

PARAEDUCATOR HANDBOOK



NKESC

Northwest Kansas

Educational Service Center

Oakley, KS

2021-2022

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www.nkesc.org

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WELCOME TO NKESC

INTRODUCTION

This handbook has been designed to assist paraeducators in understanding and successfully fulfilling their roles . Certainly , not everything that paraeducators need to know is in this handbook. However, the handbook may answer many common questions and serve as a guide.

You are a valued member of the Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center education team. What you do makes a valuable contribution to the future of the children you serve. If you have questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Kathy Kersenbrock-Ostmeyer Director of Special Education

Amy Ricker
Assistant Director of Special Education Para Facilitator

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Executive Director

Shelby
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Start Director

**"In years to come your students may forget what you taught them, but they will always remember how you made them feel."
Anonymous**

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INTERLOCAL STRUCTURE, PHILOSOPHY, MISSION STATEMENT

INTERLOCALSTRUCTURE

The Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center is a "special and general education service provider" for the 19 school districts contained in Cheyenne, Decatur, Gove, Graham, Lane, Logan, Rawlins, Sheridan , Sherman, Thomas , Trego, and Wallace Counties. The interlocal covers more than 12,099 square miles and serves a school population of over **5830** in grades preschool-12 . It provides special education services to approximately **1,190** exceptional students with a certified staff of approximately **110** and a paraeducator/clerical staff of **185**. Additional services include Head Start programs in **12** counties, Early Head Start in 3 counties, Interactive Television classes and coordination, Parents as Teachers programs, media, school improvement assistance, foreign language, school nursing, itinerant administration and counseling. In 1973, the member districts drew up an interlocal agreement to band together to provide special education and other services. The interlocal agreement went into effect September 1, 1973. The governing body is the Board of Directors which is composed of a board member from each participating district. **An Advisory** council of member district superintendents serves to provide recommendations to the board and the administration. The Executive Director, the Director of Special Education, Assistant Directors of Special Education and the Head Start Director assumes administrative responsibilities.

STATEMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

The society in which an individual functions determines his/her beliefs, attitudes, and actions. The school, as an agency of society, plays a large role in each individual' s development. It is a role that must incorporate the advancement of broad skills in one's thinking and reasoning, build one's appreciation for the arts, and strengthen one's ability to interact socially. These critical components which are needed for an individual to be an active contributor to society must be offered to all individuals on an equal basis as provided for in the Constitution and Legislation.

Though the needs are unique, the exceptional child must have the guarantee that she/he also will receive the most complete education possible in terms of their individual needs and abilities and that this takes place as much as possible in the least restrictive educational environment. The use of intervention, through special services or classroom programs, should be initiated only after careful weighing of the advantages or disadvantages in light of the child's particular needs.

Cooperative interaction between the exceptional child's family and the school is paramount in meeting the child's essential needs. We believe parents/guardians have a right to any and all information, which is needed in order to assist the school in making intelligent educational plans for their children. While we are concerned about the personal impact of the decisions made relative to the operation of NKESC, decisions will be made for the good of the organization in reference to our mission.

MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of NKESC is to allow, foster, and support cooperative efforts based on the ideas, knowledge, and beliefs of member districts and communities. We commit ourselves to the development of all students' emotional , social, physical, and academic progress ensuring that education is a lifelong process. Students can be expected to achieve standards of excellence as they prepare to become citizens of the future. While acting in a leadership capacity, the service center will strive to meet the needs of each member district and community.

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THE SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAEDUCATOR

I. JOB QUALIFICATIONS

All special education paraeducators are required to have a high school diploma or equivalent and be a citizen of good standing.

The following requirements must also be met.

1. Pass a TB skin test conducted by a county health nurse or other health care professional
2. Have a signed health certification form from a Licensed Physician , Physician's Assistant or a Registered Nurse Practitioner
3. Provide proof of United States Citizenship.

