An IEP-assigned Health Paraprofessional may require instruction or training in performing tasks safely; such training may be provided by the school nurse or the Borough Nursing Director.

12-Month Service and/or Program

For students determined to require Extended School Year (ESY) services (12-month services) in order to prevent substantial regression, IEP teams must consider the need for continued IEP-assigned paraprofessional services during July and August. For more information, see the [SOPM](#) section on Extended School Year (12-Month) Services and/or Program.

ESY paraprofessional recommendations should be made according to this guidance. The IEP team should take into account the recommended ESY special education program and/or related services, and the school and classroom environment in July and August, which may differ substantially from the 10-month school year.

Coordinated Set of Transition Activities (Where Applicable)

When developing transition activities, the IEP team must keep in mind the goal of minimizing the need for intensive adult assistance in any postsecondary environment and promoting independence. For students who are expected to continue to have intensive needs for individual support after graduation, transition services involving external adult agencies should be included in the IEP. Wherever possible and appropriate, the planned transition activities should facilitate increased student independence as the student moves toward graduation.

Participation with Students without Disabilities

The extent of the student's removal from the general education environment must be explained. The IEP team must consider whether the positive impact of maintaining the student in a less restrictive setting is balanced with any possible negative impacts of more intensive student-specific paraprofessional services.

Special Transportation

If a transportation paraprofessional is required, it is included here as a Specialized Transportation Accommodation. The **Management Needs** section must align to this recommendation by describing the need for intense support during transportation. Please see the [SOPM](#) Transportation section for more information on the process for considering Specialized Transportation Accommodations.

Placement Recommendation

The placement recommended (e.g., NYC DOE Community School, NYC DOE Specialized School, NYSED-Approved Non Public School – Day, etc.) must reflect the least restrictive environment appropriate for the student based on his/her strengths and needs and take into consideration whether the support of a paraprofessional is required.

Students recommended for a NYSED-approved non-public school (NPS) placement (whether preschool or school-age, day or residential) do not typically require IEP-assigned paraprofessionals, because NPS programmatic staffing ratios and supports are often designed to serve students with behavior-management or health needs. The IEP team should ensure that sufficiently intensive programmatic classroom and related-service ratios are recommended and can be provided by the school in order to meet the student’s individual needs without an IEP-assigned paraprofessional, if possible. The IEP team should consult with the NPS and/or CBST case managers as needed in making this determination, which, as always, must be made at an IEP meeting.

Other Options Considered

Document all factors the IEP team considered when making the recommendations in the **Recommended Programs and Services** section, including those considerations regarding the intensity of services and the student’s need for an IEP-assigned paraprofessional.

Schools should take care to assign paraprofessionals thoughtfully according to the specific needs of each student, including coverage for all necessary times and settings, given the need to ensure that paraprofessionals receive a duty-free lunch period.

Information on adding a paraprofessional in SESIS can be found here: [How to Recommend a Paraprofessional on an IEP.](#)