

# Paraeducator Handbook



New Hampton Elementary School  
New Hampton, Iowa 50659

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## **District and School Requirements:**

- Learn school policies and procedures. These can be found in the school handbook.
- Understand the chain of command in the district.
- Attend required meetings and professional development, when invited.
- Familiarize yourself with the evaluation form.

As a para, you are a huge part of our special education team. In your role as a para, you will have a wide range of responsibilities. Please remember flexibility is a must. Always expect the unexpected. If we do not tell you often enough, we appreciate all that you do and how flexible you are!

## **Suicidal Thoughts or Threats**

If you are working with a student and he or she alludes to suicidal thoughts or threats, you **must** pay attention. He or she may state very bluntly that he or she wants to die and may even have a plan for carrying it out. Either way, you need to inform the special education teachers, the school guidance counselor, **AND** the principal **IMMEDIATELY**. Before you do, please find someone to stay with the student so that he or she is not left alone. Suicidal thoughts or threats should not be downplayed by telling a student that they don't really mean it. Each threat should and will be taken seriously. You will complete a mandatory Suicide Prevention and Postvention training that will increase your knowledge on how to handle this situation.

## **Suspected Abuse**

As an employee of a school district, you are now a mandated reporter. If at any time, you suspect that a child has been abused or have proof; you are required by law to report it to social services. Abuse can be physical, mental, or emotional. If you are unsure about what you have seen or heard, please speak with the guidance counselor or administrator. No one can tell you whether or not a situation needs to be reported. You must use your own judgment. Know that by telling another professional, you are not relieved of your liability. It is your responsibility to report ANY suspected or confirmed abuse.

The number for the Department of Human Services is: 800-362-2178.

- You can get the required Report of Suspected Child Abuse form from the guidance counselor or principal.

## **Para Roles and Responsibilities**

Some of your roles and responsibilities at New Hampton Elementary will be as follows:

### **Working with Students:**

- Treat all students with respect and talk to them using a calm, assertive voice. (Yelling escalates situations.)
- Follow the school rules to address bullying.
- Follow through with what you tell the students. Do not give empty threats or promises. Students need to trust you.
- Never refer to a student as a “special ed. student.” Use friendly language.
- Assist with the arrival and departure of children, as directed.
- Assist with the instruction of personal hygiene with students in a respectful manner.
- Monitor and provide positive discipline.
- Praise and motivate the students frequently.
- Provide assistance with all instructional activities.
- Assist all students in the classroom and divide your time according to student needs.
- Provide more individual attention to students who need it.
- Listen to students read during appropriate times in the classroom.

### **Working with General Education Teachers and Other Staff:**

- Work together as a team and not as an individual.
- Build and maintain effective communication.
- Familiarize yourself with teacher rules and expectations for the classroom you are working in.

### **Documentation:**

- Fill out incident forms for bullying and behavior that result in a visit to the Stop and Think Room or office the day it occurs.
- Document any signs of abuse and how they were reported and handled.
- Fill out the daily log sheets in the folders of the students that you serve. This must be done daily to ensure that we have adequate documentation regarding student behaviors and progress towards goals.
- Documentation is important! Document Everything!

## Code of Ethics

- Discuss confidential issues only with the classroom teacher, special education teacher, or administrator.
- Recognize and respect the roles of teachers as supervisors and use teamwork when working with them.
- Recognize and respect the differences in the roles of teachers, paraeducators, and other staff.
- Acknowledge the teachers' responsibilities for planning lessons, modifying the curriculum, assessing students, and developing behavior plans.
- Share your concerns for students with the classroom teacher and special education teacher.
- Respect all students and staff.
- Do not engage in discriminatory practices based on disability, race, sex, cultural background, or religion.
- Follow the chain of command to address concerns.
- Participate in professional development when asked to do so.
- Know the school policies and procedures.
- Refer to students by their names, and not by their exceptionalities.
- Only engage in activities that you are qualified or trained for.
- Communication will be handled by the special education teacher or general education teacher. You should not communicate student progress or concerns to parents.
- Refer concerns of parents and AEA Staff, to the special education teacher or classroom teacher.
- Establish positive communication and relationship with the teacher, staff, students, and public.
- Be a positive role model for our students.
- As a public employee, do not make any references to any aspect of your job on any social networking sites.

