Connecticut
PARAPROFESSIONALS'
Guide to
Learning Disabilities

CONNECTICUT
STATE DEPARTMENT
OF EDUCATION

Paraprofessionals often have strong relationships with the students with whom they work and can be an important support to the implementation of the Behavior Intervention Plan.

Paraprofessionals have an important role in supporting students with learning disabilities. Although planning instruction is the teacher's role, paraprofessionals help to ensure students with learning disabilities receive quality education time by assisting teachers in such areas as academic engagement, one-to-one instruction, and reinforcement of skills. This brief will offer paraprofessionals an overview of how to support students with learning disabilities in the general education classroom by developing strategies that build on their strengths and promote student independence.

We welcome your comments and suggestions regarding this publication. Comments should be directed to Iris White, Bureau of Accountability and Improvement, at iris.white@ct.gov.
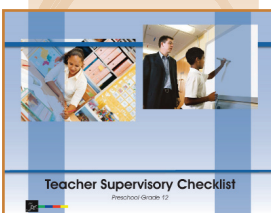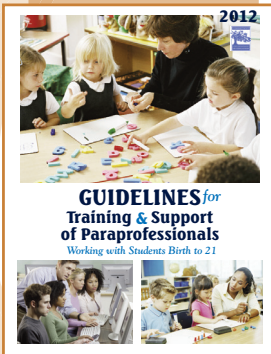
A Paraprofessionals' Guide to Learning Disabilities

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEA) is a United States federal law that governs how states and public agencies provide early intervention, special education, and related services to children with disabilities. IDEA has undergone several changes since it began as the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EHA), or Public Law 94-142, in 1975. This law originated as a way to ensure that students with disabilities receive an appropriate public education. IDEA has been updated about every five years, most recently in the 2004 reauthorization (IDEA 2004). IDEA defines a specific learning disability as:

A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, that may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or to do mathematical calculations, including conditions such as perceptual disabilities, brain injury, minimal brain dysfunction, dyslexia, and developmental aphasia. Specific learning disability does not include learning problems that are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor disabilities, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or of environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage (*2009 Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities-Executive Summary*). Simply put, children and adults with learning disabilities see, hear, and understand things differently. This can lead to trouble with learning new information and skills, and putting them to use. The most common types of learning disabilities involve problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking.

2012

GUIDELINES*for*
**Training & Support
of Paraprofessionals**
Working with Students Birth to 21

Assessment Checklist for Paraprofessionals
Preschool-Grade 12

Teacher Supervisory Checklist
Preschool-Grade 12

Identification of Students with Specific Learning Disabilities

An increasing body of research has suggested better ways to identify and teach students with specific learning disabilities. The federal government included new identification criteria for specific learning disabilities in the 2004 reauthorization of IDEA. Consistent with IDEA 2004, Connecticut adopted a process that looks at a student's response to scientific, research-based interventions as part of a broader set of eligibility criteria in the identification of specific learning disabilities. In the literature, this process is referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI). The new criteria for identification of learning disabilities also are highly consistent with the concepts of Scientific Research-Based Interventions (SRBI), Connecticut's framework for addressing student achievement in a systemic manner and reducing achievement gaps. For more information about SRBI, please read the Paraprofessionals and SRBI Bulletin available on the CSDE Paraprofessional Information and Resources page: www.ct.gov/sde/para-cali.

Understanding Students with Learning Disabilities

Students with learning disabilities aren't lazy or less intelligent. In fact, most are as smart as everyone else. Children and adults with learning disabilities just see, hear, and understand things differently. This can lead to trouble with learning new information and skills and putting them to use. Students with learning disabilities are often overwhelmed, disorganized, and frustrated in learning situations. Their poor achievement is in no way attributed to such things as vision, hearing, language, behavior, or physical problems.

The most common types of learning disabilities involve problems with reading, writing, math, reasoning, listening, and speaking. There are seven common types of learning disabilities: Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia, Dyspraxia (Sensory Integration Disorder), Dysphasia/Aphasia, Auditory Processing Disorder, and Visual Processing Disorder.

Disability	Definition	Problem areas
Dyslexia	Difficulty in learning to read that cannot be attributed to impaired general intelligence, a physical handicap, or an emotional disorder	reading, writing, spelling, speaking
Dyscalculia	Difficulty with calculation	math, understanding time, using money
Dysgraphia	Difficulty with writing	handwriting, spelling, organizing ideas
Dyspraxia (Sensory Integration Disorder)	Neurological disorder characterized by a difficulty with fine motor skills	hand-eye coordination, balance, manual dexterity
Dysphasia/Aphasia	Difficulty with language	understanding spoken language, inability to form words, persistent repetition of phrases, difficulty with reading comprehension
Auditory Processing Disorder	Difficulty hearing differences between sounds	reading comprehension, language
Visual Processing Disorder	Difficulty interpreting visual information	reading, math, maps, charts, symbols, pictures

Paraprofessionals Providing Instructional Support

Connecticut defines the paraprofessional as follows:

> A paraprofessional is an employee who assists teachers and /or other paraprofessional educators or therapists in the delivery of instructional and related services to students. The paraprofessional works under the direct supervision of the teacher and/or other certified or licensed professional. The ultimate responsibility for the design, implementation and evaluation of instructional programs, including assessment of student progress, is a collaborative effort of certified and licensed staff (Connecticut Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals, p. 3).

This definition should be used to support paraprofessionals as they work with teachers in the classroom to help all students. A paraprofessional may provide review to a small group while the certified teacher provides instruction to the whole class, or the teacher may lead a small group of students in a discussion to enhance their learning while the paraprofessional reinforces the content that has already been taught. Instruction should be delivered based on the plans of the certified teacher.

