

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



This form may be used as guiding discussion questions for the IEP team to consider as members make a final determination on the student's individual needs. This form is not exhaustive and is not regarded as a state-approved document to determine eligibility, the need for support, or a team decision-making tool to determine there is not a need for a 1:1 Special Education Paraprofessional for support or Personal Care Assistant. This form may be used as a discussion for the IEP team to make a final determination based on a student's individual needs.

Personal Care Assistants are under the directions of certified special education and/or related services staff, a Personal Care Assistant (PCA) assists one or more students in accomplishing instrumental activities of daily living, health-related functions, redirection of behavior, and other tasks as identified in an Individualized Education Program (IEP), Section 504 Plan or health plan for assigned students. Personal Care Assistants may be assigned to work with students who have physical disabilities, healthcare/medical needs, or require other forms of specialized care.

Special Education Paraprofessionals are paraprofessionals who provide instructional support for students with disabilities, for example: provide instructional services under the direct supervision of a fully certified teacher; and assist with classroom management such as organizing instructional materials.

When and how is it determined that a student needs a Special Education Paraprofessional for individual support? There is no specific answer to that question. There is not a formula to calculate the need for individual assistance nor is there a specific score related to a student's intelligence quotient (IQ) that exemplifies the need. The determination is supremely made by the IEP team. However, when a parent requests a Personal Care Assistant, adult support, or a 1:1 Special Education Paraprofessional, some factors need to be considered by the IEP team.

Data collection and supporting evidence are crucial when determining individual support. Data collection should be documented for a matter of days and the accumulation of such evidence brought to the team for discussion. If a student has previously received services for individualized support, such as a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant then the IEP team should review the documents and data to determine if the services are deemed appropriate and should continue. This decision should be documented in the IEP.

The goal for students with disabilities is to be independent in all environments throughout their instructional day. When determining a need for adult support the team might consider what activity or activities in the instructional day the child needs the most support. This means the child might be independent with some skills but need adult support with only a few skills. A good example would be a student who has Other Health Impairments with cerebral palsy and might need additional adult support on the playground, in the cafeteria, during Physical Education (PE), and transitioning between classes. The student has assistive technology devices that allow the student to be independent with all academic and written tasks, but the student may need adult support through specific physical activities that do not warrant a 1:1 Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant throughout the school day, but only portions of the day.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



Suggested preliminary discussions for IEP team review before or while data is being collected:

Questions	Consider and Discuss
Has the IEP team considered other supplementary aids and services to be provided to the student with disabilities before making the determination that individualized support is necessary?	Offering other supplementary aids and services along with access to a Special Education Paraprofessional is oftentimes sufficient without individual assistance.
What is the specific purpose of the 1:1 Special Education Paraprofessional, or Personal Care Assistant?	The specific purpose should be to support a unique individual need for the student. It may be for behavior modification, specially designed instruction, personal care, or other needs.
Has the TEP team considered the potential harmful effects on the student?	Potential harmful effects such as becoming dependent on the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant and losing independent skills, limiting peer interactions, and/or social stigmatization could be problematic for the success of the educational outcome.
How will the student's peers respond to him or her with a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant present?	Maintaining peer interactions and a circle of friends is empirical to the social development of students with disabilities.
Has the current teacher-student ratio been considered?	Consider the classroom ratio of the number of Special Education Paraprofessionals already available to meet the student's needs in the educational setting. The team should discuss and consider an additional Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant for the support of the entire classroom.
What is the timeline for reviewing the effectiveness of the support provided by the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?	Special Education Paraprofessionals or Personal Care Assistants may be assigned for individual support for a specific timeline or a specific function. At the conclusion of the timeline, the team should reconvene and determine the success and outcome of the necessity of the support.
In which educational setting(s) will the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant be used?	The team should consider which environment the support is necessary (e.g., classroom only, transitions only, unstructured activities only, etc.).
What type of plan needs to be developed for fading the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant as the student gains more independent skills?	Carefully fade the support services as the student becomes more independent in their skills (e.g., academic, behavior, daily living skills).
Will the individualized support help or enable the student?	Before offering a student with disabilities additional individual support it is appropriate to consider if the support will create a learned helplessness that the student will become dependent on the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