## Confidentiality

As a para, you will have daily access to information about students that must remain confidential. You are required to keep confidential information such as academic achievement, test scores, student behavior, attendance, family problems, and other personal information. You must keep information regarding students and their families confidential. It is required by law, and breaking confidentiality will result in termination.

Many times you will be asked questions about students with whom you work. You could be asked about their educational performance, behavior, or what is wrong with a student. Some people will want to know about student progress, their needs, their home life, and other information. You must act according to the laws that protect student privacy. There are two questions to guide whether or not to share the information.

- 1 Is the person requesting the information **directly involved** with the student's education?
- 2 Will the **student** benefit if the person receives the information?

Below are some ways to avoid confidentiality problems.

- Do not point out or label children in public or anywhere outside of school.
- Avoid sharing personal information with anyone not directly involved with the student.
- Avoid using names if you are asked about your job.
- Suggest that questions be directed to the teachers or parents.
- Be careful not to distort, exaggerate or confuse information.
- Never use student information as gossip or as a joke.
- Consider your words carefully in the workroom (teacher's lounge), where it is very easy to say something unintentionally.
- Remember, children deserve the respect you would provide your own child.
- Focus comments on student strengths and be positive.
- At any time if you don't want to answer a question or are unsure whether to answer, DON'T! (But do so gently and politely.)
- Be direct and honest. "I'm sorry, but I cannot share that information with you."
- Do not make any references to any aspect of your job on social networking sites.
- If an AEA or outside agent attempts to engage you in a conversation about students refer them to the Special Education teacher.
- If you feel you want to talk to the previous para, ask your special education teacher to arrange it.

## Do and Don'ts for Paraeducators

### Do

- Walk around the classroom and assist other students only when the students you work with do not need assistance.
- Use assertive, friendly communication when speaking with teachers and students.
- Report ANY signs of abuse or neglect as soon as you see them. You are a mandatory reporter by law. Document evidence as soon as possible.
- Use direct instruction when asked to re-teach a small group.
- Be confident and consistent! Students will test their boundaries. Be kind, but firm. Follow through with what you tell the students.
- Report bullying.
- Ask us questions or share concerns.
- Follow your schedule, but be flexible if we ask you to do something else. Changes in your schedule come from the special education teachers.
- Inform teachers of schedule changes. If they have questions, direct classroom teachers to the special education teachers.
- Complete documentation **every day** before leaving and hand in.
- Respect the school. Our custodians work very hard. If you make a mess or see trash on the floor, please be a good role model for the students by picking it up.
- If you see a person walking through the hallways with no badge on, please escort him or her to the office so that he or she can check in and receive a badge. The badge lets staff and students know that the person is not a threat and is in the right place.
- When your student doesn't need you in the general education classroom, report to your special education supervising teacher.

### Don't

- Sit in one spot in the room unless doing an observation.
- Speak with parents regarding their child. Direct them to the classroom or special education teachers.
- Speak about students' personal information to anyone who does not work directly with the student.
- Select, program, or prescribe educational activities or materials without the supervision and guidance of a teacher.
- Be solely responsible for preparing lesson plans or initiating original instruction.

## Do and Don'ts for Testing

### Do

- Follow the testing accommodations listed on the IEP
- Be neutral in your voice inflections and body language when responding to the student so as not to lead them to a correct response.
- Ask students to read the math and science symbols.
- Test a small group of students in a separate setting. Minimize distractions, for example, testing dividers.
- Add time/schedule accommodations.
- Students read out loud with para when reading any part of test directions, questions or narrative, and answer options

### Don't

- Pronounce or explain math or science symbols.
- Define any words in written test questions.