REQUIREMENTS FOR PARAEDUCATORS UNDER "NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND" LAW

-Effective January 8, 2002, all paraeducators hired after this date to work in Title I school-wide programs must have:

Completed at least 2 years of study at an institution of higher education. A minimum of 48 hours must be accumulated. The college hours must be hours that can be applied to a baccalaureate degree.

Obtain an AA degree (or higher), or

Met rigorous standards as demonstrated through a formal State or Local assessment.

EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITIES

As an employee of NKESC you have some basic responsibilities that you must complete in order to remain in good standing as an employee.

Personnel File-The paraeducator is responsible for maintaining current personnel information with NKESC. This includes having an up to date tuberculosis test, a sign health profile , current address, phone number , emergency contacts, etc.

Time Machine- the paraeducator is responsible for maintaining and turning in weekly work logs using the time machine. It is important that the work logs are accurate for each day of the week regarding service provided and accounting for student absences.

Employee Leaves- the paraeducator is responsible for making contact with their direct supervisor in the case of an absence , or for pre-approval of leave. The paraeducator must also submit the proper paperwork for the type of leave.

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Professional Development In-service Hours- The paraeducator is responsible for attending and documenting 20 inservice hours per year. In-service hours are to be documented using the HR Portal and submitted twice a year.

COMMON PITFALLS

Cell Phone Use- Cell phone use must never interfere with or disrupt student learning or the paraeducator's job responsibilities.

Food and Drink-Paraeducators must follow the school's policy in regards to food and drink in the workplace.

Dress- Paraeducators are expected to dress in a manner that has been discussed and approved by their immediate supervisor and meets the dress code policy for the school that they are working in.

Language- Paraeducators are expected to utilize professional language at all times. Profanity of any kind is not to be used in the workplace.

Attitude- A paraeducator's attitude in the workplace is the key to success for both the paraeducator and the students he/she serves. A positive future oriented outlook with a willingness to work is a must.

Contacting NKESC

The NKESC offices are open Monday through Friday from 7:30 am to 5:00 pm. The phone number is: 785-672-3125. All NKESC staff can be contacted using NKESC email. **Grievances and Complaints for NKESC:** Please refer to the NKESC Personnel Handbook

II. ROLE OF THE PARAEDUCATOR

A paraeducator is a NKESC employee who works under the supervision of administrative and teaching staff in performing various instructional and non-instructional duties to assist with providing special education students a free and appropriate education.

Paraeducators primarily provide instructional or related services under the supervision of licensed or certified special education professionals in an accredited or approved special education program. Examples of allowable activities include instructional support under the supervision of a professional, participation in IEP meetings, parent-teacher conferences, staff development, student data collection and record-keeping such as maintaining observational and anecdotal records. Paraeducators also may assist the special education teacher with paperwork related to the special education students for whom s/he is responsible. This provides important support to those students and special education teachers. By fulfilling their role, paraeducators will help increase the quality of instruction and services provided to students in a special education program.

The benefits of paraeducators' work are many and the beneficiaries are the entire community - not only students. Trained paraeducators can help an entire school district deliver the quality education its community demands.

JOB ROLES IN EDUCATIONAL SETTINGS

Instructional Support General Education Classroom (Inclusion)- In the General Education Classroom the paraeducator becomes an extension of the teacher. The paraeducator and the teacher work collaboratively to ensure that special education and related services are provided to students as specified in their IEP. The paraeducator and teacher must meet and determine the role the paraeducator will fill in the classroom and the teacher's expectations for the paraeducator. The role and expectations must be clear to the special education teacher, general education teacher and the paraeducator before placement in the classroom.

Instructional Support Special Education Setting (Pullout)-In a pull out setting the paraeducator becomes an extension of the special education teacher. Students identified with disabilities are placed in a special education setting to meet specific objectives within the student's IEP. The paraeducator must follow the educational plan created by the teacher. The paraeducator must communicate with the teacher regularly concerning student performance and data collection.

