



# **Physical Educator's Guide for Working with Paraprofessionals**

THE PRESIDENTIAL YOUTH FITNESS PROGRAM

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The descriptions, guidelines, and recommendations in this packet are only suggestions for the effective training and use of support personnel within the physical education setting. Regular and adapted physical educators are solely and purposefully responsible for all actions and/or activities that take place within their gymnasium, on the playing field, and in the pool. Physical educators should consult their school/district policies relative to additions or changes in the support personnel and the training and supervision of these individuals.



## Introduction

Involving students in the Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) in the Presidential Youth Fitness Program may require the use of support personnel, including adult volunteers, peer tutors, and paraeducators assigned to a students with a disabilities in general or adapted physical education.

Initially developed for the Denton Independent School District and adapted for use by the Presidential Youth Fitness Program, this guide provides a brief description of the general roles and responsibilities of support personnel assisting either the regular or adapted physical educator.

Support personnel are invaluable and can make important contributions to quality physical education programs.

They can:

- help make the physical education setting become more student oriented (Pickett, 1989).
- assume numerous responsibilities, such as tracking a student's behavioral discipline plan, monitoring student behavior, giving individualized instruction, and assisting in classroom preparation and paperwork (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Thompson & Edwards, 1994).
- enhance the level of instruction provided to students by
  1. tutoring individual students who need extra help.

2. being the extra "eyes and ears."
3. giving the teacher more time for assessments, parent conferences, planning, and evaluating (Pickett, 1989 p. 32).

Training is vital for support personnel to fully understand their role in assisting the adapted physical educator in different physical education settings (O'Connor & French, 1998; Sherrill, 1998). Paraeducators attendance and participation in training programs can be facilitated by the support and encouragement of school administrators. Principals are responsible for ensuring teachers and paraeducators understand their roles and responsibilities (Cramer, 1998; Pickett, Vasa, & Steckelberg, 1993).

There are many roles support personnel may assume, including (a) aide, (b) volunteer, (c) assistant, and (d) ancillary/associate personnel (Vogler, French, & Bishop, 1989). Their training and/or experience, as well as the needs of the student, should determine the responsibilities of the support personnel (Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, 1999).

Job descriptions for three specific types of support personnel follow: (a) paraeducator assigned to the adapted physical educator and to the student in regular physical education, (b) peer tutors, and (c) adult volunteers. This guide also includes ways to acknowledge support personnel efforts, examples of contacts for support personnel, and a sample task sheet that can be used in the physical education setting.



## General Roles and Responsibilities of Support Personnel

The following is a list of general do's and don'ts that were helpful in outlining job expectations of support personnel (Firth & Mims, 1998; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997) in Denton ISD.

The "do's" indicate ways that support personnel can assist the general and adapted physical educator during physical education class. The "don'ts" indicate the primary responsibility of certified general and adapted physical educators.

### Do's

- Assist in administering screening tests and informal diagnostic instruments (if trained and guided by the adapted and/or general physical educator).
- Plan learning activities (suggest ways to organize the class, grouping of students, length of lesson, logistics, etc.).
- Secure needed materials and equipment.
- Modify existing curricula, materials, and equipment with guidance from the teacher.
- Provide one-on-one instruction.
- Assist students in moving throughout the building.
- Assist the adapted and/or general physical educator with clerical duties (grading papers, recording exam scores, and other paperwork).

### Don'ts

- Assign final grades.
- Assume the role of substitute teacher.
- Administer or interpret formal standardized reference tests.
- Initiate formal contact with parents without the consent of the teacher or school.
- Conduct unsupervised therapy/ services.
- Make major instructional/curricular decisions about the students.
- Decide on discipline methods.

When assigning roles to support personnel, the student's type, age, and severity of disability must be considered.



## Paraprofessionals Assigned to the Adapted Physical Educator or to the Student in General Physical Education

Paraprofessionals may be assigned to the adapted physical educator while assisting with one class, one student, or with the entire caseload of the adapted physical educator. The paraprofessional(s) assigned to the adapted physical educator is given the greatest amount of responsibility and should receive the greatest amount of training.