## All Assessments

***The Golden Rule: Follow the accommodations as spelled out in the IEP or by the special education teacher when giving assessments.***

### Guidelines for Testing in the Following Areas:

#### Language

- Para can read questions or narratives and the answer options.

#### Math

Student will read the numbers and symbols

- Para will read the text.

#### Science

- Para can read all but the science symbols

#### Social Studies, Health/Wellness

- Para can read all of the test.

#### Reading

\*Standardized:

- Student must read stories, questions, and answer options.

\*Classroom:

- Follow the lead of the special education teacher.



# Communication

## Communication with Students

Use positive, but assertive communication when working with students. Be sure to state your expectations. Always use a calm voice when speaking with students. If a student becomes upset or frustrated, do not yell or raise your voice because doing that escalates the student. Be confident when talking to students, and make sure that you follow through with what you say.

## Communication with Parents

If parents ask you questions about their students, please direct them to the classroom teacher or the special education teacher. You should not communicate information regarding progress or student behavior to parents; that is the teacher's job.

### *Assertive Communication Styles*

- People who use assertive communication use “I” messages instead of “you”.
- They also say “and” instead of “but”.
- To use assertive communication, state the behavior objectively. Do not make judgments.
  - Say, “He stomped his feet, crossed his arms, and used a loud voice when the teacher told him to sit down,” instead of saying, “He threw a fit about not getting his way”.
- Assertive people name their own feelings and state what they would like to happen, while also expressing concern for others.
- This is the type of communication that we would like for everyone to display.
- When using assertive communication,
  - Maintain good eye contact.
  - Stand up straight.
  - Speak slowly and calmly.
  - Stop and think before you talk.
  - Make short responses.
  - Consider the consequences before you speak.
  - Ask only open-ended or specific questions.
  - Speak in positive statements to get desired behaviors.
    - Say, “Walk with quiet feet” rather than “Don’t run”.

## Chain of Command for Problems

At times throughout the school year, you may encounter problems that you yourself may not be able to handle. If the need arises, here is the chain of command you should follow to report problems.

### **If the problem is with a student...**

- Report to the general education teacher and the special education teacher
- Direct AEA staff/consultant to the teachers, if approached.

### **If the problem is with a general education teacher...**

- First, talk to the general education teacher if you feel you are able to.
- If not, talk to the special education teacher about what you should do.
- If you feel that this still hasn't solved the problem, report to the administrator.

### **If the problem is with the special education teacher...**

- First, talk to the special education teacher if you feel you are able to do so.
- If not, talk to the administrator.

### **If the problem is with another paraeducator...**

- First, talk with the paraeducator if you feel you are able to.
- If not, talk to the special education teacher.
- Next, talk to the administrator if needed.

### **If the problem is with another professional staff member...**

- First, talk to that staff member if you feel you are able to.
- If not, talk to the special education teacher.
- Last, talk to your administrator, if needed.

### **If the problem is with a parent...**

- First, talk to the special education teacher.
- If needed, talk to the administrator next.

Our advice to you is to always try and talk to the person with whom you are having troubles. We have found that this is the best way to solve the problem. However, if you feel unable to do that, please follow this chain of command. One thing we do not recommend is talking to multiple, random people about the problem. Please report your issues in a timely manner and do not wait for a long period of time. We do not want small issues to become major ones, and we do not want major problems to go unresolved.

## **Dress**

When choosing your outfit, please remember that you are a professional who is setting an example for students. You want to establish credibility, professionalism, and respect.

### **Ladies/Men:**

- Your pants should not have any rips or tears and should not look old. They should also not reveal your undergarments when you lean over or squat down. You will be doing this a lot, especially if you are asked to work with younger students.
- When wearing skirts/dresses/shorts they should nearly reach your knees.
- Your shirts should be long enough to not show your midriff. They also need to be cut high enough to not show off your chest. Remember, you will be leaning over a lot to assist students.
- Jeans are not regular apparel and are allowed for field trips and designated days.
- Shoes must have backs.