Behavioral Support-A paraeducator may be assigned to provide support to a student whose behavior is such that they cannot effectively interact with others independently. The paraeducator will fulfill two functions. First to monitor and prompt the student's behavior and second to teach the student the behavioral skills necessary to be successful independently. The paraeducator must follow the educational plan created by the teacher. The paraeducator must communicate with the teacher regularly concerning student performance and data collection.

General Supervision of Students- Part of a paraeducator's job responsibilities may include supervising groups of students at lunch, recess, field trips, etc. The paraeducator must be familiar with the expectations the school has for this role.

III. RESPONSIBILITIES

The responsibility of the paraeducator is to follow the program planned by a certified professional. The professional assumes the primary responsibility for the instruction of the students. By law a paraeducator is an extension of the teacher.

- support the implementation of individual students' programs
- provide support, suggestions, and feedback regarding the strategies and instruction that have been implemented
- become team members for planning and evaluation of individual student programs
- provide all students opportunities for positive learning in interpersonal experiences
- provide a variety of support to both students and teachers (all other assigned duties)
- provide specialized instruction to students as specified by their IEP or Student Assistance Plan

SUGGESTIONS FOR BECOMING A MORE SUCCESSFUL PARAEDUCATOR

1. Communicate with your teacher daily, this is essential to building a program which is responsive to disabled learners.
2. Offer suggestions or ideas but don't get your feelings hurt if your suggestions or ideas aren't taken.
3. Lend personal assistance to students wherever and whenever you can.
4. Discuss problems **-NOW**. Don't let them grow bigger by ignoring them.
5. Follow Instructions.
6. Remember all final decisions are up to your teacher.
7. Don't talk about school problems to people outside of school.
8. Learn the routine of the school day.
9. Let teachers know your interest, hobbies, background and experiences. You may be able to contribute much to special class projects and special interest centers.
10. Ask questions - the teacher may assume that you know what she (the teacher) is talking about when giving directions.
11. Get acquainted immediately with emergency procedures.
12. Share responsibilities - offer to do something to help equalize the work in the room. Don't wait to be told to do something. Work with the teacher as a team.
13. Be Patient: with yourself (teaching is a learned profession, it takes time) with the teacher (some days are more demanding than others) with the children (the courtesy and respect we show children will be imitated).
14. Become familiar with the types of children served in the classroom.
15. Learn the location and use of the equipment.
16. Get acquainted with the school policy as it applies to you and your work.
17. Have a positive self-concept.
18. Enthusiasm and a sensitivity to the feelings of children are very important.
19. Mutual respect and support between the teacher and the paraeducator must be shown at all times
20. There must be consistency in handling rules and rewards in the classroom.
21. Be prepared to give any practical assistance that the teacher feels necessary for the success of the program (helping make teacher-made material, dittos, etc.) Work with the teachers, not against them. Have a positive attitude and emphasize the progress made.
22. Show enthusiasm for your job. **BE ON TIME AND BE DEPENDABLE!**
23. Be a professional.
24. If work problems arise, always discuss the issues with your supervising teacher

COMMUNICATION

Effective communication between the professional and paraeducator is vital if the students are to be served effectively. An environment conducive to learning can only be provided by the paraeducator and professional communicating honestly and openly in a non-threatening manner. Each is a unique individual with unique needs with the common goal of educating the students. Individual conflicts which are unrelated to the classroom should be kept out of the classroom. The following thoughts are offered for effective communication:

1. Set aside a regularly scheduled time to communicate when the students are not present. The time should be a mutually acceptable time.
2. The professional has knowledge and expertise in the field. He has the responsibility of direct supervision of the paraeducator and the direct control of the learning environment.
3. If the paraeducator has a question or concern about anything relating to the classroom, he should feel free to ask the question in an honest desire to learn.
4. If the professional has a concern about the paraeducator, the concern should be discussed directly and constructively. First and foremost, we have an obligation to provide the best services possible for students.
5. Listen to one another's opinions and concerns regarding the learning environment and students.
6. Respect one another's opinions and uniqueness.
7. Give one another positive strokes; when something is happening that is good, tell one another. We all need warm fuzzies.