Paraprofessionals may also be assigned to escort students with disabilities from their special education classes or general education class to the physical education setting. Another paraprofessional may be hired only for the purpose of assisting a student(s) during the physical education class. Regardless, the paraprofessional's job description must include physical education. If not, then he or she can say, "I don't do windows or physical education" (Silliman-French & Fullerton, 1998). This is at least the initial step on the upward road to developing an effective paraprofessional within the physical education environment.

Some of the paraprofessionals' responsibilities and duties may include:

- Taking part in in-service education (could be specific to a population).
- Dressing appropriately for involvement with student in various forms of instruction.
- Demonstrating and physically assisting the student through activities, skills, or exercises as necessary.
- Assisting and providing cues to the student in various ways (e.g., verbal reminders of the task or physically helping the student) to help the student achieve an optimal learning experience.
- Using a systematic approach to behavior management (Lavay, French, & Henderson, 1997):
  1. Praise student for appropriate behavior and skill performance.
  2. Praise another student in close proximity who is "on task."
  3. Use appropriate prompts (verbal, modeling, physical) to assist students to stay on task.
  4. If student continues to demonstrate "off-task" disruptive behavior after using the first 3 steps, request the physical educators' assistance.
- Recording, describing, and informing the physical educator of any inappropriate behaviors.
- Assisting with both formal and informal evaluation of the student necessary.
- Reinforcing specified elements of the student's individualized education program (IEP) and Behavior Intervention Plan (BIP), if the student is under the supervision of a certified professional.
- Assisting in the maintenance and inventory of adapted physical education materials, books, and equipment on loan to the school.
- Following all directions from the general and/or adapted physical educator to best meet the needs of the student(s).
- Being prompt.



## Peer Tutors

Peer tutors are students who have demonstrated responsibility, reliability, and willingness to assist the general or adapted physical educator.

The peer tutor may be the same age as the student he/she is working with and in the same class. Peer tutors can be great role models for other students in class, demonstrating how to treat and interact with students who have disabilities.

Some of their duties may include:

- Dressing appropriately for involvement with the student in various forms of instruction.
- Assisting student to and from physical education class.
- Providing demonstration of activities, skills, or exercises as necessary.
- Assisting the student with following the physical educator's instruction.
- Using task sheets as prescribed by the physical educator.
- Notifying the teacher if the student becomes disruptive or misbehaves.
- Being prompt.

## Adult Volunteers

Adult volunteers are valuable resources in their service to the adapted physical educator and the school district.

Adult volunteers may include parents, grandparents, older siblings, friends, or other people within the community who give up their spare time and are enthusiastic about working with students with disabilities. They often have limited training, but their positive attitudes are of great value.

Some of their responsibilities and duties may include:

- Dressing appropriately for involvement with student in various forms of activity.
- Demonstrating and physically helping the student through the activities, skills, or exercises as necessary.
- Assisting and providing cues to the student in various ways (e.g., verbal reminders of the task).
- Using a systematic approach to behavior management (Lavay, French, & Henderson, 1997).
- Recording, describing, and informing the physical educator of any inappropriate behaviors.
- Using task and skill sheets.
- Following all directions from the physical educator.
- Establishing a set schedule of volunteer dates and times.
- Being prompt.

All support personnel should receive proper training to ensure an appropriate and safe environment for the children and youth. It is important that all support personnel realize that they are under the direct supervision of the physical educator. If a student becomes abusive or aggressive, the support personnel should allow the physical educator to intervene.



## Training of Support Personnel

Many support personnel are not interested and/or skilled in physical activity (Reams, 1997). Because of this lack of interest and/or skill, support personnel should be carefully trained to meet the needs of students with disabilities in the general physical education setting (O'Connor & French, 1998).

Support personnel should be provided with an initial orientation/training in which their anticipated role is explained and demonstrated. If at all possible, support personnel and the general and/or adapted physical educator should attend any and all orientation/training sessions together. If all parties attend, there will be no question as to what duties, responsibilities, and level of supervision is appropriate for each type of support personnel.