### **Questions to ask the teachers you will work with---Make sure you know----**

- Where are the materials and supplies located in your classroom?
- What are your classroom rules and expectations?
- What is your classroom behavior policy?
- Do you have a copy of my schedule, or should I provide you with one?
- If a student asks me to leave the classroom to go to the restroom, get a drink, or see the nurse, how would you like me to handle it?
- What is your emergency plan for fires, tornados & lock downs?
- Am I going to be teaching any specific groups? (For example: a small reading group)
- Where do I keep my personal belongings?

## Daily Check ins

It is important to check in with your classroom teacher and special education teacher to review the daily schedule and if there are any changes that you need to be aware of. Below are some points of what you would want to check in on.

- Whose observation day is it?
  - Specific kids?
- Daily Schedule
  - Assemblies
  - Field Trips
  - Meetings
  - Absences
- Student Concerns
- Data Collection Review
- In-service Opportunities
- Questions and Concerns

## Progress Log

Your assigned student(s) may have a progress log or Medicaid form that needs to be filled out daily. Your special education teacher will teach you the appropriate way to fill out any required log. They may at times also ask you to collect additional data to help guide their instruction or support for the student. It is important that you take these logs seriously and the information is recorded accurately and in a timely manner.

## **What if...**

### **The student has trouble taking tests, you can try...**

- Allowing more time.
- Listening to the student read.
- Allowing student to answer in his or her own words or to answer orally.
- Allowing student to use textbook, formulas, diagrams, or tables.
- Providing vocabulary list or word bank.
- Allowing student to work with another student.
- Allowing student to write on test instead of answer sheet.
- Providing a quiet environment.
- Allowing frequent breaks.
- Providing a variety of tools students can use.
- Allow students to dictate answers to you, unless it is testing their writing ability.

### **The student has trouble taking notes, you can try...**

- Giving the student a copy of the notes.
- Giving the student an outline or graphic organizer to complete.
- Having another student take notes and make a copy for the student.
- Using a tape recorder.
- Allowing students to write a summary at the end of the lecture rather than taking notes.
- Share a copy of the notes with blanks so students can fill them in.

### **The student has trouble completing study guides or worksheets, you can try...**

- Providing page numbers for location of answers in reading material.
- Making sure questions are in the same order as the reading material.
- Highlighting or underlining answers.
- Providing a word bank.
- Breaking material down into smaller parts.
- Taking turns: you write one, the student writes the next one, etc.

### **The student has trouble using a textbook, you can try...**

- Reading the textbook aloud to the student.
- Using a peer as a reading buddy.
- Using computer programs with audio.
- Using a parallel textbook (same subject, lower reading level).
- Going over important vocabulary.
- Providing preview questions.
- Highlighting the textbook's important points.
- Asking questions during reading and after reading to check comprehension and to reinforce information.
- Teaching the student to use common parts of the textbook such as the glossary, index, table of contents, diagrams, charts, words written in bold font, etc.
- Write page number(s) on the board so they can find it independently.
- Using larger print type or copies.
- Allowing the student to use pictures and manipulatives.
- Controlling the introduction of new ideas.
- Questioning the student often as he or she reads.

**The student has trouble keeping track of materials or assignments, you can try...**

- Helping the student develop self-checking or self-monitoring skills for remembering classroom supplies and assignments.
- Writing assignments on board for the student to copy
- Asking the student what materials he or she will need.
- Keeping an extra set of materials in the room.
- Making sure all returned papers are immediately put in the notebook.
- Giving rewards for bringing materials and assignments each day or class period.
- Developing non-verbal cues to remind the student to self-check for materials.
- Keeping an assignment calendar or checklist.
- Using Post-It notes to mark assignments in textbooks.
- Writing assignment requirements on Post-It notes marking assignments.

**The student has trouble completing work on time, you can try...**

- Reducing the amount of work or allowing more time for the work.
- Reminding the student of time periodically.
- Writing schedules and helping the student plan use of time.
- Helping the student keep a calendar.
- Breaking assignments up and having several due dates for the pieces.
- Developing checklists.
- Using a timer to define work time.