IV. SUPERVISION

Supervision of the special education paraeducator in most districts is a joint responsibility of the supervising teacher, building administrator, and NKESC administrator. The supervising teacher will be responsible for structuring the paraeducator's schedule and working with the paraeducator on a regular basis to ensure the responsibilities assigned are carried out in an efficient manner. The supervising teacher may assign duties to the paraeducator according to classroom needs and capabilities of each paraeducator.

It is important that supervision provided by the teacher be well organized and consistent. Proper supervision requires effective planning and communication, which must be initiated and fostered by the supervising teacher. It is suggested that formal communication between the paraeducator and supervising teacher concerning delegation of responsibilities and resultant paraeducator performance be documented. The building administrator and NKESC Administrator should be available for consultation with the teacher if questions or problems related to supervision of paraeducators should arise.

V. CODE OF ETHICS

A. Relationship With The School:

- Be on time and have good attendance
- Accept responsibility for improving skills.
- Know school policies and procedures
- Represent the school district in a positive manner

B. Accepting Responsibilities:

- Recognize the supervisor has the ultimate responsibility for instruction, etc.
- Do only things for which you are qualified or trained.
- Do not communicate progress or concerns to parents unless directed by staff.
- Refer concerns expressed by others to the teacher.

C. Relationship With Students And Parents:

- Discuss a child's progress and/or program only with the supervising teacher in the appropriate setting.
- Refrain from discriminatory practices.
- Respect the dignity, privacy, and individuality of all students, parents, and staff.
- Present yourself as a positive adult role model.

D. Relationship With The Teacher:

- Recognize the teacher as supervisor and team leader.
- Establish a positive relationship with the teacher.
- When problems cannot be resolved, utilize the district's grievance procedures.
- Discuss concerns about the teacher or methods directly with the teacher.

VI. EVALUATION PROCESS

Paraeducators are evaluated by November by their immediate supervisor. Paraeducators who have areas that need improvement on their evaluation will be re-evaluated in April of the school year.

A system for evaluating personnel is essential in an educational setting, as it assures the quality services are received by all students. Evaluations are used in making decisions concerning continuing employment, assignment, advancement and more importantly, improving services. The evaluation should appraise the individual's strengths and weaknesses, provide for growth and improvement, and encourage beneficial changes in service.

If a plan of assistance is written, termination of employment is an option when satisfactory progress is not made.

VII. CONFIDENTIALITY

As a paraeducator, you will hear, read, and observe information about students that is considered confidential. You will learn a great deal about the students you work with and their families. You must always respect the privacy of the students and their families. There are federal and state laws designed to protect the confidentiality of students served in special education. The law says that only educators, directly involved in delivering services to a student may have access to records and information about the student. *Persons not directly involved in delivering services to a student do not have a right to this information.* YOU have a right to know information about the student with whom you are involved-count yourself among those directly involved with the student. Please remember you are allowed access to information only for students with whom you are involved.

Always remember that you are a professional, and professionals honor confidentiality. Remember a breach of confidentiality is not only unprofessional but also illegal.

Problems of confidentiality are not always intentional. Eagerness to tell about a student's accomplishment or progress may appear harmless, but you may give more information about a child's area of disability, needs, or educational plan than intended.

The following are a few tips to help keep confidentiality from becoming a problem:

- Be careful with whom you share information. Is that person directly involved with the student's education?
- Don't print out or label children in public (outside of school) as "your students."
- Avoid using names if you are asked about your job.
- Suggest that questions about a student be best directed to the regular classroom teacher or special education teacher.
- Be careful not to distort, exaggerate, or confuse information.
- Never use information about a student as gossip or as a joke.
- Focus comments on student strengths and be positive.
- No matter who asks you a question about a student, if you don't want to answer or are unsure whether you should answer, DON'T. You can do this politely.
- Be direct and honest: "I'm sorry-I can't say."
- Develop a workable response to questions, write it down, practice it, and use it!

Quick Tip: If you know it because you work here-it is to be treated as confidential.