This orientation may include, but is not limited to, the following (Dunn, Morehouse, & Fredericks, 1986; Mostert, 1998; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997):

- Definition of the role of support personnel
- Behavior management techniques (e.g., reinforcement techniques, procedures for correcting the student) under the supervision of the physical educator
- Appropriate cueing and positive/specific feedback techniques
- Record keeping
- Brief overview of related disabilities

The session should also include information of safety, special assistive techniques, and any special instructional procedures (Reams, 1997).

After orientation, support personnel should attend brief, highly structured practicum experiences. These experiences will help them become comfortable with student(s) and gain confidence within the setting in which they will be placed. Increased time and responsibility with the student(s) should be based on the adapted and/or general physical educator's systematic evaluation of the support personnel. Additional responsibilities may include: task analysis, group activity planning, training of other support personnel, and help in program revisions.

Support personnel should be provided with directions and instructions in explicit detail. Initially, each activity and every step that they are to perform should be specified. As the physical educator becomes more comfortable with the support personnel and more familiar with their skills (and the support personnel more comfortable with the physical educator's expectations), there can be a gradual decrease in the amount of detail provided (Reams, 1997).

It is important that adapted and/or general physical educators and support personnel understand that their roles and responsibilities differ significantly. A clear definition of these roles is important to ensure ethical and legal requirements are met and to guide supervision and evaluation (Pickett et al., 1993).



## Communication with Support Personnel

The key to having an effective relationship between the teacher and the support personnel is communication. Attitudes and feelings of both the teacher and the support personnel need to be known, acknowledged, and respected. Everyone needs to deal openly with their attitudes and feelings toward their roles and duties, students they work with, instructional styles and management, and the value of other people's contributions (Mueller, 1995; O'Connor & French, 1998).

### Do's

- Establish a common vocabulary, ensuring directions and expectations are clearly understood, and making sure the support personnel has the information and skills needed to perform assigned tasks (Mueller, 1995).
- Work with all team members to develop a climate of cooperation, trust, respect and loyalty by meeting regularly in open and honest discussions (Dettmer, Dyck, & Thurston, 1999; Reams, 1997).
- Hold regular meetings for scheduling and designing lesson plans and to discuss student evaluations.
- Have the paraeducators complete a skill inventory to identify their strength and weakness and conduct in-services for areas of weakness.
- Make this a continuous process. Follow-up with evaluations to provide the paraeducators with feedback. See a sample evaluation in Appendix A.

### Don'ts

- Hold team meetings during regular class time (Pickett et al., 1993).
- This process should be continuous followed up with evaluations to provide the paraeducators with feedback.

## Use of Support Personnel

There are many factors that can affect how support personnel use their level of responsibility. These include: number of students with disabilities in class, degree of severity of the disability, ages of the students, and ages and experiences of support personnel.

Reams (1997) provided some suggestions for the physical educator working with support personnel:

- Plan as though support personnel are not available.
- At all times the final responsibility for organization, instruction, and safety remains with the teacher.
- Provide the support personnel with as much information as possible, and as far in advance as possible.
- Observe the support personnel while they work and provide guidance and encouragement.



## Ways to Acknowledge Support Personnel

Lack of motivation or even burnout among special education support personnel is attributed to stress, stagnation, lack of career advancement, inadequate training, poor organizational structure, undefined role descriptions, lack of support from authority figures, misconceptions about the roles of others, poor salaries, and lack of recognition (Firth & Mims, 1985; Pickett & Gerlach, 1997).

To keep support personnel excited about their job and prevent burnout requires periodic recognition of their efforts and accomplishments.