**The student has trouble staying on task, you can try...**

- Reducing distractions.
- Rewarding on-task behavior
- Providing shortened tasks.
- Providing checklists.
- Making sure the student's workspace is clear of extra materials.
- Reducing the amount of work.
- Using peer helpers or peer tutors.
- Varying activities often.
- Putting the student in a distraction free environment.
- Verbalize first and then you can\_\_\_\_\_.

**The student has trouble reading written material, you can try...**

- Finding a test written at a lower reading level.
- Providing highlighted material.
- Taping student reading material.
- Using a peer or parent to read important material.
- Decreasing the amount of required reading.  
Finding the same information in another form-videotapes, audiotapes, etc.
- Making oral reading optional: find another way the student can contribute (role-play or story telling.)
- Prearranging oral reading and allowing the student time to practice.
- Allowing extra time for reading.
- Using material that the student finds relevant and interesting so he or she will want to try to read.

- Providing questions before the student is to read.
- Pre-teaching vocabulary.
- Putting main ideas on index cards and organizing them.

**The student has trouble keeping track of materials or assignments, you can try...**

- Helping the student develop self-checking or self-monitoring skills for remembering classroom supplies and assignments.
- Writing assignments on board for the student to copy.
- Asking the student what materials he or she will need.

**The student has trouble getting interested or getting started, you can try...**

- Telling stories that relate the lessons to real life.
- Relating the lesson to things the student already knows or has experienced.
- Seating the student near the teacher.
- Using cues to begin work.
- Giving work in smaller amounts.
- Providing lots of encouragement.
- Sequencing work with easiest answers first.
- Making sure the student has all needed materials.
- Making sure the student knows exactly what is expected.
- Checking on progress often in the first few minutes of work.
- Giving clear directions.
- Providing a checklist of the steps involved.
- Having another student talk about the material or start reading the material to the student.
- Asking the student to help someone else.

**Common Questions**

**(These are things you will talk over with your supervising Special Ed. Teacher.)**

- **How do I know when to modify and whether I'm modifying too much?"**
  - Use trial and error until you find the right fit for the student. You may feel that you made it too easy sometimes. That's okay. Nobody's perfect.
  - Use modifications until the student "gets it" or "does it". You may have to try a lot of different things before this happens.
  - Find out what the student already knows and build from there.
  - Watch the student's frustration level. It is usually shown in a nonverbal manner before a verbal one.
  - Remember there is a fine line between frustration and challenge. We want to challenge students, not frustrate them. Students want to understand and be successful, before they feel ready to be challenged.
  - Remember to foster independence. Let the student build confidence to complete things on his or her own. Wean them away from the modification when you feel it is appropriate. If they begin to struggle, bring it back.
  - Ask questions. When you are in doubt or need reassurance, talk to the general education teacher or special education teacher. It's OK. You do not have to have all the answers.

- **“What if I think I am making it too easy for the student?”**
  - If you are unsure as to whether or not your modification will make the assignment too easy, go with it. It is better to make it too easy than too hard. You will know better next time. If the student says something about the task being too easy, make sure he or she knows that you intended it to be that way. Don't let them know that it wasn't your intention.
  
- **“What does it mean if I've tried and tried, but one of my students simply won't put forth the effort? They aren't supposed to fail, right?”**
  - Special education students can and will fail at times. This is okay. They are not assigned a label for a disability so that everything becomes smooth sailing. Students are identified so the ground can be made even for them.
  
- **How can I provide modifications to a student who doesn't want to be singled out?”**
  - It is hard to force a student to work with modified materials. However, as a paraprofessional you will be helping a lot of different students so very seldom will you be solely with one student. This will help the apprehensive feelings of students. Teachers and paraeducators should also always enforce the fact that it is okay to learn differently or to do things in a different way. We should also reinforce that it is okay because people need different things to complete the same tasks. Glasses are a good example. Not everyone wears them, but some people need them, be respectful of a student who asks you to not do something. Ask to talk with them later and help them to feel more comfortable about why they do the things they do. If you are unsure of what to do with a student who feels this way, let the special education teachers know so that we can talk with you and the student to brainstorm ideas.