Dr. Lowell Alexander, Director, Wyandotte County Special Ed. Cooperative, Kansas City, KS, was the original author of this paper with editing from the KS State Dept. of Education and NKESC.

VIII. JOB KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

DEFINITIONS AND TERMS TO KNOW

Characteristics of Learners paraeducators will need to understand the cognitive, physical, emotional, and social characteristics that are generally associated with children identified as in need of special education services. Children may exhibit one or more characteristics to varying degrees. The following are the definitions and descriptions of the state of Kansas eligibility criteria for special education services.

Autism

Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD) means a range of pervasive developmental disorders that adversely affect a pupil's functioning and result in the need for special education instruction and related services. ASD is a disability category characterized by an uneven developmental profile and a pattern of qualitative impairments in several areas of development: social interaction, communication, or restricted repetitive and stereotyped patterns of behavior, interests, and activities, with onset in childhood.

Deaf/Blindness

"Deaf-blind" means medically verified visual loss coupled with medically verified hearing loss that, together, interfere with acquiring information or interacting in the environment. Both conditions need to be present simultaneously and must meet the criteria for both visually impaired and deaf and hard of hearing.

Deaf/Hard of Hearing

"Deaf and hard of hearing" means a diminished sensitivity to sound, or hearing loss, that is expressed in terms of standard audiologic measures. Hearing loss has the potential to affect educational, communicative, or social functioning that may result in the need for special education instruction and related services.

Developmental Delay

Early childhood special education must be available to children from birth to seven years of age who have a substantial delay or disorder in development or have an identifiable sensory, physical, mental, or social/emotional condition or impairment known to hinder normal development and need special education. Developmentally Adapted Physical Education: Special Education "Developmental adapted physical education: special education" means specially designed physical education instruction and services for pupils with disabilities who have a substantial delay or disorder in physical development. Developmental adapted physical education: special education instruction for pupils age three through 21 may include development of physical fitness, motor fitness, fundamental motor skills and patterns, skills in aquatics, dance, individual and group games, and sports. Students with conditions such as obesity, temporary injuries, and short-term or temporary illnesses or disabilities are termed special needs students. Special needs students are not eligible for developmental adapted physical education: special education.

Emotional Behavioral Disorder

"Emotional or behavioral disorder" means an established pattern characterized by one or more of the following behavior clusters: **A.** Severely aggressive or impulsive behaviors, **B.** Severely withdrawn or anxious behaviors, general pervasive unhappiness, depression or wide mood swings, or **C.** Severely disordered thought processes manifested by unusual behavior patterns, atypical communication styles and distorted interpersonal relationships. This category may include children or youth with schizophrenic disorders, affective disorders, anxiety disorders, or other sustained disturbances of conduct or adjustment when they adversely affect educational performance. The established pattern adversely affects educational performance and results in either an inability to build or maintain satisfactory interpersonal relations necessary to the learning process, with peers, teachers, and others, or failure to attain or maintain a satisfactory rate of educational or developmental progress which cannot be improved or explained by addressing intellectual, sensory, health, cultural, or linguistic factors.

Other Health Impaired

"Other health impaired" means a broad range of medically diagnosed chronic or acute health conditions that may adversely affect academic functioning and result in the need for special education instruction and related services. The decision that a specific health condition qualifies as other health impaired will be determined by the impact of the condition on academic functioning.

Multiply Impaired

"Multiple disabilities" means concomitant impairments (such as mental retardation blindness, mental retardation orthopedic impairment, etc.) , the combination of which causes such severe educational needs that they cannot be accommodated in special education programs solely for one of the impairments. The term does not include deaf blindness.