Paraprofessionals should have an understanding of the IEP information that is pertinent to their role as implementers (Connecticut Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals, p. 58). Minimally, this information would include the student's goals and objectives and any accommodations or modifications. Specified annual goals and objectives can assist the paraprofessional with knowing the student's expected outcomes. Short-term objectives describe meaningful intermediate and measurable outcomes between the student's current performance and the annual goal.

Specially Designed Instruction (SDI) for children with disabilities is a requirement under IDEA. SDI refers to the teaching strategies and methods used by teachers to instruct students with learning disabilities and other types of learning disorders. To develop SDI for each student with a learning disability, educators and parents work together to analyze student work, evaluation information, and any other available data to determine the student's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers continue to measure students' progress and make changes in instruction as needed.

The process of data collection should be designed by a qualifed teacher/service provider. A paraprofessional may execute certain components of a program as specified in an individualized plan under the direction and supervision of the teacher/provider.

The purpose of accommodations and modifications is to enable the child to advance appropriately toward advancing his/her annual goals, to be involved in and make progress in the general education curriculum, and to be educated and participate with other children with or without disabilities. Accommodations are changes to instruction (such as materials, content enhancements, and tasks) that change how a student learns. Examples of accommodations may include: extended time for tests, special seating (in front of the class, separated from peers), and frequent test breaks. Accommodations may also include assistive technology devices and services.

Modifications are changes to the content that affect what the student learns or how much work the student completes. Examples of modifications might include the following: modified homework, fewer questions on a test, taking a test using notes, or watching a movie instead of reading a book.

Supporting Students with Learning Disabilities

Most researchers agree the best learning occurs when a student carefully observes and considers his or her own behaviors and acts upon what he or she has learned. One of the most important skills of learning disabled students is understanding how to learn. Due to the nature of their learning difficulties, students with learning disabilities need to become strategic learners. This means they need to know what strategy is appropriate in a given situation and know how to use that strategy effectively.

A strategy is an individual's approach to a task. "It includes how a person thinks and acts when planning, executing and evaluating performance on a task and its outcomes." (University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning). Strategies can be categorized in two different ways: Cognitive and Metacognitive. Cognitive strategies help a person process and manipulate information; examples include taking notes, asking questions, or filling out a chart. Metacognitive strategies are effective techniques for helping students become more independent learners based on their learning style or how they learn best. For example, a student might monitor his or her own reading comprehension if something does not make sense and look back in the text for clarification. Metacognitive strategies are effective techniques for helping students become more independent learners.

COPS is the acronym for a strategic approach that helps students detect and correct common writing errors. Each letter stands for an aspect of writing that students need to check for accuracy (Shannon & Palloway, 1993).

C Capitalization of appropriate letters, **O** Overall appearance of paper,

P Punctuation used correctly, **S** Spelling accuracy.

Students should be given opportunities to discuss, reflect upon, and practice the strategies with classroom materials. Teachers and paraprofessionals should provide specific feedback to the student on his or her use of the strategy. They may then gradually fade reminders and guidance so that students begin to assume responsibility for their use of the strategy.

Professional Development Resources *for*PARAPROFESSIONALS

The **CSDE** professional development for paraprofessionals is coordinated by Iris White, Education Consultant, Bureau of Accountability and Improvement. Iris White can be contacted at **iris.white@ct.gov** or at 860-713-6794.

The **State Education Resource Center (SERC)** provides professional development under a variety of initiatives, including the *Paraprofessionals as Partners* Initiative. Through diverse professional development opportunities from SERC, paraprofessionals working in collaborative partnerships with general and special education teachers and support services professionals can enhance and acquire skills to improve their ability to effectively provide instruction and other direct services to meet the needs of all students. SERC also holds the annual *Paraprofessionals as Partners* conference in the fall.

For more information, contact Anthony Brisson, Consultant with SERC's Paraprofessionals as Partners Initiative, at **brisson@ctserc.org** or at 860-632-1485, ext. 315. More information can also be found on SERC's Web site: **www.ctserc.org**.

The **Capitol Region Education Council (CREC)** also offers a variety of professional development and job opportunities for paraprofessionals and aspiring paraprofessionals, including a comprehensive, job-embedded professional development curriculum called *The Compass*. This series of training modules, aligned with the *National Paraprofessional Standards*, has been designed to enhance paraprofessionals' skills in working with students in educational settings. More information can be found on the paraprofessional page of the CREC Web site, **www.crec.org/paraprofessional**, or by contacting your local regional educational service center (RESC):

ACES: Patricia Hart-Cole, **phart@aces.org**

CES: Dr. Christine Peck, **cpeck@ces.k12.ct.us**

CREC: Donna Morelli, **dmorelli@crec.org**

EASTCONN: Jim Huggins, **jhuggins@eastconn.org**

EDUCATION CONNECTION: Jonathan Costa, **costa@educationconnection.org**

LEARN: Tracey LaMothe, **tlamothe@learn.k12.ct.us**

ONLINE RESOURCE: Defining Self-Regulated Learning:
www.gifted.uconn.edu/siegle/selfregulation/section2.html

References

Connecticut State Department of Education (2012). Connecticut Guidelines for Training and Support of Paraprofessionals. Hartford, CT: Author.

Connecticut State Department of Education (2009). Guidelines for Identifying Children with Learning Disabilities. Hartford, CT: Author.

Connecticut State Department of Education (2010). Paraprofessionals and SRBI Bulletin. Hartford, CT: Author.

Connecticut State Department of Education
Bureau of Accountability and Improvement
165 Capitol Avenue, P.O. Box 2219, Hartford, CT 06145
Telephone: 860-713-6760 ◆ Fax: 860-713-7035