Common modifications and questions taken from *The Personal Planner and Training Guide for the Paraprofessional* by Wendy Dover The Master Teacher Inc. 1996.



## Dealing with behaviors

When you enter a classroom when a student is elevated:

- Remain calm.
- If you have a positive relationship with the student try to calmly talk to the student about what is going on. See if they want to go for a walk, help with an assignment, need a sensory break, etc.
- If you are new to the student, assist the teacher with calling for help or managing the class while the teacher talks to the student.
- Document the event and complete any mandatory reports, if needed.

When you are in a classroom when a student is getting frustrated:

- Depending on the student, try to take a break from work and come back five minutes later. Activities could include: walk, sensory break, drink of water, etc.
  - Once you know the student, you will know what works best. Students still need to complete the task that was frustrating before returning to class.
- If the student continues to become frustrated or will not take a break please call for assistance with the student.

De-Escalation Strategies:

- Regulate - Help to establish a calm, safe emotional state
  - Rhythmic Activities
  - Repetitive Breathing Activities
  - Body Awareness Activities
  - Brain Breaks/Intervals
  - Trauma informed statements & validation
  - focused attention strategies
- Relate - Build a relationship with your child, let him/her know their feelings matter
  - Meaningfully connected
  - Developing, educating and healing
  - Being able to internalize learning new things
  - Rhythm & Relationship = Regulations
- Reason - What was going on, what were the triggers, what coping strategies can we try next time
  - Purpose
  - Inquiry
  - Conversation
  - Reflection

# New Hampton Community School District

*New Hampton Elementary School \* 206 West Main  
New Hampton, IA 50659 \*641-394-5858*

## Job Description

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Position Title: Paraeducator in the Elementary Classroom at New Hampton Elementary

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### **Minimum Qualifications - Education and/or Training:**

A high school diploma is required. The ability to read proficiently and write legibly is required.

**Reports to:** Building Principal

**Contract Period:** Approximately 180 days

### **Minimum Experience:**

Previous experience not required.

### **Summary of Position:**

Under the direction of the Elementary Principal and in collaboration with the special education and/or general education teacher, the paraeducator will be:

- Assigned to a child or children in a specific classroom and will report to an assigned special education teacher.
- Responsible for creating a warm, caring and safe environment, to support children and teachers in ways that improve the overall quality of care and education.
- Knowledgeable of the growth and development as well as health, safety and nutrition as it affects young children.

### **Essential Functions of the Paraeducator**

***Essential functions will include, but are not limited to the following:***

- Work collaboratively with the special education and general education teacher(s), as assigned by the building principal.
- Maintain the confidentiality of school and student records, issues, and daily occurrences.
- Greet each child and family warmly.
- Assist in transition activities for students specifically assigned when appropriate.
- Respond sensitively to the interests, requests, needs of individual children.
- Actively engages children in developmentally appropriate activities as directed by the special education and general education teachers.
- Interact with students and encourage natural exploration and curiosity.
- Use positive guidance strategies.
- Train and guide specific students (as assigned) to act independently, when possible.
- Assist teachers in recognizing and recording children's progress and documenting accidents, medication and concerns.
- Communicate concerns regarding children and families to the special education and general education teachers and building principal.
- Assist in cleaning and organizing to maintain classroom well-being and upkeep.

- Comply with district policies and state rules and regulations including, but not limited to, health and safety policies, anti-bullying and harassment policies and all civil right laws.
- Enforce classroom expectations focused on The Six Pillars for student behavior.
- Serve as an advocate for students assigned to you.
- Develop professional and working relationships with elementary colleagues.
- Participate in building-level, and district-wide professional development opportunities to continue learning and training, when available.
- Serve on building and district-wide committees.
- Accept other duties (including working with other children, crossing guard, hall duty, lunchroom duty, recess duty, and other supervisory duties) as assigned which are related to the scope of the job.