Specific Learning Disability

"Specific learning disability" means a condition within the individual affecting learning, relative to potential and is **A.** Manifested by interference with the acquisition, organization, storage, retrieval, manipulation, or expression of information so that the individual does not learn at an adequate rate when provided with the usual developmental opportunities and instruction from a regular school environment ; **B.** Demonstrated by a significant discrepancy between a pupil's general intellectual ability and academic achievement in one or more of the following areas: oral expression, listening comprehension, mathematical calculation or mathematics reasoning, basic reading skills, reading comprehension, and written expression; **C.** Demonstrated primarily in academic functioning, but may also affect self-esteem, career development, and life adjustment skills. Specific learning disability may occur with, but cannot be primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor impairment; cognitive impairment; Traumatic Brain Injury "Traumatic brain injury" means an acquired injury to the brain caused by an external physical force, resulting in total or partial functional disability or psychosocial impairment , or both, that adversely affects a child's education performance and result in the need for special education and related services. The term applies to open or closed head injuries resulting in impairments **in** one or more areas, such as cognition; speech/language; memory; attention; reasoning; abstract thinking; judgment; problem-solving; sensory perceptual and motor abilities; psychosocial behavior; physical functions; information processing. The term does not apply to brain injuries that are congenital or degenerative, or brain injuries induced by birth trauma.

Accommodations

Accommodations are practices and procedures that provide equitable access during instruction and assessments for Special Needs Students that do not alter the validity of the assessment, score interpretation, reliability or security of the assessment.

Antecedent

Something that comes before, precedes, or causes a behavior.

Differentiation

A way of thinking about and planning in order to meet the diverse needs of students based on their characteristics; teachers differentiate content, process, and product according to students' readiness, interest, and learning profiles through a range of instructional and management strategies.

Inclusion

The action or state of including or of being included within a group or structure.

Individualized Education Plan (IEP)

The IBP describes the goals the team sets for a child during the school year, as well as any special support needed to help achieve them. It is a document required in order for students with disabilities to receive special education services.

Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)

In the U.S. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), least restrictive environment (LRE) means that a student who has a disability should have the opportunity to be educated with nondisabled peers, to the greatest extent appropriate.

Modifications

Modifications are changes in the assessment conditions that fundamentally alter the test score interpretation and comparability. Accommodations do not reduce learning expectations; they provide access. However, modifications or alterations refer to practices that change, lower, or reduce learning expectations. Examples of modifications include:

- Requiring a student to learn less material (e.g., fewer objectives, shorter units or lessons, fewer pages or problems).
- Reducing assignments and assessments so a student only needs to complete the easiest problems or items.

Revising assignments or assessments to make them easier (e.g., crossing out half of the response choices on a multiple-choice test so that a student only has to pick from two options instead of four).

- Giving a student hints or clues to correct responses on assignments and tests.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

Of the 20 hours of staff development required, at least 10 hours of staff development activities must relate to the specific needs of the paraeducator's responsibilities. Up to 10 hours may be in staff development activities that are more generic and may not be specifically related to the specific needs of the students served. College hours may be substituted for staff development. Each college hour will be counted as 20 staff development hours, applied to the school year in which the coursework was obtained. College hours should be reported as college hours, because the conversion to staff development hours is automatically calculated within the program for the Personnel Report.

Passing (score at or above the State cut-off) a State-approved paraeducator assessment will be counted as 20 staff development hours. (Effective July 1, 2003, not retroactive.)

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RESOURCES

www.nkesc.org

Northwest Kansas Educational Service Center

www.ksde.org

Kansas State Department of Education

<https://nkesc.quickbase.com> Time
Machine

<https://portal.masterteacher.net>
e-Learning

<http://www.myinfinitec.org/> My
Infinitec

<https://mail.google.com> NKESC
E-Mail

www.cec.sped.org

Council for Exceptional Children

www.dcf.ks.gov/

Kansas Department of Children and Family Services

Please refer to the procedures for NKESC regarding reporting in the Personnel Handbook

APPENDIX

- 1) Accommodations Pamphlet
- 2) ADHD Pamphlet
- 3) Autism Pamphlet
- 4) Behavior Pamphlet
- 5) Learning Disability Pamphlet
- 6) Para in Gen Ed Classroom Pamphlet
- 7) Chart for Supervising Teachers and Paraeducators
- 8) May or May Not Chart for Paraeducators