Questions	Consider and Discuss
A.	If the student has just returned to the school campus from participating in virtual instruction, the IEP must be reviewed, and services implemented on the IEP. The team should review and update the Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP) to account for any new behaviors the student may exhibit.
B.	In regard to specific behaviors, the team should discuss the level of one-to-one support the student will need in the classroom. For example, a Special Education Paraprofessional can help redirect the student's behavior. Teachers have an obligation to teach the class, so they may not necessarily see when a student may not be looking at the same book or on the same page as everyone else. The Special Education Paraprofessional is another set of eyes for the teacher. But a Special Education Paraprofessional may also be able to learn the signs of when a student may be in distress and need a break from learning. The student may need to learn how to request a break. The Special Education Paraprofessional will be trained in the broken protocol and know how to support the student when a break is necessary and what to do during the break.
C.	Discuss the training the Personal Care Assistant may need on any updates to the student's Behavior Intervention Plan. Be sure the one-to-one Special Education Paraprofessional understands what is expected and knows what strategies work and what strategies do not work. A student may be triggered by certain words or tones that were not a concern in the past.
D.	The IEP team discusses and understands the ultimate need for the Special Education Paraprofessional is to assist the student and not to do everything for the student. It is important to discuss how to scale back or slowly decrease the Special Education Paraprofessional's involvement in the future to promote the student's independent self-regulation and coping. It is also very important to draw a line distinguishing assisting and supporting versus doing for the student. Be sure the Special Education Paraprofessional has the proper training in the needs of the student.

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



Classroom Instruction

The following tables and rubric below may be used for guidance or a decision-making tool for determining the need for individualized student support with a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant.

- None: Independent, rarely needs support
- Minimal: provided on an "as needed basis", episodic in nature, does not always need support
- Frequent: consistent over time, regular need for support at least in some environments
- Intense: constant, high-intensity support required across all environments

Student Safety

- Is there a safety concern for the student or others that require an individual Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?

Safety	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Wandering				
Hurts Self or Others				
Dropping or Falling to the Floor				
Bolting or Running Away				
Throwing Objects				
Hitting Self or Others				
Placing Inedible Objects in Mouth				

Physical and Personal Care

- Does the student have physical needs that require an individual Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?

Physical and Personal Care	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Mobility				
Eating				
Dressing				
Toileting				
Pull-ups				
Equipment				
Wheelchair/Walker				

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT



SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF

Medical Necessity

- Does the student have an individual health plan for medical necessities that require a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?

Medical Necessity	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Ventilator				
Seizure Disorder				
Tracheotomy				
Feeding Tube				

Communication

- Does the student communicate their needs and wants? (yes or no)
- Is the student verbal or nonverbal? (verbal or nonverbal)
- If the student is nonverbal what is the student's mode of communication?

Communication	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Ability to Point/Make Gestures				
Ability to Nod Head				
Ability to Use a Visual Schedule				
Ability to Use a PECS				
Ability to Use an Augmentative Communications Device				
Ability to Use Switches				
Ability to Make Happy/Angry Noises				

Social

- Does the student have social skills or the loss thereof that require individualized support by a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?

Acquired Social Skills	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Shares/Takes Turns				
Makes Independent Decisions				
Asks for Help				
Accepts Consequences				
Asks Permission				
Participates in Activities				
Apologizes				

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



Social Needs	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Significant Loss of Social Interaction				
Interact with Peers Appropriately				
Peers Include the Student in Classroom Activities				
Peers Include the Student in Playground Activities				
Student Currently Receiving Prompts/Cues to Interact with Peers				
Currently Receiving Social Skills Instruction				
Student Capable of Receiving Peer Tutoring/Support				

Academic – Classroom

- Does the student need individual support that includes a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant for academic success?

Classroom	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Receiving Services in the General Education Classroom				
Receiving Services in the Self-Contained Special Education Classroom				
Cues to Attend to Teacher Instruction				
Cues to Begin Tasks and Classroom Assignments				
Cues to Remain on Task				
Accommodations for Materials				
Accommodations for Task Completion				
Assistive Technology				
Modifications of Instruction				
Modifications of Directions				
Adaptive Equipment				
Job Shadowing or Explorations				
Work/Job Skill Development				
Community Based Activities				



Prompting

- Does the student need individual support that includes a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant for academic success?