- Identify individuals to their supervisor by:
  1. Sending a copy of your commendations to the principal/supervisor/parent of the assistant.
  2. Praising the person in the presence of his/her supervisor.
- Invite individuals to “end of school year picnic,” “parent night,” “award night,” or “field day” for recognition of their services and time.
- Provide a thank you note, letters of commendations, and verbal praise.
- Provide tangible awards, such as plaques and certificates.
- Send a thank you note from the student(s) themselves. For example, cards, pictures, flowers, homemade projects, art, etc. Mention efforts in the school paper, newsletter, or area newspaper.

- Recognize a volunteer/paraeducator/peer tutor of the month, week, or day, including passing around trophies, T-shirts, buttons, etc.
- Announce over public address system or place into daily bulletin recognitions for the work the support personnel have been doing.
- Provide class credit or grade, when applicable.
- Earn “tokens” at school to buy items from a school store.
- Paste pictures on bulletin board and put in school paper (Waugh, 2002).

## Conclusion

It’s more efficient and effective for support personnel and teachers to work together and develop a partnership for success, one that will benefit the health and well-being of all students.



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## APPENDIX A

### Sample Contracts and Task Sheet

Contracts and task sheets can be used to identify the responsibilities of the support personnel. All contracts and task sheets should be based on the curriculum and the level of training of the support personnel.

It is important that the contract and task sheets be stated in a clear and concise manner to avoid misunderstandings between relevant personnel. The lesson plans that support personnel follow should include sufficient information to enable them to conduct their portion of the lesson without having to make decisions requiring professional judgment (Pickett et al., 1993).

The following Figures (1 through 9) provide examples of contracts and task sheets.

Figure 1

#### SAMPLE SUPPORT PERSONNEL CONTRACT

I, \_\_\_\_\_ agree to the following responsibilities and Guidelines when working with \_\_\_\_\_.

- Bringing students to class on time and prepared to participate.
- Observing class warm-ups and use a systematic approach for behavior management.
  1. Praise student for appropriate behavior and skill performance.
  2. Praise another student in close proximity who is "on task".
  3. Use appropriate prompts (verbal, modeling, physical) to assist students to stay on task.
  4. If student continues to demonstrate "off-task" disruptive behavior after using the first three steps, request the physical educators assistance
- Following the prescribed behavior management contract under the supervision of the teacher.
- Taking the student directly back to his/her classroom when class is dismissed.

**NOTE:** If, for **any reason**, you must leave the class you **must notify** the teachers why you are leaving, where you are going, and when you will be back.

Signatures:

APE or RPE Teacher \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Support Personnel \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Principal \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_



Figure 2

## **SAMPLE CONTRACT: Volunteer Service Agreement**

Somewhere, USA School District  
Adapted Physical Education Department

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Title of Service: \_\_\_\_\_ Location of Service: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Beginning Service Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Ending Service Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Student(s) Served: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Responsibilities of Service Provider:**

1. Invest time and talent to assist the adapted physical educator with student or class with disabilities within the adapted physical education setting.
2. Take part in in-service education (could designate population to be served; e.g., autistic).
3. Dress appropriately for involvement with student in various forms of activity.
4. Demonstrate and assist the student through the activity, skills, or exercise as necessary.
5. Assist and provide cues to the student, to help the student achieve an optimal learning experience.
6. Provide encouragement to the student.
7. Record, describe, and inform physical educator of any inappropriate behaviors.
8. Perform the following specific services:
  - Be prompt.
  - Establish a set schedule of volunteer dates and times.
  - Follow all directions to best meet the needs of the student.

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Service Provider Signature

Date

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Adapted Physical Education Teacher Signature

Date



Figure 3

### SUPPORT PERSONNEL TASK SHEET<sup>1</sup>

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Class: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Lesson #: \_\_\_\_\_

Support Personnel: \_\_\_\_\_

TIME	ACTIVITY	GOAL	PARTNER

What does the student need to work on during the next class (goals not met)?

Were there any behavior problems? If so, what?

Overall, how did the lesson go?

<sup>1</sup> Modified From: Graham, G.; Holt-Hale, S.A.; & Parker, M. (1987) *Children moving: A teacher's guide to developing a successful physical education program* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) Mountain View, CA: Mayfield, p. 81.