Prompting	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
During Instruction				
During Independent Work				
During Transitioning				
During Electives				
During Cafeteria				
During Recess				

Sensory

- Does the student have sensory overload behaviors that require individualized Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant support?

Sensory	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Appears Restless and Irritable				
Easily Startled by Sudden Noises				
Urge to Cover Ears or Eyes				
Easily Overwhelmed by People				
Anxiety Increases When Changing Surroundings				
Avoids Crowds or Large Areas				
Refuses to Wear Itchy/Scratchy Clothing				

Transition

- Does the student require assistance with self-regulation when transitioning from one activity or environment to another that requires individualized support from a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?

Transition	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Easily Overwhelmed by People				
Anxiety Increases When Changing Surroundings				
Avoids Crowds/Large Areas				
Refuses to Leave the Cafeteria				
Refuses to Leave Gym/Other				
Refuses to Leave a Safe Place				

SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAPROFESSIONAL OR PERSONAL CARE ASSISTANT SUPPORT

SPECIAL EDUCATION - GUIDANCE BRIEF



Behavior

- Does the student require assistance for behavioral support by displaying any of these behaviors?

Behavior	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Makes Noises Often Throughout the Day				
Self-Stimulation				
Overactive				
Fidgety				
Can't Remain in the Seat				
Cries Often Throughout the Day				
Screams Often Throughout the Day				
Withdrawn, Doesn't Engage				
Hurts People (scratching, biting, kicking, hitting, spitting)				
Throws/Smears Feces				
Difficulty with Enuresis (involuntary urination)				
Difficulty with Encopresis (involuntary soiling/passing stools)				
Takes Things That Are Not One's Personal Belongings (stealing)				
Talks Back/Argues with Adults				
Refuses to Follow Direction				
Self-Injurious Behaviors				
Uses Profanity				
Explosive Outbursts in Response to Change				
Laughs Inappropriately				



Bus Transportation

The following tables and rubric below may be used for guidance or a decision-making tool for determining the need for individualized student support from a Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant.

- None: Independent, rarely needs support
- Minimal: provided on an "as needed basis", episodic in nature, does not always need support
- Frequent: consistent over time, regular need for support at least in some environments
- Intense: constant, high-intensity support required across all environments

Transportation

- Does the student have difficulties with compliance, aggression, or transition between activities that require assistance to travel to and from school safely that require the assistance of an individual Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant?

Transportation	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Compliance				
Aggression				
Transitioning Between Activities				
On-Boarding the Bus				
Off Boarding the Bus				

Communication

- Does the student have communication limitations that require the assistance of an individual Special Education Paraprofessional, or Personal Care Assistant?

Communication	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Student Can Communicate Under Ordinary Circumstances				
Student Can Receive Critical Information During an Emergency				
Student Can Provide Critical Information During an Emergency				



Health and Medical

- Does the student have a health or medical condition that requires the assistance of an individual Special Education Paraprofessional, or Personal Care Assistant?

Health and Medical	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Epilepsy				
Diabetes				
Severe Allergies				
Other:				

Mobility

- Does the student have mobility limitations that require the assistance of an individualized Special Education Paraprofessional, or Personal Care Assistant?

Mobility	None	Minimal	Frequent	Intense
Ability to Board the Bus without Assistance				
Ability to Exit the Bus without Assistance				
Student Has Debilitating Muscles				
Student Has Weakened Muscles				

In summary, it is always best practice to have an open discussion and address all parent concerns when they are requesting an individualized Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant. Data collection is empirical and establishes the foundation for the IEP team's decision to proceed with initiation of the parent's request or initiation of declining the parents' request after careful considerations. The IEP should carefully document whether the student requires supplemental support services as related to the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant. Instances where a student can be grouped with others for Special Education Paraprofessional assistance should be carefully documented in the IEP. Lastly, when the Special Education Paraprofessional or Personal Care Assistant is being slowly transitioned for removal or eliminated altogether, the IEP team has first met and created a plan for the fading of this adult support, as well as what accommodations and/or modifications may need to replace the adult supports as the student becomes more independent.

"The contents of this handout were developed under a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. However, the content does not necessarily represent the policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the federal government. Oklahoma State Department of Education, Special Education Services (405) 521-3351 | <http://sde.ok.gov/sde/